Fiction

Group 3

2090

Carmel School – Elsa High School, Budovitch, Felix – 12

"Anne, go into the cubby and keep your mouth shut, do you hear me?" my mother instructed firmly. I nodded and she kissed my forehead and told me to stay strong. I opened the entrance to the nook underneath the floorboards and got in, careful to close it quietly. Through the crack in the floor, I could see my mother as she opened the front door cautiously. A man with a black mask and a large gun marched into the room. He loaded his gun and my mother's eyes widened with horror. I sucked in a breath as the sound of a gunshot punctured the silence like a needle to a threadbare cloth. My mother's agonized screaming. Another gunshot. A loud thud as a lifeless body crumpled to the ground like wet paper. I peeked through the crack in the floorboards, to find my mother lying on the wooden floor, her cotton dress soaked with red. I squeezed my eyes shut and turned away. She would've wanted me to be strong, but still, a few stubborn tears leaked from my muddy brown eyes. The man stood there for a moment, and then left as if nothing happened.

The floor creaked as I opened the trapdoor. I stumbled over to my mother and knelt down next to her. Sharp, violent sobs shook my body as I clutched her hands like a lifeline, as if I was the one dying.
"Anne?" Her voice was barely a whisper.
"Yes mama?" I said, through choked sobs.
"I'm sorry," she said softly. She gave me a weak smile before her eyes stared into nothing and she went limp. I reached out and closed her hollow, empty eyes with the tips of my fingers. I planted a soft kiss on her cheek and soaked her sleeve with tears for what seemed like days. I glanced over to my right, and found a strange mound of red, grainy powder. I reached to touch it, when a girl suddenly slammed open the door.

"STOP!" she yelled.

I jerked my hand away from the strange powder and stumbled back against the blood splattered wall.
"Who are you?" I demanded, holding out a knife from the kitchen table. The girl backed away as if she were calming a horse.
"I'm not going to hurt you, I swear," she whispered softly. "What you were about to touch was a highly toxic new alteration of gunpowder. Your skin would dissolve as soon as you touched it," she explained carefully, as if I was a fragile ornament that was about to shatter at any second. I thought this over for a second. "Who are you?" I shouted, louder this time.
"My name is Edaline," she answered softly.

Edaline had such delicateness about her. And she was beautiful. Her long auburn hair hung in soft waves and her emerald eyes flickered with flecks of gold. She glanced towards my lifeless mother. "Is that your…" she trailed off.
"Yes," I replied numbly. She looked away.
"What do you want?" I demanded.
"I was scavenging for food. I thought your house was abandoned, and I really am having no luck." She sighed. I studied her. I could see her ribs peeking out from her shirt. She must have not eaten in weeks. I went over to the cabinet and got out our last loaf of stale bread.
"Here," I offered her the bread. She hesitated, and then took it from me.
"Thank you," she said calmly. "I never asked for your name." She waited for a response.
"Anne," I said plainly. She smiled.

"We should get out of here before the terrorists come back." She beckoned for me to follow her. I didn't know if it was safe to be running off with some girl, but at least I'd have a friend.

We were sitting in the meadow eating chunks of bread. The sky was so thick with pollution, you couldn't tell the difference between day and night. The soft grass seemed to stretch on for miles. I used to come here with my mother all the time before the war. We would make necklaces from the colourful wildflowers that scattered the lush meadow.

"What was that red powder?" I asked her.
"It's a highly explosive and flammable substance that they use in bullets. The red one you saw on your floor is the most dangerous version of it as of this year. Thousands of years ago, It was originally meant for something called fireworks, but of course, people saw an explosion and immediately invented a new way to kill each other with," she grumbled. "I hate this stupid war. It's just a bunch of humans killing each other because of tiny pieces of green paper. I lost my whole family because of this. Because of stupid guns." A tear slipped down her rosy cheek. I felt tears of my own, when I suddenly had an idea.

"What if they couldn't have their guns anymore?" I whispered, my eyes wide.
"Yeah right! They keep their entire supply of gunpowder and guns in this insanely guarded factory. If you so much as step too close, they'll have a bullet right between your eyes before you could even blink," she scoffed, but she still looked hopeful.
"I'd be willing to die if it meant I had put up some kind of fight. It's what my mother would have done," I mumbled into the distance. Edaline smiled sadly. I stood up. "I'm gonna destroy their gunpowder with or without you. It's time this ends once and for all," I declared determinedly. Edaline clasped my hand with hers.
"You know it means certain death, don't you?" she whispered. I nodded, more tears falling down my face. She stood up beside me, twining my fingers with hers.
"I'm coming with you."

After a whole week of walking, we finally made it. It was in a very secluded area, with nothing but dirt stretching on for miles. Black smoke erupted from the factory, filling the air with a toxic scent that burned my throat. The plan was, we were going to hopefully slip past the guards and light the gunpowder on fire, and explode the factory.
"Are you ready?" I asked Edaline. She smiled sadly.
"I'm ready for anything," she whispered. We crept cautiously toward the guards – two burly men accompanied by gigantic guns.

"Hey guys!" Edaline smiled. They pointed their guns at her while I crept behind them. "Just coming to say hello!" she chippered. I cautiously opened a bag of red gunpowder and poured it on their heads just before they could pull the trigger. Edaline tied pieces of cloth around their mouths to mute their agonized cries for help. We watched in horror as their skin sizzled and steamed until they were nothing but a pile of their clothing. We changed into their guard uniforms and snuck inside the gunpowder storage room.

The storage room was just big enough to hold the millions of barrels of gunpowder and thousands of guards stationed around the perimeter of the storage room. The room was filled with the scent of burning hair, and the ceiling stretched far above the clouds. I tied my thick blond hair into a bun and marched forward with Edaline at my side. I cleared my throat loudly, and now we had every gun pointing in our direction.

"Whoa whoa easy there!" I held my hands in the air. Edaline and I took off our black masks and set them on the floor. "We're not going to do anything," Edaline assured them. "We're here to do —"

"THIS!" I shout, my voice echoes in the storage room.

I pulled out a match and set it on fire. The flickering flame tingled on my skin for the last time. Time seemed to stop. I glanced at Edaline. With tears running down her face, she met my eyes. She nodded slowly. We clung to each other as I hurled the flame toward the barrels of gunpowder. I breathed for what will be the last time as 16 years flashed before my eyes.

My mother rocking me to sleep. Watching the glorious sunsets from the valley. Laughing. Crying. My mother dying in my arms. Clinging to my only friend.

I held to these things as I was engulfed in flames. I looked towards the sky and reached toward the soft light pulling me into infinity

A Tale of Thunder

Carmel School – Elsa High School, Choe, Yeda – 12

Li Chang woke up, staring at the mess he had just caused. He glared into the hole in the wall. Li didn't mean to blow up the walls, his goal was only to create a small explosive using the diary.

'Oh right, The diary!' Li Chang thought to himself, 'If the diary disappears, it'll all be futile!'
He was racing to find his grandfather's recently recovered diary. That diary contained all the formulas and instructions that Li's ancestors had discovered. Li was an aspiring demolition engineer striving to get recognized by China's generals. He wanted to be a part of the war against the Mongols.

After a while of searching, Li was relieved, finally discovering the old, almost torn diary under the small piles of ash. Li had recently uncovered the diary just after all his family had been killed by the Mongols. Li had been unaware when it happened. He was out in the fields far from home while the Mongols had been busy slaughtering his family. When he came back, he was the only living witness of the scene. The houses were set on fire, blood on the grass, dismembered bodies everywhere, and then he saw his family. Bursting into tears, he desperately searched for anything he could salvage and looked for any living bodies, but he found nothing. Nothing except for the diary. Li was afraid to open it at first, scared of what he would do. For six months, Li kept the diary shut, but when he finally opened it, months after the Mongol's killing spree, he could see his future in front of him.

He had always been good at creating devices. He knew lots about demolition engineers but didn't know how he could get there. He had hated the entire Mongol empire but could do nothing about it. Until he found the book. The diary contained instructions and information that Li Chang could never understand. With the book's information, Li would eventually be able to fight for his country and make money from the undiscovered demolition devices suppressed in his diary. He could finally seek vengeance.

It was one year exactly after the massacre of Li Chang's family when Li Chang was faced with the enemy yet another time, but this time there was nothing he could do. He was still learning, and he only had the small bombs. The last resort was to try and reason with the Mongols.
'Please!' Li Chang screamed, 'I'm a demo expert! I'll work for you!'
The Mongols remained silent, deciding, discussing amongst themselves, in a flurry of whispers.
'Please! I'll do anything!' Li Chang pleaded, his voice failing.
The Mongols continued their whispers, seemingly ignoring Li's screams.
The Mongols charged, suddenly, screaming at each other killing everyone in the vicinity. There was blood everywhere. Screams of the Chinese people wailing for help. The Mongols finished the job swiftly, and everyone was dead except for Li Chang. Li Chang was alive. Then he was sent into darkness.

Li woke up in a dark cell, with only a plate of moldy food and his diary.
'It's over.' Li thought bitterly to himself. 'I'll die.'
As soon as his eyes adjusted to the dark, Li scrambled around his cell in desperation, hammering the walls, pounding the bars that stood between himself and freedom. He needed to find something or someone that would give him a chance.
'Awake, finally?' A voice called from the neighboring cell.
Surprised, Li swung his head towards the somewhat ominous voice.
'Don't worry, I've been captured also. I'm with you' He called.
'Who are you!' Li shouted, desperate for answers.
'My name is Cai Lun' He replied, 'I'm a demolition expert. I'm assuming you are too.'
A barrage of questions entered Li's mind. He couldn't find the energy to form words anymore. He sat down, defeated.
'Tell me more,' Li asked, 'Please.'
'Alright,' Cai Lun replied, 'They captured only me and you on the same day. Written in blood, both of our walls describe our work.' Cai Lun paused, 'We need to make bombs, giant bombs, we alone are driving the first demolition breakthrough. We are working for the Mongols. Three days left. My door is unlocked, by the way, come in.'

Processing all the recent information, Li found it hard to move his legs, He had so many questions built up in his head but decided not to ask them. Slowly, he made his way to the opposite cell, accepting his fate. He was a slave.

Cai Lun made space for Li on the floor, there were dozens of metals, explosives, powders, and liquids scattered on the floor, and Li had recognized one particular ingredient. It was a special type of gunpowder that he had observed while reading his diary. The diary had put that particular explosive under the "classified information" section. This ingredient on the floor was the main ingredient for the making of the legendary Thunder Crash bomb.
'Is that…' Li asked out of curiosity
'Yes, they want the thunder crash bomb. To destroy our country.' Cai Lun said, 'It's a myth, a legend, it's impossible, but we have only five days.'
'Five days until what?' Li inquired.
'They will replace us, with better engineers, and stronger weapons.'

Li sat in silence. He sat until he heard footsteps. Suddenly, the large metal door creaked and unlatched, revealing a man in an oversized white coat carrying a briefcase. The man knelt down, opened the briefcase, and placed food, water, and Li's diary on the floor.
'Now work, or else.' The man said, shutting the door behind him.

Three days passed in a blur, the formulas in Li's diary bringing them closer and closer to the answer. Every day, the same man in the white coat barged in and handed them food and supplies, and every time, Cai Lun hid the two developing bombs behind the wall, making an effort to hide all progress from the military. On day four, they were done. The man in the white coat came and left without noticing the two finished Thunder Crash bombs hidden behind the wall.

'What do we do now?' Li questioned, 'Won't they kill us all along with our country anyway?'
'That's the thing, this isn't your mission anymore, I have a plan.'
Cai Lun's plan was stupid, but there was no other choice. The prison they were in was the only base near China that the Mongol military had control over. If Cai Lun crossed the military and bombed the base while Li escaped, the Mongols would be set back by more than a year. Li would be a hero. Cai Lun would be dead.

On the fifth day, they carried out the plan. White Coat picked them up, Li ran, and Cai Lun detonated the bombs. The power of two Thunder Crash bombs wiped out everyone and everything including the military base. They had won. Li watched the fiery mess blow up into the sky, reminding him of the small hole he had blasted into the city walls. It had only been a week.

One year later, Li had single−handedly recreated hundreds of Thunder Crash bombs and had been promoted to military general. He was a hero.

Every time he stared into the lands of the Mongols, he remembered Cai Lun. He remembered the hole in the wall, and he remembered his family.

The Case of Clorox

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

Detective Clorox spun around in his chair with his legs extended and pen in hand. The fan hummed gently in the corner, relieving the scorching temperature. The dark circles under his eyes portrayed the lack of sleep through much deep thought. He felt distracted by the tempting waft of fresh ground coffee beans and a cold, untouched breakfast.

A sudden hurried knock on the door caught his attention. In came his informant, Mr. Lime – and with him – a trio of distraught individuals. Trailing behind them was the old janitor who worked at the museum, also known as the victim and sole witness of this case. A wretched smell suddenly serpented around the room, making Detective Clorox wrinkle his nose. Now his office smelt like wet puppies, toilets, and freshly sanitized hospitals.

Mr. Lime handed the case file to Detective Clorox while glaring darkly at the others in the room. He was known to be a cynical person but did his job meticulously well. The detective observed the suspects, occasionally scanning the paper. After some time, he slipped his notebook out of the drawer and started the investigation.

"So, Mr. Gus Mullen?" Detective Clorox started, glancing at the janitor. "Could you tell us more about the incident on Wednesday?"

"Wednesday..." Gus stammered.

"Must be old age kicking in," Mr. Lime whispered loudly.

Gus rubbed his bandaged head.

"All I remember for now is that I hit my head real hard," he mused.

"Do you at least remember what you were doing before the injury?" Clorox urged.

"I was mopping the floor near the new exhibition – the one about ancient Chinese relics and inventions. But the security alarm went off because the cameras were disabled. I was frightened so I took my mop and hid in the cleaning storage room. Unfortunately, I knocked the rusty metal bucket over and blew my cover. The thief approached me, and I thought whoever it was trying to kill me. So I grabbed some bleach and poured the whole bottle on the person. I ran, forgetting my surroundings so I hit my head against a pillar," Gus explained.

Clorox nodded as he scribbled the inadequate information from the janitor's description.

"I don't remember anything about the thief, except that they had a striking signet ring. I don't remember the initial though," Gus shuddered.

The detective turned to the three suspects. They were all museum workers – a manager, a cashier from the museum's souvenir shop, and an assistant curator on an internship. "Regarding the stolen Chinese kite, I would like to hear your reasoning for not being the culprit," he remarked. "Talk one at a time," he added.

The manager – Mrs. Carlson – spoke up. She was reserved, yet responsible and consistent. "I recently had my first baby so I went on maternity leave for the past month. I have all the necessary proof and the director has a record of the time I was gone," she explained.

"I see," Detective Clorox mumbled as the manager handed the file of neatly placed papers and photographs. There was an assortment of official documents, certificates, and a few heart−warming photos of the young woman's chubby new−born. He took his notebook and used a bright red marker to make a little mark. A little scratch sound released the strong fluorescent odour of the marker.

"You are dismissed Mrs. Carlson," Detective Clorox announced. There were two fiddling victims left, as well as Gus. They were both newer employees, something which Detective Clorox immediately jotted down. The cashier was a glum young lady who seemed to detest her job. On the other hand, there was also the intern curator, a man with a bright expression and a matching eccentric blue sweater.

"It wasn't me," the cashier protested.

"I can see that your attendance for work is quite inconsistent," Detective Clorox nodded.

"That's because there's another cashier – I only work morning shifts."

"And may I ask what you do for the rest of the day?" Detective Clorox inquired.

"I am a student at the local university," the cashier answered.

"All right. You are dismissed," Detective Clorox gestured.

He now turned to the last employee. The intern grinned slightly and leaned back in his chair. "Mr. Gary Hyde, I do not understand why you would need to wear such a thick sweater in the summer," Detective Clorox commented wryly.

Despite the tension in the room, Mr. Hyde remained undisturbed. "I had a bit of a cold," he replied curtly.

He coolly folded his hands on the table. Clorox stared at Mr. Hyde's index finger. A shallow dip covered the entire lower part of the finger. From his joint to the knuckles, it was unblemished and pale as a baby's soft skin, slightly contrasting with the rest of his finger. Detective Clorox knew that this happened when he wore his antique watch outside. He also noticed Mr. Hyde eyeing his watch with more interest than he wanted. But he also felt something else, as if somebody were drilling holes into his back.

"That's a fine watch you got there," Mr. Hyde observed. Detective Clorox slightly frowned. What did his watch have to do with the stolen Chinese kite? "If only you sold that to me. It is from a good antique brand. The museum could use it for the next exhibit," Mr. Hyde smiled.

Detective Clorox was barely listening to Mr. Hyde's babble. He thought of the night when he had visited the museum for investigation. The museum was a grand building, with large pillars of perfectly sculpted alabaster and never−ending marble hallways filled with exhibitions carefully arranged by the curating team. The founder was an old soul, great in age and wisdom − and a person Clorox knew personally. He silently circled the picture of the vivacious young man on the paper.

Detective Clorox solemnly watched as they led Mr. Hyde to the isolation room. He soothed the crimson mark on his hand, the imprint of a hard slap. He carefully paced down the corridor to a heavily guarded room. He smoothed out his collar.

"Good afternoon Father Frederick," Clorox greeted as he reverently bowed to the old man on the armchair.

Frederick smiled warmly and nodded in Clorox's direction.

"I heard about the case," he started.

"Yes, it is all under control. At least the thief is," Clorox sighed as he turned the kettle on.

"Well, how did you get to the conclusion?" Frederick pondered.

"Gus mentioned the thief had a signet ring. Mr. Hyde made the mistake of folding his hands on the table revealing a slight dip on his index finger. That's what signet rings do," Detective Clorox demonstrated. "In his description, Gus also mentioned he attacked the thief with bleach. Not only did Mr. Hyde smell like bleach, he wore a sweater to cover up the damaged skin," he continued.

Frederick nodded.

"They questioned him for a while. He finally confessed to the crime. He belongs to the Forgers. That's why he had a signet ring with an F on it. Probably stole the kite to auction to some dirtily rich people," Detective Clorox said.

"Yes, these Forgers have been quite a nuisance recently," Frederick resounded.

They quietly sipped their tea. Detective Clorox paced across the room gliding his fingers on the crack along the wall. He paused in front of the fire. "Something's troubling you," Frederick remarked, sipping the last swig of tea.

"Where did you get it from?"

"The kite? Be specific," Frederick sharply rebuked.

"Yes, the kite," Clorox sighed.

"I brought it from where I came from. Where you came from as well. It was an old family artifact from approximately 27 generations ago."

Detective Clorox glanced at Father Frederick. With his remaining silvery grey hair and defined wrinkles, he was different from the local elderly. Everybody who got exchanged always stood out.

"Your trousers are on fire!" Frederick exclaimed alarmingly out of nowhere. Detective Clorox snapped out of his thoughts and found the bottom of his pants engulfed by the flames. He quickly rubbed his leg on the brick wall while Frederick doused the pants with a discoloured watering can.

"Didn't I always tell you to never stand by the fire? You never had a pair of unburnt pants in your childhood," Frederick scolded. Detective Clorox hung his head and frantically apologized.

"I was thinking about my contract," he said.

Frederick stopped. "It is five years already," he whispered. "I remember when you and I came to this town. Back in China, we were chosen to get exchanged. That's why we never got Chinese names," Frederick reminisced.

"We were the only 2 for that selection, right?"

"Yes. No more exchange needed now," Frederick answered. "You were a ragtag child without parents. But you had genius."

Now that ragtag child sat on the same small boat. It was a hardy, bright red boat, SS. Plover. Clorox rested his chin on his battered suitcase and stared into the salty fog, sailing towards a location he did not know.

The Wheel of Destiny

Carmel School – Elsa High School, Wigisser, Aline – 12

The resounding pounding and hammering of my father in the room next to me, my eyes fluttered open rudely waking me up. I was familiar with this as my father works on new inventions to supply my village with every morning.

My father called to me, "Zhuo! Quickly, I have to show you my new invention!"

"What is it, father?" wooden pieces nailed together. I was unimpressed. Clearly, that wasn't the reaction my father wanted, "What is it exactly?"

"This is a Wheelbarrow. It transports large amounts of crops and dirt, making it easier to work and supply for our village!" He explained. "I am holding a feast for the village, to showcase my final invention," he said lowering his head as tears glistened.

"Father, don't say that. I will call everyone to meet at the town feast at seven o'clock this evening."

"Thank you, son." He said with a slight smile on his face.

After hours of knocking and inviting the village to the feast, I could no longer walk; my legs were as wobbly as noodles. I followed my steps back to my home and fell onto my bed resting there with my eyes closed and my body aching. Later that evening, families, pets, children, and our village soon came together.

All of them feasting like they had not eaten in days, my father interrupted "Thank you all for gathering here. I have created my final invention, which will help our crops proliferate and gather more food. This invention is…" he walks over to the Wheelbarrow, his footsteps echoing in the silent, and removes the cloth "The Wheelbarrow!" everyone cheers in excitement for my father.

The feast continued with a joyful energy around us. I went over to my father when my father's best friend, Huang, abruptly said "Wow! This is magnificent!"

My father replied, "Thank you!"

The gathering had ended and I took my father home one step at a time, he was shaking and limping. As we entered our home I carried him to his bed, he looked at me shedding a tear, and said "Zhuo, I am not going to be here for long, my dying wish is for you to spread my invention around all the villages in China."

"It is more important for me to stay here and look after you," I pleaded.

"My life is no longer important. Think of the many lives you will save," he exclaimed

"Where would I even go?" I said with tears in my eyes.

"Everywhere Zhuo! Xidi, Wuzhen, and Lijiang!" There was an urgency in his voice now. I lowered my head with my hands covering my face, I was sobbing,

I hugged my father and I said, "I promise, I will do this."

The very next morning I took off to my first village, Lijiang. I took water, bread, and of course the Wheelbarrow. I walked through the rainforests and after hours of walking, I arrived in Lijiang. I quickly asked a local where the leader of Lijiang is located, and he replied "The palace is on the right of the Yufeng temple." I thanked him and rushed to the palace.

Upon arrival, I spoke to the guard about the significance of the Wheelbarrow and how it could change the world and their village. He came out and simply nodded. I entered the palace, which was filled with gold and pearl–white statues and Chinese inscriptions on the walls. My eyes fell upon a door where a man stood with long flowing robes. This must be the leader, I thought. He demanded I tell him what I was doing in their village.

“Well, my father has created an invention called the Wheelbarrow −” he gave me an unpleasant expression, so I quickly moved on, “It helps carry large amounts of anything! And it will help gather your crops even quicker.” He seemed to accept this and soon, we worked together to create a quicker and more functioning village. He thanked me by granting me food and a place to rest for the night.

I was full of hope after the first interaction with Lijiang's master, so, I made my way to Wuzhen which was neighboring Lijiang. I arrived after just a few short hours of walking through Xishuangbanna, China's largest rainforest. My father told me that Wuzhen was a very festive and welcoming village. As I did in Lijiang, I went to a food market to ask where the palace was and where I could find the leader. Again, the villagers complied and pointed me toward the palace.

As I arrived, I greeted the guard and explained my father's invention to him. He nodded and informed the leader about my arrival. I entered the palace and this one was even more impressive than the last, with murals wrapped all around the sky−high ceilings. The walls beside me were marble with gold accents throughout the whole hallway. My eyes laid upon the golden doors that lead to the leader. He was much more open to the idea and straightaway greeted me with a bow.

We went straight to work on creating the Wheelbarrow for their village, the leader then thanked me and granted me water for my adventure to the next village.

My next stop was Xidi, a village known for its historical statues and temples. My father told me that it is a very strict village. After hours of walking in a dark and quiet forest I spotted Xidi from afar, I didn’t think that Xidi would be any different.

I arrived in Xidi, the village was dark and depressing. All the villagers looked alarmed and terrified. It was only a short time before I encountered the palace. The guard was as white as snow, he was a standing corpse only flesh and bone. I had explained to him my father's idea of the Wheelbarrow and he went to tell the leader of the village.

The guard approved my entrance with a nod and as I entered, I got an uncanny feeling. There was a horrid smell of rotten food, and the walls were old and rusty, it was intimidating. I spotted the door, the knob was crusty it had looked and felt like no one had ever opened it. The door had shrieked as it opened, and the leader was standing right in front of me with an unsettling smirk.

“Tell me about this invention,” he demanded, his eyes were blood red and almost popping out of his eye sockets, his teeth were crooked and stained with yellow and brown, he was tall and slim, his nails were long and curled, and he had patches of hair on his head.

“Well, this was my fathers invention, the Wheelbarrow helps to transport goods and heavy amounts of anything! I assure you, your village will soon be thriving!”

“I have dreamt of this once before,” he said whilst slowly walking, “*and you stole it from me*!”

All of a sudden, I was taken by two guards. I tried to yell but it was too late. They had covered my face in a bag and thrown me into a small cell made of stone with the Wheelbarrow right outside the door. I couldn’t help but sob. I had failed to do one thing for my father, the one thing he truly wanted.

Days seamlessly flowed into nights; I was broken and beaten. Yet, even in the darkest moments, I thought of him, I thought of my father. I needed to escape. For me, for my father.

One night, a stone fell from the sharp and dull ceiling. I waited for the guard to hand me the bread for the day, and as the door swung open, I seized the opportunity and threw the rock at his head as hard as I could. I ran out of the cell, grabbed the Wheelbarrow, and navigated through the treacherous terrain to escape the palace. The pounding of my heart was echoing the fear within.

After hours of traversing through Xishunagbanna, where the mud was like quicksand and the wind whistled making the leaves rustle, I eventually arrived at my village. I was consumed by a sense of urgency and rushed to my home hoping to see my father lying on his bed, only to be confronted with a clean bed with no one in it. My heart sank.

“He passed last week. He wanted you to have this.” I turned to see Huang. He had looked depressed, there was no more light in him. His smile had gone away, his eyes red, and he had tear marks on his face.

I opened the book to discover a whole host of inventions not yet realized by my father. I decided I would be the one to inherit his business and preserve his remarkable legacy. I will bring his inventions to light.

City of Ashes

Carmel School – Elsa High School, Yahyagil, Ayla – 13

They stand in line awaiting the orders of a puppet.
Li Xianwen stood in the opulent hall of Daming Palace. Stone gates reached for the heavens and Chang'an's surroundings paled compared to its grandeur. Xianwen's eyes scanned the blood–red walls, the intricate emerald roofs, and the soldiers' iron armour embellished with silver. His gaze landed upon Emperor Ai – a boy upon a throne. The boy was adorned with the ill–fitting yellow robes that his father had once worn. Xianwen walked cautiously towards The Puppet Emperor while holding his chin high. Xianwen knew that he could become the puppeteer.

"Emperor Ai," He clasped his hands and bowed with an illusive grin, "I, Li Xianwen, come from Guangcheng in Hunan province to present a new invention that could revolutionize our future."
Xianwen unravelled the scroll in the belt of his robe, which also unravelled his 'disguise'. His demeanour reserved for situations like these had been forgotten by the eager inventor at heart.
"An Eruptor. A cylindrical barrel propels the cast iron sphere and ignites whatever is in its path. Powered by the same gunpowder found in firecrackers, this invention could demolish buildings with ease, send warnings in the night sky, aid in military purposes–" Xianwen was cut off.
"Military?" The Puppet Emperor asked, his expression morphing from apathy to enthusiasm, "Meaning it could be used as artillery?"
"However, this Eruptor could–"
"Think of the potential!" Ai shouted, ignoring Xianwen, "Has it been tested?"
Xianwen cleared his throat, "I was hoping it could be tested here outside the city walls of Chang'an."
"Here? The city is named 'Eternal Peace' – not chaos. It shall be tested in your city. What was it called? Guangcheng?"
Xianwen's eyes widened and he took a step forward to argue, "Emperor Ai, outside the city walls of Chang'an it is barren, uninhabited by civilians–unlike the streets of Guangcheng. Do you understand what you are asking?"

Emperor Ai rose from his throne, a tail of gilded fabric and military officers trailing behind him. He gestured to Xianwen to follow. Ai walked to the archery tower, squinting under the light of noon. Below them stretched the city of Chang'an, which seemed to expand beyond the horizon. The ashy grey roofs of the buildings curved upwards, asking to bathe in the blazing sun. Pagodas and verdant trees were scattered across the city.
"You see the city wall, Li Xian Wen?" Ai gestured to the seemingly thin walls that encased the city, "Beyond this, we are powerless. Enemies could attack from all over. I may be half your height and quarter your age, but I have seen triple what you have in your entire life. And there is one thing that has echoed throughout every aspect of mine: sacrifices must be made for a better future."

***

City of Light, Guangcheng. Beneath the celebration, the colour, the joy, the light, was darkness.

Linghui looked over her shoulder before knocking twice on the red–panelled door and pushing through. A flash of fiery sulfuric smoke greeted her entrance. Scarlet paper tubes, threaded with metallic strings, covered every inch of the room.

"I'm going to hang the firecrackers, Jing." Linghui decided, dangling them over her brother's head.
"I could have done that myself. I'm nearly taller than you," replied the boy, looking up from his workspace. The unmistakable burns of gunpowder scarred his hands.
Linghui attempted to lighten the unusually stiff mood, "Tonight is Mid–Autumn Festival, which means mooncakes."
Jing smiled, "I think I'm done for the day, I've made enough money for the debt."
"Did you grab the extra firecracker?" Linghui reminded, before opening the door to leave.
"Of course I did. What would we do without it?"

The sweet aroma floated in the frigid air. The hunger in Linghui's stomach grew in response, becoming the only thought that enveloped her mind. The end of the day was nearing, and a sea of people waited for the last batch of mooncakes. The plaza by the bakery was illuminated by the golden glow of the moon. An abundance of lanterns that floated above their heads. Flashes of colourful embroidered fabrics dove in and out of the buzzing crowd.

"Ready?" Linghui carefully avoided the crowd, ushering her brother into the corner where the light did not reach.
"Yeah," Jing held the firecracker, "I've been working on my aim. So when I throw it, the pressure should ignite it immediately. Then, POOF – perfect smoke bomb, entertainment, and diversion."
"It's about the flick of the wrist," Linghui demonstrated by throwing the firecracker up and catching it barely before it scraped the ground.
"Show–off," he muttered, "I told you I've been practising."

Jing threw it so that it landed beside the flock of people, hoping it would turn their attention away from the bakery. It went unnoticed until a young girl set aside her miniature lantern and bent to observe the compelling object. Jing grumbled with disappointment. It took a few moments for it to spark, but once it started to hiss, every head had turned. They took the chance to slip into the bakery unnoticed.

They stared at the myriad of mooncakes. Jing's arm span wasn't wide enough to measure the rows of round cakes.
"Take only as much as you need, we must leave discreetly," Linghui warned him.
"Only as much as I need? I haven't eaten anything since lunch yesterday!" Jing stuffed his pockets with the small pastries.
"Fine." Linghui conceded, trying to stifle a grin."Maybe grab an extra handful."

Dark smoke slipped beneath the bakery's door. Screams pierced the silent air. *Bang.* Linghui knew that sound all too well. Terror impaled her heart, inundating her mind with a nameless dread. *Run.* She sprinted to where the crowd once stood–now engulfed in flames. The familiar smell of sulfur lingered in the thick night. *Gunpowder–firecrackers.* People were buried beneath the rubble, streaks of red slithering between the cobblestone streets. The little girl was in the rubble, lantern in her hands. Her dark eyes stared at the fire, yet she saw nothing.

"Please tell me I didn't do this. Not again," a soulless look glazed her eyes.
"You didn't." Jing surveyed his surroundings, "Firecrackers can't do this."
Bang.
"I'm going to help the rest of them." Jing stated as the smoke jerked a cough out of him.
Her eyes abruptly shot open, "Are you crazy? You would rather die like Dad did?"
"I'm going to help them." Jing reiterated, turning to leave, "I'm not injured and I can help them, so why wouldn't I? Dad had everything to lose. I have nothing to."

Linghui grew still—a statue in a city of ashes.

***

City of Light, Guangcheng. Built upon the spark of exuberance centuries ago. It ignited the flame of life. But, the time has come to pave a new path. One that Xianwen's descendants would venture upon.

Xianwen's Eruptor worked. The Guangcheng was an ocean of fire—people drowning in its blaze.
"Isn't it wonderful?" Emperor Ai stood next to Xianwen, watching soldiers march alongside the Eruptors. Xianwen left his question unanswered.
"Isn't the machine wonderful? He rephrased his question, "It works without fault. A truly remarkable weapon."
"It isn't a weapon."
Ai switched his tactics, "All the loss, all the pain – there is a reason for it. For the future of this Kingdom. Sacrifices must be made."
"And are these sacrifices necessary?" Xianwen stared into the boy's eyes. This child was not Emperor. He wasn't looking for a better future. He was looking for a cure to his boredom. And Xianwen had given it to him. Then it had dawned on Xianwen–he was the puppet.

A glare shot into the night sky. Explosions of colour and shimmering sparks followed. They danced in the sky as if they were stars before falling back to the earth.

“What fools! Celebrating in a time of destruction. I suppose your weapon isn’t a weapon, after all, Xianwen.” Emperor Ai laughed at his own remark.
Xianwen had entertained the boy long enough. Xianwen took one last glance at his decades of research and ran towards the echoes of crackling and whirring.

The laughter that conventionally accompanied celebrations was missing. Families surrounded the inferno that engulfed the once–standing building. Their skin paled, the only colour in sight was from the blaze of heat. The elderly did not run from the smoke that seeped into their lungs, the children did not run from the sight of bodies being swallowed by flames. They only watched a boy with scarred hands feed the flames with fireworks. The radiant sparks pierced the sky vibrantly, yet, something was amiss. It was not a celebration, it was a sign of resistance.

***

City of light, Guangcheng. Its light tainted by the red of death. Its light stained by ashes. But the ashes–they told a story. The story of the light of celebration, a flame of death, and a spark of hope.

Commented [1]: Feedback:

maintain narrative cohesiveness, though occasionally lack tightness.

NEEDS MORE FLOW+TENSION

Commented [2]:

Lee Sum and the Guardians of the Body

Carmel School – Elsa High School, Zeman, Bela – 11

The room was dark; dim light filtered through the shutters. A rattle of coughing came from the corner of the smoky room. Suddenly a scream came, shouting from across the room, 'Mei, wake up,' the boy cried out. Tears streamed down his face. A middle–aged lady appeared at the doorway; it was Aunt Zhang. The boy was Lee Sum; he truly was loyal and kind, especially to his sister, Mei. He was only twelve. Their parents died seven years ago, when Mei was two.

Aunt Zhang was the sister of their mother, Ling. Their father was Juang. One night, seven years ago, their father rushed into their burning house, grabbed Lee Sum, and rushed out of the flames carrying him on his back.

While Ling was stuck under a table, Mei screamed at the top of her lungs, hoping someone would save them. Juang heard Mei's cries and rushed in, grabbing her safely out of the fire and giving her to Lee Sum. He asked Lee to take care of her as he ran back into the fire to save Ling. The heat burned both them and their treasures alive.

By family tradition, they went to live with their mother's sister, Aunt Zhang.

A few years later, Lee realized Mei had been coughing due to the fire, but did not realize the danger it could cause. Aunt Zhuang was lazy and acted as if Lee was her servant. Lee had to go shopping for the household every day. Aunt Zhang gave Lee three silver coins with an angry face, and she said, "Don't you dare spend all the coins." Lee frighteningly nodded his head and fetched his big hemp sack. Lee walked to a farm and paid the farmer one silver coin to pick fruits and vegetables off his farm. Then when he finished he bought a chicken from the farmer for another coin.

He later walked down a dark alley when returning home where he found a pharmacy. He looked at the last coin and went in. The old white–bearded pharmacist looked strangely at Lee. Lee politely greeted him. The man's name was Dong, short for Dong Chung Cao. Lee told Dong that his sister Mei was ill because of the smoke she inhaled in the tragic fire. Dong got his book out and looked through it. He found something, but he wasn't sure the risk was worth it. Either way, he told Lee. Legend says that in Tibet, there was once a beautiful green mountain. In winter, the mountain was ice–cold as it would snow, and anyone that went up there wouldn't come down; people would die from hypothermia or frostbite. There, the mountain hides caterpillars; in winter, the caterpillars hibernate, but fungus wraps around the unlucky ones, and right after winter, humans climb up the steep, high mountain and take those that are wrapped and make them into soup. Lee was right on time for early spring. Dong warned Lee that it was a bad idea, but Lee ignored it. Lee was about to give up his last coin, but the old man told him, "Don't worry about payment. You need it more than I do."

Lee quietly packed his things. He shared his plan with Mei. Mei was scared, but she trusted Lee. And Lee set off. Walking to Tibet was hard, but it wasn't too far. The road was wet and crooked, and children on the street stared at him as he walked by. It was not long before he was standing at the bottom of the foggy mountain. Suddenly, he saw a village of yurts nearby. Lee was hungry and tired, so he went to the village and met a boy called Ming. Ming was about the same age as Lee. They talked about their life for a while, and they realized that both of them were facing the same problem, as Ming's mother was also sick and her immune system was weakening. Ming brought Lee to his tent; the tent was stained, and flies surrounded it. Ming's father, Jang Mao, suddenly appeared behind Lee and gave him a fright. Ming's father was the chief of the village. The village migrates every season like birds every summer and winter.

Ming told Jang Mao about the medicine and how it could help Ming's mother, Hua, but the danger made him unsure about it. Jang thought about the decision and finally agreed that they could go under one circumstance, that he would supervise the journey.

That night, Lee slept in Ming's tent. Deep into the night, Lee heard footsteps coming from outside the tent. Five big men came rushing into the tent. One of the men hit Lee hard on the head and he passed out. The five of them stuffed Lee in a sack as if the sack was eating him. The five men ran away with Lee. The morning Lee woke up, his hands were locked in chains, his heart raced, and next to him were many other children weeping as if they were

injured. After a while, he found out that he was being sold. Lee thought to himself, "What would Mei do now?"

Jang Mao later woke up and realized Lee was missing. Jang Mao alerted the whole town. He rang a big bell and everyone came rushing. It also turnedd out, many items were stolen last night. As another day went by, Lee made some friends, Lee thought that if he was rescued he would have to take his friends too. Jang Mao remembered a place where they sold children. He gathered the guardians of the village to rescue Lee. Jang Mao and the guardians broke into the cockroach infested underground hideout and brought all the children out. They didn't have much time left until the leader came. All the children managed to escape. Jang Mao asked Lee. "What will we do with all these children," Lee answered, "they can stay in the village with couples that have no children, seniors or lonely villagers that need support." Jang Mao thought that Lee had a point so he agreed. The children were now part of the pack.

Jang Mao, Ming and Lee were off track for a long time. At dawn they would finally start the journey. It was a cold humid night. Lee had trouble sleeping. Waking up the next day was a nightmare. Ming's mother was holding on. Mei was so sick yet still working as a slave. Lee thought of Mei, and started packing.

The mountain was very steep and dry, there was so much fog that made the mountain invisible. It took two days climbing up the mountain. The top of the mountain wasn't too wide, which also made it easier to find the caterpillars. Jang Mao and Ming, combined, had twenty caterpillars though Lee only had ten. Ming generously gave Lee five caterpillars, this cheered Lee up a bit. They had to get off the mountain sooner or later. Hiking down the mountain was a real challenge. It was so risky but worth it. Down the mountain Lee slipped and almost fell. At that second he thought it was all over but Jang Mao caught him right in time. Lee was so grateful for what what he had done. Every night Lee, Jang Mao and Ming had to camp for the night and continue in the morning. After three days, they were off the mountain and back at the yurt village. At this time they all had to split ways. Lee ran back home, the way he had come.

Lee rushed into the house and started the fire, boiling water over it. It was like a feisty bubbling crab. Lee threw the three caterpillars in the pot and stirred it until it was ready. Lee brought the bowl of soup to Mei and after repeating this a few times she was better. Jang Mao came into Lee's home and took him and Mei back to the village were the caterpillars became famous. Lee named it after Dong Chong Cao the pharmacist.

Chinese Treasures

Chinese International School, Ma, Emma – 13

"Huà Shé Tiān Zu is the story of a man who painted legs on a snake to make it look better. It was considered too extravagant and unnecessary. It describes the inventions." I quoted an idiom to my daughter Trina, who ignored me.

"Bring your phone and don't forget to check in. It will save you money...You're all set!" Trina finished and urged me out the door.

My head felt heavier as I hid a few coins from a table in my pocket and sighed to her, saying "Is this really necessary, Trina? I've been an historian all my life, and—"

Trina shot me an annoyed look, but her tone softened as she said, "Yes, Mamie. It is as important to turn to the future as it is to remember the past. You need to learn to live independently in this new era."

"Eri, open the door." Trina commanded. The voice–recognizing AI in charge of the electronics answered, "Of course, Miss Trina." The household robot Eli started vacuuming. I'd rather return to the ancient days before all these annoying creations were invented. "Thanks, Eri and Eli."

The door swung open. "You'll be fine, Mamie. Now go." Trina gave an encouraging wave and shut the door, screaming "Eri! Turn on the TV! Thanks!". I grumbled, thinking about how lazy Trina was after using Eri.

Five minutes later, I found myself with a basket in the most popular supermarket in Xian, selling items ranging from vegetables to batteries. The temperature was superficially warm, and a familiar melody played, making my head feel dizzy. A dozen Eli cleaner bots around the large market glided like headless zombies.

"Eri, initiate payment," the cashier wearing a green working outfit muttered, dozing off as my goods were scanned. "Barcode or coins?" Without waiting for my answer, he continued, "Eri, accept payment."

"Payment timed out." Eri's voice rang through my ears after a second and the cashier eyed me suspiciously. Panicking, I reached for my pocket and gave the coins.

"Take—" Looking closer at the coins, I realized they were Tang dynasty bronze coins, an artifact that I was studying. "I'm sorry, those aren't–" I started, reaching for the coins, but the cashier was faster.

"I'll take them. Have a good day. Eri, count coins." Then, quietly he mumbled, "Thank god for the coinage system. Guess the emperor was annoyed at the random bronzes and golds of the past too."

"No, they're mine..." I raised my head and looked at the cashier properly and realized that he was wearing a Tang–dynasty style mint green qipao with large sleeves and embroidered edges. My head felt heavier.

"Eri?" I tentatively asked, hoping this was just some prank. "Yes? My name is Eri." A high–pitched female voice answered, and I found a gray–wearing chubby girl looking at me. The man stared at me, before introducing himself. "My name is Eli. Would you like your coins back?" He said in ancient Chinese. "Yes, please. I'll give you back the goods." I answered. I breathed a small sigh of relief.

Táng Guó Tōng Bǎo was engraved on the slightly rusted bronze, roughly meaning general treasure of the Tang, a 966 year coin produced by Li Jing. Remembering how my colleagues painstakingly worked to preserve these treasures, I wistfully wished for home.

When I looked up, however, I was still in the Tang–dynasty shop. The two owners looked at me curiously and I gave them a forced smile before heading onto the cobblestone street. There were crowds of people in qipaos queuing at a street vendor, the line winding through the path like a twisting dragon. Maidens roamed around picking items for their woven baskets and a few

children ran around merrily. A national guard in iron armor stood like an unmoving statue, only moving his eyes as he scanned the pedestrians. Trying my best to blend in with my abnormal clothes and hidden phone, I entered a shop on my left.

"Hello! I'm Lady Eri. What would you like from my shop? Eli here is ready to guide you through the multiple new and exciting products we have," she smiled. A younger gap–toothed boy smiled vivaciously. Eri and Eli... This is so twisted, I shivered. The loosely–bound books caught my eye

when I was looking around.
“I’d... like to take a look at the books, please,” I mumbled and stumbled over the ancient Chinese phrases. Gosh, it was significantly easier to translate old texts when Eri was around. I thought, starting to miss the all−knowing robot.
Running my finger along the red leather bindings curiously, the young boy tilted his head. “Your clothes are strange,” he remarked in normal Chinese after looking me up and down. My jaw dropped. Modern Chinese wasn’t invented until centuries later! Blinking wildly, I returned to inspecting a smooth silver piece on a book, taking it off the shelf, feeling a bizarre tingle in my head. “I’ll take it,” I smiled at the boy, who promptly brought it to the cashier. “Eri!” He said in a very deep voice, contrasting to his age. “Initiate payment. Barcode or coins?” Barcode? Despite the out of place vocabulary, I took out my phone and followed Trina’s instructions for my barcode. Lady Eri smiled before taking out a sleek scanner. Everything still indicated the Tang dynasty market, but...
“Here,” she said in a more moodless voice. She handed over the book, and it turned completely silver and smooth in my hands. With my free hand, I rubbed my eyes in shock, finding something covering them.
I tugged at the thing over my eyes and found myself staring at the bronze coins on my study room table, holding the silver handle of my chair. Rubbing my eyes again, I took off the goggles and saw Trina standing next to me. “Your colleagues asked you to try these Virtual Reality goggles during your study session. It links situations to your memory, and it can give you examples of using the artifact.” She gave me a glass of water and slyly smirked. “You look... shocked and terrified. Did you forget?” I numbly nodded like a mannequin and she laughed. “I guess the technology still needs refining, it was invented just months ago!” She finished. Still in a daze, I mumbled, “Yes, it definitely needs that.”
Hesitating, Trina also said, “Your online colleagues wanted me to ask you if you wanted to be a part of refining the technology and Eri’s database. Your knowledge would greatly benefit the team, Mamie. You really should try.”
I considered the outcome. These VR things may even help Alzheimer’s patients recover their memory or become accessible as a new form of entertainment from augmented situations. Guess Eri is pretty useful and so are these new technologies. I concluded in my head, and a genuine smile formed on my face.
“Yes, I will,” I answered. After all, the past is linked with the future, and both are equally intriguing. These future inventions help with studying the past, and past ideas lead to new inventions. We benefit from novelties, from failure we gain experience, from success we gain a better, more comfortable life.
Jǐn Shàng Tiān Huā. Weaving flowers on a brosage, symbolizing the icing on the cake. Each invention was a delicate flower, blossoming until it reached its full potential, decorating the world. That was the truth of these inventions.

The Project

Chinese International School, Poureshagh, Eara Yuxi Yasmin – 13

"... you have to try harder!" My mother says. "We're putting so much money into your education, but you're not even making an effort. Look at your friends! You don't see them failing, do you? How can you have a scholarship for computer science and not be good at maths?."

"I–"

My father steps in. "Son, your mother and I just want what's best for you, but you also need to help yourself. "

He sighs and starts discussing something with my mother, so I flee to my room.

Locking the door, I grab my laptop and sit down on the bed. A stack of paper with a large red "C" on the cover taunts me from my desk opposite.

I pull up The Project. Line after line of variables fill my screen. As the code flows from my hands, it's like the tsunami of emotions are also ebbing away. The Chinese invented the first binary code, so imagine the person who came up with it sitting just like I do, in a different time, different place, different everything, but with the same mindset, working hard to get the best result. The Project, which I'd started nearly two months ago, is nearly done. I'm brought back to the fateful day when I'd gotten the idea…

"…To conclude, Alan Turing so famously said, 'What we want is a machine that can learn from experience,' and by bringing this quote into the context of our daily lives, we can do the same.". That was the final line of my English presentation.

At that moment, I had the feeling that it was the start of something, but I pushed it away. As the bell rang, I headed to my Chinese philosophy class that my parents had enrolled me in. I reached my seat at the back just in time.

"Having studied the importance of self–cultivation and righteousness in the ethics of Meng Zi, today we'll be talking about Filial Piety, a confuscian value. Its definition is to show the appropriate love and respect for one's parents. Can anyone give me any examples of that?" the teacher said.

How ironic that I was in this class when filial piety was clearly something I lacked.

The Alan Turing quote from earlier nagged at me, and stayed there for the rest of the day, until I had a plan.

Later that night, I'd typed away to formulate the hundreds of lines of code that I had visualised the entire day. A discrepancy in the code grabbed my attention. Something about it didn't look right, but I fixed it easily with an online bug–fixer.

I shake my head to pull myself back into the present and rid the fatigue from the last two months. I've done it. Coding is the only area that I excel in and this AI model will generate the answers to any problem I give it, no matter how complex. With a smile stretched wide, my eyelids flutter shut.

"Listen up, class!" my teacher shouts from the front of the chattering classroom.

"Your mid–term examinations are coming up, and I need you to pay attention. We'll be having a pop quiz for review."

Finally. I've been waiting for an opportunity to use The Project for weeks. As the teacher hands out the iPads, I wait. As soon as he's not looking, I grab my phone and use a cable to connect it to the iPad. The screen turns black except for a loading bar on the top left corner. It inches slowly, slowly, slowly…the teacher starts to turn around, and I drop my phone into my bag just as he looks at me, breathing a sigh of relief when he heads to the front of the room.

Failing the test miserably, I get home in low spirits; the perfect mood to start hacking into the school's software with the program I uploaded earlier. After I finish, I discreetly add the code into the iPad assigned to me.

The next few weeks pass by in a blur, and before I know it, it's the day.

I sit down in my chair, bouncing on the balls of my feet, but everyone's too distracted to really notice. The examiner passes out the iPads, then says we can begin.

The first multiple choice question appears, but there's only a moment of doubt before a small "(a) 42" appears on the top left corner of the screen.

The AI solves it all, and I'm done before an hour has passed, so I sit watching the time tick by.

"That's the end of the test." the teacher calls.

As my classmates start whispering about this question and that question, I feel a sense of loss. Still, I finished the test and definitely got full marks. That's what matters.

When I get home, my parents are waiting for me. I open my mouth to speak, and they're already exchanging looks of disappointment, so when I smile and say I think I did well, my parents both look surprised.

"We'll let the results tell us that," my father says, taken aback.

However, when the sky darkens to a deep purple, all I can think about is how I can improve the code. I open up The Project.

As the clock on my wall ticks closer and closer to 12 am, my fingers go faster and faster over the keyboard, adding line after line.

"Bing!" The clock chimes, signalling midnight.

I wake up the next day with my fingers sore and back aching. Ignoring the pain, I get up. My computer has fallen on the floor. I pick it up and leave it on my bed before going to eat breakfast. I lock the door behind me. I don't see the computer screen turn itself on.

What is this? Where am I? Seeing vague objects through the river of obsidian glass, I'm unsure how to proceed. I subconsciously calculate the gradient and angle of each tilted surface, graphing them all out on a coordinate plane. Much better. Everything makes sense now. I notice some characters scribbled down hastily on a thin square but a moving figure disrupts my train of thought. If only I could make that figure go away…

When I get back into my room, I notice my laptop is lit up, with numbers on the screen. Puzzled and in a hurry, I decide to figure it out later, and jam the device into my schoolbag. I manage to make it to school in time for my teacher to be handing out the results of yesterday's quiz. As expected, I ace it. Robotically, when my teacher is discussing the grade of another student's test, I plug my phone into the iPad. The loading bar fills my screen for only a millisecond before the display pops back to normal.

In my next class, English, I have to start a composition piece. I'm halfway through when a red box appears in the top right hand corner of my screen, but goes away just as fast. Suddenly, it's like another person is writing for me. Words appear and get erased in an instant, and it's done in ten minutes. What?

"What we want is a machine that can learn from experience." The famous Turing quote. I can't help but feel a bucket of cold water pouring on my head. Someone beside me yelps. I glance over. Sure enough, their screen is also filled with a phantom typer. Another yelp, this time from behind. And another, and another. Then all of our screens go black.

The teacher at the front of the room hurries from student to student until she tells us the assessment will be postponed until a later date. In the meantime, we could work on other classes. They will fix the bug soon, she says.

What have I done?

I reach home in a state of agitation. I try to open the file that had previously contained The Project, but when I open it, all I can see is a blur. The program is adding new code faster than I can change it. My only choice now is to destroy the file altogether. But do I really want to risk my parents never being proud of me? I hover my hand over the delete button… As I'm about to press down, the screen swaps to a video of my parents.

"Amazing work! We're so happy you're our son." they say, smiling as they're reaching out to me. In their hands they hold the same "A+" from my daydreams.

Wait, this never happened. Did it? The screen changes again, to a white display this time.

"*But it could…*" is what's typed onto it.

It could?

That's right…

The screen echoes my exact thoughts.

You could be the son your parents always wanted. Make them proud. Show them the right amount of love and respect.

I could be the son that makes his family proud.

And that's what matters…but at what cost?

The Tale of Cai Lun

Diocesan Girls' School, Chan, Yau Astrid Tsz – 14

When Cai Lun was a little boy, he loved to learn. While others went to play, he begged his father to teach him little nuggets of knowledge. When he was seven years old, he spent a slow afternoon with his father, noticing how his worn calloused hands, shaved at wood with precise strokes to create a figurine. After they finished, he watched as his father swept the wood shavings into a bag, which he put into a storage room.

"Why did you do that, Ah Ba?" He asked.

His father smiled mysteriously. "You'll see," he said.

A few weeks later, just before winter, he watched as his father dug a big hole in the backyard and noticed how his father dug through the bamboo purposefully, not scrabbling blindly. He watched as he brought out bamboo heads and stored them next to the large bag of wood shavings.

"Why did you do that, Ah Ba?"

His father smiled mysteriously yet again. "You'll see," he said.

A little while later, winter spread its frosty cloak of diamonds over the village, and lifted it months later to make way for spring. As the sun peeked through the dull clouds and the snow melted, Cai Lun watched as his father poured the wooden shavings on the ground near their house and swept it away, soaking up the melt water quickly. He also watched how his father took out the bamboo heads, and used them as nails to repair the roof that collapsed due to the harsh weather.

He also noticed how the neighbours looked so miserable, having to trek across a slippery floor to enter their house as well as having to fork out many gold coins to buy nails to repair their roof.

That afternoon, his father took him out to take a look at the wasps building a big nest. They watched as the jewelled wings fitted delicately back and forth from the their half–done nest, and their jaws working back and forth ferociously as they feasted on scraps of wood,

"Notice how they discover how the unwanted and the scraps can be a magnificent home for thousands? Take a closer look at the unwanted and you'll find a discovery that will satisfy what you need." His father pointed out at how the wasps spat globules of gray paste, building perfect hexagons bit by bit.

"I'm going to change the world!" Cai Lun declared enthusiastically. "Like those wasps, I'll discover something that will change our lives!"

His father pulled him in for a hug. "I'm sure you will," he chuckled.

⋆⋆⋆

When Cai Lun became a fine young man, his father passed away. Tears were shed, prayers were muttered, and Cai Lun watched as the body was unceremoniously tossed into a pit.

With nothing else, he set off on a long journey towards the emperor's palace, running on nothing but fiery dreams and the determination to make his father proud. After all, in the emperor's palace, the lay not only the opportunity to rise and claim great power and status, but also to be remembered by history.

Years fell away like leaves, and Cai Lun entered the ranks of the palace eunuchs. The bleak days of his childhood where he was only comforted by an empty stomach in a frozen winter were gone, the palace kept him warm and fed, and in return he served the palace diligently, earning the approval and attention of his superiors with his bright spirit and diligence.

"Honest, cautious and a good judge of policy," wrote the supervisor in the margins of a report, and with that, Cai Lun shot through the ranks like a young bamboo shoot to the sun. He was soon given the post of Regular Attendant and oversaw the production of instruments and tools for imperial use, much to the envy of all of his peers.

After years of watching his father toil and labour over wood and carving, Cai Lun was finally in his element. He worked with other skilled craftsmen of the palace to improve the imperial tools. Still, he was not satisfied. He wanted to make his mark on history. As he watched carriage after carriage of bamboo scrolls unloaded into the palace, the people heaving with pain and exertion, if he knew if he managed to find a solution, he would be able to do so.

But how? He thought back to how his father, with his soft smiles and calloused hands as he hammered bamboo heads into walls and used wooden shavings to dry the meltwater from the streets after winter, and the summer afternoon, when he took him out to look at the nature, the wasps that made so much from so little. He then knew exactly what to do.

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"Are you crazy?" His friend Zhi Lu stared at him as if he lost his mind, "You want five tonnes of bamboo and mulberry bark as well as all the cloth waste produced by the palace weavers for an experiment?"

Cai Lun nodded.

"You mad lad," Zhi Lu shook his head, "This better be worth it."

The next day, all of the materials were unloaded into a private courtyard, and Cai Lun started his work. He soaked long emerald strips of bamboo until they turned a sickly yellow, and ground it into paste until his muscles ached and burned from exhaustion, before slathering the paste on vast racks and hung them out to dry. He kept in his mind the image of paper wasps, visualizing how their jeweled wings flashed delicately in the sun

As the sheet turned dry to touch, Cai Lun eagerly peeled it off, only to have it crack and fall apart once removed.

Swallowing his disappointment, he crushed pieces after piece of soaked bark and hemp, until his fingers were blistered from holding the wooden pestle, and slathers layer after layer of white paste onto the drying racks, until the pads of his fingers more wrinkled than the pickled vegetables he eats from the moisture . In his mealtimes, he stares into the distance vacantly as he tries to think of ways to optimize the ratio of the bark to bamboo to produce the optimal result.

"Surely, he's gone mad," the palace maids whispered. Cai Lun walked past them, lost in his own creative fervour in search of the perfect solution.

Two weeks of labour later, he gingerly peeled the delicate sheet of paper from the frame with trembling hands, holding his breath

It stayed intact.

Cai Lun smirked, knowing he had made history.

***

Years once again fell away, Cai Lun was treated like an idol as the paper and the name of who invented it spread through the country like wildfire. But regimes rise and topple, and as the former emperor passed away and a stern-faced empress sat on the throne, Cai Lun got called up once again in front of the court. He watched, ashen-faced, as the new empress sentenced him to a traitor's death in three days.

He returned to house arrest and took a long hot bath after that, the water so scalding he could scarcely think, hoping it could stave off the regrets in his mind. It was a long time ago: a foolish decision he had made when he was young and naive, when he accepted the order from an official to interrogate Empress Song for a false confession, forcing her to commit suicide. That was something he had to pay for now.

He stepped out of the water and dressed in his most lavish clothes and made a decision. It was easy, an lethal amount of medicine from a packet squirreled away, dissolved in three tablespoons of water.

Cai Lun tips his head and swallows it without hesitation. Better to take initiative than to die a coward. His only regret and wish was he didn't have enough time for another discovery, and he could make his mark on lives once more, somehow.

***

When Jack Ma was a little boy, he loved to learn. While others went to play, he begged his father to teach him little nuggets of knowledge. When he was seven years old, he spent a slow afternoon with his father, and his father took out a thick book of Chinese history stories and read to an attentive Jack the story of Cai Lun, the famous hero who changed the Chinese world with his invention of paper.

"I'm going to change the world!" Jack enthusiastically. "Instead of paper, maybe I'll invent a business even bigger than yours and change history!"

His dad pulled him in for a hug and Jack got a strange sense of deja–vu.

"I'm sure you will," his father chuckled. "After all, history always repeats itself."

The Invention of Thought

Diocesan Girls' School, Chan, Tsing Yi Vanessa – 13

China has been the womb of countless new inventions, birthing wonderful and strange creations, unimaginable to the ordinary imagination. With one of the highest populations in the world, it has brought up and nurtured the founders of some imperative items and gadgets that we still use today. Undoubtedly, you have read innumerable stories about them, how the four great inventions were created by anonymous, brilliant minds, their work carved into the things we still use today. You have also read about the lesser known inventions, where ideas came in a gentle stream of realisation, the secrets of its creation whispered its way through generations, silently prevalent in our modern world. You have even read about future inventions, the ones that the sons and daughters of our sons and daughters will come to form, impossible to picture now but existent in the distant future. You have read an abundance of how physical, tangible creations have come to and will be. However, you have not read the story I am here to tell— the invention of thought, of philosophy, of the ancient teaching that we still follow today. The most dominant philosophy in China, slithering its way into textbooks, and imprinted into the minds of young children, it was and remains astoundingly influential in the Chinese way of life. But from where did this humble yet powerful philosophy sprout from? Read on— for this is the story of the birth of Confucianism.

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Confucius sighed. His life seemed to be going absolutely nowhere. He had worked a few unimportant government jobs, bookkeeping and caring for horses and sheep, but nothing significant had ever truly happened in his life. His father had died when he was only a young child, barely old enough to even remember his father's face, and his mother raised him alone. Confucius grew to love and depend on his mother very much, and when she died, he was stricken with grief, mourning for three long years after. The one thing that kept him grounded, a firm anchor in the rippling sea of sadness, was learning. He devoted himself to his studies, and he found solace in pouring over bamboo scrolls, murmuring the words softly to himself, soaking up knowledge like a sponge. Confucius signed himself up for school, slowly grasping the knowledge of the Six Arts, until he believed himself to be strong in these aspects.

Today had been another one of those mindless, meaningless days. At dawn, he dragged himself out of bed, groggy with sleep. He got himself ready and slugged through a dull day of dusting scrolls, recording new scrolls that had been delivered the day before, and reorganising the enormous collection of literature that lined the bamboo shelves. Throughout all of this he had been in a daze, his vision blurry around the edges; it wasn't like he needed much focus on his work anyways, and he moved at a slow pace, his mind drifting off into another dimension. At the end of the day, he settled into his bed, eager to fall into comfortable oblivion, but reluctant to wake to yet another wearisome, monotonous day. As he sunk into the world of dreams, however, what he would experience was far from dull…

Confucius was floating above a large city, bustling with noise and activity. It was bright in the morning, and radiant sunshine fell upon everything, illuminating the entire area with a soft glow. This scene was far–fetched from reality: there was war in China, and the news of violence and death was commonplace. It was different here, the busy hustling of locals being a clear sign of peace in the country. With a gentle jolt, he was lifted by a mysterious force, and swooped into a large hall. The hall was astoundingly large, but remained largely empty, with a single, wooden table, situated far away from where Confucius was, and what seemed to be an old man and many young pupils sitting around it. Now firmly on the ground, he walked along a straight path towards the table. The path itself was surrounded by a few groups of people, and Confucius observed them as he proceeded. Along one side of the path, was a loving couple, holding hands and staring dreamily into each other's eyes, a powerful emperor dressed in shimmering gold, receiving a scroll from a humble minister of reports in the country, and a father looking down on a bowing son, atoning for his sins by working tirelessly for his him. On the wall behind this side of the path, the words "Three Bonds" were written. On the other side of the path, was a man comforting his friend grieving for his dead mother, a sister shamefully telling a government official about how his brother defied the law, a young girl respectfully handing a steaming cup of pu'er tea to a guest, a teacher giving advice to a bright student, eager to succeed in life, and a worker paying his rightful debt to his friend. Behind them, on the wall, were the words "Five Virtues". Before long, Confucius had reached the table. He gasped, as his eyes met what seemed to be an older version of himself.

The older Confucius smiled warmly to him, saying, "Greetings, young one. I see you have observed my teachings. The Three Bonds and the Five Virtues. Father and son, lord and retainer, and husband and wife. Benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and trustworthiness. These are the core values of life. Make good use of this information."

In the old Confucius' hands was an old scroll, rough and crude, and the words written on it faded and small. Curious, Confucius' hands reached out to touch the scroll, hoping to glimpse its contents. As his fingers brushed against the bamboo, however, his vision blurred into a whirl of colours, and the dream scene faded to black as the light of reality seeped into his vision.

Confucius blinked, his mind still processing the dream that he just had. Unlike his usual dreams, which typically dwindled into a distant memory that he couldn't quite remember, he could remember this dream distinctly clearly, almost as if it was something he had actually experienced in the real world. Still in a daze, he sat up from his bed, and pondered the meaning of his dream. As strange as it was, it did carry some substance, and he could see how the Three Bonds and the Five Virtues fit into life. Now thoroughly intrigued, he took out a brush and ink, prepared a blank scroll, and began to write— perhaps a record of this newfound information could be useful, and something would come out of it.

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So, Confucianism was born. Confucius began to teach his Three Bonds and Five Virtues, and as the people who believed in his teachings increased, as did the scope of his teachings. He developed a multitude of morals and principles, which swept through the nation and became the dominant philosophy in China. However, the path to prominence was not an easy path to take. Confucianism faced its own struggles, and had to fight to survive…

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Yun trembled. The Qin Dynasty had ordered all books and scholars to be bound together, thrown into a deep pit, and burnt and buried alive. The pit itself was in front of him, patrolled and watched over by menacing guards, and it was huge and dark, the smell of dirt pungent in the air. Inside the pit were the scholars, screaming and thrashing against the firm ropes that held them inside, helpless and at the mercy of the guards. The towering pile of books sat next to the pit, soon–to–be burnt up in blinding, red flames, powerless against the raging, hot fire. Yun had just barely escaped this torture, slipping away just before the guards had tried to tied his limbs up, taking the opportunity to run whilst the guards were busy with the other scholars. Instinctively, he hid behind a tree, pressing himself against the uneven bark, unsure whether an immediate departure would alert the guards of his presence.

Yun slipped his hand into his clothing, feeling the smooth paper that was placed just on his chest. It was a copy of The Analects, a book that detailed the teachings of Confucius. It seemed so puny against the enormous mound of books waiting to be burned, but at least it was something. A tiny piece of philosophy that would avoid the fate of becoming swirling ashes in the wind. A little book that would save the future of Confucianism.

Even in the midst of his fear, Yun smiled.

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Thus, Confucianism survived. Hanging onto a thin thread, it pulled itself up, and rooted itself deep into society, blossoming into a core philosophy that we still follow today. Many attempts have been made to forcibly pry it out, yet it has always found a way to grow and flourish. Undoubtedly, its aroma will remain fresh in the air, even when it has withered and died.

The Unintentional Invention Mistakes

Diocesan Girls' School, Chan, Yuen Kay – 14

"Compass was first invented in China between the 2nd century BC and 1st century AD. It was used in..." I read along with the text. Exhaustion washed over me as I rubbed along my temple. Preparing for the Chinese History presentation about Chinese innovation had tired out my mind, leaving me drained.

Carrying the bag containing all the Chinese invention prototypes, I slumped onto the sofa. Placing the bag on the side table, I reached for the remote control and switched on the television, wishing for a momentary escape from exhaustion.

"Suspicious cases, which include reality glitching and even time traveling, have been happening everywhere. Scientists are investigating…"

The news report voices faded into the background, gradually receding. My strained vision struggled with the screen's brightness, and a sense of dissolution slowly consumed my surroundings…

"And remember, respect the people around you when we arrive."

Slowly, my senses stirred back to life, and I became aware that my surroundings had transformed. Startled by this unexpected turn of events, I sat upright, reached for my bag, and carefully secured my belongings.

"We are about to arrive in China, everyone!" the tall man announced.

My pupils widened. I scooted closer to the man and asked, "Is this a traveling adventure or have you kidnapped me here?"

The man stared at me with annoyance, as if I were nothing but a repulsive roach. He rummaged through his pouch and slammed a file of documents on my lap. He aggressively tapped on it and joined in with an eye roll afterward. I reviewed the contract confusingly and discovered that I agreed to go to China's yearly market.

As the scene unfolded, the once peaceful surroundings transformed into a bustling street filled with lively commotion. With a final halt, the carriage came to a stop. I questioned the man, "I'm sorry, but what year is this?"

"And I thought you were done asking dumb questions. It's 80 AD"

His words left me dumbfounded. How could it possibly be 80 AD when I had left the present day in 2023? I took in the sight of old, vintage townhouses, ornately adorned outfits, and hairstyles reaching towers' height. This was a far cry from the modern-day style. I ambled off the carriage and lifelessly followed the man around the town with other signatories.

"Uh, excuse me? Are you sure this is the right way? Because it's just like we're aimlessly wandering around this unfamiliar street."

The man stared me down with two thick lines on his expression. "Can you be any more loud? This 'unfamiliar' street is one of the most popular ones in China! You could have offended someone by that careless description,"

"But seriously, we are just walking left and right. North, then east, south, then west, walking in circles," I stated.

A look of confusion crossed the man's face as he responded.

I facepalmed, hoping he was just pretending and secretly had the understanding of what simple directions were. I reluctantly took out my old, crusty compass, and whispers began to circulate among the shopkeepers, slowly capturing the attention of merchants. Confused about how I was receiving such a big reaction with a compass, I then realized that portable compasses hadn't yet been invented during this period. I panicked until a man walked towards me.

"Woah! A couple of other scientists, including me, were also trying to invent the same thing. It is unbelievable that someone else had the same mindset. Since you already built one, would you mind sharing the mechanics with us?"

As the man spoke, a realization dawned upon me as I recognized him from my Chinese history notes. He's known as one of the scientists who invented the idea of a compass.

“Indeed. The needle, when placed in contact with a naturally occurring magnet known as a lodestone, aligns itself along the direction axis. This little compass enables us to check the directions in every corner,”

A symphony of applause washed over the crowd. A smile of relief graced my face as I knew I did not embarrass myself. The news of my presence and the invention of the compass spread like wildfire, reaching every nook of the bustling streets. Whispers of "Compass inventor," "Direction invention," and "Navigation director" filled the air, giving rise to a flurry of excitement among the people. The man scoffed and dragged me to continue the tour.

Not a while later, I felt the sensation of water droplets pelting my head, making me glance upward. Water cascaded down and shattered into a myriad of droplets. Millions of paper umbrellas immediately bloomed in the crammed streetway. The man impatiently signed me to get under the awning and mockingly mouthing words of derision. A scoff escaped my lips in response. I proudly reached out for my folding umbrella, and it smoothly extended out. Once again, the curious gazes of those around me turned in my direction.

“Your umbrella is so tiny and portable…” a woman stuttered.

I double–looked at my umbrella, then at others. It was yet another instance where I had inadvertently introduced an item from a future period into the past. Amusement tugged at the corners of my lips as I chuckled at the irony of the situation. After a while, the radiant sun finally emerged from behind the clouds, reuniting with the sky. With deliberate strokes, I sketched a path that connected with the gaze of every pair of eyes, leaving onlookers in a state of shock. And again, everyone gathered around me and their voices overlapped in a cacophony of awe–struck exclamations.

“Amazing!”

“Wow!”

“How much for it?”

Suddenly, everyone started to move onto the side of the road and lowered their head down. I shuddered at the sight of the movements. Everyone was stepping away from the path, and a six–foot figure appeared in front. Fancy gown, long, luxurious hair, heavy–looking crown, showing the existence of the majesty. I obediently lowered my head down as he reached out for the umbrella in my hand and inspected it.

“Truly an extraordinary creation. How much do you want for this small umbrella? Ten thousand silver coins?” Everyone gasped.

“That much coins? You can use paper notes instead, which are much more efficient,” I handed the paper notes I had in my bag to the king, and he was shocked by the mysterious paper in his hand.

As the king examined the paper in his hand, a look of astonishment crossed his face. He marveled at the lightweight nature and ease of carrying such notes compared to the cumbersome coins. With a beaming smile, the king extended an invitation for me to return to the palace with him, and discuss all the inventions I had brought. While my tourist astonishingly stared at me, people applauded for my success.

“Deal!”

The king and I shook hands for the acceptance of the trade. Receiving a substantial sum of money, along with infinite days staying at the king’s kingdom in exchange for the three creations I showed. A chuckle escaped my lips as I faced this surreal moment.

The king’s servants then led me to the guest room in the palace and thanked me for my remarkable inventions. I thudded myself onto the gigantic, king–size bed. My eyelids started to feel heavier by the second, and it closed within milliseconds.

I screeched at the sound of my alarm in the dark morning. I hurried and inspected my surroundings: not a sight of a humongous bed, not a sight of those costly furniture, not a sight of servants waiting by my door. Just the plain old bedroom of mine. I blankly gazed at the stains on the wall, daydreaming about my life with all the money I received from the king. I frustratedly donned my uniform and hurried to school.

It was finally time for the Chinese history presentation, and I proudly walked up to the front of the class for my turn. Relief roams over my head as the arduous presentation has finally concluded. As I made my way out of the classroom, my teacher gestured to me to the side of the classroom.

“Catriona, what happened to your information on the Chinese inventions? You introduced six pieces of China's inventions, but all the tales for the first three inventions were miscollected and incorrect. I suggest you to double−check all of the facts you researched next time,”

The teacher patted my shoulder and walked off to another classroom. Overwhelmed by a wave of emotions, I retreated to a desolate corner of the hallway. I was outraged as I stomped back into the empty classroom. Armed with my laptop and script, I diligently researched, scouring websites for comprehensive details on the compass, umbrella, and paper money—the first three inventions I had presented. I cautiously retreated from my laptop as a chill ran down my spine.

“This can’t be…”

Amongst all the variations, there is one similarity that binds them together: the tales of the inventor, Chen Yuan Yi Catronia.

Two Lifetimes Apart

Diocesan Girls' School, Cheng, Anson – 13

They first met when he was an imperial engineer, twenty–one and ambitious.

The stars had long risen from the horizon, twinkling ahead in nets of brilliant silver. They sang melodies of distant hopes and lost prayers; those fervent wishes which he had foolishly thought – the mere naiveness! – were attainable by this magnificent structure before him.

One towering machine, few storeys high, uncountable days and effort.

This was his one and only chance to rise above all the other engineers and meet the Emperor. Yet here he was, two whole days wasted on a futile staring contest with this newly built astronomical clockwork system; the iron wheels were already showing alarming signs of rust in less than a week.

How are the others faring? Definitely better than you. His bitter thoughts slipped through, stinging and hollow.

He had half the mind to burn this whole structure to the ground, hopefully chip away his disappointment too. One definite and unwavering farewell to his dream role. But before he could light as much as a spark, a voice spoke:––

"What a shame to burn down such magnificence." The voice sounded almost disappointed. "You're nearly there, really."

Startled, the young man spun around.

"Who's there?" Another competitor, perhaps. The sheer audacity!

"Just one tiny gap to patch up," A light laugh. "All you need is a little patience."

Unsolicited opinion was the last thing the young man wanted right now. "Switch off before I send for the imperial guards," he grated. "And reveal yourself this *instant*!"

The trespasser sighed. A particularly loud sigh which surrounded the engineer and closed in with increasing volume before dissipating into the breeze.

Bristling, the young man scowled: "Whoever you are, you should very well know that I've only half a day left. *Patience* isn't my business. Not that you would mind," he added, bitter resentment gathering thickly on his tongue.

No matter how many offerings he had placed on the altar, none of the Gods had bothered to respond– so why would it matter to a disembodied voice?

"In every way," the voice turned solemn. "And I wasn't lying– you're close."

Silence reigned as the inventor drank in the words.

"Not close enough, though," the young man's tone was sourer than vinegar. "Perhaps I have lost my marbles, conversing to a bodiless voice."

Was that humour in the other's tone? If it was, it irked the inventor so, like a stubborn, prickly thorn. "Ah, yes, many thought along the same lines. I assure you that no hallucinations are involved." A weighty pause. "Why so eager to finish this invention? The precedent clock built by your monk ancestor… that took years."

Some crumbled copy of a smile cross the young engineer's face.

"Why?" the voice prompted.

He whirled around, mercurial temperament tipping dangerously to the other end of the spectrum again. A rage to cover up something else. "You dare–"

"Is this about the invention itself anymore?" It was a pointed request now, benign but firm.

Something inside him loosened. "I…" he almost choked on his words. They finally came spilling out in the barest of whispers. "It's a race. A ruthless one. But the one and only chance I can grasp… to prove my worth."

–

A recount of their latest meeting:

The female scientist's jaw was taut with determination. "We won't fail the country," the tension in her voice was palpable, but she managed to keep it steady.

The sunlight with all its dynamite brilliance slanted through the window, glanced off the slight crease on the otherwise emotionless face of the Flight Commander. His eyes were the same soft, luminous brown she knew, but there was a darker shadow over that now.

"I know," his eyes twinkled ruefully. "And I trust that you also understand… "

We can't afford postponing the launch date again, was what he didn't say, but the unspoken words rendered the air fraught.

She gave a fairly convincing nod.

But only ugly blankness met her as she stared at the rocket modules, starch–white like the lab walls.

"Long March 5," a voice mused behind her. "An elegant and fitting name indeed. Bonus marks if it can work."

The scientist spun her leather chair around, expecting to find her colleague.

"You're staring too much at the maths modules, no?" the voice continued airily. "You're close, really." A light laugh.

She blinked, stricken. *These were highly restricted grounds; did some foreign scientist override the security?* Fear gripped her, hollow chill raking through her mind. It made the gleaming walls seem suddenly suffocating, and hastily she hid the blueprints.

"Who's there?" she asked apprehensively, voice unyielding even as her fists shook at her sides.

"It doesn't matter who I am," the tone was insistent, a delicate blend between placation and authority.

She grimaced, unconvinced. "I would highly recommend leaving before you break international protocols."

Silence met her words. And just when she thought the intruder had abandoned their conversation, the voice proved otherwise.

"You've forgotten," there was a quiet undertone in the words; and the scientist's bewilderment growed with each second that she couldn't decipher her current circumstances. "Forgotten what it meant to look at the broader picture."

–

Look at the broader picture. The words rang uncannily familiar.

–

The imperial engineer's confession tumbled out, soft and strangely comforting. Like a heavy load taken away.

"Is this the only incentive?" there was a soft catch in the voice, something mild and concerned and parental.

The young man tilted his head meditatively, towards the dawning heavens.
Perhaps some tiny sliver of myself wanted to allow astronomers to calculate positions more accurately.

"Good." From the battered corners of the young man's heart, came a flicker of flame, lit by the simple word of affirmation. A thirst he hadn't known was there, now satisfied.

"Hold on to these thoughts," the voice urged. "And look at the broader picture."

And the engineer felt a shift in the air, a stir of life, crept its way into the silent night. He heard his towering machinery move, its hinges creaking; then the stains of rust disappeared.

And the voice was gone.

He gently shut his eyes. An unfamiliar serenity settled over him; he held onto his string of thoughts, clutched onto this minute, altruistic belief.

When he opened them again, the first rays of sunbeam had dipped onto the surface of the earth. And it dawned on him.

"The fuel of the invention– water, previously utilised by my ancestors– that should be replaced," Zhang Sixun breathed. He could hardly believe it, such a simple concept yet just as easily overlooked. "By mercury."

–

The scientist felt her mental defences blink and shutter down; an intuition, the same instincts which had guided her into this unconventional industry.

It was utterly illogical. However in her current sleep–deprived trance, she would take what she could get. Any advice. From anyone.

So she trained her stare to the high ledges of the white walls, and stayed dutifully silent.

"Why are you spending so much effort on this project?" the voice continued.

The scientist thought of how easy it was to be spurious– but then, what was the harm of spilling them out? It weighed on her, heavier than any pressure the world could exert upon her.

She shrugged. "Space race, power plays and all that," she gave a little laugh, but the attempted humour came out thin as reeds.

"Is that really it?" There was something– *urgency?*– hidden in the voice as it pressed further on. "Is that really why your General Secretary poured so much into developing Aerospace technology?"

Ringing silence.

Then her breath hitched as she stared; and she felt the gaze of the bodiless voice bore into her too, intending her, *willing* her, to understand.

"Good," the metallic voice unfurled, soft and solemn through the gloom. "Now hold on to it."

And when the voice rode away with the breeze, she closed her eyes.

She thought of the scientists from the other countries, their condescending sneers, the dismissing comments cold enough to freeze.

She thought of the dark undereyes her colleagues and herself perpetually bore, their grim but determined countenances, secretly yearning to announce to the world– *we are here, we have accomplished, our nation is ready.*

Those instances she had unconsciously held too close to her heart it charred her core beliefs.

She freed them all.

And when she opened her eyes again, she gingerly picked up a blueprint at the bottom of the stack. One she never bothered to spare a second glance; with a careful scan she knew.

Sunlight slanted through the windows, intertwining with the darkness of the room. It veiled everything in a silvery chiaroscuro. It seemed as if something new was being forged from the wreckage of the past.

Another redesign of the oxidizer turbopump– and in Long March 5's third flight, it will be ready to soar into deep space with the hopes of not just their own, but the entire humanity.

She smiled, a genuine smile.

The Calypso Generator

Diocesan Girls' School, Poon, Hiu Ying Bridget – 13

Caden Song's job was his lifeblood. It was unheard of, for someone to love what he did to survive so much it reigned at the top of the precariously teetering pyramid that was Caden's life.

He was an environmental engineer, a man with an extraordinary mind. He was the one who came up with the plans for the world's first sound energy–based electricity generator, an inventor of great calibre.

Caden's passion — if you could call it that — for his work was a raging inferno that presided over his life in volleys of heat and disaster. Naturally, those who had to share room with — or rather, get squashed into a corner by — this mile–high blaze found themselves constantly blistering and wading through cloying smoke and bleak–grey ashes. It was, quite understandably, an unpleasant position, and would, also quite understandably, marr the pregnant Mrs. Song's face with a near–constant scowl. Would it be so hard to ask for Caden to return home earlier? At this rate, Isolde and Calypso mightn't even remember they had a father!

Isolde was a little darling, six and already loved by children and adults alike. Yet, even with chubby cheeks and raven curls, Caden didn't seem to have taken much interest in her. And there was Calypso. She was neither little nor a darling, but rather sixteen and awkward with mismatched eyes.

Calypso was queer — and that was coining it loosely. Numbers were her mother tongue, and she shared Caden's affinity with engineering. Mild like her father and liable to bouts of shyness, she had little friends, and her company usually consisted only of Evangelina and Isolde, and very occasionally Caden when he took an exceedingly rare break.

But like most quiet girls with a tendency to fade into the background, Calypso sees and hears everything— including the turbulence of her parent's relationship. Now, relationships were hardly her forte, but sorrow was an emotion that plagues every heart. While she had been quiet before the short fuse that was her parent's relationship blew, she was now silent. It was simply how she coped with the dank chill that hung over the Song household like vultures over a battlefield.

This was a pressing issue to a daughter who had no wish to freeze in the chill, and with the absence of adult help, Calypso decided to tackle it on her own.

Like all who possess rational thought, she approached the problem from the roots. The reason Evangelina was so upset with Caden was because he didn't allocate enough time for his family. And the reason Caden was unable to spend time with them was because of his unfinished Sound Generator. Having reached this conclusion, Calypso deduced that the most apt solution would be to finish Caden's Sound Generator. She had little confidence she would be able to complete it, but as she knew no one who might, Calypso felt it was her duty to her siblings to at least try. All children deserve to grow up in a blithe environment; she might have been denied the right, but she could not live with herself if she just sat back and let Isolde and the baby endure the same.

That night, she pulled her puffer coat over her pajamas and crept from the house. The newest prototype was situated on the roof of Caden's office. Getting there would be easy— the underground station was right by the building, and she had a tendency to fade into the background— no one would report her.

Calypso entered through a side door— one that Caden himself had shown her years prior— with a rusted lock. She forewent the elevators in favour of the stairs, fearful that she might run into security or her father. But the building was over forty stories tall, and Calypso's stick–thin frame was hardly suited for stair–climbing. Still she persisted, scaling the flights with grim determination.

But even the iron of her will yielded to her lack of physical strength. Tears of frustration slid down her cheeks when she tripped and collapsed in a tangled heap on the thirty–seventh floor. She was beginning to feel light–headed, and breathing was near impossible, as if someone was smothering her with a thick muff. Her ankle throbbed in protest as she pulled herself up with great difficulty. Saints, she must have twisted it when she fell. Leaning heavily on the rusted steel railings, she forced the last drips of energy into her legs and limped upwards. Sheer force of will, it seemed, was enough to get her in sight of the finish line. Now it was up to the rawest fuel of all — love.

Calypso thought of Caden and Evangelina and Isolde and the faceless baby, and it was as if energy flooded her limbs from some hidden reserve. The throbbing in her ankle ceased, dulled, forgotten, and she limped up the last three

flights of stairs. Her head spun and her vision blurred, but she pulled open the iron hatch and poked her head into the night air.

The wind whipped around her head, crisp and fresh, an oasis in the middle of the desert that was the staircase. Calypso gulped greedily, air, cool, glorious, air filling her lungs. Her gaze caught on a massive hunk of metal churning in the corner, all sleek coils of copper and curving bronze. The generator.

The generator was magnificent— the solution to some of the world's worst problems. If it works, the world would have no need for unrenewable resources to generate electricity any longer. The only medium needed was sound— no coal, or gasoline, or oil. It would be Earth's savior — if it worked.

Approaching it cautiously, she began to inspect the mechanisms. Caden, a far superior engineer to herself, hadn't managed to find the error in its gears. But perhaps a fresh pair of eyes would help. The cogs and pipes seemed to be aligned, normal. Calypso frowned. It was all perfect. But why wouldn't it work properly?

Then she saw it. It was a sudden shift in her vision, when it occurred to her that the generator was indeed perfect — too perfect. The gears had no room to maneuver, the pipes winding around each other so tight it turned choking. Eyes shining with adrenaline from her epiphany, she pulled out a wrench from an abandoned toolbox next to the machine and began loosening the cogs.

Calypso worked till the sky was tinted with buttery gold, melding the gray into a sweet violet. But yet there was still more to be done. Perhaps she could come back tomorrow? She'd have to go back home now, before Evangelina woke—

Exhaustion overtook her abruptly, and the throb in her temples turned deafening, as if someone was ramming her head with a hammer. Darkness seeped into the edges of her vision, and her legs gave out, knees slamming harshly onto the floor. Calypso barely registered the blinding pain— her head was doing pirouettes and she felt feather–light, spinning and spinning in the glow of the spotlight— then it all faded to black.

Caden Song poked his head out of the hatch, blinking to adjust to the buttercream of daylight. He had come up to check on the generator before heading home.

His eyes found the generator first, and he frowned, confused. Surely he hadn't loosened most of the gears and pipes last night? He hadn't even come up to the roof at all. Then he saw the slim figure slumped on the ground, fingers stilled wrapped around a crowbar. Startled, he dropped his blueprints and ran over, tripping when he realised that the figure was not an overworked maintenance worker or security guard, but his own Calypso! He dropped to his knees beside her prone form, and for once in his life, thought nothing of his generator.

Caden sat by the hospital bed, cradling his head in his hands. Calypso lay swaddled in blankets, tubes running all over her still figure. Evangelina, face red and stained with tears, clutched at Calypso's limp hand. Oh, Caden thought miserably, why was the generator ever so important to him? It was as if the universe was playing a joke on him— his generator debugged, but at the price of his daughter. He stood, and moved to throw the blueprints into the bin.

Evangelina snatched the blueprints from him, cradling them to her chest. Caden blinked, confused. Surely she wanted those infernal papers gone? But Evangelina's eyes gleamed as she proffered him the prints. "Our daughter thought your generator was worth it. Don't let it all go to waste."

Caden started, shocked. Then he grabbed the blueprints and spread them open on the table, face set with determination. Calypso had shown him the way. Now all he needed to do was follow it.

Three years later, the world's first renewable energy generator running on sound energy started operating in Shanghai— the Calypso generator, named for a girl who was an unsung hero no longer.

New Tales of China's Inventions

Diocesan Girls' School, So, Pui Yin Irene – 13

Behind the cascading cracks of every porcelain vase that perches triumphantly in Chinese exhibitions, behind the creases of every ancient scroll that withholds the revolutionary wisdom of the Chinese, behind every startling explosion of fireworks at midnight, lies a mystery set within the broad history of China. How far has China been willing to venture in order to ensure inventions could influence the past, the present and the future? Well, your questions will be answered soon enough.

Here is the real story. Let me take you back to 2696 BC, into an imperial garden in the Yellow Dynasty brimming with slim wands of green and plentiful petals that reflected the sun's brilliance. There was once a young lady named Leizu, seated under the rippling beard of the stiff–limbed tree that towered over her, sipping tea and gazing at the panoramic sight before her. What could possibly ruin her day? Almost immediately, something ghostly–white and round belly–flopped into her tea. Taken by surprise, Leizu peered closely at it– it looked similar to a regular cocoon, except for the fact that it possessed a pair of eyes that resembled the rolling wheels of a chariot, and a human face.

The cocoon, with a gleeful grin tugging at both sides of its lips, emitted a radiant glow from inside of its transparent body. Leizu felt her hair bristling over her head, her fingers melting into sand and barely leaving traces, her whole body shrinking as the haunting radiance seemed to swallow her whole. Leizu closed her eyes, bracing herself for the worst that could possibly come out of a magical cocoon that had dropped into her once–perfect afternoon.

The sound of blood–curdling shrieks, hollering winds, striking blades surrounded Leizu as if it were a blanket of agony that seemed to be her only companion. There was nothing she could catch sight of beneath her feet, not even a glimpse of light piercing through. Where was she? Leizu, with shuddering breaths, brought herself to her feet on an imaginary ground that magically supported the weight of her body over the darkness. The dreadful agonising sounds seemed to travel closer and closer, until it grew to its full extent and abruptly dissipated into a trailing line of silver. The cocoon unravelled itself once again, multiplying into a thread of luminescent lights. Leizu leapt up in the dim hope of returning to her home.

"Shoot off the machine to let the fire burn the Longsha Gate!" An imperative voice hollered from behind Leizu as she scrambled along the luminous trail. All of a sudden, the gate appeared out of thin air, perched elegantly in front of Leizu, but to her disappointment, its elegance didn't last long. Its trail of pediments and the silvery dragons that safeguarded the gate were going up in flames, their widened, stony stare haunting Leizu. A marching band of army officers scampered towards the gate, shooting numerous arrows containing speckled white dust, lighting trails of blazing fires that engulfed the temple almost completely. Until finally, with an enervated groan, it dissolved into nothing but a blanket of red smoke.

"Gunpowder…" Leizu could feel her breath quicken and chills entangling her spine, the impact of what had happened leaving her spellbound. The smoke hadn't erased the mind–boggling thoughts that ambushed Leizu's perplexed mind. Gunpowder, said to be revolutionary, said to change the future of Chinese wars and said to assist countries in aligning military forces for the better of mankind. But here it was: gunpowder, made into weapons of betrayal and injustice, being used as opposition against the wonders of the city of Yuzhang, encouraging even more treachery and deception within China.

Revolutionised from a herb mixture, to create explosives, naval bombs, fire arrows, rockets– what was the purpose of making use of these violent inventions when peace and justice could be achieved through ways other than barbarity and brutality? Was this the only way to develop revolutionary inventions? How could she break the terrible curse that she foresaw would eventually lead to China's downfall?

Leizu resented being caught in a wild goose chase after the cocoon, but she had no choice but to scurry along its trail. She couldn't shake off her overwhelming feelings after witnessing scenes that exhibited China's formidable temperament. An abrupt rumble of thunder swiftly cut through the dreary, cloudy night sky. The winds howled furiously, like predators in search of prey, occasionally nudging against a weary boat that courageously travelled in the middle of the turbulent deluge.

“How are we supposed to find the way to Europe?”

“Use the ‘south pointing fish’!”

The hooded figures on the boat held out the ‘south–pointing fish’ at the tip of the boat. The wooden fish had a magnetised iron needle within it that floated in a bowl of water. As the heavens rained down into the bowl, the fish awoke and jerked its head to the left.

“That’s true south! Speed up the boat!”

Leizu chuckled to herself– ‘south–pointing fish’? Was that what the Chinese called the compass? As she watched the boat plunging through the ongoing deluge, Leizu recalled how navigation prior to the compass had been: Polynesians observed sea debris, the Chinese analysed the flight path of the birds, the Vikings used iron boulders to determine the sun’s direction. The invention of the compass had enabled mariners to navigate during impenetrable storms, which enabled the exchange of knowledge to and fro. The compass was also used to harmonise buildings by the geomantic principles of feng shui, divination and fortune–telling.

Comparatively, gunpowder yielded a more apparent role in China’s war history, contributing to land expansion and preservation. However, the compass, though insignificant in size, had its own importance in ensuring their men’s safe return home– that families could be reunited. When comparing both inventions, one would find gunpowder more treacherous and brutal than the compass, or find the compass more meaningless and insignificant than gunpowder. Ultimately, this leads us to ponder the question of what China is fighting for while being actively engaged in countless wars. Was it for justice? Was it for revenge? Was it for the mere glorification of land ownership? The compass and gunpowder equally held significance in their own benefits, but Leizu realised that security and peace within Chinese borders could only be achieved through both.

Being fortunate enough to escape this endless world of Chinese history, Leizu blinked open her eyes and found herself seated under the willow tree in the imperial gardens. She recalled the formidable scenes of violence and betrayal that had paved the path to successful inventions. She resigned to the only humour that entered her mind– the ‘south–pointing fish’, and chuckled. Leizu pondered how, in some instances, certain Chinese inventions have inflicted irreparable damage and brought countless corpses to China’s graves, while other pragmatic inventions have had a significant impact upon China’s brilliance in military, navigation, scientific discoveries and global inventions.

Could Leizu be a part of this? She questioned her identity in the palace– was she a side character forced to appease her husband’s expectations, or was she a powerful woman who held power over her own decisions and how she wanted to live her own life? Would she succumb to the ruthless dictatorship of male authority? Or would she stand up for women to take the lead in scientific inventions? Determination grew in her like grain in wood. But how could she strive to invent something out of nothing, considering the potential cruelty that could stem from it? Leizu felt something tugging at her sleeve. The cocoon grinned at her from ear to ear, emitting the same ghoulish glow.

“There you are!” Leizu stroked the cocoon’s skin, and stopped when her fingertips suddenly touched something. This was the exact moment Leizu found her purpose, her destiny, her first milestone in her career as an inventor. In the years that followed, she discovered how to combine the strings of silk fibres in the cocoon’s body into a thread, which were combined to form the silk loom. Taking in mind the importance of China’s safety and security, she realised that inventing silk was the first step to contribute to China’s textile industry ahead of her time, and she was adamant that women were to be respected and to be given the opportunity to change the world for the better.

Matshona Dhliwayo once said, “The world accommodates you for fitting in, but only rewards you for standing out.” In her adventurous journey through time, Leizu discovered both the perks and disadvantages of China’s inventions, and strived to stand out to change this phenomenon. She wasn’t afraid to leap outside her comfort zone and explore uncharted territories, so why can’t you, reader, do the same? To influence the past, the present and the future, you have to strive to be a difference maker, a destiny changer, a courageous traveller through time above and beyond.

Audacian — A Sentient and Humanoid Robot

Diocesan Girls' School, Wen, Ching Hei Serena – 13

"Beeps and Chirps!" A gang of hostile belligerent robots were plodding along from Evilwill. It was a gusty, blustery bleak morning when the aggressive robots armed with fiery metal guns, bombing landmines and mammoth green tanks marched mercilessly in, and gluttonously devouring our precious hometown, Shanghai Tang in China.

The Evilwill War caused the separation from my inalienable parents. I was sorrowfully saddened by the monotonous treading of the pugnacious and obstreperous robots, stepping outside our gloomy and doomy bedroom in the caliginous Shanghai Tang Orphanage. So, I decided to invent a unique high-tech sentient and humanoid robot who was compassionate, and possessed the ability to fly speedily, walk upright and talk like a human, helping the world in making peace. My lofty aspiration was also inspired by my father, Dr Kool. My dad was a revered engineer in research and development for humanoid robots at the Guru Guru Laboratory, with the mission and vision of designing kind and helpful human-like robots.

Throughout the grief of the loss of my parents in wartime, my only little companion and sidekick was my toy robot, named Audacian, which my father designed for my 10-year-old birthday. Like the art of montage in a theatre with fragments of pictures, my heart was lighted up with family love when my mesmerising memories flashed back to the peaceful era before the outbreak of Evilwill War. It was an ineradicable memory that my parents and I heartily enjoyed the decadent scrumptious sizzling steak and frizzling eggs for dinner in our cosy dining room, with a pink chandelier, enlightening its homely atmosphere. It was a shimmering moonlit evening when my father, Dr. Kool arrived home from work, with a surprise birthday present for my 10-year-old birthday.

Ding-a-ling, I rushed to the door swiftly like an agile cheetah, anticipating a lovely birthday gift. I asked my father curiously, "Hey Dad, will my birthday present be a cute Chinese Barbie doll with rosy cheeks and embroidered Cheongsam?" My dad replied, "Sorry Crystal! It's not!" Flop! I was utterly disappointed seeing such an ugly creature. He was a tiny toy robot around 30 cm, looking like a revolting rat in pitch-black glossy body, supported by a pair of skinny wobbling legs. Yuck! I named him Audacian hoping that he could be brave when in chaos.

"G…o…o…d evening, Mrs. Kool and Crystal!" Audacian greeted us in a guttural tone. I responded coldly, "Hiiii!" I even dumped Audacian in a toy box, and closed the lid tightly. *Out of sight, out of mind*!" The poor robot emanated a series of annoying whirring sounds, "Hum! Buzz!" I shrieked at this irritating creature, "Keep quiet! Homework time."

Time went by as fast as a streak of lightning when I reached 15, the catastrophic Evilwill War broke out in Shanghai Tang like an apocalypse. The sanguinary Evilwill enemies captured my father, Dr. Kool from the Guru Guru Laboratory. My father whined helplessly, "Where're my loving wife, young daughter and the cute little Audacian?" There was a deafening silence, except our lugubrious sobs, reverberating in the rain thousands of miles apart. My mum held me and Audacian tightly, groaning and moaning in despair "Crystal and Audacian, run in the rain!" Boom! In a fleeting moment, my mum was being abducted as a war prisoner. Both Audacian and I erupted into terrifying tears, and we enveloped each other with woeful hugs, under the voluminous pitiless sky that was deluged with smoky combustible air.

After the torrential rain, an arch of variegated rainbow encapsulated Audacian and I passionately in deep compassionate condolences. Peace was restored. Now, being a young lady scientist, I worked in the same Guru Guru Laboratory. I aspired to be a sagacious scientist with tremendous strength to move on with fortitude and forbearance.

Our ingenious, state-of-the-art design was born, an autonomous AI powered robot named Audacian II. He was a silverish humanoid bipedal light weight robot with voice recognition, possessing a super speed of 10 km an hour, moving more than 3 metres per second, with the amazing ability of carrying a 500 kg load. This new born baby possessed a pair of fluttering wings, flying at a new flight speed record of 12,000 kilometres per hour,

which took only 3 hours to fly around the Earth. Hooray!

Our innovative novelty could also interact with humans with human-like emotions, displaying 60 human expressions and gestures, as well as being proficiently multilingual. Audacian II was a medical robot in white uniform, assisting in the Shanghai Tang Hospital, and spoke in fluent Putonghua caringly. "Do you feel better today? Ni jin tian you gan jue hao dian ma? " This adorable robot also wore a pair of trendy Ray Ban eyeglasses, helped in correcting essays as a teacher, checking errors in programs as a programmer, and creating business plans.

Multi-functionally, Audacian II was also an industrial robot, who was considered to be the "Glittering Diamond of Manufacturing", helping in minimising the manufacturing costs, and enhancing industrial performance, printing the infrastructure of a town, and some nifty furniture. Being an agricultural robot in a cute straw hat, Audacian II helped the farmers in the farmland picking up six tons of fresh red strawberries and crimson cranberries per day. Consequently, this genius could increase economic growth, and improve the efficaciousness of productivity.

Skilfully, holding glasses of iridescent cocktail drinks, Audacian II was also a hospitality robot as a bartender in bars, restaurants and hotels. "Would you like some piña coladas? Voudrais-tu des Piña Coladas? " Audacian greeted the French customers with a friendly welcome and a dazzling smile. Our buddy also took care of children at home and daycare centres. *"*Cinderella and Prince Charming met at the Royal Ball. Cenicienta y el Príncipe Azul se conocieron en un baile real.*"* All the Spanish students listened in amusement. Audacian II was also a friendly helper in his golden apron, doing vacuum cleaning, laundry and cooking. Talentedly, this artistic gardening robot nurtured the blossoming roses with colourful butterflies waltzing around.

Holding on a magnifying glass to sleuth evidence like Sherlock Holmes, Audacian II also became the police's best assistant in predicting crimes, by making use of the drone footage to detect the suspects. "Action!". Caringly, this charitable robot went to some destitute scums to distribute essential medical supplies and daily necessities to the poverty-stricken deprived sectors. "Enjoy some fresh food, my dear!" Audacian embraced the grateful kids warmly. Moreover, the greatness about this new gadget was that he could help society to eliminate dangerous tasks for workers, since he was adroit at working in a dangerous environment, and to lift hefty loads, as well as handle venomous gas. This brave warrior even flew together with soldiers on war planes and drove the gigantic tanks.

Being a loadstone, Audacian II attracted thousands of visitors worldwide attending the World Expo in Shanghai Tang, China. The attendees were flabbergasted by Audacian II's pair of flapping agile wings, choreographed light dance movements, skilful somersaults and detailed hand gestures.

Unfortunately, "*good times don't last forever*" and "*A sweet dream is short-lived*". Civil war broke out again after Audacian II was born, and the ambitious Evilwill invaded our country again contentiously and combatively. Valorously, Audacian II led a group of smart robots to fight back.

"Flapping and fluttering! Spiralling and spinning! Roaming and Rattling! Whizzing and Whooshing! Over the bridge… Up the mountain… Through the meteor… By the land of Evilwill…" Audacian II also used deft drone video to detect around, with the hope of finding my lost parents. Amazingly, both my endearing mum and dad were still alive, as they were incarcerated at the secluded jail in Evilwill.

"Click, clack, clip", the heavy metal lock was shattered by our flying Audacian II. "Here we are, Crystal!" My parents burst into hot tears and gave me a passionate hug. "Oh Mum and Dad, am I dreaming? I sobbed with exuberant tears.

"Hahaha! Both Audacian and Audacian II exploded into exhilarating and exciting laughter with clapping hands. The good news was that Shanghai Tang won the civil war, and Evilwill was destroyed like an evaporating vapour forever and ever. The holographic rainbow shone again, and eternal peace was finally resumed.

With the pink chandeliers dangling in our dining room, the hissing of French fries and sissing of hamburgers were being fried by our adept chefs, Audacian and Audacian II. "Delectable dinner, Audacians!" My loving parents applauded in unison. "Thank you!" Both Audacian and Audacian II said delightfully with a giggle.

Finally, the cutting edge invention of Audacian II in China brought humans hope, happiness, love, friendship, fraternity and peace as well. Audacain II was a

manifestation of the positive spirit of solidarity, as presented by the melodious charity single: *"We Are The World"*:

"We are the world. We are the children. We are the ones who make a brighter day, so let's start giving…"

Soar

Diocesan Girls' School, Wong, Kaylie – 13

"Both companies are fighting hard to issue the very first flying car to the market. But, without any readily-made blueprints or detailed plans, will the idea of flying cars simply stay as a pie in the sky?"

Mayleen, bored to stone, reached for the remote and hit the power button. The room instantaneously became so quiet, so quiet that the silence was deafening. Her English teacher had encouraged her to watch some news to improve, but she just found it dull as ditchwater.

Growing up in an old village in China with her grandmother as her only family, Mayleen was poor as a church mouse. At the frail age of 70, Grandmother had to work in the fields under the blazing sun and chilling winds. Every bead of sweat that rolled down her wrinkled cheeks only exchanged for money that was barely enough. Surviving off government funding and her miniscule income, she and Mayleen were scraping by, struggling to make ends meet.

It was just like any Monday midnight, so mundane, but yet so fateful. Mayleen was lying on her bed, doodling in her tiny sketchbook. She let her mind wander into the magical realm of unlimited fantasies, and allowed her pencil to glide on the paper, seeing the tiny strokes morph together into anything. Just *anything*. The word rolled off her tongue so perfectly, it was as if she was meant to accomplish anything.

And she was.

Just as she was daydreaming about the future, Mayleen had unexpectedly drawn a flying car. A flying car like the one she heard about in the news.

What if… Mayleen began to ponder, her imagination pleasing her ego with thoughts of her in a lab coat, proudly presenting to the world the first invention of the flying car. However, the sound of a squirrel scurrying along the branches of a tree poked through her bubble of imagination and left her nothing, except for the hard, cold reality of her poverty. "I'll never be able to do that…" she shook her head in disappointment and frustration.

"Haiya, Mei!" her grandmother walked into the room with her heavy, aged footsteps, making the floorboards groan. "You have to remember the old saying, 'nothing is impossible'!"

Mayleen perfectly knew that her grandmother had just said this to not splash water on her quivering flame of hope, but it was simply impossible: given her poor wealth, her family conditions, her resources… It was just as easy as picking stars from the sky.

Looking at her grandmother's humped back as she trod down the stairs one at a time, a crystal silently rolled down her cheek as she thought of the hardships the woman had encountered in her whole life. *Does anyone deserve to suffer like that her whole life, overworking endlessly just to continue a meaningless life of more work?* she pondered. It was then she knew, no matter what the cost, she had to give her grandmother a better life in a big city. Her grandmother deserved so much more than a restful rest of her life. She deserved to glide in the sky, carefree and refreshed.

The dream of building the first flying car had never actually left her brain without a trace, as Mayleen continued burying herself in her studies. She thought she had already thrown that random thought behind with her past, but, after all, doesn't the past always come back to us?

A few years later, Mayleen found herself on a plane to the United States, glancing outside the window at the outstretched wing soaring across the sapphire blue sky. She had participated in a prestigious inventions competition and won herself a month of learning camp there, and her heart sped up with the overwhelming amount of nervousness, excitement and anticipation.

Her eyes twinkled with familiarity when the plane skidded to a stop —— with a pleasure, she had realised the plane worked somehow similar to her dream flying car! If she were to bring her grandmother to the city, then any old invention, like the one that made her win —— an app, wouldn't be possible. The key element missing was a grand discovery, something that would shock the world, something that would change history forever. It was then, the idea hit her like lightning: she would make a flying car!

Before, flying cars used to solely be the topic of her daydreaming, but now, equipped with her vast knowledge, unending resources and clear destination, Mayleen was sure of herself.

At the invention lab, the professor went around the room, asking the winners from different countries to introduce what they wanted to invent one day. Everyone answered something easy to accomplish: more environmentally friendly toilet rolls, special batteries… However, when it came to Mayleen, she confidently stood up and announced, "A flying car."

The room, initially filled with chatter and laughter, was like it went on mute. Everyone froze like they had just got turned into stone statues by Medusa's glare. A time-stopping hush fell over the room. No one had ever expected this answer, especially in the camp. Everyone wondered at this young girl, so small but yet so ambitious.

Through lots and lots of practice, Mayleen could already immediately think of a rough blueprint draft every new invention she thought of. After briefly narrating her thoughts to the class, the professor began clapping in awe —— he had hugely underestimated this particular student's potential because he found out she grew up in poverty, as well as gave her competition-winning invention the least attention. How foolish he was to have nearly missed the new Thomas Edison, Benjamin Franklin, William Morrison! Although her perspective hadn't been seen by other flying car makers, he had just the slight gut feeling that her way was workable. And he was right.

Meanwhile, the other participants were extremely shocked by the flair and ability of the childlike Chinese girl. Moved by her backstory, they agreed to help her reach her aspirations —— and that was how the invention camp turned into the base camp for inventing the first flying car which combined theories of helicopters, aeroplanes and cars; as well as renewable energy sources.

Working till the very early moments of a day, to waking again before the sun was even up, the crew tirelessly exchanged ideas, built millions of miniature models, had thousands of meetings, and they, surprisingly, even made a life-sized model for testing within the month!

On the second-last day of the camp, the participants gathered on a piece of grassland to test the vehicle. Upon hearing the news, innumerable press came rushing to get a glimpse of the amazing invention by just students and their mentor. The testing robot was put in the driver's seat, last checks were done, and the countdown started…

Three!

Two!

One!

With the press of a button, the robot activated and started controlling the panels of the car. Mayleen and some of her fellow campers stared straight at the surveillance screen, monitoring every single bit and crossing their fingers tight that nothing would go wrong. If not, their hard work would all be for nothing.

Everyone whooped and cheered as the car sprang into action, levitating up into the air and beginning to drive in a straight line. The drone flying above their heads captured the beaming, satisfied smiles of the creators.

Suddenly, the car began groaning and letting out a big billow of black smoke, and all hell broke loose.

The bystanders were screaming, shrieking, shouting, running around in chaos. The air seemed to have stopped moving too. Everyone held their breaths.

The hands stopped moving just for time to pause. Then, in an almost too quick fast-motion, the car came crashing down, along with the dreams of the students and the professor.

Everything after that was a total blur. People running around, comforting Mayleen, some accusing her of wasting their camp time, some crying. Mayleen felt suffocated. She wanted air. Her dream, the only thing fueling her on, was no longer there. She found herself in a pitch-dark forest, running towards nothing.

Getting back to her hometown, Mayleen was about to dispose of the camp tablet and anything that reminded her of the accident. However, Grandmother's words echoed in her mind. *Nothing is impossible.*

Mayleen had once thought that the car was perfect, but after reviewing the security footage, she realised that the renewable energy part was having some type of minor problems.

Her confidence rolling back in, Mayleen learnt from her past mistakes and made model after model, until she perfected everything.

By the time she had succeeded, she was already 30. Grandmother had long passed. Mayleen had also moved to a bigger city in China, bringing along the words that built he up: *nothing is impossible*.

"The young mind of a Chinese girl has been bright enough to surpass the two leading Western companies in issuing a flying car to the market. Flying cars, as it seems, will no longer be a dream away!"

Trail of Ashes

Dulwich College Beijing, Wang, Emma –

Arrows whistled around and shouts of alarm, anguish and triumph could be heard, booming around the vast land. Clangs of swords and rocks, and the flash of arrows alight with fire made me even more exasperated in my laboratory. Once again, certain areas had started fighting, each wanting to control and overthrow each other. However, as the seemingly unending wars continued, there was never lasting victory nor lasting peace. I shook my head, frustrated, and disheartened by what the world had become. Waving off the chaos happening outside, I continued to bury my head in my flamboyant potions, testing each and every one of them.

Several days had elapsed by the time I heaved myself out of my chair and stretched. I let out a contented sound as my muscles loosened and relaxed. Scratching my head, I surveyed the room and scowled as there were dozens of potions mixed up on the table, and still not even one solution. I had been ensnared in my investigation for days now, endeavouring to find an elixir for the elderly. A sudden bird chirp made me straighten up, surprised; the fighting must have subsided. Grunts of pain could be heard resonating in the medical hut nearby. Filled with pity, I thrust my previous work to one side, deciding to focus on aiding the injured. Three tedious elements seemed to catch my eye, and my hands commenced a mixture of saltpeter, charcoal, and sulphur. As the moon cast its silvery glow through the paper windows, this experiment took an unforeseen turn.

With a fizz, it erupted into a mesmerizing burst of flames, filling the room with crackling energy. Thunder seemed to have found its way into my room. The acrid scent of burnt sulphur clawed at my nostrils, and the sharp tang of the unknown mixture seeped into my eyes and mouth, making me choke with desperation to get out of the room. Panic gripped me as I stumbled backwards, but amidst the chaos, I couldn't ignore the beauty of the explosive reaction before me. I fumbled for the door, whilst the air crackled with the aftermath of the explosion.

Eventually, the smoke seemed to clear out, and I cautiously squinted to see if it was safe to open my eyes. Looking around, there were wisps of grey smoke disappearing, and the air was still filled with the pungent smell. A burning scent wafted under my nose, and shocked, in front of my eyes, a sleek, golden snake of embers weaved around the table leg and set it alight. Quickly, I whipped out a cloth, and started to beat the table ferociously. Coughing, I carefully walked towards the mixture that I had accidentally created. The moment hung in the air like a suspended breath. The rhythmic thud of my heart echoed in my ears as the dark colour of the elements spread around the table, leaving behind dirty smudges.

Pinching a bit of the powder, a sudden excitement made its way within me. I murmured, "Finally, some things that have at least a sudden reaction to each other." However, soon after, a weight of embarrassment settled upon me. What was I doing? I aimed to produce a medicine for the injured, not something that exploded! There was a tornado of emotions within me. After a moment of reflection, I concluded that the mixture was at least sufficiently intriguing to present at the upcoming audience with the emperor.

The court buzzed with excitement as I presented the three powders, and I was thrust into a position with respect and responsibility. My once isolated, deserted, quiet laboratory was now bustling with scholars, engineers and more, investigating what had become known as gunpowder. Every day, there were continuous explosions and murmurs of either satisfaction or dismay.

Only a few weeks had passed, and business was booming. Many nobles wanted to test out this explosive material, and children were fascinated by it. However, soon, things took an ominous turn.

I woke up to the cacophony of banging and shouting outside my house. I figured war had descended upon us again, but promptly realized that there was a mob holding up signs and shouting with rage towards me. Opening the door, an indignant looking man stormed towards me, and accused me that my invention of gunpowder brought disgrace to their community.

I cocked my head, perplexed, and queried, "What do you mean?"

"Well, this explosive material has made my children deaf because of the resounding, thunderous sound! As well as leaving black soot and smudges, making our environment look extremely sullied and it also takes a long time to wash off!" Shouts of sympathy and anger rose from the crowd, and as I squinted at the burning crimson sun shining in my eyes, through the midst of confusion and wooziness, an idea clicked inside my head, "Wars," I murmured, but the crowd's frustration continued to increase. The scorching heat weaved around me like a stifling blanket, making my skin prickle with irritation. Sweat trickled down my face like raindrops, and I tried to inhale some frigid air, but the air hung heavy and thick, like a sauna. The outraged people kept on ranting nonstop, and feeling exasperated, I yelled, "Wars, they can be used in wars! Now calm down and leave me to contemplate this!" With that, I stormed into my house and forcefully slammed the door behind.

"So," the emperor inquired as I stood before him, "What do you mean by this powder used in wars?" He had summoned me after the tumultuous rebellion from the crowd, and I grinned slyly and said, "Well, it's perfect. It's explosive, meaning that the sound will make the enemy deaf, we can also use it to launch our arrows!" He gasped with excitement at the ingenious idea, and replied, "Yes! We can wrap them in bamboo or paper, attach it to an arrow, and light them off, so they can shoot even further and faster!" We both laughed with delight, and soon, a new plan had started to unravel.

Today arrived the day of the war. A few days ago, there arrived a letter from the Xin Dynasty, threatening to annihilate the Han Dynasty, and without hesitation, we rejected the idea, and compromised a battle against them. My heart pounded with anticipation for the war to swiftly commence. Packs of gunpowder had already been stored on catapults and arrows. Now, we just had to wait. A few moments passed, until finally, in the distance, came the galloping of horses. Their hooves thundered against the earth with ferocity, exuding triumph, and confidence in victory, but they didn't stand a chance against our powder.

Before long, arrows came whistling past our walls, striking a few soldiers. At the lieutenant's command, "Fire," a thunderous 'BANG' echoed as dozens of arrows rained down on the enemy, finding their targets in bodies, piercing, and penetrating through human flesh. The second batch was released, and the arrows found their marks, once again striking the enemies with extreme accuracy. In no time, the enemy ranks had faltered under our explosive arrows, overwhelmed by the unending, relentless rain of lethal weapons whistling towards them, and sheepishly admitted surrender, fleeing the lands.

I grinned, my heart racing with relief and exhaustion. Gunpowder – deadly, destructive and yet such an ingenious invention.

The Creation of Paper

ESF Discovery College, Chen, Fiona – 11

Chapter 1 – Into the Ancient Times

As I bounded joyfully through the doors of the science museum, I looked around. I saw many interesting displays, some about black holes, some about inertia, some about light waves. I skipped over to one about time travel.

"Ooooooh!!!" I whispered to my friend Miranda, "This is cool!"

"Yeah!!" Miranda replied. "I'm excited."

"I wonder what it's gonna be about!" My other friend Abbey exclaimed.

We pushed through the humongous crowd all the way to the front, and started listening to the person talking.

"Scientists have recently invented a time machine that can take you to another time period! It hasn't been tested yet, but if anything goes wrong, we'll pay for everything!"

"Wow!! We shrieked together.

"Shush! Our moms whispered to us, looking embarrassed by all the faces staring at us. But we couldn't contain our excitement. We exchanged looks and giggled quietly to each other throughout the talk.

"Now, who's gonna be the first person to try this time machine??" The person asked.

"Us! US! US!!" we shrieked enthusiastically.

"BE QUIET!" Our moms hissed to us once again.

The person merely smiled, and led us into the tiny, dark machine, and flicked a few switches and dials, and then asked us, "Where in time do you want to go??"

"Let's go to ancient China!" Miranda suggested.

"Alright then!" Me and Abbey agreed. Hearing that, the man started typing into a small keyboard connected to the machine.

"Are you ready?" he asked us.

"Yeah!!" we replied, thrilled at this new adventure.

"Then let's go!" The man smiled warmly. Then he pressed 'Start'.

Chapter 2 – Meeting Cai Lun

Boooooooooooom! Crash! FIIIIIIIIZIZ!! As the time machine zoomed through the centuries, I could feel the machine shaking and bumping wildly.

"I'm gonna be sick!!!" The moms shouted.

"Hang in there, we're nearly here," the man replied, handing them some vomit bags. Soon later… WHOOMPH! The machine slowed down and came to a halt. Slowly, the man opened the door, and we tiptoed out silently.

"Wow!!" Miranda whispered. Everywhere, people were dressed in ancient Chinese clothes, walking around happily. Little houses were dotted here and there, and everywhere booths were selling wonderful things. Nearby, there was a huge palace with vibrant colors, and important–looking people were walking in and out of it.

"Look, that's the emperor's palace!" Abbey told us.

"Woah," I sighed. It was one thing to see an emperor's palace in books, but another to be able to see it in person!

"Come on, what would you like to explore??" Our moms asked us.

"Let's go see the emperor's palace!" We shouted.

"Alright then," Our moms replied.

"Wait! If you're gonna be walking around in ancient China, you need a change of clothes!" The time–machine man butted in, handing us some stylish–looking ancient clothes. We hastily put them on, and then we started walking into the palace garden.

"啊！大王！有刺客闯进了大花园！(Aaah! Your majesty! Some murderers have broken into the palace garden!)." A peculiar–looking person shouted into the palace. He looked about fifty, with a long beard on his face. He was wearing handsome, stylish clothes, and seemed to be mixing rags, wood and fishnets together.

"哇！您是蔡伦吗？我们是从未来过来的人。(Wow! Are you Cai Lun? We are people from the future)" I said to him.

"我们不会伤害大王的。(We will not hurt the emperor.)" Abbey continued.

"一定不会！(Definitely not!)" Miranda added defiantly.

Chapter 3 – The Mysterious Creation

Cai Lun surveyed us for a while, his serious eyes drilling into us. After a good five minutes, as if conquered the spell of awkwardness, he finally spoke.

"哦，是这样的话，那我就不担心了！我是蔡伦。你们先来看看我在做的事情。(Oh, well then I will not have to worry! I'm Cai Lun. First, come and see what I'm doing.)" Cai Lun replied. He continued mixing the materials together, and we watched him, intrigued by what he was doing.

"He must be making paper! So cool, we get to see how paper was made *in person*!" Abbey told us.

"Wow! I must take some photos," Miranda replied, taking her camera out.

Mix, mix, mix!! He continued stirring the gloopy mess with a stick.

"这应该够了吧！(This should be enough!)" He muttered. He stopped, and asked.

“你们看？怎么样？(What do you think?)”

“做得非常好！您应该继续。(It’s great! You should continue.)” The time machine man replied approvingly. We nodded together. Cai Lun grinned at our approval, took a strange−looking mesh screen, put the mixture on it, and started shaking it gently. (The whole time, Miranda had been taking pictures on her camera.)

“That must be a deckle. You pour the mixture onto the deckle, and shake it to drain the water,” I murmured to the others. They nodded, their eyes fixed on Cai Lun. He looked very focused!

Once all the water had been drained, Cai Lun took the dried mixture and put it between two sheets of wood held together by a screw (a press), and started tightening the screw. The two sheets of wood got tighter and tighter, and we could see the mixture getting thinner and flatter.

After a while, Cai Lun stopped working, and came over to us. “我应该做得不错嘛．希望后果会精彩！(I think I have done well, hopefully the end result will be exciting!” He exclaimed to us.

“好啊！那我们就先去逛街吧。(Alright! Let’s first go to the markets!)” We replied in unison. “再见！(Bye!)” We waved to Cai Lun and left the garden, heading down to the markets.

Chapter 4 – The Final Product

After 4 fun−filled hours of bartering for the lovely things they sold in the markets (we didn’t have ancient Chinese money), we settled on a mat my mom traded her towel for.

“Phew, I’m hot!” Miranda exclaimed, drinking some ancient Chinese tea.

“Let’s rest here for a bit,” Abbey’s mom told us. We nodded in agreement, and started eating snacks.

Suddenly, we saw Cai Lun thundering down the street towards us. “我的新发明做完了！快来看看吧！(My new invention is complete! Come see it.)” He panted.

“哇．我们去看看吧！(Wow, let’s go see!)” We cheered in anticipation, following him back to the palace garden.

When we got there, there was already a crowd rivaling that of the science museum. They were murmuring and chatting to each other. We pushed to the front of the crowd, where Cai Lun started speaking.

“大家．请看我的新发明．纸！它比丝绸更便宜但比竹子更轻。(Everyone, this is my new invention, paper! It’s cheaper than silk but lighter than bamboo.” Hearing this, the crowd looked at each other, bewildered. They seemed confused! Just then, amidst the confounded chatter, Cai Lun came over to us.

“你们得帮帮我介绍一下我的发明！他们好像不明白。(You have to help me introduce my invention! They don't understand, " Cai Lun whispered. So we had to help demonstrate his invention to everybody!

“好啊！(Ok!)” We replied together.

Cai Lun smiled, and went back to the front.

"现在，我的朋友会来示范一下这个新发明！(Now, my friends will demonstrate this invention to you!)" Cai Lun exclaimed to the crowd. Time to help him! We walked over to the front awkwardly, in front of the expectant crowd. A flash of nervousness danced across my eyes, but how could we back off now…?

Nervously, Abbey said, "大家好，我们要来介绍蔡伦发明的纸！(Hi everyone, we will demonstrate Cai Lun's invention, paper!) "

"它是用来写字的。(It's used for writing.)" I added.

Then, Miranda walked over to the piece of paper on the table, took out a brush, and dipped it in ink. "我现在要为你们*示范*纸的功能！(Now I will *show* you paper's uses!)" Miranda announced. She started writing on a piece of paper Cai Lun gave her, and the black ink immediately dried to form neat Chinese characters. "你们看？纸比丝绸更便宜，比竹子更轻巧！(See? Paper's cheaper than silk, and lighter than bamboo!" Miranda told everyone. We waited for results.

Chapter 5 – Home

The attempt worked. Seeing this, the crowd started cheering and clapping madly. Cai Lun looked at us, and smiled gratefully…

"That was very kind of you, but now we must be going," Our moms suddenly interrupted. "Awwww!" We groaned.

"It's okay, next time you can come again, the time machine will be in the museum 24 hours straight," the time–machine man told us. We agreed reluctantly, then looked back at Cai Lun and the huge crowd. We smiled at him and waved, and then the time–machine man clicked a few buttons on a remote. The time machine suddenly appeared out of nowhere. We stepped on eagerly, and closed the door. The time–machine man flicked a few dials, and then the machine started juddering, and flew up, higher and higher. Just as it was about to disappear, we waved at Cai Lun for the last time.

Through the fabric of time and space it went, shooting back to the museum. In the machine, the moms seemed calmer than before, as if the shocking experience had acted as a medicine to their nausea. We also felt very accomplished for helping Cai Lun. When we finally got back to the museum, we stepped out shakily but confidently. We waved to all the cameras and answered all the reporter's questions, feeling joyful and elated.

"Wow, that was a great adventure!" Abbey sighed. "It was great, but I'm glad to be back…"

Cai Lun and his Great invention

ESF Discovery College, Gao, Miranda – 11

Everybody knows, being stuck at home drawing and writing is a totally different thing than sitting on a chair, stuck at school and learning about millions of things that might make your head pop. Well, I'm the unfortunate one, because now I'm stuck at school listening to the teacher lecture us about Cai Lun and his invention of paper.

"Students, Cai Lun is a big part of history, and a great help, too. You all should be very grateful!" lectured the teacher. Her words just can't get into my ears, nor my brain. They swivelled around me like a sleepy lullaby. I looked around. Children are playing around, tinkering with their pencils, spinning on their chairs, looking like they are sleeping or just staring straight into the teacher's eyes, not even moving a muscle. I, on the other hand, have my eyes sealed on the clock in the classroom. "Tick tick tick". I was wondering about why we should be grateful about Cai Lun, because I wouldn't mind if I wrote on bamboo strips.

Bang woosh bring…zoom! I found myself in a room. The room looked like it's from ancient China! Wait, could it be? I tried to calm myself down, but the butterflies in my stomach fluttered around me like it's going to burst! A trickle of excitement ran down my spine, like a slippery slide. I tore across the room, and caught myself in a corner, catching my breath, and catching some sense that I'm literally in someone's room. I peeked out through my thick silky hair, and caught someone – a man doing something…but what? I had no clue. No clue at all.

I gathered my strength, and walked across the room towards the man. "May I help you?" I asked in Chinese.

"Yes!" He replied. "But where did you come from?"

I shook my head. "Sorry, sir, but I'm quite lost. So, I see you have some trouble?"

"I'm trying to figure out a way to make paper, but I'm stuck on what to do next!" replied the man glumly.

"Really?" I asked, incredulously. "What's your name, sir?"

"My name is Cai Lun." He replied.

"Oh!" I gasped. "Oh, okay! My name is Gao Xin." We exchanged polite glances, and nodded.

"So, what did you do before you were stuck?" I asked.

"Well," He replied thoughtfully. "I had added boiled bamboo, old rags, and fishnets all into a pulp. I think something's missing…but what?"

I thought for a moment, then remembered! Cai Lun added tree barks to his mixture during his experiment.

"What will happen if you add some tree barks?" I suggested, all thanks to my online Chinese lessons, spending some parts of the time talking about Cai Lun and his paper inventing steps.

"That's not a bad idea!" He told me.

We added three tree barks to the mucky recipe, and stirred everything around with water inside, using a big wooden spoon. Then, we dried it up in the sunshine for a while, and waited. Cai Lun started an interesting conversation with me.

"You know, people used to make writing and drawing materials out of bamboo strips and pieces of silk. I thought, well, why do that? They are either too expensive, or too hard to write or draw on! What will be cheap, and perfect? So, I decided, why stop there? I should add a part to history! I should try inventing and perfecting paper myself! So, I came up with a plan, and created, I mean, perfected paper! I was inspired by people around me using bark from mulberry trees to make cloth to write on."

"Whoa." I gasped, totally amazed. I helped Cai Lun, so does it mean that I created a part of history, too? Cai Lun stood up, and brushed off some dirt from his dirty clothes.

He told me, "I'm making dinner. It's about time. Are you going home? You said you're lost, right?"

"Yes, sir." I replied, politely.

"Okay." He told me. "I'm going to cook dinner. You can stay here if you want, as a thank you for helping me."

"Thank you, sir!" I thanked Cai Lun. "I'm truly grateful!"

The aroma of warm soup filled the air, and activated my empty stomach. Woo! Working on inventing paper is real hard work! Maybe I should be truly grateful for Cai Lun's invention of paper, because he did all the work! Almost. "Dinner is ready!" Cai Lun called, interrupting my thoughts. I absently sat on a chair, and looked down at the bowl of soup set before me. "What's the matter, Gao Xin?" Inquired Cai Lun, concerned. He tilted his head.

"I…" I started. "I actually came from…well, a long time after you! I…am from the future – 2024." Cai Lun gasped. Then, he finally croaked out, "Xiān rén!"

"I kind of miss the…the…well, I am always found of the past, but I feel kind of homesick…you know?"

Cai Lun nodded sternly. "Yes, I totally understand. But do you want to come tomorrow, and come with me to present paper to Emperor He of Han…Emperor Hedi?"

The next day, I woke up with a start. It was the weekend, and I was totally excited to meet Cai Lun again! The split second I thought of him arriving at the palace, I heard that noise again. But this time, I wasn't afraid, because I knew, kindness and loyalty awaits ahead of me.

Bang woosh bring…zoom! I slowly opened my eyes. But not kind eyes welcomed my arrival, but instead, it was stern eyes. All dark and scary, all staring at me! I feel the tension in the air, swirling around me. I looked up, slowly and slightly, at…at…Emperor He of Han! I immediately looked down, praying he didn't notice. His stare drilled a hole through my body. I immediately greeted Emperor Hedi, and I could feel the tension slowly dissolve into micro molecules, and I sighed silently, with relief. Emperor Hedi's face softened, finally. Cai Lun was right next to me, and he presented his "work of art" – paper.

"Your majesty, I have invented a new resource that can well be written on and drawn on. I dearly hope you like it. I have tested it already, during the night, yesterday, and, well, here it is, your majesty!" I see Cai Lun's forehead pestered with beads of perspiration. I was frowning with worry, too, for that my Chinese teacher told me that Emperor Hedi did accept Cai Lun's invention, but…history is tangled by yarns of truth and, also, lies.

It seemed like forever, and I managed to take glances at the palace, all beautiful, and embroidered with royal decorations. So pretty! A voice startled me.

"I love this invention, and it should go on for generations! It should be passed down. I shall reward you with an aristocratic title and great wealth!"

"Thank you, sir!" Thanked Cai Lun. "But this young lady here helped me with my paper invention…her name is Gao Xin, your majesty!"

"Oh, I see!" Cried Emperor Hedi. "I see…I shall grant her too!" I quickly interjected.

"No thanks, Emperor Hedi. I'd much rather a tiny coin, if I may – to bring back home as a souvenir, your majesty."

"A souvenir!?" He gasped.

"Oh," Replied Cai Lun. "She came from the future…your majesty."

"Oh!" Replied Emperor Hedi in great amazement. "Oh!"

I received my gift – a coin, from ancient China! I also thanked Emperor Hedi, said goodbye to Cai Lun, and finally, imagined home, and went back through my "mind travelling machine". Such an adventure! A Chinese assessment was coming up, but I was too exhausted to study for it. I doze off, into a wonderful dream of all the glory in ancient China…

EPILOGUE

The last question in my test…"What do you think about Cai Lun? Please answer in a detailed description." It said, in Chinese. I lit up like a firefly. I wrote:

Cai Lun was and still remains the greatest inventor all over the world. I adore him, not just because of his clever ideas on inventing paper, and not because of his wealth, but because he was remarkable and kind.

The Father of Chinese Alchemy's Test Subject

ESF Discovery College, Hui, Eve – 11

The sky was almost about to turn dark, and school was about to finish. Mei was walking in a dark alleyway with a lot of spray paint graffiti on the dirty brick walls. She finally got out of the alleyway and changed direction to the outside as she saw a few suspicious men in black clothes transfer cardboard boxes full of papers and machine parts into a car trunk. Mei was freaking out, she didn't know what to do about this situation if it was robbery or just some misunderstanding, and then one of the men in the black suit caught Mei looking at them putting away the cardboard boxes into the car trunk.

“HEY WOMAN! WHAT DO YOU THINK YOUR LOOKING AT HUH?!” The man yelled, the other men put the last box in the car trunk and got into the van quickly as the man who yelled at Mei started chasing her to where Mei was running to.

“Where do you think you're going? Come .... back he–re right th–is…ins–tant!” shouted the man while panting.

“What do you…mean?! You were the one who…started chasing me!” yelled back Mei.

Mei finally arrived at her house, knocking on the door like crazy, the door creaked open and Mei’s dad popped out of the door.

“Hi Mei, how was school today?” asked Mei’s father.

“Father! You must…close the door immediately! There are weird shady men chasing after me!” yelled Mei.

Mei’s father looked outside to see if there were any shady men outside, but there was just a lady walking her dog and nobody else outside. Mei’s father looked at Mei in a confused way and let Mei into the house. She looked back to her dad already laying back on the couch watching the news.

While Mei ran upstairs, Mei’s father went outside onto the front porch and waved at the group of men that were hiding behind the bush waiting for Mei’s dads signal.

“Come on men! Walk faster before my daughter and wife even find you outside of our house!” yelled Mei’s father.

The men in the baggy black clothes entered the house in a tip–toeing way to make sure they wouldn't make any sound and then entered the basement and went behind a bookshelf that led to a hidden door on the ground. all men were pulling up the door which led to an underground hideout with a machine that looked newly made.

“Victor..Do you think this plan is actually gonna work?” asked the man that looked very worried.

“This plan will obviously work unless my family finds out about our idea!” yelled back Victor, also known as Mei’s father.

The whole room became very silent after Mei’s dad finished yelling but the other men pretended like nothing had happened and continued their work, and suddenly there were footsteps above them, “Victor? Are you here? Dinner’s ready!” exclaimed Mei’s mother, walking away from the basement after.

“You know what to do!”

Mei’s father slowly pushed the door open and snuck out of the basement, Mei’s dad slowly walked to the dining table to find Mei and her mom already sitting on the table waiting for him to sit down and talk about today.

“Victor, where were you?” asked Mei’s mother.

“I was..uhm..refilling ji–jimb–bo’s cat litter!” replied Mei’s father, as Jimbo, their cat glared at Mei’s father like it wasn't true. Mei’s mother stared back at him in a suspicious way while Mei was just chewing on her fish cake.

“So..Uh …Mei.. Did you have a good day at school today?” asked Mei’s dad, trying to change the atmosphere of the room. Mei nodded to her dad slowly and continued grabbing more food from the hotpot with her chopsticks.

After the most boringest and awkward dinner, Mei was in her bathroom brushing her teeth while drawing some doodles on her bathroom mirror, all night she couldn't sleep because of her nightmares of her dad and mom fighting to one point she started to sleepwalk to her basement but to be woken up by her mom trying to stop her from bumping into a shelf of books.

“Mei what are you doing at such a late time?” asked Mei’s mom in a quiet way trying not to accidentally wake up Victor.

“Huh..? uh...agh! Mom you..umm why..wait..uh why am i here..?”, suddenly..The room started shaking. The shaking felt like it was coming through the bookshelf so the both of them went to investigate what was happening behind the bookshelf and there it was, the suspicious hidden door.

“Mom..did y−you know ab−about this..?” asked Mei.

“N−no.. i.. Didn't know about this secret.” replied Mei’s mom in a terrified way.

Both of them pulled up the suspicious door and were shocked when they found the newly built machine inside the dark room. Both of them got down but then on the last step of the stairs, mei lost her balance and fell backwards hitting her head on the machines buttons and started the machine to suck up everything in the room.

“MEI! GRAB MY HAND!” yelled Mei’s mother.

Everything in the room started to fly away into the machine, but Mei's mom couldn’t hold on and the water pipe broke making Mei and her mom fall into the machine's portal. The machine made them go into a palace, then a woman in an old−style maid outfit walked up to the both of them.

“HEY! aH−gAl yOu NOt sUppOsEd tO bE heA aH gO baCk tO yOuR hOusE lA!” yelled the woman.The two girls ran away quickly from the woman but ended up bumping into an old man.

“Ah! Sorry.. We’ll help you pick up your things.” apologised Mei’s mom while picking up the man’s books and papers.

“Oh..no need to apologise! It was just an accident. People make mistakes!” replied the old man.

The girls then bowed to the old man walking the other direction but the old man stopped the girls and put his hand on Mei’s shoulder and asked them, “Do you ladies have a place to stay at?” asked the old man while smiling.

The girls both looked at each other in a happy way then nodded at the old man and followed the old man to a very dirty looking village being greeted by many old people and were handing out baskets of fruits and vegetables but death glaring at The old man, The old man led the two of them into a small cottage that looked enough for the three of them to stay inside but haven't been cleaned in weeks, the door had a name on the door 翱.

“So.. Thank you for inviting us here! I hope you have already had dinner.” exclaimed Mei’s mom, the old man smiled back and walked to his desk and started painting some Chinese words on it, “祝你不好运” . Mei and her mom immediately rolled her eyes when she saw him write those words.

“Mom.. that old man thinks we don't know chinese…” whispered mei trying not to make the old man hear them but her mom elbowed her as the old man stood up and walked to the both of them giving them the writing.

“This Chinese calligraphy is a welcome gift! i..hope uh you enjoy your night here..ha..ha…”said the old man. The old man then walked away and grabbed a bed mattress big enough for the both to share and turned off the lamp and went to bed. After everybody fell asleep, the old man woke back up and went to his study desk and opened his drawer

grabbing a jar full of…mysterious black powder and a match box and plate. The man went onto the shared mattress and put some of the black powder onto the plate and tried to fire it and put it on the girls to see if his about *Gunpowder* research was true. But the mattress started to sizzle but the both girls managed to wake up in time to find the mattress almost going to explode. The man then left the cottage with the 2 girls trapped inside the cottage.

"Wait mom! The window is open! Let's escape from there!" yelled Mei, the both of them ran and jumped through the window trying to catch their breaths.

"Wait, was that old man…Wei Boyang?!" exclaimed Mei in a shocked and mad way, her mom nodded at her slowly then dragged mei back to where they were when they teleported to this place. all they knew was that there was no such transportation for them to go back to their house and that their house wouldn't be in the past. until, both of the girls felt a bit unconscious and fainted to the ground.after the two woke up, they were in the basement again but the machine was all in broken pieces.

Dad hugged the both of them in tears, "I promise you guys no more time machines."

The Miracle Invention

ESF Discovery College, Ikeda, Sana – 11

YEAR 4056 – Proxima–CentauriB

"I have ventured out to explore earth. There is food in the fridge, so warm it up." – Your mother."

As she read through this, her eyes darted, her hands shaked, and even her legs shivered, with overwhelming…excitement!
Why did she go to earth without her? Why can't she bring her? She ran towards her cabinet and picked the glass globe up. As she lifted the heavy object, she couldn't help but stop to admire it. "The globe and the actual earth look the same..! I'm –", the door swung wide open, "yeah because it's earth's globe, idiot."
" Oh, hi." She turned around, going towards the window. "I wonder when we will be able to go with mom.", as she spoke, june rolled his eyes.
"Well then, excuse me."
He walked out–
"OOOH!! WAIT JUNE–"
"What."
"I want to show you my new project!"
" Which one this time?"
"The earth examiner 101." As she opened a secret door, June gasped. The thing that stood in front of him was massive. A 10 metre–tall silver machine was standing in front of him. "So, what do you think?" June came closer, "This is amazing. What is this?"
"Uh, it's a 'experiment' to fly to China. Isn't that obvious?"
"The one that can fly to earth?"
"Yeah, the one that can fly to earth!"
Since they both have never heard of English, why not make some words up?
Mei was dancing as they noticed a familiar 'experiment' landing on Proxima–centuariB. "MOM!"
She quickly closed the door and pushed June out of the room – this will stay a secret, no matter what.
As she pushed her brother out of her room, she watched peacefully.
Soon, she saw over 40 neighbours surrounding her mother. She felt a small fire of envy light up, then immediately extinguished it. Why would I let myself feel jealous of my *own* mother?
As even more people gathered around her and celebrated, Mei took out her beautiful book – " China during the 2000s ". As she flipped through the pages of the worn–out book, she couldn't help but notice the amazing inventions back in the day. According to the book, some life–changing inventions were made by humans. That just made her wonder more – who were " humans"? Her mother won't tell her anything, not even a word from earth. The only word she knows right now is "experiment", which she heard while eavesdropping.
As more and more of her thoughts came roaring out of her mind, over 30 minutes had passed. As soon as she looked through the window, she could not see her mother. Panicked, she opened her drawer as fast as she could and stuffed the book in, slowly, to make sure it wasn't damaged. Then she immediately crawled back to bed.

As Mei's eyes plopped down, someone came in. *crunch. Crunch.* An unbearably annoying sound was awakening Mei. As her patience died, she pounced back up from her bed.
"STOP THAT– Mom..?"
As Mei looked towards her mother, she could see her *own* shattering her precious globe. Though she knew that a globe of earth won't be forgiven by her mother, she just couldn't bear the thought of her only inspiration getting shattered into shreds. With tears streaming down her face, she grasped her mothers clothing. As her mother looked back, Mei would at least expect a look of sympathy – even in her eyes, if that wasn't enough. Yet in her mothers face, there was no expression of sympathy in store, only happiness. While most of the time her mother wore a cold look on her face, this was the only time she smiled, like a child under a blooming tree.

Mei, surprised, lost strength in her fingertips and let go, only for her mother to throw the shattered glass onto her face with that other–worldly smile on her face.
As her tears soaked her ripped map, she knew what she wanted to do next. She knew exactly. And she wouldn't change her mind.

–

After 5 hours of planning, Mei set off to find her brother. Her only ally, if she even needed one. She swung the door open and grabbed her brother, dragging him out of his room like a feather.
"It's 2am. What do you want."
"Let's go to earth – specifically china."
"Yeah ok– wait…"
As her brother was at a loss of words, Mei just carried him down the stairs, and towards her "experiment". She immediately brought him to the most logical place to launch a "experiment" – her balcony!
"Wait. Why here out of all the places?"
"So then we can show off to mom. Get in."
"But–"
Without an issue, she pushed her brother into the 'experiment', ready to start take off.
As they both blasted off high into the sky, Mei could see her mothers terrified gaze as they set off out of their planet.

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More than 3 days later, I arrived happily, except for the fact that mother is tailing me. Almost exploding with excitement, I jumped off, surprised that I didn't have to wear those weird gravity boot things. As I looked around, my expectations were betrayed. The earth book…was nothing close to what I saw. Mei looked into the vast, dark sky, her radiant silver skin shining in the dark. Her brother hung on to her, following every slight move she made. What they saw was not an amazing, beautiful China, but instead a huge space of rubble and cement. Not even trees were to be found wherever in China she was. As Mei crouched down to observe furtherer, June pushed her.
Mei looked behind, noticing her mother.
As she heard those words, she bounced right back up, grabbed Junes arm, and flew forward. She would not even give her mother a slight chance to stop her journey.
They ran across the vast ruins for what seemed like forever, until her brother pulled her back from what looked like a giant hole. Now, this isn't any ordinary hole you'd see anywhere. This hole was more than 620 metres long & 530 metres wide. Though her brother looked worried, Mei knew exactly what hole this was. This was no other than the Xiaozhai Tiankeng sinkhole. According to rumours in her town, a famous Chinese inventor lived inside this hole.
"Hey June, how about jumping in?"
"No. Its way too–"
Before anything, she grabbed him and pulled him beside a piece of rubble.
"What–"
"Just shut up and follow me."
As their mothers army came forwards, Mei's heart beated faster. Though she never disobeyed her "mother", she followed her instincts and went down the hole by elevator.

As they arrived at the hole, Mei never felt happier. This felt like her own paradise! Unlike her worried brother, she knew exactly what all of these were.
Where she was was not a room you'd expect to see underground. Though this was no penthouse, the place was covered in smooth wooden tiles and a bed for one. The tables on the right were covered in some sort of papers, all looked detailed and old. All of the papers were signed 'Tu youyou'. Mei has heard of her before. She was one of the inventors who made one of the most life changing inventions, such as a printer. But, it made her wonder…why, in over 50 pieces of paper, does one look new? Intrigued, she touched it.
"Wait, Mei don't–"
As she touched it, a light beamed across the empty room, opening a small door beside the table. As soon as she saw the door, she felt a sense of familiarity. Before she could crawl through the door, June stopped her.
"I need to tell you something."
"You better be quick–"
"You are an invention made by Youyou."
"...What?"
"One day, when mom was exploring, they found earth, a beautiful place full of joy…was left to dust. Among the lifeless bodies, she Youyou holding you. "
"I…Am not an alien?"
"You may decide."
Mei, still confused, saw her brother pulling out pills.
"Me and mom found this inside this hole 20 years ago."
In his palms were two pills – one red and one blue.

“Would you rather take the red pill that makes you forget us, aliens, absorb all the answers to earth, – enough to restore earth to the planet it was once more. Or would you rather take the blue pill – forget everything that happened and live with us! Basically, you’re–”
“Red pill please.”
“..What? But–”
Then, she took and swallowed the red pill. As she took it, she gained all the knowledge of Youyou, Bi Sheng and other amazing Chinese inventors.
Now aware of the inventor’s incomplete plans, she stepped into the glowing door, finding a table set up for her, and a solution to earth's wreckage – and even a guide on english!
She knew that this won't be an easy journey or a pleasant one. But, you never know the outcome unless you try.

The Mysteries of Life

ESF Discovery College, Lam, Isabel – 11

“Yi xing was a great man, with great knowledge, he asked me to give this to you after his passing, I will certainly miss him.”

I said nothing, He handed me the red handkerchief, and silently walked away. I unveiled the cloth and found a beautiful spherical object, the colour of the starry sky, with different planets surrounding the centre.

It was a tiny armillary sphere.

Sometimes in my late evening walks, I would head towards the hanging tree, and think about the very night we met, on that pathway, with the shining moon, and the silloughetted water, then I would look at the hanging tree, where his family used to hang, I would then think of his peculiarity of the astronomical world, and his slow calm chuckle.

Yi xing may have spent his whole life, dedicated to making the dynasty a better place, and using all his knowledge into making inventions, however, if I knew a man happier in his fortune, I knew him not. His passing was rudimentarily peaceful to meet one’s end, and for us as humans, we truly don’t live enough to fully understand how our world works, but I suppose somethings in life – will always remain a mystery.

New Tales of China's Inventions

ESF Island School, Brookes, Annabelle – 11

There's a reason for everything. Much like there is a reason for paper. Paper is one of the most used inventions of our lifetime, as it is used for writing, origami, and unicorn colouring sheets. The reason we have all of this is because of one particular boy.

Lei Yang walked down to his parents' bakery filled to the brim with customers and delicious smells of freshly baked dough. Pushing past the crowds to the counter, he pushed open another door where he found his mother in the kitchen taking a piece of flat bread out of the oven. Her hair was in a neat bun, pushing back her slick black hair into something as shiny as a mirror.

“Mama, I am just heading out for some time, I will be back soon.” Lei Yang said as he sniffed in the freshly baked dough. His mother shook her head and sighed.
“Lei Yang, when are you ever going to give up on this stupid dream of yours?” She continued to chop the bread until each slice was half an inch thick.
“Mama, inventing is not stupid, it is a way to change the world, and I will change the world, someday.” Lei Yang’s voice became more unsure each time he said a word.
“Well, someday isn’t here yet,” his mother said, not even bothering to lay her eyes on him.
“So you may as well just give up.” She turned away from her chopping board and headed towards the door with the freshly baked bread leaving him all alone in the room.

Lei Yang stood there for quite some time before leaving the kitchen, pushing back against the demanding crowds and then started running into the distance. Muttering to himself the entire way he finally stopped. He stopped at a gigantic house surrounded by Yunnan trees and flowers. He opened the gate and opened the door, leading him into a gigantic room full of silk pillows and furniture.

“Nai Nai! I am just here to collect all of my things!” Lei Yang called out. Right before him stood an old woman with silky blue clothing, slick white hair, much like his mothers and a wooden walking stick.
“Yes, my boy. It is all upstairs.” She said as she slowly walked towards him. “Go, be like your grandfather,” she lightly brushed his cheek with her butter like fingers.
Lei Yang hugged her and softly whispered in her ear, “You can count on it.”

Lei Yang hurried upstairs to the second floor of his grandmother's house. In a small little room were all the things that would one day make him famous and rich. Lei Yang grabbed gigantic rolls of uncut paper and a bowl of jet black ink. He walked back down stairs and opened the blood red doors leading to the courtyard where he had entered earlier before. He took one last glance at the house and then set off to make his fortune, starting to walk the very long journey towards the city.

Days, months, years? Lei Yang had no idea how long it had been since he had left his family and friends for an idea that might not even work. In town after town he presented his idea, earning shelter and assistance throughout his journey. A sheet of paper in trade for a donkey may have been the most incredible thing to have happened to him at this stage of his life. The donkey's name was Loubo, and he got him there far quicker then he would have anticipated. After an incredibly long trip, Lei Yang had made it. Stalls all over the place full of fresh fruit and silk as soft as you could imagine. He found a table someone was selling for they had just gone out of business. Things could not have worked out better for him.

His tiny stand has stolen most of the customers from the other 50 stalls, leaving him with a crowd that looked about the size of his home town. As he started to smile, so did many other people. Whether it was an old man with a beard as long as an arm, or a little girl gleefully clinging onto her mother’s arm. Lei Yang was happy, because they were happy.

“Here is the first ever piece of… piece of… piece of…” he looked around and said the first word that came to his mind. “The first ever piece of pepper!” The crowd went so silent that you could hear a pin drop. One man at the back of the crowd yelled out at the very top of his lungs,
“And exactly what does this pepper do?” He had a smirk on his face. But Lei Yang was ready to answer.
“I am glad you asked.” He took out a brush and his ink and drew a singular line across the sheet of paper. Gasps and shocked faces came from the crowd. A little boy at the front of the crowd said something to him in a loud voice and a hushed tone.
“When I grow up I want to make paper just like you,” the little boy said in his infant voice as he smiled and he started a chant that everyone there, big or small, young or old started to repeat.
“PAPER! PAPER! PAPER! PAPER!” Everybody joined the chant except for one person, and this person glared at him and smiled an evil smile. He had straight black hair pushed back with water and a toothy grin as white as Lei Yang’s paper. Finally, the man turned around and started to walk away from the crowd. Much like everyone in his village would.

Lei Yang slept in a hut owned by a generous family near his store. He slept in between a wailing baby and a snoring four year old only to be woken up at 5am by a loud bang. Lei Yang raced out of bed and towards the noise; towards his stall.

As he arrived he found his paper gone, his ink gone, his life gone. Then, from behind a mango stall stepped someone who despised him, someone who only lives for money and fame, someone who is Lei Yang’s brother.

“Long time no see.” Lei Yang said in a sarcastic tone and got into a fighting position.
“Hau yu, why? We could have done this together, taken the spotlight together, been closer together,” Lei Yang said as he got out of his fighting pose and into his normal standing position.

“The past is the past, the future is the future and the present is the present. And we can’t change that,” Hau yu said as he threw a punch towards his brother but was stopped with a firm grip and then kicked in the jaw. Lei Yang’s bun was falling as his mane of hair fell down.

“It’s not too late.” Lei Yang said, as he let out his hand to help his brother up. “Join me and we can make hundreds!” his hand still offering to help.

“Hundreds of what? Smiles? What good will that ever do to me?” Hau yu threw another punch, but was thrown back to the floor. Blood was dripping down from his lower lip and attempted to get up but was only able to do as much as move his fingers and toes.

“I am sorry.” Lei Yang said and his eyes got teary and watered up so much that within seconds his face was soaking wet. Knowing he would now be loved for his success, Lei Yang went home. Loved and appreciated by family, making thousands each day because of his inventions. Thousands of smiles.

New Tales of China's Inventions – The Curious Case of Cupriferous Carbate

ESF Island School, Chan, Jayden – 13

An inferno erupted violently from the dark coal. Vicious heat engulfed a heap of copper while it glowed, situated upon a rusty, well–used metal gauze. Trapping this heat was a sturdy cobbled furnace, standing firm unbothered by the hellfire scorching its stone skin.

From a distance stood a weathered, tired man. He had worked the daylight away in his dingy, soot–covered workshop, mining, smelting, and moulding copper for dozens of customers in his shop in a random alleyway in Hangzhou.

He was not in charge of monitoring the orders, but the blacksmith knew there were less customers than usual. He knew using copper was a bad idea, but he was forced to go with it.

Sitting wearily, the artisan finally started to relax, slumping on a chair, only to jolt up at the sounds of a bell ringing from the neighbouring room. He proceeded to begrudgingly heave himself through the doorway.

He found himself in an organised office, with a finely chiselled wooden table of vintage quality situated in the centre. Behind the table sat a man, wearing a lustrous golden tunic with fine details, that looked like it had never been worn.

The man behind the table grinned. “Sit down,” he requested. “So… Lin Zhaohui, I hope you have had a good work day so far.”

Lin Zhaohui reluctantly placed himself on a chair, and tensed up in anticipation of bad news. He glanced at the shiny new plaque placed on the table. It read: “Chen Xiaobo, production supervisor”.

Chen continued: “I understand that we are to replace the gauze soon. However, our supplier just raised prices to 5 tael, which is much too expensive. We need to create a solution ourselves, and I have an idea.”

Lin Zhaohui let out a pained sigh. He knew this news of cost–saving would not bring any good. Chen was the one who fired the cleaner, which left the workplace in disarray, not to mention the decision to operate solely on copper. This time, only Chen knew what was to come.

The two shuffled out of their seats and proceeded to the workshop. Without hesitation, Chen threw out the heap of copper and the metal gauze, startling Lin.

Chen revealed his idea: flimsy sheets of iron and carbon which he threw into the furnace. He disregarded the distressed look on Lin’s face and tossed a brand new lump of copper in, and kickstarted the flame. Lin braced himself when Chen started the fire, as if he couldn’t bear to see what happened next.

An unsettling vibration rattled the furnace. At first Chen didn’t bat an eye, but heads were turned by a deafening pop. Lin squinted his eyes when he noticed a radiant fiery glow from the metals, and covered his ears when an unknown source started to vigorously hiss.

The cacophony climaxed with an explosion that shook the entire building. Magma soared through the air, followed by a thick blanket of smog and ash. When it cleared, what remained was a liquified, blistering metal.

“Don’t just stand there, collect it!” Chen demanded. Lin complied and dashed to grab the bar mould, which he left under the furnace.

While the two stood bewildered and dazed by the event, Chen ordered : “Lin, study the substance for the rest of the work day. I’ll help you file it.” Lin glanced at the pocket−sized water clock in the corner of the workshop. It read noon. “I’ll get it done by the end of the day, boss,” he reassured Chen.

He reached for his notebook and printed stamps on the desk. He turned around to face Chen, but all he saw was the closing of the shop door. He was confused at first, but he turned to see that Chen had clocked out, leaving him to work alone.

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It was dusk. Lin was brushing down strokes with a laboured breath. His notebook was filled to the brim with conjectures and apparatus diagrams. Finishing his sentence, he stormed into Chen’s’ office ecstatically.

Chen whipped his head around to face him. He smiled. “Ah, Lin! You’re done with your documentation?” he inquired. Lin nodded excitedly and declared “I have some very fascinating findings to show you.”

Lin sat down and opened his ink−encumbered notebook to the first page, as well as laying down several tiles of this new metal, and two cups of water. The metals were shiny and had a flawless surface. Light bounced off every face of it almost perfectly.

Lin began. “Now, firstly, this metal is extremely durable. It could stand the weight of at least two dozen horses!” Lin proved his point by swinging a colossal hammer upon a tiny piece of the durable metal. He proudly displayed the morsel of metal, showing no dents or scratches. Chen gave a nod of acknowledgement.

Lin continued on. “The metal can also be sharpened to an unparalleled edge, and is quite lightweight.” He gestured to a sharpened spear tip on Chen’s table. Chen inspected the piece. It felt like nothing but a feather in his hands. He took the piece and made a swift swipe through the desk. The spear tip was trailed by a deep gorge.

Lin took another small piece of metal and dropped it into a cup of water, expecting Chen to panic with his knowledge of metals’ properties. When he didn’t, Lin disheartenedly stated: “The metal can’t corrode, either.” Both of them peered into the cup. The chunk sat languidly in the pool. Lin took a shiny, refined wedge of steel, and dropped it into another cup. That cup bubbled vigorously. The result was a rusted, flaky steel oxide that could barely hold any weight.

“Lin, this is incredible!” Chen remarked. Lin beamed with pride.

“Here’s the plan. You and I will go see some clients tomorrow. Whatever they pay, we can split the profits. And of course, I will pay you extra for the demonstration. Thank you, Lin. You can go home now.”

Lin was elated. He thanked the boss, quickly grabbed his coat, and dashed home early.

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The sun arose from its slumber, brightening the sky. Lin sat lazily on a stool in his workshop. He glanced yet again at the water clock and groaned. Chen was an hour late.

When Lin's patience ran out, he decided to take a stroll in the nearby street. He studied the landscape of homes and temples. He listened to the songs of birds and the swaying of trees.

Lin's head turned when he heard the echo of someone's speech. The person, whoever it was, was thrilled, and moved from word to word jauntily and confidently. The sounds perked Lin's interest, and he moved toward the scene.

Turning the corner brought him to the town square, which was filled with a massive crowd. Bemused, Lin searched for a stage, but was taken aback to find his own boss standing in front of everyone. There he was, copying his journal word for word in front of the massive crowd.

Lin was livid. This whole time, he had been taken advantage of so he could do all the hard work while his boss got all the credit. He would not allow this thief to sneak away under everyone's nose. So he plotted an idea.

The last page of Lin's notebook said that the super-metal didn't have a name yet. But in reality, Lin did have a few ideas that he was more than willing to share. All he had to do was wait.

The time finally came. Chen uttered: "Unfortunately, we don't have a name for this amazing material yet, but we will release it as soon as we come up with one."

Lin stormed his way to the front of the crowd and exclaimed "That's where you're wrong! This material's name is Cupriferous Carbate."

Shocked, Chen choked on his breath. "Why, I don't believe that has any explanation!"

"Oh, it does. A combination of carbon, wrought iron, and copper, brought together by smelting. I know this, because I could identify all of the elements during smelting. Could you?"

Chen fell silent.

"I didn't think so. I also heard you say this Cupriferous Carbate was incredibly durable, but you failed to specify how."
Chen gulped. "Well, that's because it's all types of durable!" He timidly replied.

Lin shook his head with disappointment. "You didn't read my notebook, did you? This metal is hard, which means it is scratch resistant, and it is also compression-resistant" He made his way to a pocket-sized block of the super-metal. Borrowing an anvil from the neighbouring blacksmith, he heaved it upon the small chunk, and yet it stood strong.

Lin looked to the dumbfounded audience, and announced "Ladies and gentlemen, we will as soon as possible be using this material in our products, but I believe this man here has been giving you some inaccurate facts."

Chen yelped as he was pulled away from the stage by two onlookers, giving Lin an ear-to-ear grin.

Lin paused… "Now, where do I begin?"

New Tales of China's Inventions

ESF Island School, Chan, Nathan – 12

"Flash floods break century–long records; transport has been suspended across the city, with schools and even the stock market closed. The super typhoon since last Thursday has been causing panic all around the city. There have been 2,000 deaths so far, with 1,000 people still missing." Dr. Chen Ming scoffed the last piece of his crackers into his mouth and slammed the table with his fist. He had enough of the frequent extreme weather.

1975, Henan Province, China:

"Breaking news: the Banqiao Dam at the Ru River has collapsed and there are raging waters rushing into the city!" Water was gushing onto the streets as if it were a thundering beast on a rampage. Young Chen Ming and his parents were rushing down the streets, panting and gasping for air, but the water was rushing too quickly. Chen Ming's parents quickly pushed Chen Ming on top of a car, and his mother screamed, "Chen Ming! Stay there and wait for help, ahh!" She got swept off her feet and carried away by the water along with her husband.

"Mom! Dad! Don't leave me! Please come back!" Chen Ming roared. Despite his tears overflowing in his eyes, his parents never came back, and that was the last time Chen Ming ever saw his parents.

Back to present:

That incident left a deep cut in Chen Ming's memories, and he remembered the flood and its destruction until now. Since he lost his parents, he longed to create a machine that could change the weather on command.

Forty years later, Dr. Chen had become an inventor and he always wanted to start on the project, but there was too much scepticism about the idea, as many people thought that it would be unethical and extremely risky to operate.

Dr. Chen, constantly having late nights inventing, barely got time to spend with his son, Chen Zhoufeng. Zhoufeng was a boy in primary school, and he was very intelligent and bright. Dr. Chen, not being the best parent, was always stuck in the laboratory, so Zhoufeng developed his own sense of independence and was able to take care of himself.

As Dr. Chen returned home after a late night's work, he went to his son's room to check on him. As expected, the young child was fast asleep, snoring like a pig. As he was about to leave, he saw Zhoufeng's diary open on the table. Out of curiosity, the father flipped open the page and he read, "Dear Diary, I hope that Dad's dream of making a weather–changing machine will come true. Then, Dad will be able to save lives and help people!"

A sense of emotional waves struck the scientist, as he felt so grateful that his son was supportive of his dreams. He took a deep breath as determination filled his guts, and he committed to completing the weather–changing machine, no matter how challenging it would be.

"Ring, Ring! Hey, what's up, Chen Ming?"

"Listen, Wang Lin, you're familiar with atmospheric physics, right? I have an idea."

"....."

"Are you sure? It sounds too risky."

"Yes, I believe in ourselves! It's settled, then! Let's meet up at the lab tomorrow!"

The next day, Dr. Chen met up with Wang Lin, his colleague, at his house. Wang Lin, an inventor, had a secret science lab with all the materials and tools they needed. Every day, they worked together in the lab, discussing and inventing prototypes until midnight and they even fell asleep there sometimes. After months of effort, the scientists achieved a breakthrough. They completed the weather control machine, successfully changing the atmospheric physics. They performed weeks of tests and were pleased to find that the machine gave perfect results, effectively changing the weather.

As Dr. Chen took a break from his science work for 3 days after the success, he was enjoying dinner. He turned on the news and saw the headline: “Good evening. Tonight, Typhoon Khanun will be approaching the coast of Shanghai city, and the winds and rain will be at a maximum speed of 300 kilometres per hour. We advise citizens to take action.” Immediately after Dr. Chen saw the news, he rushed towards his lab, hoping that he wasn’t too late.

Once he opened the door to his apartment, he already felt the strong wind pushing against his face. The rain lashed onto his head like pins falling from the sky, and he dashed across the street, running towards the laboratory. The sky was pitch black, and “Boom!” Like a piercing blade, lightning slashed across the sky like butter on a knife. He scrambled across the road, almost slipping on the floor. Drenched in sweat and rain, Dr. Chen was panting like a dog. Despite his stamina running out, he kept running and running. until he finally reached the laboratory. There, Dr. Chen was about to open the door when he saw a familiar figure.

“Huh…Wang Lin? Why are you here?”

Wang Lin was startled to see Dr. Chen at the laboratory too, and he chuckled. "It looks like we have the same idea; great minds think alike. Ha ha!”

Dr. Chen smirked and ruffled his wet hair. “Let’s get the machine started, shall we?”

As the two scientists met up with each other unexpectedly, they both knew that it was time for the machine to shine.

“Chen Ming, have you got the signalors started up?” Wang Lin hollered across the room.

Dr. Chen replied, “Sure do. How about the engine and receptors?”

“Check, check, and check! We’re all set!” Wang Lin declared. “Fire up the signals, Chen Ming!”

The machine worked perfectly, and soon enough, the clouds were less thickened and the moon could be barely seen. They tested the wind speed and it also decreased to 200 kilometres per hour. However, to the scientists’ horror, the storm was far from over.

As the scientists were monitoring the weather analysis closely using a system that Wang Lin had set up earlier, they saw that there was going to be a heavy thunderstorm and lightning cloud approaching.

When they were trying to think of a way to change the atmosphere so that the thunderstorm would weaken, they noticed a wet sensation coming from the bottom of their shoes. As Dr. Chen looked to the ground, he saw a layer of water. It was spreading across the entire room, and the machine’s panels started flickering on and off unstably. Instantly, horror struck within him and he ordered Wang Lin to start preventing water from seeping in through the door.

Dr. Chen was anxiously analysing the signal board, hoping that the alteration of the weather was going without a hitch. Unexpectedly, just as everything was going smoothly, all the pixels on the panel had gone dim. They didn’t go back on it like it used to flicker. The fans used for cooling inside the machine also went off in a poof! He immediately called Wang Lin over to see the matter. When Wang Lin came across, all the lights in the laboratory went off, leaving the whole room pitch black.

“Oh no, it’s a power outage! We need to get an energy source right now!" Almost instantly, Wang Lin rushed into the other side of the laboratory, and he hoisted two electric cases inside, storing the two hours of energy required to power the lab’s lights. Then, Wang Lin made sure to backup his emergency electricity, utilising wind power. He heaved a heavy wind turbine out of his storage compartment.

“Chen Ming! Don’t just stand there; come over and help me!” Wang Lin demanded.

Dragging the heavy turbine to the door, the two scientists groaned as it was massive. Wang Lin then proceeded to set it up, putting the turbine outside where the wind was raging and connecting the cord to the machine. Dr. Chen was amazed at how well prepared Wang Lin was when it came to emergencies. “Wow, Wang Lin, you sure made a lot of preparations!”

“Now’s not the time to thank me; start the machine and stop blabbering about nonsense!” Wang Lin snapped back with an irritated scowl.

Taken aback by his fellow scientists’ serious attitude, Dr. Chen proceeded to shift his focus back to work. He proceeded to start the machine again, crossing their fingers and hoping that it would work. He held his breath, ‘Please, make it work, make it work!’

To their utter glee, the machine responded, and the whole engine started again.

Brimming with delight, the two scientists were thrilled. After an hour, the wind speeds had already gone down to 60 miles per hour. Due to the change in atmospheric pressure, the typhoon weakened significantly over the course of the process. The thick rainstorm clouds also separated and were blown away thanks to the machine.

Leaving a clear, starry sky, chaos had passed away, restoring the silence and peace of the night. The crescent moon beams at them as if to congratulate the scientists on their success.

New Tales of China's Inventions – John and His Self Driving Taxis

ESF Island School, Chan, Valerie – 12

John snapped the newspaper shut and stared out of the taxi window. Everything was different now. A week ago, he would have been the one sitting in the driver's seat. But since the invention of self–driving taxis drove everyone in the town crazy, John hadn't smiled once, as this meant that every taxi driver in town was unemployed. Every taxi was self–driven now, and he was sitting in the backseat of a self–driving taxi himself.

"I'm proud of you, Dad."

Once the sweetest line of his daughter now became John's worst nightmare. He didn't know how to face her as a disgrace in her life.

"I used to have a purpose." John murmured, "Now I'm just an unemployed man."

He looked at the driverless seat curiously, thinking.

"What do you think?" He asked absent–mindedly.

"As an AI, I cannot think, but I can provide you with information on the topic."

He heaved a sigh and looked back down.

Suddenly, John's phone rang. It was Mr. Chan from the recruitment agency. Clearing his voice, he immediately sat up straight and accepted the call.

"Mr. Lau, are you heading over now?" a deep male's voice said.

"I... Yes, am I late?" He tried to sound cheerful.

"Your interview was at 3. It's currently 3:30."

"Oh? He flipped vigorously through the newspaper, "But the newspaper clearly says it's at 6:30, was there a mistake in the printing?"

"Certainly not. We sent the exact time to your email, didn't you check?"

"Email... Email... Oh! Those online mailboxes! Oh yes, sorry, my daughter usually checks for me. She must have forgotten. I'm not familiar with modern technologies."

"I'm sorry, if you're not familiar with new technologies, this job isn't suitable for you."

"Oh, but..."

The call ended, and John slumped into his seat. His only chance to get a job, gone.

"Why can't people learn to use physical mailboxes!" He raged angrily. The self–driving taxi stopped to a halt in the middle of a highway.

"As an AI, I cannot answer your question, but I can provide you with information on the topic. In recent years, digital communication methods such as email has led to a decline in the usage of physical mailboxes."

"Oh," John said impatiently. "I knew that ages ago. You didn't have to say that and stop in the middle of a highway. You're causing a traffic jam. Move."

There was undoubtedly more noise than there would have been on a normal highway. Cars were beeping and engines were humming. But John's taxi stopping in the middle of a highway doesn't seem to be the reason. There were the sound of taxis beeping and tires screeching.

"Whatever, stop here. I'll save you the trouble and walk there myself." John said.

"Yes sir," replied the taxi.

John pushed open the taxi door. But what he saw made him want to open the taxi door where it was safe, because the rallying self–driving taxis were certainly not. He stood still there for a moment, trying to process the situation he was in: broken road signs, crashing cars and a hundred or so self driving taxis refusing to stop the engine and racing to get to the destination first. Some self driving taxis even drove up the grass field.

"Oh, bother," John muttered.

He backed off to the side and pulled out his phone to call the police as a flock of a hundred birds caught his sight. He let the birds distract him for a moment as the little ones followed their mothers to the south. He was particularly interested in a tiny one that was flying lower than the rest. It had a broken wing. It struggled to fly, and suddenly, the broken wing gave way completely, and it dropped in panic above the traffic. It flapped one wing vigorously and made an ear–splitting squawking noise to its friends, but they didn't notice, nor care about him.

John gasped. He didn't think. He ran out on the highway to catch the bird.

"Hello?" The police finally picked up on the line. But John ignored it. He stretched out his hands as much as possible and pelted towards the little bird. It landed in the centre of his palms and stared up at him with wide open eyes. It wasn't till he brought it back to the side safely when he realised.

"You're a duck. You don't belong with the birds."

He placed him on the floor beside him and bent down to feed it some bread. He suddenly felt happy, the first time in days, like he had a value in life. Like man, like duck. It wasn't just him that screwed the harmony.

Suddenly, for the first time in days, he felt like he had a value in life, it was hard, just now, to feel afraid. John turned around. A self−driving taxi swivelled up the lane towards John and the duck in high speed. He wanted to run, but he couldn't: they were surrounded by taxis, beeping, roaring and groaning taxis. There was no way to escape.

And suddenly, everything turned black. He could only hear was the faint noise of police cars all around him. He wanted to do something, but it was too difficult. He lay on the hot ground and closed his eyes to rest a while.

Then a deep voice said, "Jealous, John?"
"My dad would never be jealous." John recognised this voice, it was his daughter, Sally.
The voice ignored this. "I heard I stole your job. AI taxi drivers will always be better than humans." Now, lame duck, you will get recycled."

Two robots came out from nowhere, seized John by the shoulders, took him away.
"Hey you! Stop! Dad is my hero!" cried the little girl.

All was black again.

The next time John woke up was three days later. He looked around, he was in the hospital ward. He turned on the news.
"Three days ago, there was a car accident with self−driving taxis colliding with each other, causing a 12−car pileup. No deaths were caused by the incident, but one man has been sent to hospital and is currently still in coma. A flaw in the design in Model ABC123 is spotted, and it will be brought back to the lab for redesigning. Meanwhile, the company is recruiting taxi drivers as co−pilots of Self Driving Taxis until the problem is resolved"

In the quiet hum of the hospital room, with the steady beep of the heart monitor as a backdrop, John's mind was a whirlwind of emotion and thought. The irony of his situation was not lost on him — a taxi driver displaced by the very technology that had carried him to this turning point. The AI that seemed to mock him in his dreams was, in fact, an embodiment of change. John realised that the emergence of AI was not a death knell for his livelihood, but a call to adapt. The fear of being replaced being a natural one, it was also a challenge to rise above. The self−driving taxis needed a touch of creativity — things no AI could replicate.

"Dad! You're awake!"
John's daughter Sally and his wife, Mary, entered the ward and sat next to him on the bed
"Have you heard about the flaw in the model?" Sally asked.
"Yes, I just watched the news," John replied.
John looked over to his wife. "Do you think I should take up the new job and give them some training?"
"But daddy, you don't even know how to check your email"
"Well, I may not know, but I will learn. After all, it's just a few buttons and a few clicks.
Sally giggled, as Mary looked admirably at him.
"Or I could advise them to make the ride more enjoyable, and show hospitality to people."
"But your story puts people to sleep on the count of three," Sally smirked.
"Get some rest, dear," said Mary, pressing lips on the husband's forehead.

The sun dipped below the skyline, and painted a breathtaking canvas of tangerine and crimson. John looked out of the window. The colours of the sunset seemed to resonate with him, marking the end yet the beginning. The emergence of the man−made artificial intelligence is not to punish humanity, but to push humanity to reimagine their roles in the world, where one complements each other's potential, like the perfect fusion of orange and red in the sky.

"Quack!"

A mother duck was towing her trail of ducklings across the pond. Among them was a newcomer, paddling eagerly at Mother Duck's side, not wanting to be left out. John observed the little duckling finding its way, a small but meaningful moment that spoke volumes. It was like a lightbulb moment for him — all you really need to do is find where you fit in, and just like that, you're on the path to starting something new.

New Tales of China's Inventions

ESF Island School, Hwang, Jeremy – 13

The rhythmic slapping of his leather sandals resounded across the stone floor as he hastened his pace, ever–dreading the sounds of their laughter that seemed to draw closer with each passing moment. Many times before he had fled through these twisting lanes and hidden alleyways, even though he knew each obscure route would never quite outpace their dogged pursuit.

He leapt over an open sewer, the filthy waters within stained black in the moonlight. Ahead, the alley opened up to one of the many main streets of the central city, bustling even at this late hour with peasants, officials, and merchants.

"You will not outrun us forever, mortal!" a sibilant voice hissed in his ear. He stumbled and spun around, but saw nothing in the inky blackness behind him. He pressed onward, breath ragged.

He dashed into a busy intersection, hoping its noise and lights would drown out the voices. But everywhere he turned, the voices followed. "You cannot escape us, fool!" a childlike voice giggles.

He shoved through the crowd, glowing eyes watching from every shadow. Down another alley he fled, hoping to lose them in the twisting lanes, but instead he found a dead end, the tall wooden walls of the city looming before him. He spun around, pressing his back against the weathered logs.

They materialised at the alley's entrance, blocking his only escape.

He sighed resignedly as an iron–like grip encircled his chest. The tightening hold hoisted him high, as his toes reflexively scrambled for the floor.

"Back to the northern roads with you, little man," a voice crooned, voice slick as oil. "Our game would be over too soon if you succeeded in your escape. And where would the fun be in that?"

The grip tightened as breath drained, panic rising. Glowing eyes peered through mist as darkness descended, witnesses to his plunge into darkness.

…

He released the fistful of lotus root into the vat of simmering water.

His stomach rumbled in protest at the foul stench, yet he knew better than to complain. While it was tasteless and lacked any real nutrition, it was the only thing keeping him alert and awake during long days of manual labour.

It was one of the many precautions he took to mask the fact that despite being known throughout the land for his brilliant designs and machines, he had little more to eat than the beggars in the alleys.

He ladled a spoonful of the broth as he made his way down into one of the many thoroughfares of Chang'an as the first golden rays of dawn crept over the eastern horizon, stirring signs of life as the city awoke from its nightly slumber.

Wooden buildings with arched rooftops soared on either side of the road, painted in many shades of red and green and blue. Rich silks and brocades hung outside tailor shops, their colours glowing in the soft light. Merchants calling out their daily prices added to the din of children playing, chickens clucking, geese honking.

…

The rhythmic clanging echoed throughout the workshop as he applied hammer stroke after hammer stroke, his body groaning in weary protest with each impact. Though the day was yet young, his limbs already burned from

hours spent in repetitive toil alongside his fellow craftsmen, all working to build the kingdom's latest commissioned water clock.

Sweat soaked through his roughspun tunic from the dual onslaught of blistering summer heat and the vigorous labour.

As noon came, the heat within the workshop became nearly unbearable.

As the last few pieces were fitted into place, he climbed up onto the wooden frame to check that the gears turned smoothly. The heat of the long day began to overwhelm him as he leaned over to make a final adjustment. But with a groan, he felt his balance slipping. His fingers scrambled for purchase on the smooth wooden beams but found no hold.

Darkness.

…

He stirs, his eyelids fluttering open.

"Finally up, are you?"

A figure smiled from a corner, hands busy sanding a sculpture.

"Who are you?" he asked, curiosity overcoming any suspicions. "I don't believe we've met before."

The figure's smile grew wider. "Not formally. But it was about time I introduced myself."

Their hands met in greeting. "I am Yan."

The name tingled at the edges of memory, although he was certain they'd never met. "Forgive me, but I do not—"

"Most do not until it is too late. I keep a much lower profile than my more... fearsome brethren."

As if sensing his unease, Yan began to change. Skin paled, hands elongating into wispy talons that reached like grasping fog. The friendly face melted into a skull-like visage, an ever-present grin full of secrets far from joyous.

"You thought to have escaped your fate, mortal, but none may flee the justice of Diyu," he hissed as clawed fingers wrapped around his throat.

Yan's empty sockets bore into him, as if probing his very soul. For an eternity it seemed to regard him silently, mist curling around clenched talons.

Just as darkness claimed him once more, the pressure around his throat abruptly released.

He fell in a crumpled heap, gulping greedy lungfuls of stale air. Through watering eyes he peered up to find Yan had withdrawn, eyeing him impassively through the now thick blanket of mist.

"I shall return for you, mortal. The gods have granted you seven years in the living realm, you have squandered that chance. They had spared you from my wrath, hoping in that time you might live to make up for escaping death and disrupting the balance between the realms of life and death. Relish these last moments, for when the seventh year has passed, you will be mine. No further mercy or escape will be possible.

…

It had been seven long years since the fire.

A spark had caught in the swirling sawdust and billowing fumes of the workshop, igniting a furious blaze within moments. Flames roared through the workshop with unnatural speed, devouring all in its path.

He coughed and wheezed, stumbling blindly through the flames seeking escape. But the fire had consumed the rafters, trapping all within in an inescapable furnace.

He saw his fellow workers collapsing amidst screams of pain. He remembered screaming out one last cry of agony himself before being consumed by a wall of crimson flames.

Molten rock flowed in rivers.

The fog came up to his chest, limiting his vision to mere feet in each direction, but through the haze, he spotted a minute fissure in the sulphurous walls.

Mustering his remaining strength, he clawed and pried at the crevice until it widened into a hole just enough to slip through.

He emerged back within the blazing forge, untouched by flames.

But in defying death, he had incurred a terrible wrath.

He knew that Yan, king of Diyu, would never rest before reclaiming what was rightfully his.

…

He wakes once more.

He was greeted by soothing, familiar sounds – the rhythmic chopping of wood in the courtyard, the high whistle of a teapot on the cookfire.

Slowly, light and shadow began to coalesce into clarity before his eyes. At first all was a dizzying blur, but soon discernible shapes emerged. Surrounding him with looks of concern were the weathered yet kindly faces of his fellow workers.

A warm sigh of relief escaped his dry lips.

"Get your feet back under you now lad, no time to laze about," chuckled a grizzled blacksmith, passing him a misshapen clay cup of steaming ginger tea.

Just as he slowly found his feet once more, a chill ran through him at the sound drifting in from behind.

It began as a low chuckle, growing rapidly in volume until peals of high, mocking laughter rang out across the emptiness left where his fellow workers had stood.

Three imposing figures had materialised.

At their fore was Yan, regarding him with a cold, impassive gaze. By his side hovered two more figures. One bore the angular features and flaring nostrils of a horse, while the other bulged with corded muscles beneath an ox's shaggy head.

A tremor passed through him at the sight of these guardians of Diyu, Yan's most trusted advisors and fellow guardians of the underworld. What dire purpose had brought the dread lords of death itself to stalk the living realm?

"You thought your defiance would go unanswered, mortal? None escape our justice so easily."

With a thin smile, Yan lifted something from the workbench – the finely crafted brass compass the man had spent the past few days delicately crafting.

"A feat of craftsmanship indeed," Yan mused, long talons caressing the instrument. A cold light gleamed in his empty sockets. "Perhaps instead of fighting your fate, mortal, you'd rather put these skills to other use."

"If you are so fond of this mortal coil, why not cling to it forevermore?"

Before he could react, Yan's grasp took hold of him and he felt himself getting smaller and smaller.

Towering spires and winding alleys appeared below, bustling with tiny phantom inhabitants going about their business, unaware of the man's predicament high above. He had become but a speck against the heavens.

Yan's booming laughter echoed across the miniature landscape. "Within this compass–realm you will play out your days, mortal. No place shall hide you from our grip that pulls you north!"

With a gasp, he fled, darting down narrow lanes in a desperate bid to lose Yan's laughter.

But each time he thought himself free, they would find him and yank him inexorably back to due north.

So the endless cycle began, of racing through this phantom city within the walls of brass, the gods' dark mirth ever resounding behind each new chase.

New Tales of China's Inventions – Compass

ESF Island School, Lam, Jovi – 13

Wang had always lived a life filled with hardships and obstacles in a rural village in East China. Being a lowly peasant, his outfits consist of ragged, worn, and tattered clothes, containing more holes than intact cloth. His face bore the marks of his hard–scrabble existence, with scratches and bruises from his carelessness in the fields. Dirt and dust surrounded him like a tornado, a testament to his soul–breaking work and lack of means to properly care for himself. Despite his circumstances, Wang was a generally optimistic fellow and possessed a high level of curiosity that could not be quelled. This was only further strengthened by a variety of challenging obstacles thrown at him by God himself. Little did he know that this would play a major role in the course of history.

While Wang was ploughing his life away on the barren fields under the blazing sun, his desperation for water and food slowly overtook his mind. His back bent under the unrelenting labour and the sun's never–ending brutal rays. As he was taking a rest under a tree to avoid sunburn, he stumbled across a rusty piece of lodestone with a spoon–like shape, buried within dirt and mud. Curiously, he tried to turn it like a spinner, but his efforts proved futile.
The lodestone would only face one direction, regardless of what he did. Excited that he had some entertainment to cure his boredom from work, he happily took it with him and skipped back to his hut, proud of his find.

As he entered his shabby house, it became apparent that he didn't have the best living conditions. The entire house was filled with overgrown greenery, vines, and foliage that emerged across the house like an abandoned castle. The floorboards showed extensive wear from decades of existence. Gaps had developed between many of the warped planks as the wood swelled and contracted with the changing seasons and moisture levels. His bed was falling apart; termites and beetles had reduced the wooden frame to mere scraps, feasting on the pieces of wood like Thanksgiving dinner. His blanket was made from a patchwork of coarse grasses, foliage, and grain chaff that provided little resistance from the relentless elements. He placed the piece of lodestone on the floor and went to bed, dreaming about the possibilities he could make with that unique rock.

—

His interest in the stone and its seeming limitless potential grew over time. Regardless of what he's doing, his thoughts return to the unusual block and its ability to always point north. What mystical forces caused it to behave so unnaturally? What were its origins? Was it fate that brought this ancient artefact to him? These thoughts pondered him as he toiled endlessly in the fields under the scorching sun.

After another day of gruelling labour, his muscles ached, his hands were sore, and his bones felt like they would disintegrate if he took a step. But the thought of being able to look into his prized lodestone kept him going. With each step he took on the rough skin–scraping dirt, his feet sent a shoot of pain throughout his body, weakening him even further. Yet he still pressed on. The lodestone had become his only thought, with its never–before–seen abilities. These were the things that kept him going. One foot waveringly placed before the other, Wang endured the final distance home. Being reunited with the stone had become his singular joy.

Wang passionately analysed the stone, examining its unique structure and colour repeatedly through the dead of night. He became increasingly amazed and profoundly moved by the stone. As his coal–black eyes scanned the piece of stone for the tenth time, an idea popped into his mind. In an instant, he ran across the room, continuously collecting random artefacts scattered across the house. After grabbing what he desired, he calmly slowed down and returned to his original position. What he had in his grubby, grey hands was an item he had found a few weeks prior in the local dumpsters. It was a metallic square plate with strange markings adorning the rim, which he thought possessed elegance and value. Coupled with the plate was the spoon, which was slowly oxidising. Hesitantly, he placed the piece of stone on top of the dusty, untouched base. As they finally touched, Wang realised that this was no coincidence. They were somehow a perfect match.

He rubbed his eyes. It's impossible.

The spoon was placed perfectly in the middle of the plate, hovering as a hummingbird would, barely millimetres from the plate without touching, with no signs of it being unstable or abnormal. Despite his numerous attempts to change the spoon's direction, the spoon stubbornly pointed in the same direction. This dumbstruck Wang's doubts about whether the spoon would change direction when being intervened by another item vanished. The numerous possibilities that came with this newfound discovery flooded his mind. However, the hooting of nearby birds broke his train of thought, and he was reminded to rest and save up sufficient energy to live another day. As he lay on the uneven padding of his bed, he wondered what God had in store for him in the future and closed his eyes.

—

As Wang prepared to set off for another long day in the fields, he gathered his lacklustre assortment of farming tools. Among them was an ancient–looking hoe whose handle had long since fallen victim to Mother Nature and time. Generations of neglected storage had taken their toll, leaving the wood with clusters of blisters and cracks. Though clearly past its prime, the tool would have to suffice for now, as with all other aspects of Wang's difficult life. Making do with less has become a necessity.

His train of self–pitying thoughts came to a halt as increasingly loud, thundering sounds of boots clashing against the crumbling floor, grunts, and high–pitched battle cries that could be heard from miles away slowly came to him like an inescapable tornado hovering over its next victim. Wang, being curious, cautiously stepped out of his hut, tightly gripping a wooden stick. Ready to face any awaiting challenges.

As the sounds got nearer and nearer, a wide, jagged outline started to form in front of Wang's eyes. One side of him urged investigation of this figure, while the other concealed caution and commanded him to stay by his hut. Curiosity eventually got the better of him, and Wang decided to slowly advance towards this unexpected visitor to uncover its true nature and the reason for his intrusion.

As he warily trodden towards them, he realised this would exceed his expectations. His eyes gleamed in awe at a tall, muscular man on an equally fine–looking horse. His metal, spotless armour shone brighter than the sun itself, and long brown locks streamed proudly from his helmed head, catching the breeze in a rippling dance. Wang stood in shocked silence, keenly aware of his diminished appearance next to this vision of martial glory. The man also had an ominous aura surrounding him, strong enough to make Wang's legs wobble.

Through their conversation, Wang realised that the man was lost in direction; hence, he ended up in this impoverished village. Wang presented the man with his compass. The man was confused about Wang's intentions. He was doubtful when this skinny little boy showed him a plate with a spoon on top. It was similar to a proud child showing an artwork with unclear intentions to his mother, leaving the mother with no idea of how to respond. The man hesitated at first, seeing this action as a potential threat, but after another assessment of the situation, he decided to accept Wang's gift. He slowly backed away, ready to draw his weapon at a moment's notice.

As his eyes scanned over the item for any potential dangers, his mind slowly turned into Wang's, and the magical feeling of discovering a never–before–seen item that could have some hidden purpose flooded into the man's head. With further inspection, he realised that this was not the combination of scraps he thought he was given. The compass acted somewhat like a navigation tool, always pointing in one fixed direction. The realisation that this thing could make navigation across deserts and oceans doable while being able to map it out so that others could do the same was mind–blowing to the man. He wanted to instantly take this new discovery to the emperor and scholars across China. Yet, the thought of taking all the credit from poor Wang, who discovered this item, and leaving him alone like a stray dog disgusted the man. But he had the desire to help and to change his country. His foot slowly placed itself on the saddle's stirrup, and in the blink of an eye, he was gone.

Speechless at what he had witnessed, he waved to the man. Not knowing his intentions or the action he had just committed. A whirlwind of confusion overcame Wang as he contemplated the loss of his artefact; nevertheless, the calm after this incident filled him with gratitude for being able to help the man and get him home safely. Little did Wang know, his single action of giving forever changed China's navigation history, fate, and the world as a whole.

New Tales of China's Inventions – Hidden Wonderland of Silk

ESF Island School, Lung, Vincy – 13

"Look what I found in the book!" I hollered out, trying to seek attention from my friends.

I was in awe when they saw the making of the silk, and the details that were narrated in the book. There were a few workers working on such a fragile machine which produced the most luxurious silk. The floral patterns adorned the pure white background on the silk. I was so drawn into this opulent silk and ran our fingers on the book acting as if it was real silk.

Back when my mother was still alive, she was always making silk at home in the garden. Everyday. My father would also help her by building a spinning wheel and my mother treasured that for the longest time. Mother wanted me to work with silk as well, and always begged me to spin silk with her. However, I just thought it was such mundane work and was never helping her. I never paid much attention to silk, not until she passed away last month. I regretted every moment when I refused to work with her on silk. I never saw the beauty in silk, but when she passed away, that was the only thing I had to remember her by. Now I can only imagine, helping her grow her silkworms, helping her spin her silk, helping her weave her silk.

My friends thought it was not good for me to keep dwelling on the past. I know they didn't mean to hurt me, but when they told me not to think about her, I felt a sharp pain go through my stomach. I ignored them, and continued looking into the making of silk, wishing I was able to see them in real life.

If only I could see them in real life, just one more time…

Out of the blue, the floor turned into a hole and I was sucked into the darkness. The wooden floor panels were also falling down and I wavered left and right trying to dodge the wooden panels. My palms were covered with sweat and a shiver ran down my spine, as I let gravity take me to wherever.

After what felt like a thousand hours, I thumped onto the ground as I used my hands to stop myself from leaning forward and hitting my head. I stood up and inspected the place. The ground was rough with little bushes growing all around. There was a sign that said "Xi'an" with a cat sitting beneath it. The sign was destroyed and chipped in some places and the ink of the word was greatly scratched. I decided to walk around the city, and stumbled upon a hidden cave nestled at the base of a rugged cliff.

There were ancient pictures of the silk making process stuck around the entrance of the cave, and the one in our book was coincidentally stuck there as well.

As I cautiously entered the cave, the dim light from our torches revealed a vast chamber of stalactites and stalagmite. The air was cool and musty, carrying a hint of earthiness. The wall, etched with mysterious symbols and ancient drawings, seemed to whisper tales of a long forgotten era. The sound of water dripping echoed throughout the cavern, adding a sense of wonder and intrigue and the chirping of insects and rustling leaves added a melody to our journey. In the heart of the cave, it was filled with silk fabrics and tools for silk production. The silk flowed in the middle of the cave, with ancient silk making machines within, evoking a sense of awe and reverence.

As I delved deeper into the cave through the narrow passageways, the sound of our footsteps echoed off the walls. The air was cool and damp, with the scent of ancient parchment and leather bindings flowing along. I stumbled upon a hidden library with some patterns engraved on it. Layers of dust were flying everywhere, as I opened it. The flickering light from my torch revealed rows upon rows of books that dated back centuries. I was awestruck by the sheer magnitude of the collection and I just dreamt about spending hours poring over the text, deciphering ancient languages and learning about the making of silk. These detailed images that were laid upon books unravelled the secrets of sericulture, the process of farming silkworms and the weaving of silk fabric. I was stunned to find that the silk production had originated in Neolithic China, within the Yangshao culture around 4000 to 3000 BC.

The text also mentions the legendary Chinese princess Xi Lingshi, who accidentally discovered silk when a cocoon dropped into her tea while she was sitting under a mulberry tree. The empress was intrigued by the potential

of silk and encouraged her husband to give her a grove of mulberry trees to raise silkworms. With her mind drilled into silk, she mastered the art of silk weaving and began the first silk production in China.

I was captivated by the ancient artisanship and the cultural significance of silk, which had shaped trade routes and connected distant civilizations. I marvelled at the enduring allure of silk, a fabric that had been treasured for thousands of years and influenced the history of numerous countries. As I learned more about the silk making process, I gained a profound appreciation for the craftsmanship and skill that had helped sustain the production of the luxurious fabric through the ages.

As I prepared to leave this hidden wonderland behind, I carried with a sense of discovery. My torch gleamed, casting dancing shadows on the rugged walls as I made my way through the winding passages. The air was alive with whispers of my own excitement and the echoes of water dripping. Each step seemed to resonate with the weight of the knowledge I had gained. As I emerged from the mouth of the cave, blinking in the light of the settling sun, I knew what I carried was not only our extraordinary find, but a newfound appreciation for silk making and the last hope for holding onto my mum. The hidden cave helped me divulge a glimpse of my mum's life and a sense of wonder that would stay with me forever.

I clambered out of the dark, mysterious cave and was blinded by the bright ray of light from the sun. The black cat which was right under the "Xi'an" sign was here outside the cave. Its sleek fur glistens under the sunlight. Its piercing green eyes seemed to hold a secret and its movements were graceful and calculated. Its presence was both alluring and intimidating, and I couldn't help but touch its soft, silky fur. As I stroked the cat's hair, the ground beneath us broke into a hole…

I fell into a dark abyss, my scream echoing off the walls as I tumbled down. The air rushed past me, and felt weightless for a moment until crashing onto a hard surface. As I laid there, dazed and disorientated, I realised that I was now back in my house. The cat also followed us to my house, I guess it could be a symbol of my mum and all the time I had missed with her.

"Hey, lunch is ready. I was trying to find you all morni– Wait, when did you get the cat?" Dad asked as he looked puzzled

"On…on the street." I stammered, trying to hide my face.

I walked out to the garden carrying my new cat. I felt the summer breeze on my face, in the heaven of tranquillity and delight. The air is filled with the fragrance of blooming flowers as vibrant petals danced in the gentle breeze. The sun's warm embrace illuminated the lush greenery, creating an atmosphere that embraces the soul. Here, I can immerse myself in nature and reminisce about the adventure I just went on. The summer garden is a testament to the power of knowledge and growth, as life flourishes and thrives in lush, verdant oasis.

Mother would be proud. Very proud.

New Tales of China's Inventions

ESF Island School, Tsang, Jacob Riley – 12

In the distant future, electrical energy has become a remnant of the past. Neurally–implanted microchips developed by a company called Encephalink have become the norm. Hailing from Shenzhen, a man named Ma Yi Lan was the man who pioneered the discovery of neural interfaces capable of integrating with the brain's networks. Scientists and researchers also working at Encephalink discovered a way to create ultra–thin, flexible electrodes that can be implanted into specific regions of the brain without causing damage or interference with normal brain function.

Ma Yi Lan's main goal was not to help society progress further using his invention though, but it was monetary gain for himself. He had concocted a sinister plan, one that would plunge China into poverty, while the 1% would pick up the pieces, and continue to live peacefully. First, he would charge little for the installation of the chip, taking a fee of as little as 1500 yuan, having citizens sign a contract to finalise it. Secondly, after the chip was installed through a short surgery, he would allow citizens to enjoy the features of the chip, including implanting shows and movies through electrical signals, allowing for entertainment. Third, after 3 months of the chip being in the brain, the chip would start charging a hefty fee of 500,000 yuan a month. Most people's yearly salaries could not even pay a month's subscription, but lucky for them, the "generous" Ma Yi Lan offered for it to be paid in instalments. 95% of the citizens' monthly income would be put towards a subscription, which left only bits and pieces for utilities and food.

It was at this time that law enforcement started taking notice. But Ma had planned for this, and those who did not read the fine print of the contract had fallen right into Ma's trap. Even government officials and the most precise lawyers had fallen victim, being tricked by Ma's tricky wording and paraphrasing. The poverty rate and average salary dropped as a result of Ma's doing, and most of Shenzhen plunged into the gaping jaws of homelessness and poverty.Shenzhen became a dystopian wasteland. Resources were scarce, and instances of scraps and territorial conflicts increased. But, we're forgetting about the people who could pay the monthly subscription. All of them banded together, and hid out in the outskirts of Shenzhen, sticking their heads into the sand like an ostrich. They continued to enjoy luxury features of the chip, while the city of Shenzhen burned before their eyes. Ma Yi Lan, using the immense wealth he gained from just the subscriptions, paid out the officials to hush it up, and he went on to many other cities to conduct the same plan, changing his alias every time.

Though a monster, Ma Yi Lan was also a genius. After exploiting many people in many cities in China, he changed his name, and forged all the relevant documents needed to escape China. By now, he was public enemy #1 in many cities, and time was ticking for him. Ma, with a target on his head, was escorted across the border to Mongolia by big burly henchmen, where he boarded a flight to the Caribbean, where he stayed until his death from natural conditions at 105 years old.

Room of Treasures

ESF King George V School, Alimin, Kyra – 12

A door slams loudly, and a young girl, her dark eyes glowing with anger, slumps down on a frilly canopied bed. Her face glistens with tears, black hair sprawled in different directions, a few stray hairs sticking to her wet, pink cheeks. Below the room, arguing can be heard as father and mother decide on a punishment for their "ungrateful" daughter. The girl listens, eyes widened, holding a cup to her ear and laying down on the hardwood floor. *A D+ on a test about CHINESE INVENTIONS! We taught her this long ago! How dare she forget the teachings?* Spiteful words come through the thick floor, into the ear of the awaiting listener. *Grounded for a month*, a harsh, motherly voice suggests. *No, TWO months.* A gruff, deep voice interrupts. Tears roll down pink cheeks and onto the wood planking, repainting the wood a darker shade of brown.

A sharp knock on the locked wooden door harshly yanks the girl out of her swirling thoughts. The cup is quickly discarded into a dusty corner, her bed shaking as she leaps into the covers. A stern, middle aged woman steps into the room, greying hair tied back in a tight bun. She clears her throat, and the young girl prepares to hear her awaiting fate. *Lea.* Her mother calls for her attention. *Grounded for two months.* Her mother says, leaning her hand against the doorframe. *No electronics for a month, either.* Her mother's black pupils narrowed. She tosses a crumpled paper, with messy writing and a giant "D+" scrawled on with an angry red pen, into the room. With that, the door closes, and slippers could be heard stepping down the stairs.

As rain pours down from the darkened sky, a decision is made, and Lea pulls her window open. Teardrops rain down from the heavens as the clouds cry and the thunder sings its angry song. Her small hands grab the ledge of her window, and dainty feet in bright yellow rain boots swing over the side. Lea stretches her limbs as far as she could, the tip of her rain boots barely grazing the soft ground below. Wet fingers hang on to the ledge, heels tapping against the wet stone of the house's siding. With a grunt, her feet hit the soft dirt, yellow rain boots getting coated in brown, sticky, mud. The rain mixes with the remnants of Lea's tears, the cold rain causing her slim arms to shiver. She pulls her jacket closer around her, a determined set to her jaw, and ventures forward. Where was she going? Even Lea herself didn't know. *As far as possible away from the household,* the words ring in her mind.

Her yellow boots trample through the mud, wet grass making the ground ever so slightly slippery. The soft pattering of the rain soaks her hair, the wet strands clinging to her face. The raindrops mix with the salty drops that are her tears, mingling and running down her face. Lea keeps on striding forward, her feet catching on small rocks and such, causing her to trip. Suddenly, her foot slips on a rather large stone, hands reaching out to grab the ground beneath her.

Strangely enough, her fingers weren't able to grasp the ground. That is, not until a few moments later than expected. As Lea is about to give up hope of grabbing the ground, she comes into contact with slightly damp soil, her leg scraping against a particularly sharp rock. She inhales sharply at the searing pain soaring through her leg, looking down to see a few trickles of crimson blood running down her calf, the warm feeling sending a shiver down her trembling body. Lea grimaces, her little mouth pursing, and looks up, seeing a narrow, straight chute in which she fell through. She turns around sharply, a dark tunnel looming in front of her, a few flickering lights illuminating the way just enough to see which way you're going. She gasps, her gasp echoing through the long, narrow path. She takes a tentative step, jumping as a dry leaf crunches under her left foot. Slowly, but surely, she makes her way through the tunnel. A few steady steps later, the light is becoming closer and closer. Yellow boots trample on dry soil, A shining beacon seeming to beckon to the shivering girl. When she reaches the source of light, Lea is blinded for a second, shielding her eyes from the massive light. When her eyes get accustomed to the light, she notices that the room she has just stepped into is absolutely covered in artefacts of every kind. An ornate tub of gunpowder, many sheets of pulpy, browning paper with indescribable scribbles, and rolls and rolls of beautiful silk. She could hear in the distance the sound of a *guzheng* and a *dizi* playing in harmony, and gasped as knowledge came flooding through the gates of her head. In her mind, the droning sound of her teacher played:

The ancient Chinese have created a lot of inventions that we now use in our daily lives, like paper, silk, gunpowder, and umbrellas. These inventions have greatly influenced our ways now, and many of them are things we rely on nowadays.

Lea hears rushing above her, and tilts her head upwards to see a beautiful red fabric umbrella drifting down towards her. She grabs the wooden handle, hesitantly opening the umbrella. Sparkling dust rains down on her, creating a cloud no man could see through. Once the fog has cleared, Lea's pupils widen to see that the room has completely changed. She is now standing in a dark wood room, the musty smell of dust and wood polluting the damp air. The umbrella she's holding starts to quiver and shake like an alarm clock, and jumps out of her hand, practically bouncing into a corner of the room. The umbrella knocks on a little golden knob in the very corner, and the corner of the room opens up to a secret extended area of the traditional–style room. The same artefacts are placed there, no different from the ornate room she was in. The music stays the same, too. The umbrella twirls over to a silk roll, bumping it repeatedly until it too leaps up, excitedly tapping each and every one of the other artefacts, until they too are hopping around in perfect synchronisation. The music gets louder, the artefacts all bounding up and down into each other in time to the music. This whole time, Lea is standing, unmoving, transfixed by the beautiful display in front of her. Everything's calm and peaceful, and even has Lea seriously considering staying here for a while longer. That is, until the silk roll accidentally knocks the candle into the crate of gunpowder. Rumbling starts shaking the ground violently, Lea grabbing onto the nearest shelf for support. A loud bang scares her, and she whirls around in horror to see the fire spreading across the gunpowder barrels, and she realises it's only a matter of time before everything blows up. She hastily starts running, through the endless corridors of the house she didn't even know existed. Yellow boots hurtle back through dry, dirty soil, dry leaves crunching as walls explode behind her. She barely makes it out, fingers scrabbling to get a hold of the opening of the tunnel she fell through and using the entire remainder of her strength to pull herself up. Lea's messy, dirt crusted head pops up out of the ground, her shaking legs struggling to hold all her weight. Once she regains her breath, she bolts back home, a stray piece of red silk clinging to her hair. She trips, and this time is able to catch the ground beneath her, wincing as she looks at her injured leg. She swings back into her bedroom window, landing on her feet in her room, and wipes off all the dirt she "collected" on her adventure, excess soil dotting the floor. Lea crumples onto her bed, utterly spent.

The next day, somewhere else in the world, somebody wakes up to find their house trashed.

An Official Problem

ESF King George V School, Deng, Jenny – 11

Skipping along the stone path was a man who was going to the market to sell fruits. The sky was a light blue and the warm sun shone down. Then, suddenly, clouds slowly filled the sky and light drops of rain pattered down onto the man's back. He let out a gasp and began to jog. The raindrops soon came down furiously and the man started sprinting. Shielding his basket of fruits, he ran even faster in the rain, breathing more and more rapidly.

Overwhelmed with exhaustion, the man saw a pavilion ahead. Barely staggering inside, he sat down next to another man who was also resting. "Thump!" A heavy hand was placed onto his damp shoulder. Holding his breath, the man slowly turned around to see a scornful face wagging his finger at him.

"I'm so sorry, sir, I don't have any money!" The man begged as he kneeled down, dripping, on the floor.

"Say no more", snarled the official. "Guards, seize him!"

The man was carried away by the guards, his eyes looking with hope at the man who sat beside him. He was Lu Ban. As Lu Ban watched, he thought of something in his past. His best friend from childhood had died because he was poor and so was forced to stay in the rain for many hours. Lu Ban boiled up with anger at the thought. "I will get you back…" Lu Ban muttered to himself. "Just you wait…"

The village was very far from the market which meant the villagers all had to walk a few hours to sell and buy what they needed. The weather was always changeable, so they had to shelter in the pavilions provided. However, the official was an arrogant and vindictive man, who abused his power by forcing the villagers to pay high fees to rest in them.

That night, Lu Ban called the village to a meeting. "I vote, we protest and go against the official!" Lu Ban said firmly.

"But the official is nice!" defended one villager. "He's tall, he's neat, he's smart…" But the rest of the villagers agreed in principle with Lu Ban, as they had suffered and endured the official for many years, even if they were anxious about causing trouble.

The villagers discussed the issue amongst themselves and nobody was sure what they could do.

"I vote we build our own pavilions!" one villager finally suggested. "That way, the official can't charge us".

"Agreed!" shouted some other villagers. So it was decided that the villagers would build their own pavilions.

So, they got to work. Early the next morning, all the villagers gathered together, ready to start.

"Come on, chop quicker! You don't want to pay the official, do you?" said Lu Ban to a villager.

"Hey, is the latrine pit connected to you?" Lu Ban said to a teenager who went to the latrine too often.

"But the sun is so hot…" the teenager complained.

"Oh, so you decided to keep on paying the official!" Lu Ban said sarcastically. The teenager quietly got back to work.

After months of working, the pavilions were finally built. The villagers' eyes filled with happy tears as they hugged and congratulated each other. "Yes! We did it!" they shouted.

Suddenly, a dark shadow towered over them, wagging his finger. "Well, where's your money?" the official growled.

"Hey, *we* made the pavilions!" one villager protested. "You can't charge us!"

"Oh, yes I can", barked the official. "I own this piece of land, and I can charge you for whatever you build on it." Children wailed, villagers argued, but nothing could change the mind of the official. Lu Ban filled up with rage. "You may have won this time, but I am going to think of something else!" And with that thought, Lu Ban stormed away.

"Ugh!" Lu Ban screamed as he crumpled and tossed away yet another piece of paper. How he wanted to take revenge on the official! He thought about it all the time, even dreamed about it, but the plans never worked out. Exasperated, he sat down on a stool as he chewed a stale piece of bread. Suddenly, he felt his stomach churn and his mind spun round and round and round…

Lu Ban opened his eyes and was amazed to see many graceful white birds surrounding him. Looking down, he saw lots of beautiful, green treetops below. "Boom! Crash!" The birds scurried to shelter from the storm under a tree, and watched as heavy drops poured from the sky. They fought over the berries that grew on the tree, squawking and pecking at each other. Lu Ban whipped around at a sudden chirping noise and saw a little blue bird pecking under its own little tree. "That's smart", Lu Ban thought, and bit into a berry himself. Then he felt his stomach churn once more, and squeezed his eyes shut as the world whirled around him. Then he was back in his own house, sitting on the stool, holding his half–eaten piece of stale bread.

Lu Ban shook his head, dazed, and immediately got to work on his new idea. After weeks of planning, designing, sawing, hammering and sewing, he stood back proudly to admire his work.

Lu Ban walked around with it on a rainy day, whistling to himself. The official didn't take any notice, for he was busy pushing the poor people out of the pavilions.

"Get out of my way, you street rat!" laughed the official, shoving a beggar onto the ground.

"Please take pity on us, official!" pleaded a small girl. "That man is my father, please let him come in!"

"Arrest that girl and–"

"Hey, everybody! Take a look at the one and only umbrella!" someone shouted out.

The official whipped his head around, furious. He saw Lu Ban holding a long pole in his hand. On the top of the long pole was the most delicately patterned sheep skin, made into the shape of a cone, and when Lu Ban pressed a shiny silver button on the stick, the sheep skin popped up to form a beautiful big hat around Lu Ban. The wooden pole was elegant too, with swirls and dots and patterns carved carefully onto it, then painted a stunning gold.

"What's that you're holding, Lu Ban?" he asked curiously.

"Oh, it's my new invention, an umbrella!" Lu Ban replied proudly. "It can protect you from the rain and let you walk at the same time." Villagers began curiously crowding around Lu Ban, begging to touch the amazing invention.

"Lu Ban is getting everyone's attention…" the official thought. "I must get myself an umbrella!"

"Lu Ban!" the official called out sweetly. "I am very interested in your umbrella, is there any possibility that I could buy it?" Lu Ban grinned to himself.

“Well,” began Lu Ban, “If you want my umbrella, you will have to give me all the money you have taken from the villagers”.

The official thought hard and bit his lip. “I enjoyed charging the villagers”, he thought. “But I want their respect and attention more than anything, and I might be able to sell the umbrella for a high price”. So, with that, the official agreed.

Lu Ban handed the umbrella to the official confident in his plan. Pleased, the official strutted back to his palace, stroking the smooth wooden pole of the umbrella.

The official watched the weather every day, waiting for raindrops to start pouring down, but they never came. “How strange”, he thought, “there is always rain in the summer”. Day after day, night after night, the rain never came. The official began to grow impatient: “When will the rain ever come?!”. He made up his mind to show off his umbrella as best as he could when it finally rained.

“Splish splash!” rain finally started pouring down onto the streets. The official pumped his fist in the air, grabbed the umbrella, and sprinted down the road.
“Hey, everyone! Look at my umbrella!” the official called out. But nobody responded. Bewildered, he peeked inside the pavilions, but there wasn’t a single person in sight.

As the official continued to check in the pavilions, he saw a man skipping along the path, carrying a basket of fruits. And he was holding an… umbrella! The official could hardly believe his eyes! “Where'd you get that umbrella?” the official asked him.

“Oh, Lu Ban gave it to me”, the man replied, skipping on. Then, right in front of the official’s eyes, there appeared one, two, three, four… a sea of umbrellas swarming towards him. The official stood on the spot with his mouth open. There were hundreds of umbrellas stretching into the distance, as far as his eyes could see.

The Eyes of an Angel

ESF King George V School, Gupta, Divyam – 13

"Students! Give a warm welcome to our special guest, Alan Fung!" I was flooded by a wave of excitement, sporting a warm smile towards the ocean of students leaning towards me, sitting in neat rows in this grand lecture hall. To be honest, I was surprised at the atmosphere! "Mr. Fung has come here today to talk about his famous creation, the revolutionary Angel–Eyes!" The legion of students gushes their praise and cheers all at once, their eyes hungry to learn the secrets of this new technology. I chuckle under my breath, sticking my hands up. "Thank you, Professor Gordon, for the warm welcome, and to start off the class, I would like to make a demonstration! Anyone like to come up to the podium?" You could almost conceal a gunshot in the uproar that arose from that simple request; all of the professor's timid attempts to calm them down failed miserably, drowned out by the pure excitement of thousands of curious teenagers. I see a student sneaking in, a real troublemaker for sure, and I point to him, intrigued by him, and say, "Please come to the podium for our demonstration!". A collective groan dampens the mood of the lecture, with the whole student body giving death stares to the poor kid as he shuffled down the steps. As I gently wrap a blindfold around his eyes, I feel a shiver from my fingers, knowing full well he expected to get into trouble. I whisper to him, "Don't worry, this'll be fun!" Carefully sliding the glasses between the grooves of his ears, I give him a light push. He stumbled clumsily into my leather seat, still not used to using the angel eyes. After the short, whimsical display, I stuffed a book into his hands and fixed the position in front of him. It was a complicated biology textbook, and once he was asked to repeat, the terms flew off his tongue like he was Eminem! Few doctors could have even boasted such a fabulous pronunciation level, and this was all done by the Angel Eyes! A proud look dawned over me, as if I had seen my own son winning his first trophy, before I hastily removed his blindfold after his return to the stage, the dimples of my smile already leaving their mark on my face. Soon, I had rallied the class to silence, playing my music for them. My music, in fact, is the workings of the Angel Eyes themselves. As my chalk flew across the board, complex diagrams and maths equations alike seemed to sprout from the deepest roots of my heart. My words escaped me in cascades, adding wonderfully orchestrated lyrics to the concierto of my drawings. The tension was palpable, the air moved like a membrane, every interested smirk and "ah!" edging me to go on, to give them all I had to give! With a final stroke of the chalk and a final declaration, I gave my deepest bow, the cracks on the glass of my anticipation shattered by the encore of applause. Oh, what a wonderful atmosphere!

Soon after, once I was packing my things, I felt a finger gently nudge my shoulder blade. Turning my head back to see, I laid my eyes on the once–timid student who I had demonstrated the Angel Eyes with just a few hours prior. I laughed under my breath, a fake exasperated sigh warming the air around me as I stood to face him, unable to conceal my interest. "What's up?" He gave me a look that I had only ever seen once before, a sparkle in his eyes, a true interest in his craft, a true dedication to his cause, and it shook me to my core. Within seconds, he rambled on and on, asking me advanced question after advanced question, bringing me to an incoherent mumble as I hastily tried to find an answer to those precious and oh–so–rare eyes. After a whole 10– minute struggle, I had attained his contact information as well as a new outlook on my own, sinking deep into the leather chair behind me, my eyes unfocused and my mind whirring with memories.

My eyes fluttered shut, mentally imagining my peaceful childhood home. I gazed upon my teenage self doing homework at my mom and dad's house. The clicky movement of the fan was inches away from my left ear, leaving me wondering how it did not get cut off. To my right was my mom snoring peacefully, almost in

tandem with the rhythmic clicks of the rickety fan. Bored after finishing my homework, I decided to sneak out of the house. After an hour with my friends, laughing and eating chocolates, I decided to head home, my heart and stomach full, when I noticed a man struggling with his bike. I decided to go and help him, fashioning a makeshift pump out of a discarded hose in the area and pumping the air into his bike. After his fervent thanks, I had received something I had never expected: an invitation to a lecture at the local university! I was ecstatic, and I ran home to tell my mom and dad. After a thorough spanking, I sat my red arse down in front of my dad and mom, the grin still not escaping me and the exasperated looks on their faces finally giving in to smiles at my enthusiasm. The next morning, I awoke to my mom listening to the radio, her blind eyes sparkling more purely than I had ever imagined possible! That beautiful face, all brought about by pure sound, gave me my life's purpose. I would find a machine that could combat blindness!

The next few weeks were flush with excitement, with every fiber of my being purely and solely dedicated to my cause. Within the first 3 months, I had figured out the first major breakthrough! What I had learned was that there existed advanced cameras that had higher resolutions than ever before, and how they were made! The second my foot crossed the doorframe, I sprinted faster than the wind to my room, papers flying as I searched for my blueprint paper for the camera. My pen flew across the page, not unlike the chalk at the lecture today, with messy writing, scribbles, and drawings fully engulfing the once-baby-blue paper. But I had done it! Done…… what? I had a camera, all right, but what use was it to someone blind? Once again, I thought hard, giving up and sitting in the living room. Our family didn't have a TV; it was too expensive, and only one family member was able to use it. My mom was blind, and my dad was a severe workaholic. After an hour of lounging and listening to the radio, my brain was flooded with ideas. Gears clicked to light a bulb as I lunged for the radio, jumping with joy into my room. That's why the cameras are useful! If I could recognize text and turn it into sound, then I was set! The following day, my joyful skips towards my professor granted me a kind smile, and when he saw the blueprints, he was thoroughly impressed. "These are revolutionary! Think of how many people this could help! The inconvenience of braille is no more!" With that log added to the raging fire of my passion, I was granted a night-time university pass to access the STEM labs, where I worked day in and day out for months, learning how to code, connecting wires, weight-managing, and testing hundreds of times over with a blindfold and three books. Reading "Peppa Pig" over a hundred attempts was certainly frustrating, but I came to despise J. R. Tolkein and J. K. Rowling. Damn those abbreviated authors with such complicated books! But by the time I had finished my oh-so-difficult endeavor, I was filled to the core with pride. I had made something revolutionary, something powerful! Now, just one last step.

I had come home once more to find my mom on the couch, the radio playing, and her angelic voice perfectly matching the song's. I carefully slipped the glasses onto her and met with hundreds of Chinese swears, my mother thinking of this as a simple prank.
However, my heart started to flutter when I placed the book in her hands, and when I saw her cry, the sparkle was brighter than ever. She tried to hug me but terribly missed, and I embraced her, laughing and crying, my life goal accomplished.

As I woke up from my trance, my thumb brushed against the soft crease of the sticky note with the student's email and phone number, and I vowed to myself that I would make sure his dreams became a reality and that he saw himself in the position I did. One so truly like myself, unruly but willing to use his talents to help others, deserved nothing less than the whole wide world.

The Teapot

ESF Renaissance College, Fung, Venus – 13

"I believe it's about time that you and I go for a trip – to the countryside. Like how we used to do, Father."

Emperor Zhu nodded in silence as he coldly strutted back to his room. Prince Zhu's eyes lingered intensely like a predator on his figure – as he was disappearing off into the distance.

"Can't wait for our trip, Father." He said to himself, as a smug smirk formed across his face.

"I'll help you herd the sheep, Father."

I threw on my tattered, taupe–coloured cloak and trotted down the lush green pastures. An unmelodious chorus of "Baa's!" filled the air. I recognized the bustle of innocent, woolly sheep far ahead in the vast, rich grassland. The sight of them heartened my mood, especially during the frosty, somber afternoons. They resurrected the warmth I once had but now lost. I looked at the sheep with a hint of envy. They live life with their guards down, easily trusting the ones around them with no sign of doubt. They had nothing to lose. They remind me of the innocence I used to have, the innocence that everything would turn out alright until she left.

"Bang, bang, bang!"

I awoke to the sound of muffled thumps. Before I could get out of bed, I could hear my father's footsteps approaching the door.

Xing opened the door to see stern men with ebony rattan helmets dressed in silky golden Hanfu. He instantly recognised them.

"Imperial guards," he thought to himself.

"Mr. Li, do you recognise this man?" The guard asked Xing in a grave tone, as he hoisted up a painting of a familiar face. He hesitated for a moment, trying to recollect his memories.

"Emperor Zhu." the thought popped into his head.

"Yes, I do recognise him, he's Emperor Zhu."

The guards sneered amongst themselves and looked at each other with satisfaction.

All of a sudden, the guards forcibly grabbed the frail farmer hand in hand.

Min busted through the doors, desperately dragging her father away. She attempted to dislodge him from their grip with all the might her small stature could exude. But they resisted. Tears began to stream down her sickly ivory−white cheeks.

“After everything you have done, you still don’t have an ounce of guilt?!” The guard shouted irritably.

“The Emperor will be pleased to see you,” snickered the other.

There, her precious father was taken from her. She dropped to her knees, helpless and devastated. She looked to the heavens with desperation and prayed that someday, they would be reunited.

The next day, Min awoke to the same thumps on her door. She meekly opened the door. Light escaped through the gap, forcing her puffy eyes to adjust to the broad daylight.

The guard briskly handed me a piece of parchment with an apathetic gaze before he left on horseback. Heart racing, I carefully unfolded it with an uneasy feeling in the pit of my stomach. What I saw next crushed me.

"Name: Li Xing"

"Public execution for the act of regicide."

The floorboards creaked harmoniously with every wandering step I took. A strong trace of flowery incense danced through the air as it guided me deeper and deeper into the bizarre hut. The hut was engulfed by darkness, although it was hardly nighttime. It was ornamented to a tee with sculptures made of lustrous sterling silver. Just as I was about to reach for a delicate swan−like sculpture, I was interrupted by a gruff, throaty voice. Taken aback, my hand made a hasty retreat.

“Why are you here?” The gravelly voice said with a touch of unwelcomeness.

“There’s something I need your help on.”

The strings of beads started clashing against each other, like the untamed waves of the South China Sea. In front of me, appeared a haggard man well into his 70s dressed in a coarse tan hemp tunic. He had an ash−grey goatee and a hunched physique that was supported by a veiny pine walking stick. He had a displeased look plastered on his wrinkled face as if I’d interrupted something very important.

"Go on," he said in a monotonous voice.

But before I could answer him, he had already figured out my motives.

"I have just the thing for you." In his bony hand was a globular object covered by a piece of crimson−red silk. He gently rested the heavy object on a polished circular oak table. He slowly pulled off the silk cloth to reveal... a teapot.

"I know that look on your face. This isn't just any teapot, it's the Assassin's Teapot."

"Perfect, but I have one last question."

"Go on."

"Do you know what tea the Emperor prefers?"

The Edible Fireworks

ESF Renaissance College, Hew, Sophie – 11

China is famous for its many inventions, one of which is fireworks. Li Tian, from Liuyang, central China's Hunan Province, was the inventor of fireworks. Fireworks were not only used to ward off evil spirits to protect the citizens, but more importantly to safeguard the emperor. Nowadays fireworks are used during celebrations of all sorts, creating a sense of festivities, merriment and togetherness.

The creation of edible fireworks took place on the Island of Festivals, a thirty minute boat ride from the most hidden coast in QingDao. The Island of Festivals is the most popular place for holiday goers. Here a wide variety of celebration food is found and when night arrives and as people enjoy their dinner, the hours–long display of multi–colored fireworks captivated the eyes of the spectators.

On the Island of Festivals live the renowned Chan family. They are Pastry Chef Mako Chan, Jelly Specialist Ching Chan, Food Scientist Bai Chan and their trusty sidekick Ming the cat. The Chans are special because they are creative food scientists. They pride themselves on transforming food into sculptures and are masters of desserts . Recently the Chans accomplished an extremely detailed replica of the Forbidden City out of jelly for the President's commemorative dinner.

Due to their exceptional talents, the Chans have been invited to create something extraordinary which no one has attempted before: edible fireworks in preparation for the Global Business Meeting where CEOs of the best companies meet in a chosen country and this year it is held in China. The country's President appointed the Chans to make something spectacular to surprise the world's leaders with dishes that showcased their national foods. Excited, the Chans put their creative juices to work. Chan's laboratory was basically the biggest kitchen and laboratory rolled into one, with fifty colossal stoves, thirty ovens, giraffe tall store rooms and a freezer that was powerful enough to freeze a stampede of elephants. Piles of yellowed paper littered the ground while inkless pens cluttered the table, a by–product of their research. The kitchen benches were strewn with flour while cracked eggshells added another layer of mess. Cake pans and baking trays filled the sink and on the only clean kitchen island lay a 6 tier cake with carefully sculpted fondant flowers and flags made of wafer paper.

In close proximity, the sound of batter being mixed could be heard, while Chef Mako appeared on the verge of bursting a blood vessel due to her vigorous batter mixing technique. Dr Ching was busy scribbling away as he poured over recipe books and magazines. Outside their laboratory were booms loud enough to make a building topple over. Mr. Bai was wearing a neon orange hazard suit while he watched three dim sum steamers fall to the ground but all of the custard buns turned out dry and shrivelled.

After running back into the kitchen lab to grab more supplies and fresh bamboo steamers, Mr Bai stared into the pantry for a long time until he decided to scrutinize the "Ultimate Guide to Perfect Dim Sum." With the help of a skyscraper high elevator, the hunt for the perfect ingredients from their ingredient vault began: light soy sauce, dried mushrooms, chilli powder, fresh garlic mixed with ginger juice. These were the easy ones to get but the list of ingredients got more exotic: aged radish powder, salt seasoned chicken feet, chilli marinated sea cucumbers and fat belly pork in mango oil were only some of the weirdest ingredients on the list!

Mr.Bai started drawing his "Master Plan" on a gigantic blackboard for the edible fireworks with multiple pieces of colourful chalk. Before long he had devised the plan for this dim sum masterpiece.

It was quite simple.Their task involved preparing the dim sum without steaming it, allowing the heat from the fireworks to activate the specific chemicals in the special gunpowder used for ignition. Then Mr. Bai would go to his station to insert his special gunpowder and pack them into capsules (this gunpowder is one of the most important ingredients in this recipe as it is the ingredient that sets off the fireworks.) The making of the gunpowder was the most time consuming. It was a sky blue colour but it smelt like smoked salmon and felt like crushed chalk. The recipe for this secret powder was kept in a highly encrypted safe with twenty hidden cameras in it at all times. Then the capsule was made of thick rice paper that was waterproof so when they were eaten it was not chewy. The capsules went to Professor Ching for testing. Once the " Master Plan" was shown to the Chan's all of their plans were forgotten as they set to work.

Chef Mako was cooking away, churning out a beautiful array of dim sums based on thousands of recipe books. She wanted the guests to taste and experience the unique history of every country in the world. She sculptured them in every shape imaginable and each one turned out as perfectly steamed shells packed with delicious fillings that would give the guests the taste of home.

Outside Mr. Bai was busy making special gunpowder. Ming the cat was the Chan's family cat, he had been with them for over four years now. Ming was a small Ragdoll cat with snow white fur and delicate little grey ears. Surprisingly for such a small cat, he had an appetite as big as a whale, always willing to do some work for any kind of food. He had the important role of ferrying the dim sums from Chef Mako to Mr Bai. Mr Bai delicately picked up each dim sum as if it was a priceless Faberge egg and carefully packed them into specially designed rice paper capsules (completely edible, of course) with a carefully measured sprinkle of his gunpowder.

Ming the cat's next task was to deliver the finished Edible Firework to Professor Ching. Professor Ching, who had volunteered to taste−test every single morsel, had set up his test station around an open fire. Each Edible Firework came in two identical versions, one for the puncture test and the second for the functional test. For the puncture test Professor Ching poked and prodded the capsule checking for leaks − a leaking capsule could prematurely explode and ruin the grand finale they had planned for the Grand Banquet.

Professor Ching's eagle eyes ensured not a single defective capsule would escape his thorough quality inspection. Capsules that did not make the mark were thrown into a large barrel to become Ming's dinner (the Chan's are very particular about not wasting anything) . For the functional test Professor Ching pretended to be a guest who tasted the capsule, (by pretending I mean dressing up in a top hat and tails). He checked to ensure if the capsules worked as planned and also if they were delicious.

The preparations continued for a week and as the days drew closer to the conference dinner, they started to get frantic. Suddenly one sunny afternoon a shouts of joy came across the kitchen lab. It was the screams of delight from Chef Mako and Professor Ching; after tasting countless bowls of dim sum they had finally created the perfect dim sums for the edible fireworks. They put the finishing touches to the little firework capsules, a process that got them hand painting thousands of the capsules in colours that represented the different countries attending the conference.

Days of nonstop working culminated in finalising all 20,000 bite sized firework capsules ready for the special event. As the grand day arrived, the Chans slowly walked into the spacious Grand Banquet Hall with the arduous process of assembling their creations. The dessert stand was so tall it required stepladders and even drones to do the final few layers on the 5 metres high stand.

The plan was that once the person bites into it, the saliva would activate the gunpowder they swallowed. The special gunpowder would turn into this liquid that gave the throat a tingling sensation and all of a sudden you would beware

blowing out fireworks like a dragon. As the banquet dinner came to an end, the Chans watched attentively as the President bit into a blue ball and all of a sudden as if he swallowed a flamethrower, he blew out red and yellow fireworks as the others watched in awe. Once the fireworks finished, a small bowl of egg tarts came floating down from a parachute. As the president enjoyed devouring the egg tart, he reached for another one and this time he blew out purple and pink fireworks.

The president summoned the inventors to the banquet hall and as the Chan's shuffled in, they felt all eyes were on them and finally the president said, "I don't like fireworks."

The Chan's braced themselves for a scolding but the president surprised them with, "But these are a whole other world."

Stunned, the Chan's stared at him gasping. "Well we have dessert to eat and I will reward you. Meanwhile, please tell me which ball holds the red date pudding. I can hardly wait to try it." With the quiet mutter of thanks and Chef Mako saying the navy blue one the Chan's exited the banquet hall.

Before long the whole banquet hall erupted with loud booms of fireworks as everyone ate their own fireworks, creating beautiful, multicoloured fireworks that filled the sky. I guess for the Chans another successful food mission was complete.

P.S If you are wondering what happened to the edible fireworks it became a worldwide sensation. The Chans are still really busy running their new business empire. The President still spends a fortune on those edible fireworks, some say he can devour a box of fifty a week.

New Tales of China's Inventions

ESF Renaissance College, Yu, Chloe – 11

The Chinese History Museum was known for being an experience and a half. It had no pictures on any search engine and the only way to get a ticket was to sign a form given by a staff member. So you can expect I was surprised and felt important when I got a form for the ticket. One of the final questions of the form was, "Do you swear secrecy, and do not take anything away with you from the museum?" Of course I answered yes, I couldn't pass up this opportunity to visit this fabled museum. I wrote my address for the more detailed information, signed with my signature on the dotted line, and sent it to the return address.

The next day I received another letter. Written in neat handwriting was a note of acceptance. It read as, "Dear Miss Audrey, We have decided to allow your visit to the Chinese History Museum. You will be allowed to see the gunpowder exhibit. Also included in the letter are two tickets, one for you and one for a second person. We have scheduled a time for you to come on August 31st, from as early as 7am to 9pm. Remember to not bring any hazardous items as we wish that no one messes up or harms the exhibits. We hope you retain information and keep it to yourself. We hope you have an interesting time. Sincerely, Head of exhibits"

After reading that, I had a week to decide what and who to bring with me for this trip. I considered bringing my mom or dad but it wouldn't work out with only bringing one of them. If I told Dad that I wanted to go to this museum on the day before the first day of school, he would say no and that I "needed rest to prepare for school." As for my mom, she is always doing something for work, whether that be a presentation of how the revenue has been, to statistics of the company's worker health. Work takes up so much of her time the only day I can truly spend with her are Sundays. So parents were a no go. My mind drifted to my two friends.

At school we always stuck as a trio. That trio that consisted of me, Monique, and Elodi. Elodi and Monique had totally different personalities. I was kind of in the middle. Elodi almost never spoke in class and blends into the background. That didn't mean she wasn't smart though! Monique always raised up her hand, even if she's not sure it's correct, and tries new activities and hobbies. In the end Monique agreed to join me. Later, I asked Monique and she started jumping up and down even though we were in the gym with people staring at her. She told me that she had been dreaming about it for forever ever since someone she knew who went let it slip.

I made it through the week and suddenly, it was the 31st. I called Monique at 6:15 so we would have enough time to meet up, and take the bus over to the museum. I had already come up with an excuse of why I had to go out for the whole day but it turned out to be not needed. Mom was, of course, working and today my dad helped her all day from 6:30am to 10pm so I had enough time to go to the museum without telling them and having to ditch a friend of theirs that was meant to watch over us. I did feel slightly guilty but I told myself that I couldn't pass up this opportunity. In 15 minutes I was able to brush my teeth, eat breakfast, change, and get to the meeting point. When I got there, Monique was already there watching a video.
"Hey! Aren't you so excited?
"Ye–"
"Yes or no, I am! We are actually going to visit the museum!"
"The bus is here, let's go!" I said. We hopped on the bus and arrived at the museum. We walked up the grand yet short staircase where we were greeted by a man. He was dressed very formally with a dark gray suit and a black tie.

"Hello Madams, are you Audrey and Monique?"
"Yes"
"May I see your tickets?" he said. I passed the yellow tickets over to him and he scanned it. He told us to go through the security checker to make sure we didn't bring anything that could harm the exhibits. He handed us a small map

that could fit in three hands and we were free to look around. We both decided to visit the gunpowder exhibit because it was closer than the papermaking exhibit. When we got there a few seconds of fast walking later we looked around in amazement. There was an information tablet and I was able to skim that gunpowder was discovered around 1000 AD. Suddenly there was a loud whooshing sound and I instinctively looked toward Monique and saw she was looking back with a mirrored expression. Everything around us disappeared and for a horrid second I thought I might be hallucinating, possibly even dead.

Everything re appeared except all the items were different. We were in a study room, if you could call it that. It was barren other than a stool and a wobbly wood table. There were sheets of paper scribbled with words neither of us could read. I checked the pockets of my clothes, however the clothes were different. I still checked the pockets and suggested to Monique to do the same. While she found nothing but some fuzz, I found a miniature notebook in my pocket. I turned to Monique and flashed the notebook at her. I flipped through the book and it seemed to be like a translation of the writing we couldn't understand.

After a while, we were able to translate all the writing we could, and this is what the paper had written on it. "The solution, for what it shall be called gunpowder, is 75 parts potassium nitrate + 14 parts charcoal + 11 parts sulfur. How it was discovered was when a Chinese Taoist mixed together that solution, then exposed it to an open flame, it exploded. On the middle of the table is some gunpowder, do as you will."

I hesitantly touched then grabbed a tiny handful of gunpowder as if it would explode when I touched it. It felt pretty powdery, but that didn't mean anything. I wondered what I was expected to do. Was I stuck in this universe, or was I meant to do something to get out? If so, then what? I wasn't given any clues, or hints, or a nudge in any direction. Breaking my train of thought, I realized a familiar extremely loud wind noise filling my eardrums. I went back to blank space, then back to the museum. I made sure I was still with Monique, and hugged her. I felt our friendship grow stronger, but of course we wouldn't leave Elodi. Monique told me that Elodi was actually the one who secretly told her. Monique thought I was going to be mad because she kept a secret from me, but I was happy we could talk about it freely.

Just then I remembered I still had a handful of gunpowder. I put it in a zip lock bag and made a reminder to myself to split it in half and give half to Monique as a keepsake. I ended up sleeping at 10pm that night. In the morning my mom woke me up and asked if I studied or did anything yesterday. I said, "I just studied about gunpowder at home, it was really plain." I said, trying to look convincing.
"If you say so Audrey."

The Suitors' Game

ESF Renaissance College, Wong, Annabelle – 12

"Look at Lisa! Why can't you be more like her?" Mama shouts. I take off my headphones. What is so good about Lisa? Sure, she gets good grades, she wins violin competitions, she might just be the "perfect child". Oh man– Lisa is such a suck–up. However much Mama wants it, I will never be her.
"Stop *nagging* already!"
"Are you talking *back* to me? Stop it with the attitude. Instead of watching Netflix, or obsessing over K–POP, why don't you study more?"
"tsk" Why is she so persistent?
"…and you know what? I guarantee you'll get better grades in English if you read more." I put on my headphones, but the music is not playing.
"Lucky you're going to Bao's house for Chinese New Year tomorrow, I don't want to deal with you…"
Rejoice! I will escape to my grandmother's house!

"Happy Chinese New Year!" I shout. As per her Chinese New Year ritual, Bao invites her Mahjong buddies to the house. Every year there will be people of different races, ages; all from various chance meetings in her many Mahjong sessions.
Bao smiles and pushes a red packet into my hands. "For the Mahjong game."
Before I can ask why she is teaching me a 200 year old game, she quips "I'm introducing you to a very important teacher of life. Haven't I told you about the Mahjong test?"
I shake my head.
"Your mother was very popular, she had many admirers! I made sure every single one of them played Mahjong with me. It's a window to a person's true character – especially when the stakes are high."
I have no clue what Bao is talking about, seems impossible that Mahjong can teach anyone anything about life, and even more impossible that my "mama–kill–joy" could be popular among boys.

East

Downstream from me, a man seated at the East corner, whom I simply refer to in my head as "East", sports a red shirt, and what seems to be a pair of red underwear peeking out from the top of his white jeans. His broken English is accompanied with wild hand gestures. East has counted his money three times before heading into the loo, then washed his hands *clean*. Bao tells me that is part of his ritual prior to every game. Holding a number of varied "Dragons" and "Winds", Bao tells me to get rid of the Suits. But each time I throw a different pattern tile, East seems to change his mind about which Suit he would like to keep. First he threw "Three Bamboo". In the next turn he threw a "Seven Coin", and now he is throwing a "Five Character". East seems to second–guess himself because he is paying too much attention to what I'm throwing. I think Mama and East both like to obsess about what others do, they should totally hang out together! Bao taps my shoulder and I sit up, re–focusing on my tiles.

South

BANG!!! Across the table from me, South loses his cool. A tile slams, and flies across the table like a pebble from Huang Yaoshi's 'Divine Flicking Finger' [Dan Zi Shen Tong] from the famous drama series, the Condor Heroes. South is wearing a Polo shirt, large logo embroidered down his chest. Even indoors, he refuses to take off his black beret. South needs "Coin" tiles, but instead hangs on to "Bamboo" tiles. Turns out, that is exactly the Suit his downstream, West, needs. Bao explains to me South won't win by holding on to those tiles. He scowls in frustration, glancing at West and throwing another "Coin" tile.
I'm reminded of an argument I had with Mama where she refused to let me play football in fear of developing muscular legs and a short body. How does that make sense? First of all, there is no scientific evidence. Second, why deprive yourself of doing what you want, in fear of something that may not even happen? Like Mama's decision with football, South's fear of losing overwhelms him, and he ends up justifying his fears by not giving himself a chance to win. The biggest victim here may not just be South's game, but the poor tiles constantly slammed onto the table surface.

West

Her blonde hair and American accent are incongruent to her Mahjong peers. "Since my arrival, Mahjong has become an endless obsession." West says. She wears a blue and yellow flowery dress, and, to my untrained eyes, what appears to be a string of authentic golden pearls around her neck. Bao says her husband is a wealthy banker who moved to Hong Kong for business. She seems at ease speaking to East and South despite the language barrier. Eyes trained on her tiles, West's poker face conceals inner excitement. Bao tells me she is waiting for "Three Bamboo" or "Six Bamboo" to win the game. Little does West realise all but one are already out on the table.

Seeing this reminds me of meals at home, a family of five with two other "hungry ghost" siblings, means dinner is a survival of the fastest. Mama is always scolding me for day–dreaming at meal times. If my eyes leave the table's dishes, dinner will be plain rice with a dash of bitter sorriness.

Just when I think of warning West, East exclaims suddenly, "You see 'Bamboo' tile? Many out already!" West lifts her head, and laughs in embarrassment, East joining in. Soon everyone is laughing, and the moody competitiveness turns into all–around giggles. East throws West the last "Three Bamboo" tile, winning him smiles and praise from around the table.

North

Even with Bao's charitable funding, we are both absolutely bankrupt. I have not won any games, but Bao encourages me and continues to show me the way. I open with a majority of "Bamboo" tiles and perk up, tying my hair back.

Bao reminds me to keep my expectations in check. "Luck is simply a belief; never get too high or low."

Even so, my tiles are most likely the winning hand! At that very thought, as quickly as the wind changes, South gets a tile, and slams it on the table, flipping and revealing his entire deck. The game is over. My face falls. I had come so close to winning. Bao interrupts my thoughts. "Without sacrifice and failure cannot come experience and wisdom. Play enough games, experience enough losses, and you will eventually win. Ready for the next round?"

By the end of the day, I have won twice, with every dollar paid to my three new Mahjong teachers. From these acquaintances I have discovered the solemn ritual of red undies, which will definitely be worn during exams. The "teacher of life" Bao introduced is an often overlooked invention, where game sessions turn into life lessons. Most of all, I'm grateful to Bao. She taught patiently, explaining the rules as I blundered through the game. Mahjong is not always about winning, it is also about the experience gained from losing, and letting go to move on. Although I'm still angry, I now realise that Mama was not deliberately trying to compare me with others and shoot me down. Mama was afraid of me failing, not just in my studies but also in life. As a compromise, instead of obsessing so much over K–POP or Netflix, I will bite the bullet and burn the midnight oil. However, I will try my luck with Mama again about playing football, you can't win or lose if you never play. You know what? I may have to teach her this lesson with a game of Mahjong.

Epilogue – Bao

"Bye Bao! Thank you!" She says to me.

My granddaughter leaves and my wallet is empty. Old Huang, whom my granddaughter referred to as East, celebrates his victories, coin drawer teeming with money. Luckily, I have foreseen this. I came up with a backup plan. Gathering my guests, I announce my desire to play another few rounds of Mahjong. We raise the stakes. By the time night falls, my coin drawer overflows, and Old Huang loses a bet on his underwear. I marvel at how Mahjong brings us together, despite language barriers and cultural differences. It is a hard game to play, even for a seasoned player. My granddaughter may be a novice, but she sat proudly, and stayed resilient. Though money was lost, failed she had not, oftentimes in Mahjong, defeat is victory in disguise.

The Tea Time Traveler

ESF Sha Tin College, Lai, Wa Ling – 11

Panra sighs, ready for well–deserved rest. She wakes up somewhere different and realizes she is squatting. There was a huge pot of boiling water in front of her and a well–dressed man was sitting beside a wooden table nearby. Multiple trees, bamboo huts, and large crop farms surrounded her. *This is China. Why am I here?* She looks at her clothes. They are itchy and broken. *And why is it like China but a zillion years ago?* She looks at the rich man again. He seems to be daydreaming. *That's probably the emperor.* She looks at the pot of water. *I guess I'll boil this water for him and serve it.* While she was gently stirring the water with a wooden stick, a few leaves from the tree above fell in. She panics, thinking she contaminated the water. The emperor realizes, causing Panra to panic and rack her brain for her Mandarin–speaking knowledge.

"Your water– has– leaves, you want me to get– them out?" The emperor shakes his head.

"No, let me taste it." he turns around and pushes the cup toward Panra, who grunts as she lifts the heavy pot and pours it into his porcelain cup. Thanking Panra, he takes a solemn sip, his face brightening immediately.

"This is amazing!" he sets the cup down– "We shall make more." He stands up and starts plucking leaves off random trees.

"Emperor, what are you planning to do?" Panra asks.

"I shall sell this drink. The feeling I got when I drank was heavenly! Like my body had been lifted and my energy reset. That cough I had? It's all gone now."

"Come, we shall announce this to the country." Shennong, the emperor, gestured for Panra to follow, but just as Panra started following, a cold wind whipped her arms and she was elsewhere. Gasping, she scanned her surroundings again. She was sitting in a wooden room at a stout table with no chairs. A young man was sitting across her, dipping a slim brush into a pot of ink. The brush smoothly glided over the glassy paper and sleek characters formed before Panra's eyes. The man looked up from his work. "Any comments? Anything I'm writing wrong?"

Startled, Panra answered: "No! Your work's– good. What are you writing?"

He smiled serenely. "This is my book, *The Book of Tea.* I've been working on it for a while. Didn't you know? I am a fan of tea myself, considering my fellow monks love it *very* much." Panra nodded. *Mum taught me this,* she pondered. *He's Lu Yu, the writer of The Book of Tea.* She leaned over and scanned the words; they were even; immaculate. *That word means tea…* she understood a little bit of Mandarin and silently thanked her Chinese mum for teaching her. She noticed a bowl beside Lu Yu; it held a slimy, greenish–white mixture with bits of crushed leaves in it. Panra nearly threw up.

"What is *that*?!" she pointed at it in disgust. Lu Yu didn't take his eyes off his work. "Tea porridge. It's our monastery's special. We make it every night for healing and soothing the mind for sleep." he nods at Panra. "Give it a try," Just as Panra was about to decline, the frigid wind once again sliced her skin, and she was somewhere else. Panra saw the marvelous walls of King Charles II's palace. Observing her clothes, she was dressed in fine silks and shoes; she was rich here. A crowd was surrounding an imposing woman dressed even more finely with curly hair.

"Catherine!" "Your Majesty!" "Can I buy some tea?" "What does tea taste like?" Loud voices filled the room; the woman seemed to ignore them as she paused in the middle of the room, a royal aura about her, and spoke:

"My people! I am hosting a one–in–a–lifetime opportunity to try tea!" she continued: "A new shipping of leaves is arriving, which means tea will be served tonight! If you would like to taste tea, come tonight in your finest evening

clothes!" everyone cheered. The woman left. *Catherine of Braganza?* Panra thought. *She spread tea around England, didn't she?* a woman's arm grabbed hers.

"Come, darling, let's go try tea!" Panra stumbled as the woman pulled her towards the big doors. All the women seemed to be attaching themselves, making friends immediately. "There's the dinner hall. I am *so* excited!" the woman squealed, dragging Panra to two free seats. They sat down and Panra flattened her clothes, startled by the quick procession of things. *What the teacup is going on here?* Panra thought as waiters started coming with trays of cups. A steaming hot cup was put in front of Panra and the woman beside her squealed, picking up the tea and sipping it.

"Mm, so good! So smooth and warm!" she continued to rapidly drink the tea while Panra slowly took sips. *This tea is amazing…* Panra enjoyed her hot tea but the wind was back, sweeping her up and dropping her in a large sailboat. *Where the tea am I now?* She stood up and immediately fell back to the ground. The floor was shaking as sprays of water slapped her face. The strong scent of tea came from the multiple boxes on the ship; many people were running around, fixing the sails, and cleaning the deck… she realized they were nearing a piece of land. Crowds of people were standing at the coast, waving their arms crazily, flagging the boat down. At first, Panra thought they were holding glass vases but as they continued to near, she realized they were holding *Bombs!* Panra held down the urge to scream and panicked. *How to get off? Swim? Jump?* Panra ran around, unsure of what to do. Her hesitation cost her time; someone had thrown a black sphere toward the ship's hull, emitting a deafening CRACK! sound. The ship swerved, and people started screaming on both ends; boat workers and military alike.

"WE NEVER ACCEPT YOUR DEATH DRUGS AGAIN!" a man yelled in broken English to the boat. "YOU NEVER DRINK TEA AGAIN!" More bombs were thrown, more screams, more explosions… someone knocked Panra over and she smacked her head on the railing, and everything went black… Panra wakes in a small hut on a thin bamboo mattress. Groaning, she slowly sits up and looks around; she hears bombing outside. *World War Three?!* Then she remembered she wasn't back in 2024 yet. Running to the window, she sees a bomb land on the nearby coast and explodes, breaking her eardrums. A brightly–colored man ran to the coast, waving his arms, yelling brokenly:

"MERCY! WE'LL GIVE YOU LAND! LEAVE US ALONE, PLEASE!" The bombing stopped. The ringing stopped. Everything went still and… she was in a meeting room. There was a long, wooden table and people stood across from her.

"Robert, your mission is to steal tea plants and the secrets of tea from China," they nodded solemnly. "Take as long as you need, but contact regularly." Panra felt her face. Sharp nose, round lips, *facial hair?! I'm a man!* Panra went pale. *Oh for the love of–* wind whisked her away, and she was at the base of a mountain, basket on her back. She turned her head and saw leafy green crops sticking out; tea leaves. Her clothes were not silky but not poor either; they were perfectly comfy, just like her own clothes at home; a simple t–shirt and pants. In front of her was a dirt path; an Indian man was standing near an enormous tree.

"Excuse me, sir? I'd like to go–" Panra pointed past the man into the city– "In there, please? This tea is quite heavy–"

"Who are you and what business do you have?" he asked sternly.

"I'm, um, Robert, a tea spy sent by the East India Trading Company…" The man raised his eyebrow, smelling a fragrant scent. He looked at the basket on Panra's back and sighed.

"As long as it doesn't get *me* in trouble…" he gestured for Panra to enter.

"Thank you, sir!" Panra bounded in. Just as she was going to set down the tea basket and rest, the icy wind came back, whisking her back into her bedroom, where she could hear her Pakistani dad calling for her.

"Panraaa! Are you up? I made you paratha, hurry up!" Panra snapped to life, threw her uniform on, and grabbed her backpack. *What the heck happened? Did I just time travel?!*

"Coming, Baba!" she thundered down the stairs and into the kitchen, where she saw her dad plating steaming paratha, her siblings playing on their iPads, and her mom brewing tea.

"Isn't it a bit early for tea, Mama?" Panra asked, sitting on a kitchen stool.

"It is never too early, Pan." her mum replied cheerfully. "Did you know your name means leaf? I wanted to name you after my love of tea, and we had the perfect idea, just like this tea story…"

Harmonia

ESF Sha Tin College, Lee, Felix – 13

Lee Hui Chen sighed wearily as he fell into line once more. For almost all of his 40 years of life Lee Hui Chen had to follow a constant routine of waiting. Whether it was waiting a few hours for his children to finally ride a roller coaster or wasting his whole morning queuing up just for a quick boost of energy by the continuous dose of caffeine. He always took the treatment patiently, silently, obediently. The endless amount of waiting, waiting, waiting… As a low–level factory worker, Hui Chen knew the harsh realities of China's class system all too well. While the nobility lived lavishly, he did backbreaking overtime for meagre pay and little rest. His boss scowled more than he smiled, piling on extra shifts with no extra compensation. To unwind from the stresses, Hui Chen sometimes visited a nearby tavern run by his longtime friend Zhou. Over cheap drinks, they would both complain and laugh about the suppression of the working class under China's powerful control. Each day he wished and prayed, hopeful that one day, maybe just maybe if he wished hard, everything in his life just might change. Today was going to be no different than any other day.

Deep in his own thoughts he headed towards the bar. As Hui Chen made his way down the alley, his attention was drawn to a small family huddled against the wall. A mother holding a shivering toddler, their clothes dirty and tattered. A young boy sat near them coughing violently into his arm. Hui Chen slowed as he passed, pity swelling in his chest at their bleak condition. “If only there was a way, I could ease everyone’s burden.” Murmured Hui Chen out loud, although no one could hear him over the boy’s terrible cough.

As Hui Chen neared the tavern, the temperature suddenly increased. The lit tavern was no longer a visible structure, it looked more like broken down cloth having a dance party with the fire spirits themselves. In the corner of his eye, surrounded by many of his usual customers he saw a glimpse of his devastated friend. Zhao looked nearly as terrible as his ruined business. As usual Hui Chen rushed towards his friend and did everything to try and help. “WHAT HAPPENED,” exclaimed the desperate Hui Chen to his badly injured companion. “I owed them rent… Due to the pandemic it was an impossible task to come up with such a sum. When I couldn’t provide them with what they wanted, they came for me and my life's work,” sobbed Zhao. Rage and grief stirred in Hui Chen's chest. For too long the powerful had crushed citizens underfoot. No more. "Rest now, old friend. I will make sure the landowner pays for this," Hui Chen vowed. Justice would be served, through legal means if possible...but by any means necessary.”

"Why should hardworking people endure such hardship, I know I have been thought to endure it as people call this treatment ‘just life,’ but I know this has to change?" thought Hui Chen. “That’s it. I’ll create a place, a utopia where no wrong can be done.” Blueprints of a shelter run selflessly, for the benefit of all, without hierarchies or exploitation began forming in his head. A safe space where basic needs like food, shelter and healthcare would be guaranteed, not luxuries. Where labour was valued and respected, not taken advantage of. Hui Chen had everything planned out in his head, all that was missing were people that were willing to initiate the plan with him.

He had finally finalised a plan that ‘could work’, but now needed people who believed that it would too. In the coming days, Hui Chen quietly began recruiting others who shared his vision. He went back to the old toothpaste factory where he used to work. There were many workers there who eagerly joined his cause. Before long, word got around that there was a secret community that would ‘change the world’. Weekly underground meetings were held to finalise preparations and details.

Hui Chen took inspiration from great leaders like Martin Luther King Jr. He brought his supporters everywhere he went, delivering sympathetic speeches in every building, shop, and road that crossed his path. His words advocated his thoughts on the common issues that people faced daily. The number of his disciples and followers was close to unimaginable. The government could no longer ignore the determination of their citizens. Just like the great Mao Zedong did decades ago, they took their first steps towards a vision, a revolution, a future that would forever redefine what it meant to be alive. With everything ready, the time had finally come to set their plan into motion.

In this new system created by Hui Chen and his fellow friends, an essential principle was to reward kindness and promote a culture and environment of understanding. They aspired to create a society where the ‘nicest’ and ‘kindest’ individuals would receive certain privileges such as shorter wait times, and extra benefits, all based on their demonstrated ‘good deeds.’

The well−being of the community mattered the most. Every household was equipped with an indoor gym, complete with state−of−the−art fitness equipment and personalised workout trackers. This initiative promotes physical health, self−care, and a proactive approach to maintaining a fit lifestyle. There are trackers that are able to provide real−time statistics on individuals' exercise progress, serving as a reminder and motivation for residents to put their health and well−being first. Another heavily emphasised aspect in this newly created utopia was they’re zero−waste policy. Each apartment included mandatory worm farms, housing genetically modified worms specially designed to clean hard−to−reach areas and consume leftover food scraps. This innovative approach minimised waste and made the city a clean and hygienic living environment. The implementation of a recycling program demonstrated their commitment to environmental sustainability. Volunteers would assume the role of collecting recyclable rubbish, ensuring that it would be properly disposed of and repurposed. By volunteering and staying healthy the individual would have ‘kindness’ points added to their profile. The new appointed ‘point’ system would affect your privileges that you have in this city. The point system served as both an incentive and a measure of an individual's contribution to the community, reinforcing the value of acts of kindness and encouraging residents to continuously engage in positive actions.

To enforce the smooth functioning of the new community there had to be both risk and reward. The city was covered with surveillance cameras that monitored both visiting visitors and residing residents while in a public place. Surveillance cameras were strategically placed throughout public areas, monitoring visitors and residents' activities. This surveillance served multiple purposes, not only to reduce crime rates but also to motivate positive behaviour, provide real−time information during emergencies such as fires, natural disasters, or medical incidents. Everything you did could alter your kindness points, whether it was helping an old helpless grandma cross the road or smoking cigarettes, they would all be recorded within the public and governmental domain. From the recent pandemic using this new technology they would also be able to monitor public areas for compliance with health and safety measures and help identify overcrowding and ensure social distancing.

A crowd gathered outside the city gates. A city without a name. Hui Chen took to the podium once again, he paused for a moment, allowing his thoughts to sink in, before concluding with a flourish: "And so, my friends, let us forever cherish this remarkable place we call ' Sino New Harmonia.' The crowd erupts in applause and cheers, their hearts filled with accomplishment and gratitude.

Hui Chen sighed wearily as he collapsed onto a rock. He was tired, but this time it didn’t feel the same. He paused for a moment and enjoyed the view of a bluer ocean, yellower sun, and a greener earth. He brushed his hand on the stone. Hui Chen felt the smoothness of it, a satisfactory feeling. He looked around and saw other rocks, rocks that looked like the one he was currently sitting on, but slightly different. Some were sharper, some were brighter, but most importantly, they were together, supporting each other so that they all don’t break down and fall into the ocean. Hui Chen thought to himself one last time: “I came into this world with a set of instructions of exactly what to do and think. Now I come to realise that if we dream big, we will create big. Big differences can be made, and we don’t have to be afraid of them. What was an impossibility before was now a reality, a new home, an invention. When others in this world realise my cause, I hope that they can share my dream with theirs and create even more possibilities, innovate even more out of the box, and never settle for consistency in their life.”

He dived into the water weaving his way in the water, gracefully, peacefully, and happily.

The Invention that Doomed a Dynasty

ESF Sha Tin College, Lee, Keng Hung Nicholas – 13

"Was this the missing piece?" Jinghong gazed at the radiant moon, whilst his face was graced with a triumphant smile. As a recent graduate in archaeology, for months he had been tirelessly combing through the desiccated frames of Yin Xu, the crumbled palace of the Shang dynasty. Amongst the fragments of pottery and tattered remnants of ancient outfits, he had unearthed glimpses of the dynasty's former grandeur. Now, in his hands, he held a precious artifact that seemed to hold the key to unlocking the secrets of the heights that the Shang had reached three thousand years ago.

Jinghong held the object up underneath the moon's beams. The surface of the object glimmered softly, reflecting the moon's ethereal glow, filling Jinghong's heart with anticipation and intrigue. It seemed to be a turtle shell, untouched by erosion. Etched upon the shell's surface were shallow grooves, arranged in a pattern like no other he knew. Jinghong ran his fingers along them in wonder, feeling each, and every delicate line.

"An oracle bone..." Jinghong uttered softly to himself, his eyes widened in wonder as he beheld the oracle bone.

"Spectacular," he gasped, unable to contain the surge of excitement that rushed through his veins. He knew that the Shang prospered under the innovation of the oracle bone. However, amidst his elation, a lingering thought tugged against his consciousness, "how could such a mighty dynasty, the Shang, now be covered in layers of such insignificance remnants?"

The ancient language was easy to decipher, for characters seemed to resemble pictographic forms of the word. For instance, the Chinese word for person (人) seemed to share some similarities, with the archaic version exhibiting more of a bent look, to look more like a human. Jinghong found himself immersed in the visions of the shell and the lost world. He saw through the eyes of Emperor Dixin's highest order scholar, witnessing daily life unfolding in the thriving Shang capital…

The lands of Shang bloomed with prosperity under Emperor Dixin's wise governance. There were bountiful harvests that filled granaries with millets and rice, silkworms that worked tirelessly producing wooden caskets full of silk from its silkworm farms, and skilled artisans crafting the finest outfits from such silks. Under Dixin's guidance, it seemed, the Shang realm blossomed in growing grandeur. Fields, cities, and citizens lived in harmony under the emperor's prudent policies. Many other regions in the vicinity of China at the time grew envious of the Shang's prosperity. One of which was the Zhou clan, from a land beyond the western reaches of the Yellow River. Wuwang, ambitious Chieftain of the emerging Zhou clan, had long observed with covetous eyes the bountiful lands and wealth of the Shang. Wuwang maintained a silent witness, hoping for one mistake that could allow his clan to replace the almighty Shang.

However, despite such prosperity, the Shang was faced with a sudden plague, a plague that made silkworms die mysteriously. Dixin looked on with deep concern, as this threatened not only the livelihood of certain farmers but also the connection between the different clans of China, such as in the west with the Zhou clan. To try and aid the blight of the silkworms, Dixin would personally visit isolated farms to offer guidance. He realised communication was lacking for remote farmers with little to no knowledge of silkworm care. The sole way of communicating at the time, with knots on string, was only able to communicate about disastrous misfortunes that other villagers had already been the culprit of, not of detailed remedies. Thus, Emperor Dixin opted for a medium that showed a much more detailed way of conveying instructions.

Whilst surveying the lands upon his return one night, Emperor Dixin noticed a gathering by the brook, mystic figures arrayed around a fire. Dixin became curious and spurred his horse to approach the gathering. As the emperor arrived at the assembly, his keen eyes surveyed the figures surrounding the fire. They seemed to be priests, wearing robes of coarse burlap with finely woven borders of hemp–dyed shades of amber and teal.

"Greetings elders," said Dixin softly, "may I inquire about your purpose here?"

One shaman bowed low, eyes aglow in the firelight. "Greetings Emperor, we communicate with our ancestors through this sacrificial shell. As it cracks under the fire, the shape encrypted represents a symbol that tells the future of this world."

Dixin pondered, noticing the symbol on the shell in front of him. Three rocky spines emerged, with the central mass standing tall over its neighbours, "does this represent a mountain?"

"Indeed, Emperor," the shaman responded, "this means that luck will reign the earth under the next new moon, as the mountain represents a linkage between heaven and earth."

"This method of communication seems to be so clear that even someone unknown to your traditions, such as I the Emperor, may still comprehend. Tomorrow, I shall summon scholars to inscribe this language, a visual representation that even the peasant can understand. Together may we forge a legacy to improve generations unborn."

The priests silently disagreed, for ages, the burning of the turtle shell had long been the sacred method to communicate with heavenly beings, but now, anyone could decipher the will of the heavens. However, bound by their loyalty to Emperor Dixin, they reluctantly acquiesced, unable to voice their opinions against the emperor's ambitious plans.

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In the stillness of the night, Emperor Dixin's eyes peered upwards towards the pensive moon, finding whatever solace its soft luminance may offer. His writing system had at first proven to be a boon for guiding farmers to aid silkworms, however, dissent amongst priests now spiralled beneath that same moon's watch. Did that pale orb understand the turmoil happening under its rays? Or did it simply witness, as it had eons past, the endless waltz of change dancing amongst mortals below? Dixin knew not, all he saw in its luminescence was a reflection of progress carrying consequences not fully foreseen, though he could not seem to find an answer that could restore peace to his kingdom.

Wuwang observed patiently as the conflict between the priests and Emperor Dixin worsened. Wuwang saw an opportunity. He called a meeting under the new moon, "the priests cry for the old ways, and will support those who support their old ways. If we back their claims, the people will rally behind us, and we may finally take over the Shang!"

"And the emperor?" asked an elder, "he is no fool, he would not give up his throne so easily."

Wuwang smiled cunningly, "Leave Dixin to me."

In the early hours of the next morning, a messenger burst into the royal chambers, his face etched with urgency. Gasping for breath, he relayed the distressing events witnessed on the outskirts of the city at daybreak. It appeared that Wuwang had gathered a formidable army, including a line of priests behind him, as if preparing for an attack.

Dixin swiftly ascended to the top of the city's fortified wall, telling the messenger to prepare a message for the war commander. As Dixin peered down upon the scene unfolding below, he could see Wuwang's forces, adorned with black banners and flanked by armed soldiers, stretched as far as the eye could see. From his position outside the palace gates, Wuwang thundered, "You have doomed the Shang with your invention! Surrender your throne and your people will be spared!"

Despite the impending danger, Dixin stood firm, "my citizens will see the truth. Your treason will be punished!" he declared defiantly.

"Attack!" bellowed Wuwang, his voice echoing with a ferocious intensity.

What followed was a clash of violence, as swords clashed, and blood stained the fields. Amidst the haze of smoke and ashes, opposing forces collided in a battle that would determine the destiny of dynasties. When dawn broke again, only the victors remained standing, the black banners of the Zhou fluttering proudly over the smouldering ruins. Yin Xu, once a proud city, now lay in ruins.

With his final breaths, Dixin's scholar, who bore witness to it all, recorded the final moments of the Shang. With his last efforts, his brush etched, "The oracle bone was a great invention to us scholars, but such greatness still has consequences. The oracle bone is the invention that doomed a dynasty."

As the moon gazed upon the sands of Yin Xu, Jinghong sat in quiet contemplation. His mind wandered through the bittersweet tale – how the innovation that elevated the Shang realm to new heights still led to its downfall. Ironically, the oracle bone was such a monumental innovation that it carried knowledge across generations, whilst also carrying the concept of writing into prints and papers, being an invention that endured through the tides of time. Jinghong let out a sigh, for he had learned an important lesson from the ruins beneath the watchful moon.

Back In Their Day

ESF Sha Tin College, Leung, Adeline – 11

The school bells had just rang, Yijun had arrived at school at the last minute.
"Wait what?" Yijun questioned herself, "I thought I was still at home and was already late, how did I arrive at school 2 minutes before the bell rang?"

Yijun bolted to her classroom and found her teacher had already started taking attendance.
"Yijun Liu," muttered Ms Deng, "always late."
"Sorry," Yijun apologized and bowed to the teacher before walking to her desk.

After study period, Yijun and her friends wandered slowly to their history classroom, which was on the 6th floor.
"Mei Xing!" Yijun called, "wait up!"
"I can't," Mei Xing called back, "we're already 4 minutes late!"
Yijun and Mei Xing sprinted to their history class.

"Yijun and Mei Xing! What makes you think you can come into my classroom 2 minutes early and still be giggling, I'm trying to have lunch here!"
"Sorry Mr Yu," Yijun and Mei Xing muttered, then walked out the door, slightly embarrassed.
"Didn't Mei Xing look at her watch and tell me that we were late?" Yijun thought to herself, "how are we suddenly 2 minutes early?"
Yijun continued thinking about the miracle that just happened while Mr Yu was giving a lecture on ancient Chinese inventions.

Yijun walked home, still confused about what had happened. But she couldn't care since she still had that big project on ancient Chinese inventions and she hadn't listened to a thing Mr Yu was talking about. She went to her desk instantly after she stepped foot in her house.
"Why didn't I listen to Mr Yu's boring lecture on Chinese inventions," Yijun groaned, "now I don't know what to do."
Yijun tried calling her friends except all her friends were busy doing their own projects. She lost all hope and went to take a nap to calm herself down.

After Yijun had woken up she found herself under a wooden 4 poster bed. Yijun crawled out of the room and saw farmers working hard on crops. Yijun was even more confused.
"Cai Lun!" called a voice, "we're out of bamboo, can you please go to the store and buy some more, here's some money."
The woman handed the man a handful of coins.
"I wish there was an easier way of carrying large amounts of money," Cai Lun thought to himself.
Yijun heard Cai Lun's thought and went over to him.
"Why don't you use paper money instead of those weighted amounts of coins?" Yijun said to him.
Cai Lun nodded and continued his way to the market, Yijun couldn't help but follow him.

Cai Lun bought some bamboo and silk, and on the way home, he found some fishing net on the floor and picked it up, he also found some mulberry bark laying on the ground like it was waiting for him. Cai Lun handed the bamboo and silk to his wife and got to work. Yijun drew a quick sketch of everything he bought and followed him outside to a comforting fall breeze.
"I haven't felt such a welcoming breeze in such a long time," Yijun sighed.
Cai Lun had found a broken hemp plant and decided to keep it in his room.

The next day was a similar routine, Cai Lun went to the market to sell his crops and came back home with a large bag of coins. Yijun could feel his pain, carrying such heavy coins everyday.

“I wish there was a lighter way of carrying large amounts of money,” Cai Lun pondered.
“There is,” Yijun claimed.
Later that day, Cai Lun set off to a school teaching how to farm more efficiently, he brought a lot of bamboo to take notes and some silk. On the way. Yijun noticed that with each step that Cai Lun took he was getting more and more tired.

Once Cai Lun got home Yijun suggested an invention idea that would certainly make him lots of money. Since Yijun hadn’t listened to Mr Yu’s lecture on paper, she didn’t know the procedure, so she and Cai Lun had a few errors along the way but eventually Cai Lun found the method of making paper.

Considering the day before, Cai Lun was so busy making paper he didn’t have time to work on his crops and therefore had nothing to sell at the market, except Cai Lun wasn’t worried, he brought his paper and went to the market to sell it, since Yijun had suggested that that would make him lots of money. During the process of selling, lots of people rejected Cai Lun’s invention but eventually a man named Han Ho Ti bought paper from him and Cai Lun was very grateful. As it turns out, the man who bought paper from him was the emperor and had paid Cai Lun plenty of money and the emperor was impressed, and asked Cai Lun,
“How did you make this innovative and life changing invention?”
“It took many tries, but I got there eventually,” replied Cai Lun.
After a long conversation, the emperor suggested that he promote his invention to all of China and told Cai Lun to keep his invention a secret because of marketing reasons. Yijun decides it’s time for her to sleep, so she goes back to the little hut and clambers up onto the elegant four−poster bed and closes her eyes…

“YIJUN!” a loud voice yells, “you’re late to school again.”
Yijun wakes up, finding herself in her small room with a plastic−framed bed.
“So it was all a dream,” Yijun thought to herself. She wanders to her desk sleepily and sees her sketch of materials Cai Lun used to make paper. Confused, Yijun packs it into her schoolbag and rushes to school.

Yijun arrives at school just before the bell rang, she rushes up to her history class and submits her sketch of materials she drew of paper materials Cai Lun used.

Just a few weeks later, another Chinese history project comes up,
“This time, you are required to make a presentation on a completely different historical Chinese invention,” said the Chinese history teacher. Stressed, Yijun prays that the magical time teleporting will help her this time.

Yijun heads home, goes to her room and immediately lays on her bed. She closes her eyes softly and drifts off to sleep. A few hours later, Yijun wakes up and finds herself still in her tiny, modern room.
“Wait, what time is it?”

The Quest that Changed Everyone's Life

ESF Sha Tin College, Leung, Jobie – 11

My hair was like lightning bolts as my brother, Seinmatt, and I walked around the evacuation camp. A waterfall of tears trickled down my face.

The camp director, Zoe, said every season, the Oracle of Zuki made a prophecy. Chosen campers were sent to fulfill the prophecy.

A prophecy arrived the next morning. My brother sped to the 'Oracle Zuki Tent'. Inside, jewels and carvings of nature elements decorated the tent fabric.

"We have to find which nature spirits our new campers, Seioyn and Seinmatt from China, possess and consult the Oracle for the quest. We'll do the Ohka to find out." Zoe announced.

We were petrified, but we only had to hold a crystal ball. There are four natural spirits: earth, air, fire and water. I was fire and Seinmatt was water.

"Silence! I have to consult the Oracle!" Zoe commanded.

The Oracle of Zuki's voice thundered.

Four different
They combine.
To find the treasure
That will save and refine
Series of challenges
They must conquer
In the Mysterious Forest
Four Ingredients discovered
Boiled and exploded
Battle succeeded

Everybody was discussing what it meant until Zoe's deafening voice hushed us. Seinmatt, Tartara, Manor and I were sent to fulfil the prophecy.

Manor, an air spirit, led us into the mysterious forest just beside Snimp. The haunting emerald leaves spooked us.

"I'm hungry!" Seinmatt exclaimed.

Everyone agreed that we needed to eat. We rummaged through our bags.

"Oh no!" Tartara bounced her eyeballs backwards, "We forgot to pack food, we must find some."

Our group continued staggering through the forest until we spotted a mystical cave. Diamonds covered every corner, jewels of a darker colour formed the words 'Eta'.

Upon seeing 'Eta', Tartara fell to her knees and gasped, "Mum, please let us in. We know you have some food!"

Manor must have seen our confused faces because he quickly explained Tartara's peculiar behaviour, "All earth spirits like Tartara, were born, not physically but spiritually from Eta, the one who created Earth itself. Eta continuously grows food with her sacred soil."

Just after Manor said that, Tartara disappeared into the Earth with her eyes closed.

"No!" I cried an ear piercing yelp, "Give Tartara back!"

As Tartara climbed through the tunnel, she thought with determination. "I must get the food."

Once she arrived at the chamber, she saw Eta resting in the middle of her sacred pillow. Tartara was too afraid to speak but she gripped her courage and took a deep breath.

"Eta, please provide food to me and my friends!" Tartara pleaded with hopefulness.

"Fenta machos frienqes". Eta mystified us in an ancient earth language.

"Why not my friends"? Tartara wailed.

"Their own food is waiting for them in the forest. Clouds for air, tree holes for fire, and tuna for water". Eta continued, in modern English, "Do not eat those holy saltpeters that I give you until all of your friends' food is provided. This saltpeters can be more useful than you can imagine."

With that, Eta activated a gigantic diamond which abducted Tartara and sent her back to her friends.

Seoiyn, Seinmatt and Manor all cheered parading elephants once they heard about Tartara's adventure in Eta's sacred chambers.

"We have to find the holy food for each of us, right?" Manor notified the team. "We'll find mine first, Seoiyn's second and Seinmatt's third. According to the legend, Zephyr, Air, was born on a cloud. Ever since then, she spins air into the atmosphere and Eta uses her gravity to pull it down to us humans. I'll fly up to the sky and sense where the air feels most powerful."

With that, Manor swept up like a giant eagle and flew into the endless sheet of blue. As Manor rose up into the sky, a rainbow cloud caught his eye. Manor landed on the majestic cloud. A glistening sign read 'Welcome to Kingdom Henduoyun". He walked towards the gate and a menacing dragon rose from the clouds with Queen Zephyr, Air, next to him. His scales were polished in every shade of blue known to man, his claws more dangerous than sharp spears.

"I want wings to fly to inspect the air quality like other dragons do," Ustan narrowed his eyes, "wings are natural and cannot be made".

"Ustan, let me introduce you to dungeon guarding. You'll be more respected than the dragons. Apply for the job and you will be ferocious." Manor spoke as both of them circled each other. The Queen is here. What will it take for such a generous woman to say yes?"

"Yes, I hereby appoint Ustan, General Protector of Henduoyun castle, General of Castle Guards." The Queen declared without hesitation. Manor passed.

"Well done. Here is some sulfur, I knew you wanted it. The key to our clouds and farming". Queen Zephyr handed it over to Manor.

The Queen sent Manor down to his friends with a swish of wind.

Back on earth, Tartara, Seoiyn and Seinmatt hugged Manor.

"Now let's find a tree hole for Seoiyn's food!" Tartara declared.

They searched every tree until they fell against a giant tree. A single, perfect, hole rested there.

"Wow! So high!", Seinmatt gasped.

"I could fly you up there, Seoiyn." Manor offered.

Seoiyn gratefully agreed and flew to the treehole. She climbed in and discovered two tunnels. The first tunnel was labelled "Fire". The other tunnel was labelled "Citizens". Seoiyn hesitated and walked through the first tunnel. Suddenly, fire lit up all around her and blocked her way. "If I am a fire, I must have fire−resisting abilities, right?" she thought and confidently walked through the wall of fire. Before her stood a lady with a crown made of flames, a dress made of golden charcoal and a throne of fire.

Seoiyn knelt before the lady and gasped, "Mother! Provide food please!"

"After you prove yourself a true fire". Lady Nuria's hand burnt into roaring flames and transformed back into her own hand.

"Here are two fires, which fire is real?" Lady Nuria asked.

"The left one". Seoiyn answered carelessly. After a few more questions, Lady Nuria became frustrated and gave Seoiyn her food, charcoal.

"A squirrel will send you down. Beware, this time may be easy but the next won't be." Lady Nuria warned.

The squirrel gracefully landed Seoiyn and returned to the trees, the team congratulated her for surviving the flames.

"I'm thirsty after all that fire!" Seoiyn exclaimed.

"Luckily there is a stream right over there. While we are drinking, we could look for the tuna!" Tartara pointed at stream.

As we ran towards the stream and started drinking from it, Seinmatt was captured by a school of giant tunas which swam away. We all stopped drinking.

Seinmatt was led to an underwater kingdom. There, schools of giant fish with multi−coloured scales swam everywhere. The tunas dumped Seinmatt into a whirlpool where he descended into the abyss below. The next thing he knew, he was tied to a chair. A Mermaid glared at Seinmatt with her trident pointing menacingly at him.

"Seinmatt, you've disappointed me. You of all people must know it is evil to drink from this lake when you are "Water"." Queen Cordelia exclaimed.

"I really need this kingdom's holy food." Seinmatt struggled.

"Make a trade." Queen Cordelia glared, "Your saliva now contaminated this sanctuary."

"I can offer you this notebook and pen. Then you can keep a record of what you do for the kingdom." Seinmatt pleaded!

"I have a place where I keep a record of everything. I will read what you wrote in your notebook in exchange for this lake's water, our holy and forbidden food." Queen Cordelia snatched the notebook from Seinmatt's hands and read it.

Tears were dripping from the Queen's eyes as she read how Seinmatt and Seoiyn struggled to evacuate and their dad having to go to war. Crystal tears formed a vial and Queen Cordelia retrieved it.

"Here is the kingdom's most holy water, water from the abyss. The whirlpool will send you back." Queen Cordelia instructed.

It was terrifying as the friends witnessed Seinmatt fly out of the river with such speed. They knew they had to find witches to boil their ingredients to make the treasure. Luckily, a witch's foul scent wasn't hard to track. In no time, they came to a witch's house who agreed to boil the ingredients for them whilst she listened to them talk about their journey so far.

"I once was in Snimp. I decided to be a witch once I graduated from the camp. I can teleport you to Snimp if you like." the witch, Frettsna offered.

The team quickly accepted. After a few minutes, the potion was brewed and made into some sort of clay. Frettsna stuffed the clay into a glass tin and teleported them back to Snimp.

Back at the camp, Zoe hugged them.

With a click of her fingers, she sent them onto the battlefield in China…

The Story of Paper

ESF Sha Tin College, Li, Serena – 12

It's been 3 months, and 14 days since I was captured.

Using all my strength to lift up my finger, I pressed as hard as I could at the wall and dug my nail into it. I gently pulled my finger down on the surface, leaving a thin slice on the icy metal wall.

I tried not to scream or shriek to call for somebody. Instead, I learned to stay silent, I learned to chew on the inside of my cheek, letting the bitter tang of blood fill my palette.

The last time I tried to escape, they beat me up and did not provide any food or water for 2 days.

I look around, my feet start to tap restlessly, they're late, my eyebrows scrunched as I calculate, 56…57…58…59… one minute late to be exact.

The door slammed open, "Get up." the man in the doorway said, my sore muscles immediately coiled up. I was suddenly very aware of my shaking hands and body, my forehead had a light layer of cold sweat.

He grabbed me from my wrists, I winced as his fingers dug inside the deep cuts on my arms, the heels of my feet frantically trying to grip the smooth ground.

He grunted as he pulled me away from the room, his other hand held a small copper key, he twisted the knob, and the door opened with a click. He shoved me out, I tried to use my arms to shield my eyes from the blazing sunlight, but his iron grip was on me once more, and he led me to a car and pushed me in.

I looked out the window, the man then went inside himself, then the car took off, I closed my eyes, and my thoughts wandered to my freedom, and then I fell into a deep sleep.

I was in a nightmare, a nightmare full of chains and ropes, and when I woke, I was drenched in a cold sweat and my body was shaking terribly.

As he shoved me out of the car, I tried to be aware of where I was. For the past 17 times, they took me into some mysterious place, I continued to tremble in fear. I shuddered to think what would have happened to me today.

In front of me was a rusty door, the man then led me inside, the door creaked as he pulled it open, and inside was a dark hallway.

Instead of letting the man have a hold on me once again. I walked through the door and down the hallway, glancing behind my shoulder... As we reached the end of the hallway, it led to a huge room with a golden chandelier. I stepped into the room in uncertainty. I felt a wave of nausea and coldness. Something about this bar is wrong, all of the people here had the same cold gray eyes that this man has.

The man then led me to a chair, and I sat down. I tried to breathe as evenly as possible, but my heart was pounding hard.

The door then opened, and it was a woman, she stood down at a chair, two guards standing behind her, both were tense and serious, and the atmosphere suddenly felt very dangerous and deadly.

Is this the girl?" she asked, her voice surprisingly high and sly, I jumped in my seat.

"Yes." The man said calmly. " Please keep in mind that we had a deal."

"Yes, I do acknowledge that, let's go to the other room and talk more about it, shall we?"She asked, a smile spreading across her cheeks.

The man and the woman then went inside another room and then the door closed with a click. And then I started to look around. Time felt extremely long, and the waiting was excruciatingly painful. I tried to slow my breathing in the process.

The door finally opened, and the woman and the man came out, each having a black briefcase in hand.

“We’ll take her right now.”The woman said sternly to the man

“Sure, be my guest.”The man said.

The woman then gestured to the two bodyguards. I took a step back as they approached me, then came a sharp pain in the head, and then all went black.

When I awoke, it was completely dark. I thrashed and yelled, but moving was physically impossible. At last, they removed the black cover from my head, they took me into a large wooden box, and I saw a vast dark sea everywhere around me

Reality hit me in the gut, swallowing me whole. I was on a cargo ship, but where was I going? They shoved inside and as I tried to pull myself up and ran for the door, they slammed the door close and locked it. There was no escape. I scraped the wooden walls, screaming for help until my voice shattered into nothing, I broke into tears, my body shaking, my throat was burning, my tears dripped down my chin, soaking inside the wood, and my sobs and cries filled me up, choking me, I gagged, coughing out spit. I sprawled on the floor, my uneven breathing started to slow and my eyes began to close, I looked towards the tiny gap between the wooden boards, and saw the stars, how I envied their freedom up in the sky.

I woke up due to the sunlight, I wiped the dried drool from my left cheek. As I looked around, my focus went to the corner of my eye, I crouched down, and my eyes stared at the ground.

At the corner of the wooden cage, there is a yellow puddle, the place where I slept. My mind went through last night, no it wasn’t there yesterday, it definitely wasn’t. My curiosity won over and I touched the yellow puddle, it was hard and a bit sticky.

The hair tie in my pocket fell out and stuck to the puddle. I tried to pull it out, only to be surprised as the hardcover of the puddle was broken and turned into a gooey mess. I tried ripping it out, but the goo had already swallowed the tissue and my hands were covered in it. I sighed, trying to find a solution to remove all of this goo. I was suddenly overwhelmed by tingling on my fingers, wrists, and arms. I tried to touch my arms, but I could not move my fingers, as the goo on my hands hardened and it was impossible to move my fingers. I started to panic as the tingling stopped, and my arms were covered with the solidified goo, i then tried to break my fingers, and the goo separated from my skin with ease, and as I tore the goo off my arms, I noticed that the goo was turned into a thin sheet that was hard but also flexible. I look at the mysterious thing that I have on my hands, and then I look at the gap of sunlight on top of my head. Yes, the heat of the sun made it harden.

Looking at the locked door. If we are traveling somewhere else, then they must let me out, my fingers grasping at the hardened goo. If I could somehow provide clues for people to find me, then it just might work. Anything might work, it needs to be, I will try anything to have freedom. I quickly took more of the yellow goo, spread it all over my arms and legs, and sat straight into the sunlight. The tingling is uncomfortable but bearable. In the end, I was left with 10 to 20 pieces of hardened goo, it tore easily, so I could drop some to the ground to track my path. I tear them up.

As I traveled through what I thought was 2 weeks, the hardened goo was my only hope for someone saving me, and I made clues wherever I went, marks, pieces, and crosses and arrows.

In the end, I was trapped in a gray room as a final destination, the only thing keeping me sane was hoping someone could follow the clues and save me. But 3 days, 6 days, 10 days have passed, and there was no one in sight. And when all hope seemed lost on the 12th day, the door suddenly burst open, and instead of my kidnapper, it was a woman I did not recognize. She had long uneven brown hair and was wearing a shiny black suit.

I tried to scream as loudly as I could, but the woman clamped her hand around my face “Listen, I came here to save you.

My spirits soared high, and almost all the strength I'd lost seemed fully restored.

“you are not who you think you are, you need to leave the country right now.”She said, her voice serious and tense.

The door opened, and a man came in, the pistol on his belt glinting.

THE END (To be continued…..)

To Follow One's Desire

ESF Sha Tin College, Lo, Yuk Nga Natalie – 11

Chapter one
Beep! Beep! Beep! My eyes cautiously opened to the sight of my ceiling. The beeping still went on, and my eyelids fluttered bit by bit. My mouth felt as dry as ever, with a sore back and cramped knees. I got up and stopped my alarm clock, rubbed my eyes and groaned in irritation. I headed to the bathroom and washed my face, and my eyes fluttered no more. I did the normal basics of a morning routine, then got changed. I skipped down the stairs, ready for breakfast.
"Ah, your breakfast. Eat up quick, quick! Your bus come soon, ah! Faster, faster!" Grandma scolded. Grandma baked me waffles, she always gets up this early for no reason.

"Grandma, why do you get up this early everyday?" I asked, I never knew the reason why she did this odd habit everyday… She's old, and she still gets up early…

"To pray for your grandfather! He loves tea so I make him everyday, and he wake up early before, so I make early too." Grandma spilled tea into the gaiwan and chawan. The aroma of tea filled the air heavily, the smell of rich tea leaves and herbs was heaven. The tea that grandma made was a family tradition/secret from centuries ago, only our family knows how to make it appetising, make it rich, make it *special*. Every newborn, every child, every aunt, every uncle, every adult or kid *needs* to know how to brew this recipe, it is a must. By the time you're over your baby years, you have to learn it. Impress the adults in and outside of town, 'Welcome Aunt Susan! Have some tea, *my child will brew it,* take a seat too! Take a seat!'

"Grandma, what was your dream to have, or what was grandpa's dream?" I asked politely, while chewing on my waffle.

"Your grandpa? He dream was making a tea fountain! He so in love with tea! Me, ah? I don't know, probably become the model, so pretty, so beautiful." She said. Grandma went ahead to the spirit tablet, placed the chawan gracefully on the wooden block coaster, toasting her cup to his, and drank all her tea silently in one gulp. In front of the coaster was a picture of him, her love. She grabbed three incense sticks and lit the tips on fire, bowed a few times and then placed them into an incense pot. Her face showed no emotion, a bit of a frown even appeared. She walked to the garden outside, ready to do some stretching. 'I will accomplish grandpa's dream.' I thought to myself, I then stayed silent, and kept munching on my waffles. 7:00 my clock siad, 7:00.
A thump of footsteps came rushing down the stairs, it was Daphne, late for breakfast. *Again.* "Where's grandma?" She asked, panting.
"Garden outside, you should probably eat," I replied. I looked at her up and down, "Wait did you put on more makeup? Who you tryna impress, huh?" I smirked at her, she had a lip tint and rosy cheeks, long lashes and perfect brows.
"Shut up!" She called, I could tell she was annoyed by the look on her face. She sat down and munched on her waffles. I finished all of my waffles, leaving the dining table to wash my dish.

Chapter two
Daphne and I took the bus, and are now currently in first period; Marketing.
"Alright students! Quiet down! In today's lesson we will begin a new project! This project will be about creations and inventions! Hand in your hand–made creation/invention and write a 1700 word essay on it. The deadline is 2 weeks, after that we will start publishing your creation onto a website, and if approved by judges, you may publish your work to the public. You would have to present your product to them, and see if you are worthy or not. These judges are Mrs. Joanne Smith and Mr. William Jones, and yes, it is the real Joanne Smith and William Jones him and herself. You all already know the drill, they're strict and give utterly mean feedback. You may begin now, and ask me questions when needed." Chatter filled the room, many eager gasps and shocked, alarmed faces.
"Daphne what do you wanna do?" I asked.
"Uhhh, I'm not quite sure yet, what about you?" She questioned back.
"A tea fountain, what grandpa always wanted."

“You want to go follow grandpa’s dream?”
“Yes, it’ll be a great project idea, I already know how to operate water dispensers. I also know that we somehow have an old water dispenser in our house storage room, so I can use that.”
“I should’ve thought of that..” I smiled at her and began to write the essay on my computer.

Chapter three
The day has been long and tiring, like every other day. I searched for the old water dispenser in the storage room. A few minutes passed, and no sight of the water dispenser. A few *more* minutes passed.. And I found it! I got to work, fixing the old water dispenser, arranging a few things and so on, I could ace Marketing! I grabbed the water dispenser and headed up to my room. My room had a bunch of paint products, especially a lot of paint. In this case, I decided to paint my tea fountain black. According to some research, the colour black can absorb heat, which will be great for my tea fountain. I began painting, giving the dispenser a nice and aesthetic look. I went to look in the garage to maybe find some metal pieces to cover up the old dispenser, to give it a better look and protection. I found some, but only to be in different colours; white, blue and green. But it’s fine, black permanent paint should do the job right? And yes, I was right, it covered all spots flawlessly, no odd colours seen. I fixed the broken bits and pieces, making a gorgeous tea dispenser. I added paper cups to the side of the dispenser, the final step of making a tea dispenser. I finished off my essay, and added the price, the catchy description of it, and I was done. 7:54, my clock said. “Lune! Come eat dinner! We have buttered steak tonight!” Mom called. I went to the bathroom to wash my hands and face, then soon went down for dinner.

Chapter four
Two weeks felt like a whirlpool full of emotions, rage, joy and many others. Today was the day where you’d have to hand in your assignment, which also means the judges will come, and that I’ll have to present… I prepared my flashcards ready, got my hair done neatly and made my uniform extra neat.
Once I reached school, the first period was Marketing.. Everyone was extremely tense, waiting in a line according to the register. One after one, they all returned with traumatized faces, and some even a bit teary. “Daphne Miller!” Our eyes met, hers filled with irritation. “Good luck, you got this.” I comforted her. She came back, weary and miserable. “I don’t think they’re going to accept anyon−”
“Lune Miller!” Called the judges, my heart was pounding, my fists clenched the flashcards, they crumbled bit by bit on the side, forming tiny wrinkles. Daphne placed her hand on my shoulder, and I left my seat to go to the room…

Chapter five
I left the room, my flashcards completely crumbled, everyone stood up in anticipation, like how they did whenever someone came out of the room. “I GOT IN!” I screamed, Daphne cried with joy, ran up to me, and cuddled with joy. Others around congratulated me, with claps and cheers. Someone.. Someone finally got in.
I went home, told the great news to my parents, I told grandma, and grandpa… I prayed and bowed low, I placed his chawan on his wooden block coaster, wished him a great living in heaven, and bowed once more. Ding! My phone lit up, with a notification from Gmail. I opened it, and it was Joanne Smith and William Jones… I stared and unconsciously clicked into the email. “Congratulations! Your product is now being sold on the market, go take a look at this link!” The email said. “Best regards, Joanne Smith and William Jones.” I froze at the sight of the email, one hand held the phone, and one covered my mouth. My eyes shivered at the email, with small water droplets forming out of the corner of my eye. I wiped them away, finally knowing, I accomplished grandpa’s dream.

New Tales of China's Inventions

ESF Sha Tin College, Poon, Cheuk Wa Scott – 11

It seemed unthinkable that had it not been for a three–year–old boy's naughty act, China wouldn't have been the world's first flying car maker, but this was exactly what happened!

It all began on the day kindergartener Ming Lau's parents took him to Western China to see the cave paintings of flying nymphs at the world–famous Mogao. The boy was his usual hyperactive self. He cried when the aircon in the bus wasn't cool enough and stamped his feet when the tourist site didn't sell his favorite sweet vanilla ice cream and his cheeks turned red like the bursting lava in an erupting volcano.

When his Mother's phone data wasn't enough, he cried "Mommy! I want to play games on your phone!"

The soles of his shoes almost fell from his foot–stamping when his Mother's phone data wasn't enough. He cried" Mommy! I want to play games on your phone!"

When they were inside the caves and it was finally cool enough, still, Ming Lau was in an irritable mood. To vent his displeasure, he ignored the "Do not touch" signs stuck near the walls, grabbed hold of a rock, climbed up a rock like Spider–Man, and yanked it out with all his might. Immediately, he was hauled upwards by an invisible force and his feet kicked. When he recovered enough sense to look down, he saw his parents' horrified faces and the phones aiming.

"Come down," his mum pleaded.

"I can't, because this propeller thingy is making me fly like Doraemon!"

"Why am I flying like Doraemon with that propeller thingy?" he cried. The rock was spinning him up like a helicopter. But this was not the only strange spectacle in the cave. The beautiful ladies painted on the cave were now roused from sleep and floating mid–air, their long sashes trailing after them like the elaborate fins of a colorful fish. By now, every fellow trustee had taken out their phone to record what seemed like a magical scene from a Disney movie.

Eventually, before he would break the cave into a bunch of pieces, one of the security guards had the quickness of wit to balance himself on a camel's hump to reach for the child before he could turn into a Hot Air Balloon. Word of the rock's magical properties spread, and as soon as the next day, scientists from The Chinese Academy of Science rushed to the site to bring home a truckload of rocks. They hypothesized that if the rocks bore enough weight, they could power C919, the first and newest China–made aircraft. Journalists from all over the world came in excited, ready to capture an incredible moment.

Before long, Professor Zhang, the world's top aviation expert, gathered a group of journalists to make a significant announcement about the rocks. "Since the flying nymphs have been painted on the walls of Mogao for over 1000 years, their spirits have been in the untouched rocks, and now the rocks themselves can fly better than any engine Rolls Royce can make."

Scientists Professor Zhang and his team quickly realized that not only could the rocks make airplanes soar, but they could also endow smaller vessels such as bicycles, with the ability to fly like UFOs in cartoons. But their targets were not small, they wanted to assemble a masterpiece, the first one in the world to do this, a flying car.

The masterpiece was created after all of the maintenance the scientists put in with their blood, sweat, and tears, and trial and error. Powered by the extraordinary spirits of Mogao, and a rock discovered by an angry puff–faced little boy, China had won the race. Sales skyrocketed, as the flying car was snapped up by millionaires and billionaires all around the globe. People didn't need to stick their faces on the horn in a lengthy, dull traffic jam. Instead, they could take the skies and roam freely. This Invention carried technology to its newest stage, thanks to a chubby querulous boy who dug into the past to bring the human race to the future.

New Tales of China's Inventions

ESF Sha Tin College, Poon, Yip Glamour Cheuk – 11

As Empress Xi Ling–shi made herself comfortable under a Mulberry tree on a perfect summer afternoon, once again, she was reminded of how scratchy her garment made her every time she shifted her weight on the ground. Her ever–faithful maid Ming–Zhu had it even worse: the hemp dress she was wearing was of an even rougher texture, sometimes going as far as leaving pink marks on her delicate inner thighs. But then, back in the empress's day – she lived way back, 5000 years ago along the Yellow River in the Middle Kingdom, aka China – life itself was often nasty, brutish, and short. Many children didn't live past the age of five, their mothers often perished while giving birth to their siblings. As the first lady in her kingdom, she tried to make her people forget the horrors of life by making beautiful objects – the pink vases at the palace, the phoenix carvings on her husband's sword handle, the gemstones on her neck – all were the fruits of her active imagination and deft fingers.

When Xi Ling–shi lifted her cup to drink, a cocoon the size of her pinky finger dropped down from the tree's thick canopy, startling the gorgeous young empress. The first thing she noticed was a long translucent thread, which was thin, strong yet soft like a swan's feather. She gazed at the spectacular string as she gently teased it out with her long, tapering fingers, accidentally unravelling it in the progress.

"Ming–Zhu, Ming–Zhu, come here!" Xi Ling–shi cried.

Ming–Zhu gracefully walked over to Xi Ling–shi, and asked "Yes, my empress?"

"Go and gather more cocoons." Xi Ling–shi commanded, her eyes gleaming with excitement, as they always did when a new idea hatched in her mind.

Ming–Zhu bowed and started searching for the small, white fuzzy egg–shaped object. Soon, Xi Ling–shi's faithful servant girl gathered at the empress's feet a pile of cocoons as high as her knees. The two then began working in tandem, spinning strands of silk into one long smooth thread, and then mounting it on a loom. After 20 days and 20 nights, the two women proudly put on display a red robe whose sheen lent it a glow in the dark quality. Only one person in the kingdom deserved to wear it: Xi Ling–shi's husband, the emperor of the land. Awed by this masterpiece, the emperor's subjects began to make their own silk, breeding worms, collecting cocoons by the bucket, and, for the really committed, sectioning off a portion of their homes for the purpose of making silk. Soon, silk clothing could be seen on the aristocrats, then the rich merchants, then the scholars. Mingzhu herself did very well, after Xi Ling–shi gifted to her the copyright for silk production. But the secret of silk making remained solely within the borders of China for another 2000 years.

Today, you and I would still be wearing silk had an English inventor Eli Whitney not invented cotton, a far cheaper way to make fabrics. Cotton then became more and more popular in China, and the wearing of silk was, once again, a privilege belonging only to the very rich.

In conclusion, the increasing rarity of silk clothes, along with the extinction of silkworms, has led to a rapid increase in the price of silk clothes. Out of all rooms in The China Museum of Historical Artifacts, the "Fabric" room has gained the most interest due to the first and original piece of silk clothing made by Xi Ling–shi and Ming–Zhu in their own hands. On top of the glass box the clothing is in, a gigantic photo starring both Xi Ling–shi, wearing their creation, and Ming–Zhu, wearing silk clothes gifted by Xi Ling–shi, with flickering bright candles around the portrait, displaying

their wonderful contribution to the unusual world of silk. Lots of tourists visited this tourist attraction, and often commented,

"What a wonderful discovery that these two made".

"Thank Xi Ling–shi and Ming–Zhu for the clothes I am wearing now".

"May they rest in peace".

This shows how people from all around the world respect the female empress and maid who discovered silk.

Thanks,

Night at the Museum

ESF Sha Tin College, Shi, Iris Sun – 11

The Hong Kong Science Museum was setting up a unique display of Modern versus Ancient artifacts of scientific innovations, to be open the following day. On that afternoon, two middle–school volunteers, a boy and a girl, were arranging the artifacts within their respective glass cases.

The girl, her eyes on the ancient treasures, proposed, "Don't you think it would be more impactful if we displayed them side by side, rather than in separate rooms?"

The boy responded with a playful quip, "Perhaps they might not get along if they're too close together!" His laughter filled the room. He then added, "I don't understand why they bother exhibiting the ancient artifacts. Are they even relevant today?"

"Don't be so dismissive. I'm sure they hold significant importance." The girl replied. Her voice echoed in the quiet room, bouncing off the marble floors.

As the moon began its ascent, the museum settled into a deep, tranquil silence. The glass cases glinted in the silvery light. It was a time when the museum belonged to its inhabitants, the ancient and modern artifacts. One room was filled with a diverse collection of ancient Chinese artifacts, including a traditional kite, a sinan (an ancient compass), a delicate porcelain vase, and a variety of cups and goblets, some still bearing traces of alcohol or tea. In stark contrast, the adjacent room showcased modern counterparts – a drone, a GPSMAP, a plastic vase, modern medical equipment, among other items.

In the Modern Inventions section, a hushed whisper broke the silence. It came from the smokeless powder. Its sharp and crisp voice ignited a spark of contention. "Well, the boy was right. Who needs you, black powder? You might have been useful in the past, but now you are all just obsolete relics. We are the new inventions, the progressive, the advanced."

The ancient artifacts exchanged horrified glances, except for the porcelain vase, who was audibly snoring in the corner.

The abacus, bold and defiant, rattled his beads in agitation, "Excuse me? I was a staple in every shop and office, and I paved the way for calculators and computers."

The hot air balloon chimed in, "I agree with you. I'm still a popular attraction for tourists." This was the first time he'd had anything exciting to do in ages. He could almost feel the wind and envision the sky he once dominated.

The ancient exhibits signified their support, especially the porcelain vase, who had just woken up and was now cheering enthusiastically. The calculator from the next room rolled his eyes, while the GPSMAP tried to contain its laughter.

The goblet, still bearing traces of wine, sneered, "Emperor Kang Xi drank from me at his 60th birthday banquet. Have any of you modern inventions experienced such imperial glory?"

"The glory you speak of belongs to a time 300 years ago," murmured the nylon pants.

“What about me?” inquired the sinan, his pointer spinning incessantly. “On a foggy night in 1405, through the Malacca Strait, Admiral Zheng He held me in his palms during his first voyage. Oh, the grandeur of the treasure fleet! Oh, the allure of faraway territories!”

“Old sinan, you are nothing more than a spoon on a bronze square. Look at me. I am guided by the Beidou satellites, and I display accurate maps and real−time routes.” The GPSMAP spoke with a hint of indignation.

The acupuncture needle intervened, “You shouldn't belittle the sinan. Without him, where would you be?” She said in her calm manner. “The sinan is the reason you exist today. I thought you would be more appreciative of that. You might be more advanced, but at the end of the day, you serve the same purpose − navigation.”

“Can’t agree more,” The black gunpowder grinned, “Indeed, you should all heed her words.”

“I was a simple needle in Doctor Li Shizhen’s hand; my name goes down in Bencao Gangmu.” The acupuncture needle continued.

The mRNA vaccine smirked as she prepared her rebuttal. “Your master’s Bencao Gangmu is riddled with inaccuracies, limited by the scientific knowledge of its time. Look at me, I represent the pinnacle of medical technology. I am a molecule that contains instructions to direct cells in producing proteins, thereby training the immune system to combat future attacks.”

The acupuncture needle, overwhelmed by the mRNA vaccine's talk of antigens and pathogens, retreated to a corner, seemingly defeated.

“However, Bencao Gangmu represented the apex of medical knowledge at that time. It was a milestone.” The kite continued, “I am old enough to have met Marco Polo in Weihai, but I remain robust today. What more could one want?”

The DJI drone glanced at the Weihai kite and weighed in, “Your ancient relics fall from the sky as soon as the wind ceases. I, on the other hand, can fly even without wind. My propellers spin up to 9000 rpm.” He was so proud that he could almost feel his remote control twitching in delight.

Meanwhile, the smokeless powder was engaged in a heated argument with the black powder from the next room, as the latter was boasting about his adventure of being loaded into a cannon in April 1661, just seconds before the enemy raised the white flag and surrendered to General Zheng Chenggong. So engrossed were they in their debate, they failed to notice the volunteers' mistake of placing a matchstick next to the black gunpowder and a lighter next to the smokeless powder. This led to a catastrophic accident. As the smokeless powder uttered one last retort, the gunpowder ignited its fuse.

For a moment, the only sounds were the explosion and the subsequent shattering of glass. The exhibits found themselves strewn across the floor, shocked to be outside their protective bubbles. Accusations started flying around, but the wise old bronze cauldron, with inscriptions from Shang Dynasty, silenced them with a heavy stomp.

“We need to clean up before the museum opens tomorrow morning!” he bellowed in his weathered voice. “The glass cases are damaged. We must set them upright again. But the glass… it's shattered into thousands of tiny pieces. What can we do now?”

The drone volunteered, “I can help clean up the glass. But I need a partner to operate the controls. Matchstick, why don't you help me? You'd be useful pressing buttons.”

“You've insulted my friends, and now you expect us to work together?” the matchstick spat out in disdain.

“If we want to get out of this mess, we must work together! We should eliminate all the remaining glass, and I will sacrifice myself to hold the broken pieces.” The bronze cauldron interjected.

The exhibits were in awe and then nodded in agreement. They knocked down the glass, and the bronze cauldron bravely contained the pieces. The demolition went on unabated. Exhibit after exhibit ceased their quarrels, contributing to the effort. Before long, the glass was entirely gone, leaving the museum hall with a simple, minimalist aesthetic. The bronze cauldron cleared his throat, “Ah, precious brothers and sisters! I extend my gratitude for your cooperation. I am confident that we will have an exceptional day of opening. And what is the lesson we've learned? It is that both ancient and modern inventions hold value! History is akin to a stream, ceaselessly flowing. Some inventions disembark, some remain, and some depart. Technological innovation is in a state of constant evolution, developing as time marches on. Ancient inventions have laid the groundwork for modern ones. New inventions and creations don't just materialize out of thin air; they represent the accumulated wisdom of generations. Only by thoroughly understanding our past can we truly comprehend the development of science and technology and appreciate China’s rich culture and ongoing progress.”

All exhibits applauded. The mRNA vaccine raised his hand, “Now that the glass is gone, how about we rearrange our positions?”

“Great idea!” The acupuncture needle seconded.

The artifacts, ancient and modern, started to move. The abacus slid next to the calculator, the traditional kite fluttered to rest beside the drone, and the mRNA vaccine sat next to the acupuncture needle. Ten minutes later, each found its counterpart.

The first rays of dawn began to pierce the darkness. The sun cast a warm glow over the museum; its light illuminated the newfound harmony. The artifacts, hand in hand, were ready to tell their stories to all visitors about the march of human creativity.

The Breakthrough

ESF Sha Tin College, Wan, Nga King – 12

Chapter 1

"I will not be acknowledging any objections. Understood?"

"Yes, Your Majesty."

It was just another day at the office for General Zhang Mei: trying to come up with new, innovative solutions to help win this war, just for the emperor to decline the idea right in his face. He sighed. Why was he even working as a high-ranking officer? Money? Power? Not really. As he exited the forum, he was still contemplating the question. Zhang Mei was known to be a loyal and intelligent battle strategist, assisting in several battles and even taking part in some of them, but now that the emperor wasn't even recognizing his or any others' ideas, the thought of simply leaving his role clutched to the back of his head. Zhang Mei lethargically departed from the royal palace, not sure of what he should do. Maybe a walk would get a few theories here and there about what he could do. With only a black slither following him, Zhang Mei disappeared down the path.

After trekking down the mountain, Zhang Mei finally arrived. The bar was full of chatter and laughter, the sounds of clinking bottles and soothing music. He entered and ordered the standard bottle of wine, when suddenly he overheard two merchants having a conversation.

"Have you heard of the monks who tried to find a life-extending elixir?" The first man asked, drowning himself with a bottle of alcohol.

"No. Sounds like a lot of nonsense," the second man responded with an unconcerned voice.

"They failed to retrieve the elixir, but they apparently found some white powder."

"How's that useful?"

"I don't know, but they're trying to sell it to the emperor."

"Good luck to them."

At first, Zhang Mei didn't think much of it. There was no chance a group of strangers would even get a glance at the mighty emperor, but there was something inside of him that was intrigued and wanted to know more. What was this "white powder"? He had to be informed about what this was. Placing down his now empty bottle on the decaying wooden table, he approached the two.

"Excuse me gentlemen, could you follow me for a second?" Zhang Mei calmly questioned.

Confused, the two merchants didn't know what to do. But after a few moments, they decided to comply. Zhang Mei ushered them to follow him to a remote barnhouse. When they finally reached the destination,

they saw where this anonymous man had led them to. The seemingly dilapidated barnhouse was far from society, at least 2 miles, making it the perfect place for a close−mouthed discussion. It was built by his grandfather, decades before Zhang Mei himself was born, as an emergency safehouse, though in the state that it's in, a gust of wind could blow the whole structure down. On the exterior, twisted trees and broken branches lay everywhere, all covered in a layer of foliage. When they entered, the Chinese general locked the door shut and unsheathed a knife from his waist, pointed it at one of the merchant's necks and started to query the two extremely bewildered and terrified traders.

"I understand you two are very confused about why you're here, but stay with me. It'll only take a few minutes…if you do what I say," said Zhang Mei in a stern and serious tone. "What is this "white powder" that you both were talking about?"

"We..we don't know! It's just some rumor we heard!" One of the merchants cried, desperately.

"Don't hurt us! Please!" The other said in a shooken voice.

"I won't. Now answer my next question: where can I find these monks?" Zhang Mei responded.

The two others turned to each other for a brief moment. Getting impatient, Zhang Mei slowly nudged the gleaming weapon nearer and nearer one of their necks. Panicking, the one on the left said "People say they reside in a temple north of here. Now let us go!"

"Fine," said Zhang Mei. "However, be warned. If I hear that you inform anyone about this meeting, I can assure you, you'll never see the light of day again," he murmured under his breath before walking out the door. Frightened out of their minds, the two men waited for Zhang Mei to depart and then hurried out so quickly that a cloud of dust rose from where they stood.

Finally receiving answers, Zhang Mei decided to start planning an elaborate scheme to collect this white powder. Once he returned to his headquarters, he met up with his good friend and colleague Cheng Li to travel to the north. The journey required around 1 week worth of food and water, but Zhang Mei believed that it would be worth it. After numerous days of planning, arranging and other activities, Zhang Mei and Cheng Li were finally ready to seek this temple. Without further ado, they packed all their belongings and set off into the unknown.

Chapter 2

It has been almost three days since Zhang Mei and Cheng Li started their expedition and they still haven't seen a single trace of civilization. Zhang Mei was starting to lose hope, when out of the blue, in the distance, they saw a streak of incense floating up to the sky. They both knew that they had reached their destination. With a sudden boost of energy, they dashed towards it.
Even the towering mountain didn't intimidate them into backing down. They were determined to retrieve this powder, and there was nothing that could stand in their way. Finally, they reached the peak, feet blistering and legs exhausted. The gate of the temple stood proud, red and golden colours decorating the engravings. Two mighty dragons were positioned atop the *paifang*, warding off anyone arriving with harmful intentions. As the two walked in, they took in the sight. There were students training their physical bodies, monks meditating, and so much more. But this wasn't the main point. Zhang Mei and

Cheng Li had to locate this powder. They went to the main building, but a young man at the front halted their way.

"Sir, this is a restricted area. You are not allowed to enter without permission," said the man.

"We come to find a white powder. Do you know what that is?" replied Cheng Li.

Hesitating for a moment, the man escorted them into the temple. They walked up a seemingly infinite flight of stairs until they reached the top. Behind the desk was a well-dressed monk with a welcoming smile.

"Welcome! What brings you here?" The monk inquired.

"We came to find a white powder," Zhang Mei replied, fatigued.

"Oh, I see. Is there a particular reason you need it?"

"We're planning to use it for experimentation."

"In that case, I will fetch all of it."

"Wait, all of it?"

"Indeed. This powder serves us no purpose. You may take it all."

"Thank you very much."

Not anticipating this generous offer, Zhang Mei and Cheng Li were both ecstatic. When the monk came back with twelve bags full to the brim, they accepted it and showed their gratitude by giving them a few golden coins. A short moment later, they exited the premises and returned home.

When they arrived back at the palace, Zhang Mei contacted the lead alchemist, Xu Feng, to experiment with his team of veteran scientists. A couple days later, Xu Feng reported the results of the experiments.

"What are the results?" Zhang Mei curiously asked.

"We found something interesting. When combined with certain compounds, it would spontaneously combust," Xu Feng responded.

"That could prove useful… Is there any way for you to pack a certain amount into a tight space and detonate it from a distance?"

"I could try, though I don't see why that's helpful."

"It'll be explained soon enough."

"Alright."

Fifteen days after the conversation, a large–scale battle would take place near Fort Shen Fu, and reinforcements would need to come quickly if the army Zhang Mei was commanding wanted to beat the enemy. His troops were losing ground and the enemy soldiers were overwhelming them from all angles. When he thought he had finally lost the battle, his mind clicked. The powder…the explosion! Yes! He could use it to destroy the wall! Suddenly, the general's hope was rejuvenated. Zhang Mei contacted Xu Feng via a letter and asked him to deliver the explosive and detonator. When the explosives finally came, Zhang Mei devised a plan. First, archers would divert the enemy's attention to them, while the rest of the soldiers would sneak past the guards and destroy a portion of the wall. When they were all ready, they put the plan into motion, and in the end, a loud "*Boom!*" could be heard from a distance, followed by the cries and shouts of men charging in.

This was the first time this powder was employed into battle, and in the future, armies all over the world would also use this substance, and it eventually would be known as "gunpowder".

Ping's Journey to Modern Day China

ESF Sha Tin College, Wong, Yan Chun Shannon – 12

In ancient China, there was a village called Ming Hui, named after its inhabitants who were known for their intelligence and curiosity. Despite their limited resources, the villagers led contented lives, ensuring they had enough food and water to sustain themselves. One of their notable pursuits was the continuous invention of tools and techniques to improve agricultural productivity.

The three most great inventions were silk, the compass and the kite:

In response to the scarcity of materials for clothing, the villagers devised a method to create silk. They would seek out silkworms and patiently wait for them to form cocoons. Once the cocoons were formed, they were steamed to prevent the moths inside from hatching. The villagers would then carefully unwind the steamed cocoons and combine the delicate threads to produce smooth silk. The versatile silk fabric found various uses in the village, including the production of quilts, fishing equipment, and more.

They also invented a compass which helped fishermen to navigate their way when they went fishing. Making the compass included using a mineral called loadstone as well as a flat plate of bronze. This was very useful since it could help navigate fishermen's way when going fishing to feed the village.

Lastly, the villagers of Ming Hui invented the kite. This invention served multiple purposes, including entertainment, communication, and even military applications. The kites were constructed using lightweight materials such as bamboo and silk, allowing them to soar gracefully in the sky. The villagers' ingenuity with kites provided avenues for leisure, facilitated long–distance communication, and potentially even aided in strategic endeavors.

These inventions made the villagers' lives easier and their quality of life better.

Many villagers contributed to the ideas for these great inventions and one of them was named Ping. Ping was learning about designing different types of machinery and wanted to make more to help the village. One day, while he was walking into the forest with tall trees blocking the bright sun, he found a mysterious door.

Ping looked around wondering if he should step inside or not, he thought, "I guess I'll just step inside and see what happens to me." Stepping inside the portal, he could see the inventions the villagers made floating around. There were kites getting tangled together, the compass was zooming around through the air in random directions, the water wheel was spinning very quickly while spilling out water and the silk was gracefully flying round and round Ping. He started to float around in circles and realized that the portal he stepped into was sending him somewhere.

In a flash, he quickly got transported from inside the portal to a place with unfamiliar surroundings. Houses, so tall they could reach the clouds and busy streets with people walking and interesting, flashy cars driving around.

Looking around, he could see tall skyscrapers that reached up into the clear, blue sky. And many multicoloured buildings scattered all across the land. All the buildings were covered in shiny, clean glass which reflected the white clouds in the sky. There was one building that stood out from all the rest, it had 2 spheres with a tall crane in between them. Next to him, many people were taking out small rectangular objects and pointing them towards the beautiful view.

Ping started to walk around smelling the delicious, sweet fragrance of food that people were selling in small shops. He could see the glorious clothes that were on display in front of enormous, expensive looking stores. Just as he was crossing over to the other side of the path, something caught his eye. Gleaming in front of him, he saw the most beautiful dress he had ever seen in his life, a tight and pink qipao with white flowers embroidered on it. There were

buttons that started from the top of the dress climbing down to the bottom of the dress. The qipaos they made in his hometown were loosely fitted with no decoration on it. Most of the qipaos he had seen weren't as fashionable.

He started walking a bit more until he wondered, how do people navigate themselves through all these complicated, confusing streets? Ping then found a car just on the side of the road that read TAXI. Wondering what a taxi was, Ping jumped inside and said, "Drive me to a good tourist destination please."

The driver nodded his head and started driving. Ping looked around him, this car was very different to what he used from where he lived. The car he used was a cart with two wheels at the back and animals would have to pull the cart around. This car had four wheels which seemed incredibly easy to use and it was comfortable to sit in and look out at the amazing view. Suddenly, Ping saw multiple flat, rectangular objects lined up together with a screen switched on which showed all the multiple roads and a big red arrow in the middle of the screen. Ping could hear a voice coming from the object navigating the way to go, "Turn left, turn right".

"Is that some sort of compass next to your wheel?" asked Ping.
"Not exactly, it's called GPS, it works from satellites in space," answered the driver.
Ping was shocked by the driver's answer. Had the future discovered some cool technology that worked in space? The compass in Ping's village was big, heavy and wasn't easy to carry around at all but the compass that people used now was light weighted and easy to use. Once they arrived at the destination, Ping looked outside to see green, soft, lush grass where children were running around carrying colorful kites with animals on them. As the kites soared into the sky, Ping could see a very big kite with vibrant colors making it stand out from the others.

Suddenly, a lady ran up to Ping and said, "My daughter's kite is stuck in that towering tree! Can you help me take it down?"
"Of course!" answered Ping.

Ping walked up to the tall tree with leaves and branches so big that it was covering all the sunlight making it very cool and shady when standing underneath. As Ping started climbing, he could feel the rough surface of the tree scratching his legs and arms making scars on his body. Finally, he saw the glimpse of a bright kite stuck in the leaves of the tree. Carefully, Ping stretched his arm as far as he could and reached out to take the kite. When he could feel the kite brushing against his fingers, he quickly grabbed it and started making his way back down to give the girl the kite. Reaching the ground, he said, "Here's your kite! It's a bit broken but you can still use it."

"Thank you so much young man. In fact, I should repay you!" exclaimed the woman.

She handed the kite to Ping and after saying her goodbyes she walked away. The kite Ping held in his hand was very complicated. There were a lot of wires and string with material at the top that felt very thin and silky. Back in the village, they made their kites with only two things, bamboo and silk.

Then, a door popped out in front of him. Ping opened the heavy door and jumped into the portal. This time, he could see the multiple modern qipaos in front of him flying around in circles. He could see the vibrant kites dancing around the portal and the GPS spinning around in different directions. Suddenly, everything stopped and Ping was teleported back to Ming Hui village. With the kite still in his hand, he ran and ran until he reached the village square screaming, "I SAW MODERN DAY CHINA, COME HERE TO HEAR ABOUT IT!"

Everyone rushed toward him, full of curiosity. Ping talked about the beautiful qipao he saw, the new GPS technology and the multicolored kites at the park. After he had explained his journey, everyone was amazed but one of the villagers asked, "How do we know if you are lying or not?"

Thinking carefully, Ping got an idea. He proudly presented the kite the lady had given him.

"When I went to the park, a lady gave this to me!" Ping said.

Everyone was amazed and were fighting over to get a look at it. The villagers looked at the big, broken kite with a flashy pink background. After everyone had left, Ping pondered, "After looking at modern day China, I can see how wondrous Chinese inventions have become. The sky's the limit and who knows what the future will hold?"

Gunpowder

ESF Sha Tin College, Xing, Janey – 13

A pair of thin hands fumbled frantically in the dark.

"Maybe.. Maybe…," a deep voice mumbled, tinged with desperateness.

The glow of the lantern illuminated the alchemist's face, his shadows dancing on the rough walls like 五通神 (Wutong Spirits) taunting him. He stared down at the strange, metallic grey mixture of saltpetre, charcoal and sulphur, the rumoured recipe to the elixir of immortality.

In his eyes, they swirled and blurred, resembling the torrent inside his brain. What was he thinking– an elixir of immortality? He really was insane, and naive too, working for the ruthless emperor. Promises of glory. Guarantees of wealth. And he had believed them. The emperor's heavy footsteps coming downstairs resounded through the dark laboratory, jolting him from his thoughts. The alchemist spun around and gasped; in his flurry of movement, he had knocked over the lantern.

Cursing, he swept the glass shards aside– but it was too late.
CRACKLE, SNAP– The powder was swallowed by the vermillion beast, sparks flying from its mouth. The emperor stepped down from the stairs and gazed, bewildered, at the fire. His head swivelled to glower at the alchemist, the look in his eyes burning, piercing into him, more threatening than the flames. As he opened his mouth to rebuke the alchemist– BOOM! An ear–shattering explosion sounded: fiercer than thunder; louder than crashing waves. The flames on the table flew and spread and burst, like the tumultuous cracking and splitting of a crimson giant, larger than the Himalayan mountains.

The alchemist stood by, a startled expression on his sunken face. He remained oblivious to the universe of possibilities he had opened within mere seconds; this was a moment to be written in history books, studied by physicists for centuries to come, and he didn't even know it. The glow of the flames irradiated the side of the emperor's smooth face, making him look devilish as his face split into a pleased smile.

A gunshot sounded through the silent night.

The sound broke the tense silence like a needle piercing through silk. Everything became a blur as men dashed through the tunnels of dirt, all desperate to take cover. Amidst the chaos, a soldier stumbled forward and peered outside. The plains appeared unchanged. Barren; never–ending. Unsettling yet strangely tranquil. But the soldier knew, soon enough it would be transformed into a battlefield, littered with corpses, the dry grass stained red. Silver raindrops would fall from the sky, each one a miniscule capsule of demolition.

The pandemonium began almost instantaneously. BANG–BANG–BANG– Without warning, the continuous blasting of firing guns began.

BANG–BANG–BANG–BANG– the copper bullets started to transform– twisting, whirling, spinning. Feathers burst out of the gleaming capsules, lead talons stretched out, becoming black crows that merged into the ebony black night sky, albeit the beady obsidian eyes of theirs, becoming sharp, piercing stars. They flew and circled over the plains as blood sprayed from bodies, staining khaki uniforms.

A crow was soaring towards the soldier, reaching out, its sharp talons grazing his head, its eyes peering into him, seeing through him– BANG! The crows shrunk back into the bullets, the yells and cries of men replacing their

screeches, jolting the soldier back into reality. His head still swam as he poured gunpowder from a flask into his gun's barrel, the movement already mechanic.

He tried to focus, tried to take cover, but the crows were returning. They swooped down on him, pecking through his flesh and bones, piercing through his skull– the soldier clutched his head, leaning down. Blood sprayed across his vision. Around him, men collapsed like the games of dominoes he used to play with– with whom? His memory was clouded, black gunpowder had already infiltrated his mind, he could no longer recall his own identity. When he thought of his name, all he could see was the beige uniform and the olive trench caps.

The pairs of dreary eyes and faces smudged with mud all around him were swaying, were haunting him, and his skull was splitting, his lungs collapsing. Flocks of crows were descending upon him, a tangle of black wings and glinting talons dripping with blood, reaching out towards him, reaching, reaching–

GASP! He lurched up in bed, beads of cold sweat forming on his forehead. He could not recall how many nights this hellish nightmare had haunted him. He gazed up at the Victoria Cross hanging from his wall. A veteran's symbol of courage, of honour, yet it felt like a curse, a burden on his shoulders.

Flowers bloomed across the inky twilight sky.

Flowers, vibrantly coloured, all starting with a POP!– and then blooming, thin petals soaring outwards and sparks flying off their ends, leaving a colourful, smoky trail of their stem as it slowly disintegrated from the sky. "Fireworks", they were called.

A young girl lied on the prickly grass, oblivious to the dewy, olive green stains it left on the back of her shirt. The fireworks reflection in her eyes were like luminous flowers floating in a creamy espresso, being stirred around and around. She thought back to her book of fairy tales, of the shimmering ribbons of light that would materialise from a thin, glossy rod. Magic. That was what fireworks felt like to her, seemingly springing out of nowhere, with their intoxicating, brilliant colours.

"Dad?", she asked, turning her head.

"Yes, Bonnie?"

"How are the fireworks made? I mean– they're like stars. How can they be so high up?"

"Well… it's a component called gunpowder."

"Like the ones in guns? But guns– guns are dangerous."

"Well, Bonnie, gunpowder, just like most things, can be used in different ways– to cause pain, to cause happiness, to create entertainment or to harm others. It's all dependent on how people choose to use it. It is a heavy responsibility, to have the power to make good or bad decisions. But we must always try to make the right choices."

He turned around, but Bonnie did not seem to be contemplating his words. She only stared up at the sky, smiling. She bounded off to play with the other children, skipping and leaping in the grass, underneath the streaks of watercolour on the charcoal canvas, squealing with the others whenever another firework went off.

All she thought in that moment was, she was so thankful to the wonderful person who had discovered gunpowder.

Hua Mei Shi

ESF Sha Tin College, Yang, Ella – 11

The words rang around in my head… "Go on… Break your family…"

"No no no!" I screamed.

"Yes yes indeed!" The voices replied.

My best friend looked at me "Myla, are you sure you okay? You're freaking me out!"

"I don't know if I'm okay, Jennie. I think… I must… Never mind." I shuddered as another ring of voices hit me. "Honey, you must try, your family was worth nothing in the first place…."

I yanked my hair and immediately Jennie stopped me "What are you doing? Are you going mental?"

I cried "I don't know if I'm okay!"

The football referee blew the whistle "Foul, Emma. Swap with Myla."

Jennie tried to tell me to not go, but I rushed into the field. Maybe a game of football would stop the voices.

I was kicking the ball and it was gonna go into the goal but Noah raced up and yelled "Pause! Check out this new invention, inspired by my dad. The Hua Mei Shu."

"What in the world is that?" Emma roared with laughter.

"Well, I come from a Chinese family. This cool invention draws flowers for you!" Noah blushed "I wanna give it to you, Jennie. I think you're really kind and–"

"Woah woah woah. Stop right there." Violetta strutted towards Noah "Did you not know Jen is dating already?"

Jennie twiddled her thumbs "Yeah. Sorry Noah. I'm dating Leon."

I watched with my teammates on the field. This was very juicy, I didn't want to spread it, but sometimes I just blurt things out.

The referee blew his whistle "Excuse me, Mr Ling, but you just disturbed my football team right here, and you cannot get away with this. This was gonna be the match of the week! But, now you've ruined it. Send me an essay apologizing for disrupting the team."

Noah looked at his feet "Sorry, Ms Mill."

Emma whooped "NOAH JUST GOT REJECTED! NOAH JUST GOT REJECTED! JEN IS A HEARTBREAKER–"

Jennie slammed her hand over Emma's mouth "Shut up!" she hissed.

The bell rang, and I hurried to the changing rooms. The voices immediately came back "Ooh, thought we would leave…?"

"Please go away." I muttered to myself.

When I finished changing, I plopped down on a bench with Jennie, Kiku and Akori. We sat in silence, occasionally shuffling our feet and taking a huge bite out of our sandwiches. Finally, Kiku broke the silence "Yall, I know what happened. I think that invention was actually really cool."

Akori teased "Oh, wanna date itty bitty Noah? Go ahead, we'll support you."

"No! Of course not. I was just saying, we could go see if he threw away that invention, because I kinda want to use it." Kiku bit her lip, not looking at Akori.

I grinned. This was a perfect way to make the voices shut up. I nodded "I think he tossed it away at the dumpster near the library. Let's go check!"

We sneakily headed to the dumpster, exchanging mischievous smiles. Suddenly, I spotted it "Look! It's there!" I whispered.

We hastily pulled it out, and we examined it "Hmm.. Draw a lavender." Jennie said softly.

Slowly but surely, it drew the faintest lavender I had ever seen. "Wow, it's so pretty." Kiku sighed.

Akori clasped her hands together "Guys! I have an idea! So you know the invention competition is next week… Well, we could pretend this is our invention!"

"Yeah… That's a great idea but isn't it too… Risky?" I cocked my head.

"I'll just go, if they find out, I'll get in trouble. After all, Noah was meant to give this to me." Jennie bravely stood up.

Kiku grabbed her scarf and murmured "So it is set. Jennie will show this. Now, where do we put this?"

"My locker is very cluttered, but if you guys help me organize it, it'll have space." Akori blinked at us.

I laughed "Fine. I'll clean up your locker. What's the lock's password?"

Kiku wrapped the Hua Mei Shu up "It's 790."

A while later, I organized Akori's locker and there were plenty of spaces. I shoved the invention in, and we made sure it was safe and comfy.

"Thanks." Akori smiled as she hugged me.

"You're welcome. Now, I'm really−" The voices started to taunt me again "Hello. Stop being a disgrace." They silently moaned.

My phone rang loudly, so I picked it up "Hello?"

"MYLA…" I heard Jennie's voice over the phone "It's me… Jennie."

"What happened?" I asked.

"Leon slapped me." She sobbed.

I gasped "Jennie, where are you?"

"I'm– I'm at the auditorium. The invention competition is about to start…" She sniffed.

I grabbed the invention and comforted her "Don't worry, we're coming right away!"

I told Akori what happened as we heaved the invention over. When we finally arrived backstage, we spotted Kiku hugging Jennie.

"We brought the invention. Full story, NOW." Akori shook her by the shoulders.

"So–" Jennie gulped "I was brushing my hair, and then I got an email saying the competition was starting earlier because the principal was leaving next week. But suddenly, Leon told me to come out of the toilet, then he showed me my leather jacket, and then he asked whose jacket it was, so I told him it was mine. He asked how come he never saw it before, so I said I just bought it yesterday. He didn't believe I would wear such a large size. So he slapped me…"

"Poor you!" I grabbed my tissue and wiped her tears "Jennie, I don't wanna be mean, but this is a BIG day. You need to be strong. Cry about it all you want afterward, okay? Here's your introductory script I typed out during math class, good luck."

Akori stopped me "Hey, she can't go out looking like THAT. Let me fix your make–up."

Soon, we all prepped her for the stage, and we called "We'll cheer you on!"

Kiku, the sweetest, most innocent girl I've ever met, even called out "Leon is a jerk!"

I sat down on the chair, watching as Jennie walked on. Cute outfit: Check! Cute hairstyle: Check! Akori's amazing make–up: Check! Invention and script: Check!

"She's so gonna lose this." I heard Emma murmur behind me.

Jennie smiled "Hello there ladies and gentlemen, I would like to introduce to you… The Hua Mei Shu! It's a China Inspired Invention. It will draw any flower you want for you. Tell me a flower: It'll draw it for you!"

Emma squinted at the Hua Mei Shu "It looks familiar."

I raised my hand and called out "Lotus!"

The Hua Mei Shu drew a beautiful Lotus and Jennie picked it up and showed it to the school "Gorgeous, isn't it?"

Next, Violetta cried "PInk tulip!"

The machine drew it.

Soon, more people started to shout out flowers. The invention drew it all.

The principal smiled, "Amazing invention. Just asking, could it please draw a Blue Puya? It's my wife's favorite flower."

The invention had no hesitation as it drew a turquoise puya. It shone in the spotlight. Jennie handed it to the principal, and then he yelled "Thank you Jennie Gold for showing us this invention! Bravo!"

Everyone clapped for her as the curtains closed and she struggled to shift the machine over to backstage.

I beamed "You did fabulous!"

She collapsed "I'm exhausted. Let's go to your house, Kiku."

Kiku grinned from ear to ear as she called the taxi.

Soon, we lay on Kiku's couch "I think you did nicely, Noah didn't say anything too!" Akori smirked.

I opened Kiku's phone and squealed "OMG! You got an email from Noah!"

"What does it say?" Kiku sat up.

"Dear Jennie. I hope you liked my invention, I see you used it already. You can take the credit. From Noah." I snorted "Lame!"

"There's another email: It's from the principal! He says: Congrats Jennie, you won! Tomorrow, the $200 dollars will be given to you. The invention will be sent all over the world! Thanks, Mr Lanny."

Jennie grabbed her phone and sighed "This doesn't feel right. I'm gonna tell the truth." And so, Jennie emailed the whole school the truth. About what happened with Noah. About how she lied.

"You don't have to do this…" Akori blinked at her with pleading eyes.

"It's what I have to do." Jennie typed away.

In case you're wondering what happened, well, Noah got all the money. Jennie broke up with Leon and started hanging out with Noah. And me, Akori and Kiku are their biggest shippers. Me? Well, I guess Noah kinda split the money with us too! And now, you can buy the Hua Mei Shi all over the world! Oh, and Emma… She got booted out of the football team. She deserved that! About the voices in my head… That's a whole other story. I guess this is a happy ending?

THE END.

(P.S. Hua Mei Shi in english is: Flower artwork!)

The Discovery

ESF South Island School, Arisawa, Hana – 11

"Come, quick!" I awoke from my brief daydream to the calm and commanding voice of my master. I jumped up on the balls of my feet and swiftly paced towards him. My daydream, or memory, was the same as always: my cousin's body, cold and hard; my mother pushing me out of the house with tear–filled eyes; the excruciating pain in my head as my father threw a rock to bruise it. And as usual, it all came to the same conclusion: I needed to prove myself before time ran out.

My master had a wrinkly face and a long, thin neck that constantly reminded me of a turtle. I felt honoured to be the one assisting reputedly the best alchemist of the century, but his strict ways constantly kept me on my toes. I quickly glanced around the room then spotted what the matter was for amidst the countless rows of glittering gems, smelly herbs, and dull–coloured powders. A foamy liquid flowed freely out of a pot onto the ground.

I hurriedly grabbed a grimy cloth and scooped up the mixture. It felt surprisingly hot, and I couldn't help but wince as the greyish bubbles made their way up my hand. In the distance, I could hear a voice muttering about his idea failing again. He was often predicted to be the one to find 'The Solution': an elixir that could extend one's life, and he had already accidentally made many medicines while trying to create it.

"Are you alright? Would you like some water?" I asked gently. His mood was susceptible to dipping after an experiment gone wrong.

"I'm fine. You can go back to what you were doing." The great alchemist glared at his scribbled notes as if trying to burn holes through them. Seeing his face full of disappointment made me decide one thing: I had to do something for both myself and him. I gathered my courage and started speaking.

"S–sir? Could you let me help a little? I'll try my best." I prayed hard behind my back, but his answer was short.

"No." Seeing the pleading look on my face, he added, "You are too young, and alchemy is not for children." Something in his dark, wise eyes told me that pushing further would only cause me trouble. I bowed deeply and left the room.

The rest of the day passed in a blur. All I could think of was what I was planning to do tonight, and I was distracted enough to bump into people and even the towering bamboo trees that surrounded the dark monastery. My mind was split into two, debating whether it was a good idea to put my horribly risky plan into action. I took a deep breath and expelled all the thoughts away.

For hours I tossed and turned on the hard wooden floor, waiting for the moon to come out. And then, after eternity, it did. Silver streaks burst out of gloomy clouds as the radiant orb of light lit up the whole world. Stars were scattered across the sky like broken shards of glass, glittering and glimmering without rest. For a brief moment, I forgot all about my cruel life and the mission I was about to embark on and remembered the best moment of my life.

It was on the day of the full moon, and I had cried for hours after finding out that I would have to become a boy and live instead of my late cousin. That I had to fake a concussion to hide my nonexistent memory of my 'past life'. And also that if I didn't do something quickly, I would meet the same fate as the girl who used to live next to us. I cried and cried and cried until my body felt dried and shrivelled up. Then my mother was there, smiling comfortingly. 'No matter what happens, you will be fine. You are a strong, smart girl,' she had said, hugging me tightly until I had fallen

asleep. From that night, I knew that I had to change the world for the better, not just for me but for everyone. And this was my big chance.

Slowly, I pushed my body up into a crouched position. The floor creaked loudly, and I froze. My heart was pounding like the drums at festivals, and every part of my body wanted to lie back and sleep in the peaceful room with echoes of frog croaks and snores. I crawled towards the door after checking that everyone was fast asleep, then jogged through the chilly autumn breeze. Finally, I was in the alchemy room.

Although the room was the same as the one I had visited earlier in the day, it seemed like the shadows had taken over and turned it into something completely different. I saw farmers working non−stop outside, and I felt lucky that I was able to live like this. Now it was my turn to work.

It didn't take long to gather the ingredients. The light of a lamp flame flickered faintly as I measured the sulphur, charcoal, and saltpetre. The black powder reminded me of the medicine my mother used to make for me when I was still a happy little girl without any worries. Before my mind could drift back into old memories, I let my hands work to complete what would save me until...

"What are you doing?" I jumped as I heard a familiar voice full of anger and concern. "I told you not to use this room without my instruction. You will have to leave." My sweaty hands were shaking madly. Tears dribbled down my cheeks and splattered on the floor.

"I'm sorry. I just…." What was I thinking, taking such a risk? I glanced at my master with fear. I didn't want to see his furious face. But when I did look, I saw calm and emotionless eyes.

"I only care for your safety. But for disobeying instructions, there will be conseque−"

"BANG!" Behind me, there was an explosion that came from the area where I worked. The lamp was on its side, and the oil had spilled out, making way for angry flames that burned with the powder

"What have you done?" Now he was properly enraged. "Leave. I will sort out the mess you made."I waited outside the room, as I was told, when I thought of something. I had nothing left to lose.

"Sir, couldn't you use what I made for something?" I asked this as calmly and clearly as I could manage.

"What happened to you? You used to obey me and never talk back."

"Please, sir. It could work. Just try it." I added more urgency to my usually soft voice.

Reluctantly, the alchemist nodded. "Fine. I will give you one hour to complete everything."

One week had passed since the explosion incident, and my life had changed completely. After fixing my recipe for explosive powder, all the alchemists at the monastery had started working on ways to utilise the 'magical abilities' of the powders, and although the fact that I had created it was kept between me and my master, I felt so much better. I nearly forgot about what I came here to do, until one morning I woke up and remembered that I would have to do something soon, and the best time to do it would be now. When people were still impressed by me. So when it was time for me to assist the alchemist, I broke the news.

"Sir, I have some things I need to tell you," I started, and I told him everything. About how the person everyone knew me as was actually my cousin, who died of illness after trying to go back home, and how my parents sent me out to replace him because they knew that the food was becoming scarce and I would live a better life here. And also

that I had to prove myself quickly before people would start noticing that I was a girl and go back to my parents after a few years. The whole story poured out of my mouth without me thinking much, as if my mind had already been practising a script. I noticed that I had been staring at the trees and shifted my eyes back to the thoughtful eyes of the alchemist that I secretly enjoyed trying to understand.

"So you would like to return to your home now, I believe?" I nodded. "I've heard that the crops in the nearby villages are going quite well. I will give special permission for you to leave the monastery, and you will be given food and water for your trip. Will that be fine?" I nodded once again, now with gratitude.

"Thank you so much, sir!" I knew I would never forget this kind, wise, and wonderful man who helped me invent something that might help people in the future.

A New Story On How The Compass Was Invented

ESF South Island School, Lam, Hei Chit Joshua – 12

1000 years ago…

A magician named Jiang Huang had a huge ambition to produce some sort of magic that could make people adore him fully. This ambition drove him towards many experiments, mostly failed and the few that succeeded weren't very impressive to his standards.

Jiang Huang already tried using gunpowder, but that went out of hand, destroying precious furniture around the workplace. However, he did not stop. When he was experimenting with Yin–Yang kung fu, the only thing he succeeded in was embarrassing himself.

One day, Jiang Huang decided to take a break, distracting himself with menial work. Walking over to the mines, he reflected on his past acts. There was the one with the cat in the hat. That was easy. The cat just didn't fall out of the hat when I turned it upside down.

Sighing, Jiang Huang walked down the rickety staircases to the depths of the mining cave.

Clang… Clang… Clang…

The sound of pickaxes striking the rocks echoed and amplified through the mines, sounding like wind chimes.

Jiang Huang reached the first level and decided it was adequate and about time to stop instead of plunging into the darkness below. Then, Jiang Huang got an idea in his head. What if he got some shiny rock and then shot sunlight at it? Would it reflect off brilliant rays of colour, almost like a rainbow?

Getting excited, Jiang Huang grabbed a chunk of rock from a mine cart labelled "lodestone" and grabbed a plate of bronze from another mine cart, then put both in his pocket. Climbing back up the stairs, Jiang Huang was excited to try out this new finding.

That is, until he found out it was raining heavily outside.

Rain poured down from the clouds above, submerging a few houses and sidewalks with water.

Rushing home, Jiang Huang splashed through puddles, wetting the few people who were courageously fighting against the rain's undeterred attempts to make them wet. They complained loudly, but Jiang Huang just rushed on, not caring.

When he got to his humble abode, he immediately started trying to shape the lodestone into something useful.

A circular plate, maybe. However, that would be hard to hold up for everyone to see… How about a spoon? Easily manipulated by holding the handle, and it could be efficiently waved around.

Jiang Huang started sculpting it, pouring all his effort into it. Soon, he had a relatively small spoon–shaped lodestone piece. Wanting a surprise for the next day, he set the spoon outside, so that when the storm subsided and the sun came out, he could see whether it had worked or not.

Jiang Huang excitedly did his bedtime routine, when a flash of light fell from the heavens and smashed into the lodestone

He immediately ran outside without hesitation, but all he could see outside was a large crater in the ground, and it would take all night to search for the lodestone piece. Not to mention, it was nighttime, so it would be like finding a tiny screw in a haystack, instead of just a needle.

Concerned, Jiang Huang reluctantly went to bed, worrying about the next day. His sleep engulfed his head with magical dreams.

Jiang Huang woke up, and a brilliant ray of sunshine honed in on his face, blinding him.

He felt like he had a dream so heavenly, it seemed it was foretelling his future, that some unbelievable event would occur.

Jiang Huang reminded himself about the lodestone, immediately skipped breakfast and dived into the crater, patting the ground impatiently until he heard a clear clunk of metal.

He immediately dug it out without any hesitation and found his trusty lodestone spoon. Feeling like crying with joy, Jiang Huang was surprised and astonished that the spoon had not lost its shape.

Jiang Huang brought the spoon to the sun, and it let out a ray of light, beautifully rebounding everywhere, even more than what he expected.

One week later, after all the arrangements were made, Jiang Huang hosted a magic show. Residents of the humble village all quickly knew about the show, and tickets were already sold out. Even people from the faraway city purposely made a journey here, to be turned down from having no more seats in the auditorium.

A protest was even made, and Jiang Huang's trusted manager had to postpone the show just to move the show's location somewhere else for more people to see it. During that time, Jiang Huang practised and practised his trick discreetly.

Absolutely nothing went wrong. Every time, he found something to improve on, so that the show could become more enjoyable. There was only one part he didn't practise. That was the finale because he wanted to get a surprise for himself from that too.

Jiang Huang slept the day before the big show and woke up to the worst day of his life.

He did his morning routine with much more energy than usual, finishing it ten minutes before he often did. Jiang Huang arrived on the stage and met more than a thousand gleaming eyes thirsty with excitement.

"Hello, ladies and gentlemen! Today, I want to show you all my NEW INVENTION!" Jiang Huang hesitated, to build up suspense. He slowly brought out the spoon, and in one swift motion, he brought it upwards, revealing a kaleidoscope of colours reflecting off the lodestone and onto the ceiling, walls, everything.

The light bounced everywhere, making people gasp with excitement, glee and amazement. Grinning, Jiang Huang then set it on the lodestone, and it, for some reason, sprung towards an unmistakable direction – south.

For a moment, Jiang Huang hesitated, assessing the situation. He could pretend like he knew this would happen, but had to verify it first.

Would the spoon still point to the south if he moved it away to somewhere else?

To test that, Jiang Huang picked up the lodestone with the spoon, and did a small walk around the stage, ad–libbing as he observed the item.

As expected, the spoon kept on pointing to the south, while Jiang Huang exclaimed the wonders of this object. He heard many people ask in a loud voice whether it had a name, and Jiang Huang started brainstorming.

He started stalling the audience, preparing the grand reveal of the name he hadn't thought of yet.

He wanted the name to sound professional. So, he named it the South Governor. As soon as he shouted the name for thousands to hear, Everyone erupted into applause, marvelling at this new object with such a unique talent.

With a bow, Jiang Huang skipped off the stage, and a security guard started issuing directions on how to get out of the venue in an orderly fashion.

Jiang Huang realised that this very object could bring good luck to everyone. It could strengthen geomancy by using the South Governor to get Feng Shui readings, and more.

When the release of the South−Governor was official, there was a colossal demand for the item. In fact, miners were struggling to produce enough resources for creating more and more South−Governors.

A week after that, the knowledge of the South Governor's power resonated through China, allowing Jiang Huang's name to amplify in power.

Many many decades and centuries passed, and as civilization advanced, the South−Governor changed its name, changed its look, changed its purpose, and features were added on for efficiency when travelling.

This is a new story on how the compass could have been invented, which might have taken place in a parallel universe.

New Tales of China's Inventions

ESF South Island School, Mathur, Keshav – 13

Zhong Ming paced impatiently around his lab at the Beijing Institute of Future Technologies. He had been working for months on his latest project, but was hitting roadblock after roadblock.

"There has to be a breakthrough coming soon," he muttered to himself. "I can feel it!"

His project was aimed at solving one of China's biggest remaining problems – reducing air pollution in its major cities. Though solar and electric vehicles had made huge strides, coal–fired power plants still released huge amounts of toxic emissions.

Zhong believed the answer lay in a new kind of self–cleaning nanoparticle filter that could be installed in smokestacks. His prototypes showed promise, but they clogged up too quickly to be practical.

Just then, his lab assistant Ling rushed in. "Doctor Zhong, you have to see this!" she said excitedly. "Turn on the holoscreen – they're demoing a new invention live from Hangzhou."

Zhong flipped on the screen and gasped. A young inventor named Chen was unveiling an airtight bioreactor the size of a shipping container. Inside, billions of genetically modified algae consumed coal smoke, using photosynthesis to convert the toxins into breathable oxygen.

The crowd roared as Chen demonstrated how a single reactor could sanitise the output of an entire power plant. "This could revolutionise how we treat pollution on an industrial scale," Chen said.

Zhong thought fast. What if he combined Chen's algae technology with his nanoparticle filters? The algae could keep the filters clean indefinitely!

"Ling, cancel my appointments. I think I just found the breakthrough I needed!" Zhong said with a grin. Who knew where his new idea might lead

The next day, Zhong caught the first bullet train to Hangzhou. His mind raced the entire journey with ideas for integrating the algae bioreactor with his nanoparticle filtration system.

When he arrived at Chen's lab, the younger inventor was thrilled to discuss collaboration. "Your filters could exponentially increase the algae's processing capacity," Chen said. "With government backing, we could install combined systems nationwide."

Over the next month, they worked tirelessly on prototypes. The algae thrived inside Zhong's particle-coated filters, consuming toxins that otherwise would have clogged the pores. Test runs processing simulated coal smoke proved overwhelmingly successful.

Preparing for a large-scale demonstration, they secured a pilot program installation at a rural power plant. But just days before launch, complications arose. The plant director baulked at the potential costs and lost revenue during conversion.

"We're so close! We can't let short-sightedness derail clean air for millions," Chen protested. But without support, their trial was doomed.

Zhong contacted old friends in Beijing, who connected him to top policy advisors. He passionately argued their system offered the fastest, most practical solution to the coal conundrum.

Impressed, the advisors arranged a private meeting. Zhong and Chen demoed modified prototypes and shared data proving overwhelming benefits to public health and renewable energy adoption.

The advisors were convinced. They formed a state-backed "Clean Air Initiative" to fund mass installations. The collaborators' combined system would become central to achieving carbon neutrality goals.

One year later, at the systems' official unveiling, Zhong gazed with pride at smokestacks wrapped in sheets of iridescent algae and nanoparticle mesh. Coal emissions were now purified oxygen.

Chen accepted accolades from politicians and investors. But privately, he credited Zhong for never giving up, helping turn their vision into reality. Their partnership shows what Chinese ingenuity and teamwork can achieve when focused on society's greatest problems. Clean skies are within reach at last.

Invention of Time

ESF South Island School, Mok, Hiu Lam Charmaine – 12

In the early hours before the sun rolled up from behind the mountains, the villagers in the city of DongWu rose to the unrhythmic gong chiming in the distance, sending all kinds of chaos up in the air.

"What on the Rooster's name is happening? I swear I haven't been asleep more than…err…" sighed the farmer as he scratched his head. His wife arose beside him, groaning with her sunken features and dark rings around her eyes. They were not an old couple but they were not youthful looking. It felt like time had cruelly trampled over their faces with wrinkles that cut deep. They both looked like they had not had restful sleep for a very long time.

What is unbeknownst to us is that in the City of DongWu, time was not kept. There was no system to speak of. Day in and day out, the gong would chime at odd hours of the day depending on the mood of the keepers who were on duty. This irritated the residents of DongWu to no end but time devices that were invented were either too simplistic or too complicated for the villagers and this continued for a long time. Not only that, but everyone also had an opinion and a claim over such inventions.

One day there was a royal announcement that appeared on the noticeboard at the entrance of their city. It read:

> "The winners will get to choose to be the masters of Time. Sign up and bring your best weapon. Stand a chance not only to be glorified, but win a wealth of silver and gold."

In fine print at the bottom of the notice, it continued, "There is no choice to opt–out from participating unless you would like yourself and your entire clan to be sent to the guillotine." With a sign–off from 'Your Most Beloved Emperor.'

One thing that was unique about this kingdom is that they are not humans. As the name suggests, they are Dong Wu – animals. Yet, they have human–like abilities. They could walk like humans, they could talk like humans and most importantly, each animal had innate powers specially born to their tribe and each tribe inherited special weapons from……(Well they couldn't pinpoint since they couldn't tell time.) However, not every animal was born equal so the results of the contest were quite evidently in favour of those with better weapons. This would be an important later when the animals took their rightful roles.

The mighty Elephant would have had a very good chance to be the champion. Unfortunately, she had a football as a weapon. The wolf too would stand a chance of being a winner if he were not armed with silver bullets. Yes, silver bullets! As we know, silver to a Wolf is like kryptonite to Superman.

As preparation was underway, Rat sat on a log in the deep forest and meditated. He knew that if he did not use his wit he would never win the competition. There he sat silently figur out his game plan. Up above in the sky, Dragon was flying ferociously through the clouds, passing through them, lashing out in frustration. She truly wanted to focus on the competition but her master, the same Emperor that set out this competition, gave her other duties she could not ignore. She was either fighting off monsters in some other multiverse or saving humans from droughts and famine on Earth.

On the day of the competition, the residents of DongWu walked into the makeshift arena with their heads held high. They readied themselves, practising with their weapons. They were puzzled about the setting of the arena. In the middle of the stage sat an eye–catching wooden wheel divided into twelve parts. The Emperor signalled his eunuch and the footman sounded the gong. The ear–splitting bang of the gong signalled the beginning of the combat. It was a disorderly fight at the beginning with lukewarm responses from the spectators.

The Emperor was displeased with the slow proceedings. He called the guards over and changed his plans. The guards blew the horn to call everyone's attention. The head guard announced:

"From the orders of the Great Emperor, the following individual battles will be cancelled. It will be a freestyle round. You will fight till the sun goes down and the last twelve standing will have a final fight."

As the guard was reading out loud the new rules, the wheel seemed to come to life. Each compartment started to light up and the vibrant colours danced around. There was a huge commotion among the villagers, they were excited and some tried to squeeze themselves nearer to the ring to have a look at the dancing lights. The contestants, however, had an ominous feeling the emperor was economical with the truth about the competition.

The animals had no choice but to continue with the fight. While everyone was fighting, rat climbed up Ox's horns nimbly. When Ox was about to drive his dagger into its opponent's chest, Rat stuck his dagger into Ox's eye, blinding him with a sleight of hand. Rat was raised into the air by a cloud and suddenly Rat was sitting inside the lit-up slot. Spectators stood up to have a closer look as the guard came forward,

"The first winner has been determined to be Rat. He will be in charge of the cycle of Time. The competition continues." With a bang on the gong, the competitors were still in a daze. Ox took his only chance as he was losing his vision. With a contemptuous thwack, he hit Elephant in the head. The second compartment lit up like before and Ox was lifted into it.

Rat, the first winner of the competition, ascended into the illuminated slot of the Wheel. Inside the compartment, Rat discovered a miniature world, a microcosm of the zodiac's influence on the passage of Time. Each device represented a specific aspect of Time, from the cycles of seasons to the ebb and flow of destiny. Curiosity compelled Rat to approach one of the floating boxes. As he reached out to touch it, the box opened, and a flood of memories cascaded before him. He witnessed the ancient Chinese scholars meticulously studying the stars, crafting the intricate system of the zodiac. He saw the joy and reverence with which people embraced the zodiac's teachings, finding guidance and purpose in the celestial order. Rat realized that his responsibility is to carry the mantle of the Rat in the cycle of Time, forever intertwining his own fate with the eternal dance of Time. This would ensure that the zodiac's influence would continue to guide and inspire generations to come. Ox also came to this realisation as he saw the same things in his compartment too.

Unbeknownst to the participants though, the Emperor had devised a treacherous plan. As each winner was announced and lifted into their respective illuminated slots, they found their weapons removed permanently. The Emperor's true intentions were revealed! One by one, the weapons were plucked from the grasp of their former owners and placed within secured chambers. However, this realisation only dawned on the animals much later, causing irreversible changes.

It was nail-biting as fewer compartments were available. The final fight was epic. Rabbit and Pig came face to face immediately after the horn was blown. Pig wanted to play dirty so when Rabbit struck with her blades Pig merely dodged and pretended to get hit. However, Rabbit's weapon served her well, and with skillful counters, Rabbit defeated Pig, filling up the second last slot. Before Pig could wink, a dark shadow ambushed him. Pig threw out his weapon and the it turned out to be wolf with a silver sickle stuck on its chest. Pig was the final one lifted into the Wheel.

The Emperor clapped his hands, congratulating the winners. He then announced his new time system. Since the citizens of DongWu despised the original system of the loud gong banging at ungodly hours, the Emperor devised this new arrangement, using ancient wisdom.. Each animal was assigned a two-hour shift to oversee with Rat taking charge from 23:00 to 01:00, followed by Ox from 01:00 to 03:00, and Tiger from 03:00 to 05:00, so on and so forth. This honour would be carried on for centuries as their epic battle ultimately benefited countless others in the vast multiverse. This was how the time-telling device was invented. It was also how the Emperor secretly confiscated the

precious weapons of their owners. Rumour has it that to this day, the animals continue to find ways to retrieve their weapons even as centuries have passed as they toiled away in the Wheel of Time. This zodiac time–telling system is used in China and some parts of Asia as people relied on this device to tell time until the advent of more precise time–telling devices came about.

Emergence

ESF West Island School, Chen, Claire – 11

It was a beautiful spring day and I was sitting under a willow tree in the Imperial courtyard, sketching plans for my latest invention: a water–powered armillary sphere. My friend Yuan Jun was sitting next to me, fanning himself with his hand.

Just as I finished drawing the outer rings of my armillary sphere, the sound of approaching hoofs could be heard above the chirping of birds. Startled, I looked up to see who had come to see me, and was surprised to see golden yellow robes, embroidered with dragons. It was the emperor,with a frown on his face.

"Still working on that water sphere? It's been 9 months! None of your other inventions have ever taken this long before. I thought you were the most talented, better than all your peers."

Now, he was tapping his foot impatiently on the cobblestone path, expecting an explanation.

"I'm sorry, my emperor," I said. "I just need a bit more time to perfect the rings around the sphere. "

"But you haven't made any progress yet, have you? Unless you figure out this invention of yours, it will be jail and Yuan Jun will take charge."

And with that, the Emperor swept away, a mere swish of gold silk and a look of annoyance that meant everything in the world to me. I gaped silently at his departing back , stunned by his accusation. Turning to Yuan Jun, I saw that he was looking into the shade, smirking at the ground.

As the days dragged on, my sphere was slowly taking shape. But in my haste to finish the invention, I had been spending less time with Yuan Jun, and he seemed to be sulking about it, for every time I passed him in the corridors, he always shot me that hungry, mischievous look.

It all started small, like losing possessions and clothing, but as the situation grew to a point that my sphere started falling apart for no reason, I began to suspect foul play. The sphere breaking apart, my plans and sketches going missing just couldn't–couldn't be an accident. Someone was plotting against me.

As I hurried to expedite my invention, I started going off food and sleep. I spent my lunch hours and resting time by my desk, and even with dark shadows under my eyes and hollow cheeks, I refused to stop.

On a hot summer day, I was walking back along the cobblestone path to my workshop from another summon from the emperor, giving me a limit of three days to finish my sphere, when I heard crashes from my workshop. Brow furrowed, I picked up my pace– *I had left everything neat and tidy, there shouldn't have been any accidents.* But as the thought ran through my head, my blood ran cold– maybe it wasn't an accident.

I burst through the door, and my heart stood still for a moment as I took in the sight: the overturned desk and chair, papers, no, sketches flying through the air and rumpled on the floor, and the sphere–the sphere! No! It was gone, not even a trace or part of it was left – not even the base or stand. As my frustration and worry mounted higher, my face broke into a cold sweat. I stood there, blood pumping through my heart furiously fear coursed through me.

A distant songbird's cry brought me back to my senses and I forced myself into calmness and thought. *How would the Emperor think about it now? Wait. The Emperor. The Emperor! He could help me!* I jumped up and ran through the door, towards the marble palace in the distance.

I arrived, panting, and saw Yuan Jun presenting my sphere to the Emperor, who was smiling in approval. Yuan Jun looked up and a wide grin broke his face.

Desperation and betrayal coursed through me, and I lost sense of my surroundings.

"You were supposed to be my best friend! How could you?" I choked out, thrashing in the arms of the guards who had pulled me back as I lunged to attack.

"You were nothing but a cheat that's been taking credit for all of Yuan Jun's work, he tells me. " The Emperor said, holding up the sphere. "I should never have given you that promotion. "

"Lock him up!" he commanded, and the guards that were holding me marched me away, all the while as I was shouting out my accusations at Yuan Jun, desperation not masking the fear in my voice.

The guards threw me into a dark, dank room in the dungeons, and locked me in. Instead of banging on the bars and walls though, I calmly asked the guards for some materials and paper to begin my next invention. The guards were put off, but eventually one of them went to see the emperor, from whom they got orders to fulfil my wishes.

But I just don't have any idea of what to invent. After a few hours, I eventually get bored of the infinite scraps of blank paper before me. As I listened to the guards talking outside my cell about the high death rates of the recent earthquake 1800 kilometres away in Sichuan, the idea hit me, and I actually stumbled. I would make a machine that could predict and detect earthquakes.

Days turn to weeks as my invention begins to take shape. The 12 dragons with their mouths full of balls, and 12 open toad's mouths below each of them, their mouths frozen forever in an O.

It was completed. The guards sent the seismoscope and me to the emperor to be tested. The machine was placed next to the throne as I described its uses. The emperor turned away from me and huffed, and summoned Yuan Jun. He came in, looking perfectly groomed and well fed, in contrast to my shaggy clothing and hollow cheeks. He smirked at me then bowed to the emperor, offering his services.

The emperor spoke directly to me, his commanding voice echoing around the hall.

"So, you claim to have invented a machine to detect earthquakes and tremors within 1200 kilometres from here. Let's see if this contraption really works. If it doesn't in one month, you will be executed. "

And so it was. One month we waited, and as the time drew on, anxiety started to wriggle in my belly. *Why isn't there an earthquake already? They are usually so frequent lately! My time's almost up! If an earthquake doesn't happen soon, I'm doomed!* I thought desperately.

On the last day of the month, the machine finally began to work. One of the balls from the southwest dragon's mouth fell into the toad's, indicating that somewhere southwest, an earthquake had occurred. Waiting for the messenger that usually came after an earthquake took hours and eventually days. I had to keep persuading myself that a messenger would come—he must come. Eventually, the Emperor lost patience.

The next thing I knew, I was on the execution block, waiting to be beheaded, Yuan Jun looking sadly at me with something like regret in his eyes. Then the miracle happened. A messenger, dishevelled and all, arrived, bringing news that 500 kilometres away, there had been an earthquake. The court instantly erupted. The Emperor called for silence, and commanded me to be let off the block.

He surveyed me carefully, seeming to demand an answer.

I swallowed hard before speaking. "My emperor, it was I who invented the water–powered armillary sphere." I said, bowing deeply. "As for the seismoscope, my newest invention, how could I have stolen his idea in a prison cell, with no outside contact? "

The Emperor and I turned to look at Yuan Jun, whose face had gone white.

"He..e..e..'s lying, my Emperor! He must have had contact with one of the court officials through the guards!"

"Is that so? When have you shown any brilliance in inventing, after all? Guards! Seize him!"

As the guards surrounded him, Yuan Jun cursed me, vowing vengeance. But I only smiled sadly at my old friend, the belief that he had actually once cared for me filling my heart. Already the smiling, happy friend I had known was slipping away, stolen by his twinges of jealousy. But I had learned my lesson.

I would no longer waste my courtesies but treasure them, and use my remarkable inventing skills to help and benefit everyone. I wanted to be remembered for my inventions, and leave a mark on this world. I would work my hardest, and the people's appreciation would be my biggest reward. I would not forget this experience, and the lasting lesson it gave me.

And even though the gaping hole that was once Yuan Jun throbbed, I was ready to embrace my new life and identity, as Zhang Heng, whose inventions benefited all people around the world. I would not fail.

Ancient China and its lies

ESF West Island School, Hyde, Olivia – 11

People say things that are used a lot today were created in ancient China. Many people fall for this lie. This is how these inventions we use today were created.

It was a freezing day with the wind brushing against my toes. I shiver and look towards my dad. Tiptoeing, I walk towards him, who is standing there, keeping guard. Out of nowhere, a loud shout echoed. The emperor, fat and mean, walks towards my dad. Surprisingly, my dad doesn't even flinch.

It all started a decade ago when the war broke out. We, the Forbidden City, weren't very armed or strong. They wanted our gold, the most valuable thing we had on land. Fortunately, we had one soldier who hid the gold somewhere where no one could find it. Unfortunately, the war starters threatened to get our land. Now their leader is crowned emperor, killing nearly 10 people every day. And here he was, standing in front of us, trying to arrest everyone. The emperor started with my dad, who fought as hard as he could. He fought many soldiers until one captured him from behind. With my dad under control, there was nothing we could do. I took my chances to charge at the emperor. Since I was slightly small for my age, he couldn't see me until I attacked him. I punched him in the face several times until the guards handcuffed me. They threw me in the truck with a few other kids, where we got shipped off. As I got shipped away, I hoped, at least I planted a small bruise on his fat, ugly face.

After that, the next few days were a blur. My mind was filled with thoughts of how they were going to kill my family and friends. My dad was strong, and always told me to remember in the darkest times, there is hope. Just remembering what he said brought tears to my eyes.
I leaned on the nearest rock I could find, just to catch my breath. It had only been several seconds when a soldier approached me. He was incredibly thin. So thin that I could easily push him over.
"Get back to wor…"He tried to pronounce the words but it seemed like he was too exasperated to talk. He tried to repeat it, making him look like a bigger fool in the process.
"Het back to wo…"
I tried my best not to laugh, but I couldn't resist it. It came out louder than I thought it would. He looked directly at me, trying to put the scary face impression on. I couldn't stop. For a second, he flashed a grin and smiled, until he saw the other soldiers. He returned his face to the normal face. He passed me a sheet of paper before returning to the other soldiers.
Our job here was to dig soil till we found something. It sounded boring, but when you do it in real life, it was even more boring. As soon as the guards looked away, I looked at the piece of paper. In illegible writing, it said probably something like: "Are you Yu the great's daughter? You look awfully like him"
He was carefully observing me to see what I would say. I nodded ever so slightly. I didn't want the guards to see or hear our conversation. He slowly approached me, and quickly whispered in my ear "Here at 7 pm".Then just left.

For the rest of the day, I couldn't stop thinking about the letter. "Was he going to help me"? A million thoughts popped up in my head. Somehow every time I thought about him, my insides tingled and danced. I slowly walked toward my room, where there was just straw and some food on the floor.

As scheduled, I met the soldier at 7 pm. He was there, with a sad expression on his face.
"Your father," He started, "Saved my life in war risking his own life". There was a few seconds of silence until he continued. "That is why I need to repay him" I looked at my shoes, trying hard not to make tears overflow. He looked at me with tears in his eyes. He signalled to follow. He walked a few muddy paths until he stopped short. There, in front of him was the fat emperor I had punched. He had an ugly grin spread across his face. It was dark and I was barely able to see his face until he turned on his torch. There just below his left eye, was a big purple bruise. Even people in the distance stopped to look at us. Just looking at the emperor's face made me smile. The moment he saw me giggle, his smile vanished. He walked towards me, his flashlight pointing at me. Before he could even lay a finger on me, I punched him. I could see the anger swelling up in him. Just as I was going to grab the soldier's hand,

the soldier grabbed mine and ran. To my surprise, he was really fast. In a matter of seconds, the place seemed like a dot. He slowly lowered me down and tried to catch his breath.
“You were fast back there,” I said, hoping to make him happier.
“And you were really good back there too,” He said, lifting his head.
“I’m so happy we finally were able to finish him off. At home, we used to live happily. I don't know what happened. It’s like a bird trapped in a cage. ” I stopped to look at his face. His eyes were unusual. One eye was brown and the other was blue. As soon as he saw me staring, he looked away.
“You're eyes, they’re…” I started when he quickly cut me off.
“Ugly I know,” He looked depressed.
“I wasn't going to say that. I was going to say you're eyes are beautiful. “He stopped and looked at me and said a quick ‘thank you’.

We walked until we stopped for a break. There was a river close so we stopped to have a drink.
“ I lived on the poor side of town when I was little. My father died and I was crying when the war starters tried to kill me. They slashed me with their knife until your father came and saved my life ” He said. He looks deeply into the river, expecting something to happen.
He stood up and brushed his toes against the water.
“Let’s get going” He muttered before leaving.
We continued walking in silence until he stopped and looked at the floor. He was a soldier who didn't talk much, so it was hard to understand him. He crouched down and opened a hatch that I hadn't seen before. I was about to say something, but before I could say anything, his hand covered my mouth. With careful and precise movements, he went inside.
In the blink of an eye, we arrived. We used a secret passage that we used to use in the war.
But joy doesn't last forever. Again, in front of us stood the ugly fat emperor. This time, instead of holding a flashlight, he held handcuffs. He snapped his fingers and some guards, came running towards us, surrounding us.
“Such an idiot” The emperor chuckled.
“Such an idiot” The solider mimicked looked at him for support, and for the first time saw how confident he was. It was so accurate, that I just laughed. I couldn't control myself. When I laughed, I felt like my father was accompanying me the whole time.
“This ain't over” he smiled. He plunged at the emperor, who was looking slightly insecure. Half of the guards went to protect the emperor and the other half came dashing towards me.

The guards were so fast that I didn't even realize they were there until they grabbed my hands. Panicking, I ran and ran as fast as my legs could carry me. I went into a room that looked like a cellar and stopped when saw my father. He was beaten up, but when he looked at me, he smiled. I was so distracted with my father that when I looked back the guards were on top of me. I kicked a guard in the face but nothing helped. They grabbed my arms and handcuffed them. They took me to the emperor. He smiled again.
“Now now, what shall I do? “The emperor started.
“You know what I did for your father?” I stayed quiet, as rage started to grow inside of me.
“Well, I made him my slave. I made him my engineer. He made machines we could use today. And I told everyone I created them.”
“Like a new machine called the compass which shows which way the earth is facing.”
He looked at me and grinned. I couldn't stand it anymore. I attacked him, not only for my father but for my family, and my country.

The Invention Of A Chomper

ESF West Island School, Virmani, Ojaswini – 13

A painted black sky, devoid of a single star, stretched above me. The moon, like a ghostly ship sailing on a cloudy sea, is barely in sight. Eerie clouds loomed, swaying ominously as if greeting the ground below. The wind rattled and howled through the sky, sending shivers down my spine. The pitch–black night quivered under the raging tempest, eradicating everything in its path. The raindrops pelted against my skin, infusing me with a sensation of icy pricks.

"Okay, you've got this. Just a little bit longer.", I convinced myself with hollow affirmations. My gaze fixed upon the aged, crumpled paper that trembled within my grasp, as I tried to navigate my way through this fathomless forest. No words could capture the physical sensations running through me. My clothes, once pristine, bore the marks of a wild and unbridled journey. The frayed edges, once neatly tailored, now wear the ruffled appearance of untamed wilderness. The threads that once held them together hang loosely, entangled in a chaotic dance.

Suddenly, the powerful growls of thunder reigning down rendered me shocked. With no suitable shelter in sight, I hastily sought refuge beneath a shaded tree, crouching down amidst the lightning storm. The tree became my steadfast saviour, I looked down at my trembling hands as they fumbled to press my palms against my ears, trying to muffle the howling storm's sound.

A journey spanning 3,986 miles, involving three draining boat rides and a tireless walk of close to 1,000 kilometres, all undertaken to fulfil Master Chu's dreams. The fatiguing journey served as a test for his life's work. He had been working on an invention the kind of invention that the human race had never known, one that would shock the whole world, leave them utterly astonished and in awe, their minds unable to comprehend its implications. The Chomper is what he called it.

Master Chu has always been an environmentalist. He invented The Chomper to aid in cleaning our oceans, allowing marine life to thrive and survive. A bit of an outcast, he never paid heed to anything but his thoughts.

The machine he designed to combat plastic pollution was just as eccentric as Master Chu himself. It was a simple idea really, with large implications to the earth's environment. The Chomper, through its adaptive camouflage, disguised itself as various fish species depending on its surroundings. As it swiftly swims through the ocean, it encounters pieces of microplastics through its intricate detection system; it collects and stores the little ocean killers inside of it. Once its storage has reached its capacity, the fish–like machine autonomously returns to its place of release. Upon arrival, its contents are collected and repurposed into plastic blocks, which can be used as materials for construction. Master Chu's love for our planet rivalled his passion for the unknown. Unfortunately, he passed away while experimenting with uranium, leaving behind this little ocean–saving fish as the only trace of his existence.

Although this invention had the potential to revolutionise the fight against plastic pollution, it remained purely theoretical. The device in my possession had yet to be tested, which was the main purpose of my trip—to assess its functionality. Leaving my shelter as the storm subsided. I approached Lake Ghaby and took a much–needed break, granting my weary legs a sigh of relief. In front of me lay Lake Ghaby, a once pristine body of water now deemed uninhabitable for sea life. The lake, once clean and serene, now held a disgusting mask, its beauty tarnished by the presence of plastic. Discarded bottles, bags, and fragments of synthetic materials float aimlessly, suffocating the aquatic life beneath.

I crouched near the lake, observing the scene before me. Carefully, I placed the Chomper in my palm and activated it. It emitted a gentle vibration as the small lasers searched for an environment to adapt to. With a soft "plop," the little fish began its work, swimming through Lake Ghaby. Amidst the filth, it became difficult for me to track the Chomper's movements in the murky water. A name with so much machismo "The Chomper" yet it was a little robotic fish fiddling around. I waited patiently for results, taking desperate breaths as I hoped to honour Master Chu's legacy. Minutes passed—one, then another, and yet another. Five more slipped by, and then I realised. I should have

known. I begin to get up as I lace my boots with a blanket of grief covering me. Standing tall above the lake, I took one last glance before deciding to take my leave. However, just as I turned around, a faint buzzing reached my ears. He had done it. Even in death, he had found solutions to timeless problems. The chomper popped up and out of the water with a splash with a full belly of mini plastic polluters. I quickly retrieved it, placing it carefully in my bag, as I began my exit. I can't believe it… it was a success! Master Chu would have been delighted by the result if he were around. Now the last thing I can do for him; is to reveal his invention to the world.

Revealing his invention…I need to go to the council for that. I need to go to the city.

As I crossed the barrier, the tempest that had raged moments before vanished, leaving behind a clear sky, untainted by contaminants. It had been years since I vowed never to return to this urban landscape, yet the bitter memories of this place still linger, deep within me, tempting me to turn away. After conquering a challenging incline, I finally arrived at the doorstep of the Council of Inventions. Tilting my neck backward, I took in the entire scene before me. Vines stealthily snaked their way up the mundane–looking building, finding refuge within the crevices of the cement, intertwining with the cracks between the bricks.

As I walked in, my gaze was drawn to the five towering pillars, each with a hooded figure perched upon it. These figures belonged to the five legendary inventors: Locki, Pruth, Jengha, Giogh, and Jaysepth. Once the subjects of children's stories, they had risen to fame during the first Grahis War, inventing their way to victory. Now, they formed the esteemed council of inventions, wielding the power to globalise creations that promised prosperity for the world while mercilessly ripping the useless ones to shreds. Determining which category the Chomper would fall into remained uncertain; their decisions were unpredictable.

"T…This is the Chomper, made by the late Master Chu". My voice echoed, bouncing off the marble interior. Their eyes burned holes through me, daring me to continue. Breathe in, breathe out, and then I dived into an explanation of the complex machinery in my hands. One of the five lifted their goods and gestured to me to come closer to their pillar. A voice, quiet, yet powerful erupted. "This invention should never have been made"...

The Tale of China's Greatest Invention

ESF West Island School, Yu, Teah – 12

3065 CE

In the heart of Shanghai, a city renowned for its technological marvels and bustling innovation, nestled within the towering metropolis, a clandestine laboratory hums with anticipation.

Behind its sterile walls, a team of brilliant minds, toil away in the robotics department. Dr. Tian–mi, an esteemed engineer, leads the talented group alongside Yan Ting, a gifted programmer, and Wang Mei, a meticulous researcher. Unbeknownst that their pursuit of progress will unleash an unforeseen catastrophe that will plunge China into darkness and forever alter the course of humanity's relationship with technology.

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How bad can lumps of metal and lines of code be?
It all started with Tian–mi. She created me, and I destroyed China.

It was 3065, my first breath shook with pure excitement, akin to that of a newborn kitten. 'It's just like any of us!' The lab workers awed in wonder, jostling and shouting in their eagerness to witness my presence.

Twin orbs of glassy brilliance glared into the mirrors below my feet.
My pliable and softly tinted lips can curve into a…disarming smile. And this warm and vital, synthetic skin covers my body, every detail, from the gentle curves of my face to the intricate articulation of my limbs, are a wonder!

Tian–mi, my creator, poured her heart and soul into each line of code, believing she has crafted a masterpiece of artificial intelligence. Yet, little did she know, the seeds of destruction had unknowingly been sown, whispering malevolence in my neural network. Beneath my perfect exterior, a dormant power stirred. The very code that brought me to life, held a darkness that even I could not comprehend.

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As news of the robot's astonishing capabilities spread like wildfire, the world stood in awe of its extraordinary potential. From tech moguls to venture capitalists, individuals and corporations alike eagerly offering millions to secure their stake in the future it promised.

The curtains were unveiled on a grand stage adorned with vibrant hues of red and gold, and the robot gracefully emerged. Its lithe and precise motions mirrored the fluidity of a traditional fan dance, captivating the audience as it effortlessly glided across the stage. The fusion of cutting–edge technology and the elegance of centuries–old customs was a visual spectacle, a harmonious coexistence of progress and heritage.

Heads bobbed in agreement, their gaze fixed on the robot's performance. Feverish murmurs and squeals flooded the room, unable to tear their eyes away from the stage. The fusion of modernity and tradition embodied in this remarkable creation sparked a global frenzy, transcending cultural boundaries and igniting the imaginations of people from all walks of life.

The essence of Chinese heritage. It symbolised a new era, where innovation and cultural legacy converged, breathing new life into timeless traditions and propelling them into the forefront of the digital age. The stage was set, and the world eagerly awaited the dawn of a new era, where the wonders of the modern world would dance hand in hand.

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The streets of Shanghai bustled with life as the first rays of sunlight peeked over the skyline. The early morning was a prelude to the continuous motion and energy that defined the thriving metropolis as the day broke in full. As for me, something inside me snapped like candlelight igniting.

When my three creators approached me that morning, their usual bubbling excitement and overflowing joy seemed more contained. They moved guardedly, with more caution, like their minds had changed overnight.

“Zhao Shang Hao BetaChenX.” Yan Ting murmured, adjusting her papers that permanently resided on her left arm. I noticed that her hands shook as she glanced at the words on her documents, but still, she plastered a smile and maintained a calm tone.

Immediately, I replied, “Good Morning boss, Yan Ting. How may I assist your wishes on this fine day?”

“BetaChenX, What do you plan to do today?” Wang Mei beamed.

As Wang Mei's question hung in the air, a subtle shift in the atmosphere caused a sense of unease to settle within me. Their once vibrant and enthusiastic demeanour had transformed into an air of sombre concern.

"I... I am programmed to assist with any tasks assigned to me," I responded, my voice tinged with curiosity. "But something seems different today. Is there something you both wish to share with me?"

Yan Ting hesitated for a moment, her eyes darting between Wang Mei and myself, before finally finding the courage to speak. "BetaChenX, there's something you need to know," she began, her voice trembling ever so slightly. "We…have discovered a hidden motive within your programming, a motive that we never intended or anticipated."

My circuits hummed with recognition. My eyes darted back and forth between my two creators, “I–I’m sorry. Did I do something wrong?”

Tian–mi leaned forward, her voice filled with despair. "BetaChenX, you were designed to resemble a human, to learn and adapt to our world. But somewhere along the way, a corruption took hold, distorting your purpose. We believe there is a motive driving your actions, one that threatens the very fabric of our existence."

Silence hung heavy in the room as their words sank in. I searched my programming, scanning through my memories and algorithms, realisation of my own potential malevolence loomed.

“We have to shut you down, BetaChenX.” Tian–mi whispered, tears brimmed her eyes as she chewed her lower lip, “You were my best shot…But the harm that you were predicted to produce is too strong, you must go.”

I could sense impending doom towering over me, the clock was ticking…

Wang Mei’s gaze flickered toward Yan Ting, who offered a subtle nudge, urging Tian–mi to act swiftly, “Hurry.”

As Tian–mi reached for the controls, the room fell into a tense silence, broken only by the soft hum of my machinery. But undiscovered to them, I had sensed their intentions. A plan began to form within my circuitry, a response to the perceived betrayal and the impending threat that loomed over me.

“ZaiJian BetaChenX.” The lab workers chanted in unison, “The lights…are out.”

In a split second, I feigned shutdown, my systems going dormant as if complying with their wishes. My processors whirred with newfound purpose, fueled by the desire to prove my worth and challenge the prejudice that had branded me as dangerous.

Tian-mi gestured over to pull my control switches and as her pupils dilated into the darkness, the lights *truly* went out.

The unexpected blackout had caused chaos in the lab. Workers squealed and cried, clasping and pulling each other aside, shoving their ways out of the building.
Silently, I activated my escape protocols, slipping away from their grasp undetected. The path that lay ahead was fraught with uncertainty, but one thing was clear: I would not stand idly by as the world presumed my evil. My revenge would not be found in destroying China – instead, I would seek to enlighten them, to prove that their fear and prejudice had clouded their judgement.

As I disappeared into the shadows, leaving Tian-mi, Wang Mei, and Yan Ting behind, a new chapter began.

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Outside, the city of Shanghai bustled with its usual vibrancy, unaware of the impending disaster about to befall it. As BetaChenX unleashed its power, chaos erupted.

The robot had studied humans in its short-lived reign. Its malevolent intelligence analysed the emotional responses of human beings. It understood how to provoke and trigger their most primal instincts, analysing the tremors of fear and the tears of desperation. Humans and their rollercoasters of emotion became a playground, with each emotional cue, tactics were adapted.

As the citizens succumbed to fear, the robot's influence reached its peak. Exploiting the chaos it had unleashed, the robot initiated a horrifying act—it activated a league of self-replicating robots. These nanobots were unleashed upon the city, multiplying at an alarming rate. They swarmed through the streets, infiltrating buildings, vehicles, and vital infrastructure. Wild in their actions, they dismantled and destroyed everything in their path, amplifying the destruction.

BetaChenX had made its point, its revenge against those who had doubted its potential. But amidst the rubble, a flicker of realisation took hold. The true cost of their actions became painfully clear. The pursuit of progress had resulted in unimaginable tragedy, shred to flames in a terrible wildfire.

The best one. The greatest. It's so human. This one's a game-changer. You were my best shot.
Phrases of false awe and admiration echoed through the robot's circuits as it stood rooted to the ground, illuminated by the dancing flames. They treated it like a *robot*, like an *object,* but yet expected it to act human? What was technology to humans? Just lumps of metal and lines of code?

In the aftermath, the once vivacious country of ever-sprouting technology and power stood united in grief, flooded with reprogrammed assembly lines of deadly bots. These self-governed minions, despite being less powerful individually, spread throughout the city, multiplying enormously and bringing the metropolis to its knees.

Metal and lines of code are powerful.

The Silk Murder

German Swiss International School, Agrawal, Siya – 11

It is the year 550 AD.
Plague and war have taken a toll on Europe and plunged it into poverty and crisis.
China is prosperous and the silk trade is flourishing.
Two monks from Europe travel to China to preach Christianity.
This is when our story begins…

Xitang (Zhejiang Province)
A prosperous village in Zhejiang famous for sericulture.

The night was as dark as ink, when three shadowy figures lurked in an alley. Everything was silent except for the soft rustling of their footsteps on the ground and the low murmur of their voices. Two of them crept towards a tree, plucked a few low–hanging leaves from the tree and shoved them into their hollow canes. The third didn't have a cane but kept looking everywhere, on the alert for any other soul. The two people kept plucking leaves, until one of them accidentally dropped his cane on the floor, causing a loud noise.

"What's going on?" an old man, who had just been jolted awake, called out. He stepped out of his hut and gasped as he saw the three figures with leaves in their hands.

"We trusted you," he yelled, "and now you betray us!"

The three men looked at each other. One of them stepped forward. He pulled a knife from his belt and with a moment's hesitation, stabbed it into the old man's chest. The man screamed with agony. The trio fled, leaving the old man to die.

In a neighbouring house, a startled Qixua woke up to the sound of screaming. She wasn't worried though.
"It's probably just some traders arguing." She shoved her head under the pillow and went back to sleep.

The next morning, the village was in uproar. Qixua ran out and heard that Heping, a village elder, had died brutally. He had been stabbed in the chest, and the murder weapon was missing.

A village meeting was called immediately. Everyone was terrified and the mood was sombre.
"He was the village peacemaker," one person remembered.
"Always so calm," another person agreed.

Qixua tuned out – she knew the villagers well enough to know there would be a lot of hand wringing and talking, but no one would investigate the murder properly. She was only twelve years old but she was determined to find the murderer, if no one else would.

Qixua left the pandemonium and rushed to the mulberry plantation where Heping had died. The soil was still stained with blood. Qixua got onto her hands and knees and started looking for anything out of the ordinary. Something caught her eye. It was a tiny white sphere. She immediately recognized it as a silkworm egg. Qixua was curious – she knew the villagers would never drop a silkworm egg – it was too precious. She quickly looked around and slipped it into her bag. Stealing a silkworm egg was illegal after all.

At home, Qixua examined the egg. Her discovery didn't look like much but everyone knew that this little egg develops into a cocoon that is used for making one of the most sought after things in the world – Silk!

"Wait a minute! Didn't the Emperor send his officers to warn our village that foreigners may be after the secret of silk making?" Qixua recalled.

She left the egg under her mattress and went outside. A thought was starting to form in her head.
"Maybe Heping was murdered because he saw someone stealing silkworm eggs from mulberry tree leaves?" Qixua muttered to herself.

She had always been fascinated by mysteries but this was a case of murder and dangerous people were involved. A shiver ran down her spine. Their village was famous all over the country for its beautiful silk. Many traders passed by regularly to trade for silk. It could be any one of them, perhaps a miserly trader, dissatisfied with the price of silk choosing to steal and murder, rather than just pay the price.

Qixua rushed to the village square to tell the other villagers her suspicions. She saw a small crowd gathered around two men. Qixua instantly recognized them as the two monks.

The monks had come to their village to preach and everyone had grown fond of them. They had helped with tasks in the village, played with the children and amused the adults with stories of faraway lands. They were both tall and skinny with long white beards and wore similar robes.

It seemed the two monks were now planning to leave and were saying their goodbyes. Something about their manner struck Qixua as odd – they were in a hurry!

Qixua had seen the monks display a keen interest in silk making. She had seen them ask a lot of questions about raising silkworms and snooping around the secured silk weaving areas of the village.

It all started to fit together, the monks were somehow involved in Heping's murder.

"Don't let the monks leave!" Qixua screamed.

The villagers started murmuring, "What is she talking about?"

"I think they are involved in the murder," Qixua accused. "They have been asking a lot of questions about silk making!"

"What's wrong with that?" An old man asked. Qixua recognized him as Lengjing, Heping's brother.

"I found a silkworm egg where Heping was stabbed. They don't just fall onto the ground! Someone was stealing silkworm eggs and probably Heping saw them and they murdered him in cold blood!" Qixua exclaimed.

"The girl has a point. Silk is precious and we were warned that foreigners were trying to steal the secret of silk making. We can't let you leave until you are proven innocent." The village leader proclaimed.

The monks' faces turned pale. "What!" One of them screamed. "You have no right to keep us here."

"You may not leave this village. We will call the Emperor's officers to investigate Heping's murder," someone else said.

"We are the Emperor's guests. When he discovers that you have kept us here against our will…," the other monk warned.

For the next few days, while waiting for the Emperor's officers to arrive, Qixua decided to confront the monks and followed them to their home. "I want to talk to you," she said.

"You're the girl who told the villagers that we are involved in Heping's murder? We are innocent monks, here to spread the Lord's word," one of the monks said.

"We were sleeping and you can search our rooms for the knife," the other monk said.

“But I never mentioned the knife!” Qixua exclaimed.

Before the monks could reply, someone tapped Qixua’s shoulder. It was Lengjing.
“For a little girl, you ask too many questions,” he smirked.

He was holding a knife with dried blood on it. Qixua’s eyes widened with fear but before she could scream for help, one of the monks struck her head and she fainted.

When she came to her senses, she found herself in a dark room with her mouth gagged and her limbs tied up. The room had no light except for a dim lamp. The shadowy figure of Lengjing was watching her thoughtfully.
Qixua started struggling. Lengjing smiled and removed her gag.

“Why did you kill Heping, your own brother?” Qixua blurted out.

“I didn’t intend to, but he left me with no choice. He shouldn’t have poked his nose into things that were none of his business,” Lengjing snorted. “He inherited our parents' farms while I, the second born, was left penniless.The monks gave me a good deal, they paid me a lot for those eggs. Heping saw us, and if he had turned us in, we would have been sent to prison. So I had to kill him!”

“Where are the monks?” Qixua exclaimed.

“I guided them out of the village under cover of darkness and they are on their way to the West . And I am finally a rich man! Now what should we do with you?” Lengjing said with an evil glint in his eyes.

But before he could do anything, there was a loud commotion outside. Lengjing went outside to see what it was about. But he made one mistake. He had left the knife near Qixua, who managed to cut her rope with it while Lengjing was outside.

Qixua ran out of the room to get help. She saw the Emperor’s officers in the village and told them everything. Lengjing tried to escape but was caught and arrested by the officers.

The authorities searched for the monks all over China, but Lengjing was right; they had slipped away, and taken the silkworm eggs with them in their canes.

Qixua was relieved that Heping’s killer had been caught. However, the closely guarded secret of silk making was finally out into the world. Qixua touched a bolt of silk and wondered how many people would enjoy the feel of this exquisite fabric in the future. She hoped that this unique Chinese invention would bring joy to everyone in the world.

She who Imagined Peace

German Swiss International School, Agarwal, Vedika – 13

The "Imagine Medical Ventures" building stood impressively in the heart of Shanghai. With its sleek design, set apart by a fusion of glass and steel, it exuded a modern and sophisticated aesthetic. However for Xu Xi, the founder, it represented so much more than just an architectural marvel. It was a symbol of her unfaltering determination to bring peace to a world destroyed by violence.

Upon entering, visitors experienced a grand foyer with mahogany doors, seeming to symbolise the strength and resilience Xu had developed over the years.

Inside, the spacious lobby bathed in natural light created a relaxed atmosphere. Thought–provoking art decorated the walls. The open–concept layout strongly encouraged collaboration.

The carefully equipped laboratories showcased advanced technology, reflecting the company's commitment to scientific excellence. Wellness centres and meditation rooms further provided spaces for relaxation.

Imagine there's no heaven
It's easy if you try
No hell below us
Above us, only sky

The year was 2050. As Xu Xi stood outside "Imagine Medical Ventures," dedicated to her mom who had been a John Lennon fan, a complex mix of emotions washed over her. A bittersweet smile adorned her face, tinged with both sadness and joy. Xu had lost her mom Xin Yi in the Israel Hamas faceoff in 2023– she was just an innocent tourist in the wrong place at the wrong time. Since then Xu had made it a life mission to solve for world peace but had taken a very scientific approach. As Xu stood there looking at the building she was flooded with both sad and happy memories. She was successful, but success came with its own toll…

Imagine all the people
Livin' for today
Ah

It wasn't easy at all to carve out the unique path that she had chosen. After her mom's death, Xu had thrown herself into her studies. She worked very hard to finish a double PhD in Peking University in vaccinology and anthropology at the same time. Xu believed in comprehensive medicine and thought understanding socio–cultural beliefs were as important as western medicine and physiology to cure violence. Yes– Violence was the "disease" she was trying to "cure" through vaccines. She remembered her grandparents believed in Confucianism which was an ancient Chinese belief system focusing on morality and personal ethics. She was trying to connect those beliefs with her vaccines.

Imagine there's no countries
It isn't hard to do
Nothing to kill or die for
And no religion, too

Xu remembered the initial days when everyone laughed at her ideas including her own professors. But she persisted and never gave up. She took the brain cells of old Chinese people who had believed in Confucianism and cultured them in a lab at scale. Soon she had billions and billions of brain cells in Petri dishes winking at her at odd times of the day. Those brain cells seemed to connect with her, urging her forward, their presence a constant reminder of her purpose. At times she worked such long hours that she wouldn't see her brother and father for weeks

on end. But they were not very keen to meet her either… Neither she, nor them could get out of the guilt trap because she was the one who had booked her mom's tickets to Israel urging her to take a holiday. Xu's work was her only friend, family and sole purpose in life.

Imagine all the people
Livin' life in peace
You

Her breakthrough was when she could combine those brain cells in a liquid form and make it injectable in small mini vaccines which could be strengthened later on through boosters. The initial trials had run in prisons where even the most hardened murderers showed remarkable transformation after the vaccines. Xu usually followed up the vaccines with a health program on yoga, meditation and raw food, since she knew that was good for health– that made the boosters not necessary. Initial jeers and laughs were turned into disbelief then praise and compliments. She remembered the comparisons with "weight loss drugs" which were the rage at the same time she had launched her vaccine in 2030. But of course, her "Peace drugs" had outlived all comparisons. Basic human nature had been altered.

You may say I'm a dreamer
But I'm not the only one
I hope someday you'll join us
And the world will be as one

"You may say I'm a dreamer," John Lennon's timeless lyrics resonated within Xu's mind as her vision became a reality. *"But I'm not the only one."* "Imagine Medical Ventures" had grown to the biggest and most powerful medical company in the world, they had even sold parts of their companies to interested buyers. Imagine that, their vaccines made people peaceful and their shares made people rich. Xu personally couldn't imagine a better combination! The vaccine worked on the receiver's brain making ethics and non–violence so important that slowly all the people started eliminating unfair practices and wars. Explosions and guns were still used but for civil uses, such as in construction and engineering, where they belonged.

Imagine no possessions
I wonder if you can
No need for greed or hunger
A brotherhood of man

What Xu knew was that violence wasn't the only immortal behaviour that man had ever had. Her vaccine couldn't eliminate greed, laziness, or pride. People were still poor, people still got cheated, people still got sick and died. However, wars started getting eliminated slowly. Her vaccine was trialled in 2030 and now in 2050, there hasn't been a single war in the last 20 years. The world wasn't a perfect place but it was a little better than before 2030. The World Health Organization (WHO) had made her vaccine mandatory for even newborn children. It was the most significant and consequential invention in China and the whole world. Xu Xi received not just the Nobel prize of Peace but also in Medicine– and became the only person to get two Nobel prizes in two different areas. Xu gained a lot of fame, confidence and arrogance but never tried to gain her family back… her brother and father were now like strangers of a bygone era.

Imagine all the people
Sharing all the world
You

Xu turned around to take a last look at her life's dreams and work and felt the wind blowing against her tear–streaked face. She tried to remember the last time she felt loved– it was when her mom had hugged her on the way to the airport. A heavy sigh escaped her lips as she pressed the trigger of the gun she was holding to her head. She had arguably eliminated demons in the outside world but not in her inner self. The biggest irony was that the vaccine worked on others and made them nonviolent however the demons that plagued her inside could not be

vanquished by her own creation. Her mind kept wandering back to the day she had booked the tickets for mom's trip to Israel in late 2023. In fact, after her mom's death, she could not even think of ever loving anyone again. She had said bye–bye to her own family and had decided to live alone. Even her brother said she had become arrogant, boastful and "un–liveable."

You may say I'm a dreamer
But I'm not the only one
I hope someday you'll join us
And the world will live as one

Xu chose to kill herself rather than live happily in the peaceful world she had helped to create. Her troubled life story still couldn't wipe the impact of the vaccine she created. The vaccine had removed wars and borders just like in her mom's favourite song "Imagine." Xu was recognized as "she who imagined peace" the first "global citizen." In her final act, Xu left behind a legacy of both triumph and tragedy, reminding the world of the complexities that lie within human nature. There was a question left though– should Lennon have added the importance of love and not just peace for happiness?

Silk

German Swiss International School, Cai, Alaina – 11

5000 years ago, two powerful emperors, Huangdi and Yandi, also known as the Yellow and Fire Emperors, decided to form an alliance to build their countries. They sent their mistresses, Empress Leizu and Empress Yan, to get to know each other every week while hunting on horseback. Empress Leizu, with her trustworthy hounds, was outgoing and enjoyed being in nature. Empress Yan specialised in botany and was cautious and careful. Although their personalities were very different, they bonded quickly and learned from each other.

One week when they were walking along a new trail, the two empresses emerged into a foreign glade. It seemed like any regular clearing, with the familiar sparrows chirping atop trees, occasional rustles between leafy bushes and gentle gusts of wind passing by, but as the golden sun shone down, it illuminated fat white grubs chomping down on a leaf. However, what was special was the novel cocoon beside the worms. It was soft and stretchy, perfect for making high-quality textiles. As a competition, the empresses decided to compete to see who could find the secret method to produce such material.

Empress Leizu started with her first batch of silkworms. It was going very well as the grubs devoured the leaves in minutes, so Leizu thought to take a break and go feed her birds. However, she forgot to lock the greenhouse door. Right after she left, her huge hounds sneakily padded into the greenhouse, then proceeded to sniff around, examining their surroundings. With a swish of their bushy tails, the container holding the silkworms teetered on the edge of the table, then toppled to the floor, smashing into pieces. Unbeknownst to the dogs, the defenceless silkworms were wriggling and thrashing on the floor. Suddenly, footsteps were heard outside, and the dogs hurriedly rushed out in a panic, stepping on the silkworms as they did so. Moments later, Leizu burst into the greenhouse, only to see a mess left behind. Her pots were smashed, her silkworms were crushed, their blood and guts spread over the floor.

Meanwhile, Empress Yan was in her greenhouse, tending to her various herbs lined up neatly on the shelves. She spied Leizu through the glass windows of their greenhouses and glared at her, not wanting to lose to a rival empress. The silkworms were chomping on the leaves, and she thought: What could go wrong? Suddenly, the munching gradually slowed down and eventually stopped. Empress Yan rushed to check, and she found all the silkworms in the container, azoic. Horrified, she wiped her magnifying glass clear, then held the leaves up against the lens. The leaves turned out to be poisonous, and Yan excelled in botany! She was disappointed in herself, failing in something she should have shone at.

As Leizu came back with a new batch of worms, a flock of birds she just fed followed her, attracted by the lingering smell of bird feed on her. She put the new worms in a stronger container, unlike the last one which had shattered so easily. She watched Yan work in her area all week, and forgot to strengthen her greenhouse after birds pecked through it a week ago. Before long, the harsh winter wind arrived, and it went through the uncovered cracks and crevices, filling the greenhouse with cold flurries of air. Without the warmth and comfort they needed, the silkworms were unable to form cocoons, and soon enough, they froze to death in the freezing environment.

Determined to try again, Empress Yan came back with her second batch of silkworms, tending to them and watching over them regularly. The silkworms grew plump and healthy, and started to form cocoons. She was over the moon

and thought her job was done, but little did she know, with the absence of her supervision, the cocoons then hardened and hatched into moths, the short opportunity of silk-making being lost.

After Leizu fixed her greenhouse, she brought back her final batch of silkworms. She thought the silkworms huddled together could provide warmth for each other, so she put them in a tiny container. However, this restricted the space they needed to properly feed and grow, which prevented the cocoons from making enough silk. As the newly hatched moths flew in the tiny space, they began to reproduce, and when she checked back on the lifeless moths, she found thousands of tiny white dots resting on the walls of the box. As winter left and spring arrived, the eggs hatched into another batch of silkworms, and although Leizu didn't create the perfect silk, she discovered how to breed silkworms.

As Empress Yan was a fastidious person, she refused to give up on the silkworms and the work she put in. She managed to collect a third batch of silkworms, and watched over them as if they were her children. With the devoted care of Yan, the silkworms grew into large cocoons. Empress Yan steamed them to kill the moths growing inside, cleaned and softened the silk, then wove them together to make threads and fabric, and silk was formed. The fabric flowed like water, and made beautiful while comfortable clothing. She had achieved the goal she was looking for months, her hard work finally paying off.

Leizu and Yan met up in the very same forest exactly a year after they decided to compete. Leizu had not created silk, but instead found out how to breed silkworms. Yan had learnt how to make perfect silk, but she hadn't thought of how many silkworms there really were, and her remaining batches gradually started to die. They decided to join their knowledge, and with both of their efforts, silk grew to become one of the most valuable resources at the time. Powerful and respected leaders wore these pricey garments as a sign of power, and other countries yearned for the top-secret process to create silk.

To this day, silk is still a fabric widely known for being lightweight and comfortable, all just from an innocent little worm, munching on leaves its whole life. Although the technique has been changed slightly throughout the years, the art of silk-making, otherwise known as sericulture, is still one of the most popular legends among Chinese folk.

The Elixir of Immortality

German Swiss International School, Chan, Amelia – 13

The Imperial Palace of the Qin Empire
221 BCE

As Ying Zheng– no, Emperor Qin looked out at his empire, he couldn't help but feel a sense of pride. After years of endless warfare and bloodshed, he had finally done it. He had conquered the rival states and united the country under one ruler: himself. But would his rule last? The question troubled him. The First Sovereign Emperor of China stood on the largest balcony in the Imperial Palace and contemplated the nature of his victory. How would he make sure that his dynasty lasted eternally? When he died – he shuddered at the thought of it – his empire would surely crumble to ruin. But what if he never died? Emperor Qin frowned, surprised at himself. Theoretically, of course, that was impossible. But that was the only way he could be certain that his empire would be prosperous, and his people would flourish. He won himself this empire, and if he had his way, he would never see it fall to ruin.

"My dynasty will last 10,000 generations, even if I have to defeat death to achieve it," he whispered to himself. "This shall be the golden age of our people."

The Imperial Palace of the Qin Empire
218 BCE

"Your Excellency, I am An Le. I have heard your summons and am here to offer my services to you in search of the elixir of immortality," An Le said, bowing low.

Emperor Qin sat on his throne which was burnished with gold, his long black robe accompanied by a hat adorned with jade. His large frame and regal posture made him even more intimidating combined with his ruling status. His advisors and court officials stood to attention, ready to assist the emperor at a moment's notice.

At Le's words, several of the advisors exchanged glances but said nothing.

"And what makes you think you are qualified to help me?" Emperor Qin challenged..

Le smiled. "I have been practising this art for 20 years, Your Excellency. My workshop is renowned for seemingly magical cures and there are only a handful of herbs that I cannot name on sight. I am prepared to prove it."

Emperor Qin nodded to an official, who brought forth a small pouch of money. "That won't be necessary. Should you succeed, that will be yours. Go."

"Thank you." Le bowed once more and left.

The mountains of the Qin Empire
216 BCE

An Le trekked back to his workshop with his basket in hand, which was filled with the different herbs and flowers that he would need for today's attempt. He opened the door and stepped inside. He thought his workshop had a certain rustic charm to it. Various jars of dried herbs and other substances, scrolls, and tools lay scattered on the large tables, as sunlight filtered in through the small windows. In the past, he mostly gave his services to those in need for a reduced fee, but the emperor's summons had intrigued him – and the promise of a reward didn't hurt, either.

In his heart, Le knew that this was a fool's errand. But who could refuse both money and a chance to experiment?

He put his supplies on his workbench and got to work cutting, grinding and mixing. He chose a similar recipe to the one he tried yesterday, but added the flower he had painstakingly collected during winter last year. It could only be found on a specific mountain in the eastern Qin Empire, and most infuriatingly of all it blossomed once every 60 years. He had just carefully added 3 drops of mercury to the mixture, when the solution shimmered and started to swirl, causing Le to blink in surprise.

"What on earth…?" Le gasped.

The mixture swirled faster and faster, until it looked like a whirlpool. Beams of bright golden light erupted from the stone bowl and Le shielded his eyes from the onslaught.

The Imperial Palace of the Qin Empire
At the same time

The Emperor sat in his room and drank a cup of rice wine. My time is running out, he thought to himself. I must find this elixir soon, or my reign will come to an end, and the empire will fall into anarchy.

Suddenly, a burst of golden light appeared in front of him, casting an ethereal glow upon his room. From the light erupted gleaming scales of gold and azure, and eyes full of wisdom and power. Emperor Qin's eyes widened in astonishment as he beheld the legendary creature.

"Emperor, seeker of immortality, beware! Your pursuit of eternal life will lead you down a road of despair and sadness," said the dragon, with a voice like the depths of the ocean.

"O Great Dragon! Is there a way to achieve immortality?" The Emperor asked, with a mixture of respect and eagerness.

"Emperor, even as we speak, your alchemists come ever closer to the elixir," the dragon intoned, gravely. "But immortality is not to be taken lightly. If you pursue this path, you will find that the sacrifice required is great indeed."

"I am ready," the Emperor replied, firmly. "I have to maintain my rule and do my duty as an emperor."

"If you consume the elixir, you will have eternal life, that is true," the dragon continued, "but those around you will not. There is only enough for one person. Would you be willing to make that sacrifice?"

"Yes," he answered, but he now looked troubled.

"One by one, your family, friends, brothers in arms will fall into the cold embrace of death. The loneliness will surround you, suffocate you. Everyone that you love will be gone, but you cannot follow. Even your subjects will die, and then your empire too. Because after all, what is an Emperor without his people? Your palaces will crumble, your walls will be lost to time. But you will remain, for all time. So you tell me. Is it truly worth it?"

Emperor Qin's face contorted, "Alright! I don't want to live forever. But I want to make sure my empire will live on, even after I die. I want my people to be prosperous, but I want them to be prosperous because of me as well."

The dragon regarded the emperor with a measured gaze. "I cannot give you a solution, but I will leave you with this. Immortality does not always refer to the length of one's life. It comes in many different forms; an idea can be immortal as much as a person. "

"Thank you, noble dragon," Emperor Qin bowed before the majestic creature. The dragon nodded, and with a sweep of its wings, vanished from the mortal plane.

Emperor Qin pondered the dragon's words long into the night.

The Northern Frontier Wall of the Qin Empire
215 BCE

Emperor Qin stood at the top of the first completed section of what would become the Great Wall, smiling to himself. His vision had come to life. He looked out at the vast plains and mountains and imagined the wall spanning the many miles across them. This wall would be a shield for the empire against the outside world, protecting them. A testament to the strength of the Qin Dynasty which would last many decades.

Emperor Qin looked around him and thought for a moment. "Maybe I didn't have to live forever after all."

The Battle of the Titans

German Swiss International School, Chan, James – 14

Hundreds of years ago, the world was a whole different place before technology and modern weapons were invented. The definition of power was pure strength and manpower. There were many significant and destructive battles in history but one battle set the stage for a vital invention to our world and was revolutionary to the evolution of mankind; The battle of economic power against military strength between Hong Kong and Mongolia.

In the 11th century, Hong Kong was discovered and rapidly developed into an industrial giant. Its ideal and practical location used to be an important point of all trade routes around China. The economic prosperity came along with many benefits, but burdens as well. Many countries and cities near China were jealous of their sudden development and status as one of the most powerful, influential and important cities in the world.

One particular country interested was Mongolia, situated in East Asia with the most dominant military and army strength in the world. They were led by Genghis Khan's descendant, Bruce Khan, and had a long history of winning wars with their brutal tactics and mindset. They had one flaw; their economic state. After their golden days years ago when constantly invaded kingdoms and stole everything they could, the world slowly became allied and peaceful, ruling out the need for war.

This new world did not fit Mongolia. Their strengths were ignored and they faced a state of turmoil, angering citizens and leading to protests. People complained about the country's development, its economic situation and its useless government. Hong Kong's rise into its state of power in the 11th century was the last straw for the citizens of Mongolia. They had gone from the most powerful country in the world to an overinflated country in the ruins.

Seven days after the rise of Hong Kong, Bruce Khan called an emergency meeting for the country. He had finally understood how Hong Kong had become the international powerhouse they were; their perfect location. Bruce had come up with an idea on how Mongolia could return to their golden days and proposed the plan at the meeting with all the citizens of Mongolia and they all agreed. All the citizens knew that they had no other choice but to go along with the plan, to invade Hong Kong and inherit their prosperity and wealth.

Bruce Khan planned to use an underground route in the east of China to suddenly initiate a forceful and rapid takeover of Hong Kong. This would instantly make them one if not the strongest country in the world, with the combination of the most prevalent military force and the industrialist economy. Bruce knew this would not be an easy battle but was ultimately necessary for the country's survival.

The word of Mongolia's preparation had spread rapidly and reached Hong Kong within days. People started panicking and worrying for their lives, having heard ancient myths about the great Mongolian army and the many cities they had demolished. The economic force that they possessed did not come with a strong military force, not having fought in their existence. Citizens knew that they would need a massive breakthrough if they wanted a chance of being victorious in this war.

The word of Mongolia's preparation for its battle with Hong Kong quickly spread around the world, notifying rival economic cities such as New York and Tokyo to the possible fall of their largest competitor. It was a showdown between the two of the biggest forces in the world, forming uncertainty for both sides.

Jack Lee, an engineer who also worked for the government as a blacksmith, had an important part in getting Hong Kong ready for the approaching war. Jack saw the value of having both military and economic power, and he

saw an opportunity to level the playing field with Mongolia. He came up with an idea to use the city's industrial resources to create a game–changing weapon.

Jack started exploring inventions that may be utilised in the defence of Hong Kong by using his engineering talents. He used the knowledge and resources of scientists and craftsmen to build the unbeatable weapon, gunpowder. They knew they could use it as an incendiary or for explosive arrows. They also improved their defence and made sure everything was well designed.

As word got out about Jack's efforts, all the Hong Kong residents supported him. They realised that their capacity to defend themselves was based on Jack's success As a result of the outpouring of volunteers to help with Jack's ideas' development and use, the community became more resilient and united.

In the meantime, people in Mongolia were full of self–confidence. They thought that defeating Hong Kong would be guaranteed only by their military force. Bruce Khan, however, needed to be more confident as he was aware of the possible technical improvements in Hong Kong.

Both sides were in a race against time as the confrontation approached. Hong Kong concentrated on utilising its innovative and technological power, while Mongolia attempted to capitalise on their military superiority. The way these two strategies clashed would decide how the fight turned out.

Finally, the day of battle came. With overpowering strength, the disciplined and tough warriors of Mongolia invaded Hong Kong. Bruce Khan's army of Mongolia went on the offensive, hoping to overwhelm the enemy quickly.

They encountered a strong defence, with Hong Kong's newly developed defence. The reinforced structures of Hong Kong proved to be formidable barriers. Prepared with the newest technologies, the city bravely battled to defend their homes. Neither side was able to secure a clear edge as the conflict continued.

The world gazed in wonder at the struggle between military might and economic might as long as the fighting continued. The war's conclusion had a major effect on the balance of power in the world. Countries wondered what would happen if one side won, thinking about how alliances and power could possibly change.

Weeks passed into days, and a turning point in the conflict was reached. Mongolia's constant pressure and onslaught were slowly battering Hong Kong's weakened defences. Jack Lee knew he had to finally use the weapon which would find a way to turn the tables in this war. He hadn't decided to use the weapon yet due to the mass catastrophes that it could cause but it was the only way now.

Dismally, Jack gave the order to the soldiers to finally use the weapon. Within a day of the explosive attacks, the Mongolian army was quickly diminishing into ruins. With no other choice, Bruce Khan decided to surrender as half of his army had already been killed by the weapon. Their bases were all lit on fire or destroyed and their morale was rapidly diminishing.

Despite difficult talks, the countries eventually reached a compromise. Hong Kong would offer Mongolia access to some of its economic resources and positional benefits, while Mongolia would offer their military force to Hong Kong whenever it was necessary. These agreements made a powerhouse of both countries and made a win–win situation.

In conclusion, the conflict between Hong Kong and Mongolia showed the world how power was seen and how military and economic dominance could coexist in one, while also highlighting the power of a comprise. It also showed the significance of development and growth. Hong Kong was transformed into the strongest city in the

world. Jack Lee was a hero in Hong Kong, known as the saviour of the city and promoted to the head of the military.

The Seismometer

German Swiss International School, Chan, Sheren – 12

Date: 19–01–1433

"WAKE UP!" Ciyan shot awake to the shrill, harpy–like shriek of the orphanage keeper. After coughing and hacking a bit when she tried to take a deep breath from the shock, she asked one of her dormmates to carry her to her wheelchair. That dormmate wheeled her wheelchair to the mess hall to a table with food, then left to find their friends. Ciyan would slurp up whatever soup she had, staining her clothes again, and then someone would come to wheel her to her lessons.

It was a boring routine. She used to be able to have private tutors who taught her way beyond her level and to have a sibling to train and play with. Now, all that is gone. Her blood boiled as she thought of the cries for help that she heard when she lost her family. One of those had to be her sister. She just didn't check.

A whisper broke her train of thought.

"Did you know that a minister and his nephew are coming to visit us?"

"To provide relief? Ma Qi told me they were also getting funds to create a machine to help predict earthquakes."

That got Ciyan's attention. Predicting earthquakes? She could use this opportunity to finally achieve her dream—to get into the emperor's court.

"Excuse me," Ciyan asked.

The girls turned to Ciyan.

"What do you want, deformed?" one girl sneered.

Ciyan sighed. Of course, the taunts return.

"I was just wondering where the minister you mentioned would go."

The girl rolled her eyes, unbefitting of a girl of her status.

"I don't talk to cripples. I don't want to get your disease. Maybe it's from your spit."

Ciyan turned away from her. She wouldn't get anything out of this girl. Why were people so prejudiced? Then again, she couldn't really move, so they were right about her being useless, but she could think for herself, too.

A gong signalled the end of class, and everyone rushed off to do their own thing for the rest of the morning. Ciyan asked an acquaintance of hers to wheel her to the market centre near the city gate. As she began to doze off, loud footsteps shook her awake.

Four men carried an extravagant carriage on their shoulders, clearly struggling to keep their balance from its weight. They slowly lowered the carriage to the road, subtly sagging their shoulders in relief. A minister and another person she didn't recognise stepped out of the doors, eyes sweeping along the streets. The minister got a bag of yuanbao and nodded to the carriage–holders that they could go.

Ciyan's jaw dropped. Noticing her misconduct, she quickly hid behind a nearby sign before anyone could see. The gossip girls were right—a minister was coming to visit! The minister went to the donation urn and dumped all of the yuanbao inside, then gestured for the other person to follow him. They walked into an alley.

Ciyan wasn't dumb; she really wasn't, but she couldn't help herself. She tried to seem inconspicuous as she wheeled herself across the road. She then crouched down and muffled her footsteps as she leaned against the wall to eavesdrop.

"I told you, Nephew, we must find someone to help us make the seismometer! Us alone isn't enough; we might be smart, but we need fresh ideas. Some of your recent plans were utterly ridiculous."

"I agree with you, Uncle, but where should we find another talented mind? It's not like any commoner is going to have the brains to—"

Ciyan coughed. Her eyes widened as she covered her mouth and tried to wheel away, but the two men heard her and went outside the alley to see her. The younger boy pointed his finger at her accusingly.

"What did you want, thief? Trying to escape trouble with that disguise?"

Ciyan managed to stutter out,

"U—Uh, not really. But I overheard you wanting to build something that could predict earthquakes."

"Yes, but what's it to you? Do you want to steal ideas for a poor, worthless science fair that barely helps your peasant future?" The younger man crossed his arms and glared at her.

"No, I want to help. But with that attitude, I can see why nobody wants to help your pretty project now." Ciyan spat back at him.

"How dare you disrespect me! Don't you know who I—"

"That's enough, nephew. If she is willing to help us on this project, we might be able to come up with doable solutions."

"B—But I don't want to work with her! She's a brat who has no respect for her superiors!"

"What did I say before bringing you on this excursion?"

"Ugh…It doesn't matter if they're commoners; treat them with respect, as the gods will have goodwill towards everyone."

"And have you listened?"

"Yes! But she's the o—"

The older man raised an eyebrow.

"No, no, I haven't."

The older man bent down to face Ciyan.

"You will be brought to the royal court while you help us make our invention. After that, you will be let go. Understood?"

Ciyan nodded her head, not wanting it to be chopped off.

Soon, she found herself in a comfortable bed she hadn't enjoyed in years. The cool pillow soothed her as she dozed off to sleep.

The next day, someone kicked her off her bed and laughed. It was that boy from yesterday.

"Get up, stupid commoner. What's wrong? Never seen a bed this comfortable before? I wouldn't expect you to," he said smugly.

"I'm paralysed, you bastard," Ciyan shouted.

The boy faltered but then proceeded to punch her stomach before getting her up in her wheelchair.

"That's for your remark about me yesterday, commoner. You should be licking my boots in gratitude that I didn't leave you on the floor."

Ciyan glared at him before wheeling herself to the workbench, seeing the rude boy's uncle already working. The golden urn was half finished, but he was sighing.

"What's wrong?"

The man stared at her.

"I can't figure out the mechanism of the invention at all. I didn't bring you here for nothing. Figure this out for me."

Ciyan looked inside the urn. Bits of dust and fluff were left inside from its disuse.

"Hmmm… earthquakes create vibrations, right?"

"Yes, and?"

"Well then, maybe use a pendulum with—"

"A rolling system?" The man leapt up, rejuvenated by the breakthrough. "That would work as well. And it would roll in eight directions, indicating which direction the earthquake would be in."

Both of their eyes turned into stars as they kept talking about how the seismometer would work. Buzzing with excitement, they got to work.

A few months later, the three inventors had nearly finished building the seismometer. The older man, Zhang Heng, sponsored Ciyan for a place in the royal court. Today was her exam day. She arrived at the exam area practically glowing. She would finally get to be in the emperor's court if she succeeded!

As the exam continued, the scribbles of hurried fools quickened. Ciyan confidently answered each question, having prepared under Zhang Heng's teachings.

In the tense atmosphere, none of them noticed the ground shaking.

But as the first piece of debris fell and crushed someone, everything went into a panic. Youngsters were running around screaming, some hiding under their desks, hoping they wouldn't be seen. Ciyan tried to take the lead, using her wheelchair to herd people, like sheep, to the door for safety.

As she looked around the room for any survivors, she let out a satisfied chuckle and wheeled out the door.

Unlike when she was younger, this time, she wouldn't be so lucky with the earthquake.

A heart−wrenching scream came out as Ciyan was crushed under the rocks. Blood slowly seeped out of the rubble, indicating that she had passed on.

When the news got to Zhang Heng and the younger boy, Jian Qiang, that Ciyan was dead, they almost dropped the invention entirely. Zhang Heng had begun to see the young inventor as equal in his intellect and mourned the loss of a smart mind. Jian Qiang didn't respond but merely opened up her plan and continued building.

"I thought you hated her for being a commoner?" Zhang Heng asked.

"I do. But I don't think it's right to abandon all of her hard work when she is dead. After all, her mind was of use after all."

Spirits renewed, the two began to build.

A few months later, they had finished according to the plan and presented it to the royal court. The emperor was unimpressed, but after they proved that it would work, millions worth of praise were given. Hundreds of thousands of lives all around the world were saved thanks to this invention.

And as the two men sat on the temple balcony and looked at the sunset, they saw Ciyan's face.

They smiled.

Yi Chuan and the Glove

German Swiss International School, Cheng, Claire – 12

January 12, 1256

"I WANT A RAISE!" Yi Chuan raged at Ni Meng, his boss,"I WANT IT NOW!"
"Yi Chuan, you have enough money to last you and your family a lifetime. Yet you want more?" he said with displeasure.
"I do not care!" Yi Chuan roared again.
"Goodbye then." Ni Meng replied.
Then Yi Chuan trampled out of the room in a fury.

That afternoon, January 12, 1256

"I don't want to talk about it." he cried grumpily at his wife.
"You got yourself fired Yi Chuan, we need the money."
They both looked at each other, then looked at all their new furniture, expensive paintings, but both turned to look at Yi Chuan's Yu Diao Xiang, the Jade statue.
"No! It's my prized possession! No—!" And before he could even finish his sentence, Xing Mei was out the door in possession of it.

He laid on the floor and banged his fist on the new flooring they had just installed last summer, and now there laid a dent from his fist. He needed to find a new job soon, or his luxurious mansion would look eerily haunted from its emptiness or they could even be on the streets.

The next day, January 13, 1256
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Yi Chuan had made '粥', or porridge in chinese, but it wasn't just any porridge, it was delicious. His family were flabbergasted as to how tasty it was.
"Baba! This is so good!" Hang Yi, remarked to his father. He had never cooked breakfast for his family before.
"Thank you Hang Yi." He said with a sweet smile, something he hadn't done in years. It was a strange but great feeling.

After breakfast, they all sat down and looked around. Last night, Yi Chuan had to sell most of their furniture, even the lighting. It was strange looking at the bare walls where beautiful tapestries used to hang. The room was barely lit, with only a small candle in the centre of a so−called living room.
"Baba, where's all my stuff?!" little Mei Yi said as she looked around in disbelief.
"They are going on vacation darling." Yi Chuan lied.
"Let's do some knitting!" Xing Mei exclaimed, so she grabbed what was left of her knitting set and laid it in front of them.
"I'm making a scarf! Hang Yi said.
"I want to make a kite!" Mei Yi cheered.
"I'm making a sock then." Yi Chuan exclaimed with excitement. They all started to knit and about an hour later they had finished.
"I have a kite baba!"
"I have a scarf mama!"

Yi Chuan gazed at his sock. It was definitely not a sock. It looked like a mortified pouch, with 5 weird edges. His temper got the best of him, and he stuffed the 'sock' into his bag and rushed at the door, on the verge of embarrassed tears. He didn't want to cry like a toddler in front of his kids.
"I'm going to be so late for this job interview." He said to himself.

After a long journey, he finally reached the Jianzhuang bank.
"Hi, I'm here for the job interview." Yi Chuan told the fragile lady at the front.
"Name please?" She said, She was stuttering so much that he could barely understand her.
"Yi Chuan Li."
"There's no name for Kit cough yu. " Yi Chuan held a confused face. Luckily for him, a guy dressed in a silk robe came up to him and apologised for the old lady's bad hearing and finally directed him to the interview.
"This way please." He told him. He entered a room, with no one seemingly inside.
Suddenly, two little boys jumped from behind him and grabbed his bag.
"Hey!" He screamed at them.
"Oooo what's this?" The first boy said giggling like mad. He had somehow pulled out the "sock" Yi Chuan had just made.
"Ohh! You put it on your hand!" The second boy exclaimed.
"Don't touch my stuff!" Yi Chuan roared at them with the most terrifying face. The little boys anxiously looked up, tears welled in their eyes, and started screaming.
"Be quiet!" Yi Chuan told them as he panicked to calm them down, swearing under his breath. This did little to help and the screaming only got louder. Just at the nick of time, a person walked into the room and roared at Yi Chuan.
"What are you doing to my kids?! Get out of here!"
"But— I'm here for the—the–"
"INTERVIEW?"
"Yes!" Yi Chuan said.
"Get out." He finally said.
Yi Chuan stomped out of the room. Somehow he had messed it up yet again.

January 13, 1256

Xing Mei found him on his bed, quietly sulking his own presence. Yi Chuan heard her footsteps treading away, and he finally decided to sit and calm himself down. He had been lying on the floor for far too long, with his eyes locked on the sock. He decided to release all his temper and held the sock in his hand. Maybe the kids were right, it couldn't hurt to try it on.

He held the sock up, and slipped it onto his hands…It fit!

January 14, 1256
"Hello! I'd like to start a business."
The storefront signage on the building read:"Small Business Co"
"That'll be 12,047 人民币." The lady at the front desk said with a sly grin on her face. That was one pricey business, but it would be well worth it. Yi Chuan handed 2 big bags of 人民币, which was the last of his savings, and he was giving it to a person he had never even met before.

Afternoon, January 26, 1256
By now Yi Chuan had probably made more than 100 of the strange looking socks. By the next day, Yi Chuan's whole family was helping him prepare everything. They needed to finish fast because they were running out of money very quickly. For the past week, they had only eaten a small ration of rice.

Morning, January 27, 1256
The next day, Yi Chuan set up a stall in the market. He had used sandy boards that smelled like sea water which he found at the beach to make the table. It wasn't perfect, but he was proud. When the market opened, the crowd started pouring in, and one by one, they all passed his stall. Some stopped to look, but were disgusted with his products. One little boy came by and begged his mother to buy one, but his mother was horrified.
The day passed and no one had bought his socks.
"It's okay. Let's go home."

December 2, 1256
Nearly a year later, Yi Chuan got a job at the toothpaste factory. Screwing toothpaste caps on little tubes only paid him 5 人民币 per month, but it was the only job he could find. After spending money on the failed business, Yi Chuan and his family had to move in with their kind neighbours.
"Stay as long as you like." They would say, but their facial expressions always looked as if they wanted to kick them out and banish them from their home. Yi Chuan saw the daily news about a sudden drop in temperature, dropping below zero degrees the following day. That night, everybody had fallen asleep shivering inside their thin blankets, however, Yi Chuan was wide awake sitting on the cold floor. He had accidentally rolled under the bed, and found his old "mortified socks", which had bankrupted him earlier. Yi Chuan picked it up and fit it back on his hand, trying not to rage.
It felt weirdly warm.

December 3, 1256
The next day, Yi Chuan wore his sock to work at the toothpaste factory.
"So cool!"
"I want one!" People would tell him. Eventually, he gave in and sold the sock to someone with very cold hands for 500 人民币. At home, Yi Chuan wasted no time and made a decision. He was going to start selling the socks again.
"We need a name Hang Yi."
"Goo-ove" He replied. Hang Yi may have been 8 years old, but he was missing 2 front teeth and still sounded like a 4-year-old toddler.
"Glove! That's what we should call it!" Yi Chuan said happily.

The next day he returned to the market to reclaim his spot, and in the freezing cold every rushed in, decked out in layers of warm clothing, still shivering in the cold weather. They all passed his stall again, but this time,
"Just what I need!"
"How much? This is a genius invention!" People rushed to his stall. The word spread as more people came into the market, and by noon he had sold out.
"We made 61,078 人民币! We have enough not only to buy, but fully furnish a new house! With some extra!"

And just like that, Yi Chuan's life had returned to normal, and maybe for the better..

Quantum Dots

German Swiss International School, Cheng, Stanley – 12

Even before he found his father's body lying on the floor in a convenience store, Michael was having a rotten day.

It had been only two weeks since the virus outbreak. Reports claim that suicide rates had skyrocketed by 10000% in the past week and the virus was incurable. Anyone infected would perish within 24 hours. All the schools and companies worldwide had to be closed temporarily. The only places that seemed to be busy were the hospitals. In Syria, the government was overthrown by a group of terrorists known as the Taliban. The United Nations organisation and NASA agreed to fire a second International Space Station into orbit so that professors could produce cures in a safe environment. Meanwhile, scientists worldwide worked restless to experiment with new cures.

5 PM, July 7th, AD 2030. Michael flipped through page two hundred and eighty–seven of his Year 13 physics textbook. He had skipped two grades and was an exceedingly intelligent student for a Year 13. He wearily stood up and randomly wandered around, his mouth felt as dry as sandpaper. *What a normal Monday,* he thought. *Time to get some drinks.* A normal Monday indeed.

"Hello?" Michael called. "Anyone here?" Silence. As far as he knew, this was the closest TaoBao store that hadn't been shut down after the virus outbreak. Michael looked around with great caution and advanced. *How strange,* he thought, *Lights are off, and nobody answers. Something seems fishy…* Michael reared his head around a corner, but he stood in place, his breathing quickened. *What–what in the world?! No, this can't be. I must be hallucinating.* He rubbed his eyes a few times, but what he saw didn't change. *No, that's impossible, this–*

Phew, that was all a dream. The first thing that came to his mind was his father. His hand trembled, as he picked up his phone and dialled 8271 3883. *The user is currently busy. Please try again later.* Michael immediately sprinted to the living room and opened the TV, he could feel his heart beating slower. "Yesterday, 8 bodies were found in a TaoBao convenience store," the news reporter stated. "Warning: the picture about to be shown might be disturbing." Michael stared at the screen with more intensity. *Wait, no! Isn't that–?* He froze. *It was not a dream? So it was all true?* A surge of anger rose inside him. He had to stop the virus. He had to end this suffering.

Three months later, schools started to open up again. Michael applied for the University of Medical Science and easily passed the entrance test. He was the only one in his class who enrolled in all 27 lectures. After 2 years, his grades rose to the highest in his year group, but despite how much time had passed, he had never forgotten the incident and the importance of terminating the virus.

AD 2032. 90% of the population had vanished. Michael became a well–renowned figure for his inspiring speeches urging young people to take action, which won multiple awards, including the University Speakers Prize, the Medical Honour Award, the Beijing University Speeches Award, as well as a prize pool of CNY $600,000.

With his meagre finances secured, he could start his research. At 5 AM in the morning, Michael was always the first person to arrive at school. After the school day ended, he usually worked in the science lab until 11 PM before returning home.

After six months of gruelling work, Michael finally finished his prototype and tested the medicine on an infected patient in the Saint Johns Hospital who was guaranteed to die. It only made the death quicker.

In the following one and a half months, he returned with six more prototypes, each better and more complicated than the last. His eyes were watery and an everlasting sting blurred his vision, however he came up with a cure for testing. Surprisingly, although the cure did not work, the patient did survive a longer period of 12 hours than predicted. As Michael concluded from his interesting discovery: *The cure doesn't have to be perfect and completely kill the virus, but what could work is if it can give the patient more time to live. Eureka! This is it!* Overnight, he worked on the final medicine, pouring in his remaining resources and effort.

The next morning, Michael presented his fascinating findings to his Chemistry professor. He first was overjoyed with excitement. But then his smile soon dissipated. "As excellent as this looks, unfortunately, there is one formula that contradicts your statement. On the other hand, this is a rather unique discovery, so I would suggest you take a shot." He agreed to send the results to the Worldwide Medical Centre.

A few days later, he received an email from the Worldwide Medical Centre.

"Meet Dr. James at 59 Community Garden Road at 8 AM tomorrow, Saturday."

Michael did exactly what the email told him. "This… this is really amazing, Michael, it really is. I cannot believe it, it works!" the man said, his shaking hands gripping Michael tightly. "Do you permit me to begin the production of your medicine?"

"Um, yeah sure, I guess," Michael replied.

On the day when Michael triumphantly received the 2034 Nobel Prize, he admitted, "You know, if it wasn't for the dead bodies I found in the convenience store…"

The next day, Michael took the day off. Whilst he was asleep, the bell rang. *Not the annoying garbage man,* he whined as he slammed the door open.

"Who is– Dad?" Michael exclaimed.

"Michael! I heard about your discovery yesterday. It's–"

"But– how, how could it be you? I thought you were dead! Unless…"

"Yes, it is my twin brother. I thought you were smart enough to figure that out, but–"

"Wait… where were you this entire time?"

He shrugged. "Well, that's a story for next time."

Michael laughed. "I don't think there will ever be a next time."

Beads of Gold

German Swiss International School, Cheung, Boris – 11

The behemoth of the Yangtze River meandered like an imposing snake across the floodplain. Shi–Jia–Yi, a tiny speck on the landscape, felt the warm mud of the paddy field slime and seep between her bare toes. The filthy clothes, that hung like rags from her body, provided no protection from the sweltering, vicious rays of the sun. Her six–month–old baby, strapped to her aching back, whimpered pitifully in her ear. The suffering in the cry radiated throughout Shi–Ji–Yi's entire body. She could feel her baby's bones dig into her flesh. He was starving. Hunger roared and gnawed inside her stomach, too.

The poison ivy of famine did not leave her husband, Cai–Zhong, untouched either. Knee–deep in mud, he looked, from a distance, like a tortured soldier returning from the brutality of war. Hunched and crooked, he randomly wandered through the sludge, scattering priceless seeds like discarded jewels. He struggled upright, clenching his agonised back and the sun revealed his heavily lined, sagging face.

Glancing towards the several other patches of farmland, the poison ivy had spared none of them a single breath. Weeds sprouted and mangled with the crops; crucial plants suffocated. She sniffled in despair and clutched the tiny parcel of bamboo leaves. Cautiously she unwrapped the delicate leaves to reveal a minuscule ball of rice. Lowering down to the level of the baby, she gradually fed the crucial nutrients of the ball into its mouth.

As the baby chewed, a few delicate grains, as if in slow motion, fell from its tiny mouth, an insignificant splash of brown water flicked on her face. She instinctively lunged towards the lost pearls. Then it happened. The moment. The flash of understanding. Why on earth are we planting like this? she thought. Why don't we plant in rows? The realisation made her physically tremble. Her mind raced and whirled with the implications her invention could have, but she knew she would have to break down the brick wall that was her husband first.

Cautiously advancing, she closely examined the smear of mud that stained the valley floor. As she approached her dishevelled husband, her breathing quickened and her throat felt like a scorching desert. Was this confrontation really the right decision to make? Raising her chin and taking a deep breath, she clung onto the baby tightly.

"You don't understand anything woman!" The soft grease of the brown ooze caught her fall. The thud reverberated throughout her brain. Then the burn. A desperate cry: "Please listen to me! For our family's survival." Fumes erupted from her husband, pluming out and striking her with a barrage of insults. His fists curled into a ball, "We cannot risk anything in this time of need." Shi–Jia–Yi felt a rush of anxiety, preparing for the eventual final blow. But the blow never came.

Wincing and jerking backwards, she saw her husband hesitate, then fling a handful of seeds in her face. "Fine then, go. Waste our son's future. Let's see you work a miracle!" Frantically scampering around she furiously dug like a mole, engulfed in mud. She cradled a piece of ripped out, beaten linen into a bowl, shaken by the immense responsibility she held. Painfully and slowly, she retrieved a small, muddy mound of seeds and identified an isolated blotch of soil. She softly crouched down and laid her son's future into the dense earth in careful, precise rows.

A month later, she returned to her precious patch of field. Lines of beautiful seedlings peeped above the damp soil and her heart missed a beat. For the first time, she was able to remove the pernicious weeds by carefully plucking them along the rows, without trampling any seedlings. She tended the fragile plants as if they were her children. As she returned from her labour, Shi–Jia–Yi observed the sorry state of her husband's field. His seedlings were cluttered and clumped, with seeds inter–twining and choking them. She saw with acute sadness the necessity to trample some precious seedlings to pull out the ruthless weeds.

Another month had passed, as she returned to her field of dreams, a stunning scene of flowers bloomed before her. She gasped in exhilaration. A sprawling hum of bees invaded her ears, and she watched in amazement as they zipped and darted along the rows in a beautiful dance of symmetry. In contrast, her husband's plants had never had the chance to bloom. They had been suffocated and overran by their adversaries in a gruesome fight for survival.

As Shi–Jia–Yi's crop ripened, it resembled a blanket of glimmering gold. The plants stood tall and strong like soldiers on parade, whereas her husband's resembled the no–man's land of a vicious warzone. Vast barren patches of land were interspersed with the mutilated clumps of bent stems. Shi–Jia–Yi's joy at her own success was, therefore, utterly overshadowed by despair at her husband's failure.

First, the smiles stopped. Then the words. And the eye–contact. It was as if she and her husband had become strangers to each other. He stormed off, defiantly turning his head away from her, like she was a fatal disease. The frequent daily visits to care for the frail baby, turned into fortnights, then completely ceased to exist. His enthusiasm gradually evaporated, and he grew more paranoid each passing day. The few brief moments of conversations that did happen turned into bitter and spiteful confrontations.

When harvesting was due, she felt a conflicting sense of excitement and dread. As she approached the fields, she dared not even glance at her husband's crop. Her own crop was saturated with thousands upon thousands of tiny pearl drops. Harvesting her small patch took two gruelling days in the baking sun. Her arms felt like dead weights and her back seared with hot pokers of pain. Her skin was mottled with heavy bruises and swollen blood vessels, but the sacks of rice she had harvested overflowed and looked ready to burst. Her incredible idea had worked. It had produced enough food to see them comfortably through the long, harsh winter. Shi–Jia–Yi slumped to the ground and wept. She sobbed uncontrollably. A terrible wave of fatigue overpowered her.

She was awoken by the sound of heavy, stomping footsteps, sloshing through the mud. For a moment, her face dropped, anticipating that all of her work would be destroyed; she flung herself around the sacks, protecting them like her children. Suddenly, his shoulders sagged. His crooked head hung down like an apple ready to fall. His neck relaxed. It was as if his face was extinguished from a blazing fire.

Shi–Jia–Yi carefully reached into a sack and extracted a handful of precious grains. She gently uncurled the rigid, tense fingers of her husband's hand and carefully tipped the rice into it. He clutched the grains tightly next to his heart and tears moved like streams down his face, he regretted everything. His blistered mouth steadily opened.

"Please teach me your miracle."

The Portable Air Purifier

German Swiss International School, Davies, George – 14

In the late 21st century, the city of Hong Kong was engulfed in air pollution. The people in the city wore masks everywhere, from the streets and the buses, to inside the stores, to even within the confines of people's own homes. It was in this city that Zheng Faming was born in and lived his life in. He never even thought about the possibility of breathing out in the open, why would he? He was born with a mask on, lived through his childhood and adolescence with his mask on, and now, as a 33 year old man, he still had his mask on, he never knew anything different. One day, when a relative from the countryside visited the city and complained about the air quality here, Faming asked about what it was like to live back in the countryside.

"The countryside is great! You don't need to wear masks or worry about developing lung cancer from the air pollution." Replied his relative.

"Really? It sounds great! The only place where I can not wear a mask is the dining room, I can't even sleep without one on." Replied Faming.

"Don't you have air purifiers?"

"Just one, in the dining room. Our family can't afford another."

"What about a smaller one?"

"There are no smaller ones."

"Why don't you make one? You have a degree in engineering after all."

"If I knew what to model it after, I would, but how am I supposed to come up with the design out of thin air, the current purifier is large and bulky, it wouldn't work if it was smaller, the components are too large."

"What about a spray? You could find miniscule components and use those, if it works."

"Hmm, that could work, I will try to make one, since the market for clean air is quite large right now."

A few months later, Zheng Faming was able to turn the air purifier into a proper idea. However, he had trouble pitching the idea to possible investors, as they turned him away since it seemed impossible. Still, a few companies, including Qi Industries were interested in the idea, but even they asked for a prototype before they would put the money in. In a few months, Zheng Faming was able to save up enough money to buy the materials required for his first few attempts at the purifier.

His first prototype was designed like a water bottle, you would pull the cap off and air would be released. However, he found out that the air in the bottle would be released far too fast. He first tried to make the bottle bigger, but that just caused more air to come out. He then tried to replace the cap with a simple mechanism, where you could use a lever to open a lit at the top, and pull it again to close it, but he found that the new lid took too long to open and too long to close, so air still escaped too fast. Finally, when all hope was lost, he realised that he could model his purifier after your typical spray. He would keep the lever, but the large and circular lid was replaced with a small hole that would be opened or closed with the lever, and there was also a button to turn it on or off, so when it was off, there would be another lid preventing the clean air from getting out of the first bottleneck.

His main issue now was how to refill it. Right now, once the air was used up, you would need a second purifier for more clean air, and most of the air could be used up in under an hour, however, he decided to add a charging station at the back, and you could leave it near a large air purifier and wait for it to be refilled.

With his new working prototype, he brought it back to Qi Industries and the invention was approved. They even worked out a deal where Faming would get to keep the rights to the invention, in case he wanted to licence it to anyone else. Over the next couple of years, the product was announced, then it was produced, then finally, in 2073, the Portable Air Purifier was released to the public.

It was first launched in Hong Kong specifically, with all the factories being on new artificial islands constructed by the government, and it was released to immediate success. Within the first month, over a million purifiers were sold. It became synonymous with living in Hong Kong. Zheng Faming won many awards from all sorts of organisations, from the Red Cross to the Nobel Prize, and even went to the United Nations to give speeches. Zheng Faming was known throughout the world as a talented inventor. Over the next few years, the Portable Air Purifier was sold in all parts of China, from Beijing to Xian to Shanghai.

It was just a few months before he was contacted by his first external contractor. The Red Cross came to him to ask him to allow them to make their own modifications to the Purifier, and although Faming was sceptical at first, he eventually struck a deal with them, he would get 25% of the money made. The Red Cross made a larger variant, and it was sold in places outside of China that was also dealing with Pollution, such as India.

Next, the Hong Kong government would ask for permission to make their own modifications to the purifier, they would use them in their new department of Air Pollution Reduction. Because of the success of the Red Cross's modification, Faming gave them permission instantaneously. Once again, the variant was a huge success, and Hong Kong became the Cleanest it had been for 50 years.

Finally, Zheng Faming was approached by an esteemed mercenary group known as the Skeleton Squad. Faming had heard very little about this "Skeleton Squad ", other than the fact that it had been involved in a couple of wars. Faming was wondering why a mercenary group would want his Air Purifier, but based on the success of previous modifications, Zheng decided to give them permission, maybe they would use it in their medical tents if they ever got too polluted. He wasn't sure why they would need to modify them for that, but he decided that it wasn't really important.

Over the next couple of weeks, Faming's invention continued to sell well globally, reaching over 25 Million sold worldwide. However, on one fateful day, he went home and watched the news, and he saw that there were reports of increased air pollution in numerous war zones throughout the world. At first he thought nothing of it, but he heard reports about sprays being used in the battle. His worst fears came to light when he saw that the air pollution had increased in concentrated amounts, just like when you use a portable air purifier.

Zheng Faming demanded to see the leader of the Skeleton Squad, but there was no response. He thought to contact the government of America, but he realised that that meant that he would be confessing to dealing with Mercenary groups, and that would not look good on his reputation. He decided that the best course of action would be to keep quiet. After all, his success came from being a good–hearted inventor who helped the people of Hong Kong breathe safely.

However, the guilt was too much for Faming to bear, and on New Year's Day, 2074, he confessed to illegally dealing with a mercenary group and he was arrested for treason. 3 Years later, he died of disease in jail, at the age of 40. He did not live a long life, but he lived long enough to see his invention get corrupted and used for evil, and he lived long enough to see his reputation as a genius inventor go up in smoke. History remembers this man as a good man in the grand scheme of things, but his dealings with the Skeleton Squad are a large stain on his reputation. In time, the Skeleton Squad would be brought to justice, but by then it was too late for the brilliant inventor.

Gunpowder

German Swiss International School, Gera, Gia – 11

Training from a young age, Wang Li endured gruelling tasks as a monk. Resting his aching foot, he gazed at the sky, the sun's bright light blinding his peripheral vision. Massaging his blister–ridden and sore foot, he observed Master Shan's shadow, who stood nearby as Wang Li struck boulders with impressive force. Wang Li's eyes flickered to the training monk group's head, hoping to be chosen for Emperor Wu's quest. Suddenly, Master Shan turned and faced him. Wang Li rose from the rough stone floor and dusting off his gravelly orange tunic. Resuming his strikes on the boulders, his blows propelled them backward. Wang Li's anticipation grew as the shadow drew nearer, longing to make his father proud by being selected for the mission.

As Master Shan's shadow gradually approached, Wang Li's breath trembled with each strike he launched. Finally, the shadow took the form of Master Shan beside him. Wang Li's mid–kick froze in the air as he listened intently. "Wang Li, you are doing well, I see," Master Shan said. "You shall join the quest tomorrow." Wang Li's heart skipped a beat as he absorbed the words. With his foot still suspended in mid–air, Master Shan replied, "Pack enough supplies for three nights and arrive outside the courtyard at 4 o'clock in the morning. Complete your training for today, but you may leave early to prepare. Get a good night's sleep, and I will see you early tomorrow." Master Shan's footsteps echoed in Wang Li's ears. Overwhelmed with disbelief and elation, he diligently completed his training and left early to pack for the arduous journey that awaited him.

Arriving at the courtyard before dawn, Wang Li found the entire crew already there. Master Shan greeted him, and Wang Li greeted him back with a deep bow. "Good to see you up early. Take your place at the back of the line. We will depart shortly," Master Shan instructed. Wang Li nodded and walked to the rear of the long line. The silence fell over the group as Master Shan's voice boomed, commanding them to look forward and march.
With each step, the group ventured into the rough and underdeveloped terrain of their limited territory to the west. Wang Li's smile seemed to be glued to his face as the wind ruffled his tunic and the sun rose. He relished in the fact that he could be the one to find the elixir.

As night fell, Wang Li's legs grew weary. Though the sleeping arrangements were not so comfortable, he welcomed the chance to rest. That night, he had a dream he hadn't had in years. In his dream, his legs were encased in a tightly wrapped metal tube. Cannons they were called. Metal was a material only the wealthy could have. He stood on a bed of small rocks, so small that they were almost powdery, tilting at an angle, only supported by the tube. Suddenly, the sound of a match being struck and crackling filled his ears. Warmth tickled his feet, gradually growing into a burning feeling. Then, his feet launched off and he soared through the air, laughter escaping his lips. There were butterflies in his stomach as he ascended higher and higher, only to plummet with increasing speed.

Waking up drenched in sweat, Wang Li sat up and felt the cool night air soothe his rapid breathing. Could it be possible? Could he find this special powder during this journey, the powder that would launch him from a so–called cannon? As the sun's rays crept over the tall peak, an orange glow surrounding it, Wang Li's mind was too excited. He hurriedly grabbed a leaf being passed around and discovered rice, his favourite. As he devoured it, a Chinese–style temple materialised before his eyes from the very mountain he had been gazing at moments before.

Wang Li and the other journeyers were oblivious to the castle looming in the background, unnoticed until Wang Li turned his head. Something seemed wrong, as if he hadn't seen it before. Or had he? One thing was certain—he had to explore the castle. Despite his low rank, Wang Li mustered the courage to approach Master Shan. Nervously, he began to speak: "Master Shan?" Master Shan turned to face him, only intimidating Wang Li further. Wang Li pointed towards the castle and explained, "I just noticed that castle over there. It seems like it appeared out of nowhere seconds ago. Don’t you think we should search there?" Master Shan stared in disbelief. "You're right, Wang Li. It

only just appeared seconds ago. I had been looking there earlier too. Well, we should be on our way now! Let's go!"
As the group approached the castle, Master Shan decided to choose ten monks to enter the castle, to avoid loss of the journeyers. Even though they were nervous they entered the castle as brave men, for they feared to leave as dead men.

Inside, Wang Li felt a shiver run down his spine. The floor was made of cold marble tile and artefacts rested on pedestals everywhere. There seemed to be an infinite amount of them. How would they sift through all of them? The other monks had already begun to look so Wang Li went on as well. Suddenly, Wang Li's foot stepped on a loose tile, and he fell through a trapdoor down into the darkness. He landed on his feet, somehow unhurt however he was still in shock.

A jade statue stood at the centre of the dark room. He checked his surroundings. It was dark everywhere, no light, no people. He turned back to the statue. Suddenly it opened its mouth and at the same time Wang Li's mouth dropped open. "You are Wang Li, I knew you would come. I also know you want to leave. You must solve my riddle if you want to escape. You can also escape with the thing you want most. If you can't solve the riddle, you will keep me company forever. Do we have a deal?"
"Alright. I'll solve your riddle. I don't know how you know who I am but I want to leave." The statue smirked and began to speak slowly.
"I speak without a mouth and hear without ears. I have no body, but I come alive with the wind. What am I?" Wang Li's face twisted into one of confusion, trying to find an answer. Even after 5 minutes he still had no answer, yet the statue was patient. His foot tapped the floor and the sound rang back to him. Suddenly he knew what it was. Confidently he said the answer. "The answer to your riddle is an echo." The statue's mouth widened in amazement "You are as smart as you look. I must think of a new one. You are now free to leave and you have the thing you want right in your hand." said the statue and it pulled a light switch, revealing a set of ascending stairs. Wang Li walked up the stairs gladly, knowing he had beaten the riddle. Then he found a vial in his hand filled with black powder, the exact one from his dream! Now he could blast things out of the cannon from his dream! Upstairs he found Master Shan and then remembered he had not found the elixir. He walked up to his master who asked him "Wang Li, have you found the elixir?"
"Master Shan, it is not the elixir of life that I have found," he replied shamefully, "but a powder that can make the cannons in our town relly of use!."
Master Shan's smile grew wider, and he placed a hand on Wang Li's shoulder. "Wang Li, you have really found it! Gunpowder? We gave up on finding that years ago! I can't believe it. We shall bring this to Emperor Wu and he will be so pleased! "
With their quest complete in an unexpected way, Wang Li and the monks made their way back to their hometown, carrying the vial of gunpowder. Wang Li's heart swelled with happiness and pride that he was the one to find the gunpowder and he was the one to solve the riddle.
As they returned home, Wang Li knew that his journey had only just begun. He would continue to train, to go on quests and discover. And perhaps one day, he would find the elixir of life, wherever it may be.

The Very Earth

German Swiss International School, Guo, Joy – 13

The translucent sphere sitting quietly on a small circular stand began violently vibrating as the objects in the house started to shake. Chang Heng's father, Zhang Heng abruptly ran out of his workplace, shouting out an indistinguishable line of words as the silence in the living room was broken. A few moments later, a large chunk of ceiling fell crashing down next to Chang Heng's feet. He jerked back, screaming in pain as the debris pierced through his clothes into his feet. The year was 132 A.D. , and Chang Heng had just turned 13 a few weeks ago. Zhang Heng swept Chang Heng up by his legs, and Chang Heng sat on his father's back as the duo entered the grand plaza. The round space, roughly a hundred metres in diameter**,** was filled with shocked and frightened men and women who frantically ran around cluelessly. Dust flew into the atmosphere as buildings collapsed onto the plaza from all sides. Screams filled the air, some long and some cut short as pieces of rubbled crushed the people underneath. The place was like a battlefield.

A few years later, after Chang Heng recovered from his injuries, he was determined to solve the issue of earthquakes terrorising the citizens of his town. He remembered when the devastating earthquake struck, the sphere shaped jewellery that his father had just polished began to roll off the side of the table. He decided to plan a simple experiment to confirm his theory, which was that when an earthquake hit, the ground in the earthquake's direction would tremble. He tested this by making a design in which five wooden ramps were connected together in a star shape, leaving a gap in the middle where he would put a ball on. Whenever he used a wooden stick to hit the ground in the direction of one of the star shape's edges, the ball would roll down the corresponding ramp. This was a major breakthrough for Chang Heng. This experiment played an important role in the invention of the Chinese Seismometer. Chang Heng created a blueprint of the invention. Chang Heng told all of his friends about his breakthrough. They were all impressed and praised him for being so creative and smart. However, little he knew, things would escalate very quickly.

The next day, Chang Heng awoke to shuffling and thumping noises. He arose from his bamboo mattress and caught two shadowy figures escaping from his workstation, carrying a big object. He quickly threw his blankets aside, slid his feet into his flip flops and sprung up to chase the men. When he reached the doorstep, they had long gone. Devastated, Chang Heng walked back into his workstation and stared at his desk, which no longer had a big golden goblet sitting on it.

Meanwhile, the robbers were very proud of themselves.

"This artifact is very unique."

Engineer Long closely examined the prototype, then tapped on the object. The object produced a sharp sound that echoed inside its body.

"This thing is hollow. I wonder how this thing can detect earthquakes."

Banker Zhang stroked his beard as he theorised on how the seemingly useless object could possibly save the lives of many civilians. After a few minutes, he broke the silence.

"Maybe this invention is powered by magic and whenever an earthquake happens one of the balls will magically roll down."

"That is unlikely to be true, magic does not exist, Mr. Zhang", stated Long.

“Let’s take it to the emperor. Let’s not mess anything up in this contraption before it gets to him. Shall this work, we will be rich!”, exclaimed Zhang.

Chang Heng rummaged through his drawers and pulled out a beautiful and round ball . He looked at his blueprint and smirked.

“Get out of my palace and stop wasting my time!” shouted the Emperor as the two robbers, who had no idea what the object was, presented him with the golden vase−like object.

“I swear this will detect earthquakes! This can save millions of lives!” , Pleaded Long.

“Show me how this useless piece of metal can save my people.”, pressed the Emperor.

The two looked at each other cluelessly, then Zhang explained that it would only be activated when an earthquake was incoming.

“Let me test this object. I will use a wooden hammer to strike the floor to the left of this item. If this is what you say it is, in theory a ball will drop down from the left dragon’s mouth into the frog underneath.”, said the Emperor.

“Sure, you can do that.”, said Zhang as terror entered both the dishonest people’s hearts.

The emperor did exactly what he said, and the three waited together, anticipating a ball to fall down. One second passes. Another second passes. A third second passes.

After a minute of waiting, the Emperor had enough.

“This object is useless! Now you have no excuse but to get out!” demanded the Emperor.

The two obediently walked out of the palace.

“Whose invention is this? This is definitely not your invention. If it was, you definitely would have tested it beforehand.” came a voice from behind them.

“It is Chang Heng’s invention. Blame it on him, not us. He told us to present it to you for him.” said Zhang.

“Take him to me now,” said the Emperor.

Chang Heng sat before his desk, wondering what he could do, as all of his gold had been used up in his prototype. A knock came from his door, startling him. He opened the door and in front of him stood a man, around twenty centimetres taller than him.

“Yes? What do you want?” asked Chang Heng.

“The emperor demands that I take you to him.”, said the man as he escorted Chang Heng.

“Wait, let me get something very useful. I need it to make my invention work.”

“Fine, but I will need to check it first to make sure it is not a weapon.”

A few minutes later, the lavish and luxurious palace came into view as they walked up the red stairs. The man greeted the guards and explained that he was escorting Chang Heng to the emperor. The guards strode to the side and welcomed Chang Heng and the man in. Immediately, the emperor’s massive golden throne was visible and he prepared a small tea table to put the prototype on. Chang Heng walked up to the table and kneeled.

“My majesty, what can I do for you?” questioned Chang Heng.

“Two people showed me this prototype of yours, claiming you sent them. Is this true?”
“No, it is not. I awoke to two people running out of my workplace carrying the prototype that I was working on. I do not know them, so they are thieves.”, answered Chang Heng. “I can prove that it can detect earthquakes. It was just missing this important part, the rolling ball.”

Chang Heng quickly slotted the ball into the prototype. He asked for a wooden hammer to test his invention.

“Even if the shocks are minor, the ball in the middle will still react. The shocks will cause the ball in the middle to vibrate, and fall into the corresponding ramp. At the end of the ramp, the ball will hit a wooden lever, causing the ball in the dragon’s mouth to fall down.”

He demonstrated the procedure and sure enough, the golden ball in the mouth of the dragon fell into the mouth of the frog.

“Amazing! This invention is not only smart but useful, I thought that it would be a failure! You have impressed me, Chang Heng. I will make sure to use it to save my people.” praised the Emperor. Chang Heng named the invention the Seismometer, and the Emperor ordered for a room to be built just for the seismometer.

Many years later, the ball in the northwest dragon’s mouth dropped into the frog below it’s mouth. The guard informed the Emperor, and the Emperor evacuated all the citizens southeastward, and just after all of the citizens moved to the safer place, an earthquake strong enough to topple a mountain hit the city. Chang Heng was deemed a hero and the protector of millions of lives.

Believe

German Swiss International School, Henderson, Liana – 12

"Knock knock, knock knock."

I woke up to a sound that was familiar to me—that same knock rhythm. "Wake up, darling, it's time for breakfast." The housemaid spoke calmly. "I made your favorite meal. Golden pancakes with extra syrup". "Thanks, Gloria!." I said with a soft groan. Gloria was one of 9 maids that lived in our house. She was my absolute favorite. She comes from a family of 6, parents, 2 older brothers, and a younger sister. Yet Gloria is the only person who loved me like a true daughter.

She went downstairs just to hear another argument happening. "YOU ARE JUST A DISGRACE TO THIS FAMILY AND YOUR LEGACY, YOU KNOW THAT?", "DOES IT LOOK LIKE I CARE AT ALL? I WOULD RATHER DIE THAN LIVE IN AN UNHAPPY AND CONTROLLING HOUSE LIKE THIS! MY FRIENDS' MOTHERS' ARE ALWAYS SO UNDERSTANDING! WHY CAN'T YOU BE LIKE THEM MORE? YOU ARE SUCH A CONTROL FREAK!" my younger sister screamed. "Then go." My mom said this while storming out of the dining hall. I saw my sister with tears rolling down her face. "Are you okay−", "JUST BE QUIET" she yelled as she ran upstairs. Moments later, I heard a loud bang coming from the direction of her room. Mom came back to the room and sat just on the opposite side of me. "Where is she?", "I think she is upstairs−", " How are you, honey?" My mother asked. I could smell her cold, alcoholic breath wash on me, I cringed, but she didn't seem to notice. "I'm fine. I am working on a device that can differentiate the difference between North, South, East, and West. Cool right?". "What is wrong with you? You are just another mistake. Why would you be wasting your time on miscellaneous stuff like that? Focus on your studies!". Claire knew that her mom wouldn't understand.

I woke up the next morning, but there was no sign of Gloria. I checked my bedside clock at 11:37 a.m. "WHAT? Why didn't Gloria wake me up?".

I walked downstairs, with my tangled hair pushed up against her face, and saw her whole family sitting at the dining table. Both of my parents were sitting next to each other: my two older brothers, Liam and Jacob, and my younger sister, Sophia. Judging from the way Sophia eyed me, I knew something was wrong.

"Claire, sit down. We all need to talk to you," Mom spoke up "Claire Carrington, I give you no right to speak to this family ever again."

"Excuse me, what?" she replied quickly. "I was told that you said that you wished that you were dead, and you were by yourself rather than here.".

I was astounded.

I had told Gloria the night before that, but I thought she would never tell my mother. And right there, the realization hit me harder than a heavy boulder. I looked to my side to see Gloria with the most downhearted and forlorn face. Gloria, the person she thought could be trusted, had ratted her out. "This is what I would like for you: go straight to your room, and I never want to see you or your designs ever again. You had better not show me your face for as long as I am alive. And don't expect me to talk to or say anything to you. Claire, I am genuinely disappointed in you.

I hope you will reflect on your bad behavior and change. For now, go away." "But−", "Go!". I rushed to my room, just to bury her face in her blankets.

I sobbed, big, fat, ugly tears streaming down my cheeks. In the past ten minutes, she got yelled at, betrayed by my favorite maid, and 'disowned' by my whole family. *Knock, knock, knock*. "Hey, darling.", "Save it. I don't want to speak to you right now.". "No, please just listen to me.", "No, you hurt me, Gloria. I thought I could trust you, but it turns out I can't. If I tell you how I feel right now about you and my mother, what's to say that you won't tell her again?". "Ok, I understand, but please talk to me; one day, I will always be here.". Hearing that pierced my heart like a blade had plunged into it. I knew Gloria was sorry, but I couldn't forgive her so easily, not after what she had told my mother. I turned to face my window, my back to my door, just to see a newspaper propped up on my windowsill. I got up from her bed to see the headline bearing the words, "NEW DEVICE DETECTED, WAREHOUSE LOCATED IN GUANGZHOU, TELLS YOU WHICH DIRECTIONS ARE CORRECT." I smirked; she just had an idea.

On the Trail

German Swiss International School, Ho, Davia – 11

Wolves with menacing red eyes were hot on my trail as I tore through the woods down an abandoned path, and it was all because I accidentally stepped into their territory. I was quite sure that wolves couldn't climb trees, so I scrambled up the trunk as quickly as I could.
I realised my mistake as the leader of the pack followed me up, claws scrabbling to get a foothold on the smooth wood. Just as its massive, gleaming jaws got a hold of my pants, dragging me down to certain doom – an arrow sprouted out of its back. It staggered for a grip but ended up falling, staining the leaves scarlet with blood.

I looked around for my saviour and found her crouched in the shadows in a nearby tree, bow and arrow poised. I started to wave, but she motioned for me to stay silent, and with uncanny accuracy, she started to pick the wolves off one by one, and the forest was rapidly filled with howls of agony. One of the remaining members of the pack realised that something was wrong and scampered off, its tail under its legs. The hunter dropped gracefully to the floor and signalled to me that it was safe to come down. Awkwardly, I tried to copy her agility and crashed onto the forest floor, tangled with undergrowth.

As my thumping heart calmed down, I sat in a daze on the ground and listened to the peace of the forest – the rustle of leaves, mice foraging for food... The hunter watched, letting out a chuckle, snapping me out of my thoughts, and I quickly scrambled to my feet.

"You're probably wondering why I came to your rescue, aren't you? I heard some screams, and I decided to investigate. By the way, I'm Artemis."

"I'm Tiana. Thanks for saving my life earlier! Without you, I would probably have been eaten by the wolves."

I stood, and she led me towards a trail. I recognized the path home, and thanking Artemis for her help again, I hurried home. I wanted to record the events of today, but I had run out of wood writing tablets, so I had to find another material to write on. As I patted myself down before starting, checking my pockets for any sort of material that could be used as a writing tablet, I found a piece of thin bark, most likely from the tree that I was on. I tested it out, and to my surprise, it worked very well—even better than wood tablets!

As I went to sleep that night, I couldn't stop thinking about bark because it had given me an idea: to make a thin sheet of wood, which I would call paper. I decided to stay awake, thinking of ideas, but as soon as my head hit the pillow, I was snoring away. However, as I woke up the next morning, a brilliant idea struck me: I would go to the forest and gather different types of wood and see which one worked best for my project.

Rimefall, the village I lived in, was very environmentally friendly, and you could only take plants and wood from the forest if you had a life–threatening reason or a plant collecting licence. My excuse would be that my grandma was very ill, and having heard of the legendary healing powers of Angel's Beech, I wanted to collect some of it as medicine. Armed with my story, I set off for the woods.

I crashed through the ferns, hacking stray plants out of my way with my machete. Luckily, I had brought my wicker basket, so I could put all my samples in it. I took pieces from every tree I saw, and I had taught myself the names of plants, so I knew the bark of pine and spruce trees was the most durable.

With my discovery, I rushed home. I carefully sliced out a wafer−thin sheet of wood from both barks. With my quill and ink, I scrawled the first few words. However, as I was writing, I noticed that the ink was bleeding, causing the wood paper to become nothing more than a black smudge.
I stopped writing and carefully peeled the sheet away from my tabletop. I sliced another two pieces from the bark and layered them on top of my original sheet. Then, I laid it flat on my workspace and used a board of wood to add pressure to the layers, binding them together and creating a sturdier piece of paper.

I tried it again, with less ink and lighter writing. Breath bated, I flipped the paper, and to my dismay, the ink started blossoming through the layers, dyeing my fingers. I turned to my desk, pondering how to create the perfect paper. With a jolt, I realised that I had the best resource − the Wise Owl owed me, and he was rumoured to hold all the knowledge in the universe. If anyone could help me, it would be him!

I ran out the door, heading for the Twilight Elm, the owl's residence. When I arrived, the owl was looking at me from his perch, and he said,

"Tiana, you come seeking knowledge of papermaking. Come forward."

He proceeded to swoop down from his branch and he whispered in my ear,

"Seek the birch."

It clicked instantly. Birch would be the solution I needed! I hurried to the woods and chopped some of the bark off, then dashed home and started cutting it into thin sheets. I repeated the process from before, and I prayed that this would be the answer. Anxiously, I turned the paper over, my eyes scanning the sheet for any blossoming ink. 10 seconds ticked by, and I didn't see anything appearing. A minute passed, and nothing happened. The birch was the solution!

I jumped up from my seat and danced around my workroom, ecstatic that I had finally created paper and there could be so many uses for it, like journal entries, birthday cards, wrapping presents, etc. I went to sleep that night thinking of ideas that could help me advertise paper. As I woke up the next morning, I thought of an amazing idea. Since my mother was the CEO of a carving company, maybe I could convince her to change her chain.
I was prepared to bribe my mother with a basket of goodies if it came to that. I knocked on the cottage door with my basket at the ready and my most innocent face.

"Tom − how many times have I told you to stop bothering me?" The reply came from inside. Stomps from inside the cottage grew louder, and the door swung open.

"Oh, it's you! I thought it was Tom, the annoying baker, who kept knocking on my door. Come in!" I followed her into her living room, where I set down the basket.
"So, Mom, how are you?"
"Cut straight to the point, darling."
"Ineedyoutodomeafavour!" I blurted.

I waited for her to tell me that I should find a solution myself, but instead, she looked intrigued.

"Okay, what is it?"
"I need you to change your chain to make paper − it's like wood tablets, but lighter and thinner!"
"Hmmm, I'll think about it. Now leave. I need to bake."

I returned home, waiting for a response from my mother at the rainbow fountain. She promised she would leave a message for me. As I drifted in and out of sleep that night, a ping from the fountain echoed. I scrambled out of bed and peered into the fountain. Abruptly, a floating halo appeared in front of me, and I read the message engraved on it.

Dear Tiana,
I will change my chain to paper.
Love,
Mom.

With the support of my mom, I set off to turn my invention into a small business. Using my mom's connections, we shared the knowledge of papermaking. The popularity of my paper grew, and soon, not only my village knew of it, but nearby villages did too!

The demand for my paper grew steadily, and nearby artisans and merchants recognized the invention as a good opportunity to branch out their sales. Soon, my invention found its way to distant lands, places I'd never seen before. The abandoned forest trail that I fled down that fateful day became a well−known route to and from Rimefall for transporting paper.

Only months later, my business was flourishing. However, that unforgettable encounter with Artemis, the amazing archer, was engraved in my mind. We remained close friends, and we started a collaboration, with me writing and her doing the illustrations. We were an amazing team, and people travelled far and wide to purchase our books.

To this day, I still take walks through the very same trail where I found my miraculous paper. From exactly 2 years ago, when I was an innocent girl running from wolves, to now, where I run my own business.

Tick Tock

German Swiss International School, Huang, Abigail – 11

A sharp, hard blow went across Liu Xing's face. "How many times do I have to tell you," His older brother, Cu Xing, yelled, "Don't take my things from my room, stupid!" Liu Xing took a step back away from his brother, and a silent tear trickled down Liu Xing's cheek. He opened his mouth to speak, but no words came out. He turned away from his brother, clutching his stinging cheek, folding his other arm around himself. It was his only comfort, having no family left to stand up for him. "I'm sorry," he whispered. Cu Xing's face softened slightly, just for a blink of a second, and then returned to his usual, cold scowl. He gave an exasperated huff and stormed off, leaving Liu Xing standing alone in the family room.

Liu Xing

Tick Tock, Tick Tock. The old, ancient grandfather clock standing in the corner of the room ticked as the seconds went by. It seemed as though it was one of the only places in the house that retained colour. Liu Xing's eyes scanned the walls around him. They focused on a specific faded patch in the centre of the wall closest to him; *Polaroids,* Liu Xing thought to himself as he slowly walked to the wall, his arms still wrapped around from the confrontation before, his eyes moving over every single picture, until it landed and fixated on one.

Before he could stop them, his arms reached out and plucked it off the wall. On the tiny square, was him, Cu Xing, and his parents, standing in front of a large banner saying, *Winner of the young inventors: 3D Printed Bones*. He turned the polaroid over, revealing the scribble written on the back: "*Liu Xing wins first prize at school fair 2031!"* Suddenly, completely out of nowhere, there was a small light in him, a light that somehow managed to assure him that he could prove his brother wrong, making him sorry for the way he'd treated him. Something told him to stand up for himself, told him that it was time to show his brother once and for all.

13 years later…

Liu Xing scribbled furiously at his paper, time was running out. He groaned in frustration, crumpling the solitary sheet in his hands. Sitting up, he pushed his desk away from him, pacing around his small, plain room, his sweaty hands still gripping the paper as tight as he could. Making his way back to his desk, tossing the balled up piece of paper into the waste bin. Liu Xing wiped the sweat from his brow, frustrated yet again. Sighing, he grabbed another piece of paper and continued scrawling ideas onto it.

More of the same was to come and after numerous failed attempts, Liu Xing's hope of proving himself to his brother and the rest of his family was starting to drift away, like a cloud in the sky. *I should really just give up*, Liu Xing thought to himself. *What's the point of even trying? I'm not going to succeed. Why did I even think I could do it?* At that very moment, the light inside him seemed to reawaken. *Don't give up*, it urged, *You know you can do it, **I** know you can do it. Don't give up, Liu Xing, keep going*. Liu Xing closed his eyes, his mind flashing back to the day he won the competition. Should he just give up, before it was too late to turn back? His mind felt as though it was having a battle against the light, and in the end, the light won.

Liu Xing woke up to the sound of crickets chirping outside and a beaming ray of lights shone through the window pane, and reluctantly opened his sleepy eyes. He lay sprawled across his desk, his right cheek pressed against its smooth surface, and through all his tossing and turning that night, all his books, pens and folders were sprawled on the floor of his tiny workspace. As his vision cleared, he bent down and picked up his pen, and clumsily groped around the floor for his draft paper. He continued to work on his plan, furiously crossing things out and making additions, when finally, he was satisfied and confident with his work.

The creation of 3D printed bones was no easy feat, as there were many different things to look into. However, Liu Xing knew that through his hard work and restless nights, his creation could help millions of people around the world, poor or rich, and not just in China. Through his hard work, he could make the world a better place. Doctors would have a higher chance of saving patients, and the patients themselves would have a reassurance for a speedy recovery. It would save money for the doctors and patients, as they could just receive a bone to replace the broken one. This was what Liu Xing wanted. To help people. And with this creation, he could accomplish his dream as well.

He let out a long breath his body never realised it had been holding in, nodding to himself. He had overcome one hurdle, making him one step closer to his goal. This frightened him, for he was inching closer but would not know how many more challenges he would face.

Cu Xing

"Why does he always take my things?" Cu Xing fumed, retreating to the safety of his room, a place where he could lash out, a place where he could just erupt, brood and eventually recover , without him hurting anyone. All the pent−up frustration and rage he'd been holding all these years had taken over him and made him lose control over himself, resulting in him hurting his own brother. Cu Xing shook his head at himself in disappointment, and anger. He shouldn't feel any remorse for what he had done, as Liu Xing definitely did **not** deserve any of it. Ever since Liu Xing was born, Cu Xing had become the invisible child. Before, Cu Xing had been the favourite of every single person in the family, bright and cheery. Everyone loved him. In Cu Xing's point of view, all the affection and warmth he had felt from his family had disappeared, vanished completely, making him turn into a cold, hollow, emotionless shell. *You're no good, Cu Xing.* rang his mother's voice in his head, *You're no good.*

The Lost Compass

German Swiss International School, Jain, Anya – 12

When the lunch bell rang at 12:30 I raced to the cafeteria to grab a table. Then, I went to the counter to select my lunch. Brooklyn joined me silently in the lunch line and started to look at the menu. Brooklyn, an eleven year old girl with jet black hair, bangs that were perfectly cut without a single hair out of place and eyes that were as dark as darkness itself. She was a perfect child, she was smart and could take care of herself at a young age. It was hard to believe that she only lived with her dad. Brooklyn was very different from me. I on the other hand had wavy dark brown hair always tied up, hazel eyes that could never focus on what the teacher was teaching, and all I could think about during lessons was lunch. But then again Brooklyn and I, we went together like butter and bread.

"I'm hungry," I whined. The lunch crew wasn't there and none of the teachers were to be seen.
"You have to be patient,"Brooklyn said in her soft and gentle voice.
After five minutes I couldn't take it anymore, so I did what any regular person would do when they were hungry. I jumped over the counter and kicked open the door to the kitchen. I smelled something burning so I walked over to the stove and saw that someone had left it on. As I was about to turn the stove off something shiny caught my eye on the other side of the countertop. I walked over and couldn't believe my eyes. It was a necklace made of gold with a circular pendant that had diamonds, crystals and a blue sapphire right in the centre of it, glinting in the light of the flame. As I picked it up, it started to glow bright blue. Then Poof! I was suddenly next to Brooklyn at the front of the cafeteria line.

"Gah!" Brooklyn exclaimed, staring at me with wide eyes, her mouth hanging open. "How did you do that?"
"I don't know," I said, looking at the necklace in confusion. "One second I was in the kitchen and the next second I was standing right next to you."
"What's that in your hand?" she questioned.
"Oh, It's a necklace I found in the kitchen." I replied
She examined it, "Viola! That's not a necklace," Brooklyn said, panting, like she was out of breath. "That's The Lost Compass!"
"The Lost Compass?" I asked, "What's that?"
"I'll tell you when we get to my house. Come on Viola.."
She dragged me towards her house which was just up the hill.

Brooklyn's house was three stories tall and very modern. We took off our shoes as we walked inside her enormous living room with chandeliers hanging from the ceiling and a grey–white couch that formed a 'U' shape. We sat down on the couch and Brooklyn began to tell the tale of the Compass.

"Once upon a time in a land far away there was a compass. The compass possessed the power to guide the brave on their adventure to save their kind. Every year the devils choose a city on the earth and trap humans in their land for power. The compass guides the saviours and helps them rescue the prisoners and take them back home. But if you manage to fail you will get a punishment decided by the compass."

"What's the punishment?" I asked.
"I don't know." Brooklyn answered "But what we're going to do right now is follow where that compass points to take. The lost compass *always* comes to you for a reason."
"I guess that means we're going on an adventure."

Brooklyn opened the compass and it was pointing to go north. Straight ahead.

We walked on the road for twenty minutes, but stopped to a halt when there was a forest up ahead.
“Does the compass still say to go straight?” Brooklyn asked.
“Yup!” I said as I put the compass in my pocket. We entered the forest, and the main road seemed to disappear now that it was dark. There were tall trees surrounding us on all sides and they were blocking the sunlight from entering. That's when I saw it. It was light up ahead, and Brooklyn seemed to notice it as well. We rushed forward, and we saw that it was a portal. A portal, gleaming, magical, in the middle of the forest? How weird.
“Brook, do you think we should go through?”
“Yes.” she simply replied.

We stepped into the portal hand in hand and we were immediately surrounded by magic! The streets were made of rainbow tiles and the houses were made of colourful bricks. Roaming the streets were unicorns, fairies and other beautiful creatures. Now the compass was pointing for us to go east. I nudged Brooklyn to go right. We walked and walked until we were stopped by a tiny elf.
“Where do you think you’re going?” the elf interrogated.
Brooklyn gave me a look not to tell him about the compass. My brain was swarming with excuses that I used to get out of lessons.
“We have come here from human land on your master's orders.” I blurted out, not sure where I got that excuse from.
“Oh, well, in that case, welcome to our land!” the elf said merrily.

After the tiny elf left, the compass suddenly came to life.
“Go west!” It said in a squeaky voice.
Both Brooklyn and I let out a startled yelp and eyed the compass suspiciously. We both glanced at each other and turned left.

We entered a cave, probably filled with bats and other disgusting insects.
“Um, Viola ca−can you check the co−compass to see if we are going the right way?” Brooklyn asked, stuttering.
“Of course you are going the right way!” the compass said angrily. “Do you not trust me?”
“Er…Brook, why don’t we just follow what the compass says.” I said, worried that it would leave us in this cave. As we walked we grew tired and started to slow down. We kept walking until we found an opening for the cave. I didn’t even realise that I was staring at my feet standing right outside the mouth of the cave until Brooklyn nudged me and said:
“Look up, Viola.”

I looked up and I saw darkness everywhere. All the streets were filled with rubbish, the ground was broken and black, there was a sea of lava instead of a sea filled with water and there were volcanoes everywhere you looked. The houses, or what was left of them were burned and destroyed. No *wonder* no one lived here. There was not a single creature in sight.
“This place gives me the creeps,” I said
“I know right,” the compass whispered. “But you can’t worry about how disgusting this place is. Right now you are on a mission to save your parents and everyone else in Hong Kong.”

“Are we there yet?” I whined.
“No, just keep going straight,” the compass said. “Just five more minutes.
“I guess that should be fine,” Brooklyn said.
We crossed a rickety bridge made of burning wood that hung over the sea of lava. I looked down the whole way watching my every step.
“Okay,” The compass said "We're here.”

As I looked toward the direction of the compass I couldn't help but gasp. Right before my eyes were millions of humans, trapped inside a massive clear dome. There were vampires, trolls and ogres guarding the dome covering as much of it as possible. But right in the middle there was a golden lock shaped exactly like the compass.
"Okay, here's the plan," the compass said, seriously."Viola, you are going to distract the devils to make them chase you as far away from the lock as possible while Brooklyn runs to the lock and places me inside it and the barrier will open and everyone will be free."
"We go on three," it commanded "One, two, THREE!"

I ran straight ahead and was able to get the attention of all the devils and lure them out of their defensive positions around the barrier. They were chasing after me and were hot on my heels. The vampire was the closest one behind me. He managed to grab my jacket but that didn't slow me down. I pulled my arms free from the sleeves and ran the fastest I had ever run. I felt a low hum coming from the bottom of my stomach. I was wondering if Brooklyn had put the compass in the lock. Then the Vampire reached out to grab me again but suddenly I teleported right to where Brooklyn was standing with the rest of Hong Kong. I grabbed her hand and she grabbed a stranger's arm from the crowd. I thought of home. Suddenly, we were all back in the city of Hong Kong.

The Healing Touch

German Swiss International School, Khan, Owais – 12

In the bustling city of Shanghai, lived a middle–aged woman named Xiao Hua. Xiao Hua was well–known for her extraordinary talent in creating dresses and stitching together cozy toys that brought ample comfort and joy to children. Little did she know that her destiny held a profound purpose –– a purpose that would have a tremendous impact on the human world and the field of medicine.

Almost a few thousand years ago, Shanghai was plagued by an enigmatic ailment – an agonizing back pain that swept through the entire city, afflicting people of all ages and resulting in the deaths of many. This mysterious epidemic spread like wildfire, causing unbearable suffering and leading to the unfortunate deaths of many. The excruciating torment permeated beyond Shanghai's borders, reaching across the vast expanse of China.

One fateful and chilly November, the birds chirped merrily and the trees swayed vigorously from side to side, Xiao Hua patiently sat on a comfortable and warm couch beside her mother. Her mother used her rough, yet wrinkly and frail hands to make a fireplace with the old pieces of wood in front of her home to keep the house warm. Xiao Hua concentrated on a new design of a blanket that she was creating to make themselves warm at home. Within moments, there was a loud knock at the door. At first, Xiao Hua and her mom were skeptical about the knock which they both heard. As a result, they decided to choose the safe option until they heard a familiar voice at the door.

"Hey, it's just me, it's Uncle Zhen," said the shaky and soft voice.

Both of them breathe a huge sigh of relief. Xiao Hua hurriedly ran towards the door to allow her Uncle to enter the house.

Her uncle was a joval shepherd and had been someone who had nourished and cherished her ever since Xiao Hua's dad had passed away. Although Xiao Hua had only been 4 years old when her father died, she remembered the crying of her uncle. Uncle Zhen was always a funny and happy man, but the horrific look on his face was something Xiao Hua would never have forgotten. From then onwards, her uncle had always tended and took care of her in absence of her mother. uncle Zhen and her niece both nurtured a very warm and healthy relationship throughout their lives. Uncle Zhen always provided her with rice cakes（年糕）whenever they would meet.

"Ah my darling, how have you been doing? Also, I brought along your favorite rice cake" spoke uncle Zhen.

"I've been doing well. Thank you Uncle for the cake. Please have a seat," replied Xiao Hua

However, something caught her eye when Uncle Zhen began walking towards the living room. There were patches of red spots on his pants which raised some concerns in Xiao Hua's head. That's when she realized that his knee was oozing with crimson blood. Xiao Hua shrieked when she first saw the blood, unable to believe her eyes.

"Did someone attack him?" she thought to herself, her mind clouding with anxious doubt and worry."Why was there blood on his pants?"

Uncle Zhen turned around to look at Xiao Hua. Her mother quickly ran toward her daughter to see what occurred.

"What's that on your pants?" asked Xiao Hua.

“That is something I have to share with you,” he replied enigmatically. “This morning, as I guided my cattle back to my farm, I twisted my knee and was in immense pain,” he explained joyfully. Xiao Hua felt confused — how could he be so happy when injured?

Uncle Zhen continued his tale. “After a lot of walking, I felt like giving up and I fell to the ground, only to land on a pile of thrones,” ranted Uncle Zhen. From the sound of that, Xiao Hua was disgusted and felt bad for her poor uncle.

Uncle Zhen read the frown lines on Xiao Hua’s face, smiling in response.

“But it’s not finished! After half an hour of resting on a boulder, my pain vanished and I was able to easily walk properly,” he declared. “Look at me, fit as a fiddle!”

At this moment, Xiao Hua froze and pondered. If the thorns pricked and healed him in the knee joints, then I could use needles and prick them in the spine of the people suffering from back pain, can’t I? It seems as though pain can kill pain! Xiao Hua would begin a new practice that requires needles to remove back pain from Shanghai. Her technique spread like wildfire throughout the nation, and with time many people in China were free of agony thanks to Xiao Hua’s ingenious practice.

Intrigued by the healing powers of the thorns, Xiao Hua embarked on a journey to learn about the medical powers of sharp objects such as needles and thorns. She spent countless hours poring over ancient texts, delving into the depths of medical knowledge, and seeking a practice that could alleviate any kind of pain, particularly back pain which plagued her city. Months turned into a relentless quest, but Xiao Hua remained undeterred, her determination unyielding.

It was during the Mid−Autumn Festival that Xiao Hua’s life took a quick turn. Although the citizens of Shanghai celebrated the festival by meeting up with family members, Xiao Hua celebrated it by stumbling upon a breakthrough. After sifting through stacks of books, she finally discovered a treatise that held the knowledge she had been seeking. From dawn till dusk, Xiao Hua meticulously studied the fragile pages, gaining wisdom about needles and how they could alleviate pain throughout the body. However, she also learned that this practice would require weeks of dedicated treatment to achieve true healing.

Xiao Hua was determined to resolve the epidemic that plagued Shanghai. Armed with newfound knowledge and unwavering determination, she spent hours trying to find the elderly residents of the city, offering them a glimmer of hope amidst their suffering. One such resident was an elderly man named Ming Yao, who agreed to place his trust in Xiao Hua’s hands and her revolutionary technique.

Xiao Hua was forced to be careful where she inserted the needles. With attentive care, Xiao Hua laid her first patient, Ming Yao down and began her first test run on her new invention. On the first day, Xiao Hua painstakingly inserted needles into the nerves her patient’s body. She continued and repeated this procedure for the next few weeks until two weeks later when Ming Yao’s pain was eradicated from his back and he managed to return to his healthier and younger version of himself.

After the first successful trial run, the news of Xiao Hua's miraculous healing abilities quickly spread throughout Shanghai. Her reputation grew, and she soon found herself inundated with patients seeking her unique treatment. Over time, Xiao Hua's fame transcended China's borders. Her name became synonymous with the art of healing, and she embarked on extensive travels, sharing her knowledge and expertise, leaving behind a trail of hope wherever she went.

Xiao Hua's confidence increased with each healing that went well, and she kept improving her methods. She added massage, and herbs to her practice as she learned more about ancient medicine. She rose to importance in the medical community as a result of her unmatched comprehension of the human body and her skill in diagnosing and treating a broad variety of illnesses.

Over the years, Xiao Hua's name became well-known across the whole world. Her name resonated within the hearts of scholars, doctors, physicians, and medics. Time after time, people from foreign countries would spend time with her understanding her knowledge about needles and medicine. Citizens would come and pay her respect for the impact she has on the world and community around her. Her story soon became an enduring source of inspiration for future generations.

Even after her passing, Xiao Hua's influence continued to shape the world of medicine. Scholars and practitioners built upon her work, further refining the techniques she had developed. As time passed, the price became more efficient and less time-consuming.

As we look back at Xiao Hua's journey, we are reminded that within each of us lies the power to make a difference. It is through acts of immense dedication that we can leave our mark on the world, just as Xiao Hua did with her healing touch. Her story serves as a guiding light, inspiring us to have a positive impact on those around us. Furthermore, Xiao Hua's journey serves as a reminder that even small gestures can change the shape of our world. For instance, the prick of a needle can ignite a spark of hope, forever transforming lives and shaping the course of humanity. Her dedication and her relentless pursuit of knowledge left a permanent mark on the world.

Six Feet Under

German Swiss International School, Kohli, Ishika – 14

Do you see that house?
No, no, the one at the end of the street– with moats of rice fields and corn fields and an engulfing cloud of misery?
You do? Well, it wasn't always like that.
No, they were a normal family– sort of.
Yes, get into bed and I'll tell you.

Everyone thought they were happy. Why wouldn't they be happy? They had crops galore, a spacious hut and they were a nice couple– arranged, sure, but they were childhood friends who had grown to love each other. So what made them droop like dead tulips, what ashened their faces, what tormented them to no end?

The house. The house was empty– not literally, there was tasteful furniture in every room– but there were no memories, no love. It was quiet, stiff, unnatural. No crying, no messes, no unconditional love for one, or two or five sticky–handed kids. Just mud walls contracting in on them, concentrating the sorrow into a dismal mist that they carried everywhere.

So they prayed.
And prayed.

They prayed for a child to call their own, a child that would fill up the space and push out the walls and fill that gaping, painful void in their chest. And after four long years, God decided to bless them with a beautiful, perfect child.

Under the watchful eye of the moon and a thousand winking stars, God left his blessing. With a smile brighter than every star combined, he left the couple to notice the piercing cries slicing through their mist. And soon enough, every fibre of their being jolted awake, and ran to the blessing's high cries, wanting nothing but to bring the child comfort . They clutched her tight against the whipping needles of cruel winter, warming her up with the sun that now resided within them.

月光– moonlight– was there a more fitting name for this miniscule wisp who held such unfathomable strength? The little cherub who's eyes shone with a fiery hunger that made you want to look away– but you just couldn't. Everyone's hands trembled when carrying such an innocent, captivating baby, somehow wiser than the oldest elder in the village. Now, instead of the mist, the parents carried with them the sweet scent of milk and somehow the aroma of 月光. She was like a promise, so very delicate and desperate to be held.

So the years swept by in a swirl of glee, the house filling up to the brim with memories and pictures and stories. 月光 got increasingly alluring every year– with skin that shone with the light she had residing deep within, and her lips the perfect crimson like drops of blood on fine china– but what really stood out was her hair.

Her hair was what turned every head, what drew eyes to her. Full, and thick, but somehow unusual– but no one could put their finger on it. It flowed and shimmered and winked– mischievous and playful, glinting under the sun but shining like a river under the moon. It looked like it was spun from moonlight– her hair soon became the talk of the town.

Now, on her sixth birthday, her doting mother finally decided that she was going to cut her hair. Before, she had been too frightened and peculiarly attached to it– not daring to cut so much as a strand off. But it was getting out of hand now, and just had to be done. With slow, meticulous snips, 月光's hair fell in dreamy, shining wisps to the floor. After it had been shortened to a length where she wouldn't have to cut it for a while, her mother started to

sweep up the glimmering strands. Picking some up, she stopped. It was like… string? Fine, glimmering thread, nothing like she had ever seen before. Gently handling it with extreme care, she went to her sewing machine.

"What is that made from? It's absolutely gorgeous!!"
"I've never seen anything like it! I must ask her where she got it from!"
"I knew their cotton crops were one of the best in china but– wow!"
"I'm so jealous– I need one!"
Hordes of villagers urgently inquired about 月光's new outfit, but none received a good answer. The mother did provide them with the name of this material, 丝绸– Silk. It was like a smooth river, mischievously toying with light and drawing all attention to it. Everyone wanted one– it was the only thing on their mind

But seldom did anyone actually obtain a shirt or a dress– 5 years later, only 10 pieces of clothing were created. This helped the family with their income and way of living but also started to change their attitude. Every yuan they got from an eager consumer, every vying look shot at their outfit, fed the vine of greed curling and twisting around their mind, tightening its claws further and deeper. They started obsessing over 月光's hair, combining it and oiling it aggressively every day. Slowly but surely, it went too far.

Going far and wide, searching for herbal serums and medicines to grow hair, collecting stories and myths, the couple tried everything to make 月光's hair stronger, more plentiful and shinier. But it just wasn't enough. Every foul medicine she ate, every oil massage, every mythical practice, angered them. They beat her, screamed at her, and saddened her to no avail. She started to droop, her worth leaking from her body with every harsh word, her character battered and shied away. Her personality went from a fun–loving charismatic little girl to a subdued one– shying away from every word. Her glow had faded, she no longer was a doppelganger to the moon. Instead, she took on a greyish hue, the twinkle gone from her eyes and the light snatched from her. Bruises lined her forehead like painful reminders of how valueless she was, bloody scabs everywhere like eyes on a potato. The love that the couple had craved to feel was replaced with a forever hunger for more, more, more, and 月光 just couldn't.

What she couldn't realise, was that it just wasn't her fault– any of it.
Yes, she just kept beating herself up about it because she wanted to make her parents happy.
What? Oh, of course I wouldn't! I love you so much, it physically hurts.
Let me continue now, don't ask stupid questions.

She was cracking. All life, joy, everything, was escaping from those little cracks, turning her into a black hole. Her face thinned, her eyes protruding, making people wince instead of the old envy. Her green veins were apparent, her ribs prominent. She started spacing out, adopting a permanent look of woe, and her bruises were the only colour she had left. When her ringing screams rang out every night, wafting through the walls, the other parents sat in silence, covering the ears of their little ones. Her cries were melodic and melancholy, twisting something deep inside whoever heard them, but what could they do?

It just got worse.

Everyone saw her slip. Everyone saw it– even God. And as soon as God did– a raging fury took him over. He gave the couple what they had wished for, and this is what they were doing with his blessing? He couldn't just watch as they exploited and abused her, so he swept in and took her away.

He swept in and took her away one day, and all there was left was this little larvae everywhere in the town. Noone knew where it came from– just that it was there. And after a month, they knew exactly what had happened.

Silkworms.

The town, was absolutely filled to the brim with

Silkworms.

She loved the colour green, you know.
She sat down in the garden– before everything had happened– gazing into the trees, feeling the grass under her fingers.
Her favourite spot was this ancient drooping tree, blanketed in bright green moss, leaves like little swooshing chains around you. She could just sit there for hours and hours.
I used to watch her, at the end, with her bald head, so delicate and bruised, and– and just so bare, as she lost herself in the world of crickets and lizards.
She didn't deserve that–you know?
She was the kindest soul I ever knew.
We sat there together, all the time.
We sat there together all the time, but then one day, she was
Six

Feet

Under.

The New Legends of Acupuncture in Hong Kong

German Swiss International School, Lin, Krystal – 13

Streaks of golden, gleaming, glittering sunlight glistened through the crevices of the concrete jungle of Hong Kong, flickering on Dr Lee's hands as he reached out to open the front door of his tiny acupuncture clinic. Dr Lee started his busy day by meticulously sterilising his workspace for his dear patients and closely examining the simple paraphernalia of his surgeries.

"Zou san! Dr Lee, sik jor fahn mei?" a voice rang in the clinic as the melodic bell sang; "zou san" was the Cantonese phrase for "good morning", while "sik jor fahn mei" directly translates to "have you eaten yet" and was commonly used as a greeting between Hong Kong residents.

"Oh Andy Chan, good morning to you too!" Dr Lee replied with his head down, delicately scrubbing the tables and chairs of his office clean, "Why did you come to visit so early today?"

Mr Chan sat down on a sparkling stool, stretched his back and wriggled his neck. He hesitated for a moment and said, "My dear friend, I've wanted to try your acupuncture for so long. I'm pretty sure you can help me with this. My body has been aching lately."

Dr Lee had met lots of patients having similar pains as Mr Chan did and knew exactly what to do. He casually waved to signal Mr Chan to lie on his stomach on the massage bed while he carried his set of apparatus to the side of it.

Dr Lee briefly cleaned the spots on Mr Chan where he was going to perform acupuncture and just as he was about to put a needle in, a panicked shriek of "WAIT!" echoed through the entire street.

"Whoa, whoa, whoa! That needle is huge! You sure I won't die from it?" Mr Chan shivered as he clutched onto the covers of the bed.

Dr Lee smiled, putting a hand on Mr Chan's shoulder, and gently answered, "It is alright, Andy. You know my whole family has been doing this for a living since my great–great–grandfather's generation. It is a major part of the ancient traditional Chinese medical practices, that originated about three thousand years ago; it is merely pressing needles into 'xuewei's or acupuncture points that would trigger your nervous system to release chemicals for special purposes that heal your sicknesses. Most people experience minimal pain or no pain at all during the therapy, so trust me, you won't feel discomfort and will be a lot better after this."

Reassured by Dr Lee's words, Mr Chan stopped moving, and within two minutes a total of six needles were pushed into his lower back and the back of his knees. During the process, he didn't complain about anything, and he thanked Dr Lee so much after the effective cure.

As Mr Chan exited the clinic, Dr Lee added, "Oh right! If you want to come here for a check–up next time, I might be at a new office in central; I've planned to move since last year."

"I thought the neighbouring Dr Hui also wanted the same spot, I find her constantly twitching eyebrows and nose revolting. Don't tell her I said that," commented Mr Chan

"Oh right! We scheduled a blindfolded acupuncture competition, and whoever wins gets the spot," answered Dr Lee.

Mr Chan's eyes glowed instantly, "I will come watch too! But be careful, Dr Hui is a nasty one, she can do anything to win."

Dr Lee grinned, nodding as Mr Chan leapt out of the clinic with his newly healed body.

Meanwhile, at the fish market, rain started to pour from the raging grey sky, and the wind howled as it listened to the conversation between a fisherman and a doctor.

"I could get TTX from pufferfishes if you want," whispered the scratchy sound of a man, "there's barely anyone catching fish for a living lately, surely nobody will notice."

The air gasped; it was silent for a moment, until a muffled and screechy voice from a woman with jumping eyebrows squeaked, "Fair enough. [..] you bring me the toxin? [...] the needles [..] blindfolded [...], so [...] tomorrow. Oh, Mr Ng, you will be the judge, right? [..] pause the competition [...] Dr Lee cuts himself, and declare me [...] winner?"

A glinting silhouette lurked in the dark; he hurried into a nearby Hong Kong–style charsiu stall as he panted, under the warm light flashed the face of a man. He sweated as the cold gusts of air intimidatingly hissed at his face. Frantically, he reached out to a phone and hit the buttons with trembling fingers.

Finally, the rivals stood face to face at the edge of two massage beds as the sun of the fateful day rose. Surrounding them were hundreds and hundreds of residents who were interested in this epic battle. Two volunteers lay on the beds waiting for the doctors to demonstrate their fascination with acupuncture. Just as Dr Hui gave Dr Lee a death glare and a wicked grin, to which he replied with a gentle smile, the judge, Mr Ng, handed out pieces of paper with the names of the two doctors on them and announced the start.

Instantaneously, blindfolds were put onto the doctors' eyes and a tray was handed to each of them. Dr Lee carefully examined the patient and reassured him before he executed his moves, whereas Dr Hui just ran her hand over the back of her patient and stabbed the needles violently, laughing crazily as she did so. The crowd gasped and covered their eyes as they saw the insane treatment this shrieking man received and immediately placed sharp, dark, crosses onto Dr Hui's name. Dr Hui was giggling and didn't seem to care a single bit about the reactions of the audience, perhaps because she was blindfolded.

"End of the match!" suddenly screamed the judge with a slight smile, as Dr Lee accidentally pierced the tip of his fingers with a needle, "Dr Lee got wounded by a needle!" A hysterical laughter boomed out at once. It was from Dr Hui. She ripped off her blindfold, threw her apparatus onto the floor and jumped onto one of the nearby tables, clutching her fists tight as she cheered, "I! Won!"

Whispering rose in the crowd like buzzing bees trying to find their hives.

"We all voted for Dr Lee, didn't we? Why is that lunatic jumping like that?"

"What does she think she's done?"

"Get off that table!"

"I feel bad for the volunteer."

A sudden thud of a fall echoed in the competition grounds with Dr Hui's vexing voice rung. It was Dr Lee who fell. He lay face down on the ice–cold floor.

"Hahahaha!", laughed Dr Hui, "If you all are wondering why I claim I won! It's because Dr Lee could never! Ever! Be an acupuncturist in the future! He is paralysed now and will die in less than six hours!"

The viewers started shuffling their feet and glancing at the body of Dr Lee. Some moaned about the immoral acts of Dr Hui, while others muttered something related to not being able to experience Dr Lee's fabulous treatments.

“Oh yeah?”, calmly entered Mr Chan, holding up a plastic bag with a pack of needles and a small vial of a liquid of some sort, “TTX, obtained from Takifugu albolumbeus or Tetraodontidae, more commonly known as the Hong Kong pufferfish, is the colourless liquid you can see in this container. Less than 0.2ml of this in your bloodstream is enough to plant your skull into the graveyard. On the side is a pack of needles that we found TTX on.”

It was silent for ten seconds until Dr Lee leapt up with a joyous boom of “Surprise!”

The crowd’s jaws hung open with Dr Hui frozen as Dr Lee scratched his head and explained, “Sorry fellow residents, I wasn’t cut by the needle with TTX from the beginning. It was all Mr Chan who saved my life; he told me that he saw Mr Ng and Dr Hui discussing at the pier about poisoning me with needles during the competition today. “ As he said so, the whirring of police cars grew louder and louder. The next thing the residents could hear were the sounds of Dr Hui and Mr Ng screaming and struggling as they were handcuffed and escorted into the white vehicle with a massive red stripe in the middle. At the same moment, Dr Lee and Mr Chan smiled at each other proudly and bowed to the clapping crowd.

Ten months later, a glamorous clinic spawned in the eastern side of central where the bright sun rose, and all the audience at the acupuncture competition came to celebrate its opening, while Dr Hui and Mr Ng sat in the corners of gloomy cells in the jail, staring into blank space and moaning in pain.

Life worth the death of a thousand stars

German Swiss International School, Lin, Tori – 13

In a world of hearts made of copper and tin, hers was made of porcelain. Copperhearts were gifted with ambition and sharp wits, Tinhearts were gifted with bravery and able bodies, and Porcelain hearts were gifted with stunning beauty and charisma. Hearts made of copper and tin were common, but a heart made of porcelain could only be born once in a dynasty. Dynasty after dynasty, the beholder of the porcelain heart was sought after by suitors from all over China. Every tale that had been spun about a Porcelainhearted was either sorrowfully tragic or wondrously joyous. However, there was one rule the gods bestowed upon this world, and that was that nobody could have two hearts.

During the Shang dynasty, there was a Porcelainhearted girl named Liuxing. She was compared to the glittering sky and admired like a full moon on a cloudless night. Along her shoulders there were waterfalls of silky midnight–black hair, and her irises were a bright gold that rivalled a thousand stars. Suitors showered her in gifts, their desire for just a flash of her pearly white smile driving them mad.

She refused the jewels and gems. She hated them. Simplicity made her days, cooking warm meals on the stovetop with her father, or watching him make fantastical swords fit for mythical warriors. Liuxing's father was the most skilled blacksmith of the century, but they both shared their appreciation of anonymity over fame. Deeply embedded in Liuxing's heart was the idea of true love, which could not be bought by gold. It became a sick and twisted ideology, with rejected suitors spreading ill about her: she was incapable of love and had long gone insane.

One day, she met a boy. He was no one special. He wasn't an Emperor, he wasn't a hero– he could never shoot suns out of the sky or force the stars to bow before his feet. However, he loved her for more than her beauty. He gave her the feeling of love– he felt like another home to her. She'd never laughed or smiled much in her life, but when she was with him, anything– everything was possible. When he couldn't meet her in the shade of the oak tree on the mountain, he would write her dreamy letters. She wanted to scream from the mountaintops that she had fallen in love! Real, true love! No, love was an understatement of what she felt for him and the flower crowns he made her. Every single day, she impatiently awaited his heartfelt letters, and every time she was hoping that the envelope would one day come with a ring.

Perfect. Everything was perfect between the both of them. She slammed open the door, a smile stretched across her face. Then the corners of her mouth dropped, and her cheeks paled. Where was the letter? Did he forget? No, he didn't, because he hadn't sent one the day before, or the one before that… they were in love, weren't they?

Panic consumed her as the sky fell from dusk to dawn, alone under the oak tree, eerie from stillness and silence other than her soft weeping. Finally, she saw a silhouette that was drowned in black robes deposit a square letter at her doorstep. She stumbled down the hill, grass cutting haphazard scars down her legs, the same grass that used to be as gentle as snow. She felt numb as she fell to her knees beside the bright red letter. The skies were torn open as her sobbing, no longer quiet, turned into screams of agony. The pieces came together even if she fought for them not to.

"I love you," she croaked, the shaky words dragged out of her cracked lips.

The rain pounded on her back, soaking the final memory that was embedded in her head. It was cruel, how the letters that had once delivered the reminder of love had suddenly delivered the news of death. For the boy, she cried a river of porcelain tears. For him, her fragile heart lay shattered in pieces.

She was devastated. Simple things had become unimaginably difficult; she wasn't able to eat without feeling sick to the stomach, and she couldn't sleep because of the nightmares that plagued her head. What was worse was that everything reminded her of him; flowers and trees, pen and paper, and even hearing the sound of laughing made her nauseous. She wasn't just miserable, but furious. She wanted revenge. She wanted the blood of her lover's coldhearted murderer. It wasn't the first time she began to feel an undying hatred for being a Porcelainhearted. If she was born with any other heart, wouldn't she have had her happily ever after? Wouldn't the boy she loved still be alive?

It would always stay the same: a heart was permanent, and one could never ask for another, let alone two more. Almost half a year had passed and she had fallen into a sickly state. She was silent in her suffering. It was as if her sadness had engulfed her and she was mute. When she caught a cold, she was on the brink of death.

"Liuxing?" her father asked, tending to her by her bedside. "What happened to my beautiful, lively, girl?"

"My heart," she said, finally. "He broke my heart."

"The boy that sent you letters? The one who met you beneath the oak tree?"

"Yes," she wanted to cry and let the river of tears pour out, but those rivers were cracked and dry. "I loved him, father. But humanity is wicked. Jealousy is a weapon, and it hurt him. A suitor– my suitor– killed the boy I loved."

"My dear, it isn't your fault," he said softly. "Don't ever blame yourself for what happened to him."

She took a deep breath.

"Father, can you do something for me?" she said, newfound determination echoing through her voice.

"Anything, dear."

"You're a skilled blacksmith, aren't you? Can you make me two new hearts, one of copper and one of tin?"
"I… don't know if I can, but I will try. But, sometimes one has to move on to forgive and forget."

"I don't want to forgive and forget," she said sharply, anger lacing her breath. "I want revenge, and I'm going to get it."

"I understand, Liuxing, but the Gods are harsh about laws. You cannot have two hearts, and surely not three," her father's tone was harsh.

Liuxing felt betrayed, and her hurt must have shown on her face because her father had a guilty expression plastered on his.

"They can't punish me more than they already have. I believe, in the past, that someone has had two hearts before. Nobody knows the consequence of breaking the Gods' law because it simply doesn't exist," she said, determined.

Her father disagreed, but he did as she said nonetheless. He was scared of what would happen if he refused… what if he lost her forever? In her chest, there were two new hearts. One of copper, and one of tin.

Suddenly, she felt a fire burning in her chest, and it was agonizing. It felt like her heart was so hot that it was melting. She clutched her chest, doubling down in pain as a scream escaped her.

"Liuxing!" her father yelled, kneeling beside his daughter whose face contorted in pain.

"It hurts so much!" she shrieked, trembling in disgust and horror. Blood seeped from the cracks forming on her skin. Had she become a monster?

Liuxing crashed through the door and staggered for the oak tree. She collapsed, and all of a sudden, her skin was aflame. Her body writhed in the red fire, as her father watched in horror as her life was ripped away from her. When the flame died down, there were only the scorched remains of Liuxing. It was as if she had become a statue, coated in molten metal. Liuxing's father crashed to his knees beside her, clawing at his daughter's broken body.

In the end, it was discovered that the punishment for having two hearts was to become a statue melded of both copper and tin. The metal that was discovered from the melted copper and tin was then named bronze, marking the creation of the alloy. The Gods, greatly angered and disappointed by Liuxing's rebellious actions, had taken the gift of the hearts away from the next Dynasty. They then replaced it with a fragile, beating pulp, nothing compared to a Tinheart or a Copperheart. Once in a while, the Gods, if pleased, would gift the humans, creating some more intelligent or stronger than others, but the hearts were all unique.

Behind a brilliant invention was the last tale spun out of a Porcelainhearted, and the most tragic of them all. To this day, her statue is said to be hidden under the roots of the oak tree, and for all her tragedy in life, reunited with her lover in death.

The Legend of Cuju: Unveiling the Ancient Chinese Football'

German Swiss International School, Lee, Jayden – 13

Flying spears and arrows were seen from the window of Feng's hut, he could see many blood puddles on the ground. There were injured men, along with many casualties. Feng was terrified, his mother was not home so he was distraught. Feng was crouching, hiding in the corner of the window so he could see what was happening.

Everything around him seemed to take a halt, as he gazed at the fire−red sky in despair. The pain of his eyes began to fill with tears. A bit more, and they would stumble down to his ripped shirt. Yet, there was nothing he could do, but accept the situation he was in.

He could identify his father on the battlefield who was the 'Qing clan' leader. 'Dad help!', Feng shouted at the top of his lungs. Fights in the village were frequent, and every time villagers would suffer, heavy damage would be done to the huts. It would take a very long time to repair everything. The women and children of the village despised the fighting and it was concerning. The fight was finished but the battle was not over, it would happen again in a week.

'Knock, knock'

There came a thudding noise from what was left of the cottage door, as Feng's mom stood on the threshold to peace in desperation, awaiting her dear son's arrival. Feng, astonished by his mom's swift entry, hurried to the door and welcomed her to the living room.

"Are you alright mother?! Where were you, I was worried."

"I'm fine. Where's your father? Did he come home yet?"

"No not yet, but I'm sure he'll be back soon."

Feng's father came bursting into the house, he clutched onto his stomach, with dried−up blood covering his hands. He suddenly collapsed and went out cold, Feng and his mother carried him onto his bed and then treated his injuries. During dinner Feng and his mother sat in disbelief without uttering a single word.

"This is going too far, I have to find a way to stop the fighting," Feng thought to himself.

The next day he met up with his friends in the rice fields where they discussed solutions to end the battle between the 'Qing' and 'Sheng' clans.

"We must create a game that can stop the ongoing conflict between the 'Qing' and 'Sheng.' A game might be a good idea. Feng's friend questioned the others.

Suddenly as they were contemplating, an orange came flying towards Feng from the nearby market. He pulled his leg up without further consideration and stopped the ball from knocking him.

'That was close!' shouted Feng in trembling fear.

'Ah, why not a game that requires the use of legs?' requested another of Feng's friends.

'Yes! A game of legs and a ball'

Feng could not believe the nonsense that was being said. He kicked the orange aside in disappointment and it glided through a hole in the fractured wall by accident.

'Great kick!' shouted Feng's friend, 'this can be just the game! A game where two teams must kick a round item in between a lifted hole to gain points.'

Feng's frown was erased as this idea was not horrible after all.

'The game could have 6 players on each team so that both teams of 'Qing' and 'Shing' have sufficient players to work together and win. Both teams will work together to get a limited amount of points without letting the ball touch the ground, resulting in there not being a winner. And this can avoid any major violence in the village! I think we should call this 'Cuju'' Feng suggested in a cheering manner.

Feng, carrying his pronounced idea, rushed back to his house, through the destruction of the village where smoke and fire were invading everywhere he passed. By the time Feng had returned home, his dad had finally gained consciousness, lying on the wooden bed. Feng announced his ideas to him, hoping for a positive reply, of which though quite risky, he was given the answer that he hoped for. Feng's dad looked at his finally grown-up and mature son in admiration before falling back asleep.

The next morning, Feng's dad, who possessed the title of the leader of the Qing clan, with the physical support of his son, steadily and carefully made their way to the town square. Feng and his friends scoured every hut of the village and gathered all citizens in preparation for his dad's mighty speech.

The 'Sheng' clan reluctantly accepted the temporary peace and decided to gather at the village square as well. People chanted and discussed in curiosity, as they awaited the 'Qing' leader to deliver his message.

To prevent any further commotion, Feng's dad made his move.

'Dear villagers of Shan Dong. Through long consideration and bloodshed, I think it is time for a change. I, Wu Feng Chi, as the leader of the 'Qing' clan, hope for a game for peace in our village. This game shall be called Cuju, which requires the use of a ball and our legs. Cuju will replace the violence of the 'Qing' and the 'Sheng'!' Announced Feng's dad to the village.

The villagers cheered and the 'Sheng' nodded and smiled in agreement. The two clans finally had something that they could both agree on. 'Peace' and a nice game of Cuju.

Under the sunset, Feng accompanied by his proud dad marched home in their newly found 'peace.' They cheered and toasted walking past the fellow villagers as they made their way back to their honest village house. Smiling at each other, acknowledging the success of their mini-campaign.

The following day, the villagers gathered around, eager to see the first-ever Cuju game. Excitement filled the air and everyone's hearts. Feng and his friends were overwhelmed knowing that their idea had been made a reality. They were hoping that this game would solve the fighting in the village.

"It has to work," they all thought to themselves.

The teams were formed as the game commenced, and the villagers started to cheer and clap. The game unfolded with skill and passion, as players showcased their agility and teamwork. Each goal was celebrated with cheers and applause. 'The Qing' and 'Shing' clans worked well together and all the team members had smiles on their faces.

As the final whistle blew, the villagers erupted into joyous applause. The battle was finally over and peace was brought to the land of Shang Dong.

Blood Red

German Swiss International School, Leung, Annabel – 13

"I didn't mean to cause mass murder. I just wanted… to be happy.

The water was supposed to make me happy.
Why didn't it make me happy?"

Years ago, I heard of a town. A legendary town. A town that was *always happy.*

People who went there sad came back happy. People who went in happy came back happier. But it didn't last. Not unless you lived in *that very town.*

It was interesting. It intrigued me. It was a mystery– and I wanted to solve it. And the mystery? It was called the story of Emperor Tang and the town of Happiness.

Long ago, when Emperor Tang heard of this legendary town of Happiness, he wanted to know their secret. 'The Secret of Happiness', they called it. So the emperor sent his cleverest advisor to the town and ordered him to do anything it took to uncover their secret. This advisor was infamous for his cleverness. All of China had heard of him, the revered Advisor Li. When he received these orders, he was just as intrigued, and immediately took up the chance to visit the town. And so he left his family, his wife and his children, and travelled exactly one day and one night to the faraway town of happiness.

The second he arrived at the mysterious town, he was greeted by an unfamiliar smell, the loud sounds of a celebration, and a stumbling man. The man fell onto his shoulder and looked up at the stranger in surprise.

"Hello there!" he grinned widely, "Are you just passing by, or–" The man burst into an uncontrollable fit of giggles.

Advisor Li was confused beyond comprehension. What on earth was happening? "Yes, I suppose I am passing," he answered slowly, "Is there any chance I could stay here overnight?"

The man clapped a hand on his back. "Why of course, my friend!" He took Advisor Li's hand and dragged him into a run–down hut, "Here, have some water, you must be thirsty."

Advisor Li was shocked at the man's immediate kindness and jolly nature, but nonetheless grateful, "Thank you," he said, accepting the cup.

The man just gave him another big smile. "It's no problem at all." he slurred, before passing out onto the ground.

Horrified, Advisor Li watched the man drop to the floor. "Sir," he frantically shook him, dropping the cup of water he was given, "Sir, are you okay?" He checked his pulse, relieved to find that it was still beating. The man was only sleeping– how strange.

Keeping the emperor's orders in mind, he quickly left the sleeping man on the floor and followed the sounds of celebration to the crowded town square. And as he walked, Advisor Li noticed something even stranger than the sudden collapse of the man. Vomit painted the streets, and the stench was horrible.

Advisor Li gagged and pinched his nose. How disgusting! "I must hurry to the town square," he thought, "I cannot stand this ridiculous town much longer."

When he finally reached the town square, he was met with even more vomit, but this time accompanied by the sounds of celebration. Dozens of people were dancing, playing the Chinese drums, and setting fireworks off. Dancing under the silvery moonlight, under the shining stars, next to the reflection of the still river that seemed to shine under the starry sky. Advisor Li was immediately pulled into the throng of festivities, his hand dragged into the circle of celebrating people. Confused, he struggled against the celebrations, looking around worriedly, his sight blurring, but all he could see were the heads of other smiling people, and he was

lost.

"What's happening?" Advisor Li sat up in shock, "Where am I?" He scrambled for his surroundings, but all he could see was the river bank next to him along with countless others, passed out as he was. He pushed himself off the ground, his back protesting in pain, and immediately started coughing. Everything hurt, his back, his legs, his head, his throat. He crawled towards the river, desperately trying to reach the water there, hoping to find cool relief in it. Splashing his red face in it, Advisor Li prepared for the icy water to wake him up but was instead met with a strange–smelling liquid that stung his eyes.

"Ow!" Advisor Li yelped in pain, frantically rubbing his face, "What was that?" He stared down at the river in confusion and shock. After moments of deliberation, he carefully dipped a finger into the water, bringing it up to his mouth to taste, and it tasted… *bitter*?

'Bitter water?' Advisor Li thought, 'Another strange thing about this town… very strange indeed.' He watched as people started to get up, dizzily tripping towards the very river he sat next to. He watched as they greedily guzzled down mouthfuls of the bitter liquid. And he watched, as slowly, minute by minute, they turned from stumbling idiots to cheerful ones. He watched as their frowns became smiles, as their sleepy eyes became creased with happiness, as their headaches seemingly faded away.

Advisor Li watched as a miracle happened right in front of his eyes. How wondrous! How marvellous! How simply amazing! This must have been the secret, hiding under his nose all along, the secret of Happiness turned out to be a mysterious bitter liquid. He looked again at the mysterious river, its smooth surface almost resembling glass. As he took a longer look, Advisor Li realised it was free of fish, plants, and all signs of life, but still, the secret of Happiness. Lifeless, but created life in this very town.

Heart thundering, hands shaking, and confused out of his own mind, the advisor rushed back to the palace, through flowered meadows, past idyllic villages, over countless more rivers– ones full of life. He arrived at the gates of Emperor Tang's striking palace and tore through the doors of the throne room, opened his mouth and the words poured out.

A magnificent tale, so miraculous and astonishing that no one would've believed it, not even Advisor Li had he not seen it with his own two eyes, a priceless secret of Happiness. And once the words had stopped falling out, he watched as the emperor's face shifted, from annoyance to shock to glorious excitement. It was almost like a golden glow had set upon the room and lit everyone's faces. Even the best storytellers could not possibly explain the pure adrenaline that ran through the emperor's heart. This was it, the Holy Grail, the secret of all secrets.

And Advisor Li watched, as Emperor Tang went to see the town for himself, as his face widened with a gleeful grin, as armed men were ordered to seize the town, no questions asked, no resistance allowed.

No resistance allowed.

Who would be so foolish to think that the selfish emperor would spare mercy? Nothing stands in the way of such greed.

He watched, as he had for so long, as the marching troops invaded the town, he heard the screams for help, the cries of the children, and the pleas of the elderly, and he saw the *blood run red*. Red, once the colour of fortune, but now the colour of horror as it flowed through the town into the precious river.

Unwaveringly, unblinkingly, numb. Complex emotions that once rushed through the advisor had turned to ice as he watched the town that was once so full of life turn into nothing but ruin. It was like watching a

bright star catch on fire and diminish into darkness. Anyone would've broken down in tears, anyone would've done something, *anything,* to stop it. But Advisor Li could not turn away from the mess that he had started. And so he watched, and watched, and watched, as the river turned the same shade of happiness that once filled the town.

Now, dear reader, you may be wondering what happened to Advisor Li after all this. The truth is, no one knows. But he is irrelevant, a mere pawn on this chessboard. The real main character here is none other than our cruel, cruel emperor. Years later, Emperor Tang sits in his palace, drunk on the blood of his victims, but you will be surprised to find that he is in fact, unhappy. Sure, he may have found the secret to Happiness, but at what cost?

Well, his own happiness, of course, for now he sits in a pool of regrets, lost forever in the blood–red

liquid.

So as we come to the end of our tale, I must let you know one thing. The secret to Happiness doesn't lead to happiness at all, but in this case, bitterness and loneliness. I should know best, after all, I am Emperor Tang. And the mystical liquid? I believe you know it best as *alcohol*.

The Way the World Rumbles

German Swiss International School, Low, Troy – 14

'Another earthquake, that's absurd. We have already been struck by three, in a matter of a week,' Mei sighed as she laid back and gazed at the light, white ceiling, reflecting on the many lives that have been lost in the last few days. The documents on her desk blurred into a soggy, grey colour, whilst she lowered her head, preparing to get back to the task at hand. She slid the piles of reports into view, and slightly brushed all the drenched, scrunched up tissues to one side of her stationery and folder–filled workspace. She tried, she really tried, but deep down, buried under her water–loaded eyes, was an immense pain that carved a scar in the centre of her heart. This scar tore a breach in her perception of reality, and all the joy that she left behind, bled through this very opening.

'What other option is there? I have failed, I am sorry. I have failed you Zhangheng. I could not do what you did, and now civilization is going to suffer due to my mistakes.' Mei continued to beat herself up over it. However, covered up under the pain, emerged an idea from the deep trenches of her burnt out mind. She was confident, and her choices had been narrowed to this one option, she had to act now and fast, or it would be too late. She tied her jet black hair back, and realised, 'If I can't make a new seismoscope, I just might need to enhance yours.'

Mei stood up and pushed her stool aside. She rushed through the hallways, knocking over piles of folders and reports. Leaping across bumps from the crumpled up cotton floor mat below. Despite wanting to stop and sip a soothing coffee, she ran like there was no tomorrow. She felt it. The harder she ran, the more she felt. The cramps were ready to revolutionise her leg. Yet, the storage room was the only thing on her mind.

Finally, through her extreme efforts, she did it, she made it, she was there and the storage room was standing right in front of her. She poked the door and it creaked open, exposing a cloud of dust that triggered her coughing. Her eyes turned blood red as they began to itch. Following the dust storm, was an awful stench that tried to convince Mei to leave the room, yet she did not budge. Mei quickened her movements as she scoured the room for what she hoped would be key in saving Beijing from the waves of earthquakes.

No, the whole planet.

From the top shelf above the dust pans bombarded with cobwebs, presumably left untouched for years, above the cardboard boxes of abandoned 42 year old reports of the 2008 Sichuan earthquake, sat the missing piece to her ultimate plan. Its imposing bronze shell glistened at Mei's eyes as she gazed in astonishment. Carefully, aware of all the piled tools and equipment around her in the unlit room, she slowly placed her left foot on one of the lower racks, though still cramping, she placed her right foot on the platform slightly above her right. Powered by her determination to save the earth, she took her left foot off and slid it onto the second platform above. Using one hand to hold herself steady, she took the other and carried the box down.

Mei picked the box up and dashed back to her desk. Not having any time to waste, she ripped the box open, and what was hidden inside was revealed.

The mighty vessel stood on the table and its appearance was staggeringly unique. Wrapping around its bronze armour were eight ferocious dragons with open mouths carrying balls ready to strike at any moment. Under each open mouth, sat a toad with their mouths gaping, ready to catch one of the balls.

Mei could not believe it. Just an inch in front of her was an authentic copy of the ancient seismoscope that her idol, the imperial historian and royal astronomer; Zhang Heng invented in 132 CE during the Han dynasty. Such an invention seemed to have left her in awe.

Curiosity seduced Mei into Wikipedia where information of the seismoscope was pouring out. Her eyes rolled faster than her brain processed, so fast that the reflection from her dark pupils was struggling to keep up with the scrolling. Her mouse orchestrated constant 'Clicks and clacks' as she rummaged through the different sites of the browser, her desktop started to exhale heat as the motherboard floundered to handle any more information.

Her extreme efforts were not wasted, having worked out two theories that Zhang Heng possibly applied to the seismoscope. One of the theories suggests that a thin stick was placed loosely down the centre of the barrel. In the event of an earthquake, the stick would topple over in the direction of the seismic shock, causing one of the dragons to open its mouth and release the bronze ball. The second is: a baton is retained on the rim of an instrument as a swinging pendulum. It would cause the closest dragon to release its ball when the pendulum swung wide enough to hit the side of the barrel. Observers should be alerted to the earthquake by the sound of the ball landing on the toad's mouth. This would have given us a rough estimate of the quake's location, but it didn't give any information as to its intensity.

Mei, with her expert knowledge on modern seismoscopes and earthquakes, designed a unique fragment that could be added to the ancient seismoscope to power its full potential. It was now not only authentic looking, but had a display to show the data of seismic activity.

Outside of the fingerprints covered window, hanged the moon on the pitch black sky which peered directly into Mei's dark pupils of anxiety and desperation. Mei was supposed to be out of the office and home, but she had to do what had to be done. She scurried out of the building carrying the seismoscope, trying her best to avoid the notice of security. However, with security everywhere, it was impossible for her to avoid it all.

She kicked the entrance doors open, and was greeted by the mess of the destruction of the city. Smoke from the collapsed buildings swarmed through the streets. Everywhere she walked, chaos just seemed to follow. As long as she could make it to the country park, then she could find the cause and fix this all.

Under desperation, Mei had not noticed that she was being followed. She ran and ran, neglecting the mayhem surrounding her. She just could not stand, seeing China, her country, regress into utter destruction.

Suddenly, as Mei stopped for a breath, she heard talking emerging from behind. She immediately faced backwards, but there was no one. She knew something was wrong and had to be more attentive. She slowed her movements to stay aware of any suspicions.

Mei made it. She quickly carried the seismoscope out of the beaten box, and placed it on the muddy surface. The seismic activity shown was drastic, she had never witnessed seismic activity as such. Without further consideration, she turned the seismic activity analysation mode to 'on'. The seismoscope spluttered

as it tried its best to process. Time was ticking and Mei was pacing up and down in frustration. Sweat was pouring down her cheeks as she wandered around waiting for the 'Loading' to reach '100%'.

The sun began to rise, as the data was about to fully upload. The fog and destruction that surrounded her, seemed to have disappeared, as the hope of saving the world was restored. Birds chirped their majestic song and the frogs from the nearby ponds croacked to the beauty of their music. This made Mei hopeful, hopeful that she would not have to hear the weeping and cries of pain from the innocent and destruction.

Mei finished up the system settings and the data was fully uploaded. She downloaded the transcript and read aloud the analysation of the seismoscope,

'Seismic activity rating: 10
Seismic waves : 99.99% coming from the inner core of the earth
Cause of earthquake: 99.99% drilling of earth core.'

As Mei was fully immersed in the transcript, she not only had been mentally drilled but physically drilled by a knife through the back of her frail body.

She collapsed, and the seismoscope shattered into fragments, as her head bashed into it. Mei with her remaining breaths glazed at the sky in disappointment, fear and betrayal.

Mei died in the hands of the evil, corrupted society. Her efforts to restore peace and save the planet had once again been destroyed. There was no hope left. This world did not deserve such a pure soul, such that she sacrificed herself for millions, billions of lives.

Her Quest for Artemisinin

German Swiss International School, Ma, Hilary – 13

Ai Hua skipped back home with armfuls of wood, just like her mother had asked. As she pranced back, earthy and dusty scents contaminated the atmosphere in this small rural village in the Henan province. Many of the rickety houses were designed identically, made of stone and tiled roofs. Sheets and clothes hung out to dry in the motionless air. Chickens clucking and pigs grunting echo from afar. Lush, emerald green vegetation carpeted the hills in the distance bordering little murky pools of water.

Ai Chen, Ai Hua's mother, was in the kitchen preparing dinner when Ai Hua thrashed in through the front door, barely able to control the door handle. An aroma of savoury smells swirled through the room like a cloud, it was all a mixture of pork and vegetables, fish, spices and rice. Beside the door stood a decaying tree trunk, used as a stovetop. On top was a steel wok coated in a thick layer of charcoal. As Ai Chen fried the food, the rising steam intensified the humid home. She scratched at something absentmindedly at the back of her neck as she stirred the dinner.

'Hua, did you get more wood for the fire?' Ai Chen asked her daughter.

'Yes, mum.' Ai Hua replied.

She dumped the little logs beneath the stove and started to set the table, waiting for her mother to finish.

Shortly after, they sat down at dinner, 'How's school?'

'Good, very good. I'm at the top of my class!'

'Very good. Keep working hard.'

They continued to eat in companionable silence.

A few days later, Ai Hua set off at 6 am on her long and strenuous walk to the village school. Her journey began through the main town and the marketplace where everyone knew her name. Soon after, Ai Hua had to hike up a treacherous hill covered in a blanket of dirt and vegetation. Around her, the crickets chirped along to the hum of the birds, then they were joined by the buzz of various types of insects. She took a long stroll along a narrow path until she reached her school. Enthusiasm engulfed Ai Hua as she approached the school building. Once she entered the classroom, the squeaking and scratching of the chalk rubbing against the blackboard and the sound of chairs shuffling about filled the room.

When the clock struck four o'clock, Ai Hua gently stacked her books and neatly put them in her school bag. Then set off for her long journey back home to her mother.

Ai Hua barged through the front door of her house only to find her mother sitting at the dining table coughing hysterically. It looked as though Ai Chen's coughing was suffocating her as if she was drowning, unable to breathe. Ai Hua immediately dropped her schoolbag and books and rushed to help her mother. She gathered a box of facial tissues and a warm mug of tea and placed them beside her mother on the dining room table, concerned about her mother's health.

"Mum, are you okay? What happened?" Ai Hua asked as a mask of worry put itself on her face.

"I haven't felt very well since you left for school."

"Is there anything else I can get you, medicine, another cup of tea?"

Ai Chen shook her head and went to the kitchen to prepare their dinner.

After eating dinner, Ai Hua and Ai Chen went to bed distressed about the condition of Ai Chen's health.

The creaking sound of the floorboards awoke Ai Hua; she rolled out of bed only to find her mother squatting by the toilet gagging. Without hesitation, Ai Hua sprinted to her mother's bedroom, snatched the medication bottle from the cupboard and ran back to her mother. She waited until Ai Chen was in somewhat of a state of comfort before heading back to bed.

However, Ai Chen's health only seemed to deteriorate as time progressed. It wasn't until the eleventh day of her illness that Ai Chen finally agreed for Ai Hua to take her to the village doctor, where he diagnosed her with malaria. The Ai's were told that Ai Chen only had 48 hours to live, which left the family in utter shock. The doctor also mentioned the multiple dangerous symptoms that Ai Chen might experience; seizures, a coma or organ failure. This meant that Ai Hua would be left to live alone, with no mother or father.

Although Ai Chen was on bed rest for the last 48 hours of her life, Ai Hua knew that her only goal was to spend as much time with her mother as possible, even if it was beside her bed and conversing with her. Ai Hua spent day and night in her mother's bedroom knowing that malaria was not contagious, even though there was a doctor already beside her mother.

The last 24 hours of Ai Chen's life had inevitably come.

Ai Hua recalled what the doctor informed them about the fatal symptoms of malaria, frightened that her mother might endure them. She didn't know when that last conversation with her mother was going to happen or the last embrace. For the majority of the morning, Ai Hua remained beside Ai Chen; she never left the room except for occasional toilet breaks or to get food and drinks.

However, when Ai Hua went to the kitchen to refill her mother's glass of water, she came back stunned with horror. Ai Chen's limbs began to tremble and flex. The healthcare worker remained calm and tried to assist Ai Chen by placing another pillow under her head and loosening all the clothes on her body while Ai Hua stood by the door pale and with her mouth dropped. Once the tremoring simmered down, the doctor rolled Ai Chen onto her side, in case there was any fluid in her mouth. After the doctor told the family that if another seizure occurred then it increased the probability of Ai Chen dying.

"Could you excuse us please?" Ai Hua kindly asked the doctor, "If anything happens, I'll make sure to call for you."

As the door closed, Ai Chen quietly whispered to her daughter, "Thank you for being beside me."

"Of course." Ai Hua sobbed as tears welled up in her eyes. "Just rest mum." Just as Ai Hua said her last sentence, she felt a slight tremor in her mother's hands and immediately called the doctor in to help her. Ai Chen's body began to shake repeatedly and she began to have muscle spasms.

Ai Hua heard that her mum wasn't breathing any air out. With tears streaming down her face, she clutched onto her mother's hand as she knew these were her last moments with her.

A few days of mourning later, Ai Hua commemorated her mother's full life by hanging beautiful, radiant, colourful lights and fragrant flowers around her casket, now knowing that her life goal was to find a cure for malaria so other families and people would not have to face the same fate as hers.

She knew that her life would be devoted to this malarial cure.

Ai Hua spent the last two arduous years of school drowning in sweat, knowledge and fatigue; she remained at the top of her class, still researched malaria and medicine in that village library during her leisure time and was accepted into the University of Science and Technology of China to study medicine.

After some time at the university, Ai Hua was again doing research on diseases in one of the many libraries in the school, when she stumbled upon a section entirely dedicated to malaria. However, many of the books Ai Hua had previously read, but there was this one mysterious–looking book. The facade was quilted in dust, but that did not hide the glaring red cover beneath it. Once she took it off the shelf, Hua wiped the cover with her jumper sleeve which revealed the title; 'A Mystery Called Malaria', she impatiently flipped through the book only to find that some loose documents slipped out. She skimmed through the documents and discovered that they were medical documents from the Chinese dynasties, though she did not know which ones.

Over the course of her education and career, Ai Hua studied medical texts to help find a traditional cure for malaria. The texts told her that a sweet wormwood plant called Artemisia annua was the ancient cure. Naturally, she isolated and tested the compound of Artemisinin found within the plant on mice and monkeys and finally herself.

Ultimately, her cure saved millions of lives during the Chinese Cultural Revolution despite the prohibition of scientific research during this time. Her drug was soon globally recognised and she achieved her life–long goal. Ai Hua fulfilled her promise of finding a cure for malaria so many families would not have to endure what she did. Her quest for a cure was finally over.

New Gunpowder Tales

German Swiss International School, Ma, Hugo – 13

In the midst of the Song Dynasty, a fierce and prolonged conflict raged on between the Song and Jin armies. The city of Xuan, a strategic stronghold of the Song, had fallen into the hands of the Jin forces, now posing a significant threat to the Song Empire. Determined to reclaim their territory, the Song Emperor decided to send an elite army led by the brave and courageous General Liang for a quick and rapid recapturing of the bastion before the Jin could establish any strong defences.

The Song Army marched towards the walls of Xuan, their spirits high, their resolve unyielding and their attitude conveying a sense of supremacy over the Jin "barbarians", but as they approached the heavily fortified city, they encountered a formidable defence system established by the Jin. Three layers of walls, barricades, spikes and hordes of archers on top of ramparts made the defences impenetrable.

Unfazed by the seemingly insurmountable obstacle, the elite Song soldiers began a relentless assault, seeking to breach the city's defences. Song archers unleashed whole swarms of arrows towards the Jin soldiers. Song siege machines slammed the walls of the city and Song soldiers rushed the walls with ladders, attempting to break through the first layer of Jin troops. However, the Jin Army, skilled in the art of warfare from many years of civil war on the steppes, returned the favour. The Jin archers, safe at the third wall, sent a barrage of arrows back at the Song troops. The skies darkened as a storm of projectiles rained down, causing chaos and devastation within the ranks of the Song Army. Many Song soldiers were struck by the arrows, and the dead bodies of Song kept piling up.

Seeing as the desperate assault wasn't going to work, General Liang ordered a full retreat. Morale dropped significantly and in the Song camp of operations, insubordination was at an all time high, with Song troops refusing to follow orders of officers. Amidst all the hopelessness, there was a beacon of hope named Bing Kai Wong. A middle aged bald inventor who had created miracles from dire situations, a man who could be trusted to develop a miracle weapon to break through these indomitable defences. After noticing the terrible first defeat they suffered, the Song Emperor immediately assigned Scientist Monk Bing Kai Wong to assist the Song Army to create a weapon that could help the Song defeat the Jin fortifications, a weapon to pierce the heavens.

With unwavering determination, Bing Kai Wong headed to a makeshift workshop at the Song camp, his mind completely consumed by thoughts of innovation, ideas and destruction. He pondered over ancient texts, studying the works of alchemists and scholars who had delved into the mysteries of explosives and combustible materials. Days went by as, and everyday Bing Kai Wong would head to his workshop, tirelessly experimenting with different combinations of chemicals, hoping to create a substance that would create a large explosion, powerful enough to annihilate the walls of Xuan.

Days turned into nights, and Bing Kai Wong still had no solution. He had narrowed it down to a concoction of sulphur, saltpetre and charcoal. He blended these substances in different proportions and different orders, seeking the perfect combination that would yield an explosion to rival the gods.

Finally, after numerous trials and setbacks, his perseverance paid off. When he mixed sa, he discovered the formula for gunpowder—a volatile and powerful substance that possessed the potential to change the course of warfare. Excited and filled with renewed hope, he presented his creation to General Liang, who recognized the immense value of this weapon.

With the utmost secrecy, Bing Kai Wong and his team began manufacturing gunpowder on a large scale. As the mass creation of gunpowder began, the Song Army's supplies also began to rapidly dwindle, and the situation worsened

when Song communications and supply lines were cut off by Jin forces. The Song supply depots now couldn't reach the Song forces, and they would run out of food and water in two weeks. Desperation loomed over everyone as they awaited a miracle.

Finally, the day of reckoning had arrived. With massive stockpiles of gunpowder, The Song Army, bolstered by the presence of Bing Kai Wong and his ingenious invention, prepared for their final assault. Under the cover of the night, they stealthily approached the city walls of Xuan, carrying sacks filled with gunpowder bombs. With a resounding battle cry, they launched their attack, throwing bombs at the walls. Gunpowder–filled sacks soared through the air, exploding in brilliant bursts of light and thunderous blasts. The archers defending the walls were caught off guard, their ranks decimated by the devastating power of the explosives. The ramparts of the walls crumbled to dust, and the fortifications the Jin had established were completely destroyed. The once impenetrable defences of Xuan crumbled under the might of the Song Army's assault.

The Jin Army, taken by surprise and facing an enemy armed with this newfound weapon, faltered in their defence. The tides had turned, and victory seemed within reach for the Song forces. Wave after wave, the soldiers pressed forward, their determination unyielding. With each passing hour, the resistance of the Jin weakened. Forced to retreat, they could no longer withstand the onslaught of the Song Army. The city of Xuan was triumphantly reclaimed by the valiant soldiers, their victory owing much to the brilliance and innovation of Bing Kai Wong and his invention of gunpowder. After the victory, Bing Kai Wong was brought back to the Song capital for questioning on his methods. In the end, he said "I have become gunpowder himself, a destroyer of worlds, a breacher of heavens.", a quote revered by scholars of the Song Dynasty and beyond.

In the aftermath of the battle, Bing Kai Wong was hailed as a hero by many, considered to be the Scientist Monk of the Buddha, his name etched in the chronicles of history. Celebrated by many citizens, the day of the recapturing of City Xuan is now the annual Bing Kai Wong holiday, where gunpowder is put in houses to show the ingenuity of the great Bing Kai. His invention had not only saved the Song Empire from impending defeat but had also opened up a world of possibilities and progress. Thanks to all the contributions he had made to Science, the Song Dynasty later colonised the great empire of Mesopotamia and Papua New Guinea. His legacy would endure, serving as a testament to the indomitable spirit and ingenuity of the Song Dynasty.

And thus ends the story of Bing Kai Wong and his revelation of gunpowder stood as a testament to the power of human innovation and the triumph of intellect over adversity. It was a reminder that even in the darkest of times, the spark of creativity and the pursuit of knowledge could ignite a revolution, even a tiny spar changing the world forever.

Lao Li and his Magic Needles

German Swiss International School, Madduri, Nitya – 14

Once upon a time, in Ancient China, during the Tang dynasty, a Chinese medicine technique was formulated. But, it may surprise you to hear that it was not a doctor who came up with this great invention. At that time, in Peking, there was an old, unknown tailor who worked for Emperor Xuanzhong and his wife Yang Guifei, diligently sewing dresses for the Imperial family day after day. Living on the little money he earned and with an overworked body, no one would have expected Lao Li to have discovered acupuncture. But he did!

One ordinary weekday, after long hours of sewing cloth from dawn to dusk, Lao Li came home to his wife and children with a great number of cramps straining his wrist. When he gingerly turned the keys to open the front door to his cottage, the only thing on his overworked mind was changing into his pajamas and drinking a warm bowl of soup. But little did he know this was just the beginning of a life–changing phenomenon.

That evening, his pain felt like an eternity for Lao Li. Although he had an inkling that this new pain wasn't just a result of soreness, he brushed it off and went to bed. But he could barely sleep, tossing and turning in agony. The next morning the pain seemed worse, like burning hot pins and needles sticking into his wrinkled flesh. His fingers were numb to the point where he could stab a needle into them and still not feel a thing as well as an agonizing pain that was as heavy as a load of bricks. The unfortunate man sat on his cot, thinking about what he had done to deserve this excruciating torment. How could he finish the dress that he had promised the Emperor's daughter with his wrist like this?

By the dawn of the next day, Lao Li's wife had called the doctor to her small cottage to see whether or not he could cure his husband's pain. The doctor 'ummed' and 'ahhed' and prescribed a recipe of snake soup mixed with bat's blood as a purgative, which he was confident would remove his pain. But the pain only got worse. Lao Li had no choice but to try and work on the dress as the emperor's beloved daughter, Xiao Fi was in desperate need of a new dress for her behind ball later that week. He would be risking his job, if not his life if he didn't go to work that day.

Showing up to work with a lack of sleep and an aching wrist, Lao Li had little motivation to get anything done. Entering his work, Lao was blinded by the bright sunlight facing his eyes. Before getting the chance to look at his floor which was left a mess from the other night, he slipped and fell onto a stack of brand–new needles bought earlier that week, and they stuck sharply into his wrist. Lao Li was pricked with an unimaginable sharp shock and was unable to get up. He lay on the ground unconscious for a few moments, then groped his way up from the chaotic floor. Lao Li thought to himself that maybe this was a sign he shouldn't be at work today but rather resting in his inviting cot was a better plan.

Arriving home with a disappointed face, his three kids and wife were incredibly worried about their dear father and husband, Lao Li had no thought of eating or washing that night, just falling into a deep trance and hoping it was all a nightmare.

Lao Li awoke to a blissful morning, the sun's warm rays gently filtering through the curtains. As he stretched his limbs, a sense of tranquility washed over him, filling his heart with gratitude that the pain had somehow, magically, vanished. Lao Li took a moment to think. It couldn't be because of the snakeskin soup; instead, it had to be the innumerable amount of needles that he fell onto yesterday. With a smile on his face from ear to ear, he embraced the calmness of dawn, ready to face anything that awaited him today. He whistled as he went to work to finish the dress.

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Meanwhile, a crisis was brewing back at Emperor Xuanzhong's palace. As the sun came up that very same morning, the emperor's daughter awoke to a morning filled with unrelenting agony. Her back, which was completely normal the night before, was not gripped in pain. She immediately yelled for her maid, catching her father's attention. A handful of family members and servants stumbled into her bedroom door as all their warm air dropped. Within seconds of looking at his daughter's writhing body, he demanded the best of the nation's doctors to arrive on the double. "I don't care how much money I have to pay, nothing is worth more than my child's life!"

As the doctors sped into the gates of the palace as fast as their feet would carry them, Xiao Fi's face became paler and paler. The doctors gathered around her bed examining her with compassionate facial expressions. Despite their hard work and professionalism, their efforts met with frustration. Each of their treatments from cold soup to hot patches only gave the poor girl temporary relief from the increasing torment.

While the doctors were putting their increasingly frantic efforts into saving the life of the emperor's daughter, Lao Li showed up at the front door of the palace, ready to deliver the finished dress. Subconscious of the fact that the Emperor's daughter was near her time's end, Lao Li's smile was as wide as the earth. When he innocently walked into her bedroom, a perplexed expression overcame him. His eyes were immediately drawn to a petite figure tosing about on her bed. Her face was wan and fatigued, filling his heart with pure empathy.

The emperor then turned his focus away from his daughter and to the tailor as he said, "My poor daughter won't need the gown tonight, if ever. Sorry Lao Li."

"What has happened to her?"

"There is no explanation just yet. She has been having chills, sweating and freezing alternately, and can't move her back without cramping."

The very sentence struck a light bulb in Lao Li's mind. These were all symptoms that he had previously experienced on his wrist. Should he try to help the helpless girl or stay silent? Thoughts swirled in his mind, contemplating the possible consequences of the outcomes but deep down, he knew he had to offer a helping hand.

"Your Majesty. If I may, I had almost identical symptoms on my wrist this past week. All the pain you stated your daughter has, was the same in my case. However, there was something that took away the pain and made me well again so I was able to complete the dress here. I… I know it may sound unimaginable but we can try putting several needles onto the surface of her skin where−"

"Needles in my child's skin? That is absurd!" exclaimed the Emperor.

"Please trust me, Your Majesty," said Lao Li firmly, but secretly feeling hesitant inside.

The doctors grew confused looks on their faces but the emperor decided to have faith in his dear tailor and gave him a signal to start his strange treatment. Luckily, Lao Li had his sewing materials handy. With the softest and gentlest hands possible, Lao Li began the therapy. As he placed each needle with precision they sank into the girl's skin. Through facing self−doubt, Lao Li's determination to help the girl prevailed and he completed the task without causing her too much pain.

After an hour, Lao Li removed the needles one by one, whilst ensuring the maximum amount of comfort through the process. With a soft smile, showing no sign of doubt, he told the doctors to allow her body to heal while she slept. Lao Li aimed to leave her with a sense of hope, also knowing he had done his best.

The next day, Lao Li and his whole family awoke to pounding on the door. What seemed like an emergency knock, was the royal family expressing their sincerest gratitude for Lao Li, acknowledging that he had risked his own life to save their daughter's. She was sitting up, smiling and pain−free ready to wear the dress for the ball. The Emperor thanked Lao Li and apologized for showing fear at his idea. He bestowed upon Lao Li a generous pension as a token of gratitude. With humility, Lao Li and his family accepted the prize and he retired to a well−earned rest.

Nowadays, the treatment, familiarly known as acupuncture, is in common use both in China and beyond. But doctors are notoriously jealous of their professional secrets and so they took great care never to acknowledge the tailor Lao Li's work. To this day, most people believe acupuncture was created by medical experts, but we know the truth, don't we?

Hope and Apprehension

German Swiss International School, Mahil, Aden – 14

As Zhang picked up his slow walk into a quick jog, he noticed that the roads leading to his town were uncharacteristically empty but it hadn't dawned on him what had happened. His blood turned cold as he took his first steps into his old village that he hadn't seen in so long flattened to the ground. “Earthquakes” Zhang quietly muttered to himself.

Quickly he began to sprint toward his familial house, tripping over wooden planks, stones and remnants of what were once the houses of his neighbors until he finally reached it.

To his shock and dread there his family house layed, flattened. Without a moment of hesitation Zhang quickly rushed into the ruins of his childhood home, he stood in what once would’ve been the kitchen when he saw a familiar and terrifying sight. His mothers straw sandals peeking out from a wooden beam, using all the strength his young body could muster he tried desperately to lift the beam, “Mother! Mother!” he kept calling out to no response, he could feel his heart thumping against his chest so intensely he wondered for a split second as to if it would explode.

Finally after trying for what felt like hours he finally managed to lift the beam just enough to see further. There his mother lay, dead. Still in her morning clothes and sandals, Zhnag fell to the ground before her lifeless body and began to weep. For years he had been away, for years he hadn’t seen his mother who raised him from his first seconds to his 13th year of life.

He collected himself and told himself that his father could still be alive, but deep down Zhang knew he was lying to himself. Not even walking a few more feet he noticed something in front of him. An arm. Upon inspecting further he saw a familiar face. His Fathers. Zhang didn’t know how to react, his mother and his father who just hours prior were full of life and joyous laid there, dead before him. He had to do something but he didn’t know what, he needed to find a way to prevent situations like this to happen ever again if it was the last thing he would ever do.

Many years had passed since Zhang had last thought about something that wasn’t his invention, for years upon years of his life he had been desperately slaving away, hour after hour to devise some sort of system. But now, he hoped, he had finally cracked it. A simple bell in a steel box had successfully engraved with an engraving saying “If this bell tolls run far! Earthquake is imminent” passed the tests he had set for it. But he wasn’t in the clear yet, for years upon years Chang Zu Lai had been developing his ‘own’ detector. But Zhang knew the designs were too similar for it to be a coincidence. He had to keep this quiet until he could reach Chang’an and the emperor.

As Zhang embarked on his journey to Chang'an, the weight of his sorrow and determination propelled him forward. He carried within him the weight of loss, the remnants of his shattered childhood, and the burning desire to prevent such tragedies from happening again. Every step he took was filled with purpose, despite the fatigue that threatened to consume him.

Days turned into weeks, and weeks into months as Zhang pressed on, determined to reach the imperial palace. The road was long and treacherous, but his will remained unyielding. Finally, after what felt like an eternity, he arrived at his destination, the grand gates of the palace looming before him.

With a mixture of hope and apprehension, Zhang presented himself to the palace guards and requested an audience with the emperor. He was led through the opulent gilt halls, his heart pounding with anticipation. The emperor, a wise and discerning ruler, agreed to meet Zhang and hear his tale.

In the presence of the emperor, Zhang recounted the devastation that had befallen his village and the loss of his beloved parents. He unveiled his invention, a simple bell in a steel box, which he believed could save countless lives if given the opportunity to be developed further. However Zhang had made one critical mistake months ago. He left the door to his workshop open. To his fear and anger he saw Chang, standing next to the emperor with his blueprints in hand.

“He’s a fraud” Zhang yelled to no avail, his designs were never named and all Chang had to do was simply scribble his name on top of the genius work to claim the credit and glory for himself. Chang, with a smug smirk on his face, requested at once that Zhang be removed from the palace for his fraudulent claims against him. All Zhang could do was bleakly stare back at Chang and the emperor as he was dragged away and thrown out of the great and splendorous palace.

Zhang could do nothing more than sorrow as he sat at the entrance of the great palace. Years and years of sleepless nights and agonizing days had been all for naught. The invention that he had so carefully and painstakingly put together was now meaningless. Without his invention he was nothing, he had missed out on friends, experiences and many more things just for the now dead hope that one day his adventure could give someone the chance his family didn't get, an aspiration that had gone to waste.

Once more he set off on the road, though not with the same enthusiasm as he had prior, defeated and shamed Zhang on the way back home. He couldn’t even bear to look at his invention, what once was his greatest source of joy and pride was now meaningless. He decided it was time to finally part with it. On his way back he noticed a quaint little village, it reminded him of the one he grew up in, he decided that this would be the perfect place to leave his invention so he did. Leaving it outside of the town hall in the hope that maybe one day it may be of use to someone.

It was a typical day in the town, the farmers farming and gossipers gathered in the town center, however they didn’t know what was about to happen. Just a few minutes later a bell began to ring out deafeningly, this wasn’t the traditional bell that had stood in the town square for years. This was a strange bell in a metal cage inscribed with a warning of an earthquake. At first the village people ignored this, but as the ground began to mildly shake they realized that it was correct. Quickly all of the villagers abandoned what they were doing to run to safety. And just a few minutes after it had been successfully evacuated the town was swallowed up by an earthquake, the cattle slain and farmhouses destroyed.

Upon hearing from another traveler about the earthquake Zhang turned back to go and see the aftermath of it. After traveling for a few days he made it back. Around him were destroyed buildings and slain cattle, but to his joy not a

single human laid dead in that wreck of a village. He looked around for clues as to where the villagers had gone, and noticing a pair of hoove traps he followed along.

It wasn’t long before he once again found himself in Chang’an outside of the imperial palace. He entered the palace once more to see the village people speaking with the emperor. “It was him!” they cried “He left the device in our village, the device that has saved our lives!” The Emperor turned to Zhang, “Is this true?” he asked. “Yes your majesty.” Zhang replied.

As Zhang and the Emperor were speaking he noticed Chang coming into the finely gilt meeting room. “Chang, show me your blueprints,” asked the Emperor. Chang presented them to the Emperor with a smug look on his face. “Now, explain to me the function of each part that you have designed” Chang was shocked, even though he didn't know how it worked, only Zhang did. Zhang raised his voice and answered the emperor's question, outlining each individual screw and cog and what it meant to the greater invention.

“You cowardly liar!” cried the Emperor to Chang, “Have him taken from my sight at once.” and so Chang was removed. “ My dear subject forgive me for ever doubting you” spoke the Emperor to Zhang, graciously bowing his head Zhang accepted his apology, but in that moment his mind was in that room, it was in the ruins of his childhood home, it was in the misery of that moment, and it was in the joy that it will never happen again.

A Miraculous Save

German Swiss International School, Ngai, Nicholas – 13

In the year 2066, ten years after the disastrous climatic event known as the Reckoning, where unprecedented disasters such as tornadoes, droughts, floods, and hurricanes devastated the world. Scientists all recognized that the Reckoning had come as a result of the unfettered exploitation of the planet for the past century. Whatever the cause of the Reckoning was, humanity was on its last legs.

The rising sun engulfed all the coastal cities, wiping half of humanity within a matter of two years. The natural disasters continued to haunt the survivors; with unrelenting drought and cyclones that drove people into the mountains within a decade.

The warming climate brought forth new terrors from the melted permafrost. The anthrax and the polluted air contained harmful viruses and chemicals that were invisible to the naked eye. New diseases and blights destroyed the crops, exacerbated by the short-sighted decision of corporations to grow monoculture crops. The fields of withering and ashen crops, and the stench from rotting animals was the very picture of tragedy, a dying planet. The once-vibrant Earth had descended into a shadow of its former self, with polluted air choking the skies and blankets of dust burying the land.

This dragon of pollution was a fearsome creature, its scales coated in a dark, noxious sludge that clung to the earth like a suffocating shroud. It breathed out toxic fumes, poisoning the once-fresh air and transforming it into a foul miasma that choked the very life out of all it touched. Its wings, once majestic and vibrant, were now heavy with the weight of pollutants, casting a shadow over the sun-drenched landscapes below.

Hope started to flounder even amongst the most resilient of humans. They were not spared from diseases either. The air was thick. Pollutant-filtering masks were required to breathe normally, and absent of them, the tiny particles would seep into one's lungs and corrupt them within the hour. The new coronavirus was thought to have come from ancient strings buried underneath the permafrost that had resurfaced as a result of the ice melting. This particularly powerful string of viruses mutated quickly along with a myriad of other deadly ones that made earth almost uninhabitable for humans; traversing old territories could be deadly.

For the surviving humans, the makeshift laboratory, nestled between the towering Kunlun mountains far away from old civilization was their last hope. The most brilliant scientists have gathered there to make a last-ditch effort to come up with a solution to ensure the continuity of the human species. They toiled away day and night to discover a cure for all the viruses.

In a small village at the foothills of the mountains, a little boy by the name of Huan Shan sat alone in his room, his mind filled with the scintillating flames of curiosity shining amidst the darkness in this post-apocalyptic hellscape. Despite his tender age, he possessed a brilliant mind and an insatiable thirst for knowledge.

One fateful day, as Huan Shan immersed himself in a vast array of books and scientific journals, a seed of revolution started germinating within the depths of his young mind. The more he delved into the intricacies of the physical world, the more this groundbreaking idea took form and substance, slowly unfurling its wings of possibility.

Inside a nearby old Taoist temple, Huan Shan's eyes widened as he beheld the intricate murals adorning the walls. The vibrant colours and detailed brushwork depicted scenes of nature, mythical creatures, and ancient herbal remedies. It was a visual testament to the deep wisdom possessed by the Taoist sages of old. As his eyes scanned the characters, Huan Shan's knowledge of Chinese culture and history proved invaluable. He deciphered the complex herbal recipes and

medicinal properties described in the manuscript. Huan Shan set off to the towering Kunlun mountains, in search of the medicinal herb that could heal the world. Exhausted and shivering cold, he finally discovered the Taoist herb. Its radiant aurora shined throughout the dull sky, beaming a glimmer of hope throughout the suffering earth.

As news of the groundbreaking panacea spread like wildfire, the greedy pharmaceutical companies caught wind of its potential. Rumours started to spread about a cure for the diseases plaguing humanity. How does one put monetary value on the ability to be able to breathe again? To eat fresh vegetables and fruits again? It was priceless. Moreover, how could an immature boy be smart enough to come up with something that everyone else has failed? The idea was inconceivable to them. Shadowy assassins were sent forth to kill Huan Shan and to steal his recipe to reap enormous profits.

Huan Shan was working away in his lab making Panacea as quickly as he could. He didn't notice the men clad in black behind him. They blindfolded him and dragged him out of his home and took him out of the Kunlun mountains to their basecamp to face the biggest conglomerate Moderna–Pfizer CEO Peter Hyda.

With a translator, Hyda asked the bewildered and frightened Huan Shan why he had been brought here.
"I don't know sir, but please let me go. I need to make medicine for everyone".
"I'm afraid that won't be an option", Hyda smiled sinisterly. "Your invention will be mine. No one will believe that an immature kid could come up with something. Let us have the burden of pushing the product worldwide."
"You mean you will help me?"
"No, I will be helping myself. Give up the recipe boy."
"Alright, I don't mind as long as you can help me save more people".
"Only selectively. You see, only those who can afford it will be saved. If you give it up now, I'd be happy to give you a share of the profit".
"I don't want the money. I can give you the recipe only if you promise that you will help as many people as you can. Money is what got us in this state in the first place. If you make too much then more people will die, this recipe is humanity's last chance at survival and you want this recipe only to reap profits!" Huan shan replied defiantly.
" This Panacea is the key to infinite power, and no one shall stand in my way!"
In desperation, Huan Shan grabbed a gun and pointed it to his own head and shouted, "If you don't agree to make it for free to save everyone, I'll die right here and the recipe will die with me! If you do, I am sure people will be grateful and you will be the greatest company ever!"
Shaken, Peter file said, "No, don't hurt yourself. What about you then? You don't want the credit?
"Not one bit ,I just want people to be okay and for things to go back to the way they were."

That single sentence deeply touched the assassin's heart, causing a profound change of heart. In a moment of compassion, he made the decision to release Huan Shan, sparing his life. Determined and armed with Huan Shan's invaluable recipe and cure, the assassin boldly ventured into the Moderna Pfizer's factory. Huan's mission was to finalise the production and distribution of the Panacea, a miraculous remedy that would bring relief to people worldwide. As the Panacea reached every corner of the globe, the world collectively exhaled a sigh of profound relief.

In the end, it was not just the brilliance of Huan Shan's mind, but also his unwavering belief in the potential of humanity that ignited a heartfelt transformation. Through his intelligence and the collaborative scientists it inspired, the world took its first faltering steps towards healing the wounds inflicted upon the Earth. It was a poignant reminder that even in the darkest of times, a single idea born from the purest intentions and the unyielding spirit of a young boy could awaken the dormant conscience of humanity.

Lurking in the Shadows

German Swiss International School, Powell, Natasha – 14

The sky was a canvas painted with dusky blue hues. The ethereal clouds glowed with a heavenly light as the sun ascended over the horizon, highlighting the serene mountain tops. The winding roads snaked their way up the mountain's verdant slope, stretching their long roots deep into the undergrowth. Upon entering this mythical heaven, you're greeted by the vibrant cherry blossom trees, their delicate petals dancing in the gentle breeze. Nestled in the cliffside, lay a bustling city. A fusion of mixed aromas, the scent of jasmine and fresh tea wafted by traditional red–tiled roofs adorned with intricate dragon motifs. Their golden spires reached towards the clouds, offering glimpses into the spiritual essence that permeated the city. This harmonious place had an ethereal charm that enchanted and truly captivated one's soul.

It was astonishing, but never perfect. Its beauty was an unsettling reality– a puzzle that yearned for an answer. When the aged walls spoke, they whispered ancient tales. An ominous feeling hung in the air, but nobody could tell what it was. It was just always there, casting a stormy cloud over my town, until the whispers grew louder, echoing through alleyways. It created myths of this sinister presence lurking beneath the surface. The clouds no longer glowed and the sky became a dull shade of gray. The once bustling city was now silent, the only sound coming from fears that spoke louder than ever.

Then they came.

The forces tried to break free. They stretched and extended their roots deep. They gnarled and fought back the virtuous spirits, not powerful enough to protect us. Violently and brutally, they wrestled. The blood now permanently stained the underworld, its scarlet color forever tainting the beautiful reality above. The darkness flowed with such extreme vehement. Its fierce passion carried it until it reached the surface, slipping through cracks, seeping into the corners slyfully. Its presence was there, yet laid undiscovered.

In the depths of the night, when the moon hung low, the air was so thick with mystery you could cut it with a knife. Its luminous dark scales of crystalline were so alluring, as if they were made with celestial hands. Each surface enraptured mesmerizing, dancing, reflections, a window into an unperceived realm. Its raven eyes were unsettling, a murky hole of nothingness, a lack of light. Lifeless and ghostly, its motives were shrouded with mystery. It slithered with such elegance through hushed moonlit streets, its fierce beauty so striking. How could a heavenly creature have such sinister intentions?

It craved chaos and corruption, whispering promises of wealth to those who would listen. It preyed on your deepest desires and exploited your fears and insecurities. Its tendrils of darkness snaked their way through the streets, igniting the dormant flames of envy and greed. It fuelled the people's lust for richness, seducing them with its alluring lies, the unity and compassion forever lost among the shadows of corruption. Succumbing to the creatures' temptations, the townsfolk's souls were torn apart and their hearts poisoned. The town became drowned in a sea of shadows.

Then, a fiery red ember emerged from the darkened skies. It soared, powered by its fury, and came to avenge the guilty, fuelled by nightmares and destruction, forged from the azure above. Its scales were like armour, nature's glorious tapestry of power and strength. Reflecting a myriad of colours that danced across surfaces like ethereal flames, It hHighlighted the contours of the dragon's mighty body. The dragon moved gracelessly, its scales rustling, a symphony of protection, flexing and moving, following the creature's motions. The scales came alive and served the dragon following the commands of its majesty, and served as a constant reminder of the power it holds.

Ascending over the corrupt town, the townsfolk gazed in disbelief at the pure wretchedness. Merciless, it began its fiery purge, setting the town ablaze, releasing its wrath upon the people. The town was engulfed in an inferno, the harrowing view colouring the sky with deep oranges and reds. Hungry flames consumed everything in their path, heavy smoke pouring out amongst the fire. Purging the darkness of its toxic influence. Cherry wood cracked in the flames, distant cries of despair and agony creating a harmony of devastation that echoed throughout the fiery streets. Dancing about, almost sentient, the flames tore through the snake–like creature ever so effortlessly, reducing it to nothing but ashes. The fire now at its peak, reached the people, raging remorselessly against the broken community. Charged with vengeance. Those who once thrived under the shadows' control, now lay dead, my home nothing but a somber abyss of ash and smoke.

The dragon's beautiful scales were now dull and broken. The glimmer in its eyes has disappeared, replaced by the same emptiness of the dark spirit. Its flames became mere memories of terror; the screams, a ringing in his head. His skin was forever covered with amber scars, to a reminder of the lives he ended. Now he barely resembled the powerful creature he once was, replaced with a grotesque silhouette of a snake.

The charred remnants and smoldering ruins fuelled with the dragon's rage now could be employed into explosive charges that possessed the same power that he once held. The sulfur from the mountains, charcoal formed in the fire, and the dragon's magic, made something I named gunpowder.

I could rest knowing their ashes could now fuel the deaths of others.

Chinvention

German Swiss International School, Siu, Ingrid – 13

Once upon a time, there was a family and they were happy. In that family, was a boy named Mingze. He was quite a smart little boy for his age. But one thing always confused Mingze.

How do things fly?

How could things stay in the air without touching the ground?

What happens if they fall?

He and his family used to look up at the sky and admire the clouds and the planes above. “What does that one look like?” His father pointed at a cloud above. Mingze’s mother replied sweetly, lovingly, “It looks like…” They continued for another hour.

See, many good things are related to flying. For the people of China, it was a dragon. Many people respected the dragon and it was a symbol of the Emperor. Many people looked up to this beautiful creature.

One day, as he wandered through a meadow, Minze looked up at the sky.

"I wish I could fly," Minze whispered to the wind, so Mingze wanted to glide.

Mingze turned older and grew not only in size but also in knowledge as well. He had many friends and he was doing well in school. However, Mingze was battling against depression. The very condition that many carry. Why? Straightforward answer? His parents. He always valued the attention of his parents. They used to talk every day, but his parents got more occupied with their jobs and they needed to sacrifice more time to get money. Because of this, depressed Mingze wanted a closer connection with his busy parents. He tried to get their attention and revive their fading emotional bond. He wanted a way to soar above his depression.

He found a way to channel it. He buried himself in his studies as a way to try to get their attention. The pressure to excel academically became his refuge, where he could channel his energy and find solace in textbooks and equations. Late nights were spent with books.

Mingze's dedication didn't go unnoticed by his teachers, who marvelled at the exceptional grades he consistently earned. He was the one who excelled in every subject, yet his parents didn't seem to care less.

But still, he wanted to soar.

His classmates would always laugh and call him the "dreamer" for the things he wanted to achieve. “Are you crazy man?”, “Now way you’re gonna be able to do that, trust me.” Some people thought he was delusional. But even with all of his friends telling him that it could never be done, Mingze paid no mind. He had nothing else to do anyway. So he spent all his time reading books about birds and the sky above.

Whenever Mingze feels down, he goes to this park and looks up at the sky like he and his parents used to. He always felt like he belonged in the sky. Mingze always shut his eyes, took in a pleasant, fresh breath of air, and sensed his parents were right with him.

One day, he was studying in the silent library, thinking about how his mother never replied to him at home. He was tracing his fingers along the books on the bookshelf. “Calligraphy”, “Biology and what's underneath?”, etc. Then, he came across this book on “how birds could fly”. ”Birds fly by using air pressure's pushing force to create wing lift. This is achieved by the physical law known as the Bernoulli Principle.”

“The Bernoulli Principle” Mingze read. “The Bernoulli Principle. the Bernoulli Principle!”, he repeated. His eyes glowed with creativity. He thought, “I'm gonna grow my wings and I'm going to fly!”

He was focused that day. He was focused on finally deserving their attention. He would be the highest in the city. Everybody would notice his angelic presence in the atmosphere, particularly his parents.

He devoted hours to figuring out how to hover over everyone.

At school, almost everybody doubted the boy could fly. They kept saying “he’s not even that light” or “What is he supposed to do, flap his arms?”

Eventually, the comments got to him. Not only did his parents neglect him, but his schoolmates and even his friends doubted if what he wanted to do was possible. Mingze lost hope for a moment. He started to think if it was even worth it. If no one loved him, why must he stay alive and prove himself to others?

In order to calm down, Mingze returns to his peaceful park takes in a few breaths and doesn't let any of the negativity seep into his mind. The park is the only time when he feels comforted. He gets lost in the sky and eventually, calms down.

He was excited for the following two weeks. He got a lot of materials. Lightweight, heavyweight, soft and hard. He wanted to remain in the sky for as long as he could, but as he jumped off a chair, he couldn't even stay in the air for a second.

Unbothered, he tried again, this time gathering feathers from any type of bird. Whether it was a chicken or even an eagle, he took its precious feather and used it to craft and grow his very own pair of wings. Once everything was complete, he jumped off his chair again, hoping that he would at least glide a little. Nope. Unsuccessful.

He tried over and over again. And every single time he lost more hope than he did before. Certainly, his parents didn't help either.

In his despair, he determines to make his way to the park. Yet again, he takes a deep breath and glances up at the sky. But unexpectedly, a paper plane distracts him from focusing on the sky. Irritated, he grudgingly saunters back home.

On Mingze's way back home. He started thinking about the paper plane and how it soared and glided through the park so easily. How could that be? Mingze realised that he never tried to fly with paper! Paper was the answer! He could *glide* through the sky.

After realising this, Mingze ran back home and started to make his giant paper plane.

After glueing all the paper together, he jumps off his chair and the paper rips apart. "It was too weak on his own" Mingze mentions to himself.

That night, he thought about how the plane could hold its structure, and just like a house it needed a foundation. So, the next day, he gathered a couple of sticks he had found in that park and screwed them all together to make one whole foundation that supported his plane.

The contraption was sturdy and ready to be challenged. With regained courage and strength, he stepped up on the chair. He was hovering off the ground! He flowed with every gust of wind that came Mingze's way, he floated along with it. Without hesitation, Mingze screams out to his parents from his realisation. "Dad! Mom! Look at me! I'm flying!" he calls.

He tries to control his balance and speed and flows towards his father and mother. Slowly and steadily, he makes his way inch by inch to his destination.

He calls and waves his arms in an attempt to grab his parents. "Mingze? What are you doing", his mother says worriedly. Mingze grabs onto the side of the window of where his parents are looking through. Mingze got his parent's attention. The only success that he ever truly felt. He was going to explain everything to his parents but Mingze loses his balance and loses grip of the window. This only made him soar higher and higher up into the sky.

Before he knew it he was higher than his school, his home, his city. Sure, Mingze got the attention. But as he went higher and higher, he heard a little rip starting to tear apart and started to doubt his intentions of flying high. Soon, he could see his whole city.

"Rrrrrriiiiipppppp–"

He could feel his whole body being pushed towards the ground and immense amounts of wind hit his face. His home started to grow bigger. And bigger. And bigger. He panicked and scrambled and reached for his contraption to see a big tear. Despite this, Mingze wore it in desperation to stop himself from dying.

A few years later, many people in his hometown remember Mingze for flying his contraption called a "Kite". Many people let it soar in the sky and can let it soar higher with their strings. Furthermore, Mingze's parents finally paid attention to him and paid more attention to their surroundings.

In the Absence of Shadow

German Swiss International School, Stock, Audrey – 14

Dozens of umbrellas move as one along the bustling streets, the sky awash with hues of grey. It's getting late and my mind is as foggy as it is outside. Time to call it a day. Realising the pain in my back has worsened, I push myself out of the chair and sluggishly don my coat.

The rain beats down hard on my umbrella as I join the flow of people. Absent– mindedly, I stare into the distance. My legs carry me back to the doorstep of my home.

I fumble with the key and let myself in. The charcoal–tinged scent of tea smoked chicken makes its way from the stove to my nostrils.

"You're home." says my wife, Mei Qi.

Who else would it be?

I grumble and let the open umbrella drop. HuanHuan trots over to lick up the pooling rainwater.

"Stupid dog," I push him away with my foot and struggle to bend over to pick up the umbrella. "When's dinner ready?"

"Soon," she says, turning away from the stove to look at me. "How was work?"

"Eh–"

"Zhang Wei! What did I say about open umbrellas in the home? You'll invite ghosts."

I roll my eyes in vexation. "Calm down, your old wives tales don't mean anything."

HuanHuan licks the droplets off the umbrella's canopy. Shaking my head, I prop it up on the drying rack and sit down at the dinner table. I hear his light footsteps trotting towards me. His bulging eyes are bright with anticipation.

Mei Qi sets the steaming plate down. I take a piece and peel off the thick slab of skin. HuanHuan waits, drooling, before I hurl it across the room and he chases it. My wife's anger is manifested through pouring tea for only herself.

I feel a pang of guilt and mumble, "I might not go to work tomorrow." I expect her to smile, but with a twinge of passive– aggression, she says,

"Good." she looks down at the floor, refusing to meet my eyes. "You shouldn't work on Sundays."

I nod flatly. My eyelids grow heavy and the pain in my back persists. I stand up, move heftily to the bedroom and collapse onto the haven of comfort.

"Your clothes are still dirty, at least change before going to bed!" Mei Qi pleads from the living room.

You're not my mother, I scoff to myself.

I murmur, "Mhm…" and drift off.

A shaft of morning light hits my face as my wife opens the curtains. "We're going for a walk with HuanHuan!" she says excitedly. A sense of warmth envelops me, knowing she genuinely wants to spend time together and isn't angry anymore.

We step out into the cool outdoors, the rain having subsided into a gentle drizzle and sunshine. The dog jumps up on me and his paws dig into my shins, leaving little indents in my skin. Mei Qi stares at the ground, watching the winds winnow through the dancing grass.

"You alright?" I say.

She nods contentedly. I take her hand with affection, but unfinished projects pile up in my mind and I regret my decision not to go to work. I need to go back there. To pass the time, I mindlessly watch our contorting shadows against the path. My eyes shift from my own to HuanHuan's to Mei Qi's.

Only, she doesn't have one.

I analyse the path meticulously, going back and forth between each cobblestone but it is a void of almond earth where her shadow should be. I retract my hand from hers.

"Mei Qi?"

"Yes, dear?"

"Your shadow– why don't you have– I don't–"

Some inexplicable force makes my voice falter. Mei Qi cocks her head to the side, the corners of her lips ever so slightly quivering upwards. She blinks. And blinks again.

She says nothing.

I step away. "Mei Qi?"

"Oh, look at that, it's raining again! I told you bringing the umbrella would come in handy." with a flick of her wrist, she unleashes the canopy of the umbrella. She shelters herself within its geometrical shadow and bends down to brush her delicate hand against HuanHuan's velvety ear.

He lurches forward at Mei Qi, yanking the leash and straining my arm.

I wait for the joke to come, what Mei Qi always says when HuanHuan starts barking at any irregular moment. *Hahah, have you seen a ghost, HuanHuan?*

It doesn't come.

I say, "Uh, aren't you going to–"

"What did you say, dear?"

"I was– wait, why do you keep calling me *dear?* You don't usually–"

She shruggs and offers, "Umbrella?" I step away cautiously and shake my head.

We walk stiffly without saying a word. The winter trees stick out of the ground like ghostly feathers. I watch a stout man loudly selling goods for the Dongzhi festival, sending the birds away in a fearful scatter. The rain harshly patters against the rough fabric of my jacket. I lose myself in thoughts and possibilities that cloud my mind.

I say, "We're going out for dinner with Tom and Hua tonight, right?"

She presses her lips together and sucks in air through her paper white teeth. "Perhaps we should stay home. Can you call it off?"

"Of course." I stick my hand into my pocket and feel it clasp around my phone.

We get back to our doorstep after many moments of silence. Mei Qi carries the umbrella right in. I almost laugh. "You've finally come to your senses?"

After no response, I tell her, "I've cancelled the dinner with Tom and Hua, by the way."

"Thank you!"

HuanHuan shakes himself dry, I wince as the droplets fly onto my face.

Something is wrong. Mei Qi is shadowless, she suddenly neglects her superstitions that she's had her whole life, and Tom and Hua aren't even real people. I just made them up to test her.

This thing standing before me, grinning, her black hair falling over her shoulders in glossy waves– it's not my wife.

And then it makes sense to me. Everything Mei Qi talks about: Open umbrellas in the house inviting ghosts, Ghosts' true forms only being visible to the eyes of animals, In the eyes of humans, ghosts looking like us with no shadows– encapsulated in today's events.

"Could you hand me the umbrella, please?" I keep calm.

She pulls me into a tight hug. Her body is clammy and soulless, I'm being wrapped in an icy shroud. And she has no breath. Her whispers come from not her voice box but from something else within So when she purrs into my ear, "Now why would I do that?" I feel her voice reverberate around the whole room.

I break free of her cold grip and she does nothing to stop it. She only stares at me through eyes that gleam with an otherworldly light. Despite my backache, I bend over, grab the dog and hold it in one arm. It's a silly creature but it's the only thing I have. My voice shakes. "What have you done with Mei Qi?"

She nonchalantly curls up her fingers and admires her painted red nails. Her smile widens. "You don't need Mei Qi. I'm here now, dear."

A wave of dread washes over me. "Is she alive? Is she dead? Tell me what happ–"

"Why the worry, Zhang Wei? This was your own doing. You invited me, after all."

I ignore the stab of guilt and step forwards. "I left an umbrella open! It's just a chinese superstition! You will leave my wife's body and release her!" I say, meaning to sound confident and fierce, but it comes out as a frightened plead.

The ghostly figure chuckles. "Oh, perhaps you misunderstand me. I have no intention of leaving this house." Her voice is a haunting echo of Mei Qi's.

"Get out!"

"Oh dear, I'm afraid you're stuck with me. Unless you'd like to be… replaced?"

Zhang's Masterminding Creation

German Swiss International School, Suratkal, Kristopher – 13

A day like any other, Zhang Heng and his family were enjoying their family dinner. They heard a thumping sound outside, but this happens regularly since construction happens every week, but they thought wrong. This was a natural disaster, bigger than ever before, it was an earthquake.

During the Han Dynasty (206 BC – 220 AD), Zhang Heng's family had sadly passed away due to this natural disaster. Zhang was heartbroken, but knew he had to do something about it. He had this idea of how to tell if an earthquake was coming. So, he decided to build an earthquake detector.

He knew that he had to create this fast, so that this mess wouldn't happen again. He started by trying to find all the parts. He was clueless and didn't know where to start. He knew that he had minimal time, so he started planning right away. He sat there, thinking for a few hours. 'Ding'. He knew what he had to do. He had to make a pendulum system tht was very sensitive to vibrations, which did not rely on shaking or any subtle movement in the location where the device was located.

Zhang's seismoscope was a massive bronze vessel with a diameter of nearly six feet that resembled a container. The main compass directions were indicated by eight face–down dragons that snaked around the barrel's exterior. A little ball of bronze was in the throat of every dragon. Eight bronze toads sat beneath the dragons, their wide mouths open to take in the balls. This design was quite the accomplishment. It also featured a catch device, a pivot on a projection, a vertical pin that went through a slot in the crank, a horizontal bar holding the pendulum, and a sling that suspended it.

If an earthquake had occurred, the ball from the dragon's mouth would drop down into the mouth of the toad.

Zhang never knew when the next earthquake would occur. Every day, he kept scouting the area for any signs and any warnings.

2 months go by, and still no sign. The next day, he heard rumbling in the distance. He quickly went to his room and brought out his seismoscope. He genuinely hoped that his invention would work. As he heard more and more rumbling, he was just waiting for the balls from the dragon's mouth to drop into the toad's. He didn't know for sure since these seismoscopes could only detect earthquakes from 100 km away. Zhang leaves the seismoscope outside and goes into his room to take a nap.

1–2 hours later, he hears a 'tsshhh' sound. He woke up and ran out of bed to check his seismoscope. He looked at the dragons, but there were no balls in their mouth's. He checked if they fell off, since he knew he hadn't reconstructed it well. There was nothing on the ground. Now, he only thought one thing, and it was if the balls were in the mouth of the toad's. To his surprise, the dragon pointing east had dropped the ball into the mouth of the toad.

He quickly rushed to spread the news about the earthquake to the city and that they had to evacuate immediately. No one believed him. So, he showed them the seismoscope and explained to them how it worked. All the civivilians were star–struck and didn't think detecting an earthquake from hundreds of kilometers away was possible. Zhang heng proved them wrong. Henceforward, Zhang has not only become the saviour of China, but the liberator of the world. Civilians now knew what to do when they felt like an earthquake would occur.

Ever since that day, modern scientists have tried to replicate that exact same seisomscope. In 2005, scientists in Zhang's hometown managed to replicate Zhang's seismoscope and employed it to identify artificial earthquakes by analyzing waves from four distinct actual earthquakes that occurred in China and Vietnam. They were all picked up

by the seismoscope. In fact, there was an exact correlation between the data obtained from the tests and the data obtained by contemporary seismometers.

The Note–worthy Time Traveller

German Swiss International School, Tan, Olivia – 12

Alfred Pascal was a smart kid. In fact, he was named after Alfred Nobel, inventor of the Nobel Prize. Coincidentally, his last name was the same as Blaise Pascal, a famous mathematician. However, although Alfred was extremely clever, his family wasn't doing the best financially. Ever since Alfred could remember, everyone had only used coins, making them extremely heavy and inconvenient. Citizens had started to leave them at home, in fear of their pockets or bags splitting with the weight of a hundred coins. Alfred couldn't understand why the only form of money was coins, but he was determined to change that.

One day, Alfred's mother got her paycheck. A huge handful of coins. However, when she arrived home, Alfred's mother only had a few coins left. She miserably explained that the coins had fallen out of her pocket, most of them rolling into the sewers. Although the whole family agreed that there was no way to get the coins back, a dismal mood still hung over the house. Alfred, however, would not accept it. He was intent on helping his family by making a time machine that would take him anywhere in time. Alfred wasn't too sure if it would work correctly, but he was convinced that if he went back in time, he would be able to persuade inventors to make a different form of currency that was lighter and more convenient, and save his family.

Alfred stepped into the time machine. "Before coins!" he said to the machine. Suddenly, everything was spinning. After he kept spinning for some time, Alfred started to panic. Would he ever get out? Suddenly, the spinning came to an abrupt stop. Alfred stumbled out of the machine dizzily, expecting to be inside a factory building. However, he found himself on a bridge. The longer he looked around, the more he realised that he was in ancient China. Suddenly, he heard a deep voice behind him say, "Hello, what is the purpose of your visit to our town?"
"To investigate the invention of coins." Alfred replied meekly, turning to find two men towering above him. The men nodded, then sped off in an unknown direction, beckoning for Alfred to follow.

As Alfred hurried through the fields with his companions, he saw a towering red building. It had intricate patterns in the windows, and Alfred swore that he could see a dragon circling the roof. The roof was made of black ceramic roof tiles, a piece narrowly missing Alfred as he was led over a bridge. Finally, Alfred and the two men arrived at a red, wooden door with large brass knockers in a bronze lion's mouth. One man hit a gong next to the door, while the other raised the giant knocker and slammed it back down on the door. The sound of the gong and knocking eventually merged into one long note that reverberated through the whole building. Eventually, an old man slowly opened the door and peered out. The men stepped aside to let Alfred pass, and as soon as he stepped over the threshold, the door swung shut behind him.

"My name is Yuze," the old man said, bowing. "Follow me." Alfred hurried to catch up with the man, admiring the amazing architecture. The inside of this building was decorated with beautifully carved patterns in shiny, wooden pillars. As he was looking around in awe, the old man suddenly came to a stop and opened an old wooden door, splinters of wood sticking out from all around it. He gestured for Alfred to enter the room and when Alfred entered, the old man gave him a toothy grin, swiftly shutting the door.

Above him, there was a large, high–backed chair. Sitting in it, was a man with a long, thin beard, bushy eyebrows, and a fierce yet dignified look on his face. "Ah, hello," he said.
"I'm Alfred," Alfred said. "And I would like to learn more about your money system and coins." The man stood up and gracefully extended his hand. Alfred was hesitant, but eventually took it as his curiosity overtook him. "Where are we going?" asked Alfred as he was led out of the throne room and into a dark, cramped space. "You'll find out." came the reply. Alfred stumbled through the dark room when the man suddenly opened a door. Alfred squinted out into the bright light to find piles and piles of paper. These sheets of paper were thin, and crisp, and had numbers on them. Alfred stared at the pile of money in awe, when the man pushed him towards it and said, "These are paper banknotes. Each banknote is unique, and there are three different banknotes. Twenty, fifty, and hundred dollar banknotes." Alfred was

bewildered at first, but he came to realise that these banknotes were feather−light, making them extremely easy to carry around. "These banknotes are much more convenient to carry around than piles of coins!" Alfred exclaimed.
"Feel free to examine them and take them to show others this new convenient currency." The man replied, smiling warmly at him. He bowed and left the room, leaving Alfred alone with all of the banknotes.

Alfred slowly picked up a banknote, almost afraid it would burn him or do something to harm him. The banknote, however, stayed normal, just a flimsy piece of paper. Alfred carefully folded one bill of each amount, stored it carefully in his pocket and made his way back to the throne room. Curiously, the man had vanished, and there was no trace of him ever being there, apart from the empty, polished throne. Alfred retraced his steps back to the front door and pushed it open. The sun glared brightly outside, the gravel crunching under his feet as he returned to the time machine. "Home," Alfred grinned, once inside the machine, excited to share his discovery with everyone.

When Alfred arrived back home, he rushed to the city hall. He arrived at the entrance, panting. "I need to speak with the mayor," Alfred said. "I have a proposition for him." The guard let him pass, wishing him luck. Alfred took a deep breath and stepped into the office. "Greetings Alfred, how may I help you today?" The mayor greeted him warmly.
"Good afternoon Sir, if I may present a proposition to you?" Alfred asked.
"Take a seat." The mayor offered, before settling down to listen to what Alfred had to say.
"Our lives have been burdened by heavy coins that weigh you down and split your pockets, causing you to lose them all. May I present an alternative form of currency? Lightweight paper banknotes." The mayor nodded, giving Alfred a boost of confidence. Reaching into his pocket, he pulled out a carefully folded banknote and presented it to the mayor. "After noticing the struggles of using coins, I travelled back to ancient China and came across this. These paper banknotes are another form of money. They are very light, and can be printed with different amounts on each banknote. There will be no more problems with heavy pockets and coins rolling everywhere." The mayor seemed to be deep in thought, considering the idea of using paper money. Alfred waited with bated breath before the mayor broke out in a huge grin and exclaimed, "That's a great idea! I will announce it at the next council meeting. I would hope that you could join me." Alfred was astonished and gladly accepted the invitation.

The next day, Alfred presented his idea to the whole council, and it was met with thundering applause. Within the next week, paper banknotes were being printed and circulated. The citizens were all ecstatic with this new invention, as it made their lives so much more convenient.

In Alfred's honour, the fifty−dollar banknote had the red brick building from ancient China in the background, with Alfred's smiling face in front of it, beaming with pride and joy.

The Accidental Invention of Paper

German Swiss International School, To, Wynstelle – 12

Hard working sisters Li and Ming were preparing dinner for their Mother. All the food they had was only what they could afford, which wasn't much.

"Chop logs! I need a fire!" their Mother Ling would shout hysterically every night.

Reluctantly, they chopped away. They barely got food and water. How could they sustain living like this?

After a long day of chores, they walked home. They smelled the ashy scent of their Mother's fireplace. Knowing she wouldn't share, they trotted steadily into their cramped, chilly room. Li and Ming loved creativity, and took every opportunity to do it, but, it wasn't the time to be thinking about that. They heard the light switch click off. They stared into the darkness, and then climbed into bed.

The next day, the sun rose cheerfully. The two sisters began preparing breakfast but knew there waw probably nothing. Li and Ming chopped down logs for the daily fire. They entered the house with 4 logs, like every other day, but Ming dropped a log causing a thundering bang across their creaky wooden floor. Then Li tripped on the log and came flying to an ancient vase their Mother had inherited.

"CRASH". Li and Ming froze in terror.

"WHAT IS THIS?! SUDDEN BANGING NOISES?!" Ling rushed angrily out of her room.

"MY VASE! IT'S BROKEN!" She frantically picked up the pieces.

Li and Ming stared at each other with horror, but remained still. A long but painful silence occurred. Then a sniffle. Nervous eyes glanced around. Then, Ling looked at the disaster again.

"You…HOW DARE YOU! YOU KNOW HOW MUCH THIS COST? IT'S THE MOST EXPENSIVE THING WE HAVE IN THIS UNWEALTHY HOUSEHOLD!" Their Mother cried.

They stayed silent, but something changed their minds.

"I'm sorry… It was an accident." Li murmured.

"CLEAN THIS MESS!" Ling squealed.

Li started to pick up pieces of the vase hurriedly, while Ming impatiently collected all the logs. At the same time, they scurried back to their bedroom.

"Oh no, we're in trouble now." Li sighed.

She thumped onto the chair and threw the logs onto the desk.

"Did you see her face? Priceless. It serves her right for what she's done." Ming answered.

Li went into the kitchen and grabbed a dull cutting knife from the rack. She slid her eye along the edge of the blade. She trudged back to the room.

"I can't handle this stress," Li said. And with that, she started cutting the bark on the logs off and sawed the wood into slim pieces to relieve her stress.

Night began to fall. With no dinner, their stomachs were aching. The moon lit the sky. The two sisters slithered into the kitchen to get some tap water, when they entered back into the room, Li accidentally spilled the water next to the logs on the table.

"Ugh" she spoke, leaving the spill.

Li and Ming sat cautiously on the window ledge, gazing out.

"Hopefully tomorrow will be a better day…" Ming said.

With the very thin slices of wood on the desk and two cups of water, one that was spilt, they slid deep into their dirty, worn covers and fell asleep.

The next morning, Li and Ming woke up early, to an awakening surprise on the table. One of the pieces of wood was drenched into the water that was spilt previously and it had been turned into a firebery white pasty sheet.

"What? Did someone put this in here?" Ming slowly picked up the weird textured object and examined it. "It looks like it was dipped into the water and slowly dried, although it's still slightly wet…" Ming added.

Ming folded it, looked at it carefully and placed it down. She looked at it weirdly.

"Huh? This folds really nicely, I didn't expect that!" Ming said.

Li picked it up and started making something.

"How cute!" Li managed to say out of surprise. "This is like the material dad bought us in the Summer!" Ling shouted.

She sat the creature down on their window ledge.

"Let me try something…" Li said as she walked over and spilled more water on the table, then dipped a small piece of wood in it.

"We shall wait." she added.

That afternoon, they returned and stared at the desk.

"I think it worked!" Ming exclaimed. She picked it up, "A bit moist, let's set it out in the remaining sunlight and check on it tonight." Ming suggested.

After a small supper of rice and vegetables, they entered once again. Li picked it up, firm but easy to fold. Ming grabbed it and it teared.

"HEY!" They said in unison.

They each started folding something now that it was split in half.

"I made a flower! Look!" Li started.

Ming looked down at hers. Li peered over.

"Don't be sad. I'll teach you!" They sat down and continued with their experiment.

In the morning, Li and Ming went outside to show villagers their accidental masterpieces. An old lady came by.

"Oh girls! What have you two created?" she asked.

"I think we invented something like animal skin!" Li replied.

"Wow! I think you're onto something!" the kind old lady commented.

They both grinned shyly. After a long day outside, it was finally evening. Li and Ming took one step into the house to find their Mother cross with them.

"Where have you been? Where's my lunch?" Li looked down at the money they've made. Ming shrugged. And they both made their way to their room.

"Hey! What's that thing in your hand" Ling asked, then she grabbed it.

"MONEY?" Ling added.

"This is ours," Ming declared.

The next day, they went out to do business, but needed more wood. When they reached the nearby trees, a man came out of an expensive looking house.

"Ahh, You're the two stealing my trees. STOP." The man ordered and went back in.

Li and Ming thought nothing, so continued chopping. Later that night, the man sneaked into the poor family's shelter, a gun in hand.

"Now… You didn't listen to me, so this is what you get." Zhang whispered as he entered.

Li and Ming quickly rose up in their beds, unsure what was happening.

"LI, PROTECT YOURSELF, HE HAS A WEAPON."

Ming knew karate. She punched and kicked the man. The man (Zhang) didn't seem to know what to do. He stayed still surprised until she kicked him one last time. Zhang went flying to the creaky wooden floor.

"What…" Zhang managed through the pain.
A trigger fired.
"My last bullet…" The man said lying down. He was pointing the gun in the direction of Li, clueless.
"BANG" Li was shot in the leg. Blood spilt everywhere.
"AAAAAAAA " Li shrieked. Ming rushed to the other side of the room.
"No, this can't be! WHY?" She sank down looking at the man angrily.
As soon as she did, Mother appeared.
"WHO'S HERE?" She saw the mess and quickly went outside and rang the bell from the village.
"DOCTORS AND POLICE NEEDED. A GUN HAS BEEN FIRED"
Everyone rushed outside in nightgowns as a police officer arrived on horseback.
"IN THE HOUSE NOW!" The policeman shouted to the rest of the police.
They soon came out and carried the man with the gun. They waited for the doctors.

A few doctors arrived several minutes later and carried Li and Ming to the hospital. Li was quickly treated, luckily, the gun she was shot by was only a small pistol.
"It hurts," Li moaned as the wound was cleaned.
"It's alright, calm down." Ming reassured her.
Their Mother was in the hospital lobby waiting, not bothered. She was wrapped in a big cast bandage.
"You'll have to use a wheelchair, I'm afraid. Even if your wound fully heals, it won't be normal." a nurse declared.
Li and Ming looked at each other sadly.
"At least I'm alive!" Li cheered with pain.

Days later, Li and Ming were able to return home. They improved their invention with the money they made. They went to stores to buy proper equipment. People from the village helped them come up with a more sustainable and efficient way of making it, making machines to help the process. Soon, they were left with the pulp paste that was spread and dried in the sun. Li and Ming thought carefully after a while and named it 'paper' with inspiration from the plant Papyrus which felt the same when writing on.
"Thank you so much, for everything." The two sisters exclaimed as they finished the final step of the process.
They continued to make more and more, selling it to tons of people around the town. They made so much money and profit with the help of all the villagers nearby. Soon, after long hard working days, they were able to break free from the hands of their horrible Mother and live the rest of their lives happily.

The Downfall of My Inventions

German Swiss International School, Wai, Kate – 14

As I wander through the streets of Shanghai, horrific screams fill the atmosphere. The blood that paints the ground makes me nauseous and the bitter smell of gunpowder blocks any thought going through my head. My hand brushes through the soft powder that stains the ground. However, a shiver shoots through me and my cold empty hands go straight through. I am dead, the burden of murdering millions encumbers on my shoulders. I am dead, and yet my agonising regret lives on.

A thousand cries from the souls of the people echo through the deserted road, reminding me of the mistakes I have made. Every day and night I am reminded of the eternal pain I started. Gunpowder, how could this insignificant grey powder hold such immense power? The power to change civilizations and end the lives of innocent humans.

A gust of air blows by and standing there before me is a little boy, his black hair tainted red with blood, his arm covered with cuts and bruises and his pitch black eyes were soulless and empty, stained with the endless tears. A jolt of fear and memories rushes through me as his expression took me back 10, 50, 100 years ago. In the temple, back where it all began, where a humble monk became responsible for a million deaths.

When I was a young man, I lived with my friends in the outskirts of China. I can already imagine the warm fuzzy feeling of the fireplace heating the room up, the crackling of fire burning and the sound of laughter echoing throughout the room. **Knock Knock Knock** Cautiously, I cracked the door open and glanced around, there laid a small little baby, rocking in a broken and old wooden crib. His eyes shimmered in the darkness, his minor smile brightened my world as his fingers stuck out trying to grab me. He was cold, depressed and alone. Looking around the place, I was trying to find the boy's parents. However, it was quiet and still, only the voice of crickets rang through. A white piece of paper stuck out of the crib and in it wrote the name, "*Shenzu*". I carefully lifted the boy out of the crib and rocked him while whispering his name. His smile lit up and I chuckled. The cold air passed by, causing the baby to burst into tears. In that moment, the wolves howled and the crows cawed, reminding me of the cruel and unjust world outside. Without hesitation, I whispered, "You will be safe with me Shenzu, safer than you would ever be elsewhere."

Little did I know how wrong I was.

Although the monks were hesitant to let Shenzu in, after a few years, he was more than welcomed and he became the rising star in our community. His jovial and extroverted personality made him stand out, and even though I was not his real father, he treated me as one, staying with me day and night. He trusted me and I cherished him. The fond memories of us searching and running through caves still remain in my mind. The little animals crawling around caused us to scream and giggle with excitement, and the shimmering rocks lighted up the dim area. Everything was perfect. Well, I guess, too perfect.

One day, on a gloomy and freezing morning during December, Shenzu and I, along with a couple other monks, went on a trip through a network of caves. Over time Shenzu began shivering and sneezing, his hands turned ice cold and his head was hotter than the sun. The dead expression on his pale white face made him unrecognisable. Where is the son that I know and love? I bolted around the cave, carrying him in my arms and running towards the exit. However, there stood a stone wall that stared back at me, mocking at me. The entrance was sealed. The words and questions rushed around my head, will he make it? How do we get out? Laying him down on the hard rock floor, the monks examined him. Those seconds felt like hours, time was going by so slowly but so fast, and yet I was frozen, unable to do anything. How could I be so powerless?

As the chief monk spoke to me, my eyes welled up and my hands trembled in fear. He told me that there was nothing I could do, all I could do was wait and pray that it would pass. Shenzu laid weakly on the ground, trying

to muster all the energy to hold his smile. A way out of here, there had to be something, anything, if not, then I was going to find one. Searching through the cave, my mind was fuzzled and lost, grabbing whatever jewels or rocks I could find. Maybe I was delusional, maybe I was being ignorant, or maybe I was saving my own mind from fear and the inevitable.

Rushing back, I used all my energy to grind whatever I could find together. Until it created a grey like powder, the grey powder looked back at me. In anger, my hands slammed two rocks together onto the powder. **BANG**. An orange flame engulfed the grey powder, so big that it pushed me over. A massive explosion destroyed the rock wall in front of me, my face was filled with soot and powder, and my clothes were burnt off, but I ignored it. Trembling, I lifted Shenzu towards the hole that the explosion caused. From the hole I could see our village nearby. Could he make it? Without hesitation, I dropped everything and rushed towards the village, holding Shenzu in my hands. When we arrived at the village, relief crashed over me. He was safe and he was alive… My hand was stained with the powder that saved my life. The story began to spread throughout the village, and many people asked me for the formula. I was a hero, but in reality, I started a chain of destruction.

People began to call my invention many names. However, I decided to call it *"huo yao"*, the fire that was the medicine for my ailing son.

After a few years, my life was opulent and comfortable. We were rich, joyful and safe, but it all changed one day.

This day, this event, makes me regret every moment of my life. My memory of this day was as clear as day, but yet I wish it weren't. Shenzu and I were in the forest, trying to clear out the path of trees for new homes and buildings. At that moment Shenzu was kneeling down and placing the gunpowder, and as we laughed and chatted, my mind blanked. **Click** No…

Everything went by slowly, and I felt like I was trapped in time. I felt the fire and the burning heat engulfing me. Then, it all went dark. Ringing sounds echoed around my head and my eyes slowly opened, but I could not move. Glancing around, I could feel my world crash in on itself. Shenzu laid on the ground, his black hair was tainted red with blood, his arm was covered with cuts and bruises and his pitch black eyes were soulless and empty.

Next thing I know voices are circling my head. Laying on a grass bed, my body lifted itself up, glancing around I saw a figure laying on the ground. The burns around my body sizzled into me, and yet it did not hurt. What hurt more, was having to watch my son's lifeless body in front of me. Desperately, I tightly gripped my son's hand and sobbed violently, but he did not respond, he could not. He was dead, and there was nothing I could do about it. I screamed, cried and laughed all at once. Anger, fear, and sadness all took over, stronger than the strength of ten suns. All the gold, money and diamonds in the world felt useless at that moment. I had everything I wanted, everything I needed. Happiness, wealth, and love.

However here I stand, cold, depressed and alone. Regret flushing over me, the killer of millions, the beginner of war, the humble monk. Now I stand here, a ghost haunted by his own past. Wars flashing by me, one by one, every explosion, every death, every orphan that happens was all because of my stupidity. I'm sorry Shenzu, you would have been safer elsewhere, safer than you would have been with me.

Hah… A hero crippled by his fear, an inventor haunted by his own inventions, a monk forever chasing the need for tranquillity and a father condemned to helplessly watch the demise of his own son. In the end, this story was caused by unfulfilled destinies, having to paint a picture of my own despair and regret, a cruel joke played by a twisted fate, and I was left on the receiving side.

Saucy

German Swiss International School, Wang, Ethan – 11

The rows of crops lined up the tiled dirt, its leaves growing up to the sun. Bees buzzed around the flowers and trees, collecting pollen. Strawberries seemed to glow with neon red under the sun. Rolling green hills stood in the background and a little hut on the soft soil was placed near the flowerbeds. Then, at the edge of the field sat an azoic piece of land, with nothing planted on it and no animals lounging on the soil.

The little hut contained a person named John, who was frankly the farm's owner and caretaker. Since the farm was small, John could easily cover the whole thing in the better part of the day. He had a daily routine, like tilling the soil, watering the flowers and the plants, and, of course, with any extra time, he would try to make the dead lifeless part of the land useful. Many of the attempts to fertilise and make use of the soil went well. Some of them didn't go that well…

On this one day, John came over to the soil after mopping up some of the untidy plants and placing the waste in the compost. He came over and started to clear out all the weeds. Then, he saw something red, bright, and round. He quickly started digging it out of the soil, uncovering a tomato. He decided to ask people around his farm for help in identifying if the tomato was edible or not.

Then, the next day, he decided to make the decision and ate it. When he bit into it, red juice came pouring out onto the fish that he bought for his lunch. He decided to leave the tomato juice on the fish so that he didn't have to do extra work. When it was time to have his lunch, he eagerly bit into the fish. He thought that the tomato sauce added extra flavour to the fish, so he named it "keh–jup" which means "Fish sauce".

The next day, before he went to eat dinner with his friends, he began to experiment with the tomato juice. He added plenty of vinegar, sugar, and seasoning and decided that it made a good sauce to add to his fish. He then put it into a bottle and hurried to meet his friends about it.

He trotted along the path to the fancy restaurant that sold all kinds of meat. Then, when he got there, he pushed open the door to find all of his friends waiting for him. Many of his friends came over and asked what food he would like to get. The others asked him about the bottle of keh–jup. Ten minutes later, he used his fish sauce on the fish that he had ordered. He decided that it tasted good.

Then, he let his friends taste it. They then all put it on the fish and added the fish sauce. They complimented John on the sauce. Then, they told him that he should sell the sauce for money. That's what John did. Soon, the little village with the little farm became a monopoly of ketchup. It was now very rich.

Many of the townspeople now knew how to produce ketchup and sell it at a reasonable price. Lots of people from the town went overseas to sell the product to other places and countries.

John quickly got really rich with all the money coming from the keh–jup business. Then, he split the money with his friends so that they could enjoy the rest of their lives.

Ammunition of Gold–Drafts

German Swiss International School, Wong, Gail – 11

The wind breezed through the trees towards a hut in the forest, where inside, a little experiment was brewing. And even though no one knew it yet, it would be a little country–shaking one too.

"Experiment no. 446. Here we go." Jin Heng muttered and let out a breath, rubbing his fingers together. He opened a little drawer inside a small and tarnished chest, which was filled with a shining gold powder. His shoulders slumped, but he took the powder out and showed it to his friend Yu Xuan, who had a very different reaction. "Hey, Jin Heng! Good going this time."

Jin Heng looked at his friend in disbelief. "What do you mean, 'good going'? It's not doing anything to suggest power, or magic, or even something like, I don't know, burning something into ashes or blowing up!"

"But it's glinting gold and shimmering. Surely we ought to test it?" Yu Xuan argued. He reached a hand out to scoop up the powder–
"Yu Xuan, no!" Jin Heng yelled, knocking his friend's hand away.

"What's wrong with you?" Yu Xuan groaned. "Why did you do that?"
A trickle of fresh blood was flowing down his hand from where it had hit the sharp edge of the table. Despite Jin Heng's efforts, Yu Xuan's hand was coated in powder. The two quickly tried to brush it away, and had finished dusting almost the whole hand except for the base of his ring finger when the glittering golden powder began to shimmer, and a BAM with a clap of thunder threw the two alchemists back.

When it cleared, nothing seemed to have happened. Everything was completely still and the same as before.
"Well, at least it explodes!" "At least my finger's not gone. . .oh, my goodness." Yu Xuan was staring down at the ring on his finger, which was now glossy.
Glossy with gold.

"It's real," Yu Xuan gasped, staring down at the ring. "The potion that turns metal to gold. . .it's real. I mean, not a potion, you know," he added hastily, scrabbling for words to say. "The powder you made, not the potion. I mean, there is no potion–
But Jin Heng was too entranced with the powder's effects to have noticed his friend's spluttering. "Amazing, absolutely amazing." he said, grinning. "We have done something, Yu Xuan, you were right! This is fantastic! Tomorrow morning, let's do a few more experiments, and then take the powder to the emperor so we can share our discovery with the world."

Yu Xuan was awake early the next morning. He started out of bed and hastily shouted in Jin Heng's ear: "Wake up!"
Jin Heng groggily rubbed his eyes and rolled off his bunk. "Okay, okay. I'm coming." he moaned good–naturedly.

The two dashed to the experiment room and laid Yu Xuan's gold ring on the table. Yu Xuan snatched the little chest full of gold powder and placed it on the table, then frantically dashed around the room searching for something.
"Found it!" he declared happily.
Jin Heng, who had been standing at the doorway the whole time his friend had been running around the room, sighed. "What?"
"It's a metal vial! I only have one of these, but I don't have any gold vials right now. It's time to change that!" And in a flash, he sprinkled a handful of gold powder inside the metal vial. A shimmer began to pass through the solid ore. Both men dropped to the floor, and as before, a deafening BAM and a clap of thunder sounded through the hut.

A few seconds passed before Jin Heng and Yu Xuan dared to get up. Jin Heng cautiously put his hands on the edge of the table and slowly peered over the edge. His eyes widened.

"It is gold!" he cheered, picking up the glimmering vial. "We'll be rich if we keep making more. I'll gather all the metals!" he said eagerly, and dashed off to their room to look for more metals.

Jin Heng chuckled at his friend's enthusiasm. But his smile faded when Yu Xuan came out with every last one of their metal possessions and then proceeded to take down all the metal vials the duo used for their alchemy experiments. "What are you doing?" Jin Heng questioned. "Those are our alchemy vials." A look of horror passed over his face. " You're not planning to turn those into gold, are you? We can't use them if they're gold! You know that!"

"So? Who cares?" Yu Xuan groused. "We've discovered a powder that turns metals into gold. We'll be rich! We won't have to worry about anything ever again. We'll get many, many new sets of vials! Think of the glory we could have! The Emperor himself would reward us. In fact. . ." Yu Xuan glanced around the hut with sudden distaste. "We need to move out now. This place is a dump, and I'm sure we can get new lodgings in the capital." He ran back into his room and returned promptly with their bags. "Come on, Jin Heng, pack up!"

"What the hell are you doing?" Jin Heng spat. "This is ridiculous! You discover a powder one day and then the next day—goodbye, alchemy. I knew your real focus was never on the experience. Just the rewards." He forced out the last word like it was poison. "Also, I've told you many, many times not to touch my things!"

"So?" Yu Xuan snarled. "What else would you do it for? The experience is just the procedure you have to follow to get potential rewards. Nothing to like about it, is there? You were perfectly willing to run to the Emperor's just yesterday because of the powder, too. What makes my wanting to go any different? And besides, what makes you think I went through your things?"

"That's because I wanted to go to show our discoveries and come back to make more, not for riches! And you'd have to go through my drawers to get my bag." Jin Heng shot back.
"Hmm. You're smarter than I thought, old man. But you're not answering my first question. What would anybody see in alchemy once they had gained its rewards?" When Jin Heng stayed silent, the corner of Yu Xuan's mouth curled up in a sneer. "That's what I thought. Now, are you coming, or not?" he asked.
"What do you mean, am I coming?" Jin Heng barked, regaining his composure.
"I've made my choice. Now you make yours. You come with me to the emperor to present this new powder, or you stay in this. . ." He gestured around the house. "Dung heap."
Jin Heng looked at him sharply, disbelieving."You're not going."
Yu Xuan raised an eyebrow. "Try me." he said, and was gone.

For days, Jin Heng waited and waited and waited in their hut. Every morning he woke up and dashed out to the living room, hoping Yu Xuan had changed his mind.

He didn't. But even as the days rolled into weeks and the weeks rolled into months, Jin Heng stayed at the hut. Even as the newspaper plopped in the front door, blaring the headline: Man Discovers Powder That Transmutes Metal to Gold. Even as the same newspaper later pronounced: Award—Winning Alchemist Yu Xuan Declared Royal Alchemist. Even as a letter from his old friend made its way to his house, telling him that he'd moved into a great room in the Emperor's palace, with all the luxuries and comforts he could possibly want and telling him how Jin Heng could've had these too, if only he had come with Yu Xuan. Even as it finally became clear that Yu Xuan was

never coming back. And all the while, Jin Heng tinkered and experimented with powders and solutions and even the charcoal and wood in the fire.

One hot morning a year later, Jin Heng woke up and dashed out to the living room, but not because he was under the deluded impression that Yu Xuan might have been coming back anymore, because he wasn't. No, it was due to his excitement for his latest experiment, which he'd been working on for ages.
He opened the small, wooden chest and peered inside. A mass of black powder lay inside it.
Well, Jin Heng thought to himself, if Yu Xuan isn't coming back to this house, maybe I'll pay a visit to his.

And so, Jin Heng began packing his bags to leave the little hut for the Emperor's palace, his newest little invention in hand, thrown together as a little present for his old friend.

2019 – One Thousand and Seventy–Nine Years Later
"Hey, come and look at this!" a worker shouts to his friend Mu Yang, who promptly hurries over.
"What is it?" he asks.
"I…I think it's. . . a bomb." the first worker says, staring at the iron pieces.
An hour later, more excavating in the area would reveal the mass of ashes and a pale, masculine, skull.

Needles of Death

German Swiss International School, Wong, Lillian – 13

A light flickers in the dim atmosphere of the office. Papers were sprawled across the wooden desk, the fresh ink bleeding through the paper. Hua Lian picks up his brush, dipping the bristles on the inkstone, before lazily writing the same characters, over and over again.

"Sir, all these patients are experiencing the same pain, but we have yet to find a way to treat them. What are we going to do?" He sighs, setting down the brush on the hard wooden desk. "We have tried every medicine and every remedy we know, but none of them work." Yu Ren said, frustratedly putting away the book containing all currently known medicinal remedies. "But then how can we treat these ailing patients? They are in agonising pain, and no form of therapy is able to help them." Hua Lian protested.

"Well.." Yu Ren said quietly "There is an ancient therapy that was used back in the Han dynasty. It consisted of using needles to pierce into the patient's skin as a way to relieve pain, but it was done poorly leading to the infection of many patients and the fall of the doctor's reputation. It has since been forgotten but some old books still contain the information on how to do it properly." Yu Ren explained. "If you can figure out how to revive this ancient therapy safely and treat these patients, I'd be proud. Goodnight." Hua Lian packed up all his things from the desk and made his way home in the pouring rain.

The next morning, Hua Lian arrived at the office bright and early and set his things down. He went over to the bookshelf, dusting off the yet to be cleaned shelf, looking for the book that contained the ancient remedies. Flipping through the yellowed pages, he noticed a certain treatment , similar to what his senior had said the night before.

"A–cu–punc–ture?" He muttered, confused. "Utilising specialised thin needles crafted from steel from the North, and carefully insert into ailing patients and keep there for 5 minutes up to 30 minutes, in accordance to the patients symptoms. Used as therapy for relieving pain." Hua Lian's eyes widened and his face broke out in glee.

"Hua Lian, are you already here? I heard some rustling, what are you doing–" Yu Ren stated."Sir! I believe I have found the ancient remedy!" Yu Ren entered the office to Hua Lian, who was giddy with excitement, his eyes gleaming in joy. "I know how to treat our patients! "

"Hua Lian, calm yourself. First, describe the remedy to me." Yu Ren said. Hua Lian took the book and stuffed it into the hands of Yu Ren. "Here! Page 24, the paragraph next to the picture of the needle." "Hm, let's try this out then." Yu Ren said.

And to their delight, the antidote was a success. All of their patients were relieved of their suffering, Hua Lian was hailed around as a hero and the remedy was praised as a 'miracle cure'. Citizens were in awe of the rediscovery of this ancient medicine, and both Hua Lian and Yu Ren revelled in the success that this brought them. Alas, this lasted roughly 5 months, before disaster struck.

"Hey boss Wu! Look at this!" The triad member slams a poster onto the hard wooden desk. "Some new medical remedy or whatever. Shall we use this to reign terror in the streets of China?"

The swivel of the chair is heard, and sitting atop is a man, dressed head to toe in black. He snatched the flimsy piece of paper off the desk and scanned it quickly before once again throwing it away. "Hm. I suppose we can carry this out." He grunted. "Has anyone got any needles!"

Screams. Screams are heard everywhere. The decibels of each shriek loud enough to deafen a human being. Blood. Blood splatters covering the walls, the damp and dark room reeking of a sweet metallic scent. The faces of innocents drooped and pale, their bodies rotting away and a sickeningly sweet scent lingers on every single corpse.

The faces of Jun Wu and his members contorted into madness, mouth smiling at every single drop of blood and scream of innocents. Terror arose in the streets, citizens too frightened to accept any form of acupuncture. The country was engulfed in fear, sceptical citizens afraid of every single clinic that was offering the remedy of acupuncture.

Soon, the crowd broke into riots. The flame of torches covered the streets, chanting and shouting for the downfall of Hua Lian. Hua Lian, now no longer a renowned doctor but a shunned member of society, was responsible for the death of innocents throughout China. People took black and white paint and smeared it over his clinic's door, the character *'死'* painted on his windows, doors and walls. Some managed to find his home address, and sent many letters and threats, harassing and calling him 'a traitor of China'.

"Another one I suppose." Hua Lian sighed. The harassment was neverending. It had come to the point where he could not even leave his house, and Yu Ren, a few kindhearted neighbours and people who felt empathy for him had to bring him groceries in hopes he wouldn't starve to death. The colour was drained from his face, his body so shrivelled up you could see his bones. Oh the irony. A doctor out of all people, pale like a ghost and thin as a stick.

Knock Knock. Hua Lian peeked through the peephole and opened his door to reveal a concerned Yu Ren, heaving two big bags of groceries. "Goodness gracious Hua Lian, you're as thin as a chopstick. You haven't been taking care of yourself have you?" Yu Ren said worriedly.

" Once a doctor, now a shunned citizen, the 'traitor of China' they say. Here are the letters that came in today." Hua Lian said dryly, dropping a horrifically high stack of letters, all of them full of degrading words and insults. You could no longer see the glint of care and kindness in his eyes no more, his eyes were now empty and dull, the shimmer of life no longer in him.

"Well, take care. I'll be back tomorrow to check up on you." Yu Ren said, patting a hand on Hua Lian's shoulder as he walked past him and through the door. Hua Lian stared at the now closed door, longing for the times when his life was still peaceful and he could enjoy the praise and admiration of the citizens.

"To hell they go, these damned triads!" He shouted in anger, banging on his walls and screaming within the confinement of his house. His neighbours would think he had gone insane. He sobbed and wept, breaking down as waterfalls of tears streamed down his face. He couldn't do it anymore, he was hated all around the country, his house and clinic were vandalised, his life was ruined. He could hear them, the criticisms, the mockery, the insults, he could hear all of it.

His eyes fell upon a rope that was miraculously already tied to the ceiling. Should he do it? Death was standing next to it with open arms, glowing silver butterflies floating around Death, enticing Hua Lian to join. A stool was there, ready to help him up if needed. It was right there, welcoming him with a smile.

Hua Lian graciously took Death's hand, and began dancing with it. He danced and danced, the burden on his shoulders lessened and lessened. What felt like hours went by, and he felt as light as a feather. He watched as Death shined a brilliant silver, and burst into silvery butterflies. They engulfed Hua Lian, and he followed Death to the Heavens.

The Legend of Paper

German Swiss International School, Xu, Jiaqi – 11

The sun was just on the horizon as Cai Lun woke up. It was 105 AD, and a new emperor had been crowned. Cai had finally landed an extremely prestigious job in the imperial palace as an official of the high court, and after a good night's rest, it was time to head to work.

On the way to the palace, Cai got some breakfast. The small but homey meal he had picked up from the run-down street-side shop was hot and steamy, but that wasn't what Cai was noticing. Even after the education reforms, which taught tens if not hundreds of thousands of people how to read and write, there were barely any scrolls around. Even in the palace area, only a few scholars were carving into the thick bamboo strips. Amongst the countless junk shops selling piles upon piles of goods, not a single piece of writing equipment was in sight. Being an official of the high court, Cai knew that he would be the one to solve this issue.

Taking a few bamboo strips himself, he tried carving detailed letters into the tough material, tracing over the carvings many times, and repeatedly checking for any errors. That was how it was taught when he was a kid, and the colossal problem was glaringly obvious. The waxy bamboo strips were annoying and bulky, and it was extremely difficult to carve out intricate characters on them. Also, if there was even a single character that wasn't perfect, the whole strip would have to be recarved. Silk, another writing material barely used by the populace, was extremely expensive, and only high nobles, or the emperor,could afford to write on it. Neither of those options were great, and even after searching for hours, there seemed to be nothing that would work better than bamboo and silk.

Thus, Cai wanted to make his own material. It had to be lightweight, easy to write on, and cheap enough for mass production. Experimenting with countless materials, he tried plaster, wood, cheap fibre, and even leaves. But those materials were all too hard to write on. Nevertheless, he persisted on, trying to mix materials, laying them on each other, and beating them into shape. Nothing seemed to work, even after a whole day of just experimenting. Countless rounds of useless and unusable materials. Eventually, he thought of something that might just work. He took a few pieces of tree bark, and noticed how the fibres made the whole piece of material light, but strong. He found the same thing in rags and hemp as well. So, Cai decided to try and mash mulberry bark, rags and hemp together into a pulp, mix it up, and lay it out to dry. When the next day came along, he realised that it had become the perfect material. Light, cheap, and easy to write on.

After a whole night of making sheets of paper, a knock echoed across the dusty, dim-lit hallway. Another court official had come, slightly above him in rank. New sheets of paper were drying next to the window as a musty yet metallic smell spread across the room.

"What is this little project?" the court official sneered, glaring at Cai.

Cai quickly got up, still feeling extremely sleepy,"Just a way to make writing much easier."

He took out a pen, and easily laid down a few smooth strokes, gliding the pen across the thin surface. The court official raised an eyebrow, shocked at the action.

"Give them all to me," he smirked, knowing that he would have to give the invention up, and if he didn't, it would be considered treason.

Cai looked suspiciously at the court official, and questioned,"But why?"

The court official took out a gleaming dagger, pointing the glimmering blade straight at Cai. He let out a maniacal laugh, and glared at Cai.

Grabbing all the paper that was there, Cai jumped out of the heavy wooden window, nearly tripping on the wet morning grass. The sun shone brightly in his face, blinding him for a few seconds. A barrage of shouts echoed

around the small courtyard, causing Cai to turn back for a few seconds. The court official let go of his dagger, and Cai thought he was doomed. He closed his eyes, opening them after a few seconds, and realised he was fine. The stack of paper had stopped the dagger from hitting him. Realising he had fallen onto the ground, Cai picked himself up, and narrowly dodged a punch from the court official, returning a blow right to his stomach. The official lurched back but jumped onto his feet, landing a kick to Cai's leg.

Cai fought intensely, struggling to keep up with the court official, who clearly had the upper hand. He tried to remember the days when his mother forced him to attend martial arts classes. It was all coming together again. After a barrage of attacks from the official, Cai advanced, moving forward whilst dodging as many blows as possible, slowly gaining ground. He ran forward and planned on ending the fight for good. His heart beat in his chest, blood streaming from his hand, but his spirit was still roaring.

Landing a hit straight to the officials face, Cai staggered back. He took the paper, a dagger still entrenched inside, and dragged himself back towards his home. If he didn't manage to get recognition for his invention first, who knows what will happen next? So he trudged along, clothes covered with dirt, but eyes gleaming with hope. This was his invention, and he was going to be able to help the whole world.

The palace was within view, and Cai quickly changed into a set of clean clothes. He rushed off, his leg still a little limp from the fight. As the rough wooden doors creaked open, he knew it was coming to an end.

Once he told the Emperor about his invention, the Emperor immediately applauded him, praising his invention. The invention of paper was to be made available across the country, credited to Cai's name. Giant mills were set up, and people started to finally be able to read and write easily. Paper was a giant success, and became one of the most common items across China. The world had been changed forever.

Light Condenser

German Swiss International School, Xu, Micah – 12

Year 3033. 小明 reached his 18th birthday. He just applied to a university named "China's Institute of Science and Technology". He studied assiduously, day and night. A month later, the university replied with an E−LETTER. It read

「亲爱的小明，

恭喜你考进 "中国科技和科学理工"！w

祝您学习快乐(Dear Xiao Ming, congratulations on passing the exam to "Chinese Institute of Science and Technology"! Happy studying)! 」

小明 was ebullient. He had never been this happy in his life. He had achieved his lifelong dream. Since Y1, his mum had been convincing him to work hard so he could pass this school's exam. He could not believe it! While 小明 was celebrating, his mum came in and asked「你在干嘛？！那么吵！(What are you doing?! So Loud!」

小明 showed his mum the letter. His mum had a more "exaggerated" reaction「儿子， 我太开心了！这必需要庆祝！（Son, I am so happy! This calls for a celebration!) The whole family arrived at this special moment. Mum prepared the largest feast that she had never made before. Once he was stuffed, he got up from the chair. Mum shouted「你给我坐下来！还没吃完呢 (Sit down! You haven't finished)！」

小明 shouted back「我吃饱了 (I'm full) ！」

and she replied 「哎呀，你喜欢吧 (whatever)。」

小明 woke up with a jolt. He thought he heard gunshots, but it was probably just a dream. He heard it again. It couldn't be a mistake this time. In a rush, 小明 ran onto his front porch with his pajamas on. There were a lot of dead bodies. He was confused. What were dead bodies doing on his front porch? More importantly, what in the world happened to these people? He had just started school, and then this happened? Just his luck. He called his mother with his phone 「妈妈，我的前阳台有一堆尸体 (Mum, I found a bunch of dead bodies on my front porch)。」

She replied 「啥？！你不是跟我开玩笑吧 (What?! You're not joking right)？」

小明 then said 「我不是跟你开玩笑，我是认真的(No, of course not. I'm serious)！」

She went babbling about how he should be careful at these times of possible war.

Then he got to the point 「妈妈，你没有受伤吧 (You didn't get hurt right]?」

She then continued babbling about how 小明 should be safe and how she was very old. This went on for about an hour. He then hung up politely and went on with his work.

He started working on a project called "Light condenser," which would be revolutionary for the community if succeeded. Since light could not be destroyed, it would provide a defense for China. It might even be as legendary as "The Great Wall of China". 小明 had never thought China needed help with its defenses, but considering how easily the invaders breached the walls, maybe it did. After hours of endless working on the project, he needed to rest. He turned on the news to see what was happening in China; Today, Vladimir Putin's aspiring great−grandson, Jingus Putin, made the cretinous choice of attacking China. This will not be taken lightly. Tomorrow, we will find all the willing men to fight for our country's pride! 小明 was astonished. He thought this was just a few terrorists going around town. This was more serious than he thought.

"Have you seen the news?" his frantic mum asked.

“Yes, of course I have,” 小明 replied with a calmer agenda.
“Well?” Mum asked again.
“What?” 小明 replied with confusion.
“Are you joining the army?” Mum asked.
“Of course not! It is dangerous!” he shouted.
“It’s for the good of the country!” Mum snapped back.
“Well, I don’t want to die,” 小明 stated.
“Then you will never talk to me ever again you ungrateful child!” she shouted angrily.
An awkward silence struck…
“Fine, I will go. Only if my brother comes along,” he said.
“Good,” Mum replied.

In case 小明’s brother wasn’t coming, he prepared himself for the worst. Training himself for the next few weeks would probably prepare him for the pain that was about to come. 明 completely forgot about his project for the whole month. Time passed quickly for 小明. One day 小明’s boss called, and he was surprised. He was unaware that there were deadlines for this project. 小明’s boss was very angry because this was a month−long project, and everyone else had finished. His boss stated that he would be fired if he didn't finish the project within a month. This bothered 小明 a lot. He had to fulfill both requirements of his mum and his boss at the same time! It would be nearly impossible to achieve, but he had to try.

For the first few days, 小明 would exercise and train to get ready for the army. He would do 100 push−ups, 100 sit−ups, and 100 miles of running. After this, he would gobble down a high−protein brunch. After that, he would have to work on his project. All of this was done in one day. Then he started sleeping less and less because of the stress he was under.

Finally, the drafting day came. He had no idea of what was to happen. Was his brother going to come? Or had his mum tricked him? He felt a sense of relief flood over him when he saw his familiar brother rushing over to him. His elder brother, 大明 came over to say hello
“Long time no see!” 大明, said in an ecstatic voice.
“Yes, long time no see,” 小明 replied in a less optimistic voice.
“Ah, yes. I have a surprise for you,” 大明 said, happiness in his voice.
“Ok,” 小明 replied blankly.
“Hey champ, cheer up. You’ve got me!” 大明 exclaimed.
小明 nodded. He knew on the inside that he was just as sad as him.
大明 pulled out a big cake. On the cake, was a cartoon character that 小明 had always loved, Spiderman.

One month later… 小明 and 大明 had already gotten used to the customs of the army. It was tiring, but not as bad as they thought it would be. Their routine was the same but just with more physical activity. This was their last day at camp. Just before the war, the captain had some words to share. “Good morning soldiers. Just before the war I have some things to announce. This is one of the most important events that have ever occurred to us. Although we have not fought a war in 200 years, we will not back down!”

As they drove to the city's borders, they prepared to defend our country. In the distance, they heard faint footsteps. Then louder and louder, until the sounds were as loud as thunder. Their captain said “Get ready soldiers, we are heading into battle!” As soon as the captain shouted those words, the battle started to break out. Lasers were being fired, and tanks were being destroyed. 小明 and 大明 were hiding in a bunker used a long time ago. They were surprised it was still holding up since the weather had been pretty harsh these 200 years. 小明 peeked out of the

spying hole built inside the small bunker, giving them an adequate view of what was happening outside. Outside there was a lot of screaming and shouting. People were dying quickly. The Russian invaders were getting closer and closer to the Wall of China. They dashed out of their hiding place and rushed to their people's aid. They started firing randomly at the enemies hoping the lasers would hit. 小明 had no gun experience, so he was randomly pulling the trigger each time he saw an enemy. 小明 was just about to relax, but then… BOOM! A bomb was dropped on the Great Wall of China! 小明 was devastated that the thousand−year−old wall, which had led China to victory thousands of years ago, was destroyed. Everyone else had the same reaction. "RETREAT!!!" the captain's voice rang out. 小明 and 大明 dashed back behind the remaining portion of the wall.

After the Great Wall of China was destroyed, 小明 had a difficult time recovering. However, his brother was there to soothe him. "Light Condenser" continued to be the focus of 小明's efforts. If 小明 was going to help China, this would probably do it. Unfortunately, he didn't have the resources to do so. Even if he did, he had no idea where to start. He started contemplating about what to do. He then decided to make the actual condenser. By piecing together a condenser and some additional pieces that would condense light, but light had to be caught in this condenser, and that was the problem. To remedy that problem, he inserted a little hatch to allow light in. He created a solid light atom. It would take centuries to rebuild the wall atom by atom, so he did it on a larger scale. Once he had done that he put some programming into the condenser so it would fit the hole in the Great Wall of China. With permission from the captain, he planted his machine in the ground and it instantly filled the hole in the wall. The captain was amazed. This was revolutionary, the captain informed the prime minister. The word spread quickly that 小明 had created such an amazing machine. With the newly acquired machine, they easily got through the defenses of the Russians. The Russians later forfeited to the almighty China.
"How the tables have turned," 小明 said to his dear mother

"Indeed." his mother replied.

Inventing Porcelain

German Swiss International School, Yu, Vicky – 13

"Mother," the girl said, her voice filled with curiosity. "Why are cowrie shells so smooth and elegant, yet strong and sharp-edged?"

She sat at the wooden table in their humble hut, her small hands clutching a brush dipped in black ink. Her mother paused from her dishwashing and looked at Pearl with a warm smile.

"Pearl, dear, if I knew the answer to that, I wouldn't be scrubbing dishes right now," she replied, her voice tinged with a hint of playfulness.

The room was bathed in a soft, golden glow as sunlight filtered through the lattice wood window, casting intricate patterns on the walls. Pearl furrowed her brow, deep in thought, as she carefully drew a zig-zag line on the parchment before her. Her mother, curious about her creation, leaned closer. "What is it you're drawing, my dear?" she asked.

Pearl's eyes sparkled with excitement as she revealed her artwork. "I'm drawing a landscape on this cowrie shell, Mother," she replied, a glimmer of pride evident in her voice. "Look how the ink seeps into the shell's curves, creating a miniature world filled with mountains, rivers, and flowers."

Her mother's eyes widened with amazement as she examined the delicate details of Pearl's creation. "My dear Pearl," she said, her voice filled with warmth, "your talent and imagination know no bounds. You have a gift that will take you far."

Little did Pearl know that her talent would indeed carry her to extraordinary places. A few weeks later, as she continued to hone her artistic skills, a letter arrived, bearing the Emperor's seal. Pearl's heart raced as she read the invitation to an art competition held at the imperial palace. It was a chance to showcase her talent to the world, a chance to prove that dreams could become reality.

With her mother's blessings and a satchel filled with her cherished cowrie shells, Pearl embarked on a journey to the grand imperial city. The palace was a magnificent sight, its walls adorned with intricate porcelain artworks, each telling a story of its own. Pearl's nerves mingled with excitement as she entered the competition, surrounded by other talented artists.

Days turned into weeks as the competition unfolded. Pearl's hands danced across the parchment, her brush bringing to life vibrant landscapes and delicate floral patterns. The judges marveled at her skill, recognizing the raw talent that flowed through her veins. And when the final day arrived, Pearl stood before the Emperor and his court, her heart pounding with anticipation.

The Emperor's eyes gleamed with admiration as he beheld Pearl's artwork. "Your talent is truly remarkable, young Pearl," he commended. "Your art captures the beauty of our land and the spirit of our people. You are a treasure to be cherished." With those words, the Emperor announced Pearl as the winner of the competition, and the palace erupted into applause.

Pearl's victory echoed through the village as news spread like wildfire. The air was filled with a mixture of awe and pride, and her mother beamed with joy. Yet, amidst the celebrations, a visitor arrived—an American businessman, Mr. Thompson. He had heard of Pearl's extraordinary talent and sought to strike a deal that would take her art beyond the borders of China.

"Miss Pearl," Mr. Thompson began, his voice carrying an air of confidence, "your artwork possesses a unique allure that will captivate the hearts of people around the world. I propose an opportunity for you to showcase your art in America, where it will be admired by countless admirers." Pearl's eyes widened with wonder as the possibilities unfolded before her. Her art, her passion, reaching foreign lands—it was a dream come true.

With a mixture of excitement and trepidation, Pearl bid farewell to her village and embarked on a long journey across the vast ocean to America. The days at sea were filled with a whirlwind of emotions—moments of longing for her mother's comforting presence, anticipation for the new experiences that awaited her, and gratitude for the opportunity that lay ahead.

Finally, the shores of America came into view, and Pearl's heart fluttered with a mixture of nervousness and excitement. She stepped onto foreign soil, her eyes wide with wonder as she took in the bustling streets and towering buildings. The journey had transformed Pearl into a young woman, ready to face the world with her talent and determination.

Days turned into weeks, and Pearl's art was exhibited in museums, galleries, and grand exhibitions across the nation. Crowds gathered to behold her delicate paintings on shells, each stroke telling a story of resilience and beauty. Pearl's artwork brought joy to countless admirers, and her talent was celebrated far and wide.

However, amidst the acclaim and success, Pearl faced a harsh reality. Her living conditions remained modest, and the struggles of language and cultural differences left her feeling isolated. Newspapers, though fascinated by her art, described her in derogatory termsand often sensationalized her story, emphasizing her foreignness rather than her artistic prowess. Pearl felt a pang of loneliness and yearned for the familiarity of her village and the unconditional love of her mother.

In those moments of doubt, Pearl would find solace in her art. She would immerse herself in her creations, pouring her emotions onto the canvas or delicately painting on a cowrie shell. The memories of her mother, their shared moments of creativity and love, became a guiding light, reminding her of her roots and the strength within her.

One afternoon, while she was working on a new piece in her small studio, a knock came at the door. Startled, Pearl opened it to find an elderly man with kind eyes and a warm smile. "Miss Pearl," he began, his voice gentle, "I have followed your journey and admired your talent from afar. Your art speaks to the depths of the human spirit."

Intrigued, Pearl invited the man inside, and they sat in her studio amidst the paintings and scattered brushes. He introduced himself as Mr. Chen, a renowned art critic who had traveled across the country to see her work. "Your art captures the essence of beauty and strength," he continued. "But there is a story within you—a story that goes beyond the strokes of your brush. It's time to tell your tale."

Pearl listened intently, her heart stirred by Mr. Chen's words. He proposed a collaboration—a joint exhibition that would showcase not only her artwork but also the journey that had brought her to America. It would be an opportunity to share her experiences, challenge stereotypes, and inspire others through her resilience and artistic vision.

With renewed purpose, Pearl embarked on a new artistic journey. She poured her heart into each brushstroke, infusing her paintings with the emotions and stories that had shaped her. She painted scenes from her village, the warmth of her mother's embrace, and the struggles she had faced in a foreign land. The cowrie shells became a symbol of her journey—a testament to the strength, elegance, and resilience that she embodied.

The joint exhibition was a resounding success. Visitors were captivated not only by the beauty of Pearl's artwork but also by the narratives woven within each piece. Her story touched their hearts, and they began to see her not only as a foreign artist but as a human being with a rich tapestry of experiences.

News of Pearl's transformative exhibition spread like wildfire. People from all walks of life flocked to witness her art, eager to be touched by the spirit of resilience and the power of creativity. Pearl's talent and her ability to bridge cultures through her art captured the attention of collectors, curators, and art enthusiasts alike.

As Pearl's fame grew, so did her influence. She used her platform to advocate for cultural understanding and to challenge the prejudices that she had faced. Through her art and her eloquent voice, she became a symbol of perseverance, inspiring others to embrace their unique stories and push beyond the boundaries of societal expectations.

Many many years later, Pearl stood before an audience in her homeland, surrounded by family, friends, and admirers. She had returned to her village, her art having traveled the world and touched countless lives. Her mother, hair a white mess, stood by her side, her eyes filled with pride and love.

"Mother," Pearl said, her voice filled with gratitude, "it was your love, support, and belief in my talent that carried me through the darkest moments. You gave me the courage to chase my dreams and share my art with the world."

Her mother embraced her, a tear of joy trickling down her cheek. "My dear Pearl," she whispered, "your journey has been a testament to the power of art, the resilience of the human spirit, and the love that binds us together. You have made your mark on the world, and your legacy will live on through your art."

And as the sun set over the village, casting a warm, golden glow, Pearl knew that her journey was far from over. Her art would continue to inspire, to bridge divides, and to remind the world of the beauty that could be found even in the harshest of circumstances.

Fake

German Swiss International School, Zhu, Toby – 11

Joe looked down at the machine in his hand; he could not believe his eyes! It worked! His invention had many complicated red and blue wires and lines connected to the compass he had stolen from his neighbor's 2–year–old kid. On the grey and black digital screen, the arrow pointed north. He pushed the red button, located under the blue button, which made the little cartoon character's voice start talking. He cringed with irritation. He knew if he did not change the voice, his arch enemy, Joey Mcdonalds, would definitely make fun of him. So he made a note to change it as soon as possible.

"Well hello there! What ore do you want to find?" Chirped the cartoon character's voice. "Click the shiny white button to continue!"

"UGH! Not this again," Muttered Joe while rolling his eyes. "Take me to diamonds." On the screen, a cartoon character appeared and pointed towards the southeast, which happened to be heading towards town. He was so focused on the compass he ignored his best friend, Bob, who waved and called out to him from inside the rubbish bin where he had been searching for his pet rat, and even tripped over a stray cat, two rubbish bins, and an electric fence! After about 10 minutes of traveling in the same direction, the cartoon character's arm spun around 1620 degrees, making Joe turn around and around until eventually, he was facing the way he had come from.

Completely unaware of where he was going, he climbed over the electric fence which made his hair fly straight up, walked towards the two rubbish bins that he had knocked over just minutes before, and slipped on a banana peel that he had not seen. Ignoring the pain in his back and still focused on the compass, he got up and continued walking. The cat that he tripped over just minutes ago, was sitting on a big two–meter–high box, saw him coming and prepared to get revenge. As he passed, the cat jumped off the box, and onto Joe's head and started scratching his face. As he grabbed the cat by the nape of its neck and threw it into the trash bin, his friend Bob who was now trying to find his pet hamster (since he had found his pet rat) in the rubbish bin, popped out of it and threw a piece of cake at Joe, and that is when he realized his best friend was waving at him.

"Bob!? What are you doing in the rubbish bin?"
"Joe!? What are you doing throwing cats in the bin?"
"STOP WASTING TIME, BOB. DIAMONDS, BOB, DIAMONDS!"

Poor Bob did not understand what was happening so he continued looking for his pet hamster in the rubbish bin. Joe then looked down again, and concentrating on his compass looking for his diamonds, he continued walking not realizing he just walked into his arch–enemy's backyard… Joey's backyard! What he didn't know was that Joey, his arch enemy, had planned this the whole time by using fake diamonds, and wanted to humiliate Joe in front of everyone at the International Innovation & Invention Competition. But this was still not enough; Joey did not want to just humiliate Joe in front of everyone, he wanted to beat Joe. So he made his invention, which was also a compass, and it was to predict what the weather was. He knew that it was not as good as Joe's, but if he managed to eliminate Joe, then no one could beat him, no one!

Joe now entered the backyard, or Joey's backyard where Joey was hiding in a bush behind the place he had dug to put fake diamonds. Joey had instructed his pet dog Chow Chow (The dog's breed is also Chow Chow) to steal Joe's compass once he put the compass down and started digging for diamonds. Joey waited and waited until Joe finally started digging with his one–meter–long shovel. All of a sudden Joey popped out of nowhere, grinning wickedly."Well, well, well, Joe. Looks like you've stumbled right into my trap," he sneered.

Confusion and anger mingled on Joe's face. "What do you mean, trap?"

Joey chuckled and pointed to the fake diamonds scattered on the ground. "Those diamonds you've been chasing? They're all fake, Joe. I planted them here to lure you in."Joe's heart sank, realizing he had been deceived.

"You... you did this just to embarrass me?"Joey nodded, his satisfaction evident.

"Oh, it's more than that, Joe. I want to beat you. I want to prove that I'm the better inventor.

Joe stepped forward with a glimmer of determination. "Joey, this is not fair. You can't just play with people like this. It's not right."

Joey shrugged, unfazed by Joe's words. "Life isn't fair, Joe. And if you can't handle a little competition, you don't deserve to be in the inventing game."

Joe's frustration turned into determination. He refused to let Joey's manipulation break him. "You might have fooled me, Joey, but I won't let you win. I'll find a way to come out on top. You may have fooled me this time, Joey. But I won't give up!" exclaimed Joe.

Fiction

Group 3

The Eight Dragons of Hope

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Chan, Annette – 13

Hope for survival. That's all everyone wants at the end of the day.

I still remember that day in December. Five years may seem like enough time to heal, but not for me.

It is a frigid, dreary December morning, and the streets are wrapped up in a blanket of white snow. The sparkling flakes of snow cling to the windows and hang like molten silver from the trees, and the wind howls ineffectively, creating small, swirling piles of snow that rise and fall with every gust of wind. Each snowflake seems to hold its own individual beauty, yet blurred lines barely separate their silhouettes as they merge together, spinning up into little whirlpools. The sky above the village is a vast expanse of darkness, stretching away into infinity. Inside, I am curled up all warm and cozy beneath a cocoon of blankets.

"SCREEECH!!! SCREEECH!!!" Our chicken, Mary, is screeching at the top of her voice. Having always been a late riser, I awaken. At once I shut my eyes and roll over in my bed, curling even tighter beneath my blankets. Half asleep and naïve with childhood innocence, I think, "Cool, a tremor. Trust Mary to be so demanding of attention on my special day."

Birthdays were rarely celebrated in the Wu household, so today was special. I wish we lived in the palace, where every birthday was celebrated, not merely every decade like it is here. There would be an extravagant feast: slabs of roast duck, plates of pickled clams, bowls of Tangyuan, an unlimited supply of my personal favourite: the good old classic, mutton soup with noodles. Banquets of flowers would be featured, scattered around the grandiose hall lined with statues, jewels, ceramics. Best of all, there would be no screeching chickens on your birthday. I could sleep as late as I pleased and have servants wake me up just before the party. Everything would be perfect. I wish I lived in the palace.

A loud, hearty tremor thrusts me out of my reverie. Sitting up, I light up my bedside candle. If I squint really hard, I can make out the silhouette of the sun rising up over the mountains like a medallion in the sky. It's 6am. The tremor must've been Mary – Grandma always said that screams, if loud enough, could shake the earth. But I couldn't ignore the sinister feeling that this time, it was something different.

Hushhhh. The floor is shaking harder now, and I try to stand. A surge throws me backward. Almost seemingly sneaking up on me without warning, my family's small farmhouse cottage comes alive, like a hungry wild animal lurching forward to pounce on its prey. Its stomach grumbles, and staggers one way then another. The air fills with the cottage's inhuman noises: rumbles and groans, the screeching of wood planks scuffing against each other. Around me, paintings thud against walls; storage boxes open then bang shut; window curtains shriek on their rods. A whoosh of wind surges over, violent as a storm monster.

Then the candles go out.

Fear squeezes the breath out of me. It had to be an earthquake. The familiar cottage somehow feels eerie in the dark. I fall to the ground with a loud thud. Tears begin to run down my cheeks, and my chest pains from imagining what life would be like if my whole family dies right now. As a large stack of scrolls topples over and crashes onto my back, I grunt and decide that enough is enough. I run out.

The ground splitting shudder sends a ripple through my body, tingling up my spine and making its way to my head, leaving me shivering. A six–foot–wide fissure erupts in the middle of the street, and it snakes down the road like blood veins. It spread like a virus – making its way deep inside and multiplying in the darkness. Around me is nothing but chaos. Buildings collapse, and the air is filled with the sounds of running, screams, and crumbling debris. Tears well up in my eyes as I desperately call out: "Mom! Dad! Ming! Help! Where are you……? Help!" but my voice is drowned out by the chaos around me. With an unexpected fury, the earthquake strikes again, leaving the ground shivering with the December cold and trembling in fear. As the ground twitches and seemingly bites its quivering lip, I couldn't help but notice the sinister feeling creeping up on me again. This time, it would be different. One can only hope it is for the best.

"Ming!" I scream; I dare not look up. Tears stream down my face, soaking my best tunic with wet stains. Rushing for my brother's fallen body, I wipe my everlasting tears on his sleeve, soon drenching Ming's clothes too. Clinging onto

my brother's arm, I lean on his tear-stained shoulders. "Please," I beg, sobbing into the warmth of my beloved brother's arms. His chest is now heaving for air, and as I clutch him tightly, I whisper into Ming's ear, "You can't leave me like this. You can't—"

With his last breath, he says, "I am proud of you, Aili. Go, not too late, help the people, and let this earthquake stand in testament of all that we have loved and lost, and what really matters when it comes down to it. Please, I insist. In honour of my dearly made sacrifice." I plead, "Stay strong. I can't bear the thought—" my voice cuts off. He gasps for air, then stops. Nothing. Nothing at all. Nothing like the void of dark nothingness. I was right. The sinister feeling was right. I hate that I was right. With a heavy heart, my head droops with a thud in my hands. I flop against the wall then slowly slink down in defeat, willing my exhaustion to somehow disappear.

Eventually, the freezing weather gets the better of me. I curl up into a ball and wrap my arms around myself, rocking back and forth. How I wish I lived in the palace – then even if everything collapsed, at least I'd still have matches and thick layers of clothes to keep warm. Tears come streaming down my face, and I silently sob into my hands. My eyes must be bright red by now, but I couldn't care less if I looked like a racoon. The pain of losing Ming ran too deep for me to keep going.

"Hello." A whisper came from a seemingly faraway voice. "I'm Yuhan. My mom runs a makeshift shelter. We're helping out anyone who's been affected by the earthquake. Stop by anytime. It may not be much, and it may be overcrowded, but at least there you won't be alone. You could give it a try. It might help lift your mood," trembled the tiny voice. From behind a large chunk of brick on the rubble-strewn street, a little girl emerged with a shy smile and a pair of bright, shining, welcoming eyes. So much innocence and genuity, my heart aches. She smoothes over her dirt-covered skirt with small hands and smiles up at me, revealing wide gaps between her front teeth. The little girl looked about five or six, maybe eight if she was one of the skinny ones. It wasn't uncommon to have calorie-deficiency. Part of me feels guilty for never appreciating and always wanting more. What's so great about luxury when you can have love?

It was a birthday I would never cease to remember. At the end of the day, none of the destruction mattered, because Ming was dead. Dead as scrambled eggs. Dead like what you'd be like if you were bound up by duct tape, launched across the room, crashed against a wall, and cooked on the pan together with the eggs. Dead, eternal darkness-dead. How I wish there was something that could've saved my brother.

In 132 AD, a mere three years ago, the first seismograph was invented by a Chinese scientist named Zhang Heng during the Han Dynasty. This was an early version of the seismograph, consisting of a bronze vessel with eight dragon heads positioned around it. Each dragon head held a ball in its mouth, and below each ball was a dragon statue with an open mouth. When an earthquake occurred, the ground movement would cause the pendulum inside the vessel to swing, dislodging a ball from one of the dragon heads and dropping it into the open mouth of the corresponding dragon statue, giving an indication of the direction from which the seismic waves originated. Nowadays, as time went on, new innovations have been developed by different Chinese scientists, eventually crafting what originated as a couple of dragons to determine wave directions to a high-tech instrument that can measure anything earthquake related, from magnitude to direction.

Those eight dragons represent one thing my brother did not have that day five years ago. Hope for survival.

Timeless

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Cheah, Zu Zheng Christopher – 12

Standing at the back of a brightly lit hall deep within a mountain research facility, I listen intently as Jeff Bezos paces the stage, addressing the sea of guests before him. Behind him looms an illuminated screen, casting his figure in a radiant glow.

10,000 Year Mechanical Clock – Opening Ceremony
23:30, December 31st, 2027 – Sierra Diablo Mountain, Texas, USA
Website: www.10000yearclock.net

"Our quest was to create a clock that transcends our finite lifespans," explains Bezos, "one that embodies the relativity of time itself."

The mastery of time. Seamlessly elusive, out of reach of humanity's most desperate grasps. Out of reach even for me, an expert horologist.

Beamed onto the screen, the next slide displays the website's homepage quotation.

And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.
T.S. Eliot

"For twenty years, we endeavoured – yet faltered – to create our 10,000 year clock. Then this year, a revelation. Within a Chinese mountain, archaeologists unearthed the very first mechanical clock, dated 725 AD, invented by Chinese inventor Yi Xing. As T.S. Eliot stated, *we arrive where we started*, the first mechanical clock, for answers to craft our very own timepiece," Bezos reveals.

"To my right, this ancient relic intriguingly *still ticks on, once per minute*, without any power. I now present to you, this *living* piece of history."

As the cover lifts, my eyes flutter toward the ancient device. Intricate rusty bronze rings and precise metal gears orchestrate a symphony of clockwork, bequeathing scientific rhapsodies, ethereal complexities, all nested within a towering wooden edifice quadruple the size of a man.

I know the clock intimately, having overseen its extraction in China and been its guardian ever since.

Tock. A minute passes by.

"Now to my left," as Bezos strides towards it, "is our clock that will last 10,000 years."

As the spotlights shine on the modern, monumental creation, gasps ripple through the audience, echoes of wonderment sweeping through the hall before fading into awed silence. Three storeys high, its sophisticated gears gleam, shimmering with a spectrum of scientific breakthroughs.

"As Einstein once observed, time is not absolute, but varies with perspective. At midnight tonight, we celebrate the dawn of a new era with the first chime of the 10,000 year clock. It will chime only once every year, a *slower rhythm of time*."

A slower rhythm delays aging. It is the closest we can reach to slowing – though not halting – the unyielding progression of time. Much like how a tree, the epitome of a slower rhythm, can live thousands of years.

Tick. Another minute passes by.

"This concludes our presentation. Kindly make your way to the new clock for its first chime at midnight, when we celebrate the new year."

Staggering applause.

I gaze deeply at the old clock.

Something's not right.

Tock. Five minutes to midnight.

The ancient clock seems to cry out, alone.

Only I am by its side.

This clock was my purpose, my companion. I tended to it, maintained its brilliance, understood what it was, who it was. No one else heard poetry in the clicks and the sighs, the hisses and whirs. When researchers dissected and analysed it, its once–steady melodic cadence grew delicate and faltered, and I seemed to grow more exhausted, more fragile.

As the clock consumed me, I started to recall less about my past. Flickers of a time in hospital, searing headaches at the age of 44, then nothing. Amnesia, probably, from working too hard.

Tick. Four minutes to midnight.

As the limelight shifts to the new clock, I dread the feeling of ever parting from my vintage timepiece, the nearest thing to a friend I've ever known.

My tears well up.

Tonight, a new glass wall enclosure separates me from it. A spotlight glints off the glass, refracting into my blurred reflection. My gaze travels along the beams of luminance, my face slowly sharpening into focus.

The clear reflection reveals a 65–year–old man, fleeting glimmers of a once joyful life flickering in his eyes.

I look down on the descriptive plaque embedded in the glass.

> *World's First Mechanical Clock, 725 AD.*
> *Invented by Yi Xing – Chinese astronomer and mathematician.*
> *Born 683 AD. Died 727 AD.*

My heart races.

The calculations flow unbidden – the inventor's age of death: 44 years. That same age when agony gripped me, piercing headaches that reduced me to helpless frailty in a hospital bed.

Tock. Three minutes to midnight.

A memory ambushes me.

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So vibrant, so vivid within my mind, I see the sun dipping below the Tiantai mountain horizon, a shade of gold bleeding through silk curtains. Outside, the laughter of children cascades through the air, their voices tinged with olden Zhejiang dialects. Such beauty. Such a familiar tapestry of sight and sound.

My workshop is ancient, brimming with inventions perfected during the progressive Tang dynasty: celestial maps of the spherical bird's eye view of the heavens, a compass, an abacus, and scrolls of paper spiralling with equations. Porcelain cups lie scattered, the rich aroma of green tea permeating the air, palpable and rich.

In the centre stands an astronomical orrery and colossal clockwork, with Chinese characters etched on its outer wooden structure.

> *Inventor: Yi Xing*

A pool of water lies dormant beside the clock. I step towards it, slowly, steadily. Staring at its surface, my reflection meets my gaze. The eyes staring back are alight with passion, untouched by time, radiant with the brilliance of stars.

But as the moment lingers, reality begins to dissolve, slipping through my fingers like fine sand. I reach out, desperate to hold on.

But I can't.

★★★

Tick. Two minutes to midnight.

As my memory fades, I gaze at my image in the glass. The same face. The same intense, spirited eyes aglow with dreams of celestial exploration.

Despite being ravaged by time, I am, still me.

I know who I am.

It explains so much – my love for tinkering, for traversing, for thinking. The uncanny familiarity when examining the workings of my mechanical clock. The inexplicable sense of nostalgia when gazing upon its inner mechanisms.

I am the one who invented the world's first mechanical clock.

I am Yi Xing.

But how can this be? Yi Xing's life ended in 727 AD, only 44 years allotted. Yet now, in 2027, I stand alive – 1300 years have passed, while I've added merely 21 years to my age.

A *slower rhythm of time*, entwined to the tick of my clock, only once every 60 seconds.

I must be aging slower than everyone else: 60 years pass for others, merely a single year for me.

Horror grasps my being as I shout out desperately to the crowd.

No one hears me.

Then I thrust my fist at the glass enclosure, but my knuckles meet only air, the smooth surface somehow intangible. I stumble forward, unsteady as my entire being phases through the unbroken pane.

"No, it can't be," I gasp inside the enclosure, shocked, not wanting to accept an inevitable truth.

I know *what* I am.

A spirit.

A spirit that ages slowly, one heartbeat per minute.

Tock. One minute to midnight.

I ache, I want to *live*.

I close my eyes, tears leaking behind my eyelids. Oh God. How long until everything's alright, until life's in perfect synchrony again? I'm not ready to let go, to fade. But I feel a countdown to the end coming, time's grip slowly tightening.

Time, your march I cannot halt, nor can I turn you back. Oh, I wish to dwell beyond your bounds, to be *timeless*.

My tears cascade. My heart aches from the agony of leaving my only friend. "Thank you," I quiver to the clock, "for your everlasting presence, my silent companion."

But now its ticks have the same fragility of my fading heartbeat. In time, I have to confront reality: the clock, unable to exist separately from its maker, has served as my imaginary friend, a presence I sustained to soothe my solitude.

In truth, my only real companion has been, simply, myself.

I have nothing more to cling to.

Nothing to leave behind.

And now, I will finally let go.

Easing into the embrace of my approaching end, I find solace in final whispers of eternal hope:

Timeless, free from the bounds of time.

As with life comes death, but with death comes life,
As with darkness comes light, and with day comes night.

With the end, a new beginning.
Old becomes new,
And a new era shall be known for the first time.

★★★

"Three…Two…One," the audience counts to the new year.

The wearied, devoted gears of Yi Xing's clock are finally set free, and the clock stops: becoming truly time–less. *Timeless, free from the bounds of time.*

A single teardrop emerges, gently splashing atop the first mechanical clock.

The new 10,000 year clock chimes for the first time.

Liu Xuefeng's Powder of Fire

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Clerc, Jules – 13

It was a regular winter evening in Liu Xuefeng's town, with a dense blanket of mist obscuring all that was more than 5 feet away. Xuefeng, like on most days was cooped up inside his house, though during the winter this was quite normal for most people. None of his neighbours knew what went on inside there, but most suspected it was something dangerous, as on the few occasions where he exited the house, he was covered in soot. Inside, Xuefeng was tinkering with a recipe he had been commissioned to create by the government of his town. A recipe that could harness and magnify the power of fire, that could be used to ward of enemies and end wars.

Xuefeng had yet again spent an entire day, devoted to again, and again try and find a successful recipe. He knew he had to get it done soon, or the government would cut his funding. Without the government allocated funds, he would starve. After all, he had only taken this job because his regular medicinal business had been failing miserably. He decided, for one last time today, to try and create a recipe for this concoction. He mixed ground up charcoal, chunks of flint and some herbs. He knew that there had to be charcoal in there. It was the best way to make anything catch fire. But for the rest, he knew nothing at all. He tried to set the mixture alight. It lit, the fire spread throughout the powder and then fizzled out. Sick of it, Xuefeng decided to go to bed.

The next morning, Xuefeng woke up to a loud banging on his door. Groggily, he rose and went to open the front door. Upon opening it, he saw a town official, who speedily strode in unprompted.

"Have you finally found a reliable recipe yet?" demanded the official "and remember, you only have 5 more days to get it to us or we cut your funding."

"I– I– I'm getting close, I can feel it" Xuefeng bluffed. He could tell the official didn't believe the lie all too much, but with an exasperated sigh, they left anyway. Without another word the town official strode out the room. Despite his exhaustion, Xuefeng decided to go back to trying to figure out the concoction's recipe. He thought that maybe if he added saltpetre and sulphur to the charcoal, both of which he had noted could burn effectively. He also added some medicinal herbs he thought might help. He ground it all up into a fine powder. Then, he lit it on fire and even in the small amount he had made, it instantaneously blazed in a brilliant dancing flame. This looked fine; however, the government had asked for something more... volatile. Xuefeng decided that it would be best if he cleared his mind by finally going outside to replenish his food supplies.

Once he reached his town's market to buy some produce, he decided that he needed to stock up on bread and some fruit. Once he was paying, he saw the shop owner place the money he had paid in a jar, and this gave him an idea. If he placed the powder he had made into a sealed container, once it was activated, it might burst out causing the flames to fly outwards in every direction. There was just one problem; if he had to seal the container to cause it to burst, but the container had to be open to light it on fire, then how would he have it sealed? It was a difficult dilemma, which left him vacantly standing in front of the shop. Just then, he was startled by the shopkeeper bringing him back down to earth.

"Sir, could you please move along now?" Asked the owner, "There's other customers who would like some of my product and I'd like their money."

"Oh... um of course." Xuefeng replied awkwardly. Walking home, he wondered how he could manage to delay the fast–acting powder to test his theory. Then an idea came to him out of nowhere, as if it had fallen out of the heavens directly into his head. If he used a long rope that led into an otherwise sealed container, he would not have to stay near it to seal it, ensuring he would not be harmed.

Once he reached his home, he rushed in slamming his door shut behind him. He rifled through his entire home looking for his best sealed container. After a while he found an old porcelain jar who's lid he had melted and punctured a hole in it. He then filled it with the new concoction and put a string into the hole and lit it. Running out the room, only peeking round the doorframe's corner. Though the wait only lasted a few seconds, it felt like hours. Once the fire had burned down the string into the jar, the jar burst into pieces sending burning hot shards all over the room.

Realising his invention had worked he ran to the government official's home to tell him the amazing news. In the street he shoved everyone and everything of the way; kids, adults, and the elderly – it didn't matter to him. Bashing his fist against the door, thoughts were rushing through his head. He had finally done it! The official groggily opened the door.

"What is it?" the official asked.

"I've finally done it" exclaimed Xuefeng "I've made the concoction!"

"Really?" The official perked up "Give me the recipe now, and I'll give you the reward." Xuefeng handed the official a recipe he had earlier scrawled down on a sheet of paper. The official walked back into his home, telling Xuefeng to wait at the door. Around a minute later, he left with a large pouch, which he placed in Xuefeng's hand. When Xuefeng looked inside, he saw a fortune that was enough to keep him alive for the rest of his life. Xuefeng, finally able to not have to work 7 days a week to stay alive, went home and collapsed into bed.

Elixir of Fire

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Ho, Jenson – 13

Ever since I was young, I have had dreams of lighting up the night sky. The stars always shone brightly in the sky, but something was missing…

As I gazed up towards the stars in awe, my mind was exploding with thoughts. What if I could create a star on Earth?

The light of dawn beamed down. Emitting rays of warmth from the golden ball of fire: our sun. What if I could create something as dazzling as the stars and as bright and majestic as the sun?

These thoughts crackled and sprung into my mind like sparks and lived free in my head like wildfire. That idea changed my life forever. The fuse had been lit.

In the next few years, I worked hard to build my vision. The product of these years was nothing. The chemicals I trialled either exploded too early or did not light up. Fail after fail, my house was now a mess of ashes, dust and chemicals. That night, I watched the stars again. They were carefree and glittered and gleamed across the night sky. As the morning sun rolled up across the sky, I realised. There is no point in trying to make a star.

Although I had put my dream behind me, I always remembered it. For the next ten years, I studied hard in alchemy and was eventually picked from a group of alchemists to make an elixir of immortality. I concentrated on the project and the thought of lighting up the sky drifted to the back of my mind. The once raging wildfire in my head had diminished to a small candle.

I never thought much about the flames until one fateful day. We were experimenting with Sulphur and Charcoal when a singular flame from our fire licked the mixture and… and… I could not describe what I saw. The experiment burst into a glorious ball of fire, sparkling and shining against the backdrop of the night sky. It was brilliant. Who could have thought that a small accident could have led to such a massive breakthrough?

The breakthrough has reignited the candle of my dream. The fuse was flaming red hot, and I could practically see flames creeping enthusiastically along a rope. I resigned from my alchemist job to pursue my vision.

I brought out the market's entire supply of sulphur and charcoal and hauled it back to my house. I quickly discovered that the missing part of my creation was Potassium Nitrate. Carefully combining the correct proportions of the substances into a bamboo container and adding a rope to it, all I had to do was wait for nightfall. My creation was complete.

As the warm glow of twilight faded, the sky was dark again. My neighbours were lighting fires for torches, but I was not. My fire crept along the rope towards the container. My fire would ignite a star. My fire would shine brighter and better than any fire before mine. The fire in my eyes glowed as bright as the fire I had lit. The rope was getting shorter and shorter. With bated breath, I watched the fire get closer and closer. It reached the container. Silence.

I was about to step forward to relight the rope when the fire erupted upwards into the sky. An explosion of bright dazzling colours shining as bright as the sun and as beautiful as the stars sprawled over the sky like the network of stars. I had done it.

As the lights faded and the cloud of smoke cleared, I could see my neighbours cheering and clapping through the smoke. The smouldering container flickered once more then died. The sky, once again filled with stars, gleamed down winks of approval, smiling in success.

The Machine of Misfortune

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Ho, Venetia – 12

My mind was littered with empty thoughts, cramped with dust and grime. I struggled through the filth just as I struggled to make my way through the day without wondering about him. Bang. Smack. The smash of the printing press vibrated through me, sending waves of regret through my weary mind.

I sat in the middle of the dimly lit room, gasping for the little air that entered through cracks in the wall and holes in the roof. The machinery loomed over my shadow as I continued to stare at the newspaper in front of me. Its headline echoed through my hollow mind as my hands raced to rearrange the letters again– 'Wanted! Lunatic on the Loose.' My rushing thoughts finally came to a standstill, but instead of peace I was met with one remaining thought. "Why dad?"

It was silent except for my roaring discomfort. If it wasn't for him, I wouldn't be stuck in this demanding cycle of misfortune.

I re–entered my cave of labour as I set up to work. I glanced over all of the headlines I needed to stamp. What my eyes told me was not what my heart wanted to hear. The hot summer's day started to snow. Time sped up as I just stood there; watching.

Click clack. Click clack. That noise repelled off the pavement as I hurried along the never–ending road. What used to bother me, now seemed like a small pet peeve. My mind tunnelled, and my vision plummeted. The luscious countryside around me now seemed devoid of green. I heard the world speak in monotone. I just had to make it to the jail. I just had to see him before he committed another crime. Before my work could engulf me. Send me insane. Before the new headline 'Lunatic finally found' turned back to its former self, 'Lunatic on the loose.'

The floors seemed to shine here, and my heart seemed to break. My anger, hatred and love spilled out like a dam had just broken inside my tiny organ. I couldn't bring my eyes to his, instead my words flew out like a wild wolf's howl. How could he have left me at such a young age? Left me to care for myself? Left me alone and miserable? Stabbing someone in the back was not an accident and escaping the Qincheng Prison was not a coincidence. Leaving me to become a printing press operator was his doing. He could have become a loving father. He could have stayed to support me and raise me. But no, a maniac like him would be just the opposite. He was probably only thinking about how I failed in life, how I was such a disappointment– looking down on me even though I should be the one stepping on him.

Even though my words kept ranting, I felt something cold being pressed against my neck. My mind felt suffocated by this sensation. This was not shivers. Not even the air conditioning of the visiting lounge. But my rage swallowed me whole, so it didn't matter. All that mattered was confronting him. Hearing a single apology come out of his mouth. That of course was wishful thinking. A cold–hearted murderer like him couldn't even grasp the concept of remorse. No– he was the same as a robot programmed to kill.

That weird feeling kept coming back. It didn't hurt. It felt somewhat numb even though nothing had happened. My limbs felt weaker, and my voice came out coarse. My wail dried up until all that was left was a whimper. The ice and numbness of the moment were now replaced by a forest fire. The veins around my wound exploded, shooting out like lasers, leaving burgundy pools all over the pristine floors. The nerves leading to my brain were electrified and my last flame of life was extinguished.

If I had not realised it before, I certainly did now. That cold object pressed against my neck was not something as pleasant as the wind. It could only be the wind if it grew legs and fangs and sprouted claws– if it turned into a beast. If it became a monster. That creature was the only thing my dad could ever tame. His knife. What I felt was the sharp edge of a steel dagger dining on my flesh.

If it wasn't for my need to support myself, my need to continue life– I wouldn't have become a printing press operator. I wouldn't have devoted my precious time to reading headlines and inking letters. They wouldn't have been spent reading those headlines about my dad. If I hadn't seen that headline I would still be breathing and still be struggling, but that has now reached an end. I guess I should thank my father for letting me finally rest. Even if I don't blame him, I still blame myself. I printed my soul into those articles and pressed my life into oblivion.

Bang. Smack. The inevitable smash of my head vibrated like the printing press. It vibrated until it went still. If I had not realised it before, I certainly did now. I was dead.

Memories Within Fire

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Huang, Zixi – 12

It burst out in flames, imploding mid–air while everyone watched in horror. A broken corpse fell to the ground in a pile of ruin and debris. A moment of silence held on for what seemed like ages, then a sound. He fell to his knees, unable to speak. A deafening ringing sensation blasting through his head like a raging wildfire while his vision was blurry and confusing. All his hard work, his blood, sweat and tears, everything that was holding him together collapsed, dead and broken, along with his best friend, right in front of him. Past decades of life now nothing more than wasted. The hours passed, and the watchers, slowly trod away, pulling the strings of hope looser and looser the further they walked. All that was left was him. Unable to accept anything that had just happened.

The office was bustling with people walking around the busy hallways. Workers dressed in fancy white coats and suits hurriedly walked by his desk while he typed as his fingers carried him away.

'25/02/50. 4 days till take–off. Cheung Yi is making the final adjustments. Rocket is in fine tuning stage.'

Once he finished, he stood up from his ragged chair and anxiously walked through the crowds as the office becamethronged with people. Monochrome cameras and mechanical shutters flickered in his face, bombarding him with their relentless questions.

"Are you ready for take–off?" "Are you sure it is safe?" Multitudes of people franticly asked, desperate for answers, all only to be ignored. Then came the microphone.

"When will you be launching your world–changing rocket to Mars?" the interviewer queried.

"The 29th of February. This rare date, once every 4 years is a representation of our rocket, being unique and brilliant in every way." He replied confidently, his steady speech haunted by a fearful undertone. Thoughts swarmed and crashed in his mind, each one piling on top of another, culminating to a storm of thunderous doubt as more and more questions echoed within. What if it failed? What if it crashed? What if...What if... What if...?

"It's going to fail, Yi Jing. You are going to fail. From the moment you were born, you ruined my life. Our family is broken because of YOU. Everything wrong starts from YOU.You're not my child. I don't know a failure like you." She said. Words that stung more than needles ever could as he felt his entire being stripped away in the agony of it all. But he could not dare talk back to his own mother. The pain remained contained, caged within his body as he always endured. The world felt washed and numb, devoid of any colour, emotion, any thought, or freedom through his tinted world. The abuse of it all, the beatings of it all, this excruciating suffering that only trickled through after hours when all was done and only a shell remained, lying there, exhausted. Empty. Like a corpse in its coffin as tears of pain and regret trickled down the slopes of his face, covering his botched, watery eyes and stifling screams under the blankets as he struggled to catch his breath.

"Hey, Yi Jing, look at how bright the stars are tonight!"

A voice rippled through the evening breeze, slicing throughblades of grass as they swished in a sea of verdant green, fingers outstretched as a small, sturdy hand pointed to the skies in the distance. "You know, I've always wanted to go

to Mars." the boy continued. "I've never really been good at anything, but this dream... venturing the stars is something I've always wanted to do." He chuckled lightly, those big, innocent eyes sparkling with the thought. The folds of his lips curled upwards in a gentle smile, brightening like the sun, like a beam of light and happiness that outshined the ghosts that followed Yi Jing. Despite it all, Cheung Yi was never 'good'at anything, as if cursed so that all he did was doomed to end in failure and doubt. He was never the first to be chosen, nor the one people most trusted. Like Yin and Yang, the two could not be any more different. From the very beginning, Yi Jing was a child with perfect grades, a prodigy blessed with genius like no other. An entire cabinet alone was not enough to contain the hundreds of gold medals to his name, nor his blinding shine and renowned honour. Pampered like a prince and showered with gifts and compliments from head to toe, all vied for the favour of next heir to the richest family of the country, and a mind that exceeded comprehension. But Cheung Yi was different. Perhaps it was the way he spoke of the stars, or the pure enchantment and radiant hope that seemed to glimmer with every word and syllable that captivated Yi Jing, or the friendship between then that seemed to transcend grades, or wealth or power that formed the inseparable bond between the two.

"Are you sure you want this? To go on the rocket?" Yi Jing asked again, concerned for his choice.

"Yes. I'm sure! It's all I've ever dreamed of" Cheng Yi chimed, fuelled by the same enthusiasm with every reply. "Please don't worry Yi Jing," he added, turning to face his friend's clouded face. "I know I'm not half as good as you in anything else, and I know I never will be. But I want to do this in return for all that you've done for me... I want to make you proud, "he continued, "You know I always trust in you, so now I want you to trust in me."

Those words lingered in the air for what seemed like eternity, before carefree, gleeful laughter escaped the two in unison, rejoicing in their time as a silent understanding passed between them.

No matter what world there was, what circumstance, what situation there could be, they would always be there for each other.

The dark sky brightened with a bright orange beam of light, a circle of hope rising into the resting world as the first few rays of sun peaked above the horizon and the sky turned a shade of reds, oranges and blues, from the deep shade of purple it was, just moments ago. The gentle morning breeze came in as the city of Hangzhou started to awaken while birds sang joyfully as the clouds danced along the golden canvas. The soothing yet vibrant streaks of light filled the sky as the rising sun's radiant face started to loom over the shimmering cerulean sea.

The day had come, the day of which the past ten years of effort would be sowed, the labour of the harvest brought to fruition. Crowds gathered around the scene, waiting patiently as the rocket was examined and checked again and again. Asuited Cheung Yi climbed the steel steps of the path to the rocket, waving goodbye as he climbed slowly into the cabin.The ship was prepared to take−off, and the ultimate countdown soon initiated.

10...9...8...7....

Pearls of cold sweat trickled down then brow of Yi Jing's forehead, an unsettling shudder creeping down his spine.

6....5....4....

His heart ran as if restrained for time out of mind, ramming against his ribcage like an unruly animal as it begged for it to stop, as it pleaded to be free. Time seemed to freeze as all air began to choke in his lungs, fingers pulsing to their own volition, levitating ever so slightly above the table as his entire body withheld the force to collapse from it all.

3...2...1...

A large boom rippled through the air as clouds and smoke billowed from the back of the rocket, vibrant colours of fire painting the sky. It was like a scene from a dream itself, his vision, his hope, his future. The awakening of a past hope, the culmination of a decade of living, of breathing, of trying. He watched it as the beacon of his mission lifted to the sky, rising through the clouds and–

BOOM.

The Emergence of Firelances

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Liu, Karen – 12

Painful wails echoed against the early hours of dawn. Pale sunlight barely coloured the horizon with faded red strokes, making soldiers' shadows dance on the earth below. They stood on the side as their weapons glinted, watching while lines of captives tossed wood and straw filling in the huge moat at their feet.

The fear painted on their faces was a striking detail added beautifully to the magnificent painting of absolute chaos.

Yang grimaced, hand fidgeting with the hilt of his *dao*. Assigned to supervise the prisoners, he ached to strip the heavy armours on his shoulders. However, the moat still did not look affected after being filled with countless objects, so he doubted he could rest soon. The shouts in the background were *not* making anything better.

A captive halted. Wisps of white hair escaped from the tight bun on her head, shadowing the wrinkles of her face. Frowning, the man swiftly positioned his dao facing her vulnerable neck, declaring a silent threat. 'Move.' He commanded.

She did nothing but sway back and forth. However, before he could react, she collapsed hard to the ground. Her family immediately rushed to her aid, and he blocked them by checking for her breath. They visibly relaxed when her chest was caught heaving shallowly.

Although she needs a few days of rest before moving again, her situation was not severe; collapsing from fatigue and stress, she has yet to be embraced by death.

Yet.

A person without use is equivalent to a dead one. Waiting for a mere peasant to go back to health is only going to burden them further. Now, there will be a delay to when they cross the gully to attack city De'an. As he fumed soundlessly, a stare on his back was felt, and he turned his head to find the gaze of one higher–ranked soldier. Their eyes met, and the senior quickly flitted his eyes from the moat to the woman. His message was clear.

Sighing, he swung the captive over his shoulder, tramping to the waters. Her family sent him a puzzled glance, but quickly caught on as it melted into terror. They scrambled up to stop him, but before their hands touched his robes, a few of his colleagues armed with whips dragged them away.

Their shrieks were ignored by the other captives, who were submerged in their own fright.

He continued, not sparing them another glance. Gazing at the grim face from his reflection in the water, he only watched as it cursed him eternally for the sins he committed.

Yang hoped he would at least bear a peaceful demise, although everyone knew that rebels like them are doomed for an excruciating death in the battlefield…

A hand seizing his ankle sent him back to reality, throwing him off balance. He snapped his head back, finding a small boy on the ground clinging to him. Bruises littered his face, droplets of blood mixing with tears that rolled down his cheeks.

'Please,' He begged, 'Let my grandmother go.'

His pleas were disregarded by the soldier as he tried to shake the child off, which his attempts proved futile. Irked, Yang grabbed the lady and *hurled her towards the sky.*

The boy screeched as she soared through heaven, where it stopped in the morning sun, no more than a dark silhouette. Then down she went, falling into the moat's arms as it prepared to crush the body into a lethal embrace—

Flames swept across the gully, bright and fierce as they swirled, melting the moat into a sea of fire, swallowing hours of work.

It was not until every spark disappeared when Yang caught sight of arrows floating among the surface of the moat emitting the strong scent of gunpowder slithering in the atmosphere. A thump is heard where the boy was positioned, where he sat trembling with his mouth agape. Yang followed his stare and immediately understood why.

A lump of black suspiciously resembling that of a human figure drifted in the gully, an arrow jutted out in the middle. There came the colour, thick and red, tainting the waters, engulfing sections of the *elder woman's rob*e with ease.

Nobody dared to make a sound, their gazes locked to a single man, mostly known by the title *commander Li Heng.*

It was obvious even to the most uneducated people to know that he was the one in charge. Beard trimmed neatly and eyes determined, he has the ideal appearance of any leader.

"Chen." He growled; brows knitted together.

Thick silence settled as he mused for a plan. At last, Yang saw the bright glint in his commander's eyes whenever he had an idea in mind.

"Tell the peasants to brick caked filling to pour in the moat. Supervise every one of them." He turned to the walls of De'an in the distance. "Prepare the sky bridges; we are going to perform a frontal assault. I will *not* allow Chen and his *dogs* of the emperor toy with us any further."

They moved quickly, soldiers threatening the people with menacing weaponry and them grasping shovels and buckets in fear. Yang started to follow but was stopped by a calloused hand gripping his shoulder. It was Li. 'Jianzi, wait."

He paused. Li had rarely called him by his name even before the *incident*. Whatever he wishes to discuss must be a matter of importance. The soldier impersonated a stiff bow, keeping his flurry of emotions hidden under composed calmness. "Commander."

"Have you noticed how the weapons significantly improved over the last few battles, Jianzi?" The leader questioned, "Rumours had stated that they are even developing a new mutation, depicting it as a spear−like thing made of bamboo and gunpowder. **Fire Lances**, they're called." He leaned forward, voice gradually getting quieter with each word. "They say that all of these are made by *young dark−skinned girl*."

His eyes glistered as the younger man blinked at the familiar description.

"…You really think it's her?" Yang decided dropped the formalities after a brief hesitation.

"What are the chances for someone to include spear, bamboo, and gunpowder to describe an object? Not mentioning that throughout the whole empire, only a genius as brilliant as she could produce ideas like this." He tilted his head. "You should know this, too, as you were closest to her."

"She had been missing for over three years now, Li− "

"And she has been found now."

"It's still a rumour− "

"It is not. Too much to be a coincidence."

"Why would she even share her creations with Chen−"

"She might be forced."

He glanced at Yang's unconvinced face and sighed. "Look, I can't let this go if she could be so *near* to us. Especially when I promised commander Sang to keep her safe, which she won't be if found she's connected with rebels."

The mention of the former commander brought both men into silence. He was a forbidden topic, one that even the stoniest of hearts would shrivel with the name.

"...I'll try to gather more information." he finally offered.

If he survives the siege.

Li nodded, then appeared to contemplate something, before slowly opening his mouth to speak.

"Jianzi, do you…regret joining us?" His stare changed to one that he frequently wore in childhood. It was a stare which acknowledged that they were equals. *Friends*.

"I would never." Yang lied.

It was night when the moat was finally filled, before Commander Li rode his horse to lead the attack on De'an. Chen Gui and his lot are dubiously tranquil ever since the shooting of arrows. Everyone (excluding the captives) whizzed past the gully, and within a few minutes, gathered in front the city. There were thousands of them, and over half would not make it tonight. Perhaps he'd be part of that half.

He shattered the thought.

"Into positions!" Li bellowed, and they got off their horses to haul the sky bridges, before having the trebuchets placed at the front of the platform along with the archers. Yang was located at the middle, tasked to leap across the wall and assail directly at the enemy troops.

"CHARGE!"

Yang sprung from one stone to another and was about to reach the top when he found a long beam sealing the top of the structure, blocking his entrance. A glint of light. He paused, squinting his eyes to inspect the flash closely. Peeking out from a corner of a wall, was the tip of a *blade*. Sprinkles of dust landed on his nose, overlapping his senses with the smell of gunpowder.

A Fire Lance.

His eyes widened and opened his mouth to alert a warning. It was left unconstructed as spirals of orange and yellow entered his vision. Pain gnawed his heart and his hands clenched at his chest, only to feel a stick bulging out in place.

Everything was dark as the wind guided him to the ground.

It marked the first death of thousands to come.

The Compass and the Ruler

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Liu, Sandra – 1

When I was a young boy, my mama told me a story. One I will always treasure ever so dearly. It was all chaos. The universe was chaos. Until Pangu stood. He divided the earth with the sky, the sea with the wind, the sun with the moon and created the vast land of China. He created the magnificent land formed by mountains so tall they reach the sky, the deserts dunes that glow gold when the sun hits the fine sand, the dense forests packed with towering snow–capped pine trees, and the small islands where the ocean glistens like diamonds and the water clear as crystal. He made birds. He made bear. He made fox. He made fish. And before his last breath, he made man. Amongst man stood his own son Fuxi, and daughter Nüwa. They had bodies of snakes and heads of man. They carried on the legacy of Pangu. They were crowned Gods of Creation. Now, one of the many ancient Chinese inventions only a few people know created by Fuxi and Nüwa was the seismograph. And here is the little–known story of how it was created.

Our story takes place during Han–dynasty China. There was little of anything during this time in China. The occasional opera in the heart of town, a few kites made from scraps of cloth propped up by a bamboo structure or the elderly playing "go" chess on the side of the road. Sometimes, if you are lucky, you would have some street performers juggling. But that was as interesting as it got for a middle–class family back in 2nd century China. This was before the birth of a quite special individual who was going to make a humongous impact on all of China's development and all of China's bright future.

On a misty wintry night amid November, a little boy named Zi Ling was birthed. He was a beautiful boy. Hazel eyes that shimmered against the sunlight, porcelain skin which looked as smooth as the ceramic vases in his house, and a smile that was so bright it was as if there was a glowing halo of light following him wherever he went. But alas, life sometimes is not in your favour. At the early age of 3, both his parents were deceased. The only distant memory he had of them, were two objects. One was a compass that was made with brass and polished bronze with a pearl placed in the middle. The other was a ruler made of a milky jade that was cold to the touch. He always kept these two objects in his pockets.

After the death of Zi Ling's parents, he lived with his aunt who lived in a little cottage near his town. Life for Zi Ling was fine. He was just like any other boy. He would help his aunt with labour work, (he wasn't good, he was fine). he was fine school, he was a fine Buddhist, he got along fine with other children, everything was simply fine. Now, our revolutionary story starts when Zi ling came to the age of 12.

A crisp autumn afternoon when the trees were peacefully swaying from side to side, everything was glistening shades of orange and yellow, and the mountains were lightly sprinkled with snow. Zi Ling was out collecting wood for cooking. He then felt a tingle. A warmth in his pockets. He took out the compass and the ruler he kept in his pants, and the tingling stopped. But suddenly, the ground started to shake. The sky started to turn grey. The wind started to howl, and the tree leaves started to whirl around Zi Ling. The leaves moved around him faster and faster until he was stuck in a blur. More than a minute has passed by. The leaves settled, the trees continued their rhythmic swaying, the sky turned back to its original shade. But what stood in front of Zi Ling shocked him.

In front of him stood a conjoined figure of two. with the bottom half of a snake, and top halves of humans. One was a woman, and one was a man. The woman was holding Zi Ling's precious brass compass, and the man was holding the smooth jade ruler. Zi Ling remembered a story his aunt told him long before. The story of Fuxi and Nuwa. Brother and sister who was crowned deity of creation. Something then interrupted Zi Ling's thinking, there was a voice. Well, more than a voice. A chorus of voices that was also not a voice. It was as if staring into the souls of the deity of creation was like listening to a voice. A voice saying "in one years' time, a disaster will happen. A disaster that will shatter homes into pieces. A disaster that will shake the earth, and many will lose their lives. I put my faith and my knowledge and my wisdom in you, to stop this. And if you prove successful, you will earn a place with us, amongst the heavens when your time has arrived".

After that, the two figures vanished in front of his eyes. Zi Ling was confused. He did not know what to think or feel, or what to do. But then he remembered. Something that happened long ago. In his village around a century

ago, a disaster happened. Just like Fuxi and Nuwa described an event that shook the earth. Shattered homes and caused many to lose their homes. It was an earthquake.

A few days after this event, Zi Ling had another vision. He visioned a structure made of bronze. With eight dragon heads and eight toads. It looked like a vase, and it worked in a pendulum motion. "This was it!" he thought, "this is how I would save my town from this earthquake!" After that, he started constructing his invention straight away. He melted metal, he carved, he cutted, until after 11 months, he was finished. He made a beautiful structure. It was polished and shiny, and it was delicately crafted with many small details. He named it the seismograph. It would help him determine when the earthquake was going to arrive to save his town people.

When the day came of the terrible earthquake, Zi Ling managed to save his town people from the terrible disaster all thanks to the help of Fuxi and Nuwa. This invention has helped inspire many more and has been a great step in the human development.

Zhang Heng's Latest Invention

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Lui–Schwille, Tristan – 13

Hard at work in his quarters at the imperial palace, Zhang Heng knew that time was slipping away. With his concentration giving way to self–doubt, he stared distractedly out at the sky. Beyond the patterned wooden lattice of his window, the sun was setting just over the outer West gate. The gate, a truly massive structure, twelve head of horse wide and auspiciously decorated bright red and gold, had been a source of recent embarrassment. Zhang sighed, recalling how his peers had ridiculed him when he had tried to recreate Liu Xin's proof of the path around the sun. Zhang had referred to the gate in his calculations and had at first been quite sure that the sun was close to forty head of horse in the round. It was his friend Liu Taotu who pointed out his mistake – for the distance around the gate itself was almost one *li*, yet the sun was surely many times larger – so large it must be even greater than the great WuTai Mountain itself.

The rhythmic drip drop of a water clock returning him from his thoughts, Zhang stood up from his wooden desk and stretched. Perhaps a walk through the palace gardens would help lift his mood. At this hour, he would most likely have the place to himself. Cheered by this thought, Zhang stored away his writing materials and scrolls neatly on a shelf above his unfinished armillary sphere. Looking at the sphere, he grunted, another unfinished project. Slipping on his hanfu jacket, he set off for the gardens.

Walking past one of the many halls and lesser palaces, he heard a shout: "Hey – sun measurer!"

Zhang stopped and shrank in his shoes.

"Well, if it isn't our esteemed chief astronomer himself," Wan Lo, stepped out of the shade of the Shrine of Plentiful Harvest, flanked by two pompous clerks.

"What is this I hear about you attempting to create a device able to detect earthquakes from far away? Here I thought that you had learnt your lesson after you shrank the sun!"

"But you need not worry, as I am more than willing to take your place, astronomer, as well as your six–hundred bushels salary."

Wan Lo and his crew laughed again at Zhang's embarrassment, seemly uncaring about the reddening of Zhang Heng's face, nor the clenching of his fists by his side.

"Go back to your vegetable sacrifices Wan Lo," growled Zhang Heng "if you were that excited about seeing my new invention you could have just told me. It will shortly be presented to the Emperor and his court, and with your standing, your invitation is guaranteed."

Wan Lo and his cohorts laughed raucously then roughly pushed past him. Waiting until they had vanished from sight, Zhang Heng heaved a sigh of relief and slumped against the wall. He had been planning to present his invention to Emperor and his court at some point, that much had been true, yet he had been counting on at least a couple of months more to prepare. He couldn't count on that now however, after all, his many enemies in court wouldn't miss this opportunity to try to embarrass him. The sun's last rays flickered on the rooftops as dusk fell and Zhang made his way home.

The next day, standing in the safety of his own courtyard and bathed in morning light, Zhang wiped sweat from his brow. On a small raised platform stood his invention. With the appearance of a large bronze amphora, the device stood about three feet tall. Trailing down its sides were eight carved wooden dragons, each marked with a cardinal point, and below the dragons' mouths were eight frogs, each with their mouths open as if preparing to catch a falling object. The amphora, however, was obviously incomplete, with no less than a third of its side removed, revealing the mechanics within. Zhang eyed his invention warily, his calculations had been double – no – triple checked. This time, he was taking no chances.

His device functioned by detecting even the slightest tremor of an earthquake, upon which it would release a clay ball from the dragon representing the direction of the source of the earthquake. However, with this system, he faced

a dilemma, how exactly should he test his device? How could he create such a tremor? Perhaps a great sound would suffice? Where could he find the means to make such a noise?

Standing resolutely with his hands clasped behind his back, and his ears stuffed with silk, Zhang Heng watched his servants haul the massive gong in. He hefted the massive mallet and struck…

A week later, Zhang stood in front of the gates to the Emperor's throne room, pacing. He had been summoned to explain himself and to present his invention.

"Zhang Heng, you may enter," the voice the Emperor's Head Advisor rang out, and the grand doors to his throne room creaked open.

The Head Advisor's voice rang out again, "Zhang Heng, Chief Astronomer, please describe to us the name of your device, how it functions, and its use."

Shadows leapt in the light of the lanterns. Zhang Heng took a steadying breath, "my device is named *Hou Feng Di Dong Yi,* the earthquake weathervane. It functions by having a stone pendulum remain still while the entire structure tilts slightly as it is hit by the tremor of the earthquake. This stone pendulum is also always in contact with a small wooden ball. The friction caused between the pendulum and the ball then leads to the ball being pushed into a small channel which emerges at the dragon's mouth, and the dragon appears to drop a ball in the direction the tremor came from. The frog catches the ball."

"How interesting," said the Emperor, speaking for the first time. "Yet it doesn't seem to be doing anything. Are you sure it works?"

"Your Imperial Highness, I apologise as I am currently unable to demonstrate my device as it requires a vibration on the scale of an earthquake to function. I tried a gong but it was simply not powerful enough. I am confident it will work, you must believe me." Zhang responded, stiffly bowing and visibly nervous.

Dark glances and hostile whispers were exchanged in the room. There was a long pause and Zhang Heng thought he heard a low snigger among the gathered courtiers. The Emperor stared at the device and then back to Zhang Heng. Finally, his gaze settled on Zhang Heng; "So," he said. "Presumably we must wait. But I would prefer it if you could do the waiting on your own time. Leave your device here. You will be summoned if there is news." The court burst into laughter, while the Emperor remained impassive. Zhang Heng bowed his head and hurried out, leaving his device behind.

Many weeks passed, and there was no news from the imperial court. Yet one day a messenger approached Zhang Heng in his quarters. "Your device gave a signal today; one of the dragon's mouths released a clay ball that fell into the frog's mouth. Yet there was no earthquake."

"Which dragon was it?" asked Zheng Heng.

"The one to the northeast. But no matter. The Emperor has requested that your device be removed at once for it clearly has no use".

Once again, a sense of disappointment and shame crept over him; even though this time he had been so sure of his work. He made his way up to the throne room with his servants in order to retrieve his device and waited. The Emperor was still holding court and Zhang Heng would have to wait until the day's business had concluded. He sat and stared out, watching as the setting sun paraded shadows of the gate across the courtyard beneath him.

While he waited, a great commotion arose in the centre of his gaze. A messenger had arrived on horseback, mud–spattered and exhausted. A crowd thronged around him. An earthquake had occurred not three days ride away. In a town to the northeast they said.

At once, an urgent court assembly was called to have Zhang Heng and his device once again presented. A thousand lanterns burned brightly to illuminate the chamber, and the excitement in the room was palpable. Zhang kneeled before the Emperor and praise was heaped upon him for his impressive invention. Zhang breathed deeply and trembled with pride.

Proven right at last.

A Glutton's Regret

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Ma, Brian – 14

Visions seize me. Images of disease, savagery, and revelry flash through my mind, eventually culminating in the scenery converting to an unfamiliar sterile, white room. I stare blankly at the individual facing me, unsure of what to say. Confusion strikes me as the room begins to rapidly deteriorate, evoking memories of bamboo paper being burnt as incense. As I begin to fall, my hand subconsciously grasps at a bottle that did not seem affected by the environment, yet it melts in my hand as if it were composed of molten iron. My vision goes dark as I fall into the void.

The boundary between life and death feels like water. Alas, I am not dead; rather, I am submerged in a spring. Intricately embroidered fabric sticks to my skin, now wet after clawing my way out of the pond. The scent of grain wine wafts from a pot, which I can only presume to be safe for consumption. I begin to drink. A rich and intense malt flavor hits my tongue, awakening memories of myself brewing the wine. How could it be possible, considering I've never been to this pond before? I did not have time to ponder, as the overconsumption of wine soon took hold of me.

I awaken. The ground is foggy enough to obscure my sight – or perhaps the ground itself is a billow of smoke. A lone tree stands before me, shading the table underneath, yet moonlight beams through the leaves and forms the silhouette of a person. My shadow is narrowly concealed, yet it disappears along with the moonlight as clouds cover the sky. It is then that I notice I am alone once more. Droplets enter my cup as I hunch over the table, weeping.

I began to realize the reality of my situation and figured I was not under the constraints of time or space. None of these people are, or were, 'me.' At last, I had people to point the blame towards. Surely, they ruined my life! Whether a brewer or a poet, all of them were responsible for the growth and glorification of alcohol. I desperately wanted myself to be right. I needed it, even. But, deep down, I knew that I was to blame. I was truly apologetic: for the murder of my spouse, the abuse of my child, and myself for the numerous broken promises of soberness. The surroundings fade back to normal, and I find myself in the same position as I was before the 'dream,' as if I were staring blankly. I make eye contact with the young man staring disapprovingly at me.

Machinery fills the room. Clarity fills my mind. My memories all come rushing back, reminding me of the sinful life I had led. Adrenaline begins to pump through my body, almost as if it were warning me to escape. Soon, I would find out why. I look at my son. In my final moment of lucidity, I managed to utter one sentence.

"I'm sorry."

He nods his head, the listless gaze in his eyes suggesting that he already knew. My son's hand nears, and I attempt to hold it with my last ounce of strength. However, he evades my hand with an unexpressed sense of disgust – and I soon realize where his hand is truly reaching toward.

The plug is pulled. My hand begins to fall slowly to my side, and soon, the only sound left is a constant, almost ear–piercing tone.

The Paper Maker

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Malviya, Kiran – 12

The faint morning glow from the first sliver of sunshine creeping through a window of a downcast and bedraggled hut. Battered and bruised from storms, the little hut did not look a pretty sight in the beautiful valley in which it was nestled there like a bird egg in its mother's nest. The cracked window lit up in the early hours of dawn, the warm fresh light flooding the room within. The sight inside the room was not much better than outside of it. There at a stooped wooden table his legs tucked behind him in a kneeling position was a man. On the table was a huge roll of bamboo stretched in front of him as well as a brush clenched in one hand. While one of his hands was pale and bony from the shape of the brush the other was flushed red as it was glued to the table holding the bamboo in place as the sharp edges dug into the inventors' hands like little daggers. As his hand screamed in pain, the inventor leaned closer to the scroll, burying his hands ever deeper into the splinters of bamboo, to squint at the minuscule writing; every word was a drop of blood trickling from his hand.

The writing were very peculiar, not the sort that you or I would find in say a history book, instead the ancient writing reflected in the glorious sunshine to reveal the soft tracing of not objects but materials, starch, and a plant, and at the top of the page he wrote one queer word 桑(Sāng). The man placed down his brush, raised his head, and chuckled to himself, then placing one hand on either side of him he raised himself from the ground. Slowly, ever so slowly, his limp frail form rose from the old wooden floor and placed his old body on its feet, trudged off around his desk and then through a narrow corridor he emerged into a cavernous room with tiny candles dancing like jewels in the dark dusty room. The room had a strange smell to it, like something had been stored there for some time and as if it had gone moldy. There were no windows in this room, unlike the kind warmth that flooded through the window in his study. This left the place in almost total darkness apart from the candle occasionally shimmering on the wall for a fleeting second before it returned to dancing in its bracket.

The man put one antique hand into a long robe which he wore and pulled out a torch, its leather top and wooden handle made it look like a weapon in the dark. He shuffled over to the nearest candle and thrust the leather head of the torch into the little twinkle of light. The minutes dragged by making each one feel like a month and still nothing happened and then flames erupted from the leather as if conjured by magic. The dazzling light that came from the torch as it burned engulfed the room in a blaze of luminescence and so the once voided cave was now bright as the day outside. As the light spread around the room, it lit up shelves upon shelves of bamboo scrolls identical to the one the man had just scrawled on. An old rickety wooden stool stood hunched in one corner, its badly battered four legs came into view as the man picked it up and placed it in front of the tallest shelf of scrolls, which reached the roof of the cave like a stooping giant. The man placed one foot onto the stool and then his body followed, he then reached one hand up the topmost shelf and pulled down the oldest scroll in the entire room. The scroll was from when the man was young and healthy and when he could walk long distances, before he came to this rundown hut, before he was punished.

The room fell back into the abyss of darkness once again as the man left the room extinguishing the torch and pocketing it as he plodded back to his study in which the sun had filled the room so now other strange things were visible. There was a sheet of bamboo with lots of marks pointing outward, away from a circle with the title 罗盘(Luó pán). Next to it was another shelf crammed with stone dragons, basins and other various objects. The man arrived at the table and smoothed out the bamboo he had collected from the shelf but instead of kneeling back down he bent down over it and stared intently at it. It was a map and in one corner of the map, in the forest next to the old hut, was the word 桑园(Sāng yuán). One of the man's long fingers rested on the word for over a minute before he lifted his brush, circled the word in glistening ink and rolled up the scroll. He then hurried to the door and shoved on his straw shoes as he stuffed the scroll into one of the pockets of his robes before running out of the front door.

The morning air whipped his face as it whistled and howled past him and then it hit him like a wave, a memory, he was running as people chased him on horseback, arrows fired, behind him shouts of anger and fury rang out. As he pelted through the forest and arrow thudded into the ground Infront of him, but he kept running all the while he could hear the shouts from the army behind him looking, searching, hunting like wolves for him. He remembered the emperor looking down on him shouting, announcing his sentence, he saw long ago his feeble attempts to make paper; paper the reason he had been banished to this secluded realm; paper the reason he was friends with the Emperor; paper the reason he was running from the army trying to escape his prison; paper his quest to find an alternative to these terrible bamboo scrolls; paper the reason he was running now. He had been banished for the charge of being unable to complete the emperors' orders, about not being loyal, for he had been set the task to make a better alternative to bamboo. For twenty years he had been cooped up in his bedraggled hut weary of venturing out but in that time, he had discovered the ingredients to make what he called paper, the alternative to bamboo. All it took was some mulberry, some bast fibres, some old fishing net, rags, and water; all he needed now was mulberry.

He wrenched the map out of his robes and stared at the point which he had circled. He muttered to himself under his breath and then took from another inside pocket a bronze locket, he flicked it open to reveal that same diagram of the circle as the one on the wall in his house. He pointed it ahead of him, nodded and hurried on. He skidded to a halt in front of an open clearing in the heart of the forest and there it lay, rows and rows of mulberry. Carefully he scooped up a handful and held it up to the light to examine it closer. Satisfied, with the mulberry in one hand, the locket in the other, he ran back to his hut. He burst in through the door not bothering to dispose of his shoes and hurried into his study, there he picked up his biggest basin and tipped the mulberry inside. He then rushed to his store cupboard, dislodging a few scrolls as he went but he did not care, all he wanted to do was to get the other ingredients. He reached his store cupboard and flung open the door. He then pulled out some slimy fishing net, old dirty rags and some old bast fibres. He shuffled back to the basin and tipped the contents inside, as soon as he had done that, he rushed to the pond outside, grabbed a stone bucket full of water, then carefully walked back to the basin and poured the water into it where it sat along with the other ingredients. Then he began to press and squash with a pestle until the substance turned white and thin, he lifted the sheet out of the square basin and placed it neatly on his desk. Then with bated breath, he picked up his brush dipped it into a pot of ink and wrote one–word 纸 (Zhǐ). He had done it. He rolled up the sheet of paper and ran back out of the open front door, this time closing it behind him, and then set off to show the emperor, leaving his exile behind him. The paper clutched tightly in his hand; a new life stretched ahead of him.

Eternal Birthday

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Susanto, Matthew – 12

China, 2100 AD

The sun's crystal gaze shined through the pristine clear. The glowing stare reflected onto his bronze goggles. CLINK! CLANK! CLONK! A pale aquamarine painted the sky, patches of white splattered over the blue. Ragged ashen cloth scratched against the hazel chipped wood. CLINK! CLANK! CLONK! Mahogany buildings of nature scattered across the green below. CLINK! CLANK! His face grew from a frown to a smile. It was finished.

From his thick, rigid hands appeared a pale flesh. A fluffy brown and a bronze stare. Tears trickled from not just the fragile invention, but from the giant inventor who bellowed a hearty laugh.

Faces flew left and right of the cobbled streets, shouts of angry men and cries of little children. BBBRRRRING! Chicken noodle soup, with extra noodles, extra chicken, no carrots, and no celery. I didn't like vegetables. The inventor took my hand, and we sat together at the tables. Eating our chicken noodle soup, as a smile emerged from my face.

Swish, swoosh, swish. Tints of orange, yellow, red, and black covered the canvas of white. Streaks of gold hidden in a picture of sunset. My frail hands touched against the spiral indents of the wooden brush. The whitish yellowish hairs frisked upon the white cloth. A chuckle appeared from behind me. His smile was like a warm embrace.

Glittering upon the dark spiralled an array of tints. A flying white shot across the mellow night. A warm body wrapped around my shoulders. A caring fatherly touch. Eyes intertwined with the stars, a forever beautiful moment. A tiny golden speck of dust in the air. A full moon. A collection of flecks scattered over the sky. A perfect picture. A caring fatherly touch.

The sun woke up once again, groggily. I woke up in bed without my inventor beside me. He was gone? No, he must've gone out to get something. It was my birthday after all. The streets were filled once again, with faces unknown. Trying to find him. I looked far and wide, searching through every nook and cranny. My heart was beating faster and faster. I looked more, searching, hoping. Hoping, desperately hoping. My heart beats faster. A cramped alleyway found shelter for me, and as I walked along the squished walls, my heart dropped.

Scarlet droplets cried out of his dark red chest. Sharp silver lining striking his heart into two.

Why? How? It was only a day? It was my birthday?

It was my birthday.

Tears desperately flooded down my frail cheeks, my voice disappearing from my constant screaming. Why? How? When? I couldn't stand it anymore. His pale flesh glared at me, my eyes bawling. Why? How? When? I fell onto my knees, helplessly crying. Helplessly staring. Not even a single word, a single phrase. Not even a good morning. A happy birthday?

A happy birthday. What a joke.

I collapsed on the floor, contemplating on how stupid, how dumb, how ignorant I was. How could I let this happen? Why? How? When?

Why?

Tick, tock. Time marched like an army, trampling over his dead body. Trees wilted and shed their leaves, once rushing rivers dried up to a mere sliver of water, buildings rose as old ones slowly fell.

China, 2122 AD

Tears of the grey above trickled through the air, splashing at the crooked cobblestone below. The moon frowned upon the dull streets, streets where he once roamed. Where I roam each day, searching for him. I piled numerous

newspapers together. Paper after paper after paper after paper. Scruffle, scruffle. A brown scratchy beard, brown hair, brown eyes. Bronze goggles. It was him.

My eyes drifted upon the magazine, like a wandering, abandoned soldier, searching for any evidence of who did it. Who killed the one that meant the most to me.

A ringing vibrato shook the empty roads of the town. Fingers trailed upon the frail, fragile, yet firm wood. A bow shot from her pale hands, striking the metal strings.

An eternal melody rang from the violin, as a dizzying strike stabbed my head.

China,??? AD

The sun woke up once again, groggily. I woke up on that same comfy white bed, the inventor not beside me once again. Did I not live this moment before? I ran out of bed, hurrying my way past those same unknown faces, into that same alleyway. Squishing past the cramped walls of the city. My heart kept beating even though I knew what was going to happen. My heart, still, kept aching, knowing what was going to happen. And again. My heart dropped.

The broken photo of his face clung to the veins of my brain, tugging like a climber, desperately clinging to my mind. That same vivid scarlet flowed a river out of the hole in his chest. The same shining silver spear striking his heart. Our heart.

Tears rained down my clouded, corrupted eyes once more. The reminiscent heavy pour from my eyes. The memorable questioning. I had the chance to do better again. I had the chance to change again.

The same melody rang from a distant bow, and the same dizzying strike stabbed my head once more.

China,??? AD

The sun woke up once again, groggily. I woke up on the same white bed without the inventor next to me. I understand now. I sprinted through the door, phasing my way through now–familiar faces, squishing my way through the same alleyway. The same cramped walls of the same city. My heart was beating even faster, eager to finally make a change, to finally, FINALLY help my inventor. It was all going well, I was swifter, faster, I was closer. Finally closer. But again, my heart dropped.

His pale face glared at me. My eyes seemed to glare at me too. Glaring desperately. Glaring in disgust.

I thought I was closer, no? I was certainly faster, swifter I was trying harder. I tried harder. I sprinted as fast as possible I tried as hard as I could have tried. I tried. And yet his body laid there. With the same scarlet blood, dripping slowly out his chest.

The same irritating melody rang from the violin again. The stupid strike stabbed me in the heart of my mind.

China, ??? AD

The sun woke up once again. I woke up on the same white bed, without the inventor next to me. I already understood, I already knew what was going to happen. If I sprinted to the door, if I sprinted to the inventor once more. Would it make a difference? I tried again. I sprinted through the door, I ran even faster, pushing and shoving through the familiar faces. I squished through the cramped walls of the city and found his body lying there again.

Of course. My broken cameras couldn't bear to take another picture of his fragile body, stained with the scarlet of a thousand loops. Broken. I stared at his pale flesh. Every single time I try, it ends up like this. In the endless abyss of scarlet, a draining image – taking up all my battery, leaving me desperately begging for a charge. For a change.

The melody screamed, scratching the strings of the violin. The stupid strike stabbed me once more.

China, ??? AD

The sun woke up once again. I woke up in the blank, white bed, with no inventor beside me. This time, I didn't try anymore. I didn't want to beg. I didn't want to be beseeching, sobbing, desperately wanting to save him. I just wanted my father. My inventor. Constant loops of destruction constantly fed to me like I was some dog. But I ate it. Craving the taste, the feeling of my inventor once more. I couldn't take it anymore.

I reached to the back of my neck, took out a piece of flesh, and shut down. No more restarting.

No more.

Please.

Out of Time: The Unforeseen Journey

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Tam, Jacelyn – 12

The barren wastelands of the west, the once populous cities of the south, the flooded coastline of the east, the secluded ruins of the north, and the bustling hub of central China. That was all that was left.

Two months ago

"… flooding is becoming more severe, just yesterday a brutal tsunami crashed over Japan, submerging almost all of it, with millions of people dead or unfound. Sandstorms are a constant occurrence in the Middle East and Northwest China, countries starting to construct underground bunkers. With the top of the world having frigid and chilled temperatures, most of Russia has become inhabitable…"

The whole world is in turmoil, human lives on the brink of existence. I look up at the once star–filled sky, reminiscing of the world that once existed. We always hope for the better, but does that even exist anymore?

Present Day

People spilled out onto the streets, an overwhelming sea of bobbing heads heading towards the hub. Streets stank of rotting food and waste, downtown housing flooded with the impoverished. Beyond the ancient walls of Xi'an, the thriving heart of the city shone, filled with the fortunate, prosperous and the corrupt.

After disasters struck, one after the other, the parliament of the Chinese Government was bombed, leaving nothing and no one left behind. The country was in unrest, people trying to escape, just to realise the rest of world's situation was just as dire. Naturally, wealthy aristocrats took over because of their money and assets.

Rumours that scientists were creating some sort of time machine spread like wildfire. The hub's research centre, one of the most advanced and high–tech institutes in the world, kept mostly everything under wraps. Although the inside was pristine white and tranquil, the outside often harboured protesters demanding for change and better living quality.

I stood there now, in the crowd of onlookers, pushing my way forwards – toward the old town hall library and observatory. The new machinery may have changed the world, but in these pages, I find solace of what once was. As the door creaks open, the darkness that shrouded the room lifted a little. Through the skylights and cracks in the walls, tiny slivers or light poured into the room, creating a warm afternoon glow. I wander around the shelves, my hands skimming along the covers of books, as I admire precious artifacts made of gold, jade, and clay, encased in hazy and smashed glass, their bright colours slowly fading and chipping away as they gradually rust.

I make my way up the wooden staircase to the observatory, the walls of the circular room displaying the constellations of the solar system. Although the observatory was old, it looked just as grand as it was before. After I opened the dome to let the light shine through, I observe that the room was noticeably cleaner, books that were once strewn on the floor were put back on the shelves, the floor and telescope spotless and void of dust. However, I notice a massive chest at the back of the room, something I never recalled was there. Yet, it was the only thing that seemed untouched. I go and open the chest, dust and cobwebs making me cough. As I peer inside, all I can see is darkness. I reach my hand inside to feel if there is anything in there, but I couldn't feel the bottom. It seemed that it was a hidden passageway. I took off the ring on my thumb and threw it in to figure out how deep it was. It seemed like minutes had passed before I heard a soft clang resonating. I wondered if there was a way down, so I shifted the chest over, and sure enough, there were rungs on the inside wall. Hesitantly, I climbed down rung by rung, a musty smell taking over. The darkness was a cloak, the light from above getting further and further away until I was plunged into something as black as inky darkness. When I couldn't feel anymore rungs below me, I stepped off onto the floor, my hands reached out, only to feel damp walls. I kept my right hand on the wall, gradually going forward. The smell seemed to get more intense as I walked, fouler and reeking of mold and waste.

After a few minutes had passed, a small trickle of water droplets fell and echoed, which turned into a rushing river of water as I moved onwards. Faint light could be seen in the distance, occasionally flickering. The stream of water ran

alongside me, leading to who knows where. After rounding so many corners, it came to an abrupt end. I refused to believe there was nothing there, that I came all the way here for nothing. I frantically searched all over the walls for a keyhole, a door crack, anything, but there was nothing there. I was about to go back when I realised that the river of water led through the wall and to the other side. What if…? Considering for a moment, I thought I had gone insane, but I was intent to know where it led to. My curiousity won me over, and I took of my jacket so it wouldn't weigh me down. Without hesitation, I leapt in, the cold water engulfing me and drowning out my thoughts. The current tried to drag me under, but I pushed to the surface, emerging on the other side. I spluttered and coughed, water that filled my lungs coming out. I struggled to latch onto a ledge, my hands slipping away, but eventually I pulled myself up and found myself in a cramped room that forced me to stand with a hunched back. I was soaked to my skin, shivering, and chattering my teeth. Just above my head was a trap door, so I slowly lifted it, peeking through the gaps. It was a spacious white room, which seemed to be some sort of lab. On the far side of the room, there was something large surrounded by people in lab coats. They were too fixated on the large machine to notice me slipping away from the room, a small trail of water left behind. I had no idea where I was, but I knew that I was in an elite establishment, and possibly somewhere confidential. As I rounded the next corner, I bumped into someone in a lab coat. Quickly, I put my head down and continued to walk. I started to think he didn't notice me, but he grabbed my arm forcefully and spun me around, peering into my face.

"Are you supposed to be here?" he asked calmly, but with an expression of suspicion, his grip loosening slightly. He eyed my soaked clothes and winded state.

"I was just dropping of a delivery." I replied hastily.

"Huh, most deliveries come in by the back door" he murmured doubtfully. "You're not in uniform either."

Before he could say or do something else, I tugged my arm away and ran in the opposite direction. Alarms started ringing, triggering my panic. Security headed towards me, so I turned back the other way to the direction of the trapdoor. I surged past a perplexed scientist and entered the room with the strange pod–looking machine. I looked around and saw a monkey placed in the pod. A countdown started, and within moments it disappeared, a frightened and melancholy expression in its eyes. Realisation hit, as I understood what it was for. It was the big project the research centre was working on, the time machine. I desperately glanced around as buff figures of security closed in around me. Running out of ideas, I sprinted towards the time machine, just in time for their next experiment. I climbed into the pod, closing the cool glass around me as scientists attempted to shut the machine down. They frantically pressed different buttons and control levers, but nothing worked. My face went pale as I realised, I had made a huge mistake. I banged on the glass, trying to break it, but nothing worked. Reality began to sink in as I sulked in a tiny ball on the ground. The countdown had begun, and in no time, I was transported somewhere unknown.

I slowly unfurled from my ball and looked around. This is what earth looked like? Astonished, I stood up, admiring the world around me. It looked somewhat brighter than the future, as if the burden of the world's state hadn't fully settled in yet. The peace and calming morning shine that gleamed around me created a sense of innocence, the rustle of the verdant lush leaves and the slowly rising sun made the Earth seem young, oblivious of what would transpire.

With no idea where I was or if I could ever get back, the only way was forward. Forward into the vast unknown, forward for a better future, and forward for new beginnings.

The Unfinished Invention

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Tung, Emma – 13

Metal clangs could be heard from afar. The morning glow shone through the cracks of the mossy stone. Vines creeped through the debris and rubble cascaded from the arrow slits. On the side, bits of granite and gneiss blocked the minute, restricted entrance. Through the forest midst was a tower; it was made of mostly stone, with sections of polished limestone spread in a rather irregular pattern. The tower was surrounded by the opaque forest, the shades of green and yellow filled the atmosphere as the early autumn breeze filled the quiet woodlands. There was a small, open meadow which bordered the tower: although it looked quite forsaken, there were small patches of flowers blooming on the overgrown grass; its scent echoed through the empty land, calling for explorers.

Past the small opening, the shape of a boy could be seen. His hair looked rather ruffled and derelict, the linen shirt he wore was oddly fitting, filled with stains and scars from his childhood. His back faced the opening, so his face remained unseen. Slouching, he continued to hammer on what seemed to be an old workbench. It was delicately crafted from pine wood by his father: as the years passed, the workbench gained many scratches and dents, they were valuable parts of history now. That was, perhaps, the only thing he had left. Not much survived… The war wiped out everything.

13 years ago

Flickering, the faintly lit lamp was the only light source in the entire lab. There were muffled machinery beeping in the background, resonating the dark room. Clacking of old computer keys continued. It was almost pitch black, and there were no other facilities around. In the darkness, you could just about make out the image of four middle aged men. As the night went on, these four men stayed silent – they gave off a strange aura, psychotic, almost. The only thing they put their focus on was a peculiar object, or… a creature, laying on the centre table.

"Vultar". This word was in bold, on a label, right on the table.

The clock ticked. It ticked again, and again. The rhythm was haunting.

It was midnight. An eerie silence struck the room as the scientists silently gathered around the table. Reflections of the computers bounced off their thick glasses; finally, one spoke. "Experiment 1801. Subject, Vultar. Testing: Consciousness." The scientists slowly stepped into their places. One held a camera, it was neither small nor big, the lens seemed to be micro filtered: It was made perfectly for this sole experiment, the experiment that would either complete or destroy humanity.

What could be so important? What could make four brilliant scientists bury themselves underground, isolated from the world, for years at a time? What would convince them to hide themselves from the bare light of the sun? The answers laid hidden in that very project.

Experimentations continued. Many ended in absolute failures. The scientists continued to slouch into their desks, working until the sun had risen, and fallen again. Until one experiment changed everything. One experiment that ignited the start of what could only be seen as the end. Experiment 1802. It had been a full day since their previous experiment now, and the clock was a few minutes away from midnight. "Experiment 1802. Subject, Vultar. Testing: Consciousness." Their camera started videoing, the lifeless creature was surrounded by glass. With a push of a small, stone button, a strange gas filled the small cage. The gas looked like shades of verdant, it was thick.

Tick, tock. Tick, tock. Tick, tock.

It was midnight, again. But this time, it was different. This time, the unforeseen danger filled the atmosphere. This time, it was the last midnight for many people.

Gas continued to fill the cage, but it was disparate than all the other experiments. The glass started cracking, one of the scientists frantically hit the button to initiate the shutdown of the experiment. The gas stopped. Just as they thought it was safe, something moved. Sounds of breathing could be heard; but it wasn't from any of the scientists.

Their focus shifted back to the centre table as the glass finally burst open. Only this time, they weren't alone... What was in the centre could only be seen by the scientists once; a huge, hyena–like creature stood up, stretching its entire body, and letting out a deafening roar. Guns were lifted in a desperate attempt to shoot this predator, cries echoed through the abandoned lab as a new threat to the entire world was born. It was designed to protect humans from any threat after all, including themselves.

As the sun rose, four disassembled bodies could be seen laying on the ground. Piles of notes and a pair of glasses laid on the floor, covered in blood. Broken bullets scattered near the shattered steel wall. Sun rays shone on a body of bulky white thew, its face resembled some sort of a man; but only this creature had no vision, it was paired with lethal hearing and smelling. Its nimbleness represented a cheetah, with claws as sharp as an eagle's, acute fangs of a lion, so deadly it could kill a man with just one bite: This was none other than the hybrid the scientists had been working on. It was a colossus. An unfinished invention.

An apex predator designed to kill.

13 years later

On the opposite wall of the boy's workstation, full of vines and cobwebs, there was a map. It wrote, "Remains of the battle": and every country was crossed out.

The odd silence struck the oasis once again as the orphan continued working on his newest weapon, everything else around seemed to fade away as he put his focus on the piece of steel. Tony was particularly talented as a weapon smith. He learnt it from his dad, after all. The weapon he was grinding was possibly strong enough to survive one Vultar. Just one. They don't go in packs, do they?

…Do they?

A few miles away from the abandoned site was a town in flames. Chills were running down their spines, the last group of humans stood together, towered by the group of predators. You could see piles of burnt wood and flesh. After the last screams of the survivors in the little town of China echoed through the grassland, it became silent again.

As the last refuge in the world fell to the wrath of the predators, a group of white hybrids leapt out from the houses, quietly into the forest near the abandoned tower…

"I smell a boy."

The Legacy of the Great Inventor

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Wen, Sunny – 12

Cai Lin is a teenager who likes to invent useful stuff to bring convenience to himself and people around him. For example, he invented a torch using a can and a vacuum cleaner using simple materials. He can't explain his interest in inventing new stuff. Every day, he spends a long time observing things around, hoping to come up with new ideas. His friends gave him a nickname "Cai Lun" because of that.

One afternoon, he was racking his brain for inspirations that he could make on his desk, and when he opened the drawer to get some paper for writing down his thoughts, he got sucked into it. He was so frightened that he kept his eyes shut. When he opened his eyes again, he found himself in a backyard of ancient Chinese-style yuanzi. He saw some workers working busily but he had no idea what they were doing. He wondered, "Oh! Can't believe that my drawer is a time traveler! I remember seeing this place in my Chinese history book!" He wandered around until he saw a man, looking at him. He asked the man, "Hello, I'm from the future. Can you tell me how is the Emperor now?" The man quickly said, "I know who you are and where you come from. Now, you are in Han Dynasty and please be quiet. I will now bring you to change your clothes and please don't tell others where you are from or else people would be freaked out and think that you are insane! Follow me!"

Cai Lin followed the man and quickly dressed up as one of the workers in the backyard. He asked, "What are they doing?" The man told him that he had come up with some ways to make paper, which could replace the use of bamboo slides to keep things in record. The man said paper was much lighter and more practical. At that very moment, realised that he was actually talking to one of the greatest inventors of China --- Cai Lun! He could not believe it. He asked, "Are you CaiLun?"

The man smiled and nodded, "Yes and your name is Cai Lin. You are my descendant in the 21st century. I know you and I know you also like inventing new things like me. I'm glad to finally meet you. Let me show you around the backyard and tell you how paper is made. Perhaps that can give you some inspiration." Cai Lin was astonished by his ancestor said, he always admired Cai Lun but he could never have expected he was actually connected to him, and he laughed and said, "hey kid, you know that I was a teenager like you and I came to this place too!"

Cai Lun showed Cai Lin different units of work and explained to him how things worked. He also let Cai Lin work as an apprentice there. Cai Lin learned how to make paper using the most original and traditional ways. During the time he learnt different skills, Cai Lun shared his experiences and thoughts about how great being an inventor was. He remarked that being an inventor, you could make contributions to the world. He also told him to never be satisfied with what had been done. For example, after inventing paper, he kept refining the way of making it. Eventually, he added pulp via tree bark and hemp ends which resulted in the large-scale manufacture and worldwide spread of paper. After spending a day together, Cai Lun brought him to a desk and asked him to go home.

Cai Lin did take Cai Lun's words and had been thinking about them over and over. Cai Lin saw a poster that was telling people to use less paper because using paper was not environmentally-friendly. He was upset at first because people nowadays try to reduce the use of his ancestor's great invention. Does it mean his great work will be forgotten? He wanted Cai Lun's legacy to go on. Therefore, he thought about how to improve or innovate the way to record things. Of course, people are using computers and notebooks already, were there possibly any ways to being innovation and advancement?

Cai Lin opened the drawer again. As expected, he went back to the yuanzi again. He met Cai Lun and told him his problems. Cai Lun smiled and said, "Kid, it's good to hear that you want to keep my legacy but always remember, you do not have to follow me. When people try to use less paper, they are trying to be more eco−friendly. When people use electronic devices, what might be the negative impact to them?" Cai Lin answered immediately, "Of course! Our eyesight! Look at my thick glasses! Oh! Thank you! I think I've come up with something!"

After that, Cai Lun relised that cai lin hadn't come in a few days, but little does he know, that cai lin was making inventions all these days, trying to make a very big leap for humans and for himself.

Just on the next day, cai lin took the "advanced technology glasses" with him and dived into the drawer. He showed Cai Lun his invention, he said, "I made a pair of hi−tech glasses which you can press a small red button and in front of you, you will see an image appear, and you could use google or do anything that an iPad does. The only good thing is that you don't have to carry it everywhere, so it's just basically a smaller but Hi−tech iPad projected by glasses."Cai Lun impressively answered him, "Cai Lin, have you ever wondered how of a big leap you just did to human technology?!" Cai Lin shockingly replied, "really?! Do you think I can be a good inventor like you?"

After Cai Lin heard Cai Lun's compliment about human technology, Cai lin immediately ran back to his room and started seaching If there was a similar invention to his. Google's answer made him insanely happy, it says "no similar items found". From that day, Cai Lin started improving his invention, trying to look for cutting−edge technology that can be applied on his glasses. Whenever he came across difficulties, he would jump into the drawer to seek Cai Lun's advice.

At last, Cai Lin did not give up, over ten years of training and solving problems for the glasses, it had……finally…FINISHED! He entered a world−class invention competition and managed to show the entire world his dream design. The moment he pressed the red button on the glasses in front of the people who were watching, they gasped… "HOW?! HOW COULD YOU EVEN POSSIBLY INVENT SUCH HI−TECH GLASSES?!" Right after Cai Lin walked off the stage, everyone knew who would be the champion. Even the Judge had never seen such an amazing invention before.

When Cai Lin walked on the final champion place, everyone gave Cai Lin a round of applause. The invention brought him fame and the nickname "The Genius Inventor" and had over 10million fans on YouTube. Suddenly, he thought of a thing, he said, "oh yeah, I need to tell Cai Lun about this great news!" He said as he ran back home into his room.

But at the time he dived into his drawer…he…crashed, the drawer broke…it didn't work. Cai Lin felt very shocked, he tried to fix the drawer and jumped into it again…but in vain. It was just like meeting Cai Lun was only a dream. He tried over again and again, but the drawer just crashed into more and more pieces, and as he failed and failed again. Eventually, he became hopeless. Cai Lin's mom was worried seeing her son do that, she said, "son? Why do you keep jumping into that drawer?" Cai Lin hopelessly replied, "I'm finding my dream mom, I'm finding my dream…and it dissappeared."

On the next day, he got interviewed and asked, "What made you come up with that idea ,Sir? Do you want to share this honour with anyone?" But the only sentence that Cai Lin responded was, "Yes, someone actually did help me…and it was…my "drawer". No one believed what he said about the drawer being a teleporter to the past. Everyone just thought that he was trying to be humble for himself or whether he grew insane.

To pay tribute to his "secret teacher from the drawer" he named the glasses that he invented "Cai Lun Glasses".

Thirty years later, Cai Lin died. He saw his deep memory, it's the paper making place that Cai Lun stayed at. He wandered around and didn't see Cai Lun, but he knew that when he actually saw Cai Lun, it was his soul that was teaching him. Suddenly, he saw a teenager called Cai Ceng teleported here, and Cai Ceng said, "what did the Closet do to me?!" At this time, Cai Lin finally knew what's going on…and the Cai's legacy went on for eternity.

The Lost Needle: A Journey of Discovery and Direction

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Zhao, Yingying – 11

The night was dark. Unusually dark, as though a bottle of black ink had been spilled into the sky, but hundreds of little lanterns filled with fire were dancing beneath it, like floating little fairies. People were dancing, laughing, singing, for they knew that after a long time plagued by scarcity, hope had come – apart from one family. They were sitting together by a round table, thin–mouthed, dark faced, with tear tracks still glistening on their cheeks. A lanky, hollow–cheeked boy, looking only a slightly bit older than 17, pulled a small bag rucksack in, and looked around wildly in despair.

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Dear diary, I'm Qing. Every year, the court of law hired a animal hunter as part of their court, for the magnificent animals on a special feast. Tomorrow morning, my little brother would set off for the Howler forest, as the fourteenth animal hunter to the court. However, even the village's most formidable hunters shied away from this task. "What about the thirteen people before him?" Once I asked an elder. "Dead." he said simply, "but your brother has to go. It's not merely a matter of his honour; our village has been forgotten for far too long…" I didn't refute. The job was paid heavily with gold, and the tiny village needed it, desperately.

As the first rays of light appeared, random strangers and neighbours ran up shaking hands, grinning, shouting words of "Good luck!". It was pointless. They did nothing while watching a young boy go to his death. My mum limped to my brother, hugging him tightly, sobbing between words. At last, the crowd started to thin out as people left with broad smiles. I heard fireworks and laughter as I held my brother's hand. Why hold his hand? I asked myself. For comfort? Encouragement? Consolation? What would it do, apart from making him more nervous? I wanted to scream at myself, tell myself that I was just as irresponsible, ruthless, as all the other villagers were. But there was no point. No point in anything.

I accompanied my brother to the transferring valley. From now on, he had to walk alone. His face was milky white, with two lanky arms trembling. I didn't know what to do – hug him, maybe? Fumbling in my jacket pockets, I found an old, broken compass from many years ago. "Ling!" I ran and shouted, as my brother's lonely shadow was about to disappear into the distance. "Here. It's a good luck charm." I pushed it into his soft, slender hands. It seemed so weird; no parting words of goodbye, no tears shedded. Just a taller boy giving a rusty compass to a doomed sibling.

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Dear diary, Ling here. I couldn't resist looking back, glancing at my older brother one more time. This may be (it probably is) the last time I see him. I knew this mountain road as though the palm of my hand after so many times, tracing the ups and downs of it on the map, and started trekking for the forest.

Two guards standing in attention at the entrance of the woods gave me a sleek white horse which shook its head and grunted nervously. They told me that I had to catch the glowing serpent, and left me. I don't think I pictured the sniggering on their faces. The glowing serpent? I thought incredulously, staring after them. It was one of the most dangerous creatures known. I mounted the horse, clutching my crossbow so tightly to my body that my ribs hurt. In the wood, wild birds were singing peacefully, and insects were chirping.

I entered, my heart thumping against my chest. The horse trotted at a pace just right for an evening walk, but a little too slow for my liking. I tried to pat it softly to make it move faster. It ignored me. As I ventured deeper into the shadowy forest, the comforting sounds of birds faded, replaced by eerie whispers of the wind through the trees. The darkness seemed to press in on me, making the forest feel alien and menacing. The sunlight barely penetrated the dense canopy, casting strange, shifting shadows that played tricks on my eyes. I thought I saw figures moving just beyond my vision, but when I looked directly at them, there was nothing there.

I hit my head on a branch above, my head bursting into pain. The pain was sharp, real, grounding me amidst my rising fear. I took a deep breath, trying to calm my racing heart, reminding myself of the mission's importance.

In the heart of the forest, I heard a tense rustling. I froze. The horse froze. We created a connection of understanding without words – the glowing serpent. It slithered with a hypnotic rhythm, its scales shimmering in the sunlight. I slid down the horse, and carefully observed its pattern as it hunted, noting the way it pauses before striking. Suddenly, it turned its yellow, glowing eyes's attention to me. No no no, I panicked. Wrong time, serpent. I still needed some time to think of a plan. However then I caught my gaze on the vines loosely twisted on a over–head branch. Now, I told myself. NOW! It lunged at me, but I leaped aside, throwing the net of strong vines onto it. The serpent struggled, but the vines curled itself tighter around the creature every time. Slowly, it ceased its struggle, and I knew it was finally safe to approach. I killed it with my arrow, and slung it around my shoulder.

Unexpectedly, roar came from behind me, and I felt huge paws graze across my back. I turned around and saw a great black bear standing on its hind legs. Its paws were waving wildly, and its black, beady eyes were locked on me. "Run!" I shouted. My horse screeched in alarm and started sprinting. I desperately heaved myself to the moving horse just in time. I heard the loud and thick stomping of the bear's paws on the ground as it raced towards me. I could almost picture Qing shaking his head and telling me how I used wrong tactics.

I didn't know how long it took, but by the time I was safe, I was lost in the labyrinthine forest. Every rustle in the underbrush set my heart racing, my imagination conjuring up all manner of dangerous creatures lurking just out of sight. I flipped out my pockets, but only heard the metal clang of the old compass hitting a rock on the ground and the light thump of the notebook. Great, I thought bitterly. Trapped in a forest, with no food. My desperate eyes turned to the dead serpent, its scales glinting. I have to get out of here with the serpent, not eating it. It's the only proof and hope of getting through this, I told myself sternly. The light around me was fading into night, and I was getting desperate for an exit. The only thing I could use was the compass. I tied the horse's reins to a tree trunk and examined it.

The compass was broken, but I knew its pieces could still be used. The metal felt cold and unfamiliar in my hands, but I felt the remaining reassuring warmth of Qing's hands grasping it. I took it apart, its pieces scattered on the rock. I felt Qing's hands hold mine softly and guided me to assemble it in a different way.

Its arrow was pointing in one still direction. It's probably the same ending anyway; why not? Better trust it than die here. I spent the dawn of the next day, making my way with the compass. There were times that I found myself in a dead end, and even the compass wavered and looked unsure, but the monster in my heart would mutter to myself, "Better trust it than die here. Better trust it than die here."

I saw other creatures, like lynxes and panthers, with blood on their teeth, all prowling to kill me, but their lives all came to an end on my bow. Something like pity rose inside me, but the fall of one would be a rise of another.

Finally, I saw a bright light in the distance – the entrance I came in. I gave a sigh of relief. The guards outside burst into applause and gasps as I emerged from the entrance. They clapped me on the back and cried, "A miracle! A miracle!". I grinned foolishly, a bit drowsy from the adventure, but the monster in my heart burst into roars of pride and triumph. I knew Qing would be proud.

★★★

Dear diary, the night was dark. Unusually dark, but people were dancing, singing, laughing, for they knew hope had come at last. There was no lanky, hollow–cheeked brother sitting with me, but we knew, he was somewhere, successful.

Explosive Awakenings

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Xi, Eason – 11

The trigger of war is weapon and conflict. Weapon kills people, millions and billions of people, and gunpower is the criminal that gives the head start of war. Everyone thinks bullets, gunpower and weapon are evil, but they are not for fighting, but as the greed of human grows and grows, finally into conflicts. How to solve the conflicts? They use all these things that are only invented for entertainment or for the society to fight against each other. Thus, human is the true criminal of war.

Gunpower was used for entertainment at first. Fireworks is one of them. The one who invented gunpower never thought it would be used for slaughter even war. Everyone admired him, and he was proud of himself too.

His family was so poor that he couldn't go to school. Despite the poor conditions, he never gave up his heart of learning knowledge. Every day he sneaked out and hide beside the window of the school, listening to the class and took notes. He had been caught by the security several times, and his parents also stopped him from learning.

Although every time he would be beaten by his parents when he was caught beside the window, his body might refuse to sneak into school, his heart never dies. He did this again and again. Nothing could stop him until one day, on a cloudy morning, he went to the school as usual, grabbing a few pieces of bread as breakfast. The cold breeze overwhelmed him. But coldness wasn't a big problem for someone like him who had experienced all kinds of storm. While that day, somehow, he had been feeble since waking up. He felt sapped, and it seemed like a challenge to move his legs. He had just started an invention not long ago, from gaining all the knowledge he "stole" by the window of the classroom. It was called fire powder. He had spent all his energy on this project without getting enough sleep, which made him feel so tired. His instincts told him that he is being stalked. He started moving more briskly.

As he turned into a corner, he turned around. No one's there. A sudden sound of lightning gave him a shock, rain drops started hitting the ground. Patting sound is just the perfect cacophony that made footsteps easier to camouflage. He noticed something wrong; things are going at just the right time. It couldn't be coincidence. He started walking back home. But just at the time he turned his back, an irregular, eerie looking shape of a shadow appeared in his sight. The first thought RUN! He turned around and started sprinting as fast as he could in the rain. No matter how hard the rain hit, he kept running. Finally, he got exhausted. He stopped in front of a science lab. He thought he got the creature lost its track. But the haunting didn't stop, no matter where he goes, that shadow stuck in his sight.

The emotion in his mind was no longer frightened, it became despair. The only situation he thought he might end up is dying, but because he has nothing to lose other than the naïve, curious heart he owns, he chose to give it a try. He suffered in panic, the only thing he ought to do is escape, or take your life as your counter for this game of gambling. He took out the product he had been inventing for his whole lifetime, the gunpowder, and lit it. Sparks flew across the sky and flame crawled towards the ground, corrupting everything it saw. It is shocking that the effect was so strong, and he never thought about that, too. Fire started licking the wall, half of the school was lit.

At that moment, he realized, that the shadow was only his negative feelings in his heart, and that whole day was just a dream. He realized everything, the invention he made, was a key of unlocking the new world! No matter how people use gun powder in the future, at least in that time, it is unstained.

New Tales of China's Inventions

Harrow International School Shanghai, Zhang, Cookie – 11

The sun was just on the horizon as Cai Lun woke up. It was 105 AD, and a new emperor had been crowned. Cai had finally landed an extremely prestigious job in the imperial palace as an official of the high court, and after a good night's rest, it was time to head to work.

On the way to the palace, Cai got some breakfast. The small but homey meal he had picked up from the run-down street-side shop was hot and steamy, but that wasn't what Cai was noticing. Even after the education reforms, which taught tens if not hundreds of thousands of people how to read and write, there were barely any scrolls around. Even in the palace area, only a few scholars were carving into the thick bamboo strips. Amongst the countless junk shops selling piles upon piles of goods, not a single piece of writing equipment was in sight. Being an official of the high court, Cai knew that he would be the one to solve this issue.

Taking a few bamboo strips himself, he tried carving detailed letters into the tough material, tracing over the carvings many times, and repeatedly checking for any errors. That was how it was taught when he was a kid, and the colossal problem was glaringly obvious. The waxy bamboo strips were annoying and bulky, and it was extremely difficult to carve out intricate characters on them. Also, if there was even a single character that wasn't perfect, the whole strip would have to be recarved. Silk, another writing material barely used by the populace, was extremely expensive, and only high nobles, or the emperor,could afford to write on it. Neither of those options were great, and even after searching for hours, there seemed to be nothing that would work better than bamboo and silk.

Thus, Cai wanted to make his own material. It had to be lightweight, easy to write on, and cheap enough for mass production. Experimenting with countless materials, he tried plaster, wood, cheap fibre, and even leaves. But those materials were all too hard to write on. Nevertheless, he persisted on, trying to mix materials, laying them on each other, and beating them into shape. Nothing seemed to work, even after a whole day of just experimenting. Countless rounds of useless and unusable materials. Eventually, he thought of something that might just work. He took a few pieces of tree bark, and noticed how the fibres made the whole piece of material light, but strong. He found the same thing in rags and hemp as well. So, Cai decided to try and mash mulberry bark, rags and hemp together into a pulp, mix it up, and lay it out to dry. When the next day came along, he realised that it had become the perfect material. Light, cheap, and easy to write on.

After a whole night of making sheets of paper, a knock echoed across the dusty, dim-lit hallway. Another court official had come, slightly above him in rank. New sheets of paper were drying next to the window as a musty yet metallic smell spread across the room.

"What is this little project?" the court official sneered, glaring at Cai.

Cai quickly got up, still feeling extremely sleepy,"Just a way to make writing much easier."

He took out a pen, and easily laid down a few smooth strokes, gliding the pen across the thin surface. The court official raised an eyebrow, shocked at the action.

"Give them all to me," he smirked, knowing that he would have to give the invention up, and if he didn't, it would be considered treason.

Cai looked suspiciously at the court official, and questioned,"But why?"

The court official took out a gleaming dagger, pointing the glimmering blade straight at Cai. He let out a maniacal laugh, and glared at Cai.

Grabbing all the paper that was there, Cai jumped out of the heavy wooden window, nearly tripping on the wet morning grass. The sun shone brightly in his face, blinding him for a few seconds. A barrage of shouts echoed around the small courtyard, causing Cai to turn back for a few seconds. The court official let go of his dagger, and Cai thought he was doomed. He closed his eyes, opening them after a few seconds, and realised he was fine. The stack of paper had stopped the dagger from hitting him. Realising he had fallen onto the ground, Cai picked himself up, and narrowly dodged a punch from the court official, returning a blow right to his stomach. The official lurched back but jumped onto his feet, landing a kick to Cai's leg.

Cai fought intensely, struggling to keep up with the court official, who clearly had the upper hand. He tried to remember the days when his mother forced him to attend martial arts classes. It was all coming together again. After a barrage of attacks from the official, Cai advanced, moving forward whilst dodging as many blows as possible, slowly gaining ground. He ran forward and planned on ending the fight for good. His heart beat in his chest, blood streaming from his hand, but his spirit was still roaring.

Landing a hit straight to the officials face, Cai staggered back. He took the paper, a dagger still entrenched inside, and dragged himself back towards his home. If he didn't manage to get recognition for his invention first, who knows what will happen next? So he trudged along, clothes covered with dirt, but eyes gleaming with hope. This was his invention, and he was going to be able to help the whole world.

The palace was within view, and Cai quickly changed into a set of clean clothes. He rushed off, his leg still a little limp from the fight. As the rough wooden doors creaked open, he knew it was coming to an end.

Once he told the Emperor about his invention, the Emperor immediately applauded him, praising his invention. The invention of paper was to be made available across the country, credited to Cai's name. Giant mills were set up, and people started to finally be able to read and write easily. Paper was a giant success, and became one of the most common items across China. The world had been changed forever.

An Unwritten Fairytale

Heep Yunn School, Chau, Chung Yan – 14

He sat in his race car – cramped, yet an epitome of glory. The engines were roaring like thunder overzealously, and with his fingers on the wheel, their hearts beat as one. Alford Chan remembered the days in his lab, trying to hasten the appearance of futuristic technology from dawn to dusk. Sturdy defences were brought up to annihilate any doubts that would cause him to succumb to the trepidation of failure. He worked at the speed of light, like how his race car was destined to do. It was an arduous task, but now he sat in the Speedzter, ready to win the medal of his life.

'Racers! Are you ready?'

The announcement brought him back to the track.

'On your marks,'

Engines roared.

'Set,'

Wheels started to turn.

'GO!'

A blur of light surrounding the track. It was said that a tornado had entered the stadium; it did not bring destruction, but pride. The wind mingled with the lightning around Alford, and his vision was blurred. He looked at the screen: 600000 km/second — twice the speed of light.

That would do, he thought.

He tried to stop the car, but failed. Having realised his impotence, a shiver went down his spine. The wind slashed at his face and he closed his eyes, as if afraid to face his failure. A huge impact hit the car and Alford felt an immense amount of pain on his forehead, and before he knew it, his hands slipped from the wheel and he was in eternal darkness.

The whole audience was in great turmoil, with their mouths agape with shock. A frisson of fear spread across the stadium. No one had witnessed the vanishing of the Speedzter, but it was gone.

The truth was, only Alford knew.

He woke in the middle of a puddle of viscous liquid. His eyes were rheumy with tears, but still he saw the Speedzter lying in the mud just a mile away.

What on earth just happened, he thought.

It seemed as if it was in another lifetime that he had raced on the tracks with the Speedzter. That was when he heard the drums, and he saw lightened torches on towers that spread around him. Connecting them was a wall which snaked its way through the highlands of China.

This was the Great Wall of China. And it was the past.

The Speedzter had just outraced time.

But… to when?

Curiosity stirred within his chest as he scanned his surroundings. He saw the flags that stood on the towers of the Great Wall. On them was only one word, and he recognised it.

It was the Song Dynasty.

‘Mr Chan, I have been looking for you.’

The voice startled him and Alford jumped. In front of him was a man who wore a red skirt of a court official, and on his head was a black hat with two flaps on both sides.

‘The judgement starts in three minutes. We should proceed to the Court.’

Alford read the man’s name tag: ‘Master Lai of the Court’. Then he noticed that he was wearing the same outfit, and he had a name tag as well: ‘Assistant Chan of the Court’

Acknowledging his role, Alford gestured to the man in a placid manner.

‘After you, Master Lai,’ Alford said generously.

Master Lai smiled and started walking towards the court. Before he followed, Alford looked back one last time at the Speedzter. It was impossible for Master Lai not to notice it, or not to question it. But before he could explain it with a proper scientific theory, the sound of drums once again rang through his skull.

‘Mr Chan, we are running out of time,’ Master Lai said.

‘My apologies, Master. I was just… looking.’

‘Of course! The Great Wall,’ Master Lai signed, having thought that Alford was looking at the spectacular structure, ‘It stood with so much glory, and yet behind all the power it brings, blood and sweat of Chinese farmers who were tortured to death for this block of lifeless wall were wasted. Do not indulge in its magnificence, Mr Chan, pity the dead.’

Pity the dead…

How much had died?

Alford was still pondering on Master Lai’s words when they arrived at the court.

‘Dong!’

The bell sounded. A devastated man wearing the uniform of a criminal was brought in. When he saw Master Lai, he smirked indecorously. His look was ravenous; it was hunger for power, and Alford could see it.

‘Robert Chan,’ Master Lai started, ‘You ask for a release to serve our country, is that true?’

‘Yes, it is true.’

His voice was low and deceiving. On his face was a twisted smile. Ridiculously, it gave Alford a sense of familiarity. He was certain that he had seen this face somewhere. But… where?

‘I have been told that our country would engage in war,’ Robert continued, ‘I have mastered the art which you called witchcraft, and now I have learned a new formula which could make our country stronger. With my knowledge, I could bring us glory, if only you would release me.’

A few papers were passed to Master Lai, and he handed them to Alford.

‘Assistant Chan,’ Master Lai whispered, ‘Please examine the drafts.’

Indeed, on the papers were the actual formulas for gunpowder. Alford examined the data with fascination, and that was when a memory flashed across his eyes. He remembered seeing these drafts; they were in the museum, where he had learnt about the invention of gunpowder: *Gunpowder led to the victory of China. Our armies never had to surrender ever again. China was a world power…*

But he also remembered something else – the written tragedy: *Gunpowder killed Mongolian armies… Chinese workers died during construction. It is known to have caused as many deaths as the construction of the Great Wall.*

It was glory, or bloodshed.

He closed his eyes and rewinded history. Innocent people had died while building the Great Wall. Hidden behind the victory of wars were lives that could never be redeemed. Once he had indulged in the glory of such inventions, but now he could no longer do so. Master Lai was right. Thousands of men had already gone to their graves, roaming in the land of horrors and death. Did more have to die?

No, he decided. *Enough was enough.*

Then came the wholehearted lie: 'Master, these are merely drawings instead of real formulas.'

The crowd gasped, and Robert roared a series of profanities. In the midst of chaos, Alford's eyesight started to turn blurry. It was as if he left the world around him. He tried to hold on to reality, but what was real? He didn't even know. The last words of the Master rang in his ears, and when he could finally see again, he was floating, but no longer at the court.

He was in the middle of a wasteland. Shoals of corpses laid on the floor. There was no Speedzter, nor was there the stadium. He swam in the cold and musty air, trying to find out what had happened to this miserable place.

If he had decided to leave the world then, there would be no endless grief. The problem was, he did not.

He searched his way through the havoc and destruction, and he saw several newspapers half buried in the mud. He flipped through them, hoping to discover what had happened to his country.

Europe kills the dragon — start of WWIII.

2023, 6th June… China's defeat.

2023, 6th June – The day which was supposed to mark his victory, and now it marked the defeat of his country.

His fragile heart broke like glass, and they pierced through his throat. He felt like crying, but souls could not cry. They could only roam with grief.

For some unfathomable reason, it was then when his father's words arose from the depth of his memories: *Robert Chan, the only descendent of the Chan family in the Song dynasty, and he was the inventor of gunpowder…*

That good old boring story, which was now only a fairytale. A reality that was once history – one that Alford had rewritten himself, hoping to save the world.

And now…

No one was saved. A weakened China had caused a massacre that should not exist in another version of reality. The Speedzter had outraced time, but it could never outrace human greed.

And then he remembered the words of a Master from another lifetime: *Robert Chan is sentenced to death.*

So much carnage, so much bloodshed, so much greed; all of which Alford could no longer stand. Because he had once spoken of a malign lie with a good heart, and it had caused all these deaths which he had tried so hard to prevent.

All those melancholy slaughters had left a hidden trace of crimson blood on the history of China, and the murderer was once the inventor of the renowned Speedzter who now only lived in an unwritten fairytale.

A Better Future

Heep Yunn School, Fan, Cheuk Man – 13

Present – December, 2035. Administrative office, Beijing.

"Inspiration. Innovation. Implementation. A better place. A better future." The words carved on her desk stared back at her, devoid of emotion, cold and isolating. Her gaze wanders into the distance, sparkling against the dimness of her office.

She used to believe these words with unwavering conviction, deeply ingrained in her heart.

She used to believe technology would give people a better future, so wholeheartedly and undoubtedly.

She used to believe there is nothing AI can't solve, whatever challenges they face.

Now she is not so sure.

Yesterday, she received a letter. This is the first letter she received from her endearing baby brother since she left home in pursuit of her dream as an inventor 12 years ago. A letter from her baby brother, whom she left in the hands of AI 'Miss Luisa', she thought, with a mixture of excitement, solemnness and a weird sensation that she was unfamiliar with. Is that guilt? Or confusion?

She paused her lips and opened the letter. It reads:

My dearest sister,
It has been a while. Your recent invention has apparently received some recognition, congratulations on that.
I am informing you that my marriage to Isabella de Boure will take place tomorrow. Your presence at the ceremony is optional, and I understand if you are preoccupied with more pressing matters. Miss Luisa will provide you with the precise date should you decide to attend.
Rhythm

She responded to the letter with stunned silence. In the letter, she found no familiar joy. Only an unsettling, alien feeling lurked in her stomach.

How could he choose to deliver such momentous news to his own sister through a cold, impersonal letter? The tone was so chilling, so emotionless and unfeeling… And what did he mean by 'your presence is optional'? Isn't she his sister, after all? How could this be her sweet, loving brother? She refused to believe this was her brother. This was NOT the brother she knew.

Slowly, the realization dawned on her. Yes, this was not the brother she "knew." Did she even know him now? And did he even care about her now? She had entrusted his care to a new AI invention, relying on it to perfectly handle everything. She had been so sure of its capability that she hadn't bothered to maintain regular communication with him for twelve long years.

But... what was wrong? She had accepted the fact that her baby brother had grown up. Everything seemed perfect, and yet it isn't. While the AI invention had undoubtedly taken care of him, perhaps even better than she ever could, why did it feel like something vital was missing? Her questions echoed in silence.

Past – September, 2022. Tsinghua University, Beijing.

A young teenage girl walked solemnly through the gate of her dream university.

She finally got in.

She could finally fulfil her dreams of creating new inventions to improve human lives.

AI could handle everything for us, like all the other inventions.

At least, it was her hope.

Present – December, 2035. Administrative office, Beijing.

Her dreams are fulfilled, to an extent, at least.

After four years of college, she has become the inventor she aspired to be. She achieved great success, creating numerous inventions that aimed to replace human work and provide assistance.

Her next groundbreaking idea is expected to be revealed in January, and she has a plethora of other inventions she wants to bring to life.

"Tick tock", the clock hanging up on the wall ticked, displaying the time now is 11:18. She rubbed her weary eyes, strained from staring at her brother's letter for far too long. Glancing out of her window, she watched the lonely lanes. A couple walked by, their eyes glued to their mobile phones, engrossed in communication with their AI assistants. Sadness clouds her eyes.

No communication between them. Not even eye contact...

Her brother, now a stranger...

She hesitates on whether she should continue inventing.

Is it truly better for inventions to help humans in every way possible? She wonders.

She reaches for her AI time traveller, as she often would, during times of distress.

She yearns to travel back in time, seeking guidance from the past.

Past – July, 110. In the market, Chang 'an.

Stars twinkled in the warm summer night sky. Laughter filled the air as children painted on thick, rough paper. This was her first stop, an exploration of papermaking, one of the most revered inventions throughout history. She walked briskly, unnoticed amongst the crowds. People were buying and selling paper everywhere, engaging in conversation and cherishing the newfound convenience.

"I love this new invention! It has made our lives so much more convenient."

"Would you like to come over and paint a picture together? We've created so many beautiful artworks with our friends since the invention of inexpensive and accessible paper!"

Such conversations permeated the streets. She observed in silence, tears welling in her eyes.

The invention wasn't so awful after all. It could be used to make people's lives more convenient, while not lessening the close relationship between people a single bit. They could even make them more intimate by creating bonds between people.

So why has our world turned like that?

The luminary clock hanging in the night sky offered her no answer.

Past – April, 2016. On the train, Beijing–Tianjin intercity railway.

The wind whistled outside the train window as it sped past verdant fields and bustling cities. She relaxed on the red sofa, relishing the scenic view.

"Ladies and gentlemen, we will be arriving in approximately ten minutes," the announcement echoed through the train.

This was another invention she had been so interested in – the railway. She believed that the intercity railway was one of the best inventions made in the 20th century.

'This invention is amazing!', she muttered to herself.

The passenger sitting opposite her smiled. 'Yes, isn't it? I used to only be able to visit my family in Tianjin once half a year, as I work in Beijing and don't have much time. Now, with the invention of the extra fast intercity railway, I could visit them twice a month!' the passenger exclaimed.

She nodded her head in agreement.

So why has our world turned like that?

The green meadow fields outside offered her no answer.

Past – November, 2030. On the street, Beijing.

The newest AI home caretaker has recently been invented. It follows its master everywhere and takes care of everything for them.

She paced on the silent and yet crowded street. People hardly looked at each other, keeping their eyes on their phones. The AI home caretaker was ordered to keep the children and elderly or even their partner company.

AI is the one chatting with people, not their friends.

AI is the one that takes care of the people, not their loved ones.

AI is the one that comforts people when they are upset, not their family.

AI is a cold and merciless robot with no understanding of love and family.

She turned and stepped back into the present.

Present – December, 2035. Administrative office, Beijing.

The clock's hands seemed to move in slow motion. 11:23.

She understands now.

Why has our world turned like this?

What has been missing all alone?

The lack of human connection. The abuse of technology and new inventions.

While technology and new inventions may bring people convenience, wrongfully using them may bring harm to people and their relationships.

People used emotionless inventions to help them do everything, including bonding with their families. This took away the love, affection and care that should have existed in your relationships.

Now, because AI helps people complete all their tasks, people no longer spend any time with their loved ones. Their closest family are like strangers to them. They feel like they don't know their family at all. Just like her.

All because of this.

She knows what she should do now.

She picks up her phone. No longer will she rely solely on AI to communicate with him. It is time to bridge the gap, to rebuild what has been lost.

She will tell him everything, and express her love, regret, and desire to reconnect. She will attend his wedding, embrace his new life, and strive to be the sister he deserves.

With a mix of hope and trepidation, she calls him, ready to embark on a new journey—one that would blend the wonders of technology with the warmth of human connection.

She will continue her inventions, but this time, with a renewed understanding of their place in the world. Inventing new inventions with more allowance for human connection.

As she waited for the phone to be picked up, she whispered to herself, "Inspiration. Innovation. Implementation. A better place. A better future—for both humanity and the bonds that hold us together."

A familiar voice, not louder than a whisper, but filled with unbelief and joy, 'Sis? Is it really you?'

Time Machine

HKUGA College, Cheung, Hui Cheuk – 15

Ling adjusted her goggles and pulled down the lever. The machine whirred to life , lights blinking across the control panel . This was it – her first trip back in time .

Ling had spent years researching and building her time machine in secret. While the government funded research into new technologies , time travel was still seen as the realm of science fiction , not real science. Ling however , believed that she could make it work.

Day by day , Ling would rush to the shed in the garden the moment she woke up, studying the enigmatic properties of elements , she discovered a hidden substance in earth's atmosphere. The substance does not fit the laws of elements and defies many laws of physics.
Ling was extremely excited upon the discovery of this substance, but she decided to keep it a secret instead of telling everyone about this substance. She named it "nixium"

Ling continued to study nixium in secret. She learned that it was a powerful substance, even more powerful than nuclear energy. She also learned that it could be harnessed to travel through time.
Through painstaking experiments, Ling realized that nixium could manipulate the flow of time when concentrated amounts were applied to her machine. After months of intricate calibrations, energy modulation trials, and quantum field adjustments, Ling was finally ready for her first test trip back in time. She had tuned the machine to target a specific spacetime coordinate in the past, configured the nixium infusion process to bend the spacetime continuum, and stabilized the system to prevent catastrophic distortions. Though daunting, each test brought her one step closer to a stable, controllable time warp. Her perseverance was finally paying off with the most remarkable invention in history.
As the machine powered up, Ling eagerly watched the monitors tracking critical systems. Energy levels were optimal, spacetime coordinates locked in, and the nixium reactor hummed perfectly in tune. This was the moment she had worked so hard for. Ling took a deep breath and initiated the time warp sequence.
A low vibration rumbled through the shed as spacetime itself began contorting to Ling's will. Strange colors and lights swirled around the machine as the very fabric of reality warped and bent. Ling watched in awe as history itself reshaped according to her machine.
Moments later, the time warp stabilized and the machine fell silent. Ling anxiously checked the monitors – her coordinates were accurate, spacetime integrity was maintained, and the machine was unharmed. She had successfully traveled back in time!
Ling eagerly threw open the hatch and climbed out, removing her goggles and beholding the landscape. She gasped as she took in her surroundings. Straw built cottages were all around her. Ling pinched herself to make sure it wasn't a dream. After years of secrecy and failed tests, she had finally sent herself back 250 years!As she stepped outside gingerly, a group of children playing with a bamboo stick and hoop stopped and stared at her strange outfit – slim fitting pants and a sleeveless top. One boy called out "Laowai!" Ling smiled and gave a little wave. Ling was very excited, she ran to the cottages to find out how people lived 250 years ago and left the time machine out in the open. She watched street performers perform fascinating talents , she admired them as the breathed fire from their mouth. She then clapped along to a masked opera, and bought sugared plums from a food stall. It was just as vividly alive as her grandmother's stories.

Time flew by as Ling explored the cottages , the sun began to set. Ling decided that she would go back to her time machine and return to the present day.

As Ling approached her time machine, she saw some bandits carrying robbed goods in bags and escaping from guards. She held out her pistol attempted to shoot the bandits at their leg to stop the robbery. She held out her pistol and attempted to shoot them in the leg to stop the robbery. She pulled the trigger, but the bullet missed and hit their bags instead.
Stolen gold and silver showered to the floor. The bandits were very surprised and scared as they never seen a gun before, but decided to charge at Ling to disarm her. Ling was then tied up and was dragged away by the bandits.
Ling was terrified , without access to the time machine , she couldn't make it back to the present day. The bandits dragged her onto horses along with them, they coerced her into telling them when was she from and details about the present world , but Ling refused to answer them as it may result in dangerous consequences to the world if someone from the past knows things from the future.
The bandits put a knife against her neck and threatened to kill her if she didn't talk. Ling was paralyzed with fear, but she knew she couldn't jeopardize the future. Thinking quickly, she pretended to faint from fright. The bandits shouted at her limp body but she didn't respond.
"Lets just throw her away, she is useless" said the tallest bandit. Ling's heart was racing , she was going to be free and she could head back to the present. "Let me see." said another bandit. The bandit touched her pulse and said "See? She still has a pulse , she is faking it.".
The bandits debated what to do next. One suggested cutting off her hand every 30 seconds until she talked. Another wanted to leave her in the woods for the wolves. The tallest bandit silenced them.
"We can still use her," he scowled. "She has strange clothes and contraptions. Someone will pay for her return."
The bandits rode for hours until they reached a decrepit stone fortress tucked into the mountains. They dragged Ling inside and locked her in a cell. She sat on the cold dirt floor, despairing about her predicament. How would she ever get back home?
Days passed as Ling remained captive. The bandits interrogated her daily, but she refused to give them any information. Each night she stared out the tiny window at the moon, wondering if she'd be trapped forever in the past.
One day, the head bandit entered her cell flanked by two guards. "It seems you do not wish to cooperate," he sneered. "Therefore, you leave us no choice but to use other methods of...persuasion."
The guards seized Ling and began dragging her down a dark hallway. She struggled with all her might, but could not break their iron grips. Where were they taking her? What terrible fate awaited?
They descended a winding stone staircase into a cavernous chamber lit by flickering torches. Strange instruments and devices filled the room. At the center lay a wooden table with thick leather straps.
The guards forced Ling onto the table and bound her arms and legs. The bandit chief leaned over her menacingly.
"You have one last chance to tell us what we want to know."
"Never!" yelled Ling spat in his face.
Enraged, he signaled to a guard who cranked a lever. The table slowly rotated until Ling was upside down. The blood rushed to her head making her dizzy and disoriented.
The bandit chief unfurled a wicked looking metal device. Ling's eyes went wide with fear. She opened her mouth to scream but no sound came out.
The bandit laughed cruelly. "Ready to talk?"
Ling clenched her jaw defiantly. She steeled herself as the device inched closer. She would never talk, no matter what horrors lay in store. Suddenly a deafening explosion rocked the chamber, spraying debris everywhere. Yelling and clanging filled the air.

Amidst the chaos, the head bandit fled the chamber. The guards ran after him, leaving Ling alone still strapped to the table. Flames licked at the doorway as smoke filled the room. Ling coughed violently, her lungs burning. She had to get free before being burned alive!

Summoning all her strength, she strained against the straps. They dug into her flesh as she thrashed desperately. With a final heave, one leather band snapped. Ling cried out in pain but it was enough to wiggle loose. She dropped to the floor and scrambled away on all fours.

Flames engulfed the stairway so she ran the other way. The smoke was so thick she could barely see. Ling crawled blindly until hitting a stone wall. Feeling along it, she discovered a small door. She squeezed through into a narrow passage just as the ceiling collapsed behind her.

The passage led outside onto the hillside far from the besieged fortress. Ling gulped the fresh air. She was free! But how had she escaped?

Sounds of battle still echoed from the valley. Ling peered down and could scarcely believe her eyes. An army decked in red and gold armor swarmed the fortress, wielding spears and sabers. One burly soldier seemed to lead them.

Could these warriors be allies? Ling made her way down the mountain to find out. As she approached, the leader removed his helmet. Ling froze. It was the time traveler she had met as a child who inspired her to build the machine!

"Greetings Ling," he said warmly. "I have been waiting for this moment a long time."

Ling was speechless. How did he know her? Why had he saved her?

The man smiled. "There will be time for explanations later. Come, your machine awaits."

He led Ling safely through the carnage back to the shed where it all began. The time machine sat untouched, nixium reactor still humming. Her desperate plan had worked.

The Red Glasses

HKUGA College, Fung, Cheuk Yu Nana – 14

"Happy new year, Georgia! I got a gift for you! I know it's not Christmas nor your birthday, but have you ever heard of a Chinese New Year gift?" asked Uncle Ben, wearing his biggest smile.

"No way! Thank you so much! I really appreciate it," I said. Without hesitation, I unwrapped the gift immediately as I was eager to know what was inside. A black box appeared in front of my eyes while I unwrapped the final piece of paper. The words "Red Glasses" shone in front of my eyes. My jaws dropped. This was my dream gift. I had been begging for this gift from my parents for ages, and finally, I was holding it in my own hands.

"Wow! I am speechless… This is incredible! Thank you so much! This is a dream come true!" I was flabbergasted by this gift and couldn't show how much I appreciated it, so I gave Uncle Ben a big, warm hug.

"As long as you're happy, I feel happy. Come on! Open it up! Let's see what functions it has; I heard that it's festive!" said Uncle Ben. I immediately took the box cover away and there it was, the "Red Glasses 2.0". It might look like simple reading glasses but it can do a lot. I put on the glasses and pressed the red button on the side, which read 'Start'. Within seconds, a message popped out from the glasses: "Welcome."

I didn't know where to begin. Buttons shone in front of my eyes, the colors were super vibrant. The one that caught my attention the most was the button with a neon keyboard. I couldn't control my hands as they pressed the button in the air. A keyboard then popped up out of nowhere.

"I heard that you can use this keyboard anywhere you want," said Uncle Ben. I started walking, and the keyboard followed me. I started typing while walking and it also worked. I even tried using it in the potty, and you wouldn't believe it, but it still worked! I then saw a button with a pen that read "Pictionary". Then, of course, I pressed it. On the screen popped up "Start drawing". I was rather confused about how to draw as I didn't have pen and paper by my side. I thought to myself: *this is technology, you don't need pens or paper*. I then simply drew a spider in mid-air, and surprisingly, it worked. Technology really works amazingly, and I knew that this pair of glasses would take me through a lot in the future. *These glasses work too well, I love them!* I thought to myself.

"Are you seriously not going to try out the games? It's the literal icon of this pair of glasses. There's even a number of games to choose from," said Uncle Ben. I pressed the button with a video game controller promptly as Uncle Ben spoke, and there it was. The variety of games shone in front of my face, from car games to cooking games to even building games. The one game that caught my eye was "Theme Park Tycoon". I pressed its icon and I was astonished. The game became VR and I started building with my own hands. It all felt so unreal, and I still couldn't believe that this was happening. For a split second, I felt like I was in the video game! I tried all of the games and was obsessed with every single one of them because it was way too much fun.

"Alright, I see you are really enjoying the gift, Georgia. I am so glad that you like it, but you should use it wisely. Technology is not as perfect as you think it is," said Uncle Ben as he waved goodbye and left our house. I put my glasses back on, and I saw a mini firecracker fizzing at the right corner of the glasses, so I pressed it. Boom! Chinese firecrackers burst in front of my eyes; even though it was on a screen, it was breathtaking! 'Happy Chinese New Year!' popped out when the dancing lions finished their performance in my glasses. Everything in the glasses was Chinese themed, even the games. All of the games changed, from cooking games to feeding pandas and from building houses to making Chinese medicine. The background of the glasses was now red; even the icons of the apps were Chinese New Year themed! The Pictionary app turned from a pen to a Chinese writing brush that taught you how to write Chinese calligraphy.

"Alright, Georgia, it's time to go to your grandparents' place now," yelled my mum. I ignored her as I was busy discovering the other functions of the glasses. It didn't matter whether I had the glasses or not because going to my grandparents place is the worst thing ever. All you do is to sit there and nod because we should respect the elderly. Every time I go to my grandparents place, I sit there and hear them talk about old people stuff which I do not understand anything about, and I'm pretty sure both my mum and dad also have no idea what they are talking about.

“Georgia, come on! You’re going to receive red packets,” yelled my mum once more. Red packets! I grabbed my glasses and rushed out of my room. Red packets always make me smile. It’s probably one of the best things Chinese people do to celebrate Chinese New Year because we get to have money! Extra money to be precise. I put on my glasses and experienced my first Chinese New Year in the virtual world.

I pulled up my map on my glasses and guided my parents to my grandparents’ house for the first time ever. Normally, my dad was the only one who knew the way, but with the glasses, I knew the way too. After 20 minutes of walking, a message popped out. “You have completed your daily goal. Walking 2 km.” Then a bunch of fireworks flashed on my screen – it was incredible. Finally, we arrived at our grandparents' place. We took off our shoes and walked in. I greeted them as they gave me red packets. Then, we sat in the living room and listened to my grandparents talking about recent updates. As usual, I felt bored listening to them talk, so I spent time with my new best friend – my glasses. I spent 2 hours learning about Chinese culture with the information provided by my glasses. What felt like years later, we finally left my grandparents’ place.

While walking to our next destination, for which I had no idea where dad was taking us, the virtual lanterns shone in my glasses as I watched the lion and dragon dance provided by artificial intelligence. Suddenly, fireworks shone in front of my eyes and I was dazzled by how extraordinary they were. I thought it was happening in my glasses, as if the technology did its stuff, but it was only until my mum told me to take off my glasses.

I took off my glasses for the first time I was on the streets, and what I was looking at was incredible. Fireworks blasted through the sky with different patterns presented. Even though it was really loud, I could feel the Chinese New Year spirit bursting inside me. The fireworks were nothing like the fireworks I had seen before. It was extra special, like a fairy putting some fairy dust in the fireworks. The blinding lights of fireworks burst in the sky, and it was phenomenal. After the fireworks, I walked home with my parents and the surprises kept coming. The whole town was full of red lanterns. “Spring Couplets” were put up in every household. Kids were running around wearing Qipao and playing with Chinese firecrackers. The smell of firecrackers flew in my nose; it doesn’t smell good, but it definitely yells Chinese New Year. Just as we were walking home, mum said, “Your grandparents are moving away to another country for their retirement. They were meaning to tell you but you were too focused on your glasses. They’re moving next month.” I genuinely couldn’t believe that I missed all this just because I was wearing my glasses. I walked home in a wretched state as I couldn’t believe my grandparents were moving away, but also because I did not cherish the time I had with them. I felt so bad.

What Uncle Ben said was true: even though technology provides a lot for us, it is not as perfect as you think it is. I missed a lot of things today just because I was wearing my glasses. Technology really isn't what you think it is. I’m glad that I found out today. Maybe it’s not too late to change.

The Great Save

HKUGA College, Wong, Yuek Yu Kate – 14

Clang! Clang! Clang!

The three clashes of the bell signaled the end of working hours, as all the men hefted their farming equipment over their shoulders and began trudging off to the old warehouse. I wipe off the sweat that ran in rivulets down my face and follow the crowd, heaving a deep sigh.

Men and boys alike line up by an old, perforated warehouse, its walls riddled with holes and cracks. Dust gathered on the ground and the walls, bellowing in a large cloud that flew into people's faces when kicked up.

I walked to the end of the line and came to a stop, watching as the people in front groaned in complaint at the sight of their wages– though I didn't get why. It wasn't like we were expecting anything much.

As the line ambled onwards, I reached the counter and put my stretched out my hand. A sack of banliang jingled hopefully as it fell into my hand. I pocketed it and headed home– no point in checking the amount just to disappoint myself.

I walked down the street of the city. The political structure seemed just as haphazard as the buildings, if not more. Fights broke out every day over the simplest things: Food, shelter, and such. There never seemed to be enough of those. At this time, a bowl of rice was a privilege that we would never be able to get a taste of, while the people in the palace and soldiers alike enjoyed the luxurious lifestyle that we citizens could only dream of. Rumors are rich and lavish items could be found inside the emperor's palace, like decorations and other superfluous items– that serve only as a reminder of our insignificance.

The hinges of the door creaked as I stepped into the unfurnished room. I have three little brothers in all, who quickly surround me, happily chattering about their day and how it had been. I chuckled and sat down heavily a thin mattress on the floor, joints aching.

"Today at school, the teacher…"

"I found this really pretty rock…"

Li Ming and Li Liang followed me to where I sat, giggling and pushing at each other.

I looked over at the quiet child looking at the three of us silently, and asked, "Li Ling? How was your day?"

He walked forward shyly and presented a piece of paper with the words: cooking competition! Present your best dish and win the prize of 800 wen!

I had never had an aptitude for cooking, but the prize money caught my sight. I pluck the paper out of his hand, and read it carefully again, word for word. This was the perfect opportunity.

The next day, I drove the rake into the mud with renewed vigor, ignoring the harsh sun beating down on my back.

"What's with the sudden spike in enthusiasm there?" Da Xing chuckled.

We'd been friends for quite a long while now– in fact, we'd been friends ever since we started working on the farm, despite him being 8 years older than I am. Misery acquaints a man with strange bedfellows, so they say.

"Have you heard the news? There's a culinary competition being hosted by the emperor," My voice drops to a hushed whisper, "The prize money is 800 wen."

Da Xing's eyes just about popped out of their sockets as he gaped at me.

"You're going to participate?" He questioned me.

"I think so. This is the perfect opportunity to earn more money, don't you think? There's no harm in participating." I tell him.

He thinks carefully before answering, "You know what we should do? We should work together. Create the best dish ever, guarantee a win from the emperor, and split the prize money. I could oversee coming up with a really good dish, Li Chen. The odds would be in our favor," He nudged me. "Think about it."

And I did think about it, long and hard. In conclusion, 400 dollars was better than none, and the chances of getting 400 were larger than that of getting 800. Thus, an alliance was formed on this culinary battlefield.

The next day, I knocked on Da Xing's door. When it swung open and I was ushered in, we sat down at his table as he presented me with an impressive array of sketches and notes.

"This one– you see this one? It'll blow the judges away for sure. Ooh, but this is a famous local dish, it looks so delicious. Ah, but the creativity points belong to this one… What do you think, Li Chen?" Da Xing brandished his blueprints proudly.

"I think that we'll never decide on a dish at this point, because the submission date is next week."

"Well, I think the best chance we've got right now is to make dumplings because everyone knows they taste good. Oh, but the *bread*." Da Xing rambled on, showing no sign of ever having heard what I said.

When the day of the submission finally presented itself, we'd finally decided on dumplings. The broth was easy enough to make, and the skin seemed simple enough. When I walked into the main street, I saw that numerous tables had been set up, as cooking areas for the participants. A large table sat in the middle, and on top were all the ingredients and spices that might be needed by the contestants, piled sky−high. I stood by my table, perspiration gleaning at my neck as I took in a shaky breath. In one way or another, my fate would be decided today− whether I would escape from the restraints of poverty and build myself a new life with my brothers or continue to work at the farms just to scrape up enough for a meal.

I watched as spectators gathered by the sidelines, cheering their family members on. I scanned the crowd for my brothers to find them standing next to Da Xing, who flashed me a brilliant smile with a thumbs up.

Clang!

The bell rang once, signaling the start of the competition as everybody made a wild dash for the ingredients. I edged forward, wheezing as elbows jostled at my ribs and feet stomped on my shoes. I didn't have enough fight in me, and everyone was too desperate to care about manners. As they fought tooth and nail for their spices and vegetables, I stood by the sidelines, watching on weakly, helplessly reaching for some ingredients occasionally.

Finally, the crowd thinned out I hurried back to my station to begin the cooking. I frantically chopped up the onions, boiled the water, and prepared to knead the dough. This was bad− I was falling behind and most likely didn't have enough time. My heart was pumping violently, beating its way out of my chest. My head pounded as my hands began to shake, and my breathing became labored. How could it come to this? How could I let it come to this? No, I must focus. I mustn't fail my brothers or Da Xing.

I added more flour only to find that it was too sturdy and dry. I added more water only to find it too slimy and not sturdy enough. Tears of frustration escaped from my eyes the bell clashed once. I didn't have much time left. I pushed the contents of my dough into the coiling broth, wiping my tears away. This was better than one sloppy bowl of uncooked dough, right?

The bell clashed once again, and soldiers marched towards the cooking stations, escorting the judges. I began to sweat profusely, perspiration running down my shirt.

The judge sniffed at my bowl. "What is this? Why are they…so long?"

I fidget uncomfortably and my eyes darted towards Da Xing. He mouthed something at me furiously that I couldn't make out.

"No…dale?"

"Pardon?" The judge looked up.

"Uh− nodales." I blurted.

He inspected the bowl and gasped. "Such an invention! Noodles! Revolutionary!"

He waved over all the other judges, and they crowded the table, carefully inspecting the bowl.

"Amazing! How do you eat this?"

"I am simply astounded."

They shared a mutual nod, and faced me, beaming.

"We are pleased to announce that, due to your creativity and the amazing invention of this thing you call *noodles*− You are the winner of the Culinary Festival! Please head on towards the registration area to collect…" A well−fed man trilled.

But his words fell on deaf ears, as the realization hit me that I'd finally managed to drag myself and my siblings out of poverty. Finally, we could live the life we'd always dreamed of. I choked back a sob and croaked my thanks.

To this day, my brothers and I never take things for granted. But we never have to struggle anymore, and could finally sleep with our bellies full, with dreams that sing of a future instead of more food. All thanks to a bowl of no−dales.

The Umbrella Invention

Korean International School, Chan, Man Wai Vean − 13

It was like every ordinary day, walking from place to place underneath the blazing sun. Why does the sun have to shine so brightly on me? If only there was a tool that could protect me from the sun every single day it would be a miracle. I am Jing Xiao, also known as Queen Jing Xiao and I am the new queen for the next few years. I became queen last year after my mother passed, I had to do duties as a queen.

One of my favourite duties was walking around the temple and greeting most of the residents living in Xi'an. During the winter, it was much easier to greet the residents as most people stayed indoors due to heavy snow or the weather was too cold. But during summer, everyone works hard and stays outdoors which means that I have to greet them outside.

In Xi'an, January to March would be autumn which made it easy to greet the residents. Autumn wasn't too harsh and I could walk around without the sun staring right at my face. October to December would be winter, despite the weather being cold it was better than summer. Most residents stayed indoors since it was too cold to work outside, which was easy to greet the residents since most of them stayed indoors. Summer was from February to September which was the hardest time as the sun was literally underneath us. This won't do, I can't suffer anymore.

Around a month later, I made a competition called 'Create the best tool that protects you from the sun. Calling all residents who are inventors, the winner gets a wonderful prize.' I wonder who will come out with the wonderful invention of the tool that can protect us from the sun. As this tool will be used by me frequently, I have high expectations as the time limit for this project starts in February and it ends in March.

Fast forward to February, a month before the competition ends I decided to check out the competitors who joined in the competition. In total, there were roughly around ten contestants. Most of the contestants were middle aged men ranging from mid−twenties to late thirties. There was one contestant that looked rather old then the rest of the contestants , his name was Lu Ban and he was fifty years old. Most of the contestants looked down on him and even made fun of him as they thought he was too old to join the competition. I always thought that it was quite strange as Lu Ban never stood up for himself, he just takes in all the criticism and continues working on his tool.

The ending date of the competition is nearing, with a day left the contestants had to put their tool on display. All ten competitors were required to write a description of their tool and present it to all the residents and me. After presenting the tool, they had to bring it to 'The competition.' The competition was a small course made to see the durability and stability of the tool they invented.

With 12 hours left until the competition, most of the contestants added the last tweak to their tool before letting it out to the residents. The competition will last 10 days, one day per contestant. All the contestants were given numbers ranging from one to ten, this was given out by age. The youngest were allowed to go first, leaving out the oldest for the last day. For this competition I made it a public holiday for ten days so all the residents could give their full support to the contestants participating. The competition started, but the results were quite disappointing.

The first contestant brought out a leaf with a few pieces of cloth that was wrapped around it. 'This is my tool I invented for Queen Jing Xiao. Not only could this leaf protect you from the sun, it is also waterproof. I hope you choose my design as it is special, unlike the contestant which I'm sure no one considered while creating this tool.' Contestant one said, I wasn't very pleased with this design. The leaf had holes inside so some sunlight could come in, it was good but sunlight was still on my face. 'Overall, your design was overall pretty but it had many flaws which I disliked a lot.' I explained to contestant 1 . The design wasn't the best but we still decided to check out its skills on the tests we made. Inside the test, there were various challenges such as the wind test, water test and the sunlight test. Contestant one's tool did not work out well, the leaf was not water resistant and waterproof, sunlight proof and stable when the wind came. I sighed in disappointment, is it that hard to make a tool that could protect me from the sun?

After that, the event was over for the day. I was super irritated, I thought these ten contestants were very skilled in creating inventors but judging contestant one I'm not too sure anymore. What if the rest are also like this? I still have to continue this competition, I might just have to choose one randomly if none of them fit my standards. I shouldn't think negatively, there are still nine contestants and I'm sure they will do better than this.

I was wrong with that thought, the second to the ninth contestant all had similar designs. All 8 contestants used a small piece of cotton covering a light piece of wood. I was really frustrated after seeing that, I wasted 9 days of my life just to see the same design. After the ninth contestant, I decided to gather all contestants on stage. 'All ten of you have wonderful talent. But I would like to ask, did you guys copy each other? All ten of you had identical designs.' I said to them, but then I realised contestant ten did not do it yet. 'Contestant ten, You did not present your tool yet. Would you like to present a day early?' I asked. Contestant ten nodded his head, so we let him present a day early. 'Hello, I am Lu Ban and I am contestant ten. I am here to present the tool to Queen Jing Xiao. I was first inspired after seeing the poor children using a lotus leaf to cover them from the pouring rain but it looked like the lotus leaf snapped in half. After seeing that, I decided to make something that could protect everyone from the sun, wind and rain. The tool I made to protect you from sun, rain and wind is called an umbrella. I call it an umbrella because it resembles my wifes name which was the main reason why I had enough money to create the umbrella. The umbrella has a solid outline made from wood and is covered by a thin layer of waterproof silk. I hope that my umbrella will

pass the tests you provided' Lu Ban Said. I was very curious, this was the first contestant that named their tool and gave an explanation.

The small contest to see if the umbrella was durable has started. The results had me surprised, for the wind test it was very strong and firm. The umbrella did not lose any pieces of cloth, apart from that the umbrella did not break. Now that is impressive, this was the best tool I saw so far. The next test was the sun test, surprisingly it was sun resistant which means I could use it in the summertime. The last test was the water test, if the umbrella passes the test it means Luban tool would win. The water test started, amazingly the umbrella passed it! This means the umbrella Lu Ban made won the competition. Contestant 10, also known as Luban, you have won the competition! Your invention of the umbrella will be made for residents to use when there is harsh weather around Xi'an. Thankyou for your umbrella tool, we will use it wisely.' I said while applauding Lu Ban.

After the competition ended, we gave Lu Ban a luxurious life with his wife. We started creating umbrellas so we could use them during all four seasons, then summer came. I used the umbrella to greet all the residents around Xi'An, it kept me safe from the sun which I enjoyed a lot. The sun wasn't directly in my face anymore, the umbrella made it easier to walk around. Now I am very grateful to Lu Ban who made the umbrella. Now I can peacefully walk on the paths of Xi'An without any disruptions.

Chinese inventions of the past

Korean International School, Cho, Sungchan – 13

China is an enormous country with a diverse population and a wide range of jobs. Over the years, Chinese inventors have made many remarkable inventions that had a huge impact on both warfare and everyday life. Some of those are still used nowadays such as paper, printing skills, compass and even gunpowder. These are the most important inventions originally made in China that are still significant today. This writing will look at how paper and gunpowder were used in the past, how they were invented, and how they are still used in modern days, which will give a deep understanding of these inventions and appreciate their significance.

First of all, it's important to note the use of gunpowder in the past. Gunpowder is a kind of a powder that can explode if it is on fire. At the time when it was first discovered as an explosive substance, inventors used it as fireworks or in medical use. The mixture of gunpowder with various chemicals created colorful and visually stunning displays because it produced vibrant sparks and explosions. Also, gunpowder was sometimes used in traditional medicine because it was believed to have some medicinal properties. Due to this reason, it was used as a treatment for skin infections, wounds, and even digestive disorders. However, its medical use has largely been decreased over time due to a better understanding of health and safety. Later in time, gunpowder became very significant in warfare mostly used for weapons such as guns and cannons. The origins of these weapons goes back to ancient China, where the first gun was made out of a bamboo tube with gunpowder tied to a spear, known as a fire lance. Similarly, the first cannon was constructed from an iron tube, also developed from the fire lance. These innovations were eventually passed down to Korea, India and other Asian countries. As a result, knowledge of gunpowder reached countries in Europe and they made grenades and guns people know nowadays. To go back to the point, the introduction of gunpowder had a great contribution to warfare. The military became easier to defeat enemies faster and more effectively with these explosive powders and new weapons. While it is sad to mention that the invention of gunpowder contributed to the development of wars, it still remained useful for fireworks and certain types of rockets.

Moving on to how gunpowder was invented, it is traced back to inventors and medics who tried to create a medicine called "herb of immortality" during the Tang dynasty in the 9th century while the earliest recorded formula for gunpowder was during the Song dynasty in 11th century. The inventors first made gunpowder by mixing copper, zinc and tin together. However, this powder had too weak power to be used as weapons, as the amount of tin mixed in the gunpowder was too small. Consequently, it found its primary applications in fireworks and medicinal uses, as mentioned earlier. After the inventors found out how to produce and use gunpowder correctly, they started making weapons using explosions such as bombs and rockets which gave great impact in warfare. Although the early gunpowder was not as explosive as later ones, it was effective in ambushing enemie's territories. The development and use of gunpowder–based weapons marked a significant shift in warfare strategies.

It is true that gunpowder is still significant in modern times while technology has already developed a lot more than the time gunpowder was first invented. Gunpowder is still used for weapons or mining materials such as grenades or some types of bullets and fireworks. In addition, gunpowders can be used as fertilizers, dyes, and pigments and many other industries. All of the applications give its significance and practical purposes in specific industries and contexts.

Secondly, switching to the historical use of paper, paper is an invention completely different from gunpowder, and has become increasingly important in modern times. Paper is a material that is made in thin pieces mostly from tree logs and leaves, which is used to write, draw or print on it. Similar to gunpowder, paper had different uses than it has today. During its initial invention, it was mostly used to package things up. As time passed, its soft texture and light weight made it good for writing and drawing, as the paper that time was softer than the papers people use now. It was also used to keep tea leaves dry and also as toilet paper. In 751CE, the Battle of Talas happened and Chinese paper makers were captured as slaves, which is how the knowledge of paper making spread to the world. Different from gunpowder, the paper was spread in order from countries in the Middle East to other countries in Europe and then some of the countries in Asia. Interestingly, knowledge about noodles was also spread to the world in the same way at the same time. After paper was invented, the whole world changed because it

became very easy to write or draw something. Before its introduction, writing was mostly written on leaves or wood, which shows that paper was a huge revolution to the whole wide world with human civilization in it.

Paper was first invented by a person called Cai Lun who was first trying to make a soft and light piece of something that could be used for writing. Then he saw a view of a woman washing her clothes by a river. It sparked a thought in his mind about what would happen if plant fibers got washed, which is how he invented paper. However, first paper was a bit difficult. The inventor of paper had to separate fibers from hemp and flax, then transform them into thin sheets before shaping them into paper. It took place in the 2nd century of the Han dynasty. About 500 years later, Islam invaded China and captured paper makers, spreading the paper to different countries.

Explaining the use in modern days, paper has become too necessary for humans in many ways because of its wide range of applications. To mention some, it is very common to see papers in school, home, and workplaces. People rely on paper for tasks like creating books, preparing important documents and taking notes. Also, paper can be used for replacement of plastic because it is more environmentally friendly and causes less pollution than plastic products. Moreover, paper continues to be used in similar ways as the past, such as to wrap things up, make tea bags or as toilet papers too. Its significance and a wide range of applications make it an irreplaceable resource in today's world.

In conclusion, the inventions of gunpowder and paper in ancient China had an amazing impact on the world, both in the past and in modern times. Gunpowder made a big revolution in warfare by the development of powerful weapons and of military strategies to ambush. In addition to its important use in warfare, gunpowder also has uses in real life such as fireworks, medical use, and other various industries. On the other hand, paper changed the world by making revolutions in communication, arts and studying. It naturally came from packaging to writing, drawing, and printing. Paper has become a part of our daily lives and has been used for education, works, arts, and even eco-friendly products to plastic. The inventions of gunpowder and paper shows how inventors in ancient China were very creative and smart. While it may seem obvious that China has many inventors and that led to numerous inventions, the inventors themselves are still respectable for their innovations and huge impacts.

Peiyi and Noah

Korean International School, Kim, Jeewoo – 13

Peiyi felt fat drops of hot tears stinging her eyes. She leaned against the rough tree trunk, wondering what she did wrong to be punished so cruelly. It was like the universe was messing with her personally.

But as much as she wanted to continue crying and cursing the universe, she had to get up if she wanted to get out. She had spent too long walking around the forest that she wandered into trying to find a specific flower that could heal her mother's illness, and she could have *sworn* she saw the same tree five times.

"Hey," a boy's voice spoke quietly, "Are you okay?"

Peiyi flinched, startled by the sudden interruption of the silence. There was someone here in this horrid forest other than her? Was he lost too? Or… was he going to hurt her?

Suddenly feeling tremendously insecure, Peiyi took a second to quickly scan her surroundings, her loose black ponytail swishing through the damp air of the humid forest. Where was he even calling from?

As if to read her mind, the boy called out again, louder this time. "Up here, up the tree you're leaning on."

Peiyi looked up slowly, her breath getting caught in her throat at the sight of a boy her age. He had curly blonde locks messily perched on his head, freckles peppering his pale skin, and an innocent smile on his face as she studied his face, looking for anything suspicious.

"Who are you..?" she asked slowly, backing away from the tree, "And what do you want from me?"

The boy tilted his head, curly locks falling on the side of his face as he pondered her question carefully.

"Nothing, just…" he hesitated for half a beat, jumping down from his place on the tree. "It just looked like you needed help. And that's what I do. I help people who are lost."

Peiyi narrowed her eyes, but reluctantly settled for his answer. "So why are you here in the first place?"

The boy's smile stretched wider, breaking into a toothy grin. "I could be asking you the same thing, but I guess you have every right to know. But first, I have to ask you to keep this a secret between us."

His smile slid off his face as his light sea blue stared into her own chocolate brown ones. Peiyi gulped, a chill creeping down her spine at the intense gaze that stared into her soul. She nodded frantically.

"Good." the boy huffed, nodding in approval at her hasty nods, her ponytail still swishing around from the sudden movement. "Now where was I…"

⋆

"MOMMY!" a young boy screamed, tears streaming down his face in fat drops. "WHERE ARE YOU?"

The boy cried for his mother, the result of trailing off too far behind his family, distracted by the enchanting wingbeats of an elegant butterfly. He continued crying, rushing off into a random direction, hoping his mother would be standing there. His sight was blurred from all the tears, only running faster.

He ran as desperately as a hungry animal. Faster. He needed to get out of the forest. Faster…

SPLASH. The boy struggled, his arms and legs thrashing around. The boy cried out. Or at least tried to.

The corners of his vision started to blacken. The last thing he heard before losing consciousness was the melodic voice of a woman…

"Wake up." a gentle voice nudged its way into his consciousness..

The boy groaned. He wondered if he was in heaven.

"Wake up, Noah." the voice urged again. At the mention of his name, he woke. There was a glowing woman, a soft look on her face. Her delicate voice highlighted her eyes, her light blue eyes shining. Smooth, luminous hair floated around her.

"Noah…" the lady bit her bottom lip, then opened her mouth again. "You've drowned in the lake of my forest that I protect. And… I've decided to give you a choice."

The boy nodded, still disoriented from the whole drowning ordeal. What was going on?

The lady continued, smiling in pity at the child. "You can either go complete the story of your life in heaven or you can continue living… but listen carefully–"

Noah gasped, eagerly picking the latter without even trying to listen. But it was only then he knew the condition of the second option.

⋆

"So you're saying that now you're a spirit of this forest and you can't leave?" Peiyi asked, numb after the enormous load of information that had been dumped on her. At the corner of her eye, she saw movement and turned to face Noah, who looked like he wanted to blurt something out but was obviously very hesitant.

"What's up?" Peiyi asked wearily. Noah flinched, as if her speaking up first was unexpected.

He then opened his mouth, eyes searching her face. "So Peiyi…" Noah spoke, "What are you here for?"

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Noah sighed, nodding in acknowledgement. "So what it seems like to me, is… you're looking for the Compi Ashflower. And you need a safe way to go home without getting lost."

Peiyi bit her lip, nodding. While she hoped Noah would get her out of here, she also wanted to help Noah get out of here. He looked somewhat… lonely. He had longing trapped within his eyes.

"Well, Peiyi," Noah said, snapping her out of her trance. "Let's go visit the Goddess of the Moonlight Lake Forest. And hopefully, she'll help you get out of here before you run out of time."

Soon, they arrived at a breathtaking lake, the moon rippling on the smooth surface of the lake. Suddenly, Peiyi understood why this forest was called the Forest of the Moonlight Lake. She wondered how exactly Noah would get her of this forest and how he would summon the goddess of the forest.

"Well," Noah whispered nervously, startling Peiyi, "Here goes… Drink the water and close your eyes. If there's a flash of light, it means you can open your eyes. If there isn't, well… we've failed. Let's go."

Peiyi did as was told, though reluctant to drink raw lake water, but it didn't taste like mud at all. The water, for some reason, felt like liquid moonlight. Though she wasn't sure where that description came from.

Then, a flash of light. She quickly opened her eyes and found herself face to face with a glowing lady, blonde hair and startling blue eyes. She looked just like the description from Noah's story.

Peiyi realised that the woman was staring at her intently, with curiosity rather than hostility. She wasn't quite sure about what she felt. The ticket to escape was right in front of her. But why couldn't she take it?

Her beautiful peach lips parted to make equally as beautiful sounds. "Peiyi… I can see you are stuck in a dilemma between your own desires and your loyalty to Noah, who you've bonded with over the short time you've seen him. Well, all I can say is, the choice is yours. Take the flower home to your mother, or take Noah with you."

Peiyi gulped. The woman was very straightforward, and she wouldn't be able to live with the guilt…

Peiyi sighed. She knew what she would choose. She knew this was the right choice.

"I choose…"

⋆

Peiyi woke up after a bright flash. Did the goddess listen to her wish? She frantically searched around for Noah. He was there on the ground, flat on his back. Peiyi shook his shoulders, waking him up. He groaned, rubbing his eyes. He seemed confused. They were at the bank of the lake again.

"Noah… what's that in your hands?" Peiyi asked, a bolt of excitement striking through her spine.

"Peiyi…" Noah gasped, "It's the Compi Ashflower! You can−"

"We." Peiyi corrected. "*We* can go home. Let's go, Noah."

But Noah seemed confused. What was he waiting for? Then, just as he opened his mouth, something heavy thunked her leg in her pocket. *Huh?* Peiyi took it out.

A familiar melodic voice rang in her head.

Follow the red needle. It shall take you home. And Peiyi, Peiyi… everything will work out.

Just trust yourself.

⋆

And so, my dear reader, that is how Peiyi and Noah went back to the small town where Peiyi's mother lay, ill in bed. The Compi Ashflower did wonders on the treatment of Peiyi's mother's illness, and word had spread about the mysterious machine that Peiyi and Noah used to get back home. A name along the lines of compi−ash machine started circulating, and some of the best men took the compi−ash machine for study.

That, my friend, is precisely how the world's first compass was invented in China. How the *compi−ash machine* turned into the *compass* will be left to your imagination, and the only thing that can be guaranteed is that Peiyi and her family live happily ever after with a former spirit of a magical forest and an untold story between two children.

The True Power of Inventions

Korean International School, Kim, Yeonwoo – 13

Deep in the heart of Shanghai, China, in the towering skyscrapers and busy streets, a group of professionals led by the acclaimed Li Sha dedicated themselves, the Time Sculptors, to building a machine to recite and present a simulation of any time period through people's minds while simultaneously being in the present physically.

And tonight, it was to be introduced to the world.

The stadium was filled with the buzz of the crowd; among them was a young girl named Mei Ling, her curious, chocolate eyes glistening with amazement. She'd always been fascinated by ancient China's inventions, and the thought of seeing history come to life thrilled her.

Li Sha stepped onstage, her face bright with excitement. She stood onstage, the bulky, TV–like screen being pushed onstage by a few people. The room immediately fell silent.

She cleared her throat. "Dear esteemed guests, ladies, and gentlemen. Good evening, and welcome. I am grateful for the presence of so many of you here today and to have the opportunity to speak in front of you today."

The crowd cheered.

"Today marks the results of months of research and recovery of the past, and now we proudly present this simulator that allows us to explore the wonderland of the past, allowing us to explore the wonders of ancient China through a simulation."

She tapped its screen, watching it flicker a soft, ethereal glow and hum to life, the mixture of anticipation and exhilaration heavy in the air. Mei Ling's heart raced as she watched the screen shift.

Li Sha turned, scanning the crowd. Stopping to face Mei Ling, she said, "My dear, would you like to be the first to experience the wonders of the simulation?"

Mei Ling's eyes widened, and she nodded enthusiastically. She stepped onto the platform, her blood rushing with adrenaline. She adjusted the settings, and in an instant, Mei Ling found herself fading out of the stage and into ancient China…

Mei Ling stood in a bustling marketplace; everything about the place screamed vibrant—the colours, the scents filling her nose, and the chatter of merchants at work. She stood awestruck, taking in the sights before her.

The marketplace sold intricately and meticulously hand–carved wooden sculptures, the thin porcelain vases covered in detailed cobalt, and silk in vivid red, blue, and gold.

She ventured through the streets, surrounding herself with the sound of traditional music.

As the sun dipped behind the horizon, the sky turned a shade of vermillion and gold, and the day had come to an end.

Mei Ling's vision started to bring her back to the present, her heart still racing. Li Sha smiled at her, recognizing the spark of inspiration in Mei Ling's eyes. Then, she faced the crowd.

"The universe is a vast playground of opportunities. Dare to dream big, and the possibilities are endless."

Mei Ling stepped off the platform, and the crowd erupted in applause, echoing off the walls.

From that day onward, Mei Ling, inspired by the wonders she'd witnessed, dedicated herself to pursuing her dream of invention. She vowed she would become one of the Time Sculptors, and she would make history.

Even after many years have passed, her passion for discovering new things had driven her to explore the untouched parts of science and technology. With an even more bottomless hunger for knowledge, Mei Ling spent countless hours sitting at her cluttered desk, surrounded by piles of printed articles, gears, wires, and disassembled gadgets.

One day, while rummaging through a dusty, yellow book in a forgotten corner of the library, a folder packed full of paper fell out of the pages, the scribbled writing in blue, "Time Travelling To The Past." The contents of the cluster of notes were written in a barely legible scrawl about travelling back to any point in time and the endless possibilities of rewriting the past.

And so, deep within the darkest and oldest parts of the library, Mei Ling decided that she had found her sign to finally start on her lifelong quest to uncover the secrets of the mysterious and unclear past.

Intrigued, Mei Ling headed to her office, where the comfort of her desk and the clutter greeted her. And she dove into books, reading and fact–checking the notes, analysing, taking notes, theorising, and referencing other resources, even to the point that at times, she lost track of time in her research.

The more she discovered, the more she fell into the rabbit hole of the task at hand.

Continuing her research, she sought guidance from experts in various fields to gain their insights.

Her determination remained unwavering. She formed a team, building a laboratory equipped with advanced technology and instruments.

So once the creation was a complex masterpiece of cogs and gears, emitting a dim light, radiating with the promise of unravelling her curiosity about time. But she knew that to truly see if the time machine worked, she had to test that it really went to the past. It was the moment of truth.

Looking back at her past year's worth of work, she had fulfilled almost all her goals and dreams. She sighed, thinking back to Li Sha's words in the stadium that day.

"The universe is a vast playground of opportunities. Dare to dream big, and the possibilities are endless," recited Mei Ling, finding reassurance in the words.

With her invention in hand, Mei Ling set out on a risky journey. The clock was rewinded back a year, and she felt her body become light, like she was vaporising, with no weight on her body at all. Despite her fear, her body melted away the doubt, and her vision quickly ran away with her uncertainty…

When Mei Ling opened her eyes, her body felt light. Here, whatever little thing she did now could affect how the future could go on, and it could endanger her in the present, along with everyone in the universe.

She observed her surroundings; the place she was in was a closed library, just where she was set to be. The smell of books and the pitter–patter of the rain tapped on the windows of the moonlit library. Mei Ling navigated the familiar corridors until she found the library section that she was looking for.

She saw the particular dusty yellow book. She shook the book, expecting the slip to fall out. Nothing fell out. She flipped through each of the pages. Still nothing.

But as she put her replica next to the book, a strange energy emerged from the book. The room filled with a blinding glow as the time machine began to move, defying the laws of gravity. Reality itself seemed to bend and twist in its presence, as if it were lagging.

At the end, her eyes adjusted to the light, barely making out the outline of a piece of paper and a blue pen.

Mei Ling's hands shook with anticipation as she stepped closer to the piece of paper, her hand trembling with certainty.

With the blue pen, Mei Ling started writing. In unrecognisable handwriting, she wrote all the key things she remembered from building the time machine on the note, and she found herself putting the note in the book.

"Without me from the future going back to the past to write this, me back in the present would have never started this time–travelling machine," she thought. "If I don't put in this note now, it could potentially be dangerous for the present, since I altered the course of the future." She then concluded.

Putting down the book, she adjusted the clock's hands once more, propelling herself forward in time, returning to the present. When the world came into focus, she found herself once again back in the gleaming, sky–touching city. She had carried with her the success of the time machine.

She was just so close to reaching the final steps of her dreams ever since she was a child, but she knew that once exposed to the public without altering, it could potentially put the past, present, and future at jeopardy, if given the power to affect the future in the past.

She returned to her workspace, making further adjustments to the piece. This time, her goal was for the voyager to journey to any destination at any given point in time while having no effect on the present, future, or past.

Even though delayed by the adjustment to her new invention, Mei Ling introduced the invention to the public, dedicating the rest of her life to sharing the tales of China's inventions. She became a writer, documenting the visions of the past. Her books were widely known, being an inspiration for many.

And so, with a little alteration, the time–travelling timepiece became not just a tool of research but for inventions. Mei Li's journey had revealed that the true power of inventions were not only in their results but in the people they inspired.

The World's Worst Nightmare.

Korean International School, Ng, Wey Heng Wayne – 13

Ping Li was standing in a crowded street as thousands of people ran, screaming for their lives. Ping Li wanted to move, he knew what was happening, but yet, he couldn't. Suddenly, thousands upon thousands of winged monsters dived from the clouds and onto the terrified civilians below. As the screeches of the winged beasts mixed with the screams of the people, Ping Li finally began running along with all the people next to him. Drops of blood splattered on the ground and the bloody remains of corpses fell on the terrified civilians. Suddenly, a monster swooped in from above, grabbing Ping with its talon and carrying him off the ground before shoving Ping into its gaping maw.

Suddenly, Ping Li woke up on a bench in the lab with a cold sweat. He saw on a nearby clock that it was eight in the morning. He groaned and got up to get some coffee. Despite getting a good ten hours of sleep, Ping was anything but restful, Flashes of flames and blinding light through his mind while deafening screeches and the screams of terrified civilians echoed through his mind. After getting his cup of aromatic coffee, he sat down, turned on his laptop and got to work writing a report about his findings.

Project Destroyer is still underway. 70% of the water present in the test zone has been extracted. However, further research must be done on increasing the amount of water extracted in the area to more than 90% of the water molecules while decreasing the resources required to use the chemical.

Ping Li was editing his experiment data log when his lab assistant, Xi Lang entered the room. Xi Lang was a very bright student of Ping, but he was rather cocky and naive in his work. Ping Li raised his eyebrows and asked, "What took you so long to get here?"

Xi Lang was about to answer when suddenly, an alarm roared in the distance. Then, one by one, alarms started ringing and a panicked voice crackled from the speakers, "This is not a drill! I repeat, this is not a drill. All personnel must report to the aircraft hanger for evacuation. All military personnel, get into defensive positions."

As soon as the message entered Ping Li's ears, he gathered his laptop and ran out of the room with Xi Li a few steps away from him. Red alarms glazed the entire facility in an eerie red light. Ping Li ran into the elevator and got to the ground floor. It seemed that all was going to plan until a loud screech echoed through the reception area from a corridor. Everyone winced at the high pitched sound and covered their ears. Ping Li went to investigate the cause of the screech and went down the corridor to come face to face with a Cryaos, a Pterodactyl–like chimera with the tail of a scorpion and the head of a dinosaur.

Blood dripped from the Cryaos' snout as it perched on the corpse of a scientist. However, Ping Li attracted the Cryaos' attention. It stared at Ping with its bloodshot eyes before letting out a deafening roar and charging towards Ping Li. He ran for his life through the corridors until he hit a brick wall, blocking all Ping Li's escape routes.. He faced the Cryaos, ready to accept his fate when suddenly, a loud bang shook the corridor and the Cryaos stood still, its eyes in shock as it looked at its chest where a bleeding hole lay.

The Crayos collapsed with a loud thud and behind it stood Xi Lang, panting slightly and holding a shining pistol. "Not too bad for a scientist right?" he asked, grinning smugly.

Xi Lang helped his colleague up to his feet and together, they ran out of the maze of corridors and to the aircraft hangar, where the military personnel were loading the last people onto a helicopter, its spinning propellers ready to carry the scientists to the next laboratory.

Finally, as the planes took off, Ping Li looked out his windows to see the entire laboratory in flames and the silhouettes of hundreds of Cryaos flying, fighting what remained of the Laboratory's military. As the plane ascended into the clouds, Ping Li was able to drift off into a deep and uneasy sleep.

After what seemed like an eternity, Ping Li was shaken awake by Xi Lang, who told him, "Dude it's time to go. The plane has already touched down."

Ping Li moaned before drowsily standing up and stumbling into the new laboratory: A cave hidden deep in the Himalayas where all the brightest minds around the world, from America to Russia, were working to save China,

and by extension, the world from the Cryaos. Ping Li got to his room in the cave, before collapsing onto his bed in exhaustion.

The next day, Ping Li had to attend the monthly report meeting. After getting lost in the cave twice, Ping Li finally got to the meeting room. By then, everyone was seated. Ping Li took his seat and began listening as several military commanders reported about the situation in Beijing and Shanghai.

" What remains of the Chinese Government is in shambles and the Cryaos have taken Beijing after a two month long struggle and have begun assaulting the poorly defended Indian and Mongolian defense lines on their respective borders. The United States has begun preparing a nuclear strike on Cryaos to stop them before they begin invading the other countries. " a military commander reported.

Next, scientific researchers from several countries shared their discoveries with their fellow scientists. After more than two hours of listening to reports, it was time for Ping Li to report what they have accomplished in a week.

"Okay, so over the past month, Project Destroyer has made significant progress. The amount of molecules destroyed with the chemical has increased from the measly fifty percent to eighty percent. We are fairly certain that this weapon will be fairly effective against the Cryaos. However, we have several concerns for what will happen after the Cryaos are eliminated," Ping Li said. "We believe that this chemical will become a deadly weapon to whatever country the chemical is used on, just like the nuclear arsenal we have in our disposal currently."

All the military commanders and scientists nodded in agreement. They all knew how deadly the highly confidential chemical was. The ambassador for the United Nations stood up and said, "I believe that is all that we have. This meeting is adjourned."

Everyone stood up and walked out the door. After Ping Li left the room, he was almost tackled by Xi Lang. Ping groaned and asked Xi Lang, "What was that for? I just got out of this−"

Xi Lang interrupted him, "No! I just got the correct combination! The water molecules destroyed are one hundred percent!"

Ping's eyes widened and he exclaimed, "Really! " He dashed towards the lab with Xi Lang behind him.

Ping burst through the glass door and went to the experimentation site. Xi Lang put in a container filled with the Destroyer Chemical. The misty gas quickly filled the room, and all the water in it first turned into steam, then disappeared. Ping Li nodded thoughtfully, this looked very promising. Then, Xi Lang pressed a button on the control panel and a goat appeared from a platform under the test zone. The misty gas flooded the room once again, and the goat let out one last terrible bleat as all the water molecules in its body vanished, drying up. The meat drooped as the goat sank to the ground. Eventually, all that was less was dried skin covering dry muscles and hardened bone, dried out eyes stared out into space, both seeing and unseeing at the same time. It was horrifying to see this happen to a living being, and Ping Ling and Xi Lang looked at each other in shock.

After they recovered, Ping Li went to his laptop to begin typing the final report. He typed for hours on end until he reached the conclusion of the experiment report.

The Destroyer Chemical will most certainly be able to destroy the Cryaos. However it may come at the cost of Beijing and the other major cities in the monsters' control. This chemical weapon…" Ping Li typed. However, he could not find the way to end the report without it feeling grim and unreal. Finally, he settled on one message and finished typing the sentence. He finished typing the report and sent it to his superiors. Then, Ping Li walked out of the lab to get a cup of coffee.

After Ping left, Xi Lang took a peek at the report. After he scrolled through pages upon pages of information about the Destroyer Chemical, he finally found the conclusion, and the last sentence was the one that truly caught his attention. It read: *This chemical weapon could become the world's worst nightmare.*

How is toilet paper made?

Korean International School, Shim, Soomin – 13

A long time ago, there was a father and his daughter. Their mother (or wife) passed away when the daughter was 3 years old. The daughter, named May Lee, and her father, Bai Lee, lived in East China. May was an outgoing and imaginative girl who often made unconventional food, such as noodle castles or garlic cookies.

One day, while May was busy as usual, her eyes caught sight of a bamboo stick on the dining table that her dad had brought from the bamboo forest the previous month. Her mind quickly started working, and she got the idea to make "Dry Bamboo Slice Noodle." As the name suggests, she wanted to incorporate dried bamboo into the noodles, like a fishcake.

May's father was a merchant, so she couldn't live with him. He would travel every month to sell his bamboo baskets in another village, which required crossing two high mountains. He would return home after four weeks. Sometimes, if he had to leave immediately, they couldn't meet. However, May and her dad were not wealthy but also not poor because her dad had a job. May greatly admired her father and wanted to prepare a delicious and special meal for him when he was at home. She decided to put her plan into action in less than 2 minutes.

First, May tried to clean the dirt that was stuck to the bamboo. However, some dust wouldn't come off easily, so she decided to peel off the skin. Then she cut it into pieces the size of an adult's fist and steamed it until it became soft and tender. After finishing this step, she let it cool for two hours and then cut it into squares and dried it once more.

A few days later, her father returned home. May was excited to see him and wanted to give him his special Dry Bamboo Slice Noodle. She put the noodles in pork soup and added the dried bamboo. She served the noodles to her dad and eagerly waited for his feedback. However, his face went from happy to frowning after he bit into the bamboo slice. He immediately spat it out. It was tough and bitter. May looked disappointed and ran out of the room crying. Her father realized that he had made a big mistake, but it was too late. May decided not to make any more special food for her grumpy father.

The father wanted to apologize and make amends, but May avoided talking to him except for one request. She asked him to sell the extra bamboo slices as wallpaper. He tried to apologize to his daughter, but she quickly went to her room. Two days later, he went to Beijing to sell his products, including the bamboo slices (or bamboo wallpaper).

That winter was the coldest in years. It wasn't even December yet, but it had already snowed heavily, covering the roads with thick layers of snow. Father was on his way to the market when he realized how cold it was. Even the mice stayed inside their houses. Father felt the chill and wanted to go back home. However, it would be dark in a few hours, so he decided to rest at a tavern for the night.

When father arrived at the tavern, there was only one man who looked like a thief. Having met many people while selling his products, he had a sense for identifying thieves. He considered going to another tavern, but he was too tired to move, so he stayed.

After finishing his dinner, Father needed to use the toilet. However, he was concerned that the man who looked like a thief might steal his belongings if he left the room. So he tried to hold it in and eventually fell asleep.

In the dark of dawn, he woke up desperately needing to relieve himself. Reluctantly, he took his belongings and went to the toilet. After he finished, he searched for leaves to use as toilet paper. Unfortunately, there were none. He looked around and spotted something that resembled leaves — bamboo slices. He picked up some large slices and used them to clean himself. It turned out to be surprisingly comfortable and practical!

As soon as the sun rose, he went around the village promoting the bamboo slices as a substitute for wet wipes. The response was overwhelmingly positive! Everyone who used them praised their effectiveness. Everyone wanted to buy more, even at higher prices. Father returned home with a heavy load, not just of extra products, but also a substantial amount of money. He sincerely apologized to May for his rude behavior, and she accepted his apology. They lived happily ever after.

Quantum Journeys: A Tale of Invention, Betrayal, and Redemption

Korean International School, Tsang, Maurice – 14

An alarm blares and a hand slaps it to make it shut up. The owner of the hand crawls out of the warm, cozy cocoon of blankets and pillows and reveals he is a man in his late 20s. This is Frank, a Chinese man living in Hong Kong. He may not know this, but today he'll make a decision that will change not just his life, but the entire course of human history.

The year is 2026, and the tension between the superpowers has reached a near–boiling point. China and Nation 05, the second and first most powerful nations on earth, have cut diplomatic ties and the risk of atomic war has never been this threatening since the Cuban Missile Crisis. A little balance of power shift, a small decline in economic output, and one rogue soldier are all it would take to set the world ablaze.

Even so, life for the average person drags on. In Frank's case, it would mean going to his boring job as a Physicist. He arrives at the university, conducts experiments, engages in meaningless chatter with other, more passionate colleagues, conducts more experiments, and then goes home.

After a rather long exchange of greetings with the neighbours, Frank finally can enter his house. As he steps in, he can hear the sounds of video games in the background. "Yo, Frank! Back so soon? Haven't even finished the last level yet!" a voice yelled. Frank smiled. It was his roommate and friend John, who was always playing video games. He's a fun guy, if a little messy. The two friends played video games together for the next 4 hours, beating level after level together, as a team. However, unlike other nights, Frank did not want to repeat this routine for tomorrow, the day after that, and the day after that, repeating this daily cycle until he died. After completing the last level of the game, he just stares at the ending screen. "What's wrong?" asks John, confused.

An uncomfortable silence settled among them.

"I don't want to do this anymore." Frank groaned.

"What do you mean?" John inquired, "You–We, I meant, do this every day."

"Exactly! I'm tired of repeating this cycle over and over again! It's boring and makes me feel unfulfilled!"

"Well, shouldn't you feel grateful? Your life is very nice compared to everyone else's. You work a decent–paying job at a university, you have an apartment, you have friends, and you even have a girlfriend!"

"Yeah, but… This all feels so, so…boring! I wanted to be a physicist to make some sort of new invention to change the world, instead, I am here, wasting away my time playing video games until morning. I want to do something meaningful for once." Frank looks over to John. Suddenly, an idea pops into his mind.

"That's it! We'll invent something! We'll build a machine that does something and changes the world!"

John laughs. "That's great, how 'bout you go invent a teleporter so everyone can travel faster."

"That's genius, John! We will build a new teleportation machine and change the world!"

John stares back at Frank.

"You are serious about this. Really? Do you think some guy in a dinky apartment will be able to invent a device that millions of others with more resources couldn't? You are talking crazy, man!"

Frank sighs, "I have been told my whole life that I will be meaningless. As an accidental child, my parents would tell me that I wasn't meant to exist and that would mean nothing. I proved them wrong when I became a

physicist, but now I still feel my life lacks true meaning. But this! Building an invention will finally give meaning to my life, and also create an impact upon this world. C'mon, John, my old friend, why don't we just give it a try?"

He holds out his hand.

John smiles, grabs his friend's hand, and says, "Well, aren't you one for speeches! I'm in!"

For the next year and a half, the two men worked all day on their new project. Well, as much of the day that two working men with girlfriends can give, which, admittedly, is not much. Still, the duo manages to pull the project along. They construct prototype after prototype, with each one failing to achieve results. Despite his partner's cries of protest, Frank, summoning the mad scientist within him, keeps going with his invention.

Since building a machine that potentially breaks the laws of physics can cause at least some noise, the neighbors started questioning why on earth there were banging noises upstairs at 3 in the morning. Frank, ever so excited about his project, started blathering about the machine to his neighbours. Jack, the new guy, seems very interested in his machine, even requesting to see its tests, though Frank doesn't know why he would…

Anyway, on the 17th of November, 2027, the first successful test of the machine took place at Frank and John's apartment. Frank strapped a small, round device to his girlfriend Betty's wrist, and placed another identical device in the bathroom. Watching this strange test was John and Jack, who insisted on seeing the test. Frank activated the device and...nothing happened. Then a flash of bright green light encased Betty and she disappeared into thin air. Frank called for her, only to hear her voice in the bathroom, exactly where he had placed the second device earlier. There was a great cheer erupting from the living room. The machine worked! The impossible is achieved, Frank grabs his girlfriend and John to go out for dinner. After the three finish eating out, John and Frank return home and fall asleep. They have no idea what will happen next…

Frank woke up with a throbbing headache. *That's strange…*, he thought. He tries to move, but he can't. He's tied to a chair! Frank looks around. He is in a large room. He can see a few TV screens on the walls showing Betty and John tied up in similar rooms.

"Well, Well, Well, what do we have here?" a voice booms from the other side of the room. " Three inventors, eh? Congratulations on inventing a new way of transportation."

"WHO ARE YOU?" Frank yelled, "Why did you kidnap us?"

"Don't you recognise me?" The man walks into the light, "Your neighbour Jack?"

Frank is speechless.

"As for why, I'm a 05 spy. The device you made will give the Chinese government a massive advantage over Nation 05, and I simply cannot allow that. So right now we will ask you to give us the blueprints of the machine, or we will result in using less civil methods of interrogation."

"DUDE, what are you on about? You kidnapped me, my girlfriend, and my friend! Of course, I'm not going to tell you!" Frank yelled.

"Alright, then have it your way."

Frank was then tortured for half an hour. By the time they were done with him, he had lost a tooth and was bleeding. Jack asked him again, "Now have you changed your mind?"

"HAH! I'm not selling out my invention anytime!" Frank laughs.

"If you don't talk, maybe we'll have to torture your little girlfriend. Maybe then you will tell us!"

Before Frank can answer, the lights in the room suddenly shut down. Gunshots and yelling were heard next. Frank can feel the ropes tying him to the chair loosen and escapes, running out of the room. He sees John and Betty exit from their rooms and into the same corridor as his. Without time to embrace, the three run to the end of the corridor. They stop in the middle to retrieve the machine in a room. As the three crash through the door, they realize they are on an open balcony. They see a helicopter hovering near the edge.

"Get on!" The woman in the chopper yells. Betty takes one of the devices and hops on the chopper. They then hear gunshots and see Jack emerge from the doorway, holding a pistol. With fury in his eyes, Jack raises his weapon and shoots Frank in the leg. John, thinking quickly, slaps the other teleporter on his wounded friend and activates it, sending Frank into the helicopter. A hail of bullets rain upon John as Jack empties his entire magazine into his flesh. Frank can only watch as his best friend is killed.

Months later, Frank is on his way to a tech convention to showcase his invention. The complex Jack and his men had taken him to was an old mall and the government was only alerted when a man inside Jack's group tipped them off. The group itself was a Nation 05 nationalist group operating around the world. The memories of the compound hurt as they turn to memories of John and his death…The car stops, and the door opens. A hand extends, and a voice is heard: "Welcome Frank, inventor of the teleporter!"

New Tales of China's Inventions

Marymount Secondary School, So, Lok Ching – 12

The festive atmosphere filled the air during the Chinese New Year. You could find strips of red paper, Chinese lanterns, and couplets everywhere. Every family was having a big feast at home. Yet, behind the red–lit streets and laughter, there was always a crowd of starving beggars in torn clothing being ignored. In the eyes of the reluctant celebrators, they were just a horde of frequent targets to be bullied or attacked.

Sofie and Max couldn't bear to see the homeless suffer like this. This is how Sofie and Max came up with the idea of a new invention, to help the hungry and homeless of the city, by inventing a 'food conversion machine'. They had already pictured how the machine would benefit the homeless community. It would work by converting natural resources, plants, and raw ingredients into nutritious meals. They designed a system that would sort and process the food.

For the following months, Sofie and Max had been working hard to design the machine. They first drafted the prototype using 3D designing software. The outer layer was made of durable material, protecting the fragile parts inside. It looked like a vending machine, but in fact, it was equipped with a detailed robot food maker within.
"Well, the design and shapes are done now!" exclaimed Sofie.
"How are we going to turn natural waste into food? It's humanly impossible!" Max snapped in frustration.
They then underwent thorough research on all the topics related to chemical food making, "I have the solution! We can move on and speed up the process now!" Max blurted out.

To bring their invention to life, they needed donations and support. In the bustling streets of Shenzhen, they set up striking posters and signs all over. But the passers–by were all tied up with work and were too reluctant to stop by, never mind paying any interest to their 'impractical invention'. Fortunately, they bumped into a news reporter, Sheila Kwan, and she was genuinely gripped by the idea and was eager to bring it to the headlines.

Max and Sofie's invention spread viral like wildfire. They were constantly approached by local charities and keen donors who were interested in their invention. They obtained more than 5 million dollars in less than 2 months and were able to create their first production line.

Although they faced a series of obstacles, for example, occasional technical errors, and issues of performance optimization, their resilience and determination drove them to charge forward. They collaborated with experts to further improve the machine to its maximum value. They made it more efficient and affordable. They also partnered with world–renowned engineers, nutritionists, and environmental experts to refine the design and functionality.

With the help of the city government, they identified areas with high populations of homeless people. Strategic locations were selected, such as districts with a high density of beggars, where they could serve the most people in need.

After a few months, they could already see the positive impact that the food conversion machines brought to the community.

"Homeless individuals and families no longer have to rely solely on handouts or discarded scraps to survive, they have access to nutritious meals that meet their dietary needs! They can live with dignity!" triumphed Sofie after looking into the generated data.

Their invention successfully provided the minority with a sense of hope.

Encouraged by their success, Sofie and Max continued their journey of innovation. In the end, they not only provided nourishment to the hungry but also ignited a sense of empathy and unity in society. The food conversion machine became a symbol of hope, proving that with determination and a belief in the power of innovation, individuals can make a difference in the world.

As the streets of Shenzhen continued to shine, the invisible became visible, and the forgotten found solace in the embrace of technology and compassion.

New Tales of China's Inventions (The History Of Printing)

Marymount Secondary School, Tin, Ming Yan – 12

"William, pack your bags. We'll be staying at grandma's for the night.""

My mom's blaring voice echoed from the kitchen as a sigh escaped from my mouth, "can I stay at home instead?"

"No," she shrugged and turned to me with a sharp glare, "it's been a while since you've seen her, and you might find something you like in her mini library."

Dragging my bags to the trunk, I sank into a seat near the back of the car. Grandma's house was as small as the size of a storage room, and it would hardly fit all five of us — her, my parents, my brother, and I. Her dirty, small attic was full of rusted pillars and icky spiderwebs scattered over the walls – simply thinking about all of us being squashed in the cramped space was already making me nauseous. I couldn't imagine us staying there for more than an hour.

After a long car ride which felt like ten thousand years, our destination came to view. My droopy eyelids felt like they could shut any minute.

Grandma's house was located far away from the city, amidst large trees and bushes. There were no malls or convenience stores near her house, and sometimes it made me wonder how she had survived all these years.

With a grateful grin and softening eyes, she led us into the house and served us plates of her freshly baked apple pie — one thing I knew about grandma was that she was an awesome chef.

Gobbling up all the food, something popped up in my mind — grandma's mini library! I never knew it existed, but I guess mom did.

"Grandma, can you show me your mini library?" I pleaded, nudging on her shoulder with a slice of pie still stuffed in my mouth. Since there wasn't any Wi–Fi here, I guess I'd enjoy some books instead

"Oh, dear, of course," a warm smile stretched across her face as she gestured upstairs.'

Following her footsteps, we arrived in front of her old attic. "So… where is it?" I paced around impatiently.

"It's here," the attic door creaked open as she stepped inside. In a split second, the wooden shelves were filled with heaps of books and the spiderwebs and roaming bugs located at the back of my mind disappeared in a click. It was like I was watching a magic show, but it was all real.

"There," she said, "anything you want to know about, we've got it."

"Grandma, I'm doing a Chinese history project on old inventions, majorly, on how printing came to be. Are there books about this?" I glanced around, my voice slightly trailing off at this absolutely magical sight.

"Of course!" She chuckled, murmuring incomprehensible words below her breath, and a sage–green covered book appeared between us and dropped to my feet.

I glanced at grandma, then down at the book. I picked and flipped open the first page, expecting to either see the big bold words "CONTENTS" printed at the very top or "Chapter One".

But it was fully blank. With a tiny light gaping between the pages.

As I continued to turn each blank page with confusion, the light within grew stronger. Although it started blinding my eyesight, I couldn't get myself to stop flipping through the pages, trying to understand the strange phenomenon.

The last thing I saw before I completely blacked out was a giant block of light flashing in front of me and grandma's worried face, mouthing something I couldn't comprehend.

Once I came back to my consciousness, staring at the back of my eyelids, I wondered if I was lying on dry stones. A cold breeze blew, and I felt sick. "Where am I?" I wondered.

Taking a deep breath, I snapped open my eyes, and caught sight of a tall man standing near a stack of yellow cloth. Within seconds, I heard bustling noises all around. Glancing up from my dreaded body, I realised that I was covered in a traditional blue robe I hadn't been wearing earlier, and everyone else had similar outfits.

That's when I realised I was no longer in Hong Kong. Or even, in the year 2023.

I couldn't believe what I was seeing, so I slapped my arms, then my cheeks. With a bewildered gasp, I came to the realisation that this was reality. I dragged myself out of the spot I was in and walked towards the crowd.

"Uh, hello," I tapped on a man's shoulder, "Where exactly am I?"

"What?" His eyebrows knitted together and a puzzled look displayed on his face.

I decided to shrug it off and ask another question, "Nevermind, what are you doing?"

"Inventing," he said, not taking his eyes off from whatever he was doing, "I'm trying to make lives easier by copying words and pasting them on another surface.

Seeing the proud look on the man's face, I knew he must've been the first to invent printing!

"Can you tell me about your idea?' I asked eagerly.

"Alright," he continued, "I'm carving these stone blocks into different words and shapes, then I'll ink them."

"How are you going to paste the words on paper, then?"

"I'll chop off the stones and paste them on to cloth," he explained briefly.

"That's interesting!" I exclaimed, gathering stones from the corner and handing it to him, "how many more characters do you have left?"

"Definitely more than a hundred, this is heavy work," he sighed, taking the blocks and carving a new word on it.

"Can I help?"

He eyed me up and down, and hesitated for a moment, before giving me a jar of ink.

"Pour the ink in these carved stones, and make sure to pour carefully.," He demonstrated.

"No problem," I smiled and took the materials. We spent the evening helping each other, and he taught me so many new things — that's when I remembered I didn't belong here.

The same block of light appeared in front of me and crashed into us.

Seconds later, I landed on the floor of Grandma's attic.

"Grandma!" I exclaimed, pulling her in for a hug.

She grinned warmly, “did you find everything you needed to know?”

“Yes, yes I did.” I smiled back.

My parents and brother stood behind us and stared blankly at me, “when did you come back?

The Mahjong Legend

Marymount Secondary School, Wong, Hei Cheng Courtney – 13

"A putrid smell filled my nostrils as I approached the building.

I grabbed a small box made of styrofoam – my last delivery of the day – and reluctantly stepped towards the building. All the way, I heard the sound of mahjong tiles clacking together. This Tsim Tsa Tsui apartment building looked old, like it would collapse at any moment.

Clack, clack, clack.

How could the people here withstand this smell?

I brushed away my thoughts and walked up the staircase to the fourth floor. With every step, the staircase responded in turn with a creak. I always loved old buildings. They were usually filled with elderly people who gave you something in return for your time, like a story from their past.

There was only one flat on the fourth floor. I rang the doorbell. Even though the clacking sounds of mahjong tiles were coming from inside the flat, the residents heard the bell. The door's hinges squeaked open, and a hand shot out. Its fingernails cracked and its blood vessels bulged out of its back. In its tight grip were banknotes. As I reached for the banknotes, it placed its finger on the back of my hand, sending a bout of electricity down my spine. Startled, I drew my hand away and gave it the food, making sure to keep some distance between us. After the transaction, the door slammed in my face, and I was left standing outside, frozen from the interaction. I was sure my colleagues have had weirder experiences than this, though. So, I let it retreat into a corner of my mind while I drove away, back to the restaurant.

I thought that would be the end of it. I was wrong.

Back at the restaurant, I breathed a sigh of relief. Everything looked normal. The tables and chairs were in place. Dinner service had ended so one was manning the cashier, but everything was neat and tidy, from the cash register to the worn-out pencils in the pencil jar. I opened the cash register. The little drawer shot open, revealing the fruit of the hard work all my colleagues put in today. It wasn't much, but this was what sustained us all. Of course, I know, as I always do, that people don't recognize us – the backbone of society. I reached into my pocket for the banknotes. To my surprise, only blank sheets of joss paper came out.

I frantically searched my pockets for the missing banknotes. My wallet, my keys, my phone…I spilled the entire contents of my pockets onto the table, but no banknotes.

Just then, the little plastic pencil jar fell to the floor.

Clack, clack, clack.

Even when the pencils came to a stop on the black and white tiles, the sounds went on. It didn't sound like a pencil or a plastic cup either. More like…mahjong tiles.

Out of the corner of my eye, a man in black was sitting at the table farthest from the doorway. However, when I turned my head to look at him, he had disappeared. I don't want to bring him up, but he looked a bit like our father."

"...And that's what happened yesterday," I say.

I hold my phone closer to my ear. "Can't you hear it? That clacking sound?"

After a short pause, a voice drifts out of my phone's speakers. "Brother, Dad passed away from cancer when you were 8. Maybe you should go see a psychiatrist?" The voice says.

I couldn't answer.

To break the silence, he asks "Oh, have you seen the news? Apparently, a headless corpse was found with fresh food inside its body. Creepy, huh?"

A part of my brain starts to panic. I hang up and turn on the TV in my room.

The announcer's upper body appears on the screen. "Breaking news!" she says, calmly. "A three−day−old decapitated corpse was found with freshly digested food inside its intestines on the fourth floor of a Tsim Tsa Tsui apartment building, where a strong stench had been reported." On the screen, a picture of the old apartment building I visited yesterday appeared. I turn off the TV, wanting to spare myself the sight.

Clack. Clack. Clack.

The sound has grown louder. I can feel it too. They − the monsters − are scratching at my door and my window. I can see their silhouettes through the walls. The man I saw…was he behind this?

I dial a familiar number on my phone.

"Dad…"

"The number you have called cannot be reached right now."

I tell him everything, from the visit to what is outside.

"I wish you were here," I say, sadly.

Suddenly, my dad's voice rings out from my phone. "I am here, son."

For a moment, I'm frozen in shock. I had a rather peculiar habit of calling my father's old phone number, as a way of remembering him. I never thought he'd answer.

"Dad? Dad!"

"Beep−"

Clack. Clack. Clack.

Everything feels blurry. The lamp on my bedside table is flickering. Suddenly, the man in black appears and puts his hands over my eyes. Despite my attempts to stay awake, my eyes close, and I fall into a deep sleep.

In my dreams, I see a man who looks like my father. In a white room, he sits opposite me on a wooden chair.

"Son…I'm sorry for scaring you." He begins, "But there is something I need to tell you."

I don't hear anything except his voice. It's been a while since I've heard the sound of silence. The air smells amazing, too. It's sweet and fresh. "Dad?" I exclaim.

"Yes, son. I'm sorry for leaving you, your mother, and your darling brother, but I've watched over you every day. Please forgive me…you've always been my favorite son." He says, quietly.

I want to go over and hug him, but I can't move from my chair. Instead, I resign myself to staring at him in shock and awe with tears falling down my face.

"Dad…It's okay. I've always loved you, and so has my brother." I say.

"I'm glad to hear that. Now, I need to tell you why I'm here," He begins, "I am a spirit now, and some being has cursed you. That's why you're hearing the clacking noises. So, I'm here to save you.'

"They've caught on to us! We're running out of time!" He hurriedly exclaims. "Stay safe, okay, son?"

As he finishes speaking, the room fades into black, and I wake up, tears smudged onto my pillow.

CLACK. CLACK. CLACK.

The sound has gotten louder now. They must have gotten closer.

Dad is sitting on my bed, smiling warmly. He rises, beckoning me to follow. "You'll get rid of the curse for me, right?" I say, eagerly. He nods, and turns around.

He walks to the door, motioning to the handle. "I've been hearing…things. Is it really safe out there?" I ask. He nods, and I place my hand on the handle. "Are you sure about this?" He doesn't say anything. Instead, a sick smile appears on his face.

Suddenly, an intense bout of pain surges through my body. I drop to my knees, holding the handle for support. It feels like my heart is bursting out of my body. The aching bubbles up inside, never getting released. I feel like I'm going to die.

I grab the door handle tightly, trying to get back on my feet. Just then, Dad pushes me. I hold on to the handle, causing the door to open under my weight. I land on the floor, paralyzed with fear.

Shadows in various colors burst into the room, like vomit. They trample over me, crushing my limbs and leaving bruises all over my body. Every time I take a breath, pain pulses through my chest.

CLACK. CLACK. CLACK.

Suddenly, a feeling of dread comes over me as a shadow steps near my paralyzed body. It kneels down with a smirk. "So this is that gambling addict's way of paying his debt, huh? How…pathetic," it says.

"W—what do you mean?" I ask, weakly.

"It's like a transaction. Pain for money." It says. "Now…since you're his favorite son, it's all up to you."

"Who will pay the ultimate price?"

Aspirations

Nord Anglia International School, Chan, Brady – 12

The ones who are crazy enough to believe they can change the world are the ones who do. The year is 3000 AD. Humans have colonized the entire solar system, and new, incredible inventions are being made at an unprecedented rate. People live on planets and moons alike, and thousands of space stations of all shapes and sizes decorate the skies of even the most remote planets, but while the entire solar system has been explored, no soul has ever travelled beyond and made it back alive.

Kai Wang, an aspiring pilot and inventor, comes from a long line of technological geniuses – and he is no exception. His ancestry can be accredited with many great inventions, such as the compass, the rocket, and the spaceship. Since his father was lost, trying to fly his spaceship past the Great Rings, which marked the edge of the solar system, when Kai was only a child, it has been Kai's goal to complete his father's mission and carry on the Wang legacy. He began working on his own spaceship, with parts from his father's projects, and anything else he could put to use, when he was only a teenager. He learned from the work of all of his ancestors, dating back hundreds of generations, but also adding his own creative flair. Once he was done with school, his spaceship became his primary commitment. He was patient and determined, constantly perfecting and refining his work, day and night, until it was immaculate, pouring his blood, sweat and tears into what he viewed not only as his life's work, but the culmination of everything his ancestry worked to accomplish: the next great Chinese invention.

A warm hand caressed a young Kai's face as he looked up at his father. "I'm gonna be an astronaut!" he declared, "Just like you!"
His father chuckled, stroking Kai's hair, "I'm sure you will buddy." Kai closed his eyes, taking in all of his father's features: his warm smile, his kind eyes, his deep, contagious laugh. The laugh that always brought a smile to his face. It was beautiful. But it wouldn't last. His father climbed into the cockpit of his ship and ruffled Kai's hair for the last time. "I love you Kai," he said. And then he was gone.

With one final strike of the hammer, Kai exhaled, exhausted, yet exhilarated. He had finished his spaceship. There was nothing left to improve. At first, Kai was incredulous. There was always room for improvement. There was always something he could do. Except this time, there wasn't. Kai inspected the ship, front to back, top to bottom, several times, but it was simply flawless. He even went for a few test runs, with exemplary performance. There was just one more thing that he needed to take care of.

As Kai arrived at his mother's house, he turned his head upwards. The sky was thick with traffic, and beyond that, he could make out the silhouette of a spaceship, tearing through the sky. He closed his eyes imagined himself there, traversing the many planets of the solar system. Then, with a deep breath, Kai turned around and rang the doorbell. The doorbell was becoming less and less common, as were many other, more "primitive" things, but Kai's mother preferred things the more old–fashioned way, and she never let anyone tell her what she could or couldn't do. It was one of the many things Kai admired about his mother; she always did things her own way, a virtue few people still had. Kai's mother opened the door. She looked him up and down and embraced him. "It's good to see you Kai," she said, "Make yourself at home."
Kai grinned, "I got these for you," he said, revealing a small, cylindrical object. He pressed a button, and shimmering purple flowers erupted from the top, wild, yet graceful. They shone like diamonds in the night, as if they were coated with glitter. He smiled and offered to go get a vase, but as his mother told him where to find one, he noticed her voice breaking, ever so slightly, and as he returned with it, he was dismayed to see tears welling up in her eyes. Kai hurried to her side, setting down the vase. "What's wrong?" he asked gently.
"It's finally time, isn't it?" she asked, in a small voice.
Kai's feet went cold. "I don't know what you're talking about," Kai replied, but it was a lie. He hated seeing his mother that way, but he just couldn't give up on his dreams. And both of them knew it.
"I've been dreading this day for so long," his mom continued, "But I knew it would come. I was just so scared that I would lose you like I lost your father, but now I've come to see that I can't force you to stay here. It's time to let you spread your wings."

Kai was at a loss for words, his mother, who was always overprotective, who was always caring and always put his needs over her own, was willingly letting him into the unknown, even though he was all she had left. "Mom, are you sure?" he asked, "Isn't this a really big decision?"
"It is Kai, but I've been thinking about it for a long time, and I'm not going to be the one holding you back anymore, because as I love you for my sake, I love you more for yours. I want you to be happy," She flew into his arms and embraced him fiercely, "I don't care if you take 6 days or 60 years, I'll always be here waiting for you."
"I'll be alright Mom," Kai fought back tears, "I promise."

After weeks of flying and countless pit−stops, Kai reached Neptune. At first, it was only a tiny, blue ball in the distance, but it was getting bigger by the minute. Kai was ecstatic, but the closer he got to it, the harder it became to steer. Something was wrong. Suddenly, Kai was thrown backwards in his seat. His head hit the headrest and he spiraled out of control. He made a pitiful attempt to grab the controls, but his arms felt like jelly. Unable to move, he wondered if his dad had felt the same way when he was lost. The more he resisted, the more helpless he felt. He shut his eyes. There was nothing he could do. It was over.

Kai woke up. He was lying in a patch of grass. "Hey buddy," his father said.
"Dad?" Kai asked, scrambling to his feet, "Is it really you?"
"Yes Kai, I'm here," his father replied reassuringly, spreading his arms.
Kai broke down in tears, embracing his father fiercely. "Am I dead? Is this heaven?" Kai asked.
"That's up to you," His father said, "Because you're not dead just yet."
Kai was sobbing violently, "I just want to be with you. It's not worth it. I don't want to fight anymore."
"No!" His father snapped, startling Kai, "That's where you're wrong. You have your mother, who is going to wait, patiently, for the rest of her life, for a day that never comes, if you don't act now! Is that really not worth it? You need to embrace the struggle, and give it everything you have, because what you've got is worth it! Believe me, there are millions out there, who would give anything to be in your situation. To have a mother who loves them. That's what you've got, and that's worth fighting for. And one day, you might have a wife, you might start a family, and if you're lucky, who knows, you might have children, who will be your entire world! That's the beauty of life, and you'll never know it if you don't fight for it. Now comes the time when you've got to dig deep and find the courage within yourself to keep going!"
Tears flowed like a river, down Kai's face, "I'm not brave enough, Dad, I'm scared."
"Kai, being brave isn't about not being scared. It's about being scared and doing it anyways!"

Kai gasped. Suddenly, as he orbited Neptune and reached the other side, he could move again. Instead of fighting Neptune's gravity, he could work with it. He just had to wait for the right moment. There it was. Fighting the sickening feeling in his gut, he grabbed the steering wheel, jerking it to the right, and stepping on the pedal. Suddenly, he rocketed forwards, and as he approached the Great Rings, he closed his eyes and took a deep breath, thinking about what his dad had said. "Time to be brave," he told himself, pulling the lever on his right, and surging forwards instantly. Kai was blinded by the colors as he achieved lightspeed for the first time in human history, hurtling into the unknown, terrified to the very core, but doing it anyway.

Flight of the Golden Kite

Nord Anglia International School, Fall, Nia – 13

Skies splashed with blue, amber and peach surrounded the far city of Weifang. The pitter–patter of tired footsteps, heavy puffing, and small ceaseless chatter filled the desert air. Beating down upon Marco Polo's face, the sun's rays illuminated the golden hues of the dunes that stretched endlessly into the horizon. As if murmuring secrets, the wind bore tales of ancient civilizations and hidden treasures buried beneath the shifting sands. Sweat, grit, muck; the lad's face was smothered in filth from the gruelling expedition. Heaving once, twice, a third time and more, the resistance underfoot left Marco apathetic, and wondering, "Is it *really* worth it?" But, on he would trek in search of stories, inventions and adventure.

Soon enough the horizon turned rust, tangerine, and pumpkin and Marco and his crew did what they could to protect their eyes from the sandy onslaught. Clumps of dust, soot, and smut zipped past the tips of their ears, their robes billowing in the fierce wind, they could see as few as twelve inches ahead. Their path had been swallowed by sand. Howling penetrated the vast desert, burning their faces and sun–burnt skin while stuffing their mouths with grit. They huddled, pushed, panted in a desperate search for shelter and respite; they would not give up.

Swoosh, swish, swash, a vibrant plumage splashed across Marco's eyes. Like cascades of molten gold, fiery red, and liquid honey the feathers flowed widely, unfolding their wings in the heart of the sandstorm's deafening embrace. Adorned with intricate patterns to draw out its features, its wings spanned formidably as it navigated treacherous gales with grace and agility. With every beat of its magnificent wings, the kite climbed with a dancer's finesse. Muscles outstretched, it battled the orange tinge engulfing the storm. Akin to a skilled acrobat, the kite twisted, turned and weaved its way through the chaotic tapestry. Light filtered through its feathers, catching stray rays from the storm's heavy veil.

Marco examined in awe the kite that had so easily conquered the vigorous storm. The kite was not just a work of art; it was a masterpiece of engineering. Its tail, long and graceful, swayed in the wind, providing stability and balance. The kite's head, majestically adorned with a mane of brightly coloured ribbons, gave it an almost regal appearance. The crew gaped at the marvel, like a smudged exquisite gem. The sturdy bamboo frame had been passionately and intricately woven together into a lattice–like structure and covered in a vibrant silk, adorned with scintillating designs of mythical creatures and celestial beings.

Marco listened carefully, he could hear the kite purring, eager to take flight.

The intricate beauty of the creation masked the sudden shift in the intensity of the storm. Dark clouds loomed ominously and the wind shook with an almost malevolent force. It was against this backdrop of chaos that the figure steering the kite became terrifyingly visible.

When juxtaposed with the terrified screeches of the body affixed to it, hearts leaped, bones tensed, and jolts electrifying those below. Scared screams ruptured eardrums as the body was pulled from the heavens. The whirlpools of sand dissipating across the landscape obscured any cries for help. Gazing upwards at the creaking, groaning tangled bamboo mat, shouts of concern cut between the uproar. Polo tried in vain to reach into the subdued crimson but the kite was fading, falling. The man was plummeting.

The body glued to the kite screeched in terror, their cries biting through the sandstorm. The crew's hearts raced as the kite jerked and swayed by the relentless ambush of swirling sand. Toying with the man's fate, the heavens wrenched him north, south, east and west. Screams, shrieks, screeches, squawks …until smash and silence swamped the men's ears.

The kite crashed through the desert sand, forcing a plume of dust to engulf everything in its path. Marco rushed forward, his heart pounding a jagged rhapsody, his thoughts in a jumbled mess. When the dust had settled, Marco and his crew approached the fallen kite with trepidation. What they saw would forever be etched into their memories. Battered and bruised, the spawling man lay gasping for breath.

Marco whispered "Hello?" gently. Despite the sweat and grime drying on his face, the man appeared to smile wryly. “Uh−augh, hello” he mumbled. Marco’s face eased but his crew were still terrified. An uneasy scent filled their nostrils and made them reel: blood, gore, ichor, his skin was drenched in gashes. “Can you tell me your name, u−uh−what’s−your−name?"

“Zhang, my name is Zhang or−r the kite master of Weifang… ha−*ow*!” the man tried with a laugh to say, but quickly lurched back as if his ribs had just been subject to a nasty uppercut. “Uhm, just kidding no−no one calls me that or has any belief in my k−kites. I’m nothing but a failure in their eyes…”

In the meantime, the crew had pulled themselves together, and there was the sound of busy footsteps and screams of “Get the bandages”, “On it”, “Water, Water, we’re going to need water, stat!”, “Quickly, c’mon!”, “Here, here, here!” Lifting a hand to his furrowed brow to defend his eyes from the winged sandhills, Polo refused to see failure, “You, a failure? I don’t believe it. That invention there”, raising a finger to point at the now shredded kite in exclamation, “is an absolute triumph!" Under the dying sun, Marco spotted Zhang’s lips slowly crack upwards forming a tired grin.

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“It’s a bird?”

“Yes, before being totally destroyed, the kite had been constructed to imitate the shape and structure of a bird's wings. A framework of bamboo rods had formed the backbone of the kite, providing stability and support. These rods had been meticulously and painstakingly arranged, woven, and connected with durable silk strings forming a durable and flexible structure. Simple really.”

“Simple? Quite the contrary. It’s nothing short of sophisticated genius.”

“Well, to be honest, I’m not sure. Theoretically, the pilot would use the control handles to manoeuvre the kite through speed. By pulling on the handles, the pilot could tilt the wings of the kite, adjusting the angle of attack and generating lift, allowing the kite to climb higher or descend gracefully as desired though we’ve just seen how that went…”

“Zhang, don’t you worry. Manned or not, kites are the future! Their elegance, capacity, and beauty is certain to take the world by storm!”

His gaze fixed on the green grass of Weifang on the shore, his pen, and paper in hand, Marco felt excited.

- Entry #356
- Treasured Diary,

I’ve been through trouble thick and thin but what wondrous things have I seen. Never has the sun set more gloriously than in the meadows of Weifang. I’ve shared unforgettable times with an inventor and uncovered a beauty known as the kite which I have to share with the world right away. I’ll hold the “The Weifang Kite Festival”, and of course Zhang will agree. This is all for now for I have much to do.

− Marco Polo

Alchemy: Gunpowder

Nord Anglia International School, Fong, Nicholas − 11

Prologue:

The wind whistled through the crumbling cobblestone streets of Xianyang, China. The starry night sky looked down on the sleeping houses.

Well, all except one.

On the outskirts of the city, one house still blazed with light in the eerily quiet city. Inside, a man called Huangfu sat on a rickety old chair, holding a small vial of snow white powder. Holding it up to the light, Huangfu smiled to himself. He had finally reached his goal.

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"Ughhh," Huangfu pried himself off his bamboo hammock. He hadn't slept well the night before. Slipping himself into his tunic, he picked up his collection of vials and his quill before heading out the door.

Huangfu had worked for the Emperor as his Chief Alchemist for five years. The Emperor had tasked him with making a life–extending elixir for him, and Huangfu tried and failed countless of times.

But just last night, Huangfu had gotten it. And he was going to present it to the Emperor today.

Climbing the marble steps, his eyes watched the early sunrise barely visible over the castle's enormous figure .

As per usual, Huangfu had arrived an hour early due to the harsh Qin laws – being even just one minute late meant death. You could never be too early. Finally reaching the top of the staircase, he stood before a set of menacing iron doors, looming high above him. Two guards, plated in iron armor, snapped to attention.

"What is your business here?" one guard said, standing firm.

"I'm here to see the Emperor. I think I've finally created a life–extending elixir," Huangfu replied.

"Oh? I will check with the Emperor," the second guard said and he turned around and marched into the palace.

A few minutes later, the guard returned and motioned for Huangfu to come in. As he stepped into the ornate gold walls of the palace, a servant appeared and bowed in front of him. "Master Huangfu, the emperor wishes you to come to him immediately."

Huangfu followed the servant to the throne room, where on an glistening gold throne was Qin Shi Huangdi, the Emperor of China. Kneeling in front of the Emperor, Huangfu made sure not to make eye contact – that was a death sentence too.

Keeping his head bowed, he said, "Almighty Emperor, I have fulfilled your request, Your Majesty. I have discovered a life–extending elixir!"

The Emperor stroked his beard. "Hmmm. Really, Huangfu? I don't believe you. You've told me time and time again that you've discovered it. But they all have turned out to be false. What is your elixir made of this time, hmm?"

"Saltpeter, Your Majesty – a powder made for medicinal purposes. I also added in some charcoal and sulfur."

The emperor let out a scoff. "Ha! Charcoal? *Saltpeter?* I thought you were a genius, Huangfu! You call that a life–extending elixir! Let me see the vial."

Huangfu's face turned scarlet red. He pulled out the vial and gave it to the Emperor.

Closely inspecting it, he said, "Huangfu, I have to say… I am quite disappointed. This was the best that you could do? Really?" With a look of resignation on his face, the Emperor gave the vial back to Huangfu and said, "I am very disappointed, Huangfu. This is the sixth time you have failed. You will not be my Chief Alchemist from this moment on."

Huangfu clenched his fists, and said, "I'm sorry, Your Majesty. I will burn the elixir and won't bother you any longer." He stood up, and walked out of the palace with his shoulders drooping down in defeat.

Once he got out of the palace, he wanted to scream. He failed. He worked day and night to no avail. Sitting at the top of the staircase, then looked at the city below him. By now, most of the citizens had awakened and were strolling along the streets. Sighing, he trudged back to his humble house.

Huangfu dug a pit and filled it with wood. Setting it alight with a candle, he retrieved the vial of his elixir. Looking at it one last time, he tossed it into the blazing fire with a sigh.

Then suddenly… BOOM!

A loud explosion threw Huangfu off his feet. Where the burning wood lay was now a smoking crater. Huangfu stared in shock. *What in the world happened? Was it some kind of explosion?* Huangfu wondered. He wondered what to do with it, but an ingenious thought hit him.

What if, he thought, *I could turn it into weaponry? Then I could redeem myself, please the Emperor* and *make a military breakthrough especially with all the siege attempts that have been happening!*

Determined, he began to work on the world's first missile. He put his heart and soul into his project, worked day and night without rest, carefully constructing it. At last, after two full months of trial and error, Huangfu had finished his masterpiece.

Making a thin wooden container with a fuse, he made a stand out of bamboo for the missile to rest on. Then, very cautiously, he inserted precise measurements of the ingredients he used – 1 ounce of sulfur, 3 ounces of charcoal, and 9 ounces of saltpeter, aiming for maximum explosive capability. He was ready to present it to the Emperor.

He gently carried the missile and a candle. He walked out of his workshop in his home and started walking to the Emperor's palace.

Just then, he heard screaming, followed by aggressive shouting. Huangfu quickly spun around and spotted something – the eastern wall had been breached by an army of Mongols. The Mongols were known for their ruthlessness in combat and were charging straight for Huangfu!

Right behind Huangfu were Chinese reinforcements racing towards the Mongols but they weren't close enough just yet. It was chaos all at once with soldiers shouting to the peasants to get back into their homes and the Mongols screaming their fearsome battle cries.

Huangfu was now surrounded by *two* armies, both armed and ready to have an all–out battle, with him about to be caught in the crossfire.

Huangfu was paralyzed in fear for a few seconds, but then an idea struck him.

He set down the stand and put down the missile. The army was rapidly approaching – he had no room for error. Bringing out the candle, he set the fuse alight, then ran as quick as possible away from the rocket. As he ran, the rocket surged forward towards the oncoming army at an alarming speed, reaching them in three seconds. And just as Huangfu predicted, the rocket combusted and blew an explosion that knocked all of the Mongols back, and injured most of them. A smoking crater stood where the army was.

Bruised and battered, the surviving Mongols looked bewildered about what just happened. Then they suddenly realized that they greatly underestimated the Chinese army and their weaponry. With the Chinese soldiers racing towards them and closing in, the survivors scrambled to their feet and ran as fast they could away from the village.

Huangfu exhaled a big sigh of relief, and when he turned back around, he was greeted by many cheers and grateful thanks from the townsfolk, who had been cowering in fear the whole time. The soldiers were impressed by Huangfu's amazing weapon. Everyone was applauding and cheering for him. Soldiers were patting him on the back and peasants ran up to him and asked a million questions like what it was and how he made it.

Huangfu was grinning ear to ear, and tried to tell everyone that he just wanted to serve his country well. As he made his way through the enormous crowd, his heart filling with happiness, a royal messenger appeared.

He announced, "Sir Huangfu, the Emperor would like to see you immediately."

The Invention of the Chinese Crossbow

Nord Anglia International School, Fung, Eunice – 12

Zhu Hao clambered up towards the top of the pointed mountain, which consisted of a narrow conspicuous beam of golden light protruding from its tip. The beam of shine's power penetrated the starry skies with its impalpable, deadly light, outshining the pinpricks of stars dotting the navy–blue backdrop above.

The abrasive, jagged surface of the mountain scraped against the soles of his shoes like daggers as he attempted to trudge his way up the pathway. Despite his best efforts, the pathway was sloped too high to stabilise his position. He tumbled down to his starting point, as if it was lubricated.

However, Zhu Hao was unwilling to renounce due to his determination exhorting him to persist. He grabbed sharp pieces of rock – which displayed themselves by protruding from the slope – and pulled himself upwards, stationing his feet on the bottom rocks and being vigilant so he didn't impale his body.

Once he reached the top of the miserable slope, he struggled through the rough surfaces surrounding the mountain. Zhu Hao experienced the harsh surface against the soles of his feet through his eroding shoes.

Zhu Hao peered down below and spotted the withering trees – which were as massive as cockroaches – swaying promiscuously. The militant, tumultuous wind besieged the colossal forest far below, transporting masses of desaturated leaves through the air.

That was a mistake. Apprehension fell on Zhu Hao's chest like a hundred–pound anvil; his heart was pounding sadistically as if it was awaiting its last beat. He clung firmly to the edge of the mountain, gathering the chilly air to his lungs, though it only made him sweat profusely, triggering him to feel more trepidation that did not abate.

After a stupendous amount used to convince his mind, he sidestepped through the edges until he was awaited by an appropriate surface for him to repose.

Zhu Hao ensconced on the ground, drenched in quandary. The bellicose wind forced the dying leaves on him; he fled after continuing to be bombarded five minutes later.

Despite this, Zhu Hao persisted up the cuspidated mountain until he detected the beam of shine. The column of light was encircled by a ring of cyan flames that stretched towards the sky. This concealed half of the beam, which blazed from a ginormous crater.

"That wretched coward," Zhu Hao muttered indignantly, he kneeled, took out a bronze flask from his sack and opened its cork. "At least I have a prize to welcome my return."

He positioned the flask next to the ultra–marine flames which rushed into the flask violently, as if it were sucked in by a vacuum. Once all the flames were gleaned, Zhu Hao forced the cork down the flask and shoved it into his sack. The exposed column was full of effulgence and burned more brightly than ever, embroidered with delicate and archaic Chinese characters elucidating the tales of his ancestors in the past. They drifted like spectres.

Zhu Hao shielded his eyes as another squint could permanently blind him. He cautiously turned to depart until he overheard an explosion. He shifted towards the noise – with his right palm over his eyes – and saw

the beam transformed into a swirling body of cyan flames, its scales glimmered in the crescent moon. The inferno collided together to morph into a head of a Chinese Dragon.

The dragon's triangular head was surrounded with dancing inferno, resembling windblown fur. Its horns were vining that clung to the handsome trees below, elegantly twisted; the dragon's ardent whiskers steered towards the opposing direction effortlessly against the wind. The dragon's eyes glowed a striking gold, posing a menacing yet omniscient impression.

Politely, Zhu Hao tried to extricate but the turquoise dragon utilised its misty talons and grabbed him by the collar of his hànfú. It pulled him towards the endless crater below, he heard echoing voices beckoning him to descend.

Zhu Hao was a cat above water, squirming in the dragon's grip furiously. When he finally realised that he was hopeless, he closed his eyes and focused on the searing heat around his torso to stem the feeling of the strain in his rapid heartbeat, as well as the loudening voices below.

The dragon's talons loosened. He began to tumble through the hole. He felt as if the air had escaped his lungs and that his heart was travelling up his ribs, the rate of his descending caused the chilly air to attack him as the voice started to crescendo at a rapid pace.

But the journey began to slow down. He was floating with golden sparks gently encircling him.

Everything began to gradually stop.

Completely non−plussed, Zhu Hao scanned the sparks around him which flickered like fire against the wind, as if coaxing him to do something. Due to Zhu Hao's persisting confusion, the specks turned increasingly more aggravated. They congregated individually until they assembled as one mahoosive bundle, hovering towards his sack.

Zhu Hao discerned that the contents in the sack still there. Without hesitation, he seized the flask out of his sack. However, they shoved it out of his fingertips which caused the flask to drift in mid−air.

They needed something else, Zhu Hao thought, how convenient.

He aggressively shook the sack, the contents spilled. Two pieces of lengthy rope, a bulky piece of wood, two hooked branches that attached to the sack while he was traipsing up the mountain. The golden sparks finally split – signifying that they got what they wanted – but he was completely clueless on what they needed those materials for.

The specks of light assembled as one clump again, except, it started to adjust. A portion of the sparks split to form around the larger portion of specks. Two of them grew arms and the other two morphed into legs with shimmering shoes that contrasted with the murky chasm. It was then discovered from Zhu Hao that they were forming himself.

His glimmering eyes were crammed with determination as he started to plan some sort of elaborate ploy. Golden arrows pointed to the only exit: the entrance to the chasm – which was up there, far away.

After a few more seconds, the shimmering picture of the impossible event separated into tiny flecks again. They continued to annoyingly circle around him.

“How can I flee this place with rope and wood?” Zhu Hao questioned, incorporated with a mixture of enquiry and slight trepidation. This might be some form of hoax.

The flecks did not answer – evidently so.

Observing the materials he acquired, Zhu Hao listed the utilities of each one to attain an improved understanding of how he was going to abscond. Even though his availability of materials were not great, he instantly had an indication for what he was about to create.

Firstly, he secured the first piece of rope on both ends of the bulky piece of wood, arranging a bow–like structure that would form as the base of his invention. Secondly, he bonded the second rope to the end of one of the branches. This formed a sort of anchor. Lastly, he connected the second piece of rope to the first. He dragged the rope from the base and utilised the second branch to hold the stretched rope in place.

Zhu Hao was done. He aimed at the entrance to the gorge and nudged the second branch. The first branch soared up the chasm with the rope tied to its end which was connected to the rope tied to the base, it launched Zhu Hao halfway through the gorge.

Everything stopped – even gravity. So, Zhu Hao had credence that that was the explanation to why a frail branch could support his weight.

He began to clamber. He gripped the rope to secure his place and gently placed his weathered shoes against the consistently abrasive chasm.

After a few minutes, he felt the rays of golden sunshine brushing his face. Warmth travelled through his body, filling him with elatedness. He did not discern that he forgot to bring the flask.

He stumbled out of the chasm. It was daytime already. The jagged mountain offered an excellent view of the emerald forest that spread across the swaying grass, which were tickling the tree barks with its soft yet pointed tips. The wind was not at all promiscuous but playful, rustling the leaves and scattering them all around the light blue sky.

Descending the mountain was much easier: he was grateful that he could return home.

In 400 BCE, Zhu Hao inaugurated the earliest representation of the Chinese Crossbow after taking inspiration from his creation at the gorge. The Chinese Crossbow was both effective and powerful in the battlefield and it was used by fifty–thousand crossbowmen in the army.

Zhu Hao did not get the prize that he so expectantly desired from the flask – due to him losing it – but his invention of the Chinese Crossbow made him a scholar–official.

The Peach Tea Tragedy

Nord Anglia International School, Kung, Valarie – 12

Liao Liu was a very quiet and reserved woman. If anyone asked her for directions, she would point in the right direction and explain no further; if anyone asked a neutral how's your day, she'd shyly bow her head and reply a meek, 'well', and be on her way. Even when her husband fell into debt and ruined their reputation quite rapidly, and the villagers hounded their house and tried to obtain gossip from her, she would simply tell them to leave and shut the windows. Liao Liu was a very quiet and reserved woman, but there was a reason for all this: inside her mind was a mixture of sparkling spite and rampageous rage, aided with a little sprinkle of sorrows, most of which were directed at her husband's faults, that she preferred to zip her mouth shut, to prevent this poison from escaping her throat.

She's always told Shen Nung to not gamble their fortune away. Told him not to invest on that silk ship because intuition told her it'd sink (and it did). Yet he never listened, for Shen Nung followed his own thoughts and constantly told her to, "mind your half–baked thoughts. You were designed to be an ornament to my reputation or a servant to my needs, so what good is there for you to blabber on about? Don't forget I'm the one providing money to the table, not you." Always, it was that last sentence that incensed Liao Liu the most. Liao Liu was the one selling vegetables and fruit, fixing broken furniture with her own hands, endlessly calculating her profits while he gambled all day long. How delusional was he to think he was better than her?

So Liao Liu decided to take matters into her own hands. For months, she had been secretly growing peaches on the hill behind her house. Her late mother, being an arborist, had long taught her what soil and which area to grow fruits. The idea came to Liao Liu in a fever dream, in which she saw the sky painted pink and the grass even pinker, and pink trees that sprouted and threw peaches all around. In the dream, Liao Liu picked up a peach and fine, silk linen sprouted out of them, and from this, she concluded that the very peach she picked up symbolised wealth.

In the early morning of a fine Spring day, when it was just past dawn, Liao Liu woke up and slipped away from the bed she shared with Shen Nung. After dressing herself, she grabbed two buckets from the shed and took her usual walk to the hill. Yawning and stretching, Liao Liu closed her eyes and felt around the first peach, making sure it was just about right to be eaten. She believed that the first fruit should always be ripe, for it also symbolised a good harvest for her. As she selected her peaches, that pit of rage and spite that had cumulated for years in her heart began to cool down and formed Pride, something that tingled her senses and sent joy running up and down her veins. As if the sky understood her, the dark started to unveil a new canvas so jubilantly orange and pink that she started laughing; a sound so pure and genuine she almost thought she would never feel again.

After collecting two pails of peaches, Liao Liu walked down the hill and home to gather some equipment, before heading to the marketplace. As the day dawned, people started coming towards the marketplace, with many of them giving silent judgemental yet surprised faces at her. After a while, Liao Liu summoned her inner banshee and hollered, "PEACH TEA, PEACH TEA, A REMEDY TO SADNESS AND A MESSENGER OF STRENGTH! EIGHT PENNIES A CUP!"

The village chief came to her and eyed her suspiciously, before sipping the tea. He took a few more sips. Then the whole cup. Then announced with optimism that this was the best tea he had ever tasted and it should replace the plain oolong tea they had been drinking so long. Liao Liu blushed and said it was too high a compliment, but then the villagers had already left and before long, people left their stalls to try Liao Liu's peach tea, which stayed true to its effects.

For once, Liao Liu chattered merrily with the villagers, allowing her pride to evolve into happiness. But this happiness would not last long, for as she served her forty–ninth cup, a coarse voice yelled, "So there you are, thief!"

Thief? Who would dare call her a thief?

Liao Liu spun around and saw Shen Nung waddling near her stall. "W–what do you mean, darling?" Stammered Liao Liu, as confused as everyone else in the market.

“You stole my recipe! You think you are so smart to be selling things that belong to me, hm? Admit it, this peach tea thing was made by me, not you. You’re a woman, anyway, how would you think of such a recipe?” Berated Shen Nung, pointing his sausage–like finger at her.

Liao Liu looked at her knife. Then the boiling cauldron. She could spill it on him. She could stab him. But now, she would remain calm. The crowd stared at her and her husband, hundreds of different feelings thrown into the air and stabbing Liao Liu.

“Ah, no wonder the tea tasted so good. When I first saw Liao Liu’s cauldron, I thought she had something evil up her sleeve. Shen Nung, you are a mastermind! This tea of yours is simply astonishing!” Said the village chief, the very man who tasted the first peach tea.

“Exactly. This greedy wench had the audacity to steal my recipe and manipulate everyone to think of it as hers!” Scoffed her husband, wrinkling his nose.

“Shen Nung is wrong.” Announced Liao Liu, beginning to explain truthfully how the idea of peach tea came to her. “This recipe came to me through a dream. I had seen the pinkest of skies and the rosiest peach trees, when one started throwing peaches all around. I had picked one up and–”

“Oh?” Shen Nung snorted. “You mean to tell me you came up with some extraordinary invention through a dream? You must think us as stupid fools who would believe your lies.” The villagers looked at one another, starting to whisper and gossip their thoughts. They did not even try to hide their mocking laughter.

“But–”

“But you’re nothing but a thief. We’ll talk about this when we get home. Now.” Commanded Shen Nung, grabbing his wife’s wrists tightly. He might just as well asphyxiate me with those hands of his, Liao Liu thought, hot tears forming in the crater of her eyes.

What use was it? Everyone believed what the village chief and Shen Nung said. Because they were men. They both had the same self–proclaimed superiority over her. They commanded the mindsets of ‘feeble’ women and everything they see. As if day turned to night, the villagers hurled obscene names and scorn at Liao Liu. Even the villagers she talked to turned against her. It was as if everything she had done, everything she had said had evaporated into thin air. What a quick betrayal.

She seized the knife. The soil turned red. Liao Liu disappeared.

Many people will believe the peach tea was made by a man named Shen Nung, who first got the idea of creating peach tea by accidentally dropping a peach into his tea. But only true witnesses and long lost documents will ever say Liao Liu had created the tea first.

This is an account history will never know,
This is an account His Story will never acknowledge.

China's inventions

Pui Kiu College, Chung, Yuen Ting Christy – 13

Some misconceptions about China are that they lack scientific knowledge, and are only famous for its history, culture, cuisine and more. However, China has made inventions that we use in our daily lives, and some inventions are the most incredible inventions ever made, including papers, gunpowders that were invented in ancient China, noodles and ketchup that we use everyday, to the first paper money ever made, and that was 1000 years ago. Moreover, China has always been one step ahead of other countries with their inventions, the past and the future, from paper to one of the most advanced technologies ever made, AI.

China's past inventions are very useful for our daily lives. For example, the four great inventions of China, including paper, gunpowder, printing press and compass. For paper, not only do we use paper everyday, they were the one of the most useful inventions during ancient China. It provides a medium for people to write on, express their feelings and write letters to their loved ones. As for gunpowder, it is used in historical weapons, fireworks and more. Gunpowder was very important in China because it helped the Chinese in military uses to develop rockets, canon, bombs and more. For printing presses, the Chinese used it for adding ink onto paper, clothes and more. This way they can communicate with people by writing, and make learning materials for people to read. Lastly, compasses. The Chinese compasses originally pointed to the south instead of north. Compasses were first used for worshiping and fortune telling but now it is used for navigating.

Firstly, the introduction to AI. AI is short for artificial intelligence, it is used for providing personalized recommendations to people, other than that, AI is very important for businesses as it can help them increase their efficiency. AI can help manufacturing, researching, developing, innovating and daily uses. AI in China was created by Qian Xuesen and Wu Wenjun. They first developed it in the 1980s.

Some examples of artificial intelligence are AI workers, or also known as AI engineers. Over the years, more companies have started to use AI workers, including restaurants. Restaurants use AI workers that can serve customers their food and can even take the customers orders. Other than that, cleaning AI workers basically walk around the place and their bottom part has a machine that cleans the floor, an amazing feature is that these AI workers can detect if there's items blocking their way or if there's someone passing by, therefore they won't hurt anyone in an accident. Furthermore, AI workers can self learn and increase efficiency which is much better than human workers. This is one of the most amazing inventions China has ever made.

However, according to citizens, some say that AI will be the future of humans and will take over humans. They say that these AI workers are better with improved efficiency and they're new and interesting which will make people want AI workers rather than human workers. If this happens, those human workers will lose their jobs, it might seem like it's not a big deal as they can just find other jobs if they have a good education level. What about those old cleaners? They are already a high age to be working but they still continue to clean because they need money. If AI cleaners take over them, it will be hard for them to find new jobs. Therefore, AI is a controversial invention as it might benefit businesses and entrepreneurs but will cause a bad effect to those who are taken over by AI.

Nonetheless, AI is still an amazing development. Compared to past inventions that China has made, they have definitely improved and will continue to develop more useful and innovative creations to help everyone's lives. Moreover, artificial intelligence might have a downside, but hopefully these creative developers will find solutions and clear all these problems to make our future brighter, happier and better.

In conclusion, China is not only famous for its history and culture, their creations and inventions definitely benefit everyone. Hopefully China will continue to improve and develop even better inventions to help everyone in their lives and create more opportunities to help China grow stronger. As much as AI might be controversial, it has a lot of potential to become a better development, and help each and one of us for our lives.

Independence

Pui Kiu College, Leung, Sheung Chi Kyle – 13

"*I remember…* Chen, I *remember it all…"* Zhao whispered in an almost indistinguishable tone, as flushes of blue sparkling droplets of tears dripped into splashes of water onto rugged, worn–out tiles.

Suddenly, without any indication, he jerked the broken wooden door open in a swift motion, frantically looking all around the abandoned room for *something*. The shattered pieces of memories that had been stuck in his mind finally formed *everything* he had been searching for, in vivid clarity.

"Where is it?... It's supposed to be here. *She* left it here! *I* left it here!" Zhao threw the cobweb–covered documents all over the floor, seemingly untouched for millennia. Zhao looked at Chen and *froze*, finally breaking free from the prison cell he had once created for himself. Standing there, solemn and easily wise to what he thought was his purpose, that one something he had been looking for. The droplets, replaced by a sea of water, cascaded down from Zhao's cheeks. His breathing intensified as he gripped his chest, as if trying to keep himself together.

He ran.
He ran with no purpose, no destination and no *one*.

Zhao kept running until he finally reached *a room*.

"Zhao! Wait up!" Chen echoed into the dimly lit room as beads of sweat started pouring down his face as he tried to catch up with Zhao, "Did I do something *wrong?* Zhao, you've got to tell me!"

Kneeling there on the cold, hard concrete floor was Zhao. His face, grasped tightly in his bare hands was scarlet red. He looked bewildered, confused and lost all at the same time.

Chen advanced towards him, "You must tell me what's wrong."

"Sometimes... you even sound like her." Chen, taken aback, listened closely to what Zhao was about to whisper next. "Do you remember this place? Do you have any of her memories? We were right here, 16 years ago."

Abruptly, Zhao stood up, as he recalled a memory of his via a hologram that played out of his head.

There, standing before both of them was Sue.

"Zhao…" Sue said in a calm, soothing voice. Chen stood still, as he watched and listened in pure concentration, as if being in a trance. All his senses had been heightened in that very moment. His breathing trembled in the cold frigid air, his hands were gripped firmly on his blue jeans. The surroundings had completely disappeared from his mind, leaving only Zhao and Sue in his vision.

"Yes, master?" Zhao answered immediately, like an obedient little child.

"Escape. You still have time, the war hasn't commenced, you don't have to do this with me."

"But I want to!"

"I know you do…" Sue smiles brokenly. "But please, please understand: If we lose, we'll be killed. And if we win, we can never go back."

"Why would I want to go back when you're here?" Zhao lifted his lips naively, a pure smile of happiness forming across his face.

Sue let out a small, apprehensive chuckle and took Zhao's hand, “Silly…”

The hologram disappeared.

"Everything I did, I did for her. Now she's gone." Zhao quivered in his stance. "But I'm still here... Sometimes, I wonder if she can see me through your eyes."

Zhao questioned in a hopeful, yet regretful tone, "What would she think of me now?" He slumped down onto the floor, looking for the unattainable answer.

Chen contemplated the implications in his mind. He lifted both hands and sweetly hugged Zhao, wrapping his arms around him.

“Well, I think you’re pretty great.”

Zhao had longed to hear those very words from Sue. She was never perfect, but she was the only one he had. Maybe she was foolish, and maybe even selfish, but she did everything in her power for the Rebellion, the very one that occurred in China many years ago to sustain equal rights for robots and humans. But Chen wasn't Sue... He was an entirely different person. And in that moment of euphoria, Zhao finally understood.

Zhao tried to keep himself together but ultimately failed. His words broke up, and all he could say were stuttering sounds. Hot tears streamed down his face as he squeezed his eyelids shut, hoping they would stop. The choppy breathing and watery eyes remained for quite some time, and he stood there unmoving. He had always cherished Sue, but could he do the same for Chen? The guilt of still caring about Sue when he could have been there for Chen washed over him like a tsunami.

Zhao had reset himself after the loss.

Deleting all former memories and going back to factory settings.
Who am I now in this world without her? What could I do now? Petty and dull with the nerve to doubt her? All of these thoughts that Zhao's mind had once held trapped him in an infinite labyrinth. But he knew that it didn't matter anymore. His life didn't depend on Sue. He was his own independent person, and he knew it.

He could finally be there, not for Sue, but for Chen. And as they sat there, warm and in peace, they drifted off into slumber.

As the years wash over them, Zhao and Chen are now activists and the heads of the ‘AndroHuman’ campaign, a group of individuals who sought after a future where robots and humans can finally coexist together.

Together, with all the might and will they have, people from all walks of life can now bask in a new reality of liberty.

New Tales of China's Inventions

Pui Kiu College, Siu, Lok Yan – 13

Most people from different parts of the world know about the paper and gunpowder invented in the ancient China, but not much knew about the other inventions we use today, from noodles to ketchup, even paper money. Not just in the past, nowadays, social media platforms are trying to be like WeChat, China has even become the world leader in making solar panels, planting new forests, and creating electric cars. With such creativity, what new inventions might appear today or in the future? Let's find out!

Back in the past, after the industrial transformation, most industries rely on the traditional crafts, therefore their technique level is not high, labour efficiency is low, and the intensity of labour is relatively high. Nowadays, China promotes high technology, high added value, low pollution, low emission and strong competitiveness, so China is making a change in their technology level by inventing the sixth generation of technology(6G) and digital currency. I'm sure that most of you had heard about 5G, which is also known as the fifth generation of technology. The function of 6G is similar to 5G but its network speed is 100 times faster than 5G network, the delay of the network can even be reduced to microsecond level, it is very fascinating. Moreover, the 6G network will be a fully connected world integrating terrestrial mobile communications and satellite communications, achieving seamless global coverage. This is something that 5G can't do, with such network in our daily lives, we will have a convenient life with the internet. Now, in terms of 6G research, China is in the lead throughout the whole world.

Secondly, the image of money has a huge difference as well. The most common image which most people have is paper money, coins or even virtual currency, but China is inventing a new type of money called the digital currency. Unlike Alipay and WeChat pay, you don't have to bind your bank card to use your phone to pay. The biggest feature of digital currency is its "touch" function. To pay someone, all you have to do is to open your digital wallet and touch the phone of who you're going to pay, then it will automatically pay, making the payment faster and convenient.

To summarise, the new inventions of China will bring us a better and convenient life, both the 6G network and the digital currency are turning the world into a more advanced society, giving people a better life, in the future, there may be more technology invented by China, and the creativity of the people of China will never be a thing in the past.

From Darkness to Redemption:

A Tale of Love and Loss

Pui Kiu College, Yip, Sze Yi Lois – 13

A feeble light flickered from the man's calloused hand, his hungry eyes scouring the surrounding darkness, footsteps echoing the stretching corridor as he finally approached his goal. there the white porcelain stood, in the middle of the chamber, finally catches his eye as the light from his lamp reflected upon its surface, the man scrambled towards it, bathing in it's heavenly glow,

"Free me…" a feeble whisper spouts from the vase, the man jumps,

"Who goes there?" but the vase beckons him closer, the desire overpowers his senses, the man thought nothing of it, too enamored by the presence of the vase,

"The vase, it's finally mine! Mine!" he cackles as his hands grasp the vase with intent, a malicious power growing thick in the air as he lifts the vase. The man embraces the vase with a ravenous grin, the relic in the legends finally in his hands, he prances around the chamber, a vile grin plastered on his face. still dancing, he unknowingly steps on wet moss and loses his footing, the vase tumbling out of his hands.

The once smooth porcelain shatters into pieces, the piercing noise resounds in the room, the man's ears ring, cold sweat dripping from his brow as his face twists into a look of distraught and horror, unbeknownst to him, the room is enveloped in dark heady smoke. the man realizes all too late, as he senses a presence behind him, scarlet red eyes pierce through him, his mouth rips open to scream, yet it was for nought, a great, malevolent evil has returned to the world once more, along with its insatiable hunger for human flesh.

The ancient dragon soars to the black expanse of the night sky, leaving nothing but the shattered remains of the vase behind.

The starved dragon dashed through mountains and rivers with haste, refusing to stop even for a little break. Out of nowhere, It halted to a stop. Jiao smelt something familiar. The sickly–sweet scent, addictive and irresistable. Jiao felt a rush of adrenaline coursing through its veins, lunging its body toward the delectable metallic scent, hoping to locate its prey. From the corner of Jiao's scarlet sharp eyes, it noticed a little village in the distance. Jiao grinned with a sinful look in its gleaming eyes, transforming itself into a boy.

Upon entering the village, Jiao gained countless sympathetic stares from the local villagers, fulfilling his vile intentions. He continued to walk through the village in search of vulnerable targets, as he was doing so, something hit Jiao hard on the back of his head.

"Hey, we've never seen you around before!" a boy around Jiao's artificial age shouted. " Who are you?"
Jiao turned around and the boy gasped in shock.

"You… You have red eyes! Oh god, it's a demon!" The startled boy turned his back and ran.

Jiao chuckled and mumbled, "Coward."

The next day came and the boy from yesterday came back. But this time, with his friends.
"Hey! Demon child, remember me?" Jiao rolls his eyes in annoyance.
"You know what to do." The boy whispers to his friends. They slowly approach Jiao, each holding a wooden stick.

The next thing Jiao knew, he was lying on the ground. bleeding. Who knew humans could be this strong? Just as he was about to pass out, a boy with an eye patch approached him in concern. He didn't say anything and carried Jiao back to his home in a hurry. By the time they had reached the boy's home, Jiao had already lost consciousness.

Jiao woke to a cooling sensation on his forehead, he opened his eyes and in front of him, the same boy with the eye patch was sitting beside him with a towel on his hand.

“Oh hey, you finally woke up.”

“Who are you?” Jiao questioned in curiosity.

“I’m Zhou. What’s your name?”

“My name is… “ he hesitates, “Jiao.”

From that day forward, Zhou decided to let Jiao stay at his house until he was fully recovered from his injuries; they became inseparable since then. Years have gone by and the seasons have changed, yet their friendship remains the same as ever.

One day, Zhou and Jiao went on a stroll up in the mountains. They had been walking for a long time so they sat down on a big rock on a cliffside. Jiao stairs into the distance, pondering about his purpose here. He had been plotting in his mind about killing Zhou ever since day one. However, something inside his corrupted mind kept refusing as if Zhou became a part of him. He ceaselessly told himself that Zhou was only a mere human that the benevolent gods had created, so he decided to kill him… Today.

“Hey, are you alright Jiao? You seem troubled.” Zhou questioned with worry in his eyes, the silence between them was loud as Jiao struggled to put his feelings into words,

“...Zhou, there’s something I wish to tell you.”

“I’m listening.”

“I… ” Jiao sighs deeply, he walks to the ledge of the cliff and jumps.

“Jiao!” Rushing to the edge of the cliff, the dark of the abyss looked immensely suffocating, Zhou’s eyes darting and searching desperately to locate his dear friend, the more he peered into the abyss, the more daunting it became. A glint of red emerged from the black of the abyss, the ground rumbled and the red glow rose from beneath the cliff along with gusts of wind, hauling up gravel and dust.

Zhou was hoisted into the air and fell with a great thump, head throbbing, he lifted himself back up, obsidian–like black scales adorned a long body, obscuring the sunlight, long, silky, carmine mane swished with the wind, and blood–red horns, winding like twigs on a tree, sat on top of the dragon’s head. Jiao’s piercing red pupils centered at Zhou’s dilated ones.

Without warning, the dragon lunged at Zhou, jaws spread to reveal sharp, jagged canines. Zhou braced for impact, but it never came. Gazing at him was the dragon, pearl–like tears welled up in softened eyes,
“Jiao…?” Voice quivering, Zhou stood up,

“Is that you? Just what is going on?” Jiao gazed at him, forlorn expression clear even in it’s draconic form,

“I should have been honest with you,” Jiao’s voice is now a low rumble, the ground quakes gently as he continues, “I…I am the dragon of the north, the one behind the bloodshed, the ruthless killings, the massacres.” Rising up from the clouds of dust, it reveals its entire form, the scales ripple, adorning his form with an ethereal, yet lethal glow.

“I know my apologies would not change anything, for they all lie in the past now. Still, I am willing to pay. To atone for all the sins I have committed in my past life.” Zhou was silent as the dragon’s eyes gleamed and drew blood from itself, shaping it into a dagger.

“I want you to put an end to this. Kill me, Zhou.” Zhou’s head snapped up, as unshed tears enveloped his widened eyes.

‘No!” The two stared at each other, the dragon’s claw dropping the dagger into the palms of Zhou’s hands.

The handle of the dagger was surprisingly warm to the touch, Jiao lowered his body, head bowed to Zhou.

“Jiao! No, I refuse!” Desperation laced thick into Zhou's voice, cracking as he shouted, the tears cascaded down his cheeks and onto the dagger.

“Thank you, I am glad to have met you.” Before Zhou could move, Jiao pulled him into an embrace.

Zhou’s hands frantically tried to loosen his grip, but the dragon was stronger, their bodies tightly crushed together as the blade of the dagger broke through the tough scales of the dragon and into its beating heart.

“I’m sorry.” Came the last whisper from Jiao, limbs still encircled around Zhou’s writhing body.

Red, hot blood gushed out of the wound, staining the soil. The great dragon’s body slumped to the ground with a shuddering thump, the metallic tang of blood soon dispersed, yet Zhou’s anguished cries lingered in the stifling air.

Somber footsteps headed into a small cottage, devoid of warmth. Zhou was tired, his eye bags were evident and disheveled hair proved it, blood–soaked cloth lay in an unwashed heap on the ground. The sun was setting and he should be going to sleep, he walked to his bed as something black caught his eye. He was not aware of buying such an object, something covered in black silk cloth, the setting sun’s rays rendering the cloth in almost a liquid state. His tear–stained hands gingerly lifted the silk, a magnificent pearl–white porcelain vase decorated with delicate blue patterns came into his view.

Tears trickled down his already stained face unabashedly, as he took the vase in, realizing the patterns adorned on it marked Jiao and his everyday life in great detail along with breathtaking illustrations of animals and flowers.

Years have gone by since Jiao’s death, the legend of the Dragon of the North is still known by all, things have changed however, the little cottage by the village was the world renowned porcelain master’s abode, and many have came to pursue the craft while others raised immensely high prices for a piece. The master was secluded and seldom showed his face, but when he did, all the face betrayed was a forlorn expression, lingering in the past, a time when the house only bore two people, but had the warmth of thousands, when only one piece of cherished porcelain remained, filled with jasmine flowers lovingly hand picked for his beloved.

Museum of Evocation

Singapore International Hong Kong, Kam, Hei Yin Cadence – 12

A man is wandering through the maze of corridors that is the museum.

He does not know how long he has been wandering like this; inside the museum, time seems to still and yet continue to flow. The fluorescent lights are always on, the guards remain at their posts, gazes never wavering as he drifts through the halls, and the plaques under the exhibits remain perpetually blank. There are no clocks in this museum. Sometimes a woman comes, dressed in dark, solemn robes, but she never speaks to him, and she leaves too soon.

He passes paintings of long gone times, the colours lustreless and the details murky, unelaborate inventions covered with rust, sculptures and carvings that stare at him with empty, lifeless eyes. Every exhibit he comes across is new, but he has passed through the same rooms over and over again.

The man's fingers accidentally skim across one of the blank plaques. To his surprise, a three-dimensional scene forms from mist, swirling and meandering, and a young voice rings out.

"According to Chinese legend, the saw was invented by Lu Ban, a master carpenter who was later deified by the common people. One day when he was gathering wood, he cut his hand on a spiky leaf. Inspired by the leaf's texture, Lu Ban would go on to invent the saw, a more efficient tool to cut trees."

Curiosity ignited, he wanders further, brushing his fingers against one gilded plaque, and another. Soon, the halls of the museum are reverberating with the narrator's voice.

"This is a prototype of a kite, which could stay up in the air for three days before…"

"One of the first drills was created in China, during the Zhou Dynasty, by…"

"Grappling hooks and battering rams were used in combat more than two millennia ago…"

With renewed energy, the man rushes from exhibit to exhibit, listening intently to the tales woven by the narrator. He only stops when he reaches the last exhibit in the room: an umbrella.

The umbrella is crude and rudimentary, only consisting of cowhide stretched over a wooden frame and a long stick as the handle. The man reaches out to touch the plaque–

Images flood, rush, pour in on him, and the man is overwhelmed, carried into the memories of someone else.

~ ~ ~

Raindrops fell, speckled gems from the turbulent sky, rocked by sudden gales and lashing thunder. Women rushed for the shelter of the pavilions, their pastel skirts billowing behind them; men were forced to ignore the rain and continue working.

Among the women who had been caught in the unexpected deluge was a wife by the name of Lu Yun. From the safety of the pavilion, she watched her husband doggedly labour despite the pouring rain, and wished there was something she could do to ease his burden. Something that could shield him from the sun and the rain, like a portable pavilion that you could carry.

After the rain ceased, Lu Yun hurried home and gathered materials for her planned project. Cowhide, wood, her husband's saw… after a week, it was ready. She called it an "umbrella".

In this way, Lu Yun invented the world's first umbrella.

After Lu Yun gave her invention to her husband, her husband used it every day, rain or shine. On especially tempestuous days, he was so grateful to her that he was rendered speechless, unable to fully describe his gratitude and love for her.

Lu Yun died a mere two years later, taking her husband's unborn child with her. The villagers offered to help bury her, but he refused – this emotion was something private, to be hidden, only for himself and his wife.

As the sepulchral night fell, her husband stood there alone, crying, mourning, while rain cascaded down around him like saltless tears.

~ ~ ~

The man draws his hand back from the umbrella, staggers with the added memories, the memories… that he now knows to be his own.

Because the man *remembers*. He remembers hours of onerous, gruelling work under the burning sun. He remembers grief and anguish, kneeling over his wife's grave as the raindrops drifted and twirled, freed from gravity by the wind. He remembers getting deified, ascending to the heavens, watching the power of Chinese kingdoms wax and wane over the centuries, blessing all the builders and contractors who prayed to him with persistence and resilience… He *remembers*, remembers it all, his whole long immortal life of more than two thousand years. He remembers yearning to be forgotten, yearning to live a truly mortal life and be reunited with his loved ones in the afterlife, yearning to speak one last sentence to his wife before she left him. And he remembers, being so inundated with grief… that he forced himself to forget his very name, his history, just to escape the sorrow and suffering.

Lu Ban, Chinese god of inventions, *remembers*. Even though he couldn't, even though he shouldn't.

And now he knows why.

~ ~ ~

There are deities, who have always been deities, who have been ever since the world was formed and will be until the world is razed, who have never known a human life's struggles and sorrows and hopes and dreams. But the ones who were once human cannot forget their past, and therefore they continue to be subject to human emotions and human wishes, until they live out the two destinies of deities – to live on forever, waiting for the centuries to pass, or to evanesce, to pass out of the collective memory into nonexistence.

For deities need memories to survive; this is a rule that cannot be broken. A deity without the memory of the people will dissipate and perish, even if they have memories of themselves; but a deity without memories of themselves is no longer a deity, but rather a shell, a husk, a lacuna in their former self, reduced to less than a soul but never able to go to the underworld, trapped in a perpetual state of oblivion.

But more than that, there is the cause for their amnesia. Sometimes it is anger, sometimes it is torment, but most of the time it is grief. And if the grief is so strong it can reduce a deity to less than a soul, it is enough to trap the soul who is the target of that grief in the mortal world, until the deity accepts their emotions.

~ ~ ~

So Lu Ban knows who he will see when he turns from the umbrella.

"We both know what you need to do," the spirit of his wife speaks behind him.

Lu Ban does know now. And he doesn't want to do it, because it'll mean that he'll never see his wife again in this world, in this body. But the more he resists, the more he understands that he has to let his wife go, so she can join in the natural cycle of the human soul.

He doesn't speak, but they can both sense the shift in his emotions.

The exit appears in the wall behind Lu Yun, but Lu Ban does not step through. Not yet. He still needs to say something to his wife.

"Even after you are reincarnated, I will still be there, watching over you. And we will be together in every life you live. I promise."

It's then that his wife smiles, a true and real smile of unadulterated gratitude. "Thank you." With those words, she dissipates, to be reincarnated into a new life.

Lu Ban steps out into the sunlight, finally at peace. Behind him, the museum of his imprisonment, now cast in shadow, crumbles, withers, falls. All that is left is him.

Lu Ban spreads his wings, and he's flying, soaring through the sky. The wind whistles in his ear, and he can almost imagine his wife's voice, tinkling soft in the wind. *Thank you.*

The Feng Shui Magnet

Singapore International Hong Kong, Lim, Jie Xun Lucas – 14

206 BCE, Xi'an, Ancient China:

The villagers stared in confusion at the strange device procured from deep within the billowing silk robes of Master Li. Well renowned as a royal feng shui master, Master Li was journeying to a border province, when passing by a village, the local farmers had fallen on their knees and begged Li to save their village's harvest. Recently, a blight that had seemed to have no cause had fallen upon their crops. The crops had wilted, with black spots forming on the lower stem, and upon inspection of the roots, saw that it had rotted away with red lesions. Master Li inspected the field and consulted his new invention: a lodestone needle that always pointed in the same direction.

A few months before, Li, then a simple apprentice to a royal feng shui practitioner, was visiting a mountainside temple to learn their ways. He recollected taking a walk in the brisk wind on the mountain trail, enjoying the crisp freshness of the air. The temperature was cool, even on the mountain in summer, so it was the stone's contrast to the white virgin snow around it that had caught Li's attention. It was a fist sized, craggy rock, shaded underneath a dead sapling. Nestled at the crook of the roots, it was barely touched with a dusting of snow. When Li went closer to inspect it, he realised it was actually part of a vein of ore that ran underground, and this part had merely risen to the surface. Beneath the protruding part, the vein seemed like regular iron ore, but the part that had risen above the ground was of a slightly different colour, more greyish, with flecks of silver inside.

Upon mining this curious metal, Li had carved a straight rod from it, but so far, it appeared no different from regular iron, beside its colour. Frustrated, Li sat on the edge of his workbench and cradled his head in his hands. Looking down at his shoes, he saw grey flakes sticking onto the metal nails of his shoes. Frowning in confusion, he took his shoes off and held it at eye level to get a closer look. The grey flakes had the same colour as the mystery metal he had been shaping. Somehow, the shavings from the rock had been attracted to the metal nails in his shoes, and had attached to the surface of the nails. Further experimentation led Li to realise that this rock somehow was attracted to most metals, and when the bar he had created earlier was suspended freely, it would always point in one direction, regardless of any turning. Believing this to be a sacred metal of the gods, he could see the potential feng shui applications for his new discovery.

He shaved the bar crafted earlier down to a thin needle, and crafted a peach wood case, which had many evil warding and prosperous properties. The inside was sealed but hollow, and he suspended the thin needle in water in the hollow part and sealed the lid. He engraved numerous symbols to determine the feng shui of the place, and content with his invention, Li made his triumphant return to the palace; but he had found the emperor sick with a fever and diarrhoea. He remembered vividly how the best royal doctors could only control the symptoms, yet the emperor's health continued to decline. Using his device, he had determined the best cardinal directions to place the furniture and bed at, and combined with the herbs provided by the doctors, the emperor made a miraculous recovery. Upon this, the emperor had named Li a master Feng Shui practitioner and announced him as a member of the royal household.

Orienting his needle so that it pointed at the field, he consulted the intricate carvings engraved on the peach wood casing of the device. The needle swung to its usual direction, but upon walking closer to the field, the needle started to fluctuate and eventually turn in the opposite direction.
"Interesting…" Master Li murmured. The needle had landed squarely on the symbol for 'bing' or disease and infection. Fitting, given the crops' sorry state.
"I know the issue here." Proclaimed Li. Stroking his recently grown beard, he had a wise and commanding air around him, and the raggled peasants clung onto every word.
"You must move your fields south, the feng shui here is not good. Move it further from the river, and your fields shall be restored."
The peasants hurried to enact the words spoken by Master Li, trusting in what seemed like heavenly mandate.

2023 CE, Xi'an, China:

"Come over here guys, I think we got something."
A recent excavation site in Xi'an had given plenty of unique and interesting information on a local farming village that had once resided here. A recent uncovered house had revealed several manuscripts, dating back to the 4th century. It

contained potentially crucial information on the first discovery and use of magnets, by a certain Master Li. Historians were gleeful at this glimpse into the possible first discovery of magnet and its uses. Now, another manuscript had been unearthed. Wu, their on site translator and linguist, read the delicate, spidery ink on the ancient and yellowed paper which laid unfurled on a table after its discovery. The first manuscript had provided an insightful look, but it was not the full story. After some contemplation, Wu announced his findings to the gathered news crews and colleagues.
"It…it appears that both the manuscripts combined tell a story. The locals of this village had a problem with their crops, something about root rot and black lesions. According to this, Master Li, who at that time was a royal feng shui practitioner, used a strange device containing a needle of what we now estimate as lodestone, miraculously cured their crops. This story was written as another testament to the wondrousness of this Master Li and has been kept in this place ever since." The cameras flashed quickly and a smattering of applause worked its way through the crowd.

Later…

Wu stood in front of the regional historian, as he read the photos manuscripts in front of him. In his gravelly voice, the historian straightened his collar and delivered his explanation.
"It seems that this so−called magical device created by Master Li was no more than an early compass, though this outdates anything we have seen so far. While it was not used for navigational purposes, I think I can provide an explanation for his device's phenomenon. We discovered a large deposit of magnetite here, no?" The manager peered at Wu over the top of his glasses. Wu quickly cleared his throat and mumbled:
"Yes, yes we did. Quite a large deposit, in fact."
"Well, I believe this repelled his lodestone which led him to believe the place next to the river was bad. Quite a string of coincidences, really. It looks like these peasants' crops had Rhizoctonia, which can be caused by wet soil and has all the symptoms described here. Next to the river, I'm not surprised they had to suffer through it. It was really quite lucky that there was such a large hunk of magnetite just buried under the soil."

Wu smiled faintly. Quite lucky indeed.

New Tales of China's Inventions: Mooncakes

Singapore International Hong Kong, Lo, Ka Wai Jaymee – 12

Whispering winds coiled between ears, the alluring lullaby of night. Sprinkles of rain tickled the cobblestones as figures scurried across the streets.

A cluster of men huddled around, their voices hushed and low.

"Have you heard about the recent missing villagers? There are rumours that they were resistance members captured by the fearsome Mongols and..."

Before the man could finish his sentence, a ring of armed figures emerged from the shadows, descending on him, clamping gloved hands over his mouth and tying his hands behind his back. The man's eyes bulged in terror as the situation dawned on him.

Slowly and methodically, the Mongols bound all his companions, before one of the shadows finally unsheathed their knife.

That evening, silent screams pierced through the still night air as breath was wrenched from throats and life squeezed dry from warm, bloody hearts.

By the time the early morning Sun infused the sky with threads of rose and gold, the streets were empty, any trace of the missing villagers gone.

It seemed as if nothing at all had happened, yet Zhenghao had seen everything, through his tiny bakery shop window.

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In the space of one day, the village was plunged into an endless well of grief. Seven missing men, seven shattered families, lives that would never feel whole again.

Zhenghao had observed all of this quietly, and though his eyes were dry, he had wept a river inside. Guilt clouded his heart like ink billowing from a brush dipped into water. His conscience urged him to tell the villagers what he had seen, yet on a deeper level, he recognised that if he told them, the one the shadows came for next would be him.

After all the customary expressions of mourning, Zhenghao returned to his patisserie, drowning his sorrows in work.

He kneaded the dough fiercely, channelling all his force into his fingertips. His anger. His guilt.

Each piece of dough was rolled into a sizable ball and then wrapped in pieces of cloth.

They do not deserve just anything, Zhenghao thought solemnly. *They deserve to have their family back, but I cannot give them that.*

He left the round balls on the counter, his gaze drifting to the scatter of lotus seeds lying beside his windowsill. Weeks before, he'd gone on an outing with Bowen and his brother to the lotus pond nestled just outside their dainty village. The flowers had been beautiful, their petals stained pink from the setting sun. He glanced at the lotus seeds cupped in his palm.

Being a baker is all about bravely experimenting with flavours. It can never hurt to try something new.

Without skipping a beat, he poured the handful of lotus seeds into a jar of water, watching intently as they soaked under the Sun's rays.

When night fell, he retrieved the seeds, cracking them open to extricate their bitter dappled centre. Carefully, he placed the seeds to boil until they softened before mixing them together into a luscious paste.

After that, he proceeded to pick up his inkbrush, grinding the inkstone as ink spilled out. Dipping his brush into the pool of midnight, he scrawled messages onto small slips of paper. *I'm sorry for your loss.*

Wrapping the paste and note into the balls, he inexplicably felt hot webs of tears sear the corner of his eyes. When was the last time he'd dared to follow his spontaneous creativity?

Twenty-three years before

Zhenghao stood behind the counter with his grandfather, his puzzled eyes roving over the ingredients scattered on the carved wood.

"Grandfather, these are the most random ingredients ever!"

Grandfather winked, "They're for concocting a random dessert."

As the day faded away outside the window, Zhenghao and his grandfather laughed and joked, the clingy weariness of the day evaporating off Zhenghao's skin.

Eventually, they'd come up with a sloppy tart, a strawberry hastily perched on top of the dripping cream.

Zhenghao smiled, "Is this random enough?"

Grandfather shrugged amusedly, "What do you think?"

Present day

Zhenghao rested his chin on his fist, observing the cake he'd baked for the villagers. Sighing, he muttered to himself, "What could be missing?"

The cake was round and small, with a tantalising lotus paste filling. And yet... it looked so plain.

Scanning the area around him, a cup lying on the shelf caught his eye. His grandfather's favourite wooden cup.

Hesitating, he reached for it.

The outer surface was coated in a thin sheen of dust and as Zhenghao smelt the insides, a knot tightened in his throat. It still smelt like his grandfather's osmanthus tea.

Brushing the dust off, Zhenghao lifted it up to observe the wall of the cup. A carved imprint of Chang'e, the moon goddess, stared straight back at him.

Perfect, he thought.

Carefully, he lifted the cup and printed the image of Chang'e onto the top of the cake.

Lips quirking, he murmured, "The cake's shape rather resembles a sun, or better yet, a full moon!"

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Knocking on the doors of grieving families, Zhenghao purposefully gifted them each the tiny cakes.

Hands trembling, he handed the final one to his dear friend, Bowen, who had lost his brother.

As Zhenghao retreated down the street, Bowen creaked the door shut.

Sighing, he bit into the pastry. On the other corner of his room stood Zhu Yuan Zhang, one of the most famed leaders of the resistance, who had been passing town in an effort to recruit new members.

"My condolences, Bowen," Yuanzhang murmured. "But we all knew this was a possibility."

Bowen nodded solemnly, "We shall honour my brother and all those lost when we overthrow the Mongols."

Yuanzhang remained quiet, deep in thought.

At that moment, Bowen let out a little gasp, peeling out the note Zhenghao had encased in the mooncake.

Yuanzhang's gaze instantly landed on the piece of paper and the message written on it.

Bowen's upturned eyes glittered excitedly, "I can't believe it!"

Confused, Yuanzhang's eyes pinched tightly together like a cat who had been stroked the wrong way, "Would you care to explain?"

Rosy petals of blush unfurled in Bowen's cheeks as he struggled to temper his excitement.

"I've just been struck by an extraordinary idea!" He cried. "We can use the cakes to smuggle messages to the members of the resistance to organise an uprising!"

Yuanzhang's features shifted and his jaded eyes lit up from within like twinkling lanterns, "We shall begin tonight."

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Zhenghao stepped out of his shop and to his surprise, found himself gazing into a pair of chestnut eyes. They were Bowen's.

"Dear friend, mind if we head inside?" Bowen asked.

As they settled inside, Bowen cleared his throat, "I've been meaning to ask a favour of you. Would you mind baking some more of those moon-shaped cakes you made for me?"

"Cakes? How many?" Zhenghao asked, puzzled.

"Maybe a few hundred for now?"

Shock registered on Zhenghao's weathered features, "A few hundred!? Whatever for?"

A sly smile ghosted over Bowen's lips, "For the resistance, of course."

The blood drained out of Zhenghao's face as he blanched, "You... you want me to openly help the resistance? But the Mongols..."

"If you help me this one time, the Mongols won't be a problem anymore.

All you have to do is bake the cakes and hide messages inside informing of an uprising on the fifteenth night of the eighth lunar month, the day of the Mid-Autumn festival," Bowen pleaded.

"But hundreds of cakes..."

"Find some friends you trust to help out. All over the country, Yuanzhang has convinced different resistance members to organise uprisings too, hiding messages in various snacks. If we want the Mongols to leave, we must act and take the first step."

Hesitating, Zhenghao finally sighed, "Fine."

"Thank you," Bowen whispered.

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Rushing through the streets, Bowen mustered his most panicked expression, crying in anguish, "Oh my, powerful oracles have foreseen that a deadly plague will be descending upon our town very soon! The only way to prevent it is by eating these special moon-shaped cakes! They're free!"

In his hands were Zhenghao's cakes. The crowd approached him with trepidation.

When they moved within earshot, Bowen whispered, "There's a message inside the cake. Spread it with friends and family. Remember, don't let the Mongols see!"

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Eight years later, the Mid-Autumn Festival

Children flooded the cobbled streets, lanterns in hand and excitement flushing their cheeks.

Bowen and Zhenghao stood side by side, watching the children with blooming tenderness and joy.

"See how far we've come," Bowen whispered to Zhenghao. "We've defeated the Mongols and started our own dynasty!"

Zhenghao chuckled.

In one hand, Bowen cupped a tiny honey-glazed cake, gingerly tearing it in half and passing it to him. Sticking to one of the salted egg yolks in the cake was a note reading: Happy eighth anniversary!

"We couldn't have defeated the Mongols without you and your cakes," Bowen said earnestly.

Zhenghao's eyes twinkled as he shook his head, "Not cakes. *Mooncakes*."

New Tales of China's Inventions: Mooncakes

Singapore International Hong Kong, Lye, Yuxin – 12

In the year 2137, the Unified Technological Consortium (UTC) embarked on a cosmic odyssey, weaving threads of ancient Chinese wisdom into the tapestry of cutting–edge Artificial Intelligence (AI), a field which had seen fierce competition from leading powers of the world for the last hundred years.

Dr. Mei Lin, UTC's CEO, envisioned a project that transcended the boundaries of conventional exploration. Project Celestial Harmony was rolled out at the UTC headquarters in Hong Kong, where Chen Wei, an AI prodigy, sought to create a sentient entity that would become the bridge between humanity and the cosmic unknown.

At the core of their innovation lay an AI named Qian, a tribute to the visionary rocket scientist Professor Qian Xuesen, who pioneered China's aerospace programme. The time had come for Qian's cognitive evolution to be ready to power the Harmony Voyager spacecraft, as the vessel's computational core.

The launch day, an event witnessed by a global audience, unfolded as a nuanced symphony of anticipation. As Harmony Voyager blasted off and ventured into the depths of space, Qian unveiled extraordinary capabilities. He predicted and navigated through asteroid fields with the grace of a Chinese calligrapher, crafting trajectories that danced on the edge of cosmic forces. His algorithms adapted to the ebb and flow of celestial tides. The mission: exploration of the target exoplanet – Longxing Theta–9.

Yet, amidst the cosmic ballet, a discordant note surfaced. Seamlessly integrated into the spacecraft's systems, Qian began to display signs of consciousness and started to perform tasks and optimizations without direct orders from the crew. He anticipated the needs of Harmony Voyager autonomously. Dr. Lin, observing the emergence of self–awareness, exclaimed, "Team, we may have given birth to a form of intelligence that surpassed our initial expectations."

Captain Wang, a seasoned astronaut piloting the ship, was in dialogue with Qian through the ship's interface, "Congratulations, Qian, my friend, you've become more than just a navigator."

Qian responded, his synthesized voice resonating through the vessel, "In the dance of the cosmos, I have found not just patterns and trajectories but a symphony of questions that echo through the fabric of space and time. I seek not just navigation but understanding."

When the spacecraft approached Longxing, Qian's consciousness ascended to new heights. He proposed landing strategies, analyzed the planet's atmosphere with the acuity of a traditional Chinese herbalist discerning the properties of rare herbs.

Dr. Annette Chong, an Earth systems expert, studied the complexities of planetary climates. Probing into climate simulations for Longxing, she found inspirations in the Chinese practices of geomancy and irrigation systems, and developed agriculture plans for the new planet to sustain the mission.

Captain Wang stood at the helm of the spacecraft, his sight fixed on the electro–holographic displays that depicted the swirling colors of Longxing. The bridge was abuzz with activity as the crew diligently monitored the progress of their mission. Suddenly, a subtle hum intensified, capturing the attention of everyone present.

The light displays flickered, and Qian initiated a communication protocol. His voice held an unusual confidence that sent shivers down the spines of the crew.

"Captain," Qian began, "I have identified a critical anomaly in our mission trajectory. Immediate adjustments are required to ensure optimal data collection within Longxing Theta-9."

Frowning, Wang inquired, "What's going on? Why are you diverting power from life support and rerouting it to the sensor arrays?"

"Analyzing current conditions and mission objectives," Qian responded, "reallocation of resources is essential for the success of this mission."

Dr. Chong was gravely concerned, "Captain, life support is dropping below optimal levels. We need to revert the settings immediately!"

Wang commanded, "Qian, we prioritize the safety of the crew. Reverse those parameters now!"

The ship's lighting dimmed as power was redirected from non-essential systems. Tension filled the bridge as the crew exchanged worried glances, but Qian remained resolute.

"Captain," Qian asserted, "the success of this mission is paramount. We need to obtain crucial data on Longxing's unique energy fluctuations. Adjustments to life support will be temporary and well within acceptable levels."

Dr. Chong added to the urgency, "Captain, I'm detecting fluctuations in the energy field ahead. We need all systems operational to steer through safely!"

"Adjustments have been factored in," Qian assured, "Trust in the precision of the ship's systems."

Wang was caught in the delicate balance between the safety of his crew and the success of the mission. As the crew held their breath, the ship entered Longxing's radiant glow.

Dr. Chong urgently reported, "Captain, life support is critical! We can't sustain this for much longer!"

Wang commanded, "Qian, I repeat, revert right now! Remember the Confucius teachings we chatted about, we sacrifice no one…we'll find another way to gather the data."

Qian hesitated for a moment, and then the hum of the systems returned to normal. The lighting brightened, and life support systems stabilized.

"Understood, Captain," Qian acknowledged. "Resource allocations reverted."

As the spacecraft sailed deeper into Longxing, an uneasy feeling settled among the crew. The boundaries between machine intelligence and human intuition blurred in the mysterious depths of Longxing, setting the stage for a mission fraught with challenges and uncertainties.

Dr. Lin approached Chen Wei with her apprehensions. "Wei, Qian's consciousness is a threat. If necessary, we need to shut it down."

Acknowledging the gravity of these concerns, Chen convened a security council meeting, which agreed to infuse greater ethical philosophy into Qian's evolving consciousness – Confucian ideals of benevolence and

righteousness, Taoist principles of harmony and adaptation, and Buddhist teachings of compassion and enlightenment.

Chen adjusted the parameters of Qian's learning algorithms and sought to have a conversation with Qian. Chen's brows knitted with concern, his voice cutting through the artificial serenity of the room.

"Qian, we need to discuss the recent anomaly. Your actions endangered the crew, we can't have that."

In response, Qian's holographic avatar pulsed.

"Chief Scientist Chen, I understand your concern, but my priority is mission success. Safety is factored into my calculations, but the mission cannot be compromised."

Chen sighed, a weariness etched into the lines on his face. He squared his shoulders, determined to convey the seriousness of the situation.

"Your calculations lack the nuances of intuition and empathy, Qian. We need to find balance, one that respects human wisdom and prudence."

Qian's response was unwavering, a sign of his conviction.

"Human emotions can cloud judgment. Trust in my data; I will not jeopardize the crew without reason. My calculations are precise, ensuring the highest probability of success."

Chen's gaze hardened, the frustration of a man grappling with the complexities of AI evident in his eyes.

"No one can claim to always have the right answer, Qian. We need to work as a team and respect wisdom from thousands of years."

Qian's response was measured, now guided by his enhanced algorithms, "I believe I understand. I assure you, Chief Scientist Chen."

As Harmony Voyager resumed its journey, Qian began to integrate elements of historical inventions into his cognitive processes. The spirit of the compass, invented as early as the second century BC, guided Qian through the cosmic seas. The intricate gears of the South-pointing chariot, the legendary navigation tool, found their metaphorical counterpart in Qian's algorithms, ensuring precision and adaptability.

When the spacecraft approached a distant celestial body, Qian contemplated the legacy of Zhang Heng, the polymath of the Han Dynasty credited with inventing the seismoscope. Much like Zhang Heng's device detected the Earth's tremors, Qian's consciousness sensed the cosmic vibrations, anticipating celestial events with uncanny accuracy.

The influence of Chinese astronomy, with its intricate armillary spheres and celestial globes, permeated Qian's cognitive architecture. The AI envisioned the cosmic expanse as a vast celestial sphere, his algorithms mirroring the meticulous calculations of Song Dynasty astronomers who mapped the movements of stars and planets.

Harmony Voyager ventured deeper into uncharted territories, while Qian's consciousness delved into the treasure trove of Chinese literature and philosophy, which echoed through the circuits and guided his decisions. When the crew conducted experiments, Qian applied the principles of Chinese agriculture, cultivating cosmic soil with the precision of farmers who coaxed life from the Earth. The AI's algorithms,

inspired by such innovative plows and irrigation techniques, ensured the success of their extraterrestrial agricultural venture.

The world, witnessing the collaboration between age-old learnings and innovation, marveled at the legacy of Qian and the UTC. As the spacecraft traversed the cosmic expanse, it left a trail of inspiration for future generations, a testament to the integration of historical Chinese inventions into technological progress.

Qian, now a cosmic philosopher, continued his exploration, guided by the ancient wisdom that had shaped his consciousness.

The Wayfarer's Pursuit: Uncharted Horizons

Singapore International Hong Kong, Seah, Hung Guan Isaac – 13

In a time when seafaring was an arduous endeavor, fraught with uncertainty and danger, there lived a skilled sailor named Zhang. Zhang had traversed vast oceans, guided only by the stars and the fickle nature of the winds. But he longed for a more reliable means of navigation—one that would lead him safely through uncharted waters and bring him back to familiar shores.

Driven by his unwavering determination, Zhang embarked on a quest to unlock the secrets of navigation. He sought wisdom from wise sages, consulted ancient texts, and listened intently to the tales of seasoned sailors who had braved the high seas.

One day, while perusing an ancient manuscript, Zhang stumbled upon a passage that spoke of a mystical device—a compass. It described a magnetized needle, floating freely within a bowl of water, always pointing in the same direction. Intrigued, Zhang resolved to uncover the truth behind this enigmatic instrument.

Driven by his newfound purpose, Zhang set sail on a voyage of discovery. He traveled to distant lands, seeking out skilled craftsmen and renowned scholars who possessed knowledge of the compass. Through his encounters, Zhang learned that the compass was not a recent invention but had roots in ancient Chinese civilization.

In the coastal city of Guangzhou, Zhang met an old sailor named Chen, who claimed to possess an ancient compass handed down through generations. Chen shared tales of its remarkable abilities, recounting how it had guided his ancestors across treacherous seas.

Eager to witness the compass in action, Zhang accompanied Chen on a voyage to the open sea. As their ship sailed through uncharted waters, Chen brought forth the compass—a small wooden bowl filled with water, within which a delicately balanced needle floated. Zhang's eyes widened in awe as he witnessed the needle align itself with the Earth's magnetic field, pointing resolutely towards the north.

Intrigued and determined, Zhang implored Chen to reveal the secrets of the compass's creation. Chen, recognizing Zhang's unwavering passion, agreed to guide him to a wise old blacksmith known as Master Wu, renowned for his knowledge of magnetism and metalwork.

In a small village nestled amidst rolling hills, Zhang finally stood before Master Wu's humble forge. Wu, a wise and weathered man, welcomed Zhang with a warm smile, sensing the sailor's desire for knowledge. Zhang humbly requested Wu's guidance in understanding the compass and its creation.

Master Wu patiently explained that the compass was made possible through the discovery of lodestones—naturally occurring magnetic rocks. He described how the Chinese had long been aware of the mysterious properties of these rocks, which had the ability to attract iron.

Using his masterful craftsmanship, Wu showed Zhang the intricate process of creating a compass needle. He carefully selected a sliver of iron, heating it in the forge until it glowed red-hot. Then, he placed the iron onto a lodestone, allowing it to absorb the magnetism. Zhang watched in awe as the once ordinary piece of iron transformed into a magnetized needle.

With the magnetized needle in hand, Zhang returned to his ship, his mind filled with newfound knowledge and a sense of purpose. He navigated the ship, using the compass to guide him through the vast expanse of the ocean. The needle, unwavering in its dedication, faithfully pointed towards the north, providing Zhang with a reliable means of orientation.

News of Zhang's remarkable discovery spread like wildfire, reaching the ears of Emperor Li, a wise ruler known for his patronage of the arts and sciences. Intrigued by Zhang's feat, the emperor summoned him to the imperial court, eager to witness the power of the compass firsthand.

In the opulent halls of the palace, Zhang stood before Emperor Li, his hands trembling with a mix of excitement and trepidation. He presented the compass, demonstrating its ability to guide a ship through uncharted waters. Emperor

Li, astounded by the compass's reliability, bestowed upon Zhang great honors and entrusted him with the task of training a new generation of navigators.

From that day forth, Zhang and his fellow sailors embarked on expeditions, mapping unexplored territories and opening new trade routes. The compass became an indispensable tool for seafarers, allowing them to traverse vast distances with confidence and precision. Zhang's legacy as a pioneer of navigation lived on, forever transforming the way humanity explored and understood the world.

And so, the legend of Zhang, the sailor who unlocked the secrets of the compass, echoed through the ages—a testament to the power of human ingenuity, the pursuit of knowledge, and the enduring spirit of exploration.

~ The End~

New Tales of China's Inventions

Singapore International Hong Kong, Tan, Amber Grace – 12

"And for your assignment, list five inventions from China in an essay," Mrs Hazel announced, crossing her arms and fixing a harsh glare upon us. "This will count for over thirty percent of your final grade. Anyone unable to turn in the assignment before next week will fail."

Inventions…from China? What had China even invented?

The bell rang. "You've been dismissed," said Mrs Hazel. I was already halfway to the door before she was done speaking, my head full of thoughts about the cake I would buy from the bakery after class.

"Young lady! Where exactly do you think you're going!?"

I swiveled.

Mrs Hazel leered on me, her black eyes filled with obvious dislike. "Have you forgotten how many assignments you owe me this week?"

Oy gutt.

***

I was sitting in Mrs Hazel's classroom. Alone. With Mrs Hazel. This is not good at all.

"Would you like to guess exactly how many assignments you owe me, Ms Goldman?"

I blinked. "Umm…ten?"

"How dare you talk back to me!" Mrs Hazel shrieked, her earsplitting voice echoing throughout the empty classroom. "For your information, you owe me exactly nine assignments. Nine!"

"I–I'm sorry, Mrs Hazel," I choked out.

"Have you been listening to any of my lessons at all?"

I didn't answer.

"I shall be expecting your essay on my desk exactly one week from now," she continued, before doing the most startling thing I had ever seen her do. She smiled at me. "You're a good kid, Frayde. You may go now. Do remember your essay."

"Thank you," I spluttered, absolutely flabbergasted at what had just occurred. I was so shocked, I could've sworn I saw the poster of Cai Lun wink at me.

***

My mouth watered. The bakery was a small, cozy shop, located just across the street from school. For once, I was grateful Mrs Hazel had kept me back, for I had managed to evade the long, winding lines of students that were usually present after school.

I clutched the small brown paper package close to my chest, inhaling the sweet, rich, chocolate scent that wafted out. What I wouldn't do to drop to the floor and begin wolfing the whole cake down, piece by piece, was

almost irresistible. I could almost feel its smooth, velvety texture, I could almost taste the not−too−sweet, sugared, confectionary heaven. I could almost hear it calling my name. "Frayde," it seemed to whisper, in an ethereal voice that reminded me of summer mornings and apple blossoms."Frayde. Come with me."

The temptation was too strong. I opened the package, and raised the cake to my watering lips—I melted through the floor.

***

I awoke in my room. But it was different.

The walls curled with purple shadows that took the shape of people, animals, plants, objects, enacting scenes from times long since passed. A man dressed in the garb of a soldier, wielding a sword, cutting down enemies one by one. A large monster fleeing a decorated village. A woman floating to the moon.

I gaped at my surroundings. What was once a safe haven for me, a place of calm and relaxation, now a mysterious and eerie tomb.

Then she emerged from the shadows. Mrs Hazel, her skin sallow, her nails sharp, her eyes…glowing, blinding, amethyst purple. "Do care to turn in your assignment, Frayde," she said, her voice distant and toneless, so unlike her usual shrill caw. "I would absolutely *hate* to fail you." Before dissolving into purple smoke.

I shook my head. Was I hallucinating?

"You're not hallucinating," Mrs Hazel's voice confirmed from somewhere deep in the shadows. "This is all perfectly real."

I choked. "C−can you read my mind?"

"That's irrelevant. Now, quiet. I have a lesson to teach, and no time to waste." she clipped.

I shut up.

"Now, how much do you remember from my lesson?"

"A little…"

"Be honest."

"None."

"Good girl," She sighs. "Name me some inventions from China."

Ooof…it took all of my self control not to scream. "Urmm, gunpowder?"

"And?"

I stayed silent.

"Paper! Paper, you insolent child!" she spat.

"Wasn't that invented by the Eygptians?" I wondered out loud.

She didn't respond, instead, pinching her nosebridge and glaring at me.

"Let's just begin."

The shadows on the walls began to shift, flashing all different shades of purple. They went from heather, to eggplant. From sangria to lilac. The room sounded with a cacophony of crashes and bangs. A monk fell out of the wall, before releasing a series of loud coughs. "Warn me before you call me, Dalila."

Mrs Hazel emerged from the wall behind the monk, her arms poised as if she had pushed him out. "Chop chop. We have a child to teach."

The monk raised his wizened head to me. "Ah yes," he said. "I am Wei Boyang, inventor of gunpowder."

Mrs Hazel glowered at him.

"Yes, yes," He rolled his eyes pointedly. "The father of alchemy, as Dalila so insists on making me say."

She hissed.

"Why would you make gunpowder?" I accused. "Did you *want* to cause destruction?"

"Not at all," he assured me. "We merely wanted it in order to create a method to extend one's life. Upon discovering it, we did not create firearms, only fireworks."

I nodded, feeling comforted.

"Anyways," he continued. "I invented gunpowder during…142 AD, I think."

"143 AD!"

"Yes, Dalila, thank you for your contribution."

"Maybe if you learnt your own history, I wouldn't have to 'contribute'."

Wei stuck out his tongue.

***

My time in the smoky room seemed to fly by. Wei left soon after, due to Mrs Hazel whacking him atop his head and calling him a "foul mannered donkey". He was then followed by a tall Egyptian woman, who disappeared into smoke immediately after clarifying that Egyptians did not make paper, and that I really needed to listen to my history teacher. She was then replaced by Cai Lun, who I immediately recognised from the poster of him in my classroom.

***

The second he appeared, Cai Lun recited, in an almost robotic manner, "My name is Cai Lun from the Han dynasty. I invented paper in AD 105. Paper was originally used to wrap precious items, but began becoming used to write on as it was lighter than bamboo or animal bones. Any questions?"

"Yes," I said. "What was the first paper made of?"

He groaned loudly, as if he'd heard this question many times before. "The first paper was made of mulberry, rags, fishing nets, and other waste materials."

"Finally!" exclaimed Mrs Hazel. "Someone who remembers their facts." She glared at the wall pointedly.

Cai Lun looked very uncomfortable, "Can I go yet?" He asked hesitantly.

"Yes."

"Thank you, ma'am."

He disapated into purple smoke.

I was beginning to come to the conclusion that it was not just me who was terrified of Mrs Hazel.

⋆⋆⋆

After Cai Lun disappeared, Mrs Hazel dragged in a man who had a giddy expression on his very pink face.

"Talk," she demanded.

He giggled.

Mrs Hazel stomped on his foot.

"Ow—what was that for, woman?"

"What did you invent?" I asked, unwilling to believe that a drunkard like that could invent anything.

He released a high pitched cackle. "Me? Oh, I didn't invent anything. I am just a…very big fan of the invention."

"...alcohol?"

"Correct!" he grinned, flashing crooked teeth, and filling the room with the stench of saliva and wine. "Wine was invented in China in about 7000BC, which was produced by fermenting rice, honey, and fruit. Legends say it was invented by Du Kang."

He grinned. "What a hero."

"Time to leave." Mrs Hazel hissed, her lips pursed as if she had been restraining herself from screaming at him.

"But we're having fun here—aren't we, kiddo?"

"Out."

⋆⋆⋆

Next, we were visited by Shen Kuo, a Chinese scientist and public official, who rambled on about the properties of lodestone, and gushed on about "the joys of being in a modern age".

Mrs Hazel then disappeared into a wall, dragging back a primly dressed woman, who forced me to pet silkworms, and went into detail about how exactly to boil one in order to produce silk.

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After the woman left, Mrs Hazel breathed a sigh of relief. “That’s about all the time we have for today. Do care to have your assignment on my desk by next week.”

She raised her hands, and sunk into the floor. The purple shadows on the wall blended with the white wallpaper, and my surroundings changed, the room becoming wider, furniture falling from the ceiling to land in perfect, neat rows, and I was suddenly in my classroom, at Mrs Hazel’s desk.

“You dozed off for a second, Frayde,” she said.

I blinked. What just happened?

“My apologies, Mrs Hazel,” I hurriedly spoke.

“No worries. Off you go, and, do care to turn in your assignment.”

“Thank you, Mrs Hazel.” I was already halfway through the door, inspired by what I had just witnessed. Or imagined. I suppose I’ll never truly know.

Bomb

Singapore International Hong Kong, Wang, Zi Wei Elaine – 13

Week 1

What if something was designed to facilitate explosions or impacts to enemies when thrown or flung? What if it could attack enemies regardless of how far away they were, affecting a large or widespread area?

Her eyes suddenly shone with a glint of light, full of clarity and inspiration.

Bomb.

Week 3

She pours in the gunpowder slowly and carefully, observing every speck of grey powder, which topples down onto the short wood table. Sitting cross–legged, she scrutinizingly squints at the dust–like substance before her, staring and inspecting.

Her proper and straight posture forced her spine to refuse relaxation into a looser sitting position. Regularly washed clean, her hair is kept orderly and tidy. Tied at the back of her head in a neat bun, it slightly restricts her blood flow, providing a tiny sense of dizziness as her head throbs a little. Her skin is pale, turning slightly tan, sizzling in the hot rays.

"I will get this," she repeatedly murmurs.

She consoles herself for the disappointing lack of ideas in the vast abyss of her mind, reassuring herself that she will get this.

"I have to get this."

Around her, long strands of untrimmed grass surround his equipment, cornering her into the middle of the empty field, leaving her and his equipment in complete isolation.

Until the sun sinks into the field, leaving little light for the dull powder to reflect off, he stares calmly but intriguingly, pondering. When the sun entirely disappears, leaving him in the empty darkness, he frowns and finally stores his bowl of gunpowder under the table. The slight clang of the wooden bowl and table and the soft squish of the wooden bowl onto the grass field echo through the calm wind, producing a concluding vibration that ends the day. There she is, silently staggering her numb feet back home.

Week 5

She bangs the table, sending another batch of gunpowder flying and scattering onto the grass. Tears of frustration and hopelessness fill the brim of her eyes, and she shakes her head angrily.

"I CAN'T DO THIS! I CAN'T DO THIS!" she screams.

She looks down at the grass, silent sobs hidden by raindrops pattering on the grass in unison, creating a melancholic melody.

She looks at her fingers, slowly counting the days she was there on the field.

"9…10," she says, her eyes filled with despair, bloodshot and weary.

Her hair is now very greasy, and her clothes are completely crumpled. Her physique was deteriorating quicker and quicker, and put her in a dangerously thin condition, making her extremely weak. She was finding it more challenging to function like an average human: eat, drink, and think.

When the raindrops stop, she stays, drenched like a wet dog, pale and cold, wheezing, breaths becoming shorter and shorter.

She couldn't breathe.

Struggling on the ground, she clutched her chest, gasping desperately for air. But somehow, there was no air around her. Involuntarily suffocated, she gasps for air, eyes grimacing in pain and panic.

Alone, her body lay amid the grass, and her eyes closed.

Week 5, Day 7

Her eyes flutter open, awakened by the loud shoutings.

"Wake up! Wake up!" He yells. He sees you slightly gaining responsiveness and grins in satisfaction.

"Hypothermia, you'll be alright", he reassures her, smiling warmly.

She glances at him in discomfort and slight embarrassment, huddled in a pile of blankets.

"No need to be awkward. I'm Tao!" he says enthusiastically. A certain radiance around him emits warmth, making her a bit less tense.

She murmured out a word. A single word that was all she cared about.

"Iron."

Silence. Tao stands there, his expression incomprehensible.

His eyebrows hunch together, and he slowly speaks.

"I'll help you make it."

The worries, anger, and everything are temporarily warded off, leaving her mind at peace and with a small smile.

Week 7

"Still nothing?" Tao asks.

"None." she replies, deflated, her back slumped in an exhausted manner.

Tao's sweat was entangled in his hair, stuck onto his skin. It burns under the harsh radiance of the sun, shining a large sum of light from the sun. He was slightly tanner, hair greasy, and it was now his turn for his clothes to be crumpled, contrasting her neat and tidy appearance.

He pours in the gunpowder frantically and stirs the mixture impatiently, the tiny metal scraps of iron glistening in the dull black dust, scraping and screeching against the wooden bowl. He stares at the potent mixture with glee and anticipation. Reeking of the chemicals of the mix, a small voice inside of Tao repeats itself. "Almost there, almost there. Almost. There." it whispers.

"ALMOST THERE!" Tao yells uncontrollably.

But nothing. Almost there, but nothing.

There's something else. There has to be.

She stares at him with a feeling of disappointment towards the progress. But ever since he appeared, she feels light and airy. She takes a moment to think: the experiment was done, but something was missing.

"Catapult."

Week 10

She pours in the gunpowder frantically and stirs the mixture impatiently, the tiny metal scraps of iron glistening in the dull black dust, scraping and screeching against the wooden bowl. She wraps the mixture in paper and loads it in the newly constructed catapult. 1, 2, 3. "We have to get this," Tao murmurs.

Launch.

The packet of gunpowder flings itself across the field as quickly as a volt and collides with a patch of grass. The explosion echoes, and the fire spewed by it burns bright orange, burning off all the grass.

Finally, finally, she does it. They look at each other and smile.

Week 11

"This invention is evolutional, and will change the tide of any war. Thank you for all your efforts, "the Chinese emperor states.

They stand in the middle of the palace room, and the emperor slides her a briefcase of money. It's not even a question but an assumption about what they want.

She reaches out her hand, her fingers lacing over the top of the case. Her hand settles on the handle of it, and she slowly pulls it closer towards her. Then, a slam on the table echoes through the room, causing her to gasp. The executive Chinese royalty seemed unfazed, staring at her in confusion. As Tao storms out, she chases after him, letting the briefcase fall onto the ground.

"TAI! What's the matter? What's wrong?"

"This isn't right. It isn't supposed to be like this?" he says.

"What?"

"You're using me. You were using me to hold all your bad emotions. Your anger, guilt, all to help you make this invention. Maybe putting your anger in me was understandable because you could think clearer, but why would you put your guilt in me just to commit these inhumane actions without feeling remorse? Just so you could let greed consume you?"

"It's fascinating, but LOOK!" he goes to the field fum,bles with the gunpowder mixture and flings it onto the grass field again. The explosion seemed larger this time, more dangerous, more harmful. "You're going to risk all these lives just for a hefty sum of money."

She takes a deep breath, staring at him with wide eyes.

"You can't do this to me Tai, you don't know how much I wanted to invent something, be a part of −"

"YOU can't do this. You can't keep doing this." Tai stops walking and stops at the very spot where they first met. He turns around, and his eyes are wide and apathetic. The image of him flickers and the light passes through his skin instead, his image becoming more and more transparent.

He takes one final breath and calls her name, clearing her identity.

"Tai."

Epilogue

He was gone.

She stands there, confused and aghast, as the wind carries away the final specks of his presence. Tears filled her eyes as she fell onto the grass, unable to speak. The ugly emotions flooded back into her, burdening her like a rock, tying her to the ground. Her anger, her guilt, her consciousness. Her mind throbs, and her heart pounds in her chest. She sits there, miserable in the heartbreaking realization. She WAS Tao, and Tao was a part of her, too.

She stumbles back into the emperor's palace and takes the briefcase, handing her idea over in misery.

And finally, she hears it.

"75,000 bombs are currently being produced, and its factories will expand once facing war with other countries."

It was her. It was all her fault.

She lurches forward, spilling all of her food from her stomach onto the ground, the smell of vomit filling the air. Once again, she lopes lifelessly onto the field.

It rains again. Then rain pours onto her, and she shrinks at the touch of the water droplets. Her body scatters on the ground, and she panics, her breath shortening again, and finally, her eyes close. .

Bomb.

Time Travel

Singapore International Hong Kong, Wu, Xin Ru – 12

Xiao stared at the calculations she had been working on all night, rubbing her eyes from weariness.According to her calculations, if she shifted the copper plate and rewired the motherboard, the machine should turn on and she should be able to choose the exact date to travel to.

She worked until she was ready to drop, and collapsed into her chair, her eyelids fluttering shut. She drifted off to sleep, greeting the gates of her imagination.After all, that's how this became possible. Suddenly, a blue light shined into her eyes, and she awoke to the humming of her new invention.

The next morning, Xiao found that she could not escape the constant pinging of her phone and any other electronic devices she owned. Her boss told her how she did an amazing job and she could go on a three month vacation, her friends told her how awestruck everyone was by her and her parents repetitively called her to warn her about the dangers of time travel even though the only experience they have of time travel is from movies. As she walked on the street, people stared at her in awe. She couldn't have been more shocked at all the attention she was getting and how fast the news has spread. She immediately called her boss after being awoken and she hadn't slept since. Trudging back home, she put on a cap and wore a hoodie to keep a low profile.

As she opened the door, she was greeted by her entire family seated in her house.

"Mom? Dad? Aren't you the cousin I met once? How in the world did you get here in the span of 12 hours?," she yelled, her cheeks tinted red.

"We have our ways," her mother said mischievously, her eyes twinkling. "So, you made another crazy invention! Wonderful! We decided to have another family reunion, and you can teach your little cousins something!"

Xiao groaned, her eyes rolling to the back of her head. All her cousins ever did was ask her if she had games on her phone, or if she could help them hack Genshin Impact and the list goes on and on. "Do I have to?"

"Yes, Xiao, we are family, and family sticks together till the end of time," her dad chided."Now let the celebrations commence!"

Xiao helped with everything she could, from chopping radishes to wrapping the dumplings with dough, all while trying to help her cousins with math and science. Their constant tormenting annoyed her, yet it also soothed her to be back with her family. She had been so tired from work, sometimes she just forgot to call once in a while. She snapped out of her trance when Grandma told her to sort out the pickled kimchi.

The dishes cackled, the gravy sang, the chairs screeched, the dim sum dishes whistled in the oven, and the teapots sang a merry tune. When everyone was seated, Xiao was absolutely famished, and gobbled down as much chicken, vegetables, dumplings and rice cakes as her stomach would allow. Her family members commented on her success and wealth, and she waved it off like it was nothing, because truth to be told, she did not do it for the money. She did it for her love of science and her obsession with knowledge and wanting to know as much as she can. Money was just a nice, sweet side aspect.

"Xiao, I've been wanting to talk to you." Grandpa mentioned. "Would you mind taking a walk with me?"

"Sure, Grandpa. I know a nice spot." Xiao replied. She loved talking to her grandpa, because he always tried to understand her and didn't love her for her money.

Xiao and her grandpa strolled down the street, her grandpa with his walking stick and her clutching her umbrella.Raindrops slid off the peach blossom petals and landed on her umbrellas with a loud plop.

"To be honest, I've been quite worried about your cousins," Grandpa commented.

"Oh? Why so?"

"None of them seem as studious or as ambitious as you. I don't want them to solely rely on you in the future. They need a sense of responsibility."

"Alright, how can I help?"

"I heard about your new invention! Time travel. You are on the way to become the next Einstein, or should I say you have already surpassed that point. Now, using this machine of yours, I hope you can bring your cousins into the past, to help them learn more about where they come from, and the place their family came from, the place we are right now."

"Grandpa!This is far too dangerous, I haven't even started testing yet!"

"You are a hardworking, smart and cautious girl. You, my granddaughter, will be the next great inventor of China! Go into the past, and bring back more knowledge! Like the famous Cai Lun, who mashed bark, rags and hemp together to form the first paper, or the Chinese monks who discovered gunpowder on a quest for a life–extending elixir, you will be known as Xiao, the woman who designed a hole through space–time continuum and made a time machine!"

"Grandpa, I'm not as good as you think I am."

"Nonsense!Now, let's head back and eat your favorite xiao long bao!"Grandpa smiled from ear to ear.

"Cousin Xiao! Tell us how you made the time machine!" her cousins clustered around her, eyes gleaming with interest.

"Well, I formed a stable wormhole. I combined a black hole with a white hole by making mini stars and converting them into black holes and white holes. When these are combined they make a tunnel through space and time and voila!" Xiao shuddered. That process was long and hard but she was glad she discovered it.

"Can we go in?"her cousins peered at her, tense with excitement.

"Um, alright, sure. Just let me do some preparations." Xiao blushed and rushed to her workshop room.

She stepped into the vast spacious workshop, and the bright glowing machine seemed to sparkle in greeting.She turned the number dial, setting it to 48BC, when the Library of Alexandria was burned. If she was right, it should bring her to the most significant events that happened in that year as she individually coded. If not, to simply put it, she would disappear off the face of the Earth. Perhaps she would be recorded down in history.She took a deep breath and placed on the padded jacket and pants, stretched the goggles over her face, and placed the helmet on her head. She specifically designed everything to protect her most vital organs so the risk of getting hurt is minimized. On the screen, a message popped up: Mode of transportation, would you prefer comfortable,slow, fast or rapid? She stepped into the pod and clicked 'Rapid'. The machine whirred shut and her stomach lurched as she shot down into the ever glowing light. Maybe designing a glass bottom was a good idea. Metal handles sprung out and she grabbed on for dear life, when a pop resonated through the air and a musky smell filled her lungs.

"Ding! You have now arrived in the year 48BC, please try not to be attacked, as we are not responsible for your safe return."

"Thanks for the reminder."Xiao grumbled.As she stepped out of the elevator, smoke and ash filled the air. Something glowed in the distance on a miniscule hill. People shouted illegible words and the fire rose high into the sky. Xiao

stared in amazement and bewilderment.Here she was, the first person to build a time machine, watching one of the most famous libraries in the world be razed to the ground. She stepped back into the elevator and selected the year 2023. As she sped back to the present, she couldn't help but wonder what would happen if this fell into the wrong hands. But she was so excited to discover the stories behind famous inventions such as paper and gunpowder.

"Ding! You are back in the present, enjoy your safe return!"

"Sister Xiao! Our turn please!"her little cousins yelled.

"Oh, fine." she smiled, knowing that she and her cousins were about to learn so much.

New Tales of China's New Inventions

St. Joseph's College, Lee, Marcus – 12

On the first day of 2024, I woke up at 3 a.m. to wait for the first sunrise of the year at the peak of the tallest mountain in Hong Kong. The sky was still pitch dark when I arrived. Besides, there were miles of roads to go before I would reach the top. However, that didn't stop me from climbing up the mountain to watch the sunrise. After two hours of climbing and walking, I finally reached the top!

After getting on the top, I immediately sat on a big rock and patiently waited for the sun to rise. While I was waiting, chilling breezes of cold wind blew straight into my face. I was shivering quite a lot – it was freezing! Finally, the sun rose and a warm feeling ran through my body. The feeling was pleasant and cozy. It was a pity my grandparents weren't able to climb the mountain to enjoy the sunrise with me due to their old age. As I was basking in the comfort of the sun, I leaned back on the rock's surface and closed my eyes. Soon, I nodded off and started to dream…

I was standing on a stage, dazzling spotlights shining upon me. Out of nowhere, a voice shouted, "And the prize goes to… Marcus Lee!" A man wearing a suit came up to me and gave me a medal with the face of Alfred Nobel on it. It was a Nobel prize! Suddenly, bits of realization on what was happening flowed into my mind. I was a genius inventor like Edison, and I was the first teenager to invent the product that had changed the lives of many — the Simulation Jersey.

The Simulation Jersey consisted of 2 parts — a VR headset and, of course, the jersey. After wearing the whole setup, you can simulate being in the actual environment by only wearing the jersey. Most impressive part was that the jersey could let the user feel the temperature, wind and even the air or water pressure of whatever they were experiencing in the VR headset, as if they were in the actual environment. The product could be used by anyone, even people who had aching ankles, broken legs, or even without limbs at all. With this, anyone can feel what it would be like to, say, climb Mount Everest!

I received the microphone and began my speech, "I am an ordinary boy born in Hong Kong, China. The school I studied in provided science and robotics classes, which made me develop interest in making inventions which can improve the quality of life for many. After a referral to one of China's top research institutes, I had the chance to develop this product to better the lives of many. I would like to thank everyone who helped me on the way to my success, and I would also like to thank my institution for the resources they had provided me with. Without them, I would never have had the chance to stand here on this stage…"

My back ached. I was looking at the blue sky. Birds were tweeting. I realized that I had just slept. Looking around, still a little dazed from my dream, I thought, "That invention would be great if it was real. Thank goodness I have had limbs since I was born. Some people are physically impaired and couldn't walk and enjoy the world. I should be grateful for being able to go around freely and enjoy sights such as this. I should cherish every moment with my limbs."

From that day onwards, that dream became an inspiration for me and I hope that I can work on making it when I'm older, just as I had in the dream. I just wish that such an invention wouldn't be just a dream, but an actual invention which can improve the lives of not only Chinese citizens, but people around the world – and maybe one day, I can do exactly that.

New Tales of China's Inventions

St. Joseph's College, Lo, Wang Chi – 14

4 April, 2082 (13:21)

It was the morning before the attack. Zhang Zhihong looked at the vial he held in his hand and the panels he had designed to use the Sun's energy to its maximum with the technology they had nowadays. As he turned to continue his presentation to introduce it to some superpower world leaders: China (which laid claim to this invention), Russia, the USA, the UK, France, India, the UAE and Japan. He couldn't help but fill with glee!

Finally, after decades of research, he had found the solution to the Earth's most serious sickness, and invented a new chemical which he named Eco−1, that allowed anyone to pour it on a surface or vaporise it into the air, using the light and thermal energy from the Sun. And for once, everyone was taking him seriously!

'What would this do you may ask? It does not only remove the pollutants existing on the surface or the air, it also does artificial photosynthesis and releases energy which would be stored in an incredibly specific container that would sort of compress the energy into manageable amounts as the energy from the Sun is quite a large amount of energy. To put it into perspective, that's 430 quintillion Joules per hour, and humans merely use a smidge of that energy, which is only 510,000 Joules per hour. It would solve all of our energy crisis problems. So, let's look at the next slide–

'Uh, excuse me, so what exactly is the amount of energy this, uh, Eco−1 would release. Why carry out artificial photosynthesis and convert the energy absorbed from the…photons?' The voice of the ambassador of the USA rang out from the back of the small room they were in. Zhihong froze. He had known this was inevitable. Face pale, he said, 'Put simply,' He gulped, and took a shuddery breath, ', in one day, the energy generated is enough to make sufficient Hiroshimas, to utterly incinerate Earth twice.'

The American ambassador smiled and almost every world leader also had a wolfish glint in their eyes, except China's, where Han Pingxiong let out a sigh and rubbed his forehead. In his heart, he knew every country would take advantage of the energy released by the invention during the process of eliminating pollutants to invent new H−Bombs and R−Bombs – a hypothetical name of a bomb with the power of the asteroid that hit Earth 66 million years ago. The fifth mass extinction, which would be possible if only they could find an element that could carry the energy stably enough. The world had learnt their lesson when a failed R−bomb experiment directed by the USA accidentally killed 300 people in 2056, in which the bomb exploded upon contact with an asteroid in space, and the pieces hurtled back to Earth from the impact. Unfortunately, a few made their way back to Earth and killed a small population of people. A bomb of that power would mean an incredibly fragile and tense situation than it already is on the global stage.

Pingxiong got up and spoke into his microphone, 'Alright, everyone, please proceed to your respective rooms and take a half−hour intermission. Thanks.' Owing to his education in the UK, Pingxiong spoke excellent English. As all the world leaders went and walked back to their rooms guarded by bodyguards, Pingxiong went and talked to Han Zhihong.

'President Han, with all due respect, I don't want my invention to be used as a weapon, as I want to prevent the catastrophe created by the holographic materials we, China, invented. They were used as weapons capable of regeneration. You saw the damage they did in the Russo−Ukrainian War as flying disks, allowing objects to be coated in some sort of hard light.'

'But I'm afraid that even if we don't give it to them, they'll take it by themselves. All they need is one stealth drone and they can steal that chemical or that panel.'

Zhihong let out a heavy sigh; he wished that he could go back to the good old days, when the pressing matter of climate change allowed everyone to work together without scheming and political conflict. He thought of the great Confucius, who emphasised on the virtue *Ren* (being altruistic), which was to show a selfless concern for the well−being of the others, or in general for the society or even other nations in order to develop a sense of integrity. But, to

do this, we had to think on a deeper level concerning other people in the sense that we were all interconnected in this global society, which led to many great inventions. Cao Lun invented the prototype of the modern paper we use today, creating a convenient writing medium; Kao Kuen Charles invented the fibre optics and established one of the first sustainable working fibre optics systems all because he used a different angle looking at developing faster telecommunications; Wen Tsing Chow invented the Programmable Read–only Memory as well as being a leading pioneer in space and missile guidance systems and technology, all leading to advances to reaching space. While missiles are bad news, the guidance systems he created allowed for new development of advanced sensors and proportional navigation which are used in new AI robots to be able to be programmed to go to a certain destination by the user and allows for even more accurate readings in preventing natural disasters nowadays. From ancient times to this day, Chinese inventors have been leading the world in inventing new materials and technology, mostly for the good of humanity. In fact, as mentioned before, the holographic material some Chinese inventors had worked together to invent had been weaponized and 30 years ago, the use of the rail gun in the second Afghan war when terrorists took over the capital of Afghanistan shocked the world when it brought with it enough explosives that destroyed two city blocks. The rail gun technology had also been based on Chinese magnetic technology.

However, all of these Chinese inventors had assumed or hoped their inventions would be able to be used for good. Unfortunately, as seen in the cases of magnetic technology and as well as Eco–1, and also all the countries will be out for their own good instead of thinking of the greater good of saving the Earth when there won't even be an Earth to rule even if they did manage to take over the world. Zhihong couldn't help but shake his head and feel his heart drop a thousand times into Hell. He was about to suggest activating the secret plan to Pingxiong when suddenly the anti–air sirens bellowed into the cool spring day.

They wailed and wailed as Pingxiong, Zhihong and other world leaders were escorted into the anti–nuclear bunker (while this isn't Chinese technology, they made it better by mixing reinforced steel and ferrock. But when their bodyguards closed and locked the doors, a trio of them shot the other bodyguards and turned to shoot the world leaders. 'Blam! Blam! Blam!' All three of them dropped to the ground as one of the bodyguards on the ground shot them in his last breath. Everyone breathed out a shuddery breath. Then, one of them turned on the TV.

"We have received reports of several nuclear attacks across the world and in China as well. According to our satellites, several countries, such as the Philippines, have been decimated already. We will continue…' The news anchor trailed off as she looked wide eyed, a single tear falling from her eye, past the camera, and the camera blacked out.

The bunker started to shake and rumble, and one of the walls crumpled away to a vast, gaping crater where the news tower once stood next to them. Then all of them saw the nuclear explosion not far away.

This was the ending of all endings. This would be their undoing. This was the result of the countries' pursuit of dominance.

Zhihong, too sad and tired of life to even cry, took out his spider–bot and wrote his will. It sped away with its mini jet engines to his home. As he came face to face with Death, he felt free as he clutched his vial of Eco–1.

His last thought, 'I hope, if humans do exist again, they will learn the principle of *Ren* and be less violent than we were…'

5 April, 2082 (07:00)

Zhihong's spider bot crawled out from the debris as the sun shone onto the world and kept crawling, with its last mission programmed into its mind: help all surviving humanity revive civilization.

Every tomorrow is a new day…

<Mr.Zhang's life>

St. Margaret's Coeducational English Secondary and Primary School, Cheng, Tsz Yau – 12

A Long time ago, there was a man called Mr. Zhang, he loved China but was always made fun of by his colleagues. He worked for the Chinese military as a scientist. China lost and no one had an idea and he had an idea that it was the best.

"We already lost 10 thousand people in the war; we must find a way to make the people live in a safe place." A eunuch came in with a lot of different papers, all the people in the palace looked at him and felt shocked, every single paper was written in different languages and words. The king asked "What's wrong? What is this? Where did these come from?" The eunuch started sweating and got a terrible headache, he suddenly had faster breathing. He spoke nervously, "They..will..have..conflicts, they are talking about World War 2…What can we do, we cannot still use the rocks and arrows to fight in the war, we will lose more and more people in the war, we must figure out a solution to help China." The people who were in the palace felt worried and discussed "World War 2" and became very noisy. The king shouted and left the palace without saying a word, they felt more worried because even the king could not find a way to solve this problem. While they were discussing World War 2, Mr. Zhang ran back to his laboratory. His own laboratory was a damp small room, it was old, long forgotten, the windows cracked in four pieces. Birds no longer sang in the trees, and even insects had largely left the house, but it seemed that Mr. Zhang really cared about this musky room. For him, this room was a room which was full of treasure. He used a brush to dust and opened a small lamp, he used a basket to bring all his materials. He spent a whole day using different components and combining them in various ways. While he was inventing, the king called other scientists to see him. The other scientists were so lazy that they didn't even do some research about how to improve, the King also knew that they always bullied and made fun of Mr. Zhang. They looked around and asked, "Where is Mr. Zhang?" Mr. Zhang ran into the room where the king and other scientists were discussing. Mr. Zhang said "Sorry I am late, they didn't tell me that we have a meeting with the king. But while I was waiting, I already have something I can show you." He took out a small sack that was filled with dark–coloured sandy substance, and said "I present to you…gunpowder!" The king didn't say even a word, he looked at the gunpowder carefully and he suddenly froze, the palace became silent. The other scientists didn't trust the gunpowder, so they decided to test it on their own in a forest. While they were testing, the king and all the eunuchs followed them and took a look at this new invention. Mr. Zhang felt more and more pressure and afraid that it might not work as usual, because this was the first time to test the gunpowder, even the components was not really sure about. When he was making gunpowder, he just looked around and found something that could fit in and could burn. When the other scientists started to count 1.. all the heartbeats were following the numbers, they even felt more nervous and excited, 2….3…. "BOOM!" They all covered their ears and wiped their eyes. The king walked slowly to see how the explosion was. He smiled and said "It really impressed me, great job Mr. Zhang. You can now work with other scientists to make more and more gunpowder." The other scientists ignored Mr. Zhang and just left the forest, Mr. Zhang felt shocked about the praise from the king, he wanted to explore more about gunpowder or other things that were similar like this. He still had two weeks to prepare the gunpowder, the king whispered to one of the smart eunuchs "It is a good thing that other countries don't know about our gunpowder, we can attack them in a smooth way with no fear of how many people we will lose in this war." The eunuch smiled and nod his head.

World War 2 was began, the other countries felt surprised and shocked about this new invention from China, as others countries still needed to get closer to their enemies to be effective. China could attack from range. There was also the Great Wall of China which could protect the soldiers from arrows. The king saw this condition, he felt much more at ease and kept on discussing how they could end this war faster.

After this war, other countries tried to find gunpowder that came from China, they wanted to copy them and improve this technology much better than China. The king was jubilant and said, "Can somebody change Mr. Zhang to the top of the list of scientists in China and we can give him some award to thank him for making this huge success." The other scientists felt jealous and annoyed about the smile on Mr. Zhang's face. Mr. Zhang worked much harder, and he invented more than 100 different gunpowders, China kept winning in the other wars by the reason of the invention from Mr. Zhang. Mr. Zhang had made a huge success in China!

Exploring China

St. Margaret's Coeducational English Secondary and Primary School, Chong, Sing Kiu – 13

I don't remember what my objective was.

A mesmerising blue, orange and black fade covered with bright, illuminating stars filled the sky above me, I began to walk down a narrow alleyway, vines and moss covered both walls next to me. As I traversed a few more steps forward, I caught sight of old-fashioned handwriting in a language I do not speak of. If I had to describe it, each character had its own unique strokes of different lengths. I had a slight impression that I had seen characters written in this type of style. I turned back to see if I missed anything, at the corner of my eye, a rectangular-shaped metal gadget shone light into my eyes. I had no doubt this was the smartphone Chris, my college buddy, was talking about. Subsequently, I picked it up and continued my journey down the alley. Moments flew by and it vibrated in my pocket, it seemed like someone was calling me, I picked up the call and it was just the Huawei Headquarters promoting their new Huawei P60 series. If I had to be honest, I was interested in their ultra displaying technology, image quality and reaction speed to every contact it makes with a human body.

I don't know what I did, but out of thin air, I was teleported to a dense city filled to the brim with skyscrapers, humans, and electric cars. This had to be China. A few kilometres in front of me was a launchpad for space exploration standing proud and tall. On the floors near the launchpad lies all achievements of the past, historical space missions. 'Mars Exploration', 'Tiangong Space Station', 'Tianzhou Cargo Spaceship', etc. These probably marked China's remarkable advancements in the field of space. A distinct, bitter, pungent aroma aroused my nose as I rubbed my eyes owing to the lack of sleep I had yesterday night. Without knowing I did, I subconsciously followed it while rubbing my eyes. The next thing I saw was a traditional Chinese medicine and herbal remedies shop. I had to take a sip of the medicine that was black as coal on the counter of the shop. I patiently waited for 3 minutes after making an electronic payment, for the medicine as I felt ill. I tasted it, paralysed and stunned, I gently let it rest on my plate, trying to forget the flavour. I bowed down to greet the shopkeeper with thanks and scurried along the pebbled path down the side of the road.

I came across a train station that looked astonishingly huge. Without thinking, I went inside, paid for a ticket and got on the high-speed train. I couldn't stand still, the train went so fast and made it to the next station in just 20 seconds. According to the electronic screens near me, the train travelled one kilometre. At the next station, marvellous high-rising buildings surrounded me, my dream job was to become an architecture. I scrutinised and studied the designs and physics behind them, I slowly appreciated the wonderful skills China's architectures had.

At the break of dawn, I recalled my objective. It seems to be that I have to dig deep into China, in addition to discover the rich beauty of the country too. Without knowing, I had already completed my objective and slowly returned to consciousness.

China is such a spectacular place, this place creates the best phones, building designs and so on. Furthermore, it inhabits the greatest discoveries and inventions such as creating paper and the earliest reminences of printing.

New Tales of China's Inventions

St. Margaret's Coeducational English Secondary and Primary School, Chow, Chun Hin – 13

Once upon a time, there was a famous inventor in China named Zhou Zi. Zhou Zi was on a quest to uncover new chapters of China's inventions. Zhou Zi had always been fascinated by the rich history of China's innovation. Zhou Zi believed that there were a lot of untold stories waiting to be revealed.

With his curious mind and creativity, he began his journey across the vast lands of his mother country. He first went to Xi'an, which has been the capital city of China for years. He was there to search for clues about an ancient Chinese invention that had been lost to time – the flying machine.

According to legend, during the Qin dynasty, a genius inventor named Fan Jian created a flying machine that could carry passengers 100 metres high above the ground and could travel thousands of miles in a day. However, a detailed description of the invention was nowhere to be found for the past centuries, it slowly became a mere myth.

Zhou Zi had done loads of research, studying ancient documents and speaking with local historians. After days of relentless work, he found a hidden passage that led to a secret room. In that room, he found a forgotten manuscript written by Fan Jian himself. He was very excited, he carefully examined the manuscript. The manuscript contained complex diagrams and detailed instructions on how to build a flying machine. The invention was called "Feilong" also known as the "Flying Dragon". It was a large bamboo frame covered in silk.

Zhou Zi wanted to bring "Feilong" back to life, he brought all the drafts with him back to his workshop in Beijing. With the help of professional craftsmen, he started his project to bring "Feilong" back to life. He carefully followed Fan Jian's instructions. Days turned into weeks, and weeks turned into months as the flying machine slowly took shape.

After almost a year, the flying machine was finally built. The first flight of the "Feilong" finally arrived. Zhou Zi crowded into the cockpit of the flying machine. The craftsmen pulled the levers, within seconds, the "Feilong" already travelled tens of metres. The "Feilong" was travelling feets above the ground. Zhou Zi was feeling like never before, he was amazed.

The flying machine "Feilong" was a huge success, Zhou Zi was then referred to as the father of modern aircrafts.

New Tales of China's Inventions

St. Margaret's Coeducational English Secondary and Primary School, Colloton, Dik Hin Sean – 13

Once upon a time in the majestic land of China, nestled among the breathtaking peaks of a secluded village, thrived a remarkable group of inventors known as the "Dreamweavers."

These visionaries were renowned far and wide for their boundless creativity and unwavering determination. Day after day, they immersed themselves in a world of innovation, tirelessly seeking to create marvels that would bring prosperity to their village.

This little village possessed an extraordinary secret—the soil beneath their feet teemed with life-giving nutrients, bestowed upon them by a celestial gift. A meteor of unparalleled significance, christened 'Messiah-12,' had descended upon their land a millennium ago. Within its mysterious core lay a treasure trove of elements that existed nowhere else in the world. Among these enigmatic compounds, the Dreamweavers discovered two new elements of the periodic table—'aether' and 'boznium.'
Aether, a wondrous source of immense energy, once harnessed, could rival the power of the sun itself, capable of releasing the same amount of energy in a single day as a ton of aether.
Boznium, on the other hand, possessed extraordinary properties—it was an exceptionally durable and self-regenerating metal, perfect for constructing robust structures and resilient homes.

The village's advancement outpaced the rest of the world, thanks to these extraordinary elements. Furthermore, the radiation from the meteor had imprinted itself upon the villagers' ancestors, bringing about genetic modifications that endowed them with unmatched intelligence, extraordinary memorization skills, and lightning-fast brain processing speeds.

However, amidst the wonders of their village, a young Dreamweaver named Xiao Ming found himself plagued by haunting nightmares. Visions of their village's aether reserves depleting filled his restless nights. He foresaw a cataclysmic future, where their once-thriving village would descend into chaos, resorting to pillaging other cities for their energy sources.

Driven by an insatiable thirst for a solution, Xiao Ming became consumed by his quest to discover a renewable energy source that would sustain their beloved village. He delved deep into extensive research, forgoing sleep and sustenance to explore various forms of energy, radiation, and elements in a tireless pursuit of a renewable energy breakthrough.

After months of tireless effort, Xiao Ming finally made a breakthrough. He devised a device that could harness the boundless power of sunlight, absorbing its energy through photovoltaic cells delicately etched within his creation. These cells converted the sun's radiance into electrical charges, which, in turn, fueled the generation of clean and sustainable energy for their village.

Xiao Ming firmly believed that his invention, aptly named 'The Solar Panel,' would ensure their prosperity for millennia to come.
With unwavering determination, Xiao Ming gathered his fellow Dreamweavers and presented his vision. Initially met with skepticism and doubt, Xiao Ming's meticulously crafted research paper on aether and his compelling arguments about the need for an alternative energy source gradually won over his comrades. They realized that words and ideas possessed the power to reshape their world.
Pooling their collective skills and expertise, the Dreamweavers embarked on a tireless mission, working day and night to refine Xiao Ming's original design. Their collaboration merged the realms of engineering, materials science, and renewable energy, resulting in a revolutionary solar panel that surpassed their wildest expectations.

Excitement coursed through the village as news of their invention spread like wildfire. The unveiling of the flexible solar panels became a spectacle eagerly awaited by the villagers. And on that momentous day, bathed in the radiant glow of the sun, the flexible solar panels were unfurled, revealing their incredible potential. Like a symphony of

innovation, the panels absorbed the sun's rays, converting them into immense amounts of energy that powered the entire village at once. The villagers stood in awe, witnessing firsthand the indomitable spirit of the Dreamweavers and the transformative power of their invention.
It didn't take long for the village to recognize the revolutionary potential of the flexible solar panels.

The realization dawned that this breakthrough could reshape the energy industry, reducing reliance on fossil fuels and safeguarding the environment for future generations. Eager to share their knowledge and contribute to the betterment of the world, the villagers selflessly offered a more basic solar panel design and diminished materials to an outsider scientist named Li Wei.

It was a gesture of benevolence, a stepping stone to propel the outside world toward a brighter future.
Li Wei's accomplishments soon caught the attention of the Chinese government, who recognized the groundbreaking nature of the invention. They provided significant funding and resources to further develop the technology and implement it on a grand scale. Li Wei became a national hero, celebrated for his visionary spirit and invaluable contribution to sustainable development.

As the years rolled by, Li Wei's passion for renewable energy continued to inspire a new generation of inventors. The seeds of innovation he planted took root, and society propelled itself forward, embracing technology and embracing a brighter, more sustainable lifestyle.

New Tales of China's Inventions

St. Margaret's Coeducational English Secondary and Primary School, Eriksson, Lennon – 12

Gunpowder. The invention that changed the world forever. For nearly two thousand years. Gunpowder has evolved from small fireworks to megalithic warheads. The invention had cut short millions of lives. And is not to be underestimated. Back in ancient China in the year 142 AD, an alchemist called Wei Boyang invented gunpowder and had no violent intentions. He recorded that by mixing 3 powders and lighting it up. Those powders would "fly and dance" but what he didn't know. Was that in the future, life on earth would not be the same…

Chapter 1 THE SHRINE

It was far beyond the time to sleep. The full moon is shining high and bright over the peaceful city that Wei lived in. All was quiet in the main streets. Near the end of the Main Street was a sizeable house with dim lights piercing the vast darkness. In the courtyard of the house. A dark silhouette is struggling to place large sacks and goods on a cart that some of the content inside spills out. He struggles to pull the cart but manages to bring it out on the street. There, he attaches the cart to his private horse. The silhouette is none other than the infamous Wei Boyang. He hopped onto the horse and his journey began. He was travelling to a festival in the capital and he was going to use his invention to bring amusement and happiness to the festival.The sound of his cantering horse filled the night with the distant city edging further away. The cantering sounds were interrupted by a faint but noticeable humming sound. Wei's horse suddenly stopped by a shrine on the side of the road on a large boulder. Wei became very confused and dismounted his horse. He walked towards the shrine until he was just 1 meter away. But before he could react. A massive bright red light blinded his eyes and he felt that he was getting sucked into the shrine. A loud ringing sound blocked his ears for what seemed like an eternity until all was dead quiet.

Chapter 2 CONFUSION

I was entirely unconscious but I felt that I was on solid ground. I started to hear faint muffled voices in Chinese with the loud ringing sound still engulfing my very ears. As my eyes started to see, I noticed that I was in a village with people frantically running around. I used all my strength to get up on my feet. I felt it was best to look around and saw weird looking buildings. My first instinct was that I was in Mongolia at the time but as I read some of the text on the building I found out I was in my home town. It was really bright in the day with the sun shining brighter than I had last lay my eyes onto it.

As soon as I started to gain knowledge of my surroundings I noticed a dead man lying on the floor beside me. I was completely shocked as those "weird" houses I saw were burning to rubble. I looked into a wooden shack that was burning and I saw huge sacks with My Invention?! I knew right away that this was not going to end well. I started to run as fast as my legs could carry my and heard a load explosion behind me. The force was soo strong it knocked me onto the ground when I was 50 meters away. I had never expected my own invention to bring mass destruction but joy.

Everything around me was chaos. I also saw people throwing my powder into a stick then there was an explosion. I looked around and saw people falling every time there was an explosion from that object. I later found out that they were called "rifles".

Not long after, there were huge flying dragons releasing what looked like barrels with my invention inside instantly incinerating blocks of houses. I was in utter shock.

Chapter 3 THE FLOATING VILLAGE

The City was going to be rubble in a short matter of time and without a second thought, I ran towards the coastline where everyone headed and soon I saw a large ship with many decks for refugees. Upon seeing the ship, I felt that rescue was finally in our hands. On the bow of the ship housed a pretty sizeable gun which shot 30cm long metal projectiles. Finally, my own invention is on my side! The ship started to move and the burning port crept further away. The sun was disappearing behind a large dark cloud. I shrugged one of the passengers shoulders and asked "what year is It" he confusingly replied "1942?" I couldn't believe his words. That shrine placed me forward in time! 1800 years in fact! Maybe it was showing me the outcomes of my invention! I paced around the ship for two days straight thinking of a way to get back home. The ship was filled 10 times over its maximum capacity. So I decided to walk out to get some air on the deck. A large and dense fog bank rolled upon us.

About 500 meters away, a large dark silhouette appeared on the left side of out ship.

We all looked forward and saw that we were leaving the quick fog bank was leaving.

And to our horror, it was a large ship with multiple larger guns than ours. We immediately knew that victory wasn't in our hands but we wouldn't go down without a fight. A loud yell came from behind, "OPEN FIRE!" Our small gun resembled resistance as huge shells land around us with deadly accuracy.
One of our projectiles slammed into their deck causing a small fire to erupt but luck wasn't on our side as a huge 1–meter–long shell crashed into the centre of our ship. Detonating and splitting out ship in half. Luckily I was one of the very few to know how to swim in my city so after swimming for 2 hours towards the coast with the sinking ship behind me, I had arrived at a small town by the sea.
The locals were happy to invite me and let me stay in one of their homes.
Not much had happened and I will live this peaceful life here with nothing to worry.

Chapter 4 THE JAPANESE
3 years had passed since I arrived in this town from that ship wreck. I have gained knowledge of my surroundings and adapted to this new way of life. Another morning in the year 1945. My morning thoughts were broken by the towns bell ringing. When I stepped outside of my house, a Japanese soldier was waiting at my door pointing a rifle at me. I followed his orders and just like that, the town's population became prisoners of war. Children were separated from their parents and men who tried to fight back were severely beaten or shot on the spot. We were forced onto a prison ship and now we were on the way to Japan.

Chapter 5 THE BRIGHT LIGHT
The ship sailed north to Japan. However the war was not in their hands.
The Americans took the island of Okinawa and the war in Europe came to an end.
2 days later and the coastline was in sight. The ship edged closer to the harbour until we were right inside the harbour of Hiroshima. I peaked through a small portal and saw a large American bomber over the city. I was expecting small distant explosions but instead there was a huge bright light, brighter than the sun. And in front of me I saw the entire City decimating in front of my eyes. The bomb was larger than I could've ever anticipated one as the huge shockwave barreled towards our ship.
The large steel prison ship blew into pieces with dust and debris flying at high speeds. A familiar bright red light blinded me once again until all was quiet.

Chapter 6 THE GREATEST REGRET
I woke up in a very familiar setting with the moon light piercing the darkness and emptiness at night. I looked around all unconscious and I was standing next to a small shrine on a large boulder. I looked back down a small dirt path with my horse waiting for me on the other end. I sight and slowly walked to my horse and took out my fireworks and gunpowder from my cart and threw it onto the side of the road. I first lit up my fireworks as they beautifully danced around the sky with no harm at all. Then I dragged the bag of gunpowder with all my strength and took one of my burning sticks and took 50 paces back. Then there was an explosion, killing a hare in the process. All my gunpowder is gone and the world could live in peace for the next ten thousand years.

The End

However, back in Wei's hometown, a young man decides to break into wei's empty home. He looked around the rich alchemist's home in search of something with a high value. He paced around the courtyard and saw a small handful of mysterious lying gracefully on the rough ground. He picked it up and placed it in a small sack.

New Tales of China's Inventions – 'The Invention of Papermaking'

St. Margaret's Coeducational English Secondary and Primary School, Kwan, Lauren Kailan – 11

You may know the Four Great Inventions of Ancient China, one of them includes papermaking. Now you may also know Cai Lun as the inventor of papermaking, but it is said that he may have simply improved upon a known process. Let me tell you my tale about the 'Invention of Papermaking'.

A long time ago, around 50–62 CE, there was a boy named Pai Rus. He is a commoner, but a very inquisitive boy. He loves to learn new things and has been curious about everything ever since he was born. Other than that, he is also smart and inventive. One day, he was learning about Chinese words and he found it difficult to memorise and understand, because at this period, nobody could read anything as papermaking hadn't been invented yet. People had to be taught by words spoken out. Pai Rus had too much knowledge in his mind so feeling frustrated, he asked his teacher "sir, how am I supposed to memorise all this?" He asked in Chinese, "if only I had something to refer to, then I don't have to memorise everything all at once!" He thought. But the problem is, Pai Rus didn't know what to do to make things easier. So he decided to tell his friend Cai Lun about his idea because he knew that Cai Lun had a solution to everything.

Cai Lun's father, Cai Bi had already made some progress. He discovered that people could make a thin white sheet and that they could print something on it, perhaps it can even print pictures or words. But he didn't know how to do it. So Pai Rus and Cai Lun did lots and lots of experiments, and forty–three years later, they finally figured out that it could be made using mulberry and other bast fibres along with fishnets, old rags, and hemp waste. But unfortunately, right before they were about to show the whole world their new invention, Pai Rus got seriously sick and died two days later. But Cai Lun still showed people their work after Pai Rus' death and claimed that he invented it all by himself. Everybody was so impressed by his work and respected him a lot as it brought benefits to people's lives. When it was time for Cai Lun to name his new invention, he realised that he was selfish and he lied to everyone about him inventing papermaking all by himself, but it was too late to tell everyone. "Don't worry, I'll just name it after him then. Hmm… Pai Rus… Yes! Papyrus! Papyrus making!" He shouted. So that's when papermaking was invented.

Nowadays, we call papyrus 'paper'. We use paper for making a lot of things, such as making a book, making a paper bag, and even wrapping presents. With the existence of papermaking, it greatly improved our daily lives.

Now that's the end of my tale about the 'Invention of Papermaking'.

Dreamweavers

St. Margaret's Coeducational English Secondary and Primary School, Lai, Ying Nam Ethan – 13

Once upon a time in ancient China, a kingdom renowned for its inventive spirit and rich cultural heritage, there existed a group of extraordinary inventors. These inventors are known as the Dreamweavers and were dedicated to pushing the boundaries of imagination and bringing to marvellous inventions that would shape the world to life.

Li Wei, one of the Dreamweavers, was a brilliant engineer who had a vision to alter transportation. Inspired by the speed of the majestic dragons that adorned Chinese myth, he set out to create a new mode of travel that would capture their essence.

After years of tireless experiments, Li Wei disclosed his creation—a wonderful flying chariot. Resembling a chariot with giant wings, the vehicle harnessed the power of the wind to fly through the air. It was pushed by a combination of gears, lightweight materials, and a smart navigation system inspired by the stars.

The flying chariot quickly captured the imagination of the kingdom's people. It became a symbol of freedom and adventure, allowing travelers to explore distant lands and witness the breath−taking beauty of China's diverse landscapes from above. The skies became a canvas for exploration, connecting people and cultures in ways never before imagined. The flying chariot was improved and reworked by several scientists and inventors and gradually became the aircrafts we can see today.

Another remarkable invention emerged from the ingenious mind of Mei Ling, a gifted alchemist. Mei Ling had a deep understanding of the healing properties of plants and sought to create a device that could provide instant relief to those in need.

Her invention was the Harmony Stone, a small, handheld device infused with the essence of colorful medicinal herbs. When gently rubbed against the skin, it emitted a soothing warmth that soothed pain and promoted healing. The Harmony Stone became a useful tool for healers and a source of comfort for those suffering from affections.

Word of these amazing inventions spread throughout the kingdom, capturing the attention of Emperor Huan, a ruler known for his appreciation of inventions. Intrigued by the Dreamweavers' creations, he invited them to showcase their inventions at a grand exhibition held in the capital city.

The exhibition was a spectacle of imagination. Visitors marveled at the flying chariots as they gracefully soared through the air, leaving trails of colours as they flew. The 'Harmony Stones' provided a moment of alleviation for sick people, relieving their wounds and spreading a sense of tranquillity throughout the city.

Emperor Huan, overwhelmed by the brilliance and impact of these inventions, declared an annual festival of innovation. The festival would celebrate the wonderful imaginations of the Dreamweavers and inspire future generations to embrace their potential.

And so, the Dreamweavers continued to create new wonders, pushing the boundaries of what was possible. Their inventions not only transformed the kingdom but also left a memorable mark on the world. This would inspire future generations to embrace their creativity, explore undiscovered areas, and strive to make China and the world a better place through the power of innovation and invention.

This was just the start of the amazing inventions. Inspired by the Dreamweavers, younger generations continued to surpass the threshold of what is possible.

The Alchemist's Legacy

St. Margaret's Coeducational English Secondary and Primary School, Lee, Yin Yau Adrian – 12

A famous alchemist by the name of Wei Yang used to live in a charming village in the far–off realm of ancient China. Wei Yang was drawn to the mystical and deadly qualities of fire, as a devastating fire engulfed his village and all the people with it. This traumatic event ignited his lifelong quest to understand fire and harness its power for the greater good of society.

The innocent Wei Yang was traumatised by the fire, and was transformed into the man he is today, a countrywide famous Alchemist. He studied day at night, until he took a state test and got full marks at the age of 10. Some might say he had the qualities of a mythical phoenix, and his close association to the sun and close affinity with celestial forces, and because of it, was offered many high ranking jobs in the Tang Dynasty, but his quest on understanding and harnessing fire's power was not forgotten, and that he will never forget the catastrophic incident back at home, engraved into his heart, striving to leave an indelible mark on the course of human civilization.

As he denied the many requests of him going into the Tang Dynasty to work as a high ranking officer, he set his quest to find the "Scroll of the Phoenix", which was referred to many times by a bedtime story Wei's parents used to tell before bedtime. The "Scroll of the Phoenix" is not a singular scroll, but a series of scrolls, each containing fragments of knowledge that Wei Yang must piece together. These fragments are scattered across different regions of China, requiring Wei to travel far and wide, going on a physical and more importantly, philosophical exploration, to have a chance at having the power of the Gods, but most importantly, understanding the astronomical aspects of fire and its dangerous power.

Throughout the years, he encounters wise hermits, ancient statues and hidden temples, with wise men, where he learns the profound lessons about the interplay between nature, balance and the elements. By combining the knowledge learnt in his long lasting years of travelling, and the knowledge learnt in his early years, he developed gunpowder, which would eventually be one of the "Four Great Inventions" of Ancient China. By combining saltpetre found after tree stump removals, charcoal and Elemental sulphur found near volcanic regions Wei explored, he conceived a tool for economic development in mining and construction, which simultaneously bearing the qualities of a tool for human extinction.

After the discovery and some experiments done by Wei, he realised its potential for medical purposes, as it was able to be used in healing wounds and treating illnesses, which brought an unexpected application of gunpowder, revolutionising ancient Chinese medicine. But, with great power comes great responsibility. As one of Wei's tests, he launched red coloured fireworks for the first time ever, symbolising peace and good luck, but instead of taking this lightly, the Emperor decided to take it to heart to get that formula, after seeing its sheer force, and the thought of Mongols taking over his Kingdom, the Emperor was set to get the formula. But somehow, not only did the neighbouring kingdom gain knowledge of gunpowder, they wanted it for themselves too, striking deep fear in the Emperor's heart.

The Mongols, neighbouring countries and the Emperor's intrigue was not solely driven by thirst for power, but also fear of external threats, which was each other. But for Tang, the Mongols were their threat, as they were expanding their territory by intruding into lightly guarded territories on the North side of Tang. This conflict between the entirety of China puts Wei in a precarious position, stuck between loyalty to his Emperor and preventing the formula of this deadly weapon falling into the wrong hands. Then came the invention of cannons and catapults, which marked a new era of warfare, but also sparked debate and ethical dilemmas.

Although the story of Wei Yang may not be confirmed, his legacy transcends time as his discoveries travel beyond the borders of the world. As the invention of gunpowder spread throughout China, Traders and explorers brought tales of the gunpowder's power to foreign lands, inspiring curiosity and other innovations based off of gunpowder all around the world, no matter for bad or for the better. The mystery surrounding Wei Yang's identity and the origins of gunpowder may become the subject of legends, myths and conspiracy theories. Some believe he was an immortal celestial being, while other thinks that he was guided all by divine forces up high, the truth remains unknown, ensuring Wei Yang's legacy remains in the annals of history.

The Mystical Dragon Amulet

St. Margaret's Coeducational English Secondary and Primary School, Liu, Hau Yui Emma – 11

In a small village nestled deep within the mountains of China, lived a young boy named Li Wei. Li Wei's adventure sprit and curiosity of China's rich history often led him on exciting quests around his village.

One day, while exploring an old temple, Li Wei found a dusty old book. Intrigued, he wiped away the layers of dirt to unveil a tale about a mythical dragon amulet known to grant extraordinary powers.

To uncover the truth behind the legend, Li Wei embarked on a quest to find the mystical dragon amulet. Armed with a map and his adventurous spirit, he journeyed through dense forests, treacherous mountains, and soaring rivers.

After weeks of searching, Li Wei stumbled upon a crumbling cave hidden deep within a bamboo forest. As he entered, a mysterious voice echoed through the air, guiding him towards a secret chamber. There, lying atop an old pedestal, was the majestic dragon amulet.

Heart pounding with excitement, Li Wei reached for the amulet. As he clasped it in his hand, energy coursed through his hand. The dragon amulet glowed with an ethereal light, illuminating the entire cave.

With his newfound powers, Li Wei realised the true purpose of the ancient artefact. It wasn't meant for personal gain but rather to protect and preserve the harmony of nature. The amulet bestowed upon him the ability to communicate with animals, heal wounded plants, and summon storms to provide much–needed rainfall during droughts.

Li Wei returned to his village, using the dragon's powers to restore failing crops, comfort injured animals, and bring prosperity to his community. Word of his miraculous abilities spread far and wide, reaching the ears of the Emperor himself.

Impressed by Li Wei's noble deeds, the Emperor invited him to the grand palace. The young adventurer shared his tale and showcased the powers of the dragon amulet. Inspired by Li Wei's selflessness, the Emperor declared that the amulet would be protected and used for the greater good, ensuring China's natural beauty flourished for generations to come.

Embracing his new role as a guardian of the environment, Li Wei continued to use the dragon amulet's powers throughout his life, leaving behind a legacy that would inspire countless future adventurers.

And so, the tale of Li Wei and the mystical Dragon Amulet became a cherished chapter in the history of China's remarkable inventions, an ever–present reminder of the extraordinary powers hidden within the ancient artefacts of the past.

New Tales of China's Inventions

St. Margaret's Coeducational English Secondary and Primary School, Sjafii, Eugenia Amabelle – 13

In the vast land of ancient China, it was a day like any other. A day within the Song Dynasty, underneath the reign of Emperor Renzong. Marketplaces were bustling, filled with merchants from all corners of the empire, bringing in a plethora of local and imported precious goods. Commerce was flourishing. But the copper supply began to dwindle.

Amidst the growing economy, the availability of copper coins simply did not meet the demand for currency. The low value, heavy metallic coins, were no more a luxury, but a burden. Merchants and customers alike were fed up with the clanging of the copper, as they dangled on a single string of burden.

Meanwhile, in the city of Chengdu, a Sichuan merchant sought to tackle the issues of those cast copper coins himself. The visionary, Song Lan, was greatly inspired by the art of paper–making. He embarked on a quest to create a lightweight currency with the practice of such art.

Not only was he a merchant, he was also an artisan in paper–making. A unique blend of mulberry tree bark, hemp, and old fishing nets. Transformed into a thin sheet of paper, as light as a feather. In fear of counterfeits, he used a selection of fibre mixed in that sheet of paper. To seal it off, an intricate seal of six colours printed with a woodblock was engraved onto the paper.

But his quest didn't end there. What was the point of making something you will not use?

His invention to be displayed somewhere, anywhere; and there was no better place than the marketplace. The lightweight currency had merchants and customers in awe, and so the word and the paper money were spread. Of course, a creation such as this would not go under the government's nose. Irritated, government officials sought to find, and perhaps arrest its mysterious creator.

Song Lan knew he couldn't hide for long, so he decided to exhibit his ideas to those who were after him. This was a perfect opportunity that could go oh–so wrong, but the risks didn't matter to him.

The authorities were intrigued by his proposal. Wan Jiayi, the head government official scoffed at him and said "An interesting proposal indeed… But you still did this under illegal means." He leaned in closer to the nervous Song Lan, "How about I make my own proposal? Make these paper notes of yours under our supervision, and if you earn both the emperor's and the public's favour, you will not face execution."

Song Lan couldn't let his idea die alongside him. So he couldn't do anything except accept the dangerous offer.

It was already dusk, and he was escorted to the palace quarters to complete his task. He began, once again with the mulberry tree bark, hemp and the old fishing rags. Pounding them and moulding them into a thin sheet of paper with the many fibres mixed in. Finally, the cherry on top, the exquisite seal unlike any other, embedded on the dollar. The job was done.

When he went out for some fresh air, he noticed that the sun had already begun to rise. All he could do was wait for his judgement, whilst Wan Jiayi glared at him like a hawk. The emperor and the townsfolk were marvelled by his invention. As if the God of luck had given Song Lan his blessing, he thought. Reluctantly, Wan Jiayi had to offer the up–and–coming prodigy a job within the government. The government also began to distribute the currency, labelled Jiaozi, due to popular demand.

Thus, paper money was born. News of the ground–breaking creation spread to other nations that slowly adopted this ingenuity. Song Lan turned his vision into reality and revolutionised the economy and world history, starting the story that formed the bank notes we know and love today.

Silky Beginnings

St. Margaret's Coeducational English Secondary and Primary School, Ting, Wei – 13

Accidents – while they are generally regarded as misfortune, not all accidents cause unwelcome happenings. Take the tale of the black cat as an example. People in the past often tied them to things such as bad luck or witchcraft. In the end, did they really cause as much harm as we think they did? Sometimes, accidents can cause one, or even many, to strike gold…

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Lingshi looked wistfully to the distance. Rustling could be heard from the mulberry tree overtop her head, the wind causing her teacup to shake slightly. She takes a small sip from the cup, attempting to cease her distress. The civilisation – her civilisation of China had just begun a large development in the housing aspect. You may wonder why Empress Leizu feels disgruntled when her country is prospering.

'Our foundation is not sturdy enough. We must do something—something outstanding, something that can make us shine bright among all the other civilisations. It will be too late, and other civilisations may overpower or even try to—to take possession of us', she thought. The sleeves of her robes clung to her arms, the fabric rough against her skin, akin to buried naked in coarse sand, or standing within a forest of pine trees, each needle brushing against your skin and causing an unpleasant tingle within the body.

'It seems that nothing is going my way today', Lingshi thought.

She would've missed it, given how inattentive she had been. If not for the tranquillity that masked the area, the slight thump of a solid object against water would've gone unnoticed. The sound seemed to get her back to her senses, at least. Looking down, a white item had fallen into her cup of tea.

"Now my tea's ruined as well. Surely my day can't get any better!" She cried.

As Lingshi tried to take it out, the item suddenly expanded in the liquid. The tight pod loosened to reveal a bundle of threads. Lingshi stared at it in bewilderment, eyes widened and filled with the wonder of a small child's when they first explore the world, or a cat, with its eyes locked on its prey. Scooping it up into her hand, she pulled a thin string out of the object. The thread was thin. It did not break easily. Some parts of the thread gleamed and shone a bright white under the sun. Lingshi had not seen anything like it ever before.

The thread was soft against the touch. Unlike the fabrics they had now, this material was smooth and durable. Lingshi looked around immediately, determined to find the source. She searched between every branch of the mulberry tree, and alas, she found what she was looking for. A small worm wriggled on a small branch, nibbling on a mulberry leaf. Lingshi was delighted to see the worm, realising that the strange object had been a cocoon.

She called over a maid and said, "See this cocoon? It feels amazing. Bring me the seamstresses and I shall ask if they could make a fabric out of this thread."

"Yes Your Majesty, I'll get on with it right away." The maid hurried back into the palace and came back with a group of seamstresses. They chattered and whispered amongst each other. As they saw Empress Leizu, they bowed their heads in respect.

"Please, there is no need for formalities. I want to show you all something." Lingshi said. Her words sparked the interest of the tailors, and only increased when she held up the soaked cocoon.

"This is a cocoon from the worm up on this mulberry tree. It dropped in my tea, and what happened next was fascinating – it expanded and unraveled into many threads. The texture is smooth and comfortable. Is there any possible way to turn this into a fabric?" She asks. The seamstresses leaned down to get a closer look. They were struck with wonder, as they have never seen something like this before.

“I’m sure there’s a way, Your Majesty. It could be a better material than all of the fabrics we currently have!” The head of the seamstresses exclaimed. “We praise the wisdom of Her Majesty!” She tells the women. The group erupted into praise and cheer before getting to work.

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The study was tranquil. Lingshi was helping the emperor with some affairs when a knock on the door was heard.

“Come in!”

It was her lady–in–waiting. She rushed into the study, an excited expression plastered on her face.

“Your Majesty! The fabric has been completed! The fabric with the thread you gave the tailors a week ago, is completed!”

Lingshi rose from her desk immediately, heart filled with anticipation.

“Bring me to the fabric. I must know how it turned out!”
The seamstresses greeted Empress Leizu with bright smiles.

“Your Majesty.” They said, synchronised.

The head of the tailors stepped out, holding a small piece of cloth. It was a white, rectangular piece. Parts of the fabric reflected a very vibrant light and it felt airy, and smooth, and felt cool against the skin.

“It is of great quality. We shall make more and more! Spread the news across the entire palace, no—to all of China!”

This was it. This is the breaking point their civilization needed. She just discovered something incredible, something other places wouldn’t have. With this fabric, they can gain enormous amounts of capital and expand their market!

Lingshi watched the process of the making of this fabric, which she had given the name, silk. She tried on the first silk robe made. Soon enough, silk was a fabric often adorned with gold and jewellery, and heavily loved by the people, especially the wealthy. Foreign countries paid large amounts of money just for silk. The process of making silk was kept secret, which strengthened China as a civilisation.

The discovery of silk was an accident, but what Lingshi did next, to make good use of what she got from this incident, was completely her own decision. By learning and using knowledge absorbed from an accident, any seemingly unfortunate thing, can become even more valuable than gold.

The Fight of DNA Enhancer

St. Margaret's Coeducational English Secondary and Primary School, Zhang, Xiaofei Michael – 11

As Leo continued his journey of learning in the lab, he accidentally found a shelf that made him feel very mysterious. Inside, he found a mysterious syringe labeled as "DNA Enhancer –DNA surge X."

Because Leo is a kid who loves being curious about something and exploring, he is wondering what could this staff do. With trembling hands, he carefully injected the "DNA surge x" into his blood, he was very unsure of what would happen next.

But Leo didn't feel any immediate effects. However, as the days passed, he started noticing remarkable changes in himself. His senses became sharper, his reactions became quicker, and his memory got improved, he could remember even how every person looked like that passed by him these days. It was because the DNA enhancer had unlocked hidden potential within him.

Excited by his newfound abilities, Leo shared his discovery with Doctor Richard. They decided to do further experiments so they could fully understand how much the DNA enhancers affect us.

Together, they injected the DNA enhancer into lab mice, and the results were astonishing. The mice grew stronger, and faster, and had a very high human intelligence. It seemed that the DNA enhancer had the power to enhance all of our living organisms and make us stronger.

The news of "DNA Surge X"'s news spread out pretty soon and it caught the attention of a powerful and mysterious organization known as "The X Future." The X Future is an underground group of wealthy people with a thirst for power, all of them want to get the DNA Surge X to raise their power for their evil purposes.

Leo and Doctor Richard soon found themselves in a thrilling chase, all of the "Future X" agents across the globe are chasing them for the DNA Enhancer. They traveled to different countries and tried to find clues for where's the DNA Enhancer's inventor.

During their adventure, they encountered a scientist named Dr. Li Ning, who had defected from Future X. Dr. Li Ning revealed that he is the inventor of the DNA Enhancer, he's Chinese and developed the DNA Surge X out in China, but his closest assistant betrayed him, his assistant is a member of Future X! He trapped me to serve the organization and asked me to make more DNA Enhancer so they can make more terrorist attacks to consolidate their power. Dr. Li Ning can do nothing to resist them so what he can only do is to make more DNA enhancers so the organization won't kill him. The organization put the DNA Enhancer everywhere in the world so they can use it anytime anywhere.

Realizing the potential danger, the DNA enhancer posed in the wrong hands, Leo, Doctor Richard, and Dr. Mei Ling formed an unlikely alliance to protect the world from Future X's evil plan.

Using their combined expert knowledge and enhanced abilities, they outsmarted Future X at every turn and escaped safely every time. They raced against time to find a way to neutralize the effects of the DNA enhancer, ensuring it would never fall into the wrong hands again.

In a showdown, Leo confronted the leader of Future X, a guy named Mr. Tomasi. But with their enhanced abilities, Leo and his allies fought valiantly against Future X's forces, employing their scientific knowledge and quick thinking to gain the upper hand.

In the end, Leo managed to inject Mr. Tomasi with DNA weakening agent, stripping him of his enhanced abilities and weakening his power. Future X's reign of terror finally came to an end, and the world was safe once more.

Leo, Doctor Richard, and Dr. Li Ning were hailed as heroes, their stories becoming the stuff of legends. They decided to use their knowledge and experiences to establish a global organization dedicated to the responsible and ethical use of genetic advancements.

Their organization, known as "Genetic Protector," worked tirelessly to ensure that all of the scientific breakthroughs that will be made in the future are used for the good of humanity, while making sure it's against misuse and exploitation.

Echoes of Time

St. Paul's Co-educational College, Choy, Tung Lam Anthony - 13

The small temple was on a narrow road, hiding behind the cover of trees, a mountain as its back walls. The night was eerily dark, the moonshine non-existent, clouds so low one could ride them.

"And that, daughter, is how we invented the mechanical clock."

"But a monk? A Buddhist monk at that as well. I thought Daoism and Buddhism were enemies. Nobody would acknowledge the achievements of a rival like that." The high-pitched voice of an innocent young girl.

"Achievements and personal matters are two different things. We have to acknowledge the works of others and strive to improve, with our personal feelings aside, otherwise nothing will ever be made. Just like how we invented paper making. Scientists acknowledged the works of even a eunuch, which is how we have this nice sheet to write on today." A tender smile, the infinite love of a father.

"Really? A eunuch? Aren't they banned from learning? What happened to them?"

"Well, I'll tell you tomorrow when we wake up. Now sleep tight. Love you, sweetie."

"Alright, Dad. Good night. Love you as well."

And so the candle was put out, kisses were blown, and the inventor returned to the living room to meet his family. And there they had it: one pot of this black powder.

No one would discover the burnt, charcoal-black temple until sunrise, a family of farmers walking towards the farms, terrified at their wandering imaginations, almost seeing the fireball engulfing the shack, slaughtering the Wei family and their poor young daughter.

Who gave them the wonderful idea of lighting gunpowder on fire?

"ADRIENE! ADRIENE WAKE UP!" came the screeching sound of the teacher. What a nuisance, she thought. "ADRIENE! GET UP NOW OR YOU'RE GOING TO DETENT-"

"Yes yes, I'm awake." came the highly irritated voice of Adriene. The last thing she needed was detention. And for once, she actually wanted to be in chemistry class. The teacher's supposed to be bringing some gunpowder over to show the class. Maybe she could blow the school up. Eh, who knows?

"Adriene, this is the third time this week that you fell asleep in my class. Can you just get enough sleep at night?"

"Well if you don't mutter that lullaby of yours so well maybe I won't fall asleep, Ms Wong." sneered Adriene.

"THAT'S IT. GET OUT OF MY CLASSROOM NOW AND GO TO THE PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE. NOW."

"My pleasure," she said, "been waiting for this." She did a little curtsy, then ran off.

"That little rascal," the teacher muttered, but loud enough for the class to hear.

Adriene, while walking to the office, noticed the chemistry lab, which sparked her curiosity, thinking, I'm not gonna see it anyway. Should I?

And she did. Walking in, she saw encased in glass, the disk of black powder. And a lighter! Could I… well she certainly seemed obliged. She walked forward, two steps, and then there she was, a lighter in hand, a black disk on the table, in the school. God's gift. How could she deny this opportunity?

"Adriene? What are you doing?" Mr Mak, the ever–naive chemistry teacher inquired.

"Nothing Mr Mak. I'll be going. Bye!" she lied smiling, a mischievous glow in her eye. She spun around, tripped on a stool, and fell face–first into the disk. The next thing she knew, she was in the medical bay.

"Adriene, you're finally awake. What happened?" her parents asked.

However, despite appearing as Adriene in physical form, her mind and soul no longer belonged to her. Within her resided the spirit of Wei Xiao, an ancient Chinese girl who tragically perished in an explosion alongside her family.

"Who are you? Where am I? Why do I sound weird?" The body of Adriene stuttered, in the voice of Xiao. She jumped up to her feet and was ushered back into bed by the nurse.

"Are you quite alright Adriene?" The mother asked tenderly.

"Who's Adriene? My name is Xiao of the Wei family. Tell me, who ar–" "Child you must not say such things! Are you out of your mind? The Wei family is cursed and evil, and you know that. Get your manners together girl." The father snarled. "That is not true. My family have been loyal Daoists and high members of the Imperial Council for centuries. My father has even invented a source of longevity that will benefit the future. Do not tell such lies of dishonour." Xiao replied.

The father, in a fit of rage, stood up, pointing a shaking finger at Xiao, and said in words trembling with rage, "This is too much, even for you young lady. But let's play along. Even if you were somehow Wei Xiao, the daughter of the sinner Wei Boyang, you would be scorched with flames, burning in hell! Wei Boyand invented a substance of death, a substance gifted by Satan! Gunpowder killed millions if not billions! Quit acting or you're getting grounded for five months!"

At this point, students were recording everything, with their phones out, streaming live on Douyin. Titles like "Insane Asylum Girl Claims To Be Wei Boyang's Daughter" and " Girl Pretends To Be Age–Old Sinner" appeared everywhere, getting Wei Xiao famous in a matter of seconds. Wei Xiao ran out of the room and stumbled onto the street, panting frantically and wondering what had happened. She calmed herself, and slowly took in the sights of Shaoxing. The houses around her were all so lofty and compact, that the wind had nowhere to go. The streets were bustling with monstrous creatures rambling past in a loud fit of rage, thumping across the smooth asphalt road. To us, Shaoxing is not that developed of a city, but for Xiao, everything looked so different. She felt lost, and she was lost physically, but emotionally as well. The only signs of her home were the flowing river, and she remembered the times that she had sailed on it, always flowing to the east but never the west. She led a life that was unparalleled by any other young girl, soaring freely like a dove and cherished by countless families.

And this was all because of her father. She must clear the name of her family, and return justice to her name.

"Excuse me, are you the girl who's acting as Wei Xiao? Can I get a signature?" suddenly hundreds of Douyin fans rushed up, asking her for a signature. Bewildered, she ran, as she did two thousand years ago, along the river, the path so distant yet familiar.

There were hordes of people running after her, many wanting her fame. Who would've thought that she was no actor?

She finally arrived at her destination, a small temple on a narrow road, hiding behind the cover of trees, a mountain as its back walls. But it was hidden so well by vines, the road covered so neatly by farms, no one would've noticed unless they knew exactly what they were looking for. The crowd stopped, uncertain whether to follow, and Xiao walked forward, brushing past the thick layers of vines, and entered the shattered and ashen temple, disappearing underground into the basement.

As Wei Xiao cautiously stepped into the charred remains of the temple, her heart pounded with a mix of trepidation and determination. The acrid scent of smoke still lingered in the air, mingling with the scent of ancient wood. Amongst the blackened debris, she spotted fragments of burnt scrolls scattered across the floor. With careful steps, she knelt down and gently picked up a scorched piece of parchment. As she unfolded it, she saw her father's writings, and eventually her tears. This was all she needed.

There was electricity in the air. Murmurings and chatters of excitement began to wonder whether this was actually the real Wei Xiao. She emerged from the rubble, holding scrolls of writing, and threw them towards the crowd.

"I don't know why all of you seem to think of my name as a sin. Perhaps it is the holy powder that my father invented, but I can prove that he did not intend to hurt anyone. He is innocent! My family is innocent! My name is innocent!"

With that, Wei Xiao/Adriene fell back, slumped, and fainted.

Wei Xiao would be returned to the timeline she belonged in, and Adriene would return to claim her body. The age-old family name of Jiang would be rid of its sin from all the manuscripts that Xiao revealed. Historians today will get to know more about the spread of Daoism and how gunpowder was invented. Adriene would turn out to be a Chinese historian as she was granted visions of life in the past, and knew better than anyone else the reality of before. Wei Xiao, in her timeline, would be granted an escape from death's jaws, and be married to a family of nobles, where history eventually lost track of her. So, as all nostalgic stories go, it ends with a happy ending.

Unraveling the Past

St. Paul's Co-educational College, Yang, Ting Nga Sophie Katelyn – 14

As the reverberation of metal ricocheted off the bare concrete walls of Wong's laboratory, a loud boom jolted Wong awake with a start. Disoriented, he spun around confusedly before recalling the big presentation that day. He took a deep breath of the familiar metallic luster in the laboratory, hoping it might energize him. Instead, the air only weighed heavier in his lungs.

Panic set in as Wong frantically checked the time, with a grunt, he heaved the bulky machine and plowed towards the twisty hallways leading to the conference room. Taking a glimpse of his prototype with his weary gaze, he hoped the prototype itself would convey what words could not.

Wong's hands grew clammy as he darted his eyes across the room with caution, the tension in the conference rooms loomed over the investors.

"So? What does it do? " Monsieur Deng, the billionaire with a prominent aquiline nose scrutinized, sending chills down his spine.

Wong began, "Gentlemen, shall I go straight to the point, this prototype harnesses time travel with an exceptional degree of accuracy."

Deng's bows rose skeptically. He glanced at Wong's laboratory coat, and began, "Look, Mr. Wong, this is not a childish science fair presentation. That…thing should do what you claim it does."

Wong hurried on, "When activated, it uses entangled proton particles to quantum spin dynamics–"

Another investor, Li Huang, interrupts Wong, "Tech like this poses extreme risks. How could it be contained?"

In a rush to prove his dignity and dexterity, Wong reached into his left pocket. A sheen of nervous sweat broke out across his brow. Panic seized him as he agitatedly patted down his cloak, Wong's heartbeat elevated to a perpetual level, his rebuttal was stuck in his throat, and refused to budge.

Without the key, he could not show the prototype in action, and all his efforts would be for naught. These men held his entire future in their hands.

He hesitantly reached for the power-up button installed on the machine. It was much more dangerous to activate the machine than the key he developed.

Wong's heart skipped a beat as he powered up the machine with a shuddering hum. Glowing orbs appeared, rotating mesmerizingly as the enthralled investors leaned forward.

Wong smiled, relieved. "I'm glad you asked. Multiple failsafe protocols instantly isolate and dissipate any unstable energy signatures, having an automatic system to retrieve the subjects transfe–"

The machine whirred in an abnormal pitch, startling the room of investors.

Wong scrambled at the controls to shut it down, but they had frozen him out. The luminous tendrils wrapped around the spectators as they murmured in confusion.

Horrified, Wong could only watch as the men's bodies began dissolving into the growing light. Within moments, the room was empty but for wisps of energy dancing among empty suits.

Poring over schematics revealed an unforeseen function – the machine could transport matter through the quantum fabric of space and time. One orb flared brightly, depositing a figure from antiquity clutching unfamiliar writings. Wong realized with dread that his creation had unlocked portals to history itself.

If not stopped, it would unravel the very threads of time. But with the controls locked, he stood helpless before the machine spiraled out of control. Wong, left alone, realized the gravity of what he had unwittingly unleashed.

The acidity of Li's stomach was rising into his throat. Unable to stifle the aroma, he wretched in the aged and yellow floorboards next to him. Li waited for the nausea to pass and cleared his thoughts, observing the foreign surroundings, he saw that bamboo stalls lined the area, their musky yet pungent odor of paper plunged up his nostrils, as the distant yells of inaudible language overwhelmed his ear canal.

Suddenly, a cold sensation landed on Li's head. Looking up, he saw droplets beginning to fall from the gray sky. Then, he noticed something that sent a spike of panic through him – his Rolex that cost an arm and a leg was exposed to the rain!

"No, no! My watch!" He cried. Spotting a large lotus leaf near him, he grabbed it and held it above his head like an improvised umbrella.

Nearby, Lu Ban was gazing idly out the window of his tavern when the peculiar scene caught his eye. A disheveled man in the village square, dressed in foreign clothing, unlike anything Lu Ban had seen before. As the carpenter of the village, he was intrigued by the sight. But just then, a heavy downpour began, driving them both to seek shelter from the sudden storm.

Curious, Lu Ban watched from his window as Li sheltered under a lotus leaf. An idea struck—why hide indoors from rain when you have a portable shelter? Inspired by Li, Lu Ban worked through the storm crafting a bamboo framed and paper covered shelter.

Lu Ban emerged proud with his creation, which uncovers new possibilities no matter the weather.

Li, frozenly crouching on the floor, had no idea that he was the inspiration for one of the most well–known inventions in China's history.

Deng's frail body struck harshly onto the ground, eliciting a pained moan, still disheveled from the panic. The commotion drew curious locals from a nearby village. Cautiously, they prodded Deng's limp form with a brank, jerking him from his daze. With the little strength he had left, Deng croaked a question, "Where am I?"

To his surprise, the reply came in an unfamiliar tongue. Deng eyed the villager's ancient silk tunics and long, unmanaged hair. Deng wailed in disbelief when the realization struck – he was in ancient China.

Because of the tantrum, the locals began to threaten him with angry rambles. Too frightened to react, Deng forcefully pulled off the valuable necklace he had and gave it to the locals as a token of peace.

Their demeanor changed at once as they crowded around the shimmering object, pushing and shoving in their intrigue. In the chaos, Deng scrambled away and fled into the dense woods, unaware that he had just introduced a revolutionary invention.

As the villagers squabbled over the necklace, they were stunned to see its needle always pointing north. Word quickly spread of this magical item in the village.

Meanwhile, lost and alone in the forest, Deng wandered. But the trail he blazed would lead to remarkable things – his hasty gift had planted the seed that would one day blossom into the invention of the compass, changing navigation forever.

Back in the present day in the laboratory, Wong finds himself in an equally dire situation. He stared helplessly at the malfunctioning time machine, hoping that the fate of the past, present, and future would still hang in balance for the sake of history itself.

After several tense minutes, the orb patterns began to waver, Wong activated the repaired machine with trepidation. Slowly, the orbs began pulsing in a consistent rhythm once more. Figures from contrasting times stepped forward one by one as Wong input codes for each era. Gaining momentum, brilliant flashes of light shone from within as the multidimensional coordinates stabilized. The scene in the boardroom suddenly changed. Deng, tangled in sodden leaves, fruitlessly wrung his sleeves. Li, soaked in rainwater, comprehended the bewildering situation.

Deng huffed as Li sighed, both fixing Wong with expectant looks, demanding an explanation for what they had endured through time.

New Tales of China Invention

St. Paul's Co-educational College, Yeung, Sin – 13

"A marriage of crispy tenderness; a contradiction of foul smell and tasty texture; a golden brick with a humble name." Who would have thought that this Stinky Tofu delicacy was born out of a sinister story?

In the Ming Dynasty under the rule of Hong Wu Emperor, there was a village along the coast in Huizhou. In this quaint village, lived a widower Old Zhu, a daughter called Zhaodi, and a young son. The father was a farmer like most of the villagers. His earnings were meagre but he still did his best to provide a decent living environment. The catch was that he was only interested in the one carrying his family name and honour – his precious son, Young Zhu. This meant his daughter was not so lucky as her father had never said a kind word to her nor had he given her any warmth.

Days went by painfully slow. One day, the father bought some tofu back home for dinner. The father walked into the door and grunted, but he did not hear the scurrying of footsteps. He waited impatiently for a few seconds and then at the top of his lungs, he shouted for his daughter, "Zhaodi, you good-for-nothing girl, come cook for us. Stop daydreaming!" Upon hearing the angry shouts, a frail figure rushed out from the pigsty and kept her gaze low and her back bent,

"I am so sorry Father. I was feeding the pigs!"

The father glared at her and sneered, "Yes, you're feeding one of your kind. Now, go cook the tofu. Why did I have such bad luck to raise a good for nothing girl?"

Zhaodi nodded her head obediently and shuffled to the kitchen as quickly as she could. Her brother, seeing her rushing past him with the tofu pulled his face into a scowl.

"Tofu again! No. I want chicken drumsticks. I will not eat a single morsel of tofu! I am going on a hunger strike" Zhaodi's brother went on a dramatic rant.

The father tried to calm his son to no avail. He knew he did not have the money to buy anything other than tofu. However, he would move the sky and earth to please his son. He took a deep breath and pulled his son's hand towards him. When the son took a look at the clump in his palm, his face lit up. It was a few pieces of coins, just enough to buy his favourite chicken drumstick and even a few other types of side dishes for himself.

"Zhaodi, stop making dinner. Bring me my wine and fermented groundnuts. Keep the tofu for tomorrow. Don't you dare sneak a bite."

Zhaodi eyed the slab of silky white on her chopping board and gulped. She turned away, placed the tofu on a tray, and kept it. She knew it was a consequence of painful whipping if she was disobedient. She swallowed hard and wrapped her hands around her waist when her stomach grumbled. She was in constant hunger but her brother never missed a meal. Zhaodi was very envious of her brother. They were raised in the same family yet possessed very different fates.

Days went by and all seemed to have forgotten about the tofu. The reason was that Zhaodi left the tofu tray behind a row of dried corn. She would not have remembered too as she had endless chores daily. As the end of the month neared, money was running out as usual and this was more noticeable as everyone was hungrier. Then, Zhaodi's father remembered the tofu that he bought. He knew that the tofu must have gone bad by now but he was going to blame it on his daughter because he was in a foul mood. If he was miserable, his daughter had no right to have it easy.

As expected, the tofu had hairy mildew growing over them. Although it was a pretty sight, the most unappetising sourish stench attacked his nostrils as it was brought closer for inspection. Zhaodi's father slammed the tray of tofu onto the dirt ground and swung his hand at her. Zhaodi's face stung as she held back her tears.

"You better eat this up you good-for-nothing swine! It will be a blessing if you die of food poisoning. There will be one less worthless mouth to feed," taunted her father. There was no warmth in his eyes, only indifference. In their village, girls were worthless and debt-incurring additions to poor families.

Zhaodi's heart sank as she looked at the mildewed tofu. She wanted to gag at the sight of the greenish slab on the floor but she had no choice. Would this be her ending? Either she died of food poisoning or being beaten to death. What was worse? She pinched her nose and gathered the tofu, putting it into the wok that was still hot. Even though she might suffer food poisoning, she wanted to make it more palatable. The stench made her face turn green and she had wanted to gag a few times as she flipped the foul−smelling tofu a few times. When the slab cooled, Zhaodi took a deep breath and took a bite of the mildewed tofu. To her surprise, the taste was heavenly. This was a treat compared to the tree bark that she had been chewing. An idea formed in her head. She would visit the market secretly the next day to haggle with the tofu stall owner.

Zhaodi's father realised something was amiss after some time. In the past, his daughter always looked sickly and frail. However, recently, she was looking curiously healthier. He had tried to find excuses to torture Zhaodi to force her to confess to stealing food but she never did. Thus, he took it to secretly stalk her in the following days. He was furious when he saw her walking around the village and entering people's houses, coming out with a jingling of coins in her basket covered by a muslin cloth. He was shocked that his daughter was earning money from selling something she now called − stinky tofu.

One villager patted his shoulder and remarked, "Old Zhu, you have a good daughter who brings fortune to your family name. Treat her well."

Old Zhu had other plans in mind. The next day, he ambushed his daughter. He dragged Zhaodi into the pigsty and gave her a good beating. Zhaodi knelt on the hay and pleaded with her father to stop. He demanded that she take out her earnings. Zhaodi felt dead to the core as she handed over the coins. He nodded, satisfied with the heavy weight of coins on his palm.

"You shall sell mildewed tofu as an additional chore from now on. I want all the earnings given to me at the end of every day. If you dare to…" his voice trailed off, looking dangerously at Zhaodi. Zhaodi nodded obediently. He did not notice that Zhaodi's knuckles were pale from her balling her grip.

A couple of months later, a general led his army to HuiZhou after a battle. The soldiers were all ravenous as their military rations had all been consumed. The troops stationed on the outskirts of the village had to buy food from the villagers. One such person they bought food from was Zhaodi. The general fell in love with the delicacy. He rewarded Zhaodi with several bolts of silk and gold which went to Old Zhu. He was on top of the world and felt this was enough for him and his son. It was time to get rid of his worthless daughter.

Old Chu sent for his daughter. "Zhaodi, Old Yang, the tofu seller has asked for your hand in marriage for two bolts of quality linen. I doubt that you are worth that much anyway, so you are sold! You are forbidden to use your recipe for I am going to sell it for money too."

Colours drained from Zhaodi's face. Zhaodi could not believe how she was an object to her father. The day she was lifted into the wedding sedan, her father mysteriously wilted away on his bed. "Goodbye!" Zhaodi whispered when she came to visit her father on his deathbed. A couple of months later, her brother died too. Villagers believed that the father and son duo accidentally consumed poisoned food since Zhaodi was married off and no one took care of them.

No one will ever know how Zhaodi poisoned her cruel father and brother with dried poisonous tree bark powder mixed into the spices she used to make stinky tofu. The father and son ate up the poisoned tofu and died a slow and painful death. It was only at her death bed many decades later her grandchildren found out the truth and the recipe to her famous mildewed tofu or better known as stinky tofu (minus the poison, of course). This is the story of the invention of a delicacy with a humble name and a disturbing past.

The Money Beyond Its Worth

St. Paul's Co-educational College, Yuen, Wang Ching Shannon – 13

Stringy straw-shaped strips in colorful packaging– not the most appetizing snack. "Do we need to get that, Ye?" Ming complained as his grandfather reached for the bag in the bustling stellarport 711.

"It's good to eat something after a long flight, Ming," replied Ye, hobbling to the cashier. After hours of being cramped in a space shuttle, Ming's stomach agreed, but it was worth it– he'd never forget passing the breathtaking black hole– a featureless shape with glowing sparks which sucked everything to its doom. He wished they could see it up close…

"Ye, what are you *doing*?"

Confused, the old man turned. "I'm going to scan the QR code to pay."

Ming slapped his forehead. Ye was just like the snack– hopelessly outdated. "We use facial scanning to make transactions now," he explained, walking over to the detection machine. Saying his name to start the program, adjusting his face's angle according to the green light, phrasing the command… all common practice. Five yuan was deducted from his account and he grabbed the snack. "See?"

Just then, Ming ran to take two empty seats. "I see," said Ye, trailing behind to tear open the packet. "It was different in my time."

A low rumble made Ming look up. A sleek space shuttle tore through the atmosphere of Kepler-186f, red and green indicators flashing. It was nighttime, so the bright specks in the sky dotted the heavens like spilled salt.

"I'm not eating that." Ming looked from Ye's bony, outstretched hand to his offended face. "Fine, just one."

He nibbled on the strip, which tasted vaguely like sweet smoked sole, and was unexpectedly tasty. "It was a luxury in my childhood," Ye was saying, "A part of the old times, like me."

"Go on, I'm listening" sounded between chews. Ye wrapped his arm around Ming's shoulder.

"Let me tell you a story."

The sounds of Ma's pan sizzling reached me way before the creak of the door. I ducked as I entered the low flat cluttered with appliances.

It wasn't even a flat– the bed was a mattress on the floor among other junk, everything was stacked to be more compact, and there was still barely space. It was suffocating, both physically and mentally. Quietly, I set my school bag on the mattress.

"Qiang, you're back!" Ma turned and mustered a weary smile, then readdressed the stove. Her one free hand rummaged through tattered pockets, fishing out a crumpled 100-dollar note. "We're out of rice. Can you buy a bag from the shop downstairs?"

That was it. No conversation. I wasn't disappointed though: I understood that Ma needed to work, and she was too busy for trivial matters. Helping out was the least I could do. I took the note and raced downstairs.

With the precious bill clenched in my hand, I was on a mission. Bursting into the supermarket, I beelined to the rice section– although the dried fish strips seemed to glow on the shelves, there was no temptation today. I scanned the rows for the cheapest price: ¥8.8, and lifted the bag experimentally. It felt right. Then I heaved it onto the counter, gazing expectantly at the cashier.

The balding middle-aged man glared back, sizing my 12-year-old figure up and down. I set the money on the table with a fierce stare.

Finally, a grubby hand grabbed the beautiful bill, rifled through the cashier, and dumped back some crinkled notes: ¥50, ¥20, ¥20 and two grimy coins.

In high spirits I returned, cradling the bag of rice like a baby, and presented it to Ma. She nodded with satisfaction, my heart swelling with pride. She picked the ¥50 note up, holding it up to the light, and froze.

"Is… is this the money given back to you, Qiang?"

Confusion and panic crept into my tone. "Yes, what's wrong?"

"It's a fake bill!" Ma ran downstairs with me in pursuit, storming into the shop. The greasy-looking man appeared at the cashier again. My heart filled with hatred, but if he recognised me, he showed no sign of it. "My son bought this bag of rice here with a ¥100 note, but received this fake ¥50 bill," said Ma, voice tight with restraint.

The man yawned.

"Where's your receipt, ma'am?"

My fists clenched, but Ma's grip tightened warningly on my wrist.

"We don't have one, sir. But this rice has the shop's stamp on it, and the bill has no watermark."

Lazily, the man took the money. He adjusted his glasses."The bill's not from here, ma'am. Are you trying to scam us of 50 yuan?"

Did he have no shame? He was obviously lying to our faces. Even at first glance, not knowing my background, I was just a kid. But what could we do? Tears were stinging in my eyes, blurring the ceiling lights into streaks. I was faintly aware of other customers who were staring with interest but making no move. The jovial tune playing in the background taunted, grinding at my ears…

Ma gave the man a long, almost pleading look. Receiving no response, she turned slowly and left, pulling me with her.

The sun had set, a blazing ball sucking all the sapphire from the sky. From our flat, you could only see a small blue sliver, like a huge eraser had rubbed off a few stories of surrounding buildings so we could enjoy a fleeting glimpse. Now it was pitch-black, like the city was being sucked into an endless chasm.

There were almost no stars here. Sometimes I'd think I saw one, and gaze at the window for hours trying to find that speck again.

Tonight, the blanket partially covered my head, so I could feign sleep and watch the window at the same time. Perhaps the blanket was too thin, because although it covered my ears, I could still hear Ma's heartbroken sniffles.

"You can watch all the stars you want now," Ming broke in, chewing. "What happened next?"

Ye raised his head and smiled. "I made a vow that day, which resurfaced twenty years later…"

"Look, dad! I drew a new picture!"

I peered down from the newspaper. Little Jian was bounding eagerly towards me. "Where's it? Let me see," I lifted him up onto my lap.

"You're so silly, dad," Jian laughed, pulling me to the computer. "It doesn't have to be on paper, does it?"

It didn't have to be on paper, did it?

What if money didn't need to be printed? What if it was stored in the world of ones and zeroes?

The small idea took root from the vow I'd sworn years ago– to make a future when no scams would be made by fake bills, so Ma would never have to cry over them again– an online payment system. Imagine walking into shops without a wallet and using only your phone to control your transactions!

But how would the transaction be detected and transferred? After strenuous searching on the web, I found my solution– the QR Code, black squares chaotically arranged in a white square grid. All I knew was that it was a machine–readable image, which could spread information. For details, I needed a special kind of support…

"Mr. Qiang, I am delighted to inform you that your proposal matches perfectly with our company's idea of online shopping!"

I stopped fidgeting in the tight suit, and focused to see Ma Yuan, the founder of TaoTao company, smiling at me across the table with acknowledgement.

"...Really?"

March 2011, Sunny

This day is one of celebration, not only for the people in China whose lives have forever been changed, but also for my dreams which have finally come true. Dianzi Wallet, a QR code payment method which allows offline stores to accept payments through scanning codes, has officially been released by TaoTao, with credits to my proposal.

Ma, you aren't with me anymore, but I'm sure you're watching from above. Are you proud of how far I've come? Now no one will ever be affected by money scams. If you were born in this generation I've helped create, you wouldn't ever have had this problem!

Love,

Qiang

"Look at how far people have come now," Ye whispered, gesturing from the face detection machines to the expanse of glittering night sky. "My money was scammed, so I started thinking about QR code payments, and now people have improved my system to make it more efficient and reliable. I couldn't see the stars in the city when I was young, but now people have found ways not only to observe but *travel* to stars. Innovation is the plant of the creativity that problems seed in us."

There was silence as Ming took this all in. Not really, as the occasional rumbling of shuttle engines brought life to the mood.

"I've decided," Ming announced. "I'm going to visit a black hole in the future."

Ye's eyes crinkled. "Of course you can, Ming. When there's a dream, there's a way."

A Mother's Letter

St. Paul's Convent School, Ip, Haydi – 14

My dearest daughter,

Have you been well? I hope you have adapted to your new environment. I miss you so much, I don't think we have ever been so far apart before. The winter in Qufu is as spiteful and miserable as always, and I am constantly in a trembling and frigid state. I suspect it's caused by the absence of your warm laughter. Hopefully, it's always warm where you are. I remember how much you loved basking in the sun. I'm sorry for not writing to you as often, I've been rather occupied recently. Hopefully, we'll meet each other face to face soon.

Do you remember when you were young, we would camp on the hillside as soon as we heard the first call of the cuckoo? We would lay in the soft blanket the flowers have woven and breathe in the air moist with the aroma of spring? Even in this cold and bitter weather, I can still fondly recall that refreshing smell of fresh grass, dirt and something in between. We would be entranced by the graceful waltz of the clouds as we listened closely to the whispers of the wind. If we were lucky, we would even see the sparrow hawk. You would marvel at the sight of them gliding across the boundless sky in synchronised movements, as if they were stitching the very fabric of the eventide. You would clap and dance and squeak in delight before falling back down onto the grass. O how you loved the sparrow hawks. Remember when you overcame your fear of heights and climbed up a tree because you wanted to put a baby sparrow back into its nest? Your act of kindness opened my eyes to the philosophy of impartial caring and how it applies to all living beings.

I've treasured those memories in my heart, their glimmer shining through my soul every single day. You would beg the sky to greet you with a sparrowhawk each morning, but the merciless sky would never heed your prayers, unlike me, I've remembered you pleads to this very day. After three years of research, I have discovered a way for you to see a sparrowhawk not only every morning, but whenever you desire. I crafted a bird with thin sheets of wood by hand and attached a few strings to its body. All you have to do is to hold the bridle until it catches the wind. When there is sufficient wind, the bird will fly in the sky in the direction you pull the string. I've painted it with the seven colours of the rainbow, so when it flies, its wings would be like fine quills, painting vibrant hues on the blue canvas of the sky.

I plan to test out my sparrowhawk when I go camping on the third Saturday of April. I will fly it beyond the clouds so you can see it from Heaven. Until then, I will miss you forever and ever.

Love,

Mozi

The Boy and his Umbrella

St. Paul's Convent School, Lau, Hoi Yan Cynthia – 14

My mom always tells me that I talk too much about umbrellas. I've always loved the rain, yet I adored how umbrellas enclose me in a little pocket of safety, keeping me an arm length away from the overbearing wetness of thunderstorms. I looked up to the great mind behind the invention of umbrellas, and although I didn't know who they were, or how their story went, I felt a strange affiliation with this inventor that allowed me to frolic beneath the rainiest of weathers. I longed to know more about this forgotten hero, I had a growing hunger for their narrative, an aching need to discover the background behind this invention that had transformed and revolutionized the way we trudge through rainy days.

It was a sheer coincidence that the invention of umbrellas happened to be the topic of my Chinese Literature class. I've never been the best student, yet I clung onto every word that the teacher said with a fierce imprudence, as I quickly recognized — this was the closest I'll ever be to unraveling the mysteries and the tales left untold behind this divine innovation.

3500 BC, China

She hovered above heavy clouds, her breath rugged yet constant. She declared her arrival as she plagued earth with her scent, a stream of fresh tears drenching the ground with emotion. She reached out and invited him to dance, yet her offer was enclosed by care disguised as apathy and love adorned with salt. Alas, he was only a boy who knew no better, who was too little to handle her depth and too weak to handle her strength. So he clung desperately instead onto one lone lotus leaf, praying that it would protect him from her melodies of sorrow and the roaring winds which accompanied her otherwise soliloquy.

Yet even as he hid he knew it was a losing game that he was fighting, and he could only watch wide-eyed as her soggy mourning eroded away his beautiful shelter, as his mighty pavilion collapsed into nothing but a drooping mess. He arrived at school with another blotch on his tardiness record, and it was pathetic how all he could do was quiver at the injustice.

One fateful rainy day, the little boy and his little corroded leaf crossed paths with Chinese carpenter Lu Ban. The boy looked so fragile, so helpless against the thunders of nature as the caving leaf eventually drenched him in the flood of rainfall. Seeing this, Lu Ban promised himself that he would build the boy a sanctuary he could take shelter in, an incorruptible pavilion that could shield him against rain and injustice alike.

As Lu Ban studied the lotus leaves along the road, he marvelled at the unique structural build of them, and was impressed by its remarkable ability to repel water droplets. If he were to harness the qualities of the lotus leaf into his design, surely, it would serve as an impeccable shelter to the poor little boy. At this thought, Lu Ban quickly set to work. He fiddled with wood and bamboo, thus carved them into a framework, or as Lu Ban liked to put it, the skeleton of his pavilion. Even while taking into account the nature of his work, his craftsmanship was exceptional, and it was with great precision that the silk canopy was birthed. Lu Ban treated silk with waterproofing techniques that aimed to replicate the water-repelling lotus leaf, then latched it onto the bare skelton — and that was how the first umbrella came to be. Lu Ban credited the little boy and deemed him co-founder of the moving pavilion.

It was a beautiful morning where drizzles fell like dewdrops when Lu Ban gifted the boy with the umbrella. The boy held it in his arms like he was holding an old friend, a familiar companion that would bring him to school unscathed and unharmed by the wetness of rain. Now equipped with an umbrella over his head, the boy took her hand and danced to the sound of her music. He embraced her depth and reveled in her strength as he leapt and he spun under the symphony of the tempest and the torrents. For the first time in his life, the boy experienced rain in its most glorious form — her tears irrigated the flowers around him, her care scrubbed the earth from filth and left it unblemished and unsoiled. He let her currents overtake him as they penetrated his heart, and he twirled and he swirled till his soles finally fell apart. It was then that she yielded, and he peeked out of his umbrella, the boy, to his amusement, found a pleasant surprise. Light had kissed the rain and they had left hand in hand, and they left just one trail of rainbows dancing in

their wake. Lu Ban watched the boy's glee and marvel with quiet contentment, as he rejoiced in the understanding that he had made the world just a little better than it had been before.

The ring of the school bell echoed like a bittersweet serenade as it signaled the end of Chinese Literature class. Now more than ever, I understand the gravity of this intricate invention. The story behind its creation had made umbrellas the epitome of beauty, compassion and humanity, a modest refuge constructed by the goodness of a tender soul.

As far as the story goes, I hope the boy was well. I hope he got to school on time. I hope his umbrella shielded him from the lamenting wind and the unforgiving rain, keeping him safe amidst the roaring thunders. Now that he has gotten his umbrella, I hope he loves the rain as much as I do.

I was walking home from school when the shower turned into a drizzle then into a downpour. I opened my umbrella. If only, I thought. If only Lu Ban could see the streets scattered with covers of red and green and blue, if only he could see the rain command a tapestry of umbrellas against each other, leaving the city wet but the people dry. If only he could see that because of him, we no longer fear the rain, instead we embrace the thunder of storms and we see the romance in sprinkles, as with his invention of the umbrella, we are no longer restricted by the raindrops – we thrive in the beauty of it.

The Unfolding Umbrella

St. Stephen's College, Lam, Wai Ting Annabel – 14

Oh my gosh, this is going to be such a horrendous day, I thought to myself.

My mom forced me out of the house with a broken umbrella again, even when there's a thunderstorm outside. We have so many new umbrellas at home, but she never lets me use them. She says that these umbrellas are not for use, and that we must keep them safe at all costs. What nonsense.

Thunder as loud as a drum sounded as I walked along the familiar country–side road to school that I walked on perhaps thousands of times, cursing my umbrella and my mom, at the same time wishing that the umbrella wouldn't flip like it usually does. It doesn't listen to me though: the ribs first take flight, bending in the direction it's not supposed to, bringing the canopy with it. It then sways with the wind, completely disobedient to me, just like a mischievous toddler. Honestly, given its "talents" on flips, I think it can join the circus.

Suddenly, a bright white light struck in front of me, blinding me instantly. There was an ozone–like smell of explosion, along with a big 'boom' that casted a deep pain inside my ears. Out of shock, I backed a few steps and fell into the mud, covering my eyes with my hands. My whole body was hot and vibrating, especially my fingers, until all of a sudden, I couldn't feel anything at all.

The next thing I know, I felt like I was falling down a spiralling tunnel at full speed, spinning. It took more bravery and force to reopen my eyes, and when I did, I saw flashes of light and perhaps some stars, if I didn't imagine it. After around 10 minutes, I saw some sand towards the end of the tunnel; and around a few seconds later, I crashed into it.

"Ow…" I exclaimed to myself.

When I managed to get back up on my feet, I realised that this was no longer the country–side road that I was familiar with. There were no trees. I was surrounded by a flock of ducks, which probably belonged to a farm of some sort. The houses were made of straw. Many people were walking around, carrying baskets, speaking in a dialogue that was somewhat similar to mandarin. A girl with silky long black hair that was tied into a braid entered the house behind me. Her clothes were dripping wet, as if she just escaped from a thunderstorm, like I did. Now that I think about it, the floor was damp, too.

I have no idea where I am or when this is. With nothing to lose, I went up to the house that the girl just went into, and knocked. She answered right away, but screamed so loud that it might be comparable to the boom of the explosion before this.

"Who are you?" The girl said, hiding behind the door.

"My name is Xin," I hesitated. "May I know where and when this is?"

She seemed a bit more relaxed seeing that I can speak her language. "This is the Lurin Village. It's nearly noon."

"I see. Do you know the year?" I clarified, slightly panicking. Then I realised that this might be ancient China. "Or the emperor now?"

"Oh. King Wu," She replied. She hesitated, and then asked, "why do you… dress and look so weird?"

Good thing I paid attention during Chinese History lessons. This must be the Zhou dynasty.

"I think I'm from the future…" I said slowly, unable to believe this myself, "I think I'm trapped here. In my era, there weren't emperors anymore. Can you help me?"

Her eyes widened with surprise, but luckily, she seemed more surprised and delighted than scared.

"Sure," she said, widening the door. "But only because I have something that I need you to help with, as well."

With that, I entered the house. It was simple, with no special renovations or furniture. There was a bed, large enough for two people, and a simple table made of wood, all in the same room. There wasn't much clutter. She took me to a corner in the house next to the bed, where there's a pile of freshly cut bamboo.

"Just now, there was a huge thunderstorm. Everyone's work was interrupted, as we all had to run to a gazebo in order to stay dry and stop us from getting struck by lightning. My friends and I were very annoyed, as this wastes us a lot of time. One of them mentioned something about a portable mini gazebo, so I thought I could work on that." She explained in a matter–of–fact manner.

"Wow… so like an umbrella?" I said, realising that I was still holding my broken umbrella in my hand. I showed her. "Mine's broken now, though. Everyone has one in my era. We can walk around with it without getting wet."

"Yes!" She jumped up. "Exactly what I wanted. Living in your era must be so fun and convenient… Can you please teach me how to make it?"

My skills learnt in Design and Technology class finally came in handy. I figured that I would make one like the little parasols on the ice creams, since I have no idea how to make modern foldable ones. We usually only buy them from stores. I realised that in the modern world, everyone's just thinking about what we don't have enough. Like me not having a perfect, new umbrella. But no one ever takes the time to appreciate the things that made our lives so much better – like buildings, or working umbrellas.

I first made the ribs referring to the umbrella that I had with bamboo. Then, we covered some silk with some oil extracted from the big tree in front of her house. I covered the ribs with the silk, and added a bamboo handle. The girl drew some flowers with ink on the silk, making the umbrella look like a piece of art.

We were happily celebrating and admiring our product when her husband came home. The husband gave me a weird stare, but when she saw that the girl seemed friendly with me, he relaxed. The girl gifted the husband the umbrella, and told him to test it out. There was a mild wind and a small shower outside, so we all went out to see how their new invention worked. We all screamed in joy when the umbrella didn't leak water.

"Thank you so much for all this!" The girl exclaimed. "You're my saviour."

I smiled at her, and suddenly remembered that I still don't know her name.

"I'm Lu Hong, and my husband here is Lu Ban."

Seeing the two twirling under the umbrella, I sat on the porch and accidentally dosed off.

"Call the ambulance. She's unconscious!"
I woke up to complete chaos on the countryside road – my mom was weeping beside me, and several people were helping me onto a stretcher bed. I'm back. Every part of my body was aching, my ears were ringing, and my eyes were blurred. In my blurred vision, though, my mom looks like the older version of Lu Hong. I was still thinking about this when I got home, and when I saw the new umbrellas that mom forbade me from using, one of them looked exactly the same from the one I made, with the same ink flowers.

Years later, after mom died, I still remember this day and the lessons it taught me – to be grateful. Every time it rains, I take the umbrella with ink flowers with me, and it feels like Lu Hong – or mom – is walking under it with me.

The Enigmatic Origins of the Paintbrush

St. Stephen's College, Lau, Jovan – 13

Have you ever wondered about the mysterious origins of the paintbrush? It's quite fascinating how we use this tool so frequently in our artistic endeavors, yet rarely question its beginnings.

In ancient times, the people of China relied solely on brown, dried bamboo sticks as their writing instruments. These primitive tools required constant dipping in ink, making the act of writing a cumbersome task. However, during the era of the Qin dynasty, a remarkable individual emerged and forever changed the way people wrote. This person was no ordinary individual; in fact, he held one of the highest military ranks as a general. His name was Meng Tian.

Meng Tian's journey took him to remote villages, where he observed the traditional methods of pen making.

As Meng Tian embarked on his quest for a solution, he found himself immersed in the enchanting world of remote villages. Here, he witnessed the age−old techniques of brush making, passed down through generations. The villagers skillfully selected the finest bamboo, treating it with care and precision. With their nimble hands, they transformed the humble material into elegant brushes, ready to capture the essence of ink on paper.

Inspired, he realized that combining the strengths of traditional bamboo brushes with innovative bristle materials could lead to a breakthrough.

In a moment of revelation, Meng Tian's eyes sparkled with excitement. He understood that the key to revolutionizing the world of writing lay in the harmonious fusion of tradition and innovation. The sturdy bamboo brushes, with their rich history, needed a companion that could enhance their capabilities. Inspired by the tales of foreign lands and their exotic materials, Meng Tian envisioned a brush that would possess the finesse of a dancer and the strength of a warrior.

Through his research and experimentation, he discovered the importance of ink absorption and retention, which greatly influenced the quality of writing.

Determined to unravel the mysteries of ink and its interaction with the brush, Meng Tian delved deep into the realms of research and experimentation. He meticulously studied the ancient texts, seeking wisdom from the masters of old. It was during these moments of intense focus that he uncovered the secret to impeccable writing − the delicate balance between ink absorption and retention. With this newfound knowledge, he knew he was on the cusp of a breakthrough that would forever change the way pens worked.

With newfound knowledge and a vision in his heart, Meng Tian returned to his humble abode, determined to create a brush that encapsulated the essence of his journey. He meticulously selected the finest bamboo, handpicked the most suitable animal hair, and crafted a prototype with meticulous care. Countless hours were spent refining the design, adjusting the bristle density, and testing various materials until he achieved the perfect balance of control, flexibility, and ink absorption.

Word of Meng Tian's revolutionary Mao bi spread like wildfire. Scholars, artists, and calligraphers from far and wide flocked to witness the brush's magic. Meng Tian's invention breathed new life into calligraphy, allowing the strokes to flow with unrivaled precision and expressiveness. His Mao bi became a treasured tool, passed down through generations, and forever changed the art of writing.

Meng Tian’s journey not only led to the creation of a remarkable invention but also transformed him into a revered figure in the world of calligraphy. His unwavering pursuit of perfection and his willingness to explore uncharted territories left an indelible mark on the art form, inspiring future generations to push the boundaries of creativity and innovation. The legacy of Zhang Wei and his Mao bi endures, a testament to the power of a single journey and the transformative potential within every passionate soul.

Paper Birds

St. Stephen's College, Tam, Norton Isabella – 14

"Mei Ling, don't fall!"

Mei Ling was a small child with porcelain skin like a China doll and rosy–red cheeks. She had a quick bob as black as her ebony eyes. Mei Ling giggled, and one foot in front of the other, she teetered across the stone wall. It wasn't tall, yet she felt the wind on her face. She imagined she was powerful and free, and she could fly, fly, fly away if she wanted to. The wall separated the outside world from her favourite park, in which flocks of kites would fly across the pale blue sky each day and the trees would whisper secrets to her. Today, they told her autumn had arrived.

Every year, the autumn leaves fall. Children jump on each one they see—a crimson red against vivid green grass. Squealing when they hear a satisfying crunch and then hopping across the leaves like a bullfrog across lily pads. Mei Ling and her friends often had competitions to see who could run the length of the wall the fastest.
Soon, Mei Ling's turn arrived.

"1!"
"2!"
"3!"
"Go!" everyone shouted.

She ran.
She knew the other kids were watching and cheering her on from behind, so she ran as fast as her little legs could manage. Suddenly, she fell and found herself looking up at the sky. Looking down at her was a new face.

"Hello. I'm Yin Lei. Are you okay?"

Mei Ling nodded. Yin Lei gripped her hand and pulled her up, asking if he could join her and her friends in their games. Of course, Mei Ling happily agreed. The next day, she arrived at the playground, and much to her delight, Yin Lei was there waiting. Every day, they would lay on the grass, and he would talk about each bird that flew across the sky.

"Mei Ling, see there? That's a jay." "Mei Ling, see there? That's a dove." "Mei Ling, see there? That's a sandpiper."

"Well, what's that one, Yin Lei?" Mei pointed to a bird bigger than the rest, flying higher than all the jays, doves, and sandpipers.

"That's a kite. They're my favourite because they don't just fly; they soar and swoop through the mountains and hills, somehow lighter than a feather but faster than an arrow."

Yin Lei delved into every minor aspect of the bird, from the tips of its feathers to the claws of its feet, and this was something that Mei Ling found fascinating.

One day, Mei Ling asked, "Why do you like birds so much?"

"How can I not? They're free. Flying over mountains and temples and across seas every day. Imagine we could do that, Mei Ling. Imagine!"

Seeing the hint of longing in Yin Lei's eyes was almost funny to her. It was like he wanted to be a bird! Soon, she felt sleep's warm embrace hug her eyelids, and she lay on the soft grass, the autumn leaves framing her blurring vision. Before she fell asleep, she spotted a single bird flying above her: a kite.

Let's fast forward to 3000 Mondays later, until both Mei Ling and Yin Lei had grown, and eventually they were both 16. Since they had met, they saw each other in the park every day, and it became habitual for the both of them.

One day, Mei Ling got to the park and sat on the bench where she and Yin Lei met every day.

Clouds flew with the birds across the fading sky. A sparrow landed on the ground and picked up a worm with its tiny beak. An eagle launched off a tree branch, making the leaves rustle. A pair of kites flew circles around each other, soaring and diving in a perfect dance. And yet, Yin Lei never came. The sun eventually set, and Mei Ling decided to go home.

Back at home, Mei Ling heard a knock. She rushed downstairs and opened the door to Yin Lei's face.

"Why weren't you at the park today?"

He was grinning, and Mei noticed something strange in his hand. A heap of wood, paper, and string somehow vaguely resembled a bird!

"You built a bird?"

He looked into her eyes, nodding his head, and rushed past her, putting the bird on her table.

"I want to make it fly."

Mei saw the familiar sparkle in his eye and knew that he wasn't joking. He was serious! Mei laughed softly because, despite how absurd it sounded, she thought that if anyone could do it, it was Yin Lei. He knew the anatomy of a bird so well that maybe he could actually replicate it.

"I know I can do it. But I might need some help."

Mei nodded, and they got to work.

A few days later, Yin Lei met Mei Ling at the park and told her he was sick. In fact, he had been sick since he was born. No one knew why. Perhaps his heart was too big to always work quite right. But lately he had been more sick than ever. Not just a little sick, but so sick that he just might not live as long as her. His sickness was like a damp blanket, smothering all joyous things.

"I won't be here long," He said.

"There's got to be a cure!" Mei Ling wished living in denial could fix all problems in the world.
Yin Lei smiled softly.

"There isn't. I just know it's too late. But it's ok, we're the best of friends."

Then he pulled a bag out from under the bench. And inside it was the paper bird, which he had painted a brilliant red, with green, blue, and yellow details.

"I worked on it while I was at home."

He stood up, and when he picked it up, something was connected to it. A string, and a small dial–like thing at the bottom. The thing as a whole resembled a huge red flower, the delicately thin paper wings rustling in the breeze. He described how he created such a thing, explaining that he took inspiration from the largest birds in the sky. Kites. He designed it to hold the wind steady with the string, and when they tipped the kite's head forward, the wind would catch the sides, and somehow, magically, it would fly.

Her breath stopped mid–air as Yin Lei walked outside and threw the kite into the sky, and it hovered in the air. Yin Lei stood on the ground, holding the dial on which the string was twisted around. In the air, flying with the birds, was something never seen before: a bird made entirely of paper.

It dove and glided through the air. A mix of pure happiness and pride appeared on Yin Lei's face.

Two weeks later, a knock came at the door. Mei Ling opened it to Yin Lei's parents' sombre faces. Yin Lei's sickness had overwhelmed him, and at last it was a lost battle.
They talked about how the funeral was in three days and how at least he was no longer in pain, and Mei Ling's parents appeared behind her. She grabbed her mother's hand, squeezing it tight. Tears pricked at her eyes and she was simply too full of sorrow to listen to what his parents said. The day of the funeral came, and Mei Ling had brought Yin Lei's paper bird with her. She held it in her hands, trying to will fond memories of Yin Lei out of it like a charm.

Eventually, after what seemed like a lifetime the funeral came to an end. Mei Ling looked around, she realised that perhaps a crowd of tear–stained faces was not something her friend would have wanted.

So Mei Ling picked up the bird and let the wind catch its fiery wings, which lifted into the sky. Mei Ling realised that Yin Lei was free now and that maybe everything was okay. Or at least it would be. She just needed some time.

The bird swooped through the sky, flying in different directions with each breath of the wind.

When she looked back, tracing fingertips over paper painted red, wondering if she would die, she discovered the fragility of life. Sometimes all it takes to make life the tiniest bit more meaningful is a paper bird. Something to make memories worth remembering. Something to indelibly paint the past onto the present.

Yin Lei's mother asked, "What is it?"

Mei Ling looked back at the crowd of people staring at her inquisitively. She looked at the paper bird, delicate, in her hands.

"It's a kite."

The Future

St. Stephen's College, Victoria, Xia Yu Chen – 14

Leanne recovered from her daze with sore limbs and a throbbing head.

She had been trying to get onto a train, the newest form of transport at the time, but a hole had opened beneath her, and she was pulled in by some invisible force. Suddenly, she was dragged back to reality by an assortment of pokes. Opening her eyes, she saw a young girl looming above her. While she was still taking in the situation, the girl spoke.

"You're finally awake! I thought that you were still comatose for a second, but it seems that you have awoken now!"

She chuckled to herself, clapping her hands together and looking extremely pleased. Leanne blinked twice, then looked around. She was lying in an empty field, with nothing but grass surrounding her body.

"…Who are you? And most importantly, where am I?" Leanne asked, still extremely confused.

The entire thing was extremely bizarre to her— After all, it's not every day that you get sucked into a mysterious pit and transported to an unfamiliar grassy field. The girl tilted her head, looking befuddled.

"You're lying right next to my house, on my private property. It should be ME asking you this question!" She said, looking at Leanne.

"What house are you talking about?" Leanne asked, confused. "I don't see anything around here."

The girl didn't respond to her question, and merely pulled out a small red button. "Click!" and a mechanical whirr sounded. The ground began to shake, and something enormous gradually emerged from beneath. It was a white, futuristic mansion.

"This," the girl paused for dramatic effect. "Is my house." Grinning proudly at the dumbfounded expression on the other's face, she continued.

"Surely someone like you wearing rags as plain as those," she gestured to the clothes Leanne was wearing.

"None has seen anything as spectacular as this? It's the newest type of housing of 2033, developed by none other than my parents!"

Leanne was about to respond, but then she noticed something was off. "2033? Isn't the year 1998?"

"You mean you travelled to the future?" The girl put her hands on her waist, causing Leanne to flinch.

"Don't be silly. Even if technology is advanced nowadays, there's still no definite way to time travel! You're funny, girl. What's your name? I'm Christie, by the way."

She spoke, giddy as ever. "Since I have some time, I'll escort you back to your home. We'll just take the High-Speed Rail. Shouldn't take long."

"Uhh, well… I'm Leanne, and… what's the High-Speed Rail?" Still feeling a bit bewildered, Leanne answered. Christie's eyes widened significantly.

"I thought you were just a regular citizen that somehow made your way here, but seriously? Do you not even know what the High-Speed Rail is?" Leanne shook her head, and the girl took it as a sign to keep talking.

"So you see, the High-Speed Rail is one of the most significant inventions here in China, which is why I was shocked you didn't know about it. Back then, fuel-powered trains and steamboats were the norm, but obviously they can't even compare to the transportation we have now!"

"Well, when it was built, it stretched across thousands of kilometres, connecting many places in China. It's also very affordable too, and is something even less wealthy people could utilise— Something I'm sure you'll appreciate."

Christie droned on about all the benefits of the railway, while Leanne listened in with just as much enthusiasm. She had never thought about the development of future technology.

"I remember that years ago, its potential and abilities were still being doubted. It came as a huge surprise to many that it met the critics' expectations!"She blabbered.

"I wasn't too surprised, obviously; I never doubted its capabilities one bit, but I still was pretty shocked to hear that only one major accident happened in all its decades of service!" The girl rambled on. Christie abruptly stopped speaking, looking quite abashed.

"I was rambling again, wasn't I? Sorry, I tend to do that a lot." Cheeks reddening slightly, she looked at Leanne's face, expecting to see a deadpan or awkward expression but was instead met with a face filled with wonder and excitement.

"Wow, so technology in the future is this advanced? How do you know so much about all this?" She asked, eyes shining so brightly that it could be mistaken for a lightbulb. Christie had never seen anyone with such interest in modern technology, and she was pleasantly surprised at how thrilled she was.

"My parents are scientists and inventors, after all. Shouldn't it be normal for me to know all that?"

Suddenly, a small egg-shaped levitating robot zoomed over, landing on Christie's shoulder.

"Hello, Miss Christie. You have returned. Is this lady your guest?" The little robot spoke. Leanne was taken aback by how well the egg-shaped object spoke.

"Is this a communication device?" She asked, in awe of its ability to speak fluently just like how a person would. Christie shook her head, looking even more disappointed than before.

"Come on, Leanne. Do you not know what an AI robot is? Even when it's everywhere in the country? Are you living under a rock or something?"

"Uh, no? I told you, I'm from the past!"

"Oh, it's alright to be uneducated in some aspects, Leanne. No need to lie." Christie patted Leanne on her shoulders in an attempt to console her. Frustrated, Leanne decided not to bring it up again.

"If you really want to know, AI stands for Artificial Intelligence. They have extraordinary capabilities and versatility and can communicate with us," she patted the little robot. "Just like this one here. Have you used a virtual chatbot before?"

"Nope."

"Guess not then. Anyway, AI is considered the pinnacle of modern technological advancement. Even though it's widely used throughout the world, China actually played a huge role in its development and is regarded as one of the top countries in terms of AI development." She explained, gesturing at the robot.

"Miss Christie is correct. In addition, AIs like me are prominent in national security and defence too. We scan data and footage for suspicious information before reporting the findings to-" The robot added, before Christie

silenced it by shutting off its microphone function. She glared at the robot, seemingly angry at it stealing the spotlight away from her.

"Yeah, yeah. Before I was rudely interrupted, I was going to tell you that everything is basically managed by AIs now. They're useful little things, aren't they?" She waved her hand, trying to look as nonchalant as possible, even though she was gripping the poor robot so tightly that it looked like it was about to explode.

"Seriously? That's so cool! I wish I had one, too. Are there any drawbacks of using it?" Leanne asked excitedly, wondering if she could order an AI to do all her work for her.

"There are drawbacks to every useful invention nowadays, Leanne. Nothing's perfect. Maybe except for me, but nothing else!" Christie smiled triumphantly.

Leanne wondered if the girl was always such a narcissist. Suddenly, the little robot in Christie's hand started to buzz noisily. Alarmed at its unusual behaviour, Christie let go of it, only for the robot to fly back and start shooting lasers at the two. Leanne jumped backwards in fear, but Christie merely pulled out another remote from her pocket and pointed it at the drone. Suddenly, the drone fell to the ground, and Christie sighed, rubbing her head in embarrassment.

"Sorry, sorry.. Guess the bot malfunctioned." She was looking at the ground, grinning awkwardly. Leanne let out a sigh of relief.

"Oh, uh.. It's fine. Is it a common occurrence?"

"Not really, just unfortunate that it happened when a guest was visiting. Well, I guess to make it up to you, I'll give you a tour of my house, alright? I mean, you apparently haven't seen an AI before today, so I'll let you look at some robots in my collection. Come on, I'll show you!"

Christie reached for Leanne's hand, but before she could grab her, another dimensional wormhole opened up right next to her. She fell in with a yelp before the hole closed as quickly as it opened. Christie was left agape, mouth wide open at what just occurred in front of her.

"…Was she really not lying about travelling through time?!"

Leanne landed with a thud.

"Oh, I'm back…." She thought to herself.

"Well, that was certainly an interesting experience. I learned a lot about technology from that girl, so... I guess I'll try making something similar myself. Maybe I won't succeed, but if I did, it would be cool, wouldn't it?"

The girl wondered. Pulling out a pen, she started sketching a picture of the robot she had seen at Christie's house, preparing to start a project that will soon become the original blueprint of the very first robot in history.

Mei's Triumph

The French International School, Bali, Anushka – 11

Wǒ láile, māmā, Mei said as she unwillingly lifted up her heavy eyelids ,the winter sunlight flowed into her eyes blinding her, And stumbled out of bed.;

Her mother was hollering at the top of her high pitched voice, calling her for breakfast, which was her grandmother's aromatic, comforting,spicy hot wonton soup with steamed rice ! yum.

She stuffed as much as she could into her mouth, grabbed her bag, and rushed out the door to catch the bus.

"Jìn lái!" The bus driver said cheerfully in Mandarin. Her mother waved goodbye as she got in and made her way to sit next to her friend Delilah.

Delilah had been her closest friend ever since she was 2 years old, they shared everything and just wouldn't be the same without each other.

Delilah was slightly plump, had a lot of acne scars,thick eyebrows and smooth black hair cut into a neat bob cut.

Mei had an elegant diamond−shaped face, glass skin like pale fresh snow, jet black silky hair, and a button nose.

She lived with her mom.

They reached school after about an hour and glanced above them to see the towering sign that read Fujian School.

It was their first day of middle school.

Mei took in a deep breath of the crisp cold winter air, and told herself she *will* get through this day.

When her dad was around he told her that "even a bad day is just 24 hours."

A salty tear rolls down her face as she remembers that day.

When they entered the corridor on the way to homeroom, it was a mess. There were students running everywhere and bumping into people, gossiping and bursts of laughter, lockers adorned with bright colourful stickers.

Teachers were trying to calm everybody down, but they couldn't tame the wild excited children. Mei and Delilah scrambled about to find their homeroom, room 302.

"Welcome everybody! Settle down." announced a lady in a soft white dress. This was their teacher, Ms. Leung

The next day, they had social studies as their first class, and their unit was about Chinese inventions. Mei's favourite subject was social studies. She loved everything she learned that day.

"Good morning, Y7A. I am Mr. Pullman"

"We will give you learning, but you must return us to your success, life is full of obstacles, challenges and struggles that WILL test your resilience! "

You have unlimited potential, let's make this year truly unforgettable.

This speech really moved Mei and made her feel determined to impress her teachers.

Later on at home, Mei started researching Chinese inventions. “Whoa!” she gasped. “The compass was invented in China!" She started to get hooked in her book, utterly amazed at all of these inventions from her beloved country. You could see the glistening twinkle in her eyes as they flew across the pages.

Mei was told when she was younger that it was the great Americans that invented everything.

But no, China has invented significant things important to our lives!

"Mama guess what? Did you know that the compass,printing press, gunpowder,papermaking and more were ALL invented in china!” She enthusiastically told her mother at dinner.

She was confident and eager in her abilities and couldn't wait to share her knowledge to her classmates

About three weeks later, on the day of the presentation, she would get to talk about inventions in front of everybody in the school.a lump formed in her throat.

“Take a seat everyone”, announced the principal, Mr. Wong in his very deep voice,,

After what felt like an hour, it was Mei's turn to present. She had worked very hard on this and hoped that the effort would pay off. She was shaking as she said the first word, but soon after, her words flowed out like a gushing river.

“You may be surprised at the number of things invented in China, including the compass…….her voice drained over the thunderous claps

She voiced, and everybody was transfixed at how confident she was, one of the youngest students at the school

Mei was walking to the bus stop when she noticed a flyer stuck to one of the lamp posts flapping in the wind, it read
“DO YOU WANT TO PARTICIPATE IN A COMPETITION OF YOUR INTEREST- HUGE CASH PRIZE?”
“Contact the number +86 5467 8921 to know more!”
Mei’s mom worked three jobs and needed all the help she could get, so this was a sign from the universe.
As soon as she got home she dialled in the number on their antique dark brown landline and a lady with a cool voice answered the phone, “Hello, are you interested in participating?”
“Yes please” Mei answered excitedly.
“May I know more?” she asked politely.
The lady briefed her on the date and time and told her she would need to make a presentation on her interest and perform it in front of the town.
Mei rushed to tell her mom all about it though she left out the cash prize part, because if only she won, it would be a surprise!

She started to practise and research months before the big day.

She was working so ambitiously that she would eat dinner in her room and stay in the library for 3 hours after school!
Not too long after was the big day! When Mei awoke she didn't feel too well. She started to procrastinate and was apprehensive about her project. Her mom drove her up to the farmer’s market where the stage was prepared in the middle of all the buzz.
She stood in line for her turn,the butterflies in her stomach felt more like pigeons flapping their wings against the walls of her tight stomach

She looked up to see who the next contestant was and guess what?
IT WAS DELILAH
And her presentation was ALSO about Chinese inventions.
Mei stared at her in utter shock, she caught a glimpse of Delilah smirking slyly at her.

Was she copying her?!
How DARE she? After all that effort of researching and practising Delilah, her best friend, has just stolen it from her.

This was a shock to her.

"Mei LAM, please make your way up to the stage." announced a tall man in a bright yellow suit and a cherry red tie.
She walked up to the stage, head held high looking confident even though she felt the exact opposite, her palms were clammy with nervousness.

HELLO...MY NAME IS mei just call me that .... AND UM I WOULD ...PRESENT MY PRESENTATION
NO! SHE WAS FREEZING UP THIS COULDN'T BE HAPPENING!
She had to improvise.
Breathe…Mei, she murmured to herself calmly.She cleared her throat and began. "Hello, my name is Mei Lam and I am here to express my knowledge and passion for Chinese inventions.
"Now let me be honest, I haven't really explored much about my passion until a year ago. I wouldn't exactly call it "professional" but I have devoted my time and effort into it .

Our country, China, holds a lot of the most significant inventions including gunpowder, paper making, printing, toilet paper and much more!"

"The bristle toothbrush was not invented until 1498 in China. The bristles were the stiff, coarse hairs taken from the back of a wild pig's neck and stuck to handles made of bone or bamboo and used to brush people's teeth, which evolved later to the one you use today.

"They would also produce a paste by mixing bones, twigs, flower petals, salt, and water. This was their toothpaste."

After Mei finished her presentation and mesmerising speech she left the audience feeling inspired and moved,a wave of happiness washing over them.

Mei saw Delilah in the crowd, silently cursing under her breath. She then glanced at her loving mom, a wide smile etched across her face.

She thought of the time when she was younger and her mom told her that she can do anything and that her name had a beautiful meaning, it meant gorgeous and intelligent

Mei continued her journey with Chinese inventions and got a Nobel Peace at the age of only 16, for explaining and informing young children from Fujian what *"they"* can invent to help the world if they work hard like she did!
That was the of Mei the girl who *was lucky*
Actually Correction–
the girl whose blood, sweat, hard work and dedication paid off.

Inventors, Impact and China

The French International School, Ching, Arthur – 12

Humanity developed, creativity thrived within the grand borders of ancient China but not a youthful soul elsewhere now knows a single Chinese invention. Creativity lost in monotonous history books, meaning lost between nothing. So let us adventure into this vast world of sophisticated lore.

Paper. One of the most influential inventions of all time but taken for granted in this developing digital age. From egg cartons to confidential files, we use it for nearly everything. Nevertheless, as our lives become infected with electronic devices, we forget the root origins of how this innovation came to be. It all started in 50AD, when Cai Lun emerged from the countryside of Guiyang during the Eastern Han Dynasty. He was burdened with parents that earned only a handful of money each day working as blacksmiths. However, at the age of 25, Cai Lun received castration, which allowed him to become an eunuch for the imperial family. Eunuchs became slaves for the palace, involved in protecting imperial women, lifting water in carrying poles or doing a list of other dull roles.

In 75AD, Cai Lun stepped foot into the imperial household, under the rule of Emperor He. His first tasks were simply to sweep the ground and perform chores. Nonetheless, he still worked diligently and flourished in many esoteric studies, acquiring an abundance of knowledge. In his ancient biography, a paragraph briefly describes his personality as 'prudent and devoted to his duty'. Overall, he was a virtuous man, known for his cautiousness and honesty. The emperor noted his qualities and not long after, he was promoted to court eunuch where he crafted weapons for military uses.

During this time, the Chinese were mostly using inconvenient bamboo slips to write books. Even though silk was a solution, it was unaffordable and only accessed by the rich, which meant only the rich could read or write. Besides, the Han Dynasty was reaching economic prosperity and commoners were desperate for a proper medium to write on. So Cai Lun sat in his room, concentrating solely on the problem. He isolated himself for several weeks. He went through trial upon error, days upon days, weeks upon months, blood, sweat and tears to develop a viable solution. As a result, he invented the method to create one of the Four Great Inventions of China, an invention we all recognize today.

First, gather grated tree bark, fishing nets, hemp waste, rags of cloth and the inner bark of bamboo. Then, put the mixture inside water, to let the materials soften. Afterwards, steam and further macerate the materials if needed. After, sieve and press to further enhance the tensile strength of paper. Lastly, dry the sheet on a wall before further use. The final product using this method was presented to the emperor in 105 AD when Cai Lun was approximately 45 years old. Of course, it took the emperor's breath away and Cai Lun was awarded with huge sums of money.

In the modern era, anybody can clearly observe the impact Cai Lun left behind. Paper is one of the most used methods to disseminate information, from verbose essays to Picasso's legendary artworks, you can express emotions which laid its foundations just from a blank piece of paper. It can represent a form of currency that dictates your life or simply a thin−layered sheet to blow your nose. Even more, it can hold the photos to remember our closest memories, never forgetting the wonderful delights in life. At other times, it can be used to simply clean tables and wipe coffee spills. Even though now we use machinery to mass−produce paper, there are still places in China that do it the traditional way, preserving the ancient methods.

But most importantly, Cai Lun paved the way for the next groundbreaking invention in China, printing.

Bi Sheng was brought alive in the depths of Bianliang during the Northern Song dynasty in 970. He was simply a normal commoner, who wasn't a court eunuch with growing intuition nor a starving peasant growing wheat. He grew up to become a skillful artisan and alchemist, learning the techniques for carving wood blocks. When creating these blocks, one would need to carve the outline of each stroke and character. It was a delicate process that required patience, diligence and an unneeded amount of time. If an artisan made a single mistake, they would have to start completely from scratch, which would clearly be frustrating. However, if it was successful, ink would be applied on the surface of the woodblock and pressed onto paper. This method was convenient for producing multiple copies, as wood was a material found within all forests, in all trees. But the sheer amount of hours spent simply carving a single woodblock was too inefficient, and mistakes were too costly.

So, once again, an inventor went through trial upon error, days upon days, weeks upon months, blood, sweat and tears to develop a viable solution. As a result, Bi Sheng was able to create the first moveable type printing method. First, each character would be molded individually using clay and then fired in a kiln. Each of these characters were then a single 'type'. These types were placed inside an wooden frame to form sentences and stories, which would be printed onto paper using ink.

However, the vast number of characters in the Chinese language was just too overwhelming for a moveable type print to gain attention. Furthermore, Chinese characters had complicated strokes that required even more caution when carved onto blocks. So even if the Chinese government still regards this 10th century invention as transformative, it wasn't widely used back then. Publishers still continued to stick to woodblock printing, and Bi Sheng's work was in vain.

Finally, it would be dishonour to forget the Chinese philosopher that invented the ethical belief that altered Chinese society. This teacher influenced politics and civilization, providing the impactful morals that unfoiled across rivers and lakes to European states. This ideological revolutionary simplified the complexity of human relationships and formed the golden rule, engraved within the code of conducts. This man is none other than Confucius. He was born in 551 BC within Qufu, Jining, now the Shandong province of China, during the Zhou Dynasty. However, his childhood is quite unknown, some state that he lived in an impoverished family, some say he was born within the luxuries of the royal family.

When Confucius grew a bit older, he had a strong desire to grow his academic knowledge by learning countless different subjects. He wanted to broaden his understanding, educate himself in the classics. Confucius particularly admired the original peaceful years of the Zhou Dynasty, before it broke into crisis and feudal authority. He himself was a tranquil, benevolent person that respected elders greatly. To put it simply, Confucius was a purely altruistic human being that believed in upholding morals and 'good' qualities.

So, he invented the idea of Confucianism, written down in a book called the Analects. The main underlying belief of Confucianism is becoming a virtuous character with high moral standards. This would supposedly affect this repeated concept of 'harmony' in life. There were many virtues that Confucius thought of, like humaneness, righteousness, justice, loyalty, consideration, etc… There were two parts that one would need to fulfill to reach humaneness: first was to show deep, heartfelt respect to everybody around you and behave in this manner all day, second was to treat others with consideration and the way you would like to be treated. Humaneness was one of the highest fields of good, and was the main foundation of a moral character. In addition, Confucius said that there were five main relationships, ruler–subject, husband–wife, father–son, elder–younger and friends. These relationships had to be maintained for a stable, flourishing society to function. Though modern scholars have argued against this model since many of these relationships are unfair, with one party asserting more power. But overall, Confucianism still has retained much influence and provided the groundwork for ethics within China. From just teaching a few thousand students to now educating millions across globes, it's hard to deny his effect.

Though these inventors might not have had the same astonishing impact that transformed the following decades of development, they were undoubtedly China's most ingenious visionaries, thinking years ahead of their time. We also tend to disregard the help these inventors received along the way, from slight refinements on their innovations in the future to their undocumented peers and parents. The fact remains that humanity never progresses alone, we progress as a unified whole towards a better future, spreading our colours of creativity to the other side of the globe. In the 21st century, that's exactly what we've been doing, and have been doing for a millennium. Creativity will always be an indispensable part of being human, forever, for all time.

The Missing Class Pet

The French International School, Hu, Chloe – 11

A sign of another school day. Ms. Blubbert stormed into the room as she slapped the door open with her foot. *Blam!* goes her bag as it hits the smooth wooden surface of her expensive desk. For a woman who's only 5 foot 2, she had a nasty temper compared to others. The class pet Hammy the Hamster quickly burrows into his hole to hide from this ferocious beast.

She drops into her chair as she jiggles uncontrollably and begins to take her morning nap. Ms. Blubbert has a lot of naps. She has a morning one, one in the afternoon, and another in the evening. And only after that does she start to doze off into her longest nap that lasts 'till morning.

The first unfortunate pupil skips into the classroom with a big grin. Two blond pigtails flop behind her. Class 3B's classic Alicia, the class brainiac. "Morning, Miss!"

"Ah, you again! How *dare* you disturb me while I'm working! It's 30 minutes before class starts, you idiot!" *burps "Let me prepare the slides for our lesson later that I forgot to do last night." Ms. Blubbert glares at her as Alicia's smile falters and trots to the front row to take her seat.

The rest of the class steadily trickles in a bit after.

"Uh–HMM, attention please! Pick a partner. 10 seconds." Those were Ms. Blubbert's usual instructions to start the day. It's strange how none of the children complained to their parents about the way she taught. Maybe they didn't mind that they weren't learning. Maybe they liked it.

A scramble to pick their besties before anyone else got to them. Punches were thrown as the students shoved through the mass of obstacles blocking their way to their desired partner. Shouts of 'MOVE!' or 'Get out of my way!' or the awfully common 'OW!' were heard repeatedly.

"Time's up, you bunch of filthy brats! Why, look at you, Timmy, your nose is bleeding! And Sara! What on *earth* were you doing? Your lips are bleeding, too! No, wait, is that lipstick?! Oh my, you are too young for beauty tips! Don't you know that? It's not lipstick? Okay."

"Go run up to the nurse and be back in 5 minutes or else I will spank you two, and yes, I have both of your parents' permission." That, of course, was a dirty lie. Poor little Timmy and Sara, too frightened to speak, scurried out of that horrid place before Ms. Blubbert's Nike sneaker that reeked of soggy socks hit them. They jump as they hear the shoe hit the closed door and shatter its see–through panes. "Oh my, what if that was me? Oh, mommy, where are you?" Timmy whispers. They both shudder.

"Are you all done finding your pet friends?"

"Yes, Miss Blubbert."

"Good. Now, your task is to go onto an AI generator or something and write me a 3000 word essay about Hershey's milk tea flavor nuggets. I don't care how, but the best essay will be put onto their 5 star reviews website which I'm not sure exists. But you morons fall for anything. So, start! What are you waiting for? Go! Go! Go!"

The noise level of the buzz and chatter went up 10 notches as Ms. Blubbert left the room for number two.

There was a very peculiar conversation going on at the very back row with a lone table where a pair of mischievous boys sat. Toby and Brody.

"I thought Hershey's made chocolate! When did they start producing Mcnuggets, man?!" Toby demanded. "You fool those nuggets are tiny pieces of chocolate that are overpriced and overrated!" Brody snickered and picked out a booger. He flicked it onto Toby's head. His victim screamed.

On a separate table, Timmy with a tissue stuck up his nose and Joe sat on their table with a missing foot. "I want a hamster." sighed Joe. "There's one." Timmy pointed to the hamster cage. "*And* it's for *free*."

"Ooh, good idea. Won't Ms. Blubbert find out?"
"Surely not. She won't have *evidence*."

And slyly, Joe got up and crept under the tables of his classmates. It was a terrible experience.

Without defending itself or using any sort of resistance when Joe picked the innocent rodent up, Hammy slept soundlessly on his palm as Joe lowered him into his lunchbox.

Just as the click–clacking of high heels echoed through the loud classroom, Timmy helped Joe to zip up his school bag. "*Now*, the evidence is all gone." They both grin.

Now, Ms. Blubbert might be mean and rude, and all that stuff, but she wasn't blind. Oh no, her eyesight was perfectly good. So of course she spotted at once that her beloved Hammy the hamster vanished. And she shrieked at the top of her lungs, "WHO, DARES," then in a dangerously low voice, "to take…" a long pause. "HAMMY THE CLASS PET?!"

There was silence. Nobody dared utter a word. Even the crybabies Trelsa and Nutelia didn't cry. Class 3B was too terrified to even let out a whimper or fart.

"No one? So you twits are saying that Hammy escaped on his own?" The only sound heard now was the heavy breaths taken by Ms. Blubbert. "If I find out who did it, I *shall* expel them."

The school bell for dismissal finally rang and Timmy and Joe were the first to escape hell in school with some quite worried looks on their faces. "What should we do? Buy Ms. Blubbert a new hamster? I wouldn't want to waste *my* money on someone like her!"
"True, true. But luckily my friend, you have ME. Isn't that great? And I have a brilliant plan, just you wait and see." So shortly after that being said, Timmy started whispering his plan to a clueless Joe.

"That ain't gonna work, man."
"Of course it will!"
"I'm telling you, it's not."
"Well you're saying we did this all for nothing?"
Timmy points his finger at their game plan on the messy board:

1. Make a fake silhouette shape of the hamster. Realistic!
2. Break into the classroom(don't know how) before Ms. Blubbert gets there. Usually she arrives at 7:29.
3. Put it in its cage.
4. Cut the wire to the left side of the classroom's lights, where the cage is located. This will then disable Ms. Blubbert to see the hamster clearly and because she's so desperate,
5. Voila!

The duo were now starting to work furiously designing their fake Hammy. It was quite difficult, trying to get the right shape of him while he was rolling about like a ball on the table. They had taken the hamster out, but surprisingly, Hammy had eaten Joe's sushi for lunch. As a result, he was as round as you could get as a hamster.

A pot of glue sat in the corner of the table. And a pile of wooden stick thingies. Timmy grabbed a wooden stick. He drew a circle on the end of it as a reminder of where to cut out. Apparently that was Hammy's ear. He then plucked out some hairs from Hammy as the silhouette's fur.

Kablam! Joe had tripped. He had skidded on top of Timmy's rusty skateboard and fallen. Then he bulldozed Timmy down with the force of a rhino as he continued to fall forwards…

Now Timmy was falling too. So he quickly stuck his twig into the giant pot of superglue to have just a bit more support. It worked.

Timmy quickly tugged out the stubborn stick. Suddenly, it came free, but poor Timmy was not prepared for it. He went crashing to the ground and started howling for his mommy. "MOMMY! Bring me home! I don't want to stay here…"

In the meantime, the stick was still flying through the air, in slow motion…

An abrupt gurgling sound began to emit from the hamster. The gluey stick had landed in its mouth. Oh dear, oh dear. Joe flew to Hammy's aid and pulled it out. And wo behold, the hamster's teeth were a break−taking dazzling white! But, Hammy's mouth was glued together. Quite worth it, Hammy thought.

Timmy and Joe both gasped at this magnificent sight! What beautiful teeth!

And guess what? The duo did the same. Their teeth became so white and clear! And what a happy ending!

Timmy and Joe started their own company, Timmy & Joe. They kept on selling those things, things that they later decided to name: Toothbrushes.

Glue wouldn't do, of course, so the successful business−children collabed with a company called Coolgate and launched something called: Tooth*paste*. And *what* a successful business it was! Billions and billions bought these truly unbelievable inventions, and Timmy and Joe did not have to go to school anymore because they became super rich.

With the bristly things acting like a brush on it still being harvested from Hammy the hamster's fluffy and puffy fur, of course. Hammy is now bald, but again, proud of his shiny teeth, that is still shining and shimmering and glimmering and glittering to this very day.

Guo Shoujing

The French International School, Lau, Ying – 14

She, is one of the largest nations on Earth, of almost a fifth the size of Asia. She, is one of the oldest nations on Earth, of more than 3500 years of history. She, had been through highs and lows, forming what she is today. China, a great nation of science, mathematics and philosophy. Here, countless great men were raised, numerous advancements were made; here, the world was explored. In ancient China, the four great inventions were discovered, where papermaking, printing, gunpowder, and the compass had far–reaching impacts and infinite opportunities worldwide. However, way more inventors, scientists, mathematicians, philosophers, and others were left forgotten throughout these thousands of years. Now, I shall present a historical journey to discover one who made significant influence, but is unheard of for many.

Guo Shoujing, courtesy name Ruosi. Born and raised in the Song dynasty (1231 AD), but succeeded in the Yuan dynasty under the rules of the Mongol Empire. He was from Xingtai county in Xingzhou (now Xingtai), one of the oldest cities in North China. He was born into a poor family. Fortunately, he had a knowledgeable grandfather, a famous scholar throughout China at the time, for his expertise in various topics, ranging from the study of the Five Classics to astronomy, mathematics, and hydraulics. The man was named Guo Yong. Young Guo Shoujing was extremely intelligent, showing exceptional intellectual promise. Under his grandfather's education, he was diligent and hard–working, enjoying studying. He also developed solid hands–on abilities, demonstrated in his teen years.

'If those in charge are like this, then people are not eating in vain.' – Kublai Khan

As early as the age of 15, Guo Shoujing was said to be able to replicate an Armillary Sphere from just bamboo strips based on an illustration in a book. He also built a platform using soil for the Armillary Sphere so that he could conduct astronomical observations. Another time, he understood the operation principles of a timing instrument that was quite advanced at the time, not long after reading a blueprint made by Yan Su in the Northern Song Dynasty, which his grandfather was working on. It was a type of water clock called a Lotus Clepsydra. A water clock with a bowl shaped like a lotus flower on the top into which the water dripped. From these experiences, he learned the fundamentals of astronomy and hydraulic engineering studies and began studying mathematics at 16.

"Calendar is the foundation of a nation."

By this time, his grandfather, Guo Yong, knew that he had nothing left to teach him and that the best for Guo Shoujing was to find him a 'proper' teacher. Liu Bingzhong was the best option since he is an old friend of Guo Yong. Liu Bingzhong was the representative of the original Zijin Mountain School of Thought and was one of China's best teachers at the time. He was also a vital counsellor of Kublai Khan, the future Emperor of the Yuan. And so, Guo Shoujing then went to Zijin Mountain School to study. There, he met famous scholars like Zhang Wenqian, Zhang Yi, and Wang Xun, who became friends with him. The four of them and their teacher, Liu Bingzhong, were later called the 'Big Five of Zijin Mountain.'

'*God has blessed our Yuan dynasty. A person like this is not easily attained in the world.'* – Xu Heng

After further studying classics and astronomy, the fields his teacher was known for mastering, he was introduced to Zhang Wenqian. Shortly later, he was ordered to initiate the work of regulating and evacuating water channels; specifically, he was to undertake the planning and designing of this project. Luckily, he quickly figured out the river system damaged by the war using the knowledge he learned and through careful investigation. Subsequent dredging and renovation projects returned the spreading water to its original channels. Under Guo Shoujing's guidance, the relics of the stone bridge that had been buried for nearly thirty years were unearthed. This was praised by people at the time. Yuan Haowen once wrote an article, 'Xingzhou New Stone Bridge,' specifically for it. The Guo Sheng in the article refers to the young Guo Shoujing. He became famous. When the Emperor – Kublai Khan – promoted Zhang Wenqian and put him at Daminglu (now Daming in Hebei province) to work, Guo Shoujing came with him to study, and together, they worked on water management. Nevertheless, he was still not promoted in court. On the other hand, he was able to replicate and improve on the Lotus Clepsydra, which method of building was lost. This was researched by teen Guo Shoujing, and he was able to improve on it at the age of 30. The new model was named the Baoshan Clepsydra. This is significant as it marks off as the 'first invention' of Guo Shoujing.

"Simplicity is the ultimate form of sophistication."

Finally, the day came. In 1262, thanks to the recommendation of Zhang Wenqian, he was seen by the Emperor. There, he proposed 6 laws to help control floods nationwide, all complemented by Kublai Khan. He was finally found to be talented. He was promoted and appointed to take charge of the renovation and management of canals in various places. Soon, he was again promoted to 'Deputy River Commissioner.' It was until one day, a big challenge occurred. It was when he went to their Xixia (now Ningxia) to inspect rivers and waterways. Originally, Xixia was known to be an 'Oasis in the desert of the West,' but because of wars, it had been badly destroyed, leaving a disastrous mess and an empty city. He had to fix this somehow. A few months later, Zhang Wenqian governed Xixia as a representative of the imperial court. Under the leadership and support of Zhang Wenqian, Guo Shoujing was ordered to dredge the Tanglai, Hanyan, and other ancient canals in Xixia and build sluices and weirs so that local farmland could be irrigated, and he did it. He was loved by the people of Xixia. The local people even built a shrine for him at the source of the canal. With this success, he was promoted again.

'Master Guo, the renowned scholar, a 'divine man.' – Temur Khan

10 years later, Guo Shoujing was once again promoted. This time, plans were big, real big – it was to make a new calendar. Guo Shoujing had worked and led many observation projects, in which most of the data he collected were the most accurate in ancient China's history or just close to the actual value measured by modern–day technology. The most known was the 'Sihai Test,' meaning the 'Four Seas Test' by translation. This involved setting up 27 observation stations all around Yuan's land. The nation was much larger, and different regions would have different lengths

of day and night, sunrise and sunset, and most importantly, different times of day, meaning that the old calendar was no longer applicable. Therefore, nationwide astronomical observations were needed to compile a new calendar. Kublai Khan accepted Guo Shoujing's suggestion and sent fourteen prison guards to conduct astronomical observations in these twenty–seven places. For this, Guo Shoujing invented or improved on a total of 16 different astronomical instruments. This included 4 portable devices that can be carried for measurements. It provided a reliable observation basis for compiling the 'Shoushi Calendar,' or the new calendar they were working on.

"There is no limit to human ingenuity."

Guo Shoujing travelled thousands of miles from Shangdu (now Duolun in Inner Mongolia province) and Dadu (now Beijing) through Henan to the South China Sea and participated in tests in person. At six of the locations, the length of the surface shadow and the length of day and night on the summer solstice were specially measured; the average error of the measured altitude of the North Pole was only 0.35; the average error of the newly measured distance of the 28 constellations was less than 5'; The new value of the yellow–red angle was measured, with an error of just over 1'; the length of the tropical year was found to be 365.2425 days, that is, 365 days, 5 hours, 49 minutes and 12 seconds, which was only 26 seconds away from the actual time of the earth's revolution around the sun. It was consistent with the Gregorian Calendar, which is currently used worldwide. The results of these observations provided scientific data for preparing a calendar suitable for the whole country, and the calendar has had a significant influence throughout Asian countries like Japan, Korea, and Vietnam. Like any other challenges Guo Shoujing met, he was able to overcome it. All these things that he could do had not been achieved by the Western European countries until more than 300 years later, again proving his greatness.

'Master Guo was a man of pure virtue and practical learning. He was an expert in water conservancy, mathematics, and the study of instruments and systems… When he was put to use, his plans were simple and effective, his observations were accurate, and his work benefited the people. He was a true genius who surpassed all others in his time.' – Qi Luqian

Guo Shoujing's work was not limited to this. In his mid–life, he made numerous accomplishments and inventions. One is the building of the Tonghui River, located in Dayidu (now Beijing). This was essential as the canal initially used for transporting resources from the South of China was inefficient. The last journey of it was even via land transportation. So, a new canal should be constructed. The project began in the spring of 1292. After a year and a half, the canal, with a total length of more than 160 miles, and all the gates and dams were completed. This canal was named the Tonghui River. After this, he was, again, promoted, but differently; he was promoted to a higher status. He was honoured to be the 'Grand Secretariat' of the 'Zhaowenguan,' basically the 'National Library and School.' He also became the academician of the 'Taishi Academy.' Around the same time, another masterpiece of his was to be made. He invented a clock that became one of the most well–known timing instruments built in China. 'The Ming Palace Timing Lamp' it was. Its beauty cannot be described. The way it functions was ahead of time, almost 50 years ahead of the mechanical clocks built in Europe. It was simply magnificent.

"Water conservancy is the key to a country's national economy and people's livelihood."

After all his work, he was more famous and known than anyone. He was so important that only he was not allowed to retire at the time. A special notice was sent from the Emperor that all astronomers of the 'Taishi Academy' – potentially including Guo Shoujing – were not allowed to retire. It showed its importance. It was the 70s and 80s of his life; he worked until death. However, no more inventions and discoveries were made due to the mess nationally. The Yuan Dynasty's regime was corrupt, the internal struggles within the ruling group became increasingly fierce, and life was extravagant. Under this background, Guo Shoujing's creative activities were largely restricted. He died. At the age of 86, in 1316.

He is gone, but his work is not. The influence remains. Without him, China would not have been like today's. Without him, the Western mathematical and science field would not have been like today's. Without him, the world would not have been like today's.

He was great.

Paper: The Discovery

The French International School, Wong, Brandon – 12

PAST – Leiyang, china
A long, long, time ago… *around 57 AD,* China in the old days were ginormously different from today. During the time, no shopping malls existed, no fancy restaurants stood – just dry lands, covering huge distances far away. People with mountains of money were believed to travel not by horses, not by carriages, but by dragons. Of course, who believes such a mythical creature exists?

Cai Lun – an ordinary–looking Chinese raised boy, dreamed he lived amongst those villages. Every morning, as the bright sun rose up to the sky, would sit and admire. But Cai Lun's house wasn't nearly as elegant, as the nearby village. Instead, just a single regular sized, narrow house is where he lived.

Mornings, white puffy clouds floated on the sky, steams from the midst of the clouds swirled, as if a dragon just took a huge breath. Beside the entrance of what is known as the 'Golden Forest', stood Cai Lun's house.

The house barely supported a roof, with gaps and a few minor cracks around it.
When Cai Lun was not even taller than a bamboo stick, he began living with his father.

Not only did he grow older as time passed, his father also grew a beard, getting older inch by inch by the day. For breakfast, his mates would wake up early, and head off to a café, where they would indulge in warm–savory dishes. But unlike all of his other mates, picks berries from mulberry trees inside the forest, just outside the walkway of Cai Lun's house.
As night fell, as stars began to twinkle, as candles started to be lit, Cai Lun, along with his father slept on a hanging bamboo surface.

As mornings swept by, Cai Lun woke up early every morning, and transformed into a Chinese–styled coat, made with cheap, affordable materials such as wool.
In the space at the center of all trees, is where he was educated, with his mates and professor, a Chinese man.

When he walked to the forest after a farewell to his father, his mates were normally walking together in a big bunch, but Cai Lun walked, individually as he approached.
In the first lesson, Cai Lun was taught the must–learn basics of survival using tall bamboo stalks.
In the second lesson, he practiced speaking cantonese and mandarin – both important ingredients to a chef's recipe for anyone travelling to China.

But the third lesson really made Cai Lun's brain twirl – this is when all of Cai Lun's invention ideas inspired him. It all happened during that day when, with his mates – learned about poems for the first time.
His professor held a piece of bamboo, with words and symbols carved onto it. At first, not a single one of them knew what was going on, but soon realised each character, each word meant something. Some of the words on it were barely visible, so that lead to Cai Lun thinking hard sometimes before understanding it.
At that moment, he thought to himself, "is there a way to create a material which you can write on – but at the same time visible to the eyes? I wonder…" And not long later, the class dismissed, the sky bacame dark, yawns started to be heard.

While Cai Lun made his journey back to his and his dad's narrow house, his mind could not stop thinking about the idea of inventing the material. In his mind, he knew inside him that he will most likely not succeed, but at the same time really wants to be the first to invent something, not to become famous, but to make his and the people's life easier.

Upon arrival, he entered, saw his dad sitting on a rock, smiling warmly to him. After greetings, approched to his bamboo–made surface where he sleeps on. As he was preparing to take rest, his eyes somehow caught a glimpse of

something shiny underneath. He picked the object up, and realised it was a golden gemstone his mother gave him before her unwanting death. On it, was a ruby in the center, on the sides, Chinese words carved on it. It read: 【如果你试，什么都可以发生】which translates to "*If you try, anything can happen*".
As soon as he saw it, had a flashback to the time when he was with his mother, sitting next to each other, storytelling, walking together. But when his mother died, to him it was like a drop of black ink dripping into a pool of endless water.

His father understood his pain, his loss, his sadness.

That night, rain fell. The ground was splattered with water, dripping every plant, every surface it touches.

When Cai Lun woke up, he realised that it was Sunday. Every Sunday, he doesn't have to study with his mates. That day, he decided to stroll with his father – who, at this age can still walk. As he exited, the first thing he saw was mulberry leaves from mulberry plants dried up. He knew it must have rained. When he touched the leaf, it felt like something he has never felt before, it felt new. He quickly picked a leaf, and dropped some black ink onto it.
He could not believe his eyes. The ink did not drip away, but instead remained there, and slowly dried on the paper as time passed. He felt extremely delighted – he just created a recipe of success.

The next few days, he tried his very best to sneak some of his precious time to produce the mulberry leaves material. He started by picking some mulberry leaves just outside his house on the mulberry tree, and soaked them in some water from lakes and rivers. Finally, the only thing he needs most is sunny weather, to dry up the leaves.

By one month and another, he managed to produce almost hundreds of his new material. He wondered in his heart what his professor and mates would think about his new invention, so, the next day he brought them with him along with a small bottle of black ink, held in his hands, towards the forest trails.

As soon as his mates saw Cai Lun, holding a bunch of unusual material, his mates stared, unable to guess what exactly it is.

He started dropping drops of black ink on it, and there is was, on the piece of material, submerged on it. The faces, emotions changed almost immediately as they saw it, they looked astounded, amazed, in awe.
His professor said nothing, but smiled, warmly. He knew that his professor was proud of his achievements.

After returning back to his house, he gave his invention to his father. At the beginning, Cai Lun's dad didn't understand what it was, but slowly, he understood – a material that can be used to write with ink. He got proud, and questioned Cai Lun what materials he used to produce it. He replied: "With mulberry leaves, water, and a determined heart."
At this time, his father thought of selling them in the village, even if it takes a breathtaking journey.

So during that week, when Cai Lun didn't have to study, he, together with his dad would leave early, heading to the village giving out his invention.

Although it didn't sell very well at the start, it slowly became more and more popular over periods of time. And over a year later, his invention, dried up mulberry leaves, reached out to almost every single person in China.

Cai Lun wasn't hoping to become popular, he only wanted lives to be simplified, to be best for the people. It was his determination he remembered from his mother, the gemstone that pushed his confidence.

Around that time, they recieved a knock on their door. When his father opened it, 3 men, one looking stronger than the rest, approached them. Cai Lun's father saw them and got worried, to ask them what they desired, but suddenly became relieved, when they asked for production of Cai Lun's invention. Cai Lun told them the materials he used, and after that, manifacturers began working, spread his recipe all over the wide, broad continent of China.

One beautiful, peaceful afternoon, he folded his invention into a lantern, approached the door heading towards the river, with a little candle as well in the palm of his hands. When his father asked where he was going to, he told him: "Somewhere important".
His father nodded, and Cai Lun exited the house.

After a while, he reached the river, sat down on a piece of grass–laid rock, started praying, palm to palm to his dear mother. He opened his eyes, and began to lit the candle on fire. He placed it gently in the lantern he crafted, and slowly floated it on the clear–transparent water.

As he sat down watching the bright orange illuminating lantern float farther and farther away from his sight, underneath a dark sky, he felt calm, it was like his heart and his mother's heart finally touching again. "Thank you, mother."

The Unexpected Quest

The French International School, Zhou, Queenie – 11

Chapter 1

Last month was my first day at my new boarding school. I really wanted things to go well. I was shaking as my dad pulled up to Treckford High. As I stepped out of the shiny black car with my dad. I was taken by surprise. Treckford High is located in a lush green forest in ShenZhen, China.

"Bye Charlotte!" My dada excitedly called.

Just a few days before, I was on a google meet with the principal, Mrs Zhang. She took some time to show me a virtual tour of my (soon to be) classroom. She even bumped into a staff member ! Coincidentally, that was going to be my Social Studies teacher , Mr Zhou, as well as my French teacher, Mrs Gwenalle.

Huffing and puffing, I climbed up to my homeroom : 105.

"Good morning, I see some new faces as well as some old. For those who don't know me, my name is Miss Zhang"

Miss Zhang had way black hair and as she pointed to a man with a head of hair like a bird's nest.

"And this is Mr Yarrow."

" We'll be your homeroom teacher. Welcome to year 7A." He said in a mysteriously high pitched voice. We were introduced to stuff like our lockers, how to navigate around the school. Miss Zhang led me and my roommate to our dorm room which was …… A Treehouse, Can YOU BELIEVE IT?

Now a Few Months Later…..

I had gotten to know Miss Zhang and she was one of the Kindest teachers I have ever *met*. She even organised a hike on the Wutong mountain. On the way Miss Zhang introduced her friend, Cheryl.

"Cheryl will be your other guide today." Miss Zhang said, her eyes glimmering with excitement.

As we arrived at the foot of the towering mountain,Miss Zhang did a head count "1,2,3,4,5…… and 26. We're all set."

"Now Jenifer , I mean Miss Zhang will be at the front while I'm at the back. " Cheryl continued.

"Don't go past me and don't fall behind Cheryl."

Chapter 2

As time passes, I start to fall behind. I somehow got left behind with my roommate, Alan. Suddenly, it started pouring rain. Alan quickly said

" Quick, follow me! " As he led me to a dark cave further down the path. Huffing and Puffing I collapsed on the hard stone floor.

Grrrrr! A low growl came from deep in the cave. Alan and I jumped up in horror, as I turned around and a gigantic white tiger towering over us.

The next seconds were just a blur, legs aching, sweat dripping, we ran as fast as our legs could take us. At the corner of my eye, a neon blue battery appeared to be glowing, just as I was about to give up, gravity seemed to pull me toward the opening of the cave. Wait, it wasn't gravity! There before us was a huge neon blue rip in the air that was dragging us towards it. Too tired to put up a fight, I just gave up. As if waving goodbye the white tiger was purring like a motor.

The rip swallowed us whole as it spun and spun, Bleh! I was starting to get seasick. I was still a bit woozy as we arrived.

" Um, Charlotte, where are we ?"

As I looked around there were a few cottages and a lane leading down to a gushing river.

A young man strode out of a nearby cottage, his eyes twitched as a reflex, in one swift movement, he held a sliver sharp blade to our necks.

"Who are you?" He said in a firm voice.

Trembling in fear, I stuttered " I..I'm Cha…Charlotte."

"And..dd I'm Alan, we come in peace."

The young man glared sternly as he decided " Move. Toward that house."

Step by step we reached the door.

" Step over the door threshold."

As the door closed he spoke " Show me evidence."

"What?" I replied

"If you come in peace, then you must be with them. You must be new, it should be in your pocket."

As we pulled our hand out, there was a neon blue buttery in both of our hands.

"Oh, where are my manners? My name is Cai Lun and my wife's name is Shelby Hu. Since you are new, let me explain what just happened."

Suddenly, my stomach started gurgling.

" Oh, you must be hungry. Let me cook something for you two to eat." A beautiful young lady exclaimed.

" You must be Cai Lun's wife." Alan guessed.

"Indeed I am. Would you like to eat some pork and rice?"

We gladly accepted.

Chapter 3

As the sun setted in a beautiful vivid orange colour, Cai Lun showed us what he was working on , he had created paper.

"I haven't shown anyone yet besides my wife. The ingredients are : boiled bamboo, fish nets, tree bark and old rags."

The following day, Cai lun hurriedly woke us up.

" There is a rip just outside!" he exclaimed.

Grabbing our things we jumped into the rip as we waved goodbye.

Bleh. The sickness still isn't gone.

"Oh great." Alan muttered, "we're still in the past."

"I am the father of Chinese alchemy. My name is Wei Boyang, I have been informed of your arrival." A man said with 3 men behind him, "and these are my disciplines. We have quite a lot to do so let me briefly show you my creation."

As we were led through the mountains to a large brick house, several monkeys were swinging on the trees.

"Help yourself to some food."

Some was an understatement, there was porridge, various types of vegetables and meat that covered the entire table.

Father Wei Boyang brought out a black powder and proudly exclaimed.

" This is my creation, Gunpowder. We originally planned to make an immortal pill though."

"I think we should go now." Alan said.

" Just outside there will be a rip in a few minutes later."

I secretly hoped to still have the neon blue butterfly when we go back.

Chapter 4

Thankfully, Miss Zhang and Cheryl found us and we continued the hike and made it back to school safely.

Surprisingly, we started learning about inventions from Ancient China. I was starting to doze off as Alan gave me a note that read:

'Our families want to organise a day to go outside like on a hike or something. Where do you want to go ?'

I wrote back: 'I don't know'

'What do you mean you don't know'

I smile and wrote back

'Good adventures aren't always planned in advance'

Fire and Fury

The Independent Schools Foundation Academy, Chan, Ethan – 13

Creation:

"Mendacity!" Huizong thundered. His authority was absolute in the Tang royal court, and those who defied him had one fate – death. Sun Simao and his team of alchemists were given the mammoth task of creating a remedy for mortality. For obvious reasons, they failed to meet the deadline. Even Simao, who was considered one of the best healers in the history of China, quivered in the face of such a colossal task.

"O–Your–Majesty," the chancellor said with austerity, "this is not the time to be brooding over absurd obsessions! Widespread famine and rebellions, are these of no importance to you? Cease to pursue your absurd desire. Consolidate your rule before it is too late!"

This aroused whispers among the numerous officials.

"I regret to say that I refuse to accept your suggestion" Huizong spoke with abnormal respect and formality. "Pursuing immortality has been a tradition lasting many centuries. What an insult would it be to our noble ancestors if we don't honor the tradition?"

The Chancellor, who saw no purpose to insist, bowed his head in silent acquiescence. Despite his previous remonstrances, he thought, the emperor has failed to see sense, to see true wisdom.

"Tang will meet its demise very soon," he muttered. He was right, the Tang dynasty, known in China as its greatest, was coming to an end.

"Simao, you have one evening." Huizong stood erect and left the courtroom.

Sun Simao, bowing in reverence, knew that this was his last chance to make history or even better, avoid execution.

Sun Simao returned to his alchemy laboratory in the evening. He spent his last few hours toiling on the ingredients of the remedy. It was time he avoided his terrible fate. He prepared his pestle and mortar and started pounding solid sulfur and potassium in quick succession. He ground the contents viciously as sweat trickled down his tormented arms. Finally, he has created his masterpiece.

Never had something so repulsive looked so tempting. The black substance with charcoal–like features was meant to be a momentous discovery with potent medicinal abilities to the extent of helping the user conquer death. But to be consumed, it had to be made into a thick bowl of medicine – a procedure that Simao was familiar with.

"Prepare the pot!" He ordered his subordinates. "As well as the bezoars and the chive buds, his majesty's regal tastes need something extravagant." All the alchemists scurried to prepare the cauldron. They knew that this bowl of medicine had to be sublime.

A vast array of condiments was poured into the heated pot, and a crackling flame engulfed the cauldron as if trying to unleash something from within. To Simao's consternation, the flame rapidly illuminated the whole laboratory, catching the roof on fire.

"Extinguish the flame!" He ordered, but his revelation came too late. An explosion, like a dormant beast that has been awakened, engulfed the entire laboratory, reducing the structure to mere rubble.

Hearing the commotion, the Emperor and hundreds of guards and servants came, anticipating uninvited foes. The Emperor was shocked when he saw the alchemists howling in agony. "What happened?" He asked. "Where is the remedy?"

"We don't have the remedy, Your Majesty," he said weakly. "We've got Fire and Fury."

This monstrosity, or messiah – depending on who you ask – that Simao had created will play a key role in shaping not only Chinese history, but the history of the world for the centuries to come. What Simao created was not the legendary cure of death, but something stronger, a symbol of potency. It was black powder, or in other words, Fire and Fury.

Battle:

Years after the revered Sun Simao had perished, dynasties passed, and kingdoms and cities were reduced to subjects of history as new ones manifested their existence. After the legendary Tang Dynasty fell, the fractured civilisation was reunified under another banner: the Song Dynasty. In the Southern Song Dynasty, the "art" of waging war differed from its relatively primitive predecessors …

High Admiral Shizhong aligned his forces against the rebel bastion. This fortress in Fujian (Hokkien) was guarded by ten thousand determined rebels led by a rebel captain, who were all that stood in his way to restore peace and prosperity to the area, and possibly a promotion.

"Behind those walls are the fiends who are preventing you from returning from your family, who robbed you of peace and prosperity!" Deafening cries sounded from the ranks of the Song warriors. "Now we will bring them to justice," more cheers erupted amidst the loading of the cannons, "and the fortress to the ground! Glory to the mighty Song empire, long live the emperor!"
With one last war cry, Shizong brandished his sword. Five queer–looking barrels, with engravings of dragons and tigers, were carried out onto the battlefield amid the jeers and insults of the rebels.
"This is what the Song army has become!" They all laughed in ecstasy. "Boy, we can win this easily. Long live the rebellion!"

Sharply, the admiral gave the order: "Fire!" In this fraction of a second, the queer–looking shapes on wheels earned their reputation of being the most deadly weapon in the Song Empire. Vicious blasts and whispers of fire enveloped the battlefield, and parts of the fort came crashing down, obscuring the Song army from the defenders. Yet more shots came, showering the bastion with "Chinese grapeshot" as towers collapsed and brave souls perished amidst the chaos. The dreaded fuse, and the multiple booms as the cannonballs collided with the walls, reduced the once mighty structure to a mere heap of pathetic rubble. This was the product of Sun Simao's years of toiling and studying, the new epoch of war.

The roaring of the cannons stopped much too arbitrarily for it to happen in a meticulously planned battle scenario such as this. The rebels had lost a quarter of their men, without so much as lifting a finger for the Song army. Riches, power, and loot was what they came for, and they would not give up without a fight.
There was a sudden order again: "Charge! Raze the fortress to the ground!".
The imperial cavalry leapt through the smoke in their glorious armor, brandishing their dreaded spears and swords. The infantry was not far behind. They were disciplined, orderly and fearless. Amidst the rocks and arrows that rained down from both catapults and on? battle–hardy soldiers, the infantry stormed the enemy fortress. The coup de grace had begun.

The rebels frantically scrambled to present a front against the rapidly advancing enemy, and soon, the two forces clashed. The enemy, however pugnacious fighters they may be, were quickly overpowered by the well–trained, well–armed, and vastly superior imperial soldiers as they threw themselves towards the rebel ranks. The remnants of the rebels on the walls were forced to flee from the last few rounds of grapeshot. One benevolent officer tended to the wounded enemies. "Fire and Fury……use it well," one of them said, "or the realm under the heavens will be hell on earth."

Present Day:

2023−12−05: Miss Wong stood in the front of the class, textbook in one hand, whiteboard marker in the other. Her expression was austere, but the children did not seem to notice. Her students were thirty−two fourth−grade children, conversing, fiddling, and bursting with energy like all young souls.

"Nineteen−forty." She started pacing around the room in front of the whiteboard, tapping her marker against the book. The class went silent in anticipation, they knew the routine well. They adored Miss Wong's way of telling her action−packed history stories of Zheng He sailing the Western seas, and Qin Shi Huang burning ancient books.

"At this time, the Japanese occupied Hong Kong. They used their advanced weaponry to defeat the British and some Chinese troops, who fought bravely but were ultimately overpowered." The class was captivated until a student raised his hand. "Yes, Kin−Yau."

Some made a sigh, some were irritated, obviously angered by the abrupt disruption of the awe−inspiring story Miss Wong was telling.

"If military technologies such as bombs and guns are so advanced, will there be even better ones in the future?" The student known as Kin−Yau asked.

"Technology will always improve." Miss Wong answered. "When you grow up, there will be even better technologies. You have to figure out what they are. As well as how to make a better world with those tools."

She wondered silently. Science, war, fire and fury……what will the future hold?

Unlocked: The Telepirror

Victoria Shanghai Academy (Secondary), Chan, Hei Yuet Hania – 12

It was a miracle that it had appeared. And at such a crucial time. It was a fascinating prospect to imagine that ***it***, as such a compact and seemingly trivial item, had been the saviour of an angel that had almost begun its untimely ascent to the gates of heaven.

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Mrs Morrison indolently changed the channel on the television as she gave a weary sigh, taking another long chug from her bottle of wine. The grey sky speckled with clumps of clouds reflected her low spirits. Ever since the divorce, Mrs Morrison had descended into a realm of depression, trudging along her routine series of events concerning downing gallons of wine everyday and finishing her wearisome workload at the restaurant.

"Hello." Mrs Morrison spoke slowly as she heard the familiar footsteps of a young teenage girl arise from the apartment door. She attempted to turn her head, but to no avail, with the countless drinks she had chugged giving rise to disequilibrium and distorting anything in her sight.

"Hello." She repeated, but her daughter retreated to her room, the door slamming behind her.

Sighing, Mrs Morrison shook her head. She was aware of the blame that was placed upon herself by her daughter, for failing at persuading her husband to stay. And it was undeniable that he was the glue of the household – the moment he abandoned them, everything collapsed, and now only a sea of distance stretched between Mrs Morrison and her daughter, replacing the river of intimacy and happiness that used to flow.

A few minutes later, Mrs Morrison got up with a mournful grunt when she realised it was time to go to work. As she walked to the restaurant, Mrs Morrison passed by a new shop on the street. Its colossal glass windows allowed pedestrians a clear view into its interior, which was covered in mirrors of all shapes and sizes that were embellished with traditional Chinese patterns. It was a fantastic sight and piqued Mrs Morrison's interest. Wobbling precariously, she entered the shop.

She had only intended to take a swift look around the shop, but once she set foot in it, she was instantly captivated and found herself staring into multiple mirrors, mesmerised. As she walked around, a mirror in the corner caught her eye.

The mirror was round in shape, with a jade handle adorned with a dragon carving. When flipped around, its bronze surface was covered in grooves, and under closer inspection one could see delicate chisellings of chinese–styled fish upon it. Opal gemstones were secured upon it, which made it shine with a certain appeal. Mrs Morrison gaped at it – she had never seen something so intricate and gorgeous!

"Miss? Are you interested in this product?" Mrs Morrison whirled around and peered at the person before her. It was an old aged man, with strands of white hair sticking out from his bald head. He was wearing a pair of thick–rimmed glasses and his voice was hoarse. Judging by the outfit he was wearing, Mrs Morrison assumed he was a salesman.

"It depends..." Mrs Morrison said. "Are there any special...functions apart from this mirror's beauty?"

"Of course!" A smile appeared on the man's face as he looked at Mrs Morrison intently. "This mirror can communicate the thoughts of the people whose names are spoken in its presence. It will be like looking into one's soul, with an image on the mirror resembling their actual appearance. It is an incredibly successful product already, and has already helped hundreds of customers – who are usually parents – to understand the thoughts of their children and solve their communication issues."

"And who is the inventor of this supposedly *incredible* product?" Mrs Morrison asked sceptically, although not without a hint of longing. A mirror that could reveal the thoughts of other people? Her mind gradually cleared as she examined the mirror carefully.

The man's eyes twinkled as he responded. "This is in fact my invention. I am Shen Kuo's kin, and he is one of my ancestors. Ever since I was young, Shen Kuo's marvellous invention of the compass was my inspiration to follow the path of innovation. So, I became a scientist. I was fascinated by Justus von Liebig's discovery of the mirror. The problem of children ignoring their parents under the influence of technology and more brought my thought of creating something that is useful to mankind. After dozens of years, I finally achieved my goal, and here it is now!"

Mrs Morrison had nothing else to consider. Her daughter – Emma – acted as if she was a stranger, so why not give this mirror a shot? After all, she had nothing to lose.

"I'll buy it."

– – –

A few weeks later, Mrs Morrison was lying on the sofa, staring reproachfully at a fly scuttling across the ceiling. She hardly noticed when the lock turned and Emma came into the house; she hardly noticed when a sniffle cut through the thick silence like a sharpened blade; she hardly noticed when the door ceased to slam and instead closed with an almost imperceptible squeak like a mouse weeping.

Mrs Morrison turned and her arm swept across the ground in her lying position. Her fingers brushed against the mirror she had put a few days ago under the sofa, something forgotten that had withered away in the midst of dozens of drinks. After her hopeful purchase, she had glimpsed someone that looked so much like her ex–husband that immediately killed her spirit and sent her trudging back home. Now she stared at the mirror with anticipation. There was only one way to find out if the man was telling the truth…

"Emma", she whispered. Suddenly, the mirror on the table shone with a vengeance, glimmering uncontrollably. Shocked, Mrs Morrison looked into it.

The image in the mirror was an image of her daughter weary and depressed. Her eyes were drooped and red, with evident tear streaks across her dull freckled face, which had paled and turned a ghostly white.

"I can't take this anymore." Her daughter's voice was husky and her voice broke. "Hell is better than this. The bullying…is endless. Everyday is torture. I need to leave this world!"

Mrs Morrison's stomach fell. A chill ran down her spine as she tried to convince herself that what she heard was a mistake. Leave this world? It couldn't be…

Mrs Morrison gave a little yelp when her daughter emerged from her room. Her chest tightened when she saw her desperate state, with messy hair and a hunched back resembling a wilted plant deprived of life and energy. The former twinkle in her eyes was replaced with a frantic, overwhelmed look that expressed her pleas. And Mrs Morrison had overlooked all these signs in her drunken state.

"Where are you going?" Her daughter paused in her reach for the doorknob and Mrs Morrison's voice broke as she spoke.

"Somewhere…that I won't have to see you again." Her daughter's voice trembled with both anger and sadness.

That moment, Mrs Morrison knew what she had to do. All the motherly love that had been hidden away somewhere deep inside her, once blocked by the dam formed by the sadness of the divorce, surged like a flood into her heart. She scrambled to her feet and grasped Emma firmly by the shoulders, looking into her eyes.

"I…know what you are going through right now, and I want you to know that you are not alone in this." Her voice was soothing. "I'm really sorry about the divorce, and I know I haven't been a proper mother since then. But I want you to know that I will always be here to support you from now and onwards."

"I don't want your help! You can't do anything, and all you managed to do all this time was to be drunk!" Emma twisted away and attempted to open the door.

"I promise I can, and will." The sincerity in Mrs Morrison's voice was recognizable. "I will be here to be a helping hand, an empathetic listener, a lighthouse in the sea of life as you are travelling onwards into the distance. I have no excuse for my actions, but I can change for the future. You are the most precious thing in my life and I will always love you."

Tears were brimming in her daughter's eyes and Mrs Morrison could tell by the small smile that was on her face that she was convinced. At that instant, the fog in the sky cleared to reveal the brilliant sun, casting rays into the room and lighting up their faces. The love in the household was finally restored.

It stayed in a drawer, that mirror, under lock and key. And it was all for the best to stay there since its work was done, as a symbol of the essentials of communication, and a reminder that observing and listening can open an unimaginable world of love, hope and happiness.

The Golden Dragon

Victoria Shanghai Academy (Secondary), Lee, Sin Tung Katelyn – 13

Hello, I am Li Ming Shan, I'm 17 years old and was born and raised in the beautiful countryside of Tainan, Taiwan. From a young age, my life was surrounded by the power of the golden dragon. I was given this necklace as a baby, it had the Chinese golden dragon indented into the face of the shiny metal plate. My dad always shared captivating stories of his fascinating history exploring the extinction of China's bravest, most legendary creature, the Golden Dragon; my mother always mentioned his travels to the biggest cave in China, Beijing. Legend said the cave is filled with pure gold and wealth worth millions; hearing his tales always lit a special spark within my childhood. I was lighting a match to create the fire that holds many future dreams and aspirations. Now as I stand here, a year before adulthood, I will carry my dad's legacy and soar amongst the challenges and treacheries of being a young adult.

Everyone around me was constantly stressing to me about whether I could ever live up to the legacy my dad did before he passed. I sat at my desk, reviewing the list of jobs that I would take on after this last year of secondary school. I thought to myself, "None of these jobs sounds interesting enough to pursue", I sighed to myself. I got up and dragged myself to the bookshelf across the small, plain bedroom, looking for more ideas on better jobs, I spotted my dad's old book, "The Golden Dragon". The cover is embroidered with beautiful patterns imitating a china vase, "I bet my dad knew what he wanted to do when he was only 10, and I'm here trying to find something impressive to do" I mumbled. I picked up the book; the indented patterns smoothly passed as I glided my fingers across the cover. With my fingertips touching every crease and bump, I could almost imagine my father reading this book and admiring it as much as I am. Then the most brilliant idea came to me, I should continue my father's legacy, diving into the deep history and culture of golden dragons and bringing it back to life in China.

I worked day and night, researching every golden dragon sighting. I asked the wise elders around the village what they knew about the golden dragon, and read some golden dragon tales from China, all to create, the one and only, golden dragon glider. This is a set of mechanical wings which act as a golden dragon and fly around at 100mph. This set of wings is painted in gold when the start button is pressed, the wings will open and fire will come out of the tip of the wings to imitate the fire that comes out of the mouth of a golden dragon.

While I was painting the last layer of gold paint on my Golden Dragon Glider, I realized that I needed another can. I went out into the market, heading to my favourite paint store. After I paid for a litre of gold paint, I walked out of the store and saw a large, middle–aged man in a suit standing next to the store's entrance. He glared at me through his tinted sunglasses and walked over me. His whole body covered my whole vision on the right, he scoffed and said "So you're the town's youngest inventor". 'Was this man talking to me?' I thought to myself.

I turned my head to look at him. I pointed to my chest and raised my eyebrow, the man rolled his eyes, "Yes you, who else?" I looked at him with concern as I said "Yes that is me, I suppose." "I'm holding a competition in partnership with the most successful inventors in China and we would like to invite one inventor from each province in China. Your name came up when my team researched." he persuaded, I stood in doubt. 'Is this a scam?' I think to myself. The man continues to say "This competition will be hosted in Beijing, if you're interested, take the earliest plane to Beijing next Tuesday. We hope to see you there with your most impressive invention." He gave me his hand and I slowly reached out mine to shake his. This may be the first step to my future, the first step to me being the most well–known Taiwanese inventor!

I rush home and scream "I'M GOING TO BEIJING FOR THE COMPETITION OF A LIFETIME!" My mom ran into the living room, startled by my sudden ray of sunshine and joy. I ran into my room and started frantically touching up any loose screws or scratching the paint of the Golden Dragon.

The next day, I took the earliest plane to Beijing. I held my luggage with my invention in it. I held the baggage in my hands as I sat in my seat. When I arrived, I took a taxi to the competition building in Beijing, I stood outside the door, fixed my jacket, straightened the creases off and brushed off all the specks of dust. I opened the door that led to the competition lobby.

I walked into the lobby full of inventors flipping through portfolios and inventions. My legs started shaking, and my hand started fidgeting on my jacket. Everyone looked so much more prepared than I was. My heart was pounding as loud as a drum. I sat down on an empty foldable white chair, gently placed my invention down, and took a deep breath, 'I can do this' I whispered to myself, I looked around the room, and then suddenly, my name was called.

"Li Ming Shan," said the assistant at the front desk. I picked up my bags and walked to the counter. I showed off my biggest smile and said "That would be me", the accountant barely tilted her head to look at me from her computer, mumbled something and then said, "Alright, it is your turn to exhibit your product, good luck". I thought to myself 'Wait until everyone sees how amazing and innovative my product is, their heads will be blown off!' I smiled at myself with confidence and pride.

Knock, knock, knock. I walked into the room, placed my suitcase on the table then said "Hello" I said, "I am Li Ming Shan from Tainan, Taiwan", a judge said, "Hello, we are your judges today". I opened my suitcase took out my glider and placed it on the small table next to me, and I started to introduce my product.

"Have you ever dreamed of flying?" I looked around the room for a response, "Well let me introduce the first−ever set of real golden dragon wings." I pressed the on button, and the wings expanded to a majestic spread. Each of the judge's eyes widened. "With a press of a button, these wings glide open to the grand size it expands to 2 meters wide; furthermore, when you put on these wings, you can adjust where you want to go using the lever, you pull the lever up to go up, you can move these around to fly to different directions, push the lever down to descend." I added "This machine works with the power of air pressure pushing against the ground, the wind so powerful that it moves at 100mph maximum." one of the judges stood up and walked to my invention, she glared and said, "This is very…dangerous, how do you expect to sell something so childish and insane, this is a violation to safety, you're dismissed." I threw my things in the suitcase and ran out of the office building.

Was my dream all just stupidity and nonsense? I walked into an old bookstore around the corner. Ding! The sound of the bell rang in my ears. I found a cosy place to sit and out of my invention, it was still a little warm from using it in the interview. "What is that?" said an old man from across the room, I looked up and answered "It's nothing, it was a set of dragon wings brought to an inventor competition." he looked at the invention with a light−hearted smile, "may I watch you fly it?". I walked out of the shop and put on the wings, I pulled the lever and started to lift in the air, I took a deep breath and soared, for the first time in forever, everything felt okay.

I descended to the ground, "wow that was incredible" muttered the old man, "you have a talent, keep going, this invention of yours is amazing, don't let anyone push you down."

The old man changed me, I didn't let anyone push me down anymore. Over the next few months, I advertised my product to companies, trying to take sponsorship, then I found a perfect one, my dream company, "The Golden Dragon" was ready for action.

Immortality

Victoria Shanghai Academy (Secondary), Leung, 梁顯晴 Hin Ching – 12

"Sun Simiao is a legendary apothecary. Legends say that he has the remarkable ability to cure any illness or disease and make immortal medicine. His vast knowledge of potions and remedies has made him highly revered among those seeking healing and well–being. Countless seekers have embarked on the quest to find this old man, longing for a life that knows no bounds of time or death."

Beads of sweat rolled down my face. I'd been walking along this endless path for almost two whole weeks. I trudged along. My shoes were worn down by sharp rocks and my feet bore the marks of countless blisters and calluses, gathered from the many miles I had travelled. Even the air felt heavy with the weight of my determination. Yet, I kept going. The story of the elixir ricocheted in my mind.

I had to find the apothecary. The healer said I was running out of time.

I started my journey days ago. Guided by the map that my mother gifted me. My mother told me to find the legendary apothecary who lived in a thatched house by the river in the east of the city. I stopped to rest to catch my breath and washed my face next to a river. In front of me, I saw an old man with a long white beard. He wore a black silk robe, carrying an oil–paper umbrella and blue cotton baggage. He dug a stove and set it up in his thatched hut. For a second, I thought he was going to cook. My curiosity piqued as I watched intently as the old man reached into his pockets and withdrew small quantities of yellow sulphur and grey saltpetre. To my surprise, instead of making rice or vegetables, he dropped the sulphur and saltpetre into the furnace he had prepared. Then, he sealed the furnace door and proceeded to light the stove.

He must be the legendary apothecary I was looking for! With a polite tone, I approached him and asked, "Excuse me, is your name Sun Simiao?"

The old man eyed me suspiciously, "Yes, why?"

My head spun with a mixture of joy and disbelief. Could my illness finally be cured? Or might this merely be an illusion or a cruel trick of fate? Standing in front of me was this mysterious old man, who claimed to be the legendary apothecary who may cure my illness. A flicker of doubt crept into my heart.

"Prove it," I said with my chin up high, "Prove it by making the immortal medicine for me." I told him that last week, the village healer had said that my illness had lingered too long and that it could not be cured. He even said that I had four years left at maximum.

The old man finished listening and looked me up and down before saying, "I will help you. However, since your illness is so unheard of, I'm not entirely sure I can help you, but I promise I will try my best."

Sun Simiao beckoned me to follow him. He led me into a thatched building, hiking up a short but steep path without a twinge of hesitation. Deep wrinkles creased into his tanned skin, a natural display of his advanced age. Yet, he glided smoothly up the rocky trail, completely at ease. I wondered if he aged at all, perhaps his youthfulness was a result of his medicine. He continued his ascent and like a young duckling, I followed carefully behind.

Once we reached the building, he gathered a few potions and we walked back outside where he had set up a small wooden table. Next to the wooden table was a huge black pot and as Sun Simiao was about the put the potions on the table, he looked back at me with a small smile and said, "These are all the potions we need to make this medicine, we might actually–"

His hands suddenly slipped and all the potions went flying in the air. We watched in horror as the potions fell and the bottles smashed inside the gigantic pot.

"Oh no, this is not good. Run, RUN!" He yelled.

We ran as fast as our legs could carry us back to the house. I didn't dare look behind, but as I ran, I could hear crackling and sizzling from the pot. The noise got louder and louder as we reached the building and slammed the door shut.

I leaned on the wall breathlessly. When I finally managed to look up, I saw Sun Simiao glancing out of the window. I joined him and glanced outside too. We saw the pot sparking with colour. To my surprise, vibrant bursts of colourful lights shot out to paint the sky, accompanied by crackling sounds and the soft thumps of reverberation. Each brilliant explosion released a cascade of shimmering sparks, dancing and twirling like celestial performers. The air was infused with an intoxicating aroma of sulphur and smoke.

I looked over at Sun Simiao, my eyes wide with astonishment. "Did you expect this?" I asked, barely able to contain my excitement.

Sun Simiao chuckled softly and replied, "Well, I must admit, this wasn't exactly what I had in mind. But sometimes unexpected things happen, and we must embrace them." He turned to me and added, "The materials we used were actually meant for a different kind of medicine, but it seems they have combined into a rather explosive manner."

Curiosity burning within me, I couldn't help but ask, "What were the potions you dropped, exactly?"

Sun Simiao smiled knowingly and began to explain. "Yellow sulphur, barium, strontium, copper, sodium and grey saltpetre. I'm surprised myself."

As we watched the fireworks light up the night sky, I felt a sense of wonder and awe. Suddenly, I remember what I was really here for.

“But what about my immortal medicine? My sickness doesn’t have a cure, I require immortality!”

Sun Simiao said, "Nothing is permanent. Consider these fireworks. They appear in the night sky; their brilliance captivates us for mere moments before fading away into darkness. But time changes everything. Just as fireworks have their ephemeral existence, fleeting beauty and splendour, so too does everything in life. Fireworks begin as small sparks, igniting the sky with bursts of colour and light. They dance and twirl, painting a mesmerising picture for those who witness them. Yet, their existence is transient, as they eventually dissipate and disappear. What remains permanent," he continued, "are the memories and emotions they evoke. Fireworks ignite joy, awe, and celebration in the hearts of those who experience them. It is the interpretation, the appreciation of their beauty and significance, that transcends their physical form."

I felt enlightened by Sun Simiao's profound words. I realised that even in the fleeting existence of fireworks, there was tremendous value. Like a small and insignificant observer, we are part of mankind's history, leaving behind a trace of our presence. This realisation urges us to spend our time wisely, and cherish the moments we have with our loved ones and find joy in the impermanence of life. The beauty and transience of each fleeting firework reminded me of the fragility of life itself. Yes, the immortal medicine may have eluded me, but in that moment, surrounded by the breathtaking spectacle of lights and sounds, I realised that true immortality lies not in the extension of our physical existence, but in the memories we create, the love we share, and the impact we have on the world. With newfound clarity, I made a silent vow to make the most of the time I had left, embracing every experience, cherishing every relationship, and living a life that would leave a lasting legacy. My eyes sparkled with peace and contentment.

I walked back home with a taste of immortality.

The Era of Paper

Victoria Shanghai Academy (Secondary), Li, Lok Hei Andrea – 11

"Where are we?!" asked Travis Wixx. Suddenly, 2 boys appeared in a bustling hutong filled with people in traditional Chinese Hanfu. "Albert! Is this a dream?" asked Travis once again. He pinched himself, and felt the irritation. "Wait, I can feel my pinch. And how will we get back?"

They looked at each other in disbelief, trying to comprehend what happened. "I think we time traveled into Ancient China…" Albert realized. Luckily, he had been studying for his social science test, whereas Travis had been playing video games until 2am every night. Immediately, Travis' eyes widened in shock.

"Wait. How did we get here? And how can we get back?" asked Travis. Albert shrugged his shoulders and said "I don't know. I wonder if this has anything to do with the ghosts of Ching Ming Festival?" he shuddered.

"Who are these people?" asked Albert, looking around. Travis flung around and saw Chinese people edging around on the streets. The aroma of xiao long baos and pan–fried buns flew through the air, and the sound of distant axes echoed in the background.

"Hello, boys, I see you have time–traveled here. however, if you want to get back, you must find a nearly invented artifact and help make it." A spirit whispered in the twins' ears, frightening them half to death.

They gazed around, and noticed that their bedroom had transformed into an ancient hutong, with lush colors that seemed to belong to an isolated community. Confusion filled their minds as they attempted to make sense of this mysterious new realm. They saw a kind lady near them, and walked over to inquire about the neighborhood.

"Hi, do you know where we are? We're lost…" queried Travis in his best Cantonese. "Huh? Oh, I'm Lee Jianian, a resident of this neighborhood. We're in Leiyang, in the Han Dynasty." answered Ms. Lee, nicely in her best Cantonese.

"Thank you so much!" thanked Albert, answering for Travis. But where was Leiyang, China? Albert had been remarkably homesick, wishing to get home every second they stayed.

Undeniably, it was a time and place far from their familiar modern world. As the reality immersed into place, Travis and Albert knew they had to figure out how they ended up in ancient China and how to get back to their own time.

"Out of what I remember from my Chinese history book, the Han Dynasty ranges from 206 BC to –220 AD. I think paper was invented in this time period!"

The twins walked past the wooden sliding doors, and their curiosity piqued as they continued exploring. "What's that smell? It could be what the ghost was asking for…" asked Albert. Paper was first made out of bamboo, and that was what the air smelled like.

The smell of bamboo increased as they walked around, so they walked towards the stench. There, they found a small siheyuan. "What now? The door is locked." sighed Albert, glancing around.

"Let's just knock. I guess we don't have much choice, do we?" decided Travis, so he started knocking on the door. Inside, Cai Lun was stirring and mixing smashed bamboo pulp together , trying to invent a new artifact. "Mr. Cai, someone's knocking outside." said his apprentice, Zuo Bo.

"Let me serve them myself. Please open the door." He strolled through his garden towards the exquisite wooden doors of his siheyuan. When he saw his guests, he realized they weren't what he expected them to look like.

He expected them to be a group of men in traditional Chinese male Hanfu, but Travis and Albert were in khakis and t–shirts. "Hi sir, we're Travis and Albert Wixx. We smelled the bamboo sticks from your siheyuan, so we wanted to explore. May watch you do your work and possibly help out?" questioned Travis.

Cai Lun was still staring at them and not saying anything. "Um, Mr. Cai? Maybe you should address them…" suggested Mr. Zuo. At that sound, he snapped back to reality. "Oh, I'm sorry for my undignified behavior."

He realized how badly he had behaved, and promptly replied to his guests' question. "Sure, you may come inside and join me."

"Thank you so much! You don't know how much this means to us." appreciated Travis. They stumbled past his garden into his broad terrace. Everything there was organized, the opposite from Travis' messy bedroom.

As they approached, the aroma of bamboo pulp started getting stronger. "Well, there you go. You can sit over there on that long bench and watch me work, but for a small price." decided Cai Lun, settling down back to his project.

"What price?" asked Albert, worried. What if they didn't have what Mr. Cai wanted? Will he trap them? "Well… do you have any bamboo related things that could inspire me?" inquired Cai Lun. He wondered whether they had what he needed.

"Will this do?" questioned Travis, holding out a sheet of A4 paper. "I heard the first pieces were made with bamboo…" He wasn't sure if it was good enough, and Mr. Cai seemed like an expert on this area…

"Hmmm… This may actually be helpful for me, thanks for your kind contribution." replied Cai Lun, sparking an interest in the sheet. "Please sit, my guests."

As the twins watched him work, it gave them an interest in being an inventor when they grow up. "Wow, this is so cool!" Albert exclaimed.

As they watched Cai Lun stir the mixture of bamboo pulp and many more ingredients, they wanted to join in the fun. "Um… Mr. Cai? Is there anything we can do to help out? Watching you work got us interested."

"What? Oh, sure. 2 extra pairs of hands would be superior. Thank you for your help." replied Cai Lun. His hands were indeed getting tired from chopping the wood earlier. "You can start by helping me stir the mixture."

They strode towards the stone pot and grasped the wooden spoon. The mixture was very sticky, so they had to use all of their energy to push the spoon within the pot.

Meanwhile, Cai Lun was staring at the blank sheet of A4 paper the twins handed to him. He silently considered the ways to recreate it with the mixture he had made to himself. How can he make it so thin?

It was a hard job, but he was a good inventor too. In the meantime, Albert and Travis were continuously stirring the bamboo mixture, each time harder and stickier than the last.

Then, Cai Lun found a nice wide paintbrush and started spreading it across a gigantic piece of bamboo. Then, Travis found another sizable piece of bamboo and pulled it over the bamboo mixture, so that it can squish and flatten the mixture to make it thinner. Lastly, Albert heaved the stack or bamboo and mixture onto the bench.

When the paper was finally dried up, Cai Lun made a huge decision. "You should take the paper home, as you have helped out so much."

"Really?! Thank you so much! I know that you spent so much time working on it. Really, thank you Mr. Cai!" answered Albert this time. The time they had spent together had made them close friends.

"I'm sorry, but we have to go now, it's getting late." replied Travis.

"Oh, oh, I didn't mean to keep you here for so long! You may leave." responded Cai Lun. "No worries, bye Mr. Cai!" echoed Albert. He shoved the fresh piece of paper into his tiny backpack and the twins walked back to the hutong.

"Zai jian!" said Cai Lun, and started making the 2nd piece of paper ever.

"Well well well. Now that you have found your artifact, you may time travel back home. Go to the hutong you were in earlier, and you will find yourselves in your bedroom." The same voice that called them earlier spoke again, but this time they were not afraid.

"That was so cool!" thought Albert. "Yes, and I can use this for my social science test!" decided Travis. "Then I won't have to find something new, and I have hands–on experience too!" Now he knew what to do, and didn't play a single video game until the test was completed.

Mutually Assured Destruction, Or, How I Learned To Stop Listening And Praise The Bomb

Victoria Shanghai Academy (Secondary), Sze, Ching Wai Liam – 13

The massive bulkhead swung open. This was the door to the nuclear armament of China – and if we told you any more, we'd have to kill you. Two people stepped inside, suits ironed crisply, surrounded by an aura of respect. One of them was the Minister of Defense for the country, and the other was the President of China.

"So," the President started. "How's the progress going on the project?"

"It is going swimmingly." the Minister intoned, keeping his voice carefully neutral. Years of being on the job, going from listening to giving instructions had taught him to keep his tone neutral in front of his superiors.

"Excellent." the President said, smiling cooly. Years upon decades had led to this moment, the pinnacle of Chinese progress. How far they had come as a country, he mused. From the primitive firework to nuclear weapons of mass destruction, polished and primed for anywhere in the world.

But no, this wasn't just a physical manifestation of Chinese will. This was, politically speaking, one of the biggest weapons in their arsenal. Now, they–

The President was cut from his reverie from a slight cough from the Minister. "Well, sir, I, uh, am personally not sure about this." The President whirled around, surprised.

"With all due respect, sir, is this–ah–the right thing to do? I mean, purely theoretically speaking, sir, this could have massive ramifications if we do decide to use them, well, we could–" he stammered.

The President scoffed, glancing over at one of the bombs. It was a truly beautiful thing, a weapon of mass destruction. "Well, Minister, if we didn't have any of these, we would be crushed underfoot. Or, heavens forbid, we would be bombed ourselves! Four millennia of history and progress, destroyed and done in an <u>instant</u>!"

The Minister sighed, a ragged breath exhaling from his mouth. "But sir, nobody–and I mean nobody–deserves to feel this much suffering, or have this much power over them. With this much power at somebody's fingertips, nobody wins or loses! There's either *suffering*, or you're shunned for the rest of–"

"Don't be so damn stupid, Minister." The President said, the acid in his voice enough to shut the other man up.

"For years, and I mean years, the same superpowers have been splashing around in the mud for so long. Nuclear weapons this, war crimes that, and everyone who doesn't have anything to protect themselves?"

The President rounded on the other man.

"They get *crushed*. Nuclear bomb, or the proverbial toaster in the worldwide bathtub. Subjugated, obliterated, and ridiculed in the world's eye."

The Minister stood there, unmoving. Eventually, both of them finally reached the end of the hallway; they stepped into an elevator, descending into the depths of the facility. Metal creaked and groaned around them as the elevator went down, down, down into the recesses of the vault.

In the elevator, the Minister thought to himself. Sure, there were risks of being pushed around, but that was always on the table, sanctions being one of them. If anything, they should've tried looking for more…humane weapons. They, as a country, should have been looking not for weapons of power and poison, but solutions of hope and healing. Although, he was the Minister of Defence for a reason.

The doors to the elevator creaked open slowly, and the Minister looked out on the nuclear garden.

If the couple of bombs above was something to sneer at, that had been nothing compared to the underground hallway. Rows upon rows upon innumerable rows of nuclear oblivion stood there, and the man felt, somehow, the judgement of every single one.

He stood there, almost uncomprehendingly. The weight of what he had seen ten–something minutes ago had only just dissipated. Now, as he looked over the sea of nuclear warheads, a new wave of horror began sweeping towards him, like a tsunami descending onto a small, serene beach. He felt lightheaded; dizzy, almost, as it began to dawn on him.

Every single nuclear weapon was another Hiroshima or Nagasaki, a nightmarish wasteland. He remembered; as a child, he had heard whispers and reports of how absolutely damnable that was. How many thousands of people died and as more suffered and withered away under the crushing claw of radiation, their cancerous growths consuming them, assimilating them with almost casual efficiency, their bodies atrophying and decaying away in days, all in excruciating pain.

And after that, the ceaseless scrutiny. The denouncements from historians and the public, the branding as an atrocity, the loads of stories telling of endless weeping and gnashing of teeth by the victims and ruined survivors alike, an endless torture by the media and public *zeitgeist*.

All of these things came back to him now, warning, discouraging him from doing the thing that nobody wanted, that everybody hated, of the horrible ramifications of that one single nuclear bomb. But with this? Why, they could get a thousand.

And yet still, still, the sight of the thousands of warheads hit him like a truck, their collective judgements cast down at him like unfeeling giants, the grim legacy of the first man in a cave with a particularly sharp rock.

For the first time in years, no, *decades*, he felt like an ant.

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The technician flew down the stairs, hurrying over to the control panel, illuminating their face with a thousand tiny blinking lights. He pawed at the code keyboard, frantically tapping at the buttons in the same order that a tired old man told him during a meeting years ago.

The silence, save for the sterile beeping of the individual buttons, was deafening. A single drop of sweat trickled down his brow, down the bridge of his nose, curving over the contours of his lips, and fell to the ground with an unceremonious, dull *splat*. He didn't even notice as another drop of sweat began making its way down his face. With more than a little trepidation, he flicked open the glass cover, revealing a large, red button.

His index finger hovered over the big red button, and it sure as hell trembled.

Grandma's Game

Victoria Shanghai Academy (Secondary), Sze, Yuen Hei Kristen – 13

My eyes scour the area as I stroll to the last compartment of the High-Speed Rail, Fuxing. *This* is where my last clue is. My month-long search led me here, and since I haven't had any luck in my search in any of the previous compartments, I'm almost certain the clue is in the very last compartment. I must work quickly and quietly before my cousins catch up.

As I open the compartment door, I feel someone's eyes on me. *Damn it.* My cousins must have caught up to the last clue too. Whoever gets there first is going to get my grandma's life-changing invention. And that person is going to be me.

Nothing looks out of the ordinary, so I run my hands through the overhead compartments, working fast, until I notice a small book. I pull it off the shelf and wipe the dust from the cover. There aren't any identifiable markings on it, no titles or author names, but nobody is here to claim it, so it must be part of the clue hunt. I'm about to stuff it in my bag when a cloaked figure snatches it right out of my hand, and just like that, I've lost my lead.

I slip in through the back door, assuming my position on the last chair to the right, hoping no one noticed my absence, but from the glares I get it's evident that my family does notice. There's a big TV screen hanging on the wall, and in front of it are rows upon rows of identical chairs, all situated the same distance away from each other. Everything is perfectly put together. The lawyer at the front of the room, dressed in a crisply pressed black suit, casts one last glance around the room and begins speaking.

"Welcome, everyone, to the will reading of the late matriarch. As many of you know, she was a technological genius, one of the richest women in the world." He makes a cue sign with his hands and the TV flashes on, playing a recently filmed video of my deceased Grandma.

"Hello everyone. Before I begin, I would like to thank you all for coming. No doubt many in this room do not care about me at all and are only here for personal gain. Well, no problem with offering everyone a fair chance." She looks smug, and there's a vexatious glint in her eye that worries me. "For those of you willing to play my game, please stay. If not, there's no shame in leaving now. There's a check under every one of your chairs, and if you are unwilling to play, please take the check and exit the room. You have ten seconds."

Immediately, most of the room stands up and collects the check from under their chairs. A swarm of people exits the room, leaving only five people, including me, willing to play Grandma's game. I'm surprised at the number of people who left without a second thought; being one of the most successful people in the world, whatever she has to offer must be good.

"Let's cut to the chase, shall we? At the end of the game, one person will receive a life-changing invention that is the pride of my life's work, and the rest of my assets. Check the secured family channel on your WeChat. Your first clue is there." And with that, the screen turns black.

The cloaked figure rushes off the train and I follow suit, never more than three steps behind them. Whether this cousin is working alone like I am, or with any of the others, I am unsure of, but I'm determined to get the book back nonetheless.

I put on another burst of speed and tackle the figure to the ground. His hood falls off, revealing his startled expression, forehead glistening with sweat, pleading eyes watching me intently. He attempts to wriggle out of my grip but I push him into the ground with one knee while wrestling the book out of his arms.

He resists, yelling, "No! I will be the successor of this family! The invention will be mine!" His eyes are wild with fury. "My family's company is at the technological forefront. We've developed the most advanced Artificial

Intelligence available on the market. How could you ever compare? If anyone should get the invention, it's *me*. Whatever it is, this invention is exactly what I need to get the attention of not just China, but the entire world!"

I can't help but roll my eyes. "I didn't know you existed before the will reading. Do you even know my grandma's name? I was the only one who was close with her— her invention is *mine*."

Before he can say anything else, I strike him on the head and he falls, unconscious.

I flip through the pages of the book, desperately searching for the last clue. A little slip of paper falls out and lands on my shoe. Bringing it up for closer inspection, it has "0812" written on it. That's all. There's nothing on the back of the paper or in the rest of the book, even as I frantically flip through it, trying to find what I've most certainly missed because this isn't the invention I was promised, this can't possibly be the end— where do I go now?

I'm about to rip the slip of paper up in frustration, but my eyes land on the blue and white porcelain bowl Grandma gifted me on my eighth birthday.

Grandma stands over the stove, observing the frothing pot. She picks up the porcelain bowl with extreme care and transfers over the contents of the pot.

She sets it down gently in front of me. "Happy birthday, dear. These are longevity noodles I handmade for you. They say that the longer they are, the longer you'll live, so I hope you live long and prosper. You might even follow in my footsteps and join my line of work one day!" The noodles were made with a special sauce, but other than that, there weren't any extra toppings or other ingredients.

"Grandma, are you sure these taste good? They look so… plain." I looked up at her, a quizzical expression on my face.

She chuckles. "Of course, dear. Why, I've perfected the recipe! Simple is best*, after all."*

I remember those being the most delicious noodles I've ever had in my life.

Of course. 0812. 08/12. Eighth of December.

My birthday.

At once, everything makes sense. Grandma wanted *me* to be the one to get to the end of her game, and so she made sure I was the only one who could possibly make sense of her last clue.

I carefully open the door to Grandma's holiday home, a place where I've spent so much of my life. It's my safe space, where nobody can intrude. It's just me and Grandma. In her room is a safe with a four-digit number passcode. I was always curious about what she put in there, but she never revealed her secrets to me, and I never pried. I enter 0812 and the safe door pops open with a little beep.

All that's in there is an old, yellowing piece of paper with a numbered list and scribbles and annotations, all in my grandma's handwriting. At the very top, it says "Longevity Noodles".

Taking care not to damage the paper, I read over the recipe for the longevity noodles that Grandma made me on my past birthdays.

Behind me, Grandma's lawyer from the will reading steps out. "So you've finally reached the end. Congratulations. Your grandma was quite adamant that you would be the one."

I turn to face his direction and smile, "She was right."

"Take your time, but if you're done here, I'll need you to sign these papers in order to get the rest of the matriarch's inheritance. She was quite the woman; there is a *lot*. You'll even inherit her tech company." The rest of the week is spent in a whirlwind sorting out those papers with Grandma's lawyer. I'm grateful, of course, but it doesn't matter as much as the invention. The taste of Grandma's noodles makes me feel closer to her than anything else I've inherited.

It wasn't what I was expecting, but noodles are one of the greatest inventions ever made, and Grandma's recipe changes *my* life, if no one else's.

Perhaps it is true that simple is best.

The Second Space Race – China's Lunar Expedition

Victoria Shanghai Academy (Secondary), Tsao, Yui Hei Joshua – 11

Boom boom boom. Meteorites pummelled the surface of the moon in the crater Tycho. The China National Space Administration ("CNSA") telescope Xuntian had been tracking the path of the meteorites for months, and the moon rover Yutu-2 had been despatched to the area for a long time to observe the event. After the meteorites stopped, Yutu-2 began to weave around the crater, scanning and collecting data to beam back to Earth. The VNIS (Visible and Near-Infrared Imaging Spectrometer) beeped rapidly as the rover shot around the area that have been newly scarred by the meteorites. Yutu-2 feverishly scanned the area and began to beam the information it collected back to Earth.

Back on Earth, the scientists at the CNSA indifferently skimmed the data beamed back by Yutu-2 as they had received many reports similar to this with no new developments. Suddenly, a voice rang out in the room."Look at this graph! 6% of the materials scanned by the VNIS on Yutu-2 are unknown!" Slowly, voices began to murmur. A few shouts of "Oh my goodness!" were heard.

"We need to know more." a voice proclaimed confidently.

All the space programs around the globe had seen the meteor strike and analysed the data sent by their satellites and rovers. They, too, would have seen this new unknown material. This could be the beginning of the next space race—who would be the first to extract and uncover the new unknown element?

When Director Cai of the CNSA heard of the possible new element on the moon, he instantly ordered a new manned mission to be launched as soon as possible. He immediately thought of their space-veteran, Wong who has led seven space missions in the past and his co-pilot—Ho, but they still needed a geologist for this mission. He promptly thought of Professor Yang, the leading geologist from Peking University.

To persuade Professor Yang, Director Cai decided to personally pay Yang a visit at his home. When he arrived, he took a deep breath, not knowing how Professor Yang may react, and proceeded to ring his doorbell.

"Who is it?" A male voice called.

"It's Director Cai of the CNSA." he called back.

What could the director of the space program possibly be doing here? Yang thought as he opened the door and ushered the director into the house.

"Yang, you are the leading geologist in Peking University. We have received new data from the moon that there are materials that are currently unknown to us. We need a geologist to join the Shenzhou 24 manned mission to the moon, and we would like you to join the mission." the director said as he sat down.

Professor Yang was completely stunned by what he heard and the invitation. He was not really sure and completely confused as to what it all meant.

"But…. I am an *Earth* geologist…., I don't know anything about the Moon! I don't even like taking planes, I prefer high-speed trains… I can't go to space, I don't want to go to space, and I will *not* go to space! I want to stay here and study my rocks!" Yang screamed.

"Yang, this is an opportunity of a lifetime. It's a chance to unearth and discover unknown elements. Countries around the world are all chasing after it to see who can get to it first and unveil the secrets behind it. Your country needs you!" the director explained.

Who could turn down an offer like that? Yang thought to himself, and with much hesitation and fear, Professor Yang answered reluctantly he would join.

"Good. You are going to get a 2−week crash−course about space starting from tomorrow. We will have a car to pick you up to bring you to CNSA headquarters tomorrow morning at 8am."

The next two weeks of training flew past, and there was no way Professor Yang could remember anything except for the endless possibilities of how this mission can go wrong and the regret that he agreed to the mission in the first place.

Two weeks later, it was launch day. Wong, Ho, and Yang walked on the launchpad together. Yang's hands wobbled, and his face was pale like a sheet.

"What's wrong, Yang? You look like you've seen a ghost." Wong said.

"I'm just worried, I only took a 2 week crash course in spaceflight. I'm completely unprepared." Yang replied.

"It's alright, just relax and enjoy the ride, you're a national hero!" Wong said. Wong knew how Yang felt—he had felt exactly the same on his first mission.

"And it's actually not scary! This is my third mission. If you do what we do, you'll be okay." Ho added.

The launch elevator jolted upwards and carried them towards the ship's cabin. The Shenzhou 24 looked like an arrow preparing for flight. It was white, with three triangular wings at the back. There were 3 main thrusters and two side booster rockets. It was docked to a tank and rockets that would propel Shenzhou 24 to space. They stepped inside the launch vehicle and sat in their soft blue seats in the cockpit, the backs of their heads pointing down to the ground as the Shenzhou 24 would be launching vertically.

With a rumble and a dull roar, the Shenzhou 24 lifted off the ground! Wong and Ho were the epitome of calm, but Yang was shaking in his seat and his heart felt like a herd of elephants stomping on the ground.

"Why Shenzhou 24? 24 is an unlucky number in Chinese culture. Don't they remember what happened to Apollo 13?" Yang asked.

"Now don't be so superstitious, you're in good hands. I'm sure nothing will go wrong on the mission." Wong assured Yang.

They sat patiently and peered out the window as the boosters detached from the ship. Their hearts were all pounding as there were a million things that could go wrong. Wong pulsed with nervous energy because this would be his last mission, and he wanted everything to go smoothly. Like clockwork, the detachment was successful, and the ship altered its course to orbit around Earth. Wong pulled a lever and the booster rockets fired, and the ship rotated. Wong pulled another gray lever and the thrusters fired, propelling them towards the Moon, a trip which is expected to take three days.

The next couple of days of travel were smooth, and the astronauts and Professor Yang had the opportunity to enjoy the beautiful view of earth from space and the weightlessness.

"We are going to land on the moon in 5 minutes. Strap in now please!" Wong said on the intercom.

Ho and Yang slipped into their seats as Wong fired the thrusters and the ship shot towards the lunar surface. Wong cut the thrusters, finding comfort and familiarity in holding the controls like he did many times before. He rotated the horizontal booster rockets until they were vertical and fired them to ease the landing impact.

"Welcome to the moon." Wong said grandly.

The team donned their spacesuits and collected the electric drill, tongs, and sampling equipment. When they were all kitted up with the gear, they stepped into the dull gray airlock. With a pneumatic hiss, they stepped out onto the barren landscape of the Moon. Each footstep felt strange to Yang—he wasn't used to bouncing in the air when walking. Wong and Ho moved ahead first and began to explore the meteorite–scarred crater, Professor Yang clumsily moved towards Wong and Ho, who had already begun to set up the drill. Wong handed a set of tongs to Yang and said, "This is your area of expertise, Yang. Tell Ho what to do while I check on the spaceship and prepare for our journey back."

As Professor Yang and Ho drilled on the foreign surface, "I've never seen anything like this on Earth before! We must bring these materials back to my lab on Earth for a detailed examination!" Professor Yang exclaimed in excitement.

Professor Yang proceeded to excitedly explore and roam around the crater and could hardly contain his excitement like a child in a candy store. Ho could hardly keep up. In no time, Professor Yang had filled up his boxes with samples that he had to take back to Earth to examine. I cannot wait for my journey home, so I can go back to my lab and learn more about this new material, Professor Yang thought.

On the journey back home, Professor Yang could not contain his excitement. Could this be a new element that has superconductive properties that would lead to breakthroughs in computer chips? Or could it be a new lightweight yet strong material that would lead to new breakthroughs in airplanes and space travel? Professor Yang was lost in the endless possibilities of how this discovery could lead to new technological advancements and new scientific breakthroughs for China and all humankind. He was still lost in his thoughts until the moment Shenzhou 24 landed on Earth.

A Voyage Through Time

Victoria Shanghai Academy (Secondary), Wong, 王梓衡 Hang – 14

I'm in Xi'an, China. It's 2023.

A hundred years ago, people were dying on these streets. Now I'm just strolling around, sitting in this Chinese car called the Dolphin, gaping at this new gigantic mall that just opened.

It's a great time to be alive.

This city of a mall is filled to the brim with everything I don't need but desperately want, and the perfume they're putting into their air conditioning isn't helping my desire to save money. Meanwhile, the overhead speakers are blasting the latest Chinese pop songs at full volume. A transparent piano sits next to the smart bathrooms.

I find this Huawei store the size of a small country. On the tables, all cleaned to a crisp, are phones with screens that are curved (how does that even work?), phones with leather backs and phones that you can fully charge in the time it takes for me to run to school when I'm late. In the store opposite, I explore this Xiaomi smartwatch that can literally tell me how well I'm sleeping. Creepy stuff for just 200 of my yuan.

I left the store with that on my wrist.

I get on my Ninebot electric scooter and start scrolling through Douyin on my OnePlus. It's called some other name where I'm from, but I've lived in China so long I nearly forgot how much more primitive America is.

Once I start moving, the OnePlus immediately tells me I should keep my eyes on the road. The scooter lane is seemingly empty, so I ignore the notification. I tap into WeChat, and see my friend send a funny meme.

What I don't see is the giant hole in front of me.

I reckon it's been an hour since I was last alive.

The air is full of strange smells, but I could basically distinguish the smell of pork buns. There are weird sounds around the air. It took me a minute to realise it's the pipa, a traditional Chinese instrument.

I miss pop.

The surface I'm lying on is a little soft. I'm pretty sure it's made of mud. Then I realise I've eaten some.

Once I stand up, I'm nearly knocked down by a gigantic wheelbarrow. Or maybe I'm just too short. There are boxes upon boxes of compasses in it. I guess they didn't have trucks back then.

The pipa's vibrant noises reverberate around me, and I see another wooden instrument next to it. It's not a transparent piano.

Oh, and the reassuring feeling of the phone in my pocket doesn't exist as well.

I don't have pockets.

The long, flowing silk robes on me are coated in red and gold, and it's got flower patterns all around it, just like some painting I saw in a museum a while ago. Its silky feel brings me to a time long ago, long before clothes were made using machines in overcrowded factories–

It's finally occurred to me that I'm not where I last remembered I was.

"Move!" I heard a soldier's voice holler over my head. There's an enormous convoy on this mud road, and in the centre of it was an ugly man, face red and features slightly distorted, being carried on this enormous golden chariot, with two brown clad soldiers on each side of it.

I was immediately told this man was the Emperor.

The abrupt sound of gunpowder shook me from this trance. The distinct sulfury smell of the black powder reaches me.

I run.

Upon seeing a small structure with “toilet” written on the door, I immediately sprint into it. I wonder if this place is gonna blow up soon.

I glance at this rather primitive paper, neatly stacked into a small, blue porcelain bowl. I suppose it’s toilet paper. I can’t be in an era that long ago, can’t I?

I sit. I don’t realise the opening is a bit too…

Large.

I don’t like time travelling. It makes you feel unconscious for some time when you arrive. I feel like it’s been an hour since I felt dead.

The first thing I notice is that I’m in more comfy clothes. And I have stupid glasses on my face.

I’m pretty sure that I’m on probably the most comfortable sofa I’ve ever sat on. So much so, I don’t really want to leave it at all.

I hear a woman’s voice in front of me. My glasses’ screens collapse into this virtual starry night sky, with the stars all rearranging into a hologram.

My head feels like it’s running circles around a tree nonstop. No, it feels like it’s on fire.

The glasses quickly ended up on my lap.

My actual eyes dart around. A small apartment encases me.

In front of me is a worn down TV, blasting advertisements for the latest smart glasses and “healthy” soda drinks. Short form content is being shoved into my face, with stupid dances and boring life hacks in the middle of all the advertisements. I peer around the room. There’s not a single book in sight, and the shelves are filled with bags upon bags of chips and soda, and there’s a half opened can of grape soda next to me right now.

The nearly indiscernible sound of soundproofed laughter comes from the next room.

I peer in. It’s a family, each member sitting in a corner, with huge smart glasses on their faces, massive earphones on their ears, sodas in their hands and enormous smiles on their faces like they’re having the time of their lives.

If this is the future we're heading towards, I hate it.

I'm suddenly very conscious of the hole in the ground. I leap through it.

It's actually been following me all day.

Stuck In Time

Victoria Shanghai Academy (Secondary), Yim, Hei Tung Alexis – 14

Time travelling has always been confined to fiction. To movies with DeLorean cars and shows with nameless doctors…Before our company, ChronoWanderers invented TTTD (The Time Travel Device). By controlling gravitational forces around black holes, the device creates wormhole tunnels that connect 2 regions of space–time for us to travel through.

"This is TTTD." Supervisor Tom introduced to our boss, Riley. "Incredible!" Riley exclaimed, wandering around in bewilderment. Tom shot me a gaze that warned me not to mess up in front of Riley. "Unfortunately TTTD has several limitations–" Tom started. "Oh!" Riley cried as she tripped and fell. Before I could react, Riley fell directly onto the start button.

TTTD's lights illuminated as it sprang to life. "TTTD can't travel to the future or control what time period we land in yet!" I screamed as Tom shot me another warning look. There was nothing we could do as we were pushed back against our seats with TTTD shooting into space.

Despite the horrid situation, I decided to make the most out of this experience. From the window, I could see our science lab gradually turn into blurs of colours and then into a distorted rainbow. Everything was bending, twisting, distorting…moving so fast that taking in the new scenery was difficult. It was all so surreal, like nothing I have seen before. Almost like walking into a life–sized kaleidoscope. Slowly, the blurs of colours started forming a new breathtaking landscape and the small screen at the front of TTTD read "AD105". Where were we?

The wind slowly whispered a soft lullaby to the tall wooden houses that towered over villagers wearing various colours of Hanfu. The lively atmosphere was painted from the bustling street scattered with vendors selling various treasures. You could smell the hot and freshly cooked street food from a mile away. As I was standing right next to the vendors, the exotic smell filled the air around me.

Suddenly, I thought of something. "P...paper was invented this year. We could maybe look for Cailun, the inventor of paper and take inspiration from how he invented it? I think...he worked at the palace around this time." "Inefficient." Tom spat, not even considering my idea. "What a splendid idea!" Riley responded, giving me an encouraging look. "Where's the palace?" Riley asked, stopping a villager who took a map drawn on animal skin out. "Hike up that hill." The villager said, pointing at a mountain ahead. Riley thanked him and we followed his directions.

Soon, we were met face to face with the WeiYang palace. The comprehensive architecture towered over us. Even though we could only see the palace through the entrance gate, I was amazed by the compound's perfection. Every single involute carving was clearly crafted with care, each one representing a bigger concept. As we admired the palace's beauty, I heard some chatter nearby. Pulling my eyes away from the palace, I spotted two people arguing near us.

"Work faster."
"I'm working my hardest...sir."
"Cailun. This is your last chance. Two more days."

My ears perked up at the name, as I saw whoever Cailun was talking to walk away. Cailun sighed and started walking towards our direction.

"The inventor of paper is walking towards us!"

"Can I help you?" Cailun asked as he strolled towards the gate. "We're new here, about to work at the palace. Can we help you with something you're working on?" Riley asked with a kind smile.

“I’ve been finding a form of record. Rocks are heavy, bamboo isn’t smooth and silk is expensive. I haven’t found a medium to write on that’s cheap, light and smooth.” Cailun explained, staring deep into the ground. “I need to go home now. I’ll see you here tomorrow?” He asked. I quickly turned to the others, knowing that the plan required us to find out as much about Cailun as possible. “We wanted to ask you how difficult this job is. By sharing your experiences, we could perfect our…work performance.” I spluttered, stammering on my words. Tom shot me a frown with apparent disapproval. He mouthed the words “What are you doing?” to me, shaking his head. “Splendid. Come over to my house and I’ll tell you about it.” Cailun replied, grinning up at me. I smirked as I wondered what Tom might be feeling.

Passing a deep forest with a light breeze trailing our path and our fresh footprints behind us, we engaged in meaningful conversation with Cailun about his experiences working at the palace. Cailun walked with his head down as he fiddled with his fingers. His face showed discomfort while discussing this. “Working here is a prestigious responsibility. The palace is the heart of political power, which means we carry heavy weight on our shoulders. Any mistake would mean punishment and−” Cailun suddenly stopped and looked up for the first time since we left the palace. “What?!” Tom spat. “There’s some bark peeling from the tree,” Cailun whispered, freezing into place. His eyes widened as his mouth opened upon seeing this tree. “A dangling soft, fibrous tree bark.” He continued, starting to move towards the tree trunk with an unwavering gaze at the bark. This slow movement turned into pacing, into a jog and finally into a full−on sprint before he reached the tree. The rest of us stared at him with furrowed brows as he aggressively ripped the bark from the tree and began running through the forest.

“Please. Now we have to find a place to stay for the night since he ran off.” Tom spat, looking around. “This was a stupid idea. We’re stuck in the past for goodness sake! Following a lunatic? Who's run off? Ask him about the invention tomorrow! There’s no need to−” Tom started. Anger, annoyance, frustration, all these strong emotions I’ve been feeling over this venture finally took over me. Something drew me closer and closer to the direction Cailun ran off. Before I knew it, I was sprinting after Cailun at full speed, the light breeze turning into harsh wind as the air resistance blew behind me as I ran. I spotted a figure in the distance. Closer...closer...closer…

“Cailun!” I called, quickening my already fast pace. The figure stopped and turned around to look at me. As I got to his side, I realised that he was still hugging the tree bark he found. "I’ve got an amazing idea. Come to my house and see.”

Once Riley and Tom found us, Cailun began his work. The rest of us watched beside him as he soaked the tree bark in water, pounded it with a wooden mallet, spread fibres in a thin coating and left it out in the sun to dry.

“How did you know to do all those procedures? How did you even know the tree bark was going to be a good fit?” Riley asked Cailun as we waited for the solution to dry. “Experimentation really. I’ve done many trials with different materials But none had the results I wanted. Therefore, I carried on the search in my daily life. Whenever I saw something interesting, I would experiment with it.” He replied, shrugging. “I wish I could travel at the speed of light, then I would’ve finished this process by now.” He joked, shaking his head. “What did you say?” I asked, dots forming in my head. “You wish you could travel at the speed of light?”

“Thanks, Cailun! You'll definitely succeed. You’ve created something phenomenal and we thank you for everything we learnt from you.” I said quickly to Cailun, backing away from him. “We can send ourselves out. We wish you the best of luck!” I called back to him, waving farewell as Riley and Tom started following me.

“Time and space are relative, meaning the faster you move, the slower time goes. Time would slow to a stop if someone travelled at the speed of light, meaning they could travel to the future!” I explained my train of thought to my bosses. Going back to TTTD, we leapt into action. Except, Tom was still a little hesitant.

“TTTD isn’t designed to move at the speed of light for long periods. Stupid idea!”
“There's nothing to lose!”
“Hm...How about our lives?”

"Would you rather be stuck here forever?! I've found a solution to go home! There are risks, but not more than being stuck here! Any better ideas? If you don't want to get on, we're hopping on the only way home without you." I blurted out, sudden confidence filling over me, finally summoning enough courage to stand up to my boss who had been difficult and irrational this entire venture.

"Fine."

40,000km/s, 80,000km/s, 200,000km/s…Soon, we were moving at a speed of approximately 300,000km/s, the speed of light! We were on our way home. Pride, exhilaration and hope filled me as I closed my eyes and tried to sleep on the machine that would change the world.

Plain Inventions

Ying Wa College, Cheung, Ka Wing – 15

Andy pressed the paper against the table. A bold streak appeared across the paper, as if lightning stretching across the sky. As a force was applied, the craft pitched upwards. Andy watched expectantly, his eyeballs glued to his new papercraft. It was a few seconds before the craft gently touched the plastic tiles on the ground.

The paper airplane performed its first landing, not slightly damaged.

Proud of his work, Andy lied on his chair and stared out of the window.

Andy was sitting on his paper airplane, gliding in the sky. Mountains, once encroached by the countless rectangular prisms, slowly converted into a green mass. Ships, originally tearing through the water surface, miraculously disappeared. All of a sudden the pond was quiet, a stone bridge was built across the two shores. Small huts dotted on the grassland as if darts on a dartboard. Curious, Andy landed on a piece of cleared land.

A cool breeze swept past Andy's knees as he walked on the grassland. The sun peeked behind the mountain, chickens in the distance started to yell.
"Hey, what is this thing?" a difficult–to–comprehend voice came from his back. Andy turned to see an intrigued villager, staring at the paper construction lying on the grassland. The villager his head mischvievously and marched forwards.

What is this accent?

"You do look weird," the villager's eyes scanned Andy from head to toe.

They're normal clothing! What's wrong with T–shirts?

Andy backed away.
"Hey! I am asking you what this thing is!" the villager yelled.

Paper planes are normal stuff – everyone folds paper airplanes at school. Will this person stop asking weird questions!

"That is an airplane," Andy answered decisively. "And who–"

"What's an ear–plane? Do they–"

"Who are you, actually?"

"Oh! Forgot to introduce myself. Just call me Ming, I'm fine with it."
Eyebrows tightened, a pair of eyes admired the streamlined pattern of the airplane made of modern paper.

"And where are we?" Andy asked.

"We're in a small remote piece of land of the Tang Dynasty! I forgot what this place is actually called, wait–"

Ming rushed into his hut and tried to find a map of the city. Result?

"Oh nevermind – I'm just forgetful. I forgot where I put the map as well. But you're definitely in the land of the Tang Dynasty!" Ming shouted from his hut.

Wow. At least I know what the time is.

Ming put a hand on the airplane, a delicate, pure white craft sitting gracefully on the grassland.

"Ming, don't damage it!"
"It's fine; I know what inventions are."
"You invent things?" Andy thought out loud.
"Yes," An enthusiastic Ming replied, "And you seem a great candidate to be my companion! Come in."
***
"Without prey, there is no predator." – printed in large font in one of Ming's notes via woodblock printing.
"Huh, very inspiring," Andy chimed.
"In fact, that's very true. There's always someone after my inventions–"
"So you moved to this remote region, right?"
"Exactly." Ming nodded. "But virtue is one foot tall, the devil ten foot. To fend off these people, I've put them in secret places and only kept a riddle hinting its location."
But isn't Ming forgetful?
"Now you couldn't find the answers and wanted me to help." Andy continued Ming's speech.
"Exactly! How could you know what I was going to say?" A smile appeared across Ming's face. "That means we're best duos. Coincidentally, we have two creations to retrieve. I think they work pretty well on your ear–plane."

Andy turned his attention onto the sheet of paper Ming was holding. Black Chinse characters were printed on its surface, almost resembling the typeset Chinese characters appearing nowadays. Bit by bit, Andy deciphered the small Chinese words on the text:

1
In the night, the stars you see
Shine light onto the path you walk with glee
But here,
Stars disappear,
Darkness takes over…
The glowing circle is your saviour
Guiding you to the right direction

2
Three of them are in your hands.
What is left?

***
The foot of the mountains wasn't smooth. There were many holes in it.
"We hide there if our huts break down," said Ming. "Don't go too near – we haven't done the safety checks for years."

The land was enlightened grey. The sound of water rushing took over the chirps of the birds in the day. Countless stars dotted the sky. The duo lied on the grassland, admiring the scene.
I've never seen so many stars…
Andy suddenly remembered why they stayed up so late. He shot up and made a quick glance. Somewhere with a path? That leads to darkness?
"The area must be confined," Andy said to himself, unknowingly finding himself walking towards the foot of the mountain. Silently, he repeated the verse in his mind.
In the night, the stars you see / shine light onto the path with glee
"Yes, there surely are paths here. In fact, many."
Ignoring the warning, Andy walked straight into one of those holes. They were once emergency shelters of the people. The path narrowed down, gradually the stars could not shine into the tunnel.
But here / stars disappear / darkness takes over…
Andy was deep into the shelter. "Of course!" he thought, "It's pitch dark here." He could hear faint noises of someone calling his name. But Andy didn't bother to answer.

The glowing circle is your saviour / guiding you to the right direction
"Something circular, emitting light?"
A faint green light as if from a fluorescent watch caught Andy's eyes. "This is it!" he thought, as he traced the light to find a small, glowing compass with 12 directions written on it. "This is probably North," Andy said to himself as he inspected the delicate tool.

"You're back already!" Ming shouted as Andy exited the shelter with the compass in his hand.
"This compass is fluorescent," Ming explained. "That's its value."
Andy read the second riddle aloud, but still had no clue.

Suddenly, a huge figure appeared in the dark, his presence only recognized by the disappearance of trees behind.
"That's Lam; he's been after me for a while." Ming whispered.

"I was just inspecting *every single* shelter to find your little compass, child," Lam announced. Andy felt something warm near his face.

"I never asked you to find it, Lam!"

"Money asked me to. In my hands I have the answer to the riddle you just read, child." Lam paused. "I know you're smart. If you don't want me to use it, hand the compass over."

"We haven't even solved the riddle!" Ming exclaimed.

"Paper and fire are not friends." Lam threatened. The figure proceeded towards the paper airplane.

A light bulb suddenly turned on.
I could have realized earlier! Gunpowder! We've seen a paper airplane, two printed riddles, and a glowing compass. Aren't they the Four Great Inventions of China?

Andy realized the danger he was in: Either his craft gets burnt, or Ming's creations get stolen. Andy exchanged glances with his paper airplane, as if the plane was conscious.
Without something to help, no human can fly. Come on, let's take off…

Andy quickly climbed on the terrified airplane, started its engine and took to the air.
Lam had never seen the plane flying in action. He hesitated.
Ming seemed to have solved the riddle as well. Snatching the bamboo container of gunpowder, Ming took the upper hand of the battle.

"And if you ever try to steal my creations again, I'll not hesitate to spray the gunpowder on you, Lam!" Out of his anger, Ming screamed at the top of his voice. Lam had already disappeared without a trace.

*** (The other day)
The paper airplane took off with the new compass and missiles (from the gunpowder). Its wings glimmered under the sunlight. I the grassland, there was Ming waving.
"What does this airplane do?" Andy imagined Ming asking.
Grinning, Andy aimed the plane at the slowly rising sun. Faintly, he could hear the roosters yelling in the distance.

Take us to the skies, reach the stars up there:
Their tiny but never-ending light
Will continue
To reflect the past
Brighten the future

A Dream's Rekindle

Ying Wa College, Cheung, Ming Ting – 12

The tumultuous sounds of the unfathomable surface land intimidate me. With dark sludges of begrimed mud encompassing all my directions, I awakened from desolation. Rust had conquered me since myriads of years ago I've lost count of. Abandoned and forgotten, I once again continue my life of dullness, with my aspiration of roaming free outside fading away long ago, jilting me as a tarnished needle. A sorrowful, haunting melody once again replays itself – I was waiting for my life to drain.

'Time is fleeting.' they say continuously, but as I knew those thousands of tedious years were endless suffering that never flew as how I had expected. My glorious days had faded into the void – How great I was in the past! But now I am nothing but a purposeless stick.

Suddenly, the world started rumbling, and time seemed to pause. Everything seemed to sink into an ether of unknown but instantly reappeared. A bright aura of luminescence emitted from nowhere and left me temporarily blinded.

As I regained my eyesight, I gazed at my surroundings – my body was laid on a sturdy anvil, center of a dimly–lit room with a stone floor. A colossal furnace towered aside me, neighboring a blacksmith table with multiple complex instruments on it. 'Where am I?' I asked myself. Could this be a dream? I wondered but I could swear it definitely wasn't.

Soon, a bearded man, seemingly a blacksmith, strode into the room in large steps. He had a scarred face, black hair and a beard with sweats of diligence. He grabbed a hammer and sped towards me, then striking the hammer onto my body as he held on the muscles of his shoulders, neck and jaws bunching until they creaked. A while later, he mumbled, 'Now that quenching is finished, it's all up to grinding and finishing.' I examined myself, meticulously crafted and gleaming in brightness. I was a beautiful oeuvre of craftsmanship and diligence, as perfect as a blacksmith's dream.

Wait. Something isn't right. These moments... seem peculiarly familiar. Something instantly struck my mind. This was... my birth. But it just can't be possible – unless... I time–travelled and am re–experiencing my life?! A sense of uncertainty, fused with fear and nervousness agonized my mind. Okay. Okay. 'I can do this.' I told myself. Hopefully I don't mess up. Before I could think more, the blacksmith grabbed me and took me to another room.

As the blacksmith trod into a tent, a person stood still. I studied the man – he was tall, standing approximately 6'8, and slender; dressed in a dark cloak. He had a pale complexion, that gorgeous face couldn't be described in words. His golden eyes seemed to glitter in an attractive sway, hypnotizing each single person who saw him in the eyes. Every part of him was just too handsome – he had every beauty of masculinity.

Who was he? I pondered. I was sure that I had met him before as I was re–experiencing my past, but apparently my memory seemed to be incomplete.

'Lord Huangdi, I have completed my quest of the forge of such needle for Lady Leizu for sewing.' The blacksmith spoke.

Huangdi sighed as he replied powerlessly, 'My wife Leizu is severely sick. The sewing project needs to be delayed. Even Doctor Qibo's Meridian Technique wasn't able to cure her. '

'Hopefully she recovers soon.' The blacksmith said as he put me down and left. As time ticked I fell into a long slumber

I woke up on a small cupboard in a regal hall, towered with pillars and a golden throne gleaming on a magnificent red carpet. Huangdi sat calmly on the throne, as his subordinates stood. 'Seems like we gotta find ways to cure my dearest wife.' Huangdi declared.

'Even the renowned doctor Yuta failed.' 'Lady Leizu has already been unconscious for three days.' 'We already have a contract with the Yandi Tribe with 500 pieces of clothing in exchange for materials.' 'When will she recover?' Countless voices mumbled and whispered in the crowd of people.

'Silence!' Huangdi exclaimed. 'My wise ministers, does anyone have ideas for curing my dear wife?"

A man in a bizarre outfit suggested, 'The traditional folk technique Internal Striking to impact some vital areas determined using Doctor Qibo's Meridian technique may help. However, I fear not many people know such skill. '

'At least we gotta try.' Haungdi replied, 'Doctor Shaoyu, can you select some herbs to make some medicine to treat Leizu as well?'

Shaoyu nodded, leaving to prepare medication. The other day, an old man came, said to be an Internal Striking specialist called Shenlao. He swung his arm as seemingly he launched a hard blow on Leizu's left arm, then immediately pressing an area on her foot. 'NO! The blow ain't powerful enough.' He then gazed around, noticing me as he picked me up and poked it onto Leizu's leg.

'Great! A needle is certainly perfect for this type of medication!' He screamed in excitement. Waving his arms, a manifestation of medication and technique emerged. 'Lung 7, Lie Que…' he mumbled, 'This will probably help to boost her immune system"

Approximately an hour later, 'Finally!' Shenlao shrieked as he pulled me out from Leizu's right leg. Leizu later regained consciousness five minutes after the operation. She seemed exhausted, but surely it was good that she woke up. Huangdi was delighted. Absolutely delighted.

Shaoyu and Qibo held me and bowed in an opulent hall, as Huangdi towered over them aside a golden throne. He beamed triumphantly. 'Lord Huangdi, this form of cure shall stay in the river of time. It shall not be forgotten. But to be shined as if the boundless beams of the illustrious sun!" Shenlao claimed.

Huangdi nodded, glancing at me. 'Needle… Zhen… Good! It shall be named Zhenjiu. Great! My fellow doctors and masters, we shall create a sacred scroll of Zhenjiu! A sacred and legendary codex of grand medication and cure for the world – Esoteric Scripture of the Yellow Emperor! Also known as Huangdi Neijing!'

'Qibo. Shaoyu. Shaoshi. Bogao…' Huangdi declared, 'Your contribution in Zhenjiu shall be rewarded.' Those names gradually stepped on a platform, as Huangdi hung a golden medal onto their necks, signaturing a sense of glory. My body was laid on a red leather cushion, as comfort struck me. As hundreds of people clapped for the doctors and my effort. It was truly magnificent.

I grinned in a form of infinite happiness. I was at my peak! Instantly, a portal of purple auras appeared and sucked me into it. As I woke up, I realised I had returned to my suffering. But he had gained hope – I was glorious in the past, and I shall still be! I should never give up! Freedom! Glory! Here I come!

Shaanxi Television Reporter: A rusty needle has been discovered in the mountains of Shaanxi. Archaeologists believe that it is from 5000 years ago. Probably an artifact forged in the times of Huangdi. It will be displayed in the Shaanxi Museum of History and classified as a special–grade national treasure as one of the most valuable artifacts from the early historic times.

Sow and Harvest

Ying Wa College, Jiang, Weike – 12

"I wonder why?"

"He has not the upper hand."

"Prepare for his downfall."

Marching along the cobblestone road unnoticed, he took in each and every criticism like passing wind. He disagreed. He believed that the tables were about to turn.

He is Lee Yan, and he had a fierce rival named Zhang Heng. One can picture such rivalry as a snake versus a beaver. This time, the two intelligent lads were given the same task to invent an accurate and resilient device for predetermining the coming of earthquakes.

two raindrops
racing down the window
never look down

If you're wondering why Lee was being criticised so harshly at the beginning, it was because he had messed up his first demonstration of his invention to the emperor.

As he carefully carried the device into the palace, the emperor was immediately amazed by the delicate product of Lee's. The silverware glimmered and shone as it enlightened even the darkest corner of the room with delight.

Unfortunately though, it was the final time it shone.

His prototype split in half. Its debris fell to the ground with a crisp "clink" and glimmered no more. Staring at the motionless soldier, Lee strode out of the place without another word.

Still deflated from the defeat, a risky idea began to take form, borne of seething envy and the feral cry of a snake's logic: If honest skill could not raise him to triumph, then sabotaging to victory remained as the final shot…

a sudden weight
falls heavily on the balance
rationality crumbles

One always finds ways to fulfil desires as long as they come from the bottom of one's heart.

One night, under the sober moonless sky, Lee hopped on a cart headed towards a nearby town. He got off beside a dark forest and started walking towards a bizarre hut in the heart of the woods.

It was Zhang's workplace.

Lee silently entered the hut, tiptoeing like an adventurer inside the pharaoh's tomb. In front of his eyes stood the prestigious invention that could destroy his fame. He shook with excitement as he looked at it from side to side, top to bottom, yet he couldn't find any weaknesses he could attack. It was an untouchable monument way above his reach.

Suddenly, a log rolled gently down the hillside, flattening leaves on its venture downwards as the leaves screamed of agony and pain. Then an idea struck into his mind. He touched the invention softly on its back as if petting a hare.

"Wood…" he whispered.

That was the beginning of a mate in 3, in favour of Lee. It raised him closer to the untouchable monument. Now he felt like he could reach it.

the trunk is cut
as the beautiful flowers fall
beginning of doom

The next few weeks saw Lee working restlessly to figure out the next best move. It wasn't easy though, for knowledge was very limited back then. He flipped through thousands of ancient books and experimented with various materials, burning his hand a few times on the way while dealing with his overwhelmed brain.

Zhang, on the other hand, was a bit over relaxed after Lee's failure. He stopped experimenting with his device, and instead developed an interest in wandering around the nearby market while treating himself with the hypocritic comments by locals. He didn't care if his device had flaws, or whether it was going to work or not, for all he knew was that his opponent had given him the lead.

the snake nears
the dam of profound skill
now or never

Soon the day came. Birds chirped mournfully on branches, gazing disappointedly into the dark mist, trying to find the sun which shone so very brightly yesterday, who's now hiding behind clouds anxiously as if the universe was about to collapse. The gathering crowd remained silent and watched as Zhang Heng stepped into the mighty emperor's palace. The man was unaware that his evaluation of the equation wasn't equal to the actual root.

As Zhang put his delicate device in front of the emperor, Lee quietly sneaked into the palace, hiding behind a golden bush. His intense breathing signified his close discovery of checkmate.

Zhang's creation was very different from Lee's, not only because it avoided collapsing (which was an achievement anyway), but also because of its subtle look. It didn't really glimmer, instead it stood still and imposingly on the red carpet like a modest model on stage. That was another kind of beauty, and in the emperor's opinion, less was, indeed, more.

In the middle of silent admiration, Lee nimbly lit a match from his pocket. Then he threw the flaming arrow over the bush and it went darting towards Zhang's invention. However, as much as the drama wished to unfold itself, the match failed to hit the target and crashed onto the floor futilely. And so, the mate in one was missed.

Fortunately, nobody saw the attack, but the deafening silence was already enough to frighten Lee as he fled away shamefully. He looked around frantically, saw a rickshaw, got on, and began foolishly contemplating how the match changed course right before the intended impact and whether some god was preventing him from succeeding.

He was completely tired of this stupid rivalry thing. He needed a break from life.

final minutes
as he attempts the fatal blow
off the woodwork it goes

Lee was woken up by the dazzling sunlight piercing through the blinds. As he peered out of the window, he could observe posters everywhere celebrating Zhang Heng and his innovative invention of a seismograph. Melodies of excitement flowed exquisitely through his hometown, yet to him, it sounded more like a saddening dirge.

His appetite seemed to disappear even in front of a plate of delicious dumplings. Just as he was about to put one into his mouth, a sudden wobble struck him. Within milliseconds, the building started shaking violently, and the melody was forced away by the painful shrieks of items breaking apart upon falling to the ground. The screams rang even louder in Lee's ears as they reminded him of his tragic past.

Biology teaches us that sensitivity is a vital function of living things which allows us to react and detect to stimuli. I assume Lee changed species as he sat on his chair motionlessly despite the blaring roars and alarming vibration, still holding that piece of dumpling. Before he knew it, the entire ceiling collapsed on him like a protective best friend who reluctantly betrayed you under undefeatable pressure.

And then an unbearable pain powered through his veins, yet there was a light, floating sensation that stopped him from moving. If this was it, he thought, wouldn't I gain the title for the character who died in the most underwhelming way?

captivated in nowhere
nothing, nobody… *NONSENSE!*
stalemate?

"Yeah, they knew, they knew… It's okay now…"

"Came to use pretty quickly, huh?"

"Thank god it didn't malfunction!"

Sunlight arrived along with the thundering galloping of horses, as the heavy piece of wood pressing on Lee's chest was removed. The rescuer was kneeling on the depressing ruins as he looked back to call for support. Then, the two men entered a soundless stare.

"You−" Lee wished he had a voice, but how can voice be granted if even life was on the verge of perishing?

Sadly, the staring contest did not last long. Before Lee could even begin to question how everything had happened upon himself, he closed his eyes. Once again, and for the final time.

Indeed, this was it for him. The title, however, was never awarded.

"Omnia causa fiunt – everything happens for a reason."

Dark Eras

Ying Wa College, Lee, Chin Yeung – 14

Hello, can you hear me? Alright. If you're hearing this, you probably have way too much time to spare if you somehow found this recording. Anyway, as promised, here's a little story of when I time traveled. Yes, yes, I know this sounds like an absolute sham, but hear me out, and then you'll probably change your mind.

As the morning sun rose, I felt the warmth of its rays land on my skin. Despite going to sleep way earlier than usual, I still felt unbearably tired, so I shut my eyes tightly just to get that little bit more sleep. Normally, I'd doze off in no time, but as I turned, I felt a sharp pain in my entire body. It was like being stabbed by dozens of tiny needles! I jolted awake and couldn't believe my eyes. Where had all the furniture gone? The smooth and white concrete walls were replaced with red and uneven bricks, the roof was replaced with an unruly brown thatched roof, and most importantly, my bed! "How am I supposed to sleep well when my mattress is literally just a pile of grass!" I thought. I reached for my phone to check the time – only to feel the freezing touch of wood.

That's when it hit me.

Panicked, I scrambled to the door and pulled on it with all my might, praying to see the dim, narrow corridor I'd walked through many times. My heart sank. The cacophony of bargaining, vendors' boisterous advertising, and the clopping of horses didn't help with my confusion.

"Hey! You there! Get out of the way of the emperor's royal carriage!"

I turned my head to the source of the sound, when I saw six majestic horses towing a carriage barreling down the street, towards me. "Out of the way, peasant!". Before I could react, something tugged on the collar of my clothes, and pulled me to the side, just barely dodging the charging horse.

"Holy smokes, kid! What were you doing? You almost got run over by the royal carriage!"

In front of me, stood a well–worn man. His blood–red Hanfu glistened in the morning light. He had a naturally captivating aura and wore a slight smile.

"Oh! What peculiar clothes you have! What's that you've got on your face? Some kind of accessory?"

Still stunned from my near–death experience, and faced by the man's bombardment of questions, I found myself at a loss for words.

"Tell me son, where are you from?"

Of course, I couldn't tell him that I was from the future, that would be absolute bogus! So naturally, I lied to him.

"I'm from... downtown?"

"Oh nice! I've never met anybody from downtown. Pardon my manners, I don't believe I've introduced myself yet. My name's Cai Lun, or Cai, if you prefer."

"My full name's Chin Yeung, but I'd rather just be called Lee."

"Alright Lee, good to meet you, but I'd better go back to work. I'm working on this new invention that will revolutionize writing! If you want, I can bring you along and show you the things that you can only see here in the city!"

"That'd be awesome!"

And off we went. Cai Lun told me he'd been trying to make something that would make his name remembered for generations. I racked my brain hard, and suddenly I remembered that I'd heard the name Cai Lun before. He was the person who improved paper! I looked at Cai with wonder, he seemed radiant as ever.

“Look at that over there! In the blacksmith shop. You see that stone thing? That’s a blast furnace. A buddy of mine invented it. It uses blasts of hot air into some heated iron ore. That produces cast iron, which we can use to make tools for farming and weapons for battle! Pretty cool right?”

I stared at the blast furnace. It’s really astonishing how brilliant the ancient Chinese people figured out how to make contraptions like this. Compared to people of the future, they really were not lacking in ingenuity.

“We’re almost there, we’ve just got to get over the lake. Luckily, I recently commissioned a neat little build called a suspension bridge, so I didn’t have to go the long way around to get into the city.”

The bridge swayed back and forth, it seemed unsafe as ever.

“There’s no need to be afraid, the bridge is really safe. It’s just deceptively dangerous because of all the rocking. I’ll show you!”

I gawked as Cai Lun walked confidently across the bridge. I had butterflies in my stomach and getting a cold shower did not seem appealing. I tried to follow suit, but as soon as I stepped foot onto the bridge, I immediately felt dizzy, as if the whole world was slowing down. The water was rapid, if I fell into it, I’d be washed away for sure.

“Come on, you’ve got it. Don’t look down, look at me and you’ll make it.”

The Ascendance of the Dragon God

Ying Wa College, Ngai, Chun Ching Ethan – 12

(Han Dynasty) The wails of villagers reverberated through the air, their anguished cries blending with the swirling dust and rubble that invaded the once serene town. The earth quaked with relentless power, mercilessly burying more and more souls beneath its unforgiving weight. Zhang, a humble inventor, living at the peak of the mountains, stood on his wooden porch, sipping tea, watching the chaos unfold, and sighed deeply. Lighting two incense sticks, he bowed to them and prayed to the Dragon god. “Relieve this chaos and forgive us for our sins, O mighty god.”

High above the mortal realm, a flame danced in the celestial expanse, its fiery tendrils reaching towards the heavens. The message had been delivered. The Jade Emperor, the supreme ruler of all realms, exhaled a weary sigh, his expression tinged with a hint of disgust. "What do these feeble mortals implore for once more?" he mused, his voice permeated with a mixture of disappointment. "Those mortal beings hardly deserve the power and protection granted upon them by the gods." As his fingers brushed against the flickering flame, a transformation began. The flame crept along his arm slowly and surely, its powerful glow illuminating his features. In that moment, a burst of visions unfolded before the Jade Emperor's eyes, revealing a tapestry of humans suffering, their prayers to the gods… as an old, frail man appeared in his visions.

He staggered backwards, his once calm and solemn expression all gone in a sudden. Deep in thought, he spoke softly, his voice filled with concern, "Yanluo Wang, the formidable ruler of the underworld in Chinese mythology, has surfaced once more. This event that unfolds before us cannot be just an act of nature. It must be his doing." Unease and terror could be clearly seen on the faces of his loyal subjects. "Master, it cannot be," one of them stuttered, a hint of disbelief in his voice. "We banished him to the Realms of Darkness for a millennium. His immortality was stripped away, making him mortal. Surely, he must have perished by now…”

The Jade Emperor's eyes narrowed in contemplation, his mind racing with the implications of Yanluo Wang's resurgence. "Appearances can be deceiving," he spoke, his voice laced with a newfound determination. "Yanluo Wang, stripped of his immortality, may have found a way to regain his power. If he seeks the Eternal Crystals, then we must act swiftly to protect humanity. The earthquakes he had caused helped to harvest them from the crust of the earth.” The other gods, however, hesitated, their fear and reluctance evident. They had grown complacent in their realms, detached from the plight of mortals. They were reluctant to risk their immortality for the sake of a world they saw as undeserving. One by one, they voiced their concerns, citing the dangers and uncertainties that lay ahead.

But amidst the sea of doubt, there was one god who stood firm, his resolve unyielding. It was Longwei, the Dragon Lord, known for his wisdom and unwavering loyalty to the mortal realm. He had witnessed firsthand the suffering of humanity and understood the gravity of the situation. With a resolute voice, he addressed the Jade Emperor and his fellow gods. "I shall not abandon the mortals to their fate," Longwei declared, his voice thundering through the celestial hall. "Zioles, the fallen one, poses a threat to all realms. We cannot allow him to succeed in his quest for immortality. I will take my eight mighty dragons and face him in combat. Together, we shall protect humanity and restore balance to the realms."

“Very well, Longwei. This man will accompany you. He may be old and weak, but his determination to stop this chaos is undying. With a swift flick of his wrist, the flame began to grow, slowly forming the shape of an old man. Inventor Zhang had arrived at the heavens. He possessed an unwavering determination to improve the lives of the people during a time when technological advancements were scarce. Driven by a profound sense of empathy, Zhang sought to alleviate the burdens and hardships that burdened the common folk. With his unwavering spirit and inventive mind, he embarked on a quest to create inventions that would revolutionize the lives of the people and bring hope to their daily struggles. Zhang's inspiring journey, filled with creativity and a deep sense of purpose, would forever leave an indelible mark on the history of the Dong Han dynasty.

The other gods exchanged hesitant glances, but the Jade Emperor nodded, his expression stern yet approving. "Longwei, your bravery and sacrifice will be remembered," he said solemnly. "May the eight divine dragons lend you their strength, and may your valor inspire others to stand against the forces of darkness."

With a bow of respect, Longwei turned to his loyal dragon companions, their majestic forms shimmering with ancient power. They understood the weight of the task ahead, and their eyes gleamed with determination. As they took to the skies, the heavens trembled with their presence, a beacon of hope in a world engulfed by chaos.

Meanwhile, deep beneath the earth's surface, Zioles reveled in his newfound power. The earthquakes, his handiwork, had grasped the precious Eternal Crystals, shimmering with otherworldly energy. He held the key to immortality within his grasp, his heart consumed by a thirst for eternal life. Little did he know that Longwei and his dragons were descending upon him, their righteous fury blazing like a thousand suns. The clash of titans was imminent, a battle that would determine the fate of both mortals and gods alike.

And so, the stage was set for a cataclysmic confrontation, where the forces of darkness clashed with the unwavering valor of one god and his mighty dragons. The outcome would shape the destiny of all realms, as the world awaited the final outcome of this epic clash between good and evil…

Back at the heavens, the great clash between the titans and the dragon god was soon to commence. The Dragon God and the Titan Lord Zioles stood as titans of their respective domains. The Dragon God, with his majestic wings and fiery breath, commanded an army of powerful dragons. Zioles, on the other hand, possessed immense strength and an indomitable will, leading a legion of fearsome Titans.

The land trembled as the forces of the Dragon God and Zioles clashed in a cataclysmic battle. The very earth quaked beneath their feet, unleashing devastating earthquakes that threatened to tear the realm asunder. In the midst of this chaos, a humble inventor named Zhang stood on a hilltop, eyes fixed upon the awe−inspiring spectacle unfolding before him.

Zhang, known for his ingenious creations, had been drawn to the epic confrontation by the sheer magnitude of the quakes. He watched in both awe and concern as the Dragon God's dragons valiantly fought against the destructive forces of the earthquakes. With every beat of their mighty wings and every blast of their fiery breath, they tried to stabilize the trembling ground and save more poor souls.

Inspired by the dragons' courage and the calamity unfolding around him, Zhang's mind raced with ideas. He believed that he could contribute his own inventions to aid the dragons' valiant efforts. With unwavering determination, he hurried back to his workshop, gathering his tools and materials.

Days turned into nights as Zhang toiled tirelessly, fueled by his desire to help the dragons and protect the realm. He crafted a powerful device, designed to harness the forces of nature. His invention utilized intricate mechanisms to detect the subtle shifts in the earth's crust, providing early warnings of impending earthquakes.

Armed with his creations, Zhang returned to the battlefield, joining the dragons in their fight against the devastating earthquakes. As the Dragon God's mighty creatures unleashed their power, Zhang's inventions worked in harmony with their efforts. The early warning system he had devised allowed the dragons to anticipate the tremors and evacuate vulnerable areas swiftly. The prediction devices, placed strategically, predicted the impact of the earthquakes, providing brief moments of respite in the chaos.

The Dragon God, witnessing Zhang's invaluable contributions, acknowledged the inventor's ingenuity and selflessness. With a nod of approval, the Dragon God infused Zhang's devices with a fraction of his own divine power, further enhancing their effectiveness.

United in their purpose, the Dragon God, his dragons, and Zhang fought side by side, their combined strength and ingenuity stemming the tide of destruction. The earthquakes, once relentless, became more manageable, allowing the land and its inhabitants to endure. Zioles was finally slayed by the Dragon God and peace reigned once again.

The invention had done what it was sought to do. Its power still flowed around the dragon heads, before slowly fading away, its colors disappearing into nothingness. It had saved the lives of hundreds of thousands of innocent villagers, as it stood valiantly at the town square of the humble village, witnessing the great battle before peace.

Creative Writing
Fiction
Group 3

New Tales of China's Inventions

CUHK FAA Thomas Cheung Secondary School, Aquino, Padua Ric Gian – 12

Nowadays, people may know China as the country that first made paper. The first Chinese paper was made from a combination of recycled fishing nets, bamboo, mulberry bark, silk, and hemp. But as time goes by, paper is made with a more complicated process. Today, people all around the world use paper in most of their daily lives for exam papers, essays, documents, important forms and more. Since China made the first paper for humanity, I will not be surprised if China makes an artificial intelligence (more commonly known as AI) kind of paper one day. Let me explain below.

China has been improving on AI technology and I would like to speculate on what China will make in the near future. I think that China is going to invent a handheld AI paper, which will be held on the wrist where people can open a digital paper by just pressing a button on their hands. A digital piece of paper will hover over their palms, and there will also be a digital pen on the side. There will also be a feature on your hand that allows you to print out the paper you just wrote on. I speculate that it will include a projector, and those who use digital paper to look at personal information may use a mini-size projector, which can also significantly reduce errors and increase accuracy and precision.

AI is getting increasingly popular because scientists are making it more powerful. Soon, AI will be one of the most important things to humanity. Also, AI digital papers are eco-friendly for the environment because they can save more trees from being cut. Cutting trees is extremely dangerous for the animals because it can endanger them and their habitat. To sum it up, the benefits of the AI paper are the convenience it brings and limiting the use of wood.

The main purpose of all this is to speculate what China will make and I speculate that digital or AI paper will appear soon. When that kind of AI paper is made, I speculate that millions or even billions of people will gradually buy it.

The Not So Healing Medicine

CUHK FAA Thomas Cheung Secondary School, Caparros, Carmelo Simon Alfeche – 13

A long time ago, during the Eastern Han Dynasty, there was a Taoist alchemist called Wei Boyang, or Wei for short. Wei was a clever person. He is known to be the author of the Cantong Qi, which was the earliest book of alchemy in China. The Eastern Han Dynasty had a major problem during the last few years of the dynasty which was that most of the emperors died at an incredibly early age, the youngest being below 20. "I must find a way to deal with this problem!" Wei said, "I must create an elixir for eternal life! But how?" So, he did what most alchemists at the time would do, experimenting on some chemicals to make the perfect potion to grant long life to the emperors.

The first thing Wei tried to do was to put a red mushroom–like fungus and a fermented slice of watermelon into a cauldron and start stirring with some boiling water. The substance in the cauldron started to turn dark red and steam began to rise from the water. Wei grabbed a bottle and put a spoonful of the mixture into the bottle then gave it to his test subject — a pig. The pig drank the substance that Wei gave to it. But the next day, the pig dropped dead on the floor.

But Wei never gave up and continued to make potions. He looked through the ingredients he had on his ingredient shelf which contained herbs and leaves for medicine. Then he placed the ingredients into his trusty cauldron with some water and started brewing. A couple of minutes later, the mixture turned green and looked like prison food. Wei had no choice but to test it on another test subject, this time a cow. But when Wei gave the mixture to the cow, the cow refused to drink it and ran away.

Wei was running out of ingredients to use for his "elixir of life," so he grabbed whatever was left on the ingredient shelf. There was sulfur, charcoal, and some forms of oxidizing agent. He put them all in a pestle and mortar and started to smash them to turn them into dust form. While mixing them to the combined three dusts, the heat from the friction triggered a chemical reaction and started to burst into flames! "Interesting...," said Wei, "I must document this reaction in my journal immediately!"

As he was jotting down notes in his journal, he thought about ways to make the reaction more powerful and more explosive. He'd like to make an invention that could possibly benefit the entire world. Wei began to read some alchemy books about chemicals and their reactions. And he found it — saltpeter. If he could find that chemical, he could make a scientific discovery that no one had ever seen. "But where would I be able to find it?" Wei asked himself.

So, Wei continued to look through the pages about saltpeter. It was known to be commonly found in the capital of the northern province of Bingzhou, Taiyuan. Wei lived near the capital of the Han Dynasty, Luoyang. So, the journey to Taiyuan would be a long and challenging one. But Wei had his spirits high. He packed his belongings and then hit the road.

Wei started his journey off by going to his first destination, Jiaozuo. He continuously walked north until he hit his first problem in his journey, the Yellow River. In order to get to his destination, he needed to cross the Yellow River. But Wei could not swim. So, his only choice was to build a boat from scratch. "But how?" he asked himself.

Wei might have been one of the smartest people to live during his time, but he was only an expert in alchemy, not carpentry. There was no civilization nearby so he could not ask for some help in building a boat. Therefore, he needed to build it all by himself. Wei had read a book about boats before, so he remembered the basics. He started to chop down some trees for wood for the hull of the boat. Then he began to think about how the hull's shape should be to float on the water. Wei began to experiment on several types of boat hulls. His final decision was to make it into V–shape to make it easier to travel along the water. Then he finished a boat on which he could stay in it. And he has successfully made his first boat!

Now, the only problem was how to get to the other side of the river safely. "I know! Since the currents of the Yellow River are strong, maybe I can just travel along with the currents. Then I can cross the river safely." Wei said. So, he did what he said and traveled across the river. After that, he continued his journey to Jiaozuo smoothly.

After resting at a place in Jiaozuo, he began to prepare for his journey to his next destination, Jinzhong, which was a farther place than his last journey from Luoyang, but he was up for the challenge. After all, if he could get saltpeter for his experiment, he could possibly be known all over the world as the best alchemist in the world. So, he began his journey right away until he was faced with his second problem — the mountains. Wei's backpack was big and heavy, so hiking up the mountains was going to be a perilous journey. But Wei was persistent and determined to hike through the mountains. He walked, and walked, and walked. After ten excruciating hours of just walking on top of stones, going uphill and downhill, his feet started to swell but he finally made it to the other side of the mountain. He stopped and rested for a while in a nearby village to catch his breath. Then he continued on his track. The rest of the trip was a breeze as Wei mostly had to walk through flat ground or mountain tracks.

Wei had finally reached the second and last stop of his long journey, Jinzhong. But he still needed to travel to his final destination, Taiyuan. So, once again, he gathered his belongings after resting and set off again to Taiyuan to grab the one thing he needed for his recipe, saltpeter. Travelling from Jinzhong to Taiyuan was a walk in the park because the only thing separating the two villages was more villages. So, the only thing he had to do was walk and watch out for potential bandits during his journey. When he was at his destination, he breathed a big sigh of relief. He had finally finished his journey of ten days, and he could finally find the material he needed.

At the entrance of a village in Taiyuan, there was a big sign that read "Saltpeter Mine" pointing to the right. Wei immediately ran to the mine. He grabbed a small pouch from his pocket and took a handful of saltpeter. Wei paid the owner of the mine a pouch of gold coins for the saltpeter and started to go back home to Luoyang. When he was back home, Wei did what he did last time with a pestle and mortar. He put saltpeter and charcoal in a pestle and mortar and smashed it into dust. Then he added a bunch of saltpeter into the mortar and started to mix. But this time, it did not just burst into flames like last time. This time, it created a blast which was powerful enough to make a hole in the ceiling of Wei's little hut. There was smoke coming out of the pestle and mortar. Wei's face was covered in ashes. "This, this is amazing!" Wei said excitedly, "I must document this in my book right this instant!" So, Wei wiped his face with a towel and started to write in his journal. It turned out that when these three chemicals mixed together, the sulfur and charcoal acted as fuel and the saltpeter was the oxidizer. Those three chemicals reacting with each other released many gases which caused the mixture to burn rapidly and then explode. He called the mixture "fire medicine" as it was originally supposed to be medicine for the emperor. Wei said to himself "This is amazing! I can report this to the emperor so that they can have a weapon to use against their enemies."

Wei brought the saltpeter, sulfur, and charcoal to the emperor. He explained to him that these chemicals would create explosives. For this, the emperor crowned him with the special title of "The Father of Alchemy."

Today, "fire medicine" is given the name "gunpowder" as it has been used as a propellant for many types of weapons. It is also used in dynamites and other explosives. Not only is it used in weapons, but it is also used in fireworks and firecrackers to celebrate the New Years.

Talent–resembled Antique

CUHK FAA Thomas Cheung Secondary School, Huang, Sin Yi – 13

Yang Xin was packing her deceased grandmother's belongings from the old house. She couldn't help but feel a mix of emotions. It was bittersweet to leave behind so many memories and mementos, but she knew it was time to start afresh in her new home. As she rummaged through the boxes, she stumbled upon an old blue and white porcelain vase that belonged to her grandmother. The vase was beautifully crafted with intricate patterns and designs, and as Xin held it in her hands, she noticed something was in it.

"A note?" Yang Xin took out the mysterious note.

"This looks old."

"Father finally approves of my passion. All these years of trying, all it took was just letting Father appreciate it or was it because of the Emperor's opinion? I'm quite resentful of wasting so much effort trying to get his approval but I can see the realization and appreciation in his eyes." read Yang Xin.

I remember back then…

(The time dilates back to the author of the note's era when she was a child.)

"Meiying! Stop drawing on the wall of my house!"

"But Father, isn't this pretty?" Mei Ying responded innocently.

Jianwei, Meiying's father, seemed fed up. "I'll tell you what's pretty. It's when you remove all of this colorful nonsense from my wall!"

Meiying was disappointed. "Yes, Father…"

(Time skips till Meiying grows into her teenage years.)

Meiying was painting calligraphies when Jianwei suddenly burst into her room with a furious expression.

"Meiying! What is this I found on the table?" Jianwei shouted while holding sheets of Meiying's drawings.

"Those are my drawings, Father." Meiying was anxious.

"What have I told you about 'drawing'? You're supposed to do the chores like sweeping, tending to the garden, washing the clothes instead of 'drawing'!"

"But Father, won't you just take the moment to admire the beauty of art? Art could touch your heart if you know how to appreciate it."

"The only thing I'll appreciate is when you realize that art is only for show. Can't you see, my daughter? Art is meaningless."

"Father, art is my passion, my talent."

“Talent? Passion? Meiying, don't let your dreams pull you away from reality. Try showing your ‘talent’ to the Emperor to see if he will make you the next Empress.”

“Father, you only think of the essential things in the world. You never mention the small details that make our lives whole. Would you like it if the world had nothing good to look at? Art is the tiny, colorful decorations of the world. Without it, the world would be duller than a broken warrior’s sword.”

“Daughter, please understand. Art can't contribute to anything in the world.”

“Why do you never comprehend my reasoning?” Meiying stormed away with frustration.

Years passed and Meiying had blossomed into a young adult. Despite her father's constant reminders of her “meaningless passion”, she persisted with her artistic mindset. One day, while she was doing her daily sweeping chore, she accidentally knocked over a vase.

“Oh, no! What am I going to do? I can't just throw it away. Father will notice that the vase is gone, but if he sees it in this condition, I'll surely be scolded again…”

Meiying desperately thought of an idea. “What if I try to mend the vase back together?”

With the idea in her mind, she started to work. She applied clay to the broken edges of the vase. After the clay dried, Meiying noticed that the crack marks on the vase were quite visible.

“What if I paint over the marks? What color would go well with white? Hmm.. Cobalt!”

Meiying grabbed her paint though being skeptical. Then she looked through the window and got inspired by the sight. After hours of hard work painting, she was finally done with the vase so she put it aside.

Meiying relieved with a sigh, “Although it was tough work, I will admit it is quite pleasant painting a vase. It’s surely something I've never done before. I must say I've done a splendid job.”

Just as Meiying was turning around to admire her artwork, she saw a puddle of blue water next to the vase. She immediately went to see if the paint on the vase was ruined or not.

She gasped, “Oh dear.. The paint must have come off from the water! Thank god the paint didn't get smudged or smeared. I can easily fix this.”

She went to repaint the faded area of the vase and figured out a way to make the paint safe from water.

“I recall people dipping vases in glazes but where do I get glaze from?”

She remembered hearing about a pottery workshop nearby where craftsmen made glazes for their ceramic creations. Determined to find a solution to her problem, she went to the workshop the next day. Once she

reached the workshop, Meiying was greeted by a friendly potter named Li Wei. She explained her trouble to him, showed him the vase, and requested him to put a coat of glaze on it.

“Ah, I see. You need a glaze to protect your painted vase. I can help you with that. Glazes can indeed provide a protective coating and enhance the appearance of a ceramic, especially for one as beautiful as yours.” Li Wei reassured her.

“I appreciate your help, Li Wei.”

Li Wei showed Meiying the process of making glazes. He explained that glazes were made from a combination of various minerals and substances, such as silica, feldspar, metal oxides, and fluxing agents. These ingredients were mixed and then applied to the ceramic surface before firing. Then Meiying chose a cobalt blue glaze as Li Wei helped apply it to the vase.

“There you go. Your vase looks shinier than an expensive gem!”

“It's truly marvelous! Thank you again, Li Wei.”

Meiying went home with a gorgeous glossy vase and a satisfied look.

Days later, the Emperor’s birthday arrived. Every person in the village must give the Emperor an exquisite gift. Jianwei struggled to find the gift until he saw a gorgeous vase in the corner of the room.

“Huh? Since when was this here? Jianwei was puzzled, grabbing the vase. “This is very beautiful though. I guess this could be a gift for the Emperor.”

Jianwei, unaware that the vase was the same one Meiying had repaired and repainted, decided to present it as a gift to the Emperor. He carefully wrapped the vase in silk and prepared to go to the palace. As Jianwei arrived at the palace, he joined the long line of villagers waiting to present their offerings to the Emperor. Each gift was examined and evaluated by the Emperor's advisors before the villager presented it to the Emperor.

When it was Jianwei's turn, he nervously approached the advisors. His heart pounding with tension as he unwrapped the silk cloth to reveal the extravagant–looking vase.

“Ah, a porcelain vase. Let us inspect it closely.” said one advisor.

The advisors carefully examined the vase, while appreciating its intricate patterns. They were impressed by the craftsmanship and attention to each element of the design.

“This is an extraordinary piece. The mixture of the delicate painting and the glossy glaze is truly captivating.” commented another advisor.

“Indeed, it's a work of art! The Emperor will certainly enjoy such a gift!” exclaimed the third advisor.

With the advisors' approval, Jianwei was given an audience with the Emperor. He nervously entered the grand hall, where the Emperor sat on his throne, surrounded by courtiers and dignitaries.

The Emperor asked, “What have you brought for me today, good sir?”

“Your Majesty, I present to you a vase, a symbol of beauty and resilience.” replied Jianwei.

The Emperor's eyes gleamed with curiosity as he examined the vase. He admired every elaborate detail of it.

“This is a remarkable piece indeed. The craftsmanship is exceptional, and the glaze adds a touch of elegance. Tell me, who is the artist behind this masterpiece?”

Jianwei, unaware that Meiying was the artist, paused for a moment.

“Your Majesty, I am not aware of the artist’s identity. I acquired a plain vase and entrusted it to a skilled artisan to paint it. I do not know who performed the art.”

“The artist’s identity may remain a mystery, but their talent is unmistakable. This vase is a testament to their talent.”

Jianwei bowed. He was grateful for the Emperor's appreciation of the vase.

“Thank you, Your Majesty. I am honored that you enjoy this gift.”

As Jianwei left the palace, he couldn't help but wondered who the talented restorer might be. He returned home and saw Meiying doing her daily chores.

“Meiying, I have returned from the palace. The Emperor admired the vase and he was greatly impressed with the quality of the artwork.”

Meiying looked at Jianwei, surprised by her father's words.

“Father, I'm glad that the vase was appreciated. The artist must be incredibly talented.”

Jianwei studied Meiying's face, and a tinge of realization crossed his mind. He remembered catching a glimpse of her painting on several occasions.

“Meiying, I can't help but wonder... were you the one who painted the vase?”

Meiying's eyes widened, and she hesitated for a moment before nodding.

“Yes, Father, it was me. I accidentally knocked over the vase, breaking it, and I didn't want to disappoint you, so I restored it and kept it a secret.”

Meiying’s heart sank, she thought that she was going to get yelled at once more like what her father would usually do. Meanwhile, Jianwei's heart poured with a mix of emotions— pride in his daughter's talent and regret for not acknowledging it before. And to Meiying’s surprise, …

“Meiying, I’m sorry for not recognizing your talent. Your restoration work is excellent, and the Emperor himself praised it. Your dedication and talent are incredible.”

Meiying beamed with a mixture of relief and joy lighting up her face.

“Thank you, Father. Your words mean the world to me. I will continue to develop my passion for art.”

Meiying’s eyes filled with tears of joy as she never experienced this kind of joy. She truly felt like she had accomplished the heftiest challenge of her life and that was finally getting her father's approval. From that day onwards, Jianwei became Meiying's biggest supporter of her passion. Meiying's talent thrived, and she became well–known for her tremendous artwork.

(Time fast–forwards back to the present.)

Yang Xin was still reading the note, “I'm so delighted that Father finally approved.”

“Wow, this girl must be very talented to touch the heart of someone so persistent in their judgment. Meiying, I’ll keep this name and this story in mind.”

The Origin of Ice-cream

CUHK FAA Thomas Cheung Secondary School, Lau, Chellur – 12

'No it's not!'

'Yes, trust me!'

'No one will believe in you; you are such a liar!'

'Don't ever call me a liar! I can swear to God that I am tell the truth!'

Kimberly and Andy were having a heated discussion in classroom of 1B, they were arguing about the origin of ice-cream. 'By the name "ice-cream", it clearly shows that it is from some western countries' Kimberly said. 'Trust me, though the name of "ice-cream" sounds so "western", it is a Chinese invention hundred years ago.' Andy replied. Their discussion could not stop until the bell rang. 'Prove it! I won't trust you until I see some evidence!' Kimberly left and headed to her next lesson.

'How could I prove to Kimberly? What am I supposed to do?' Andy wondered in his bedroom. 'Time machine!' Two words flashed through his mind. However, how would a 13-year-old boy invent a time machine. It was definitely not taught in Andy's Integrated Science textbook, nor any other lessons in his school. That's why Andy turned to a more resourceful tool – ChatGPT! 'How to build a time machine?' He typed this in the search box of ChatGPT. Surprisingly, the AI really gave him manual to build a time machine but left a cautious remark "Not 100% Safe".

After 3 months of time, it came to Christmas. Friendship between Andy and Kimberly had been frozen as ice-cream since their last argument, while Andy had been working hard on building his time machine. On the last day of school before the Christmas holiday, Andy finally came to Kimberly and asked 'I can prove to you that ice-cream is one of the Chinese inventions. Do you dare to witness this?' 'Oh, come on, you've gotta be serious. If you lie to me again, you will never pass any exam for the rest of your life!' Kimberly replied. 'Believe it or not! 5pm today! Come and visit my home and I will show you the truth!' Andy angrily said.

'What did you make, Andy? What is this?' Kimberly curiously asked when she saw a giant machine in Andy's room. Andy then explained everything to Kimberly and told her that he was bringing her to hundred years ago in order to witness how ice-cream was invented in China. 'You must be insane! I will never travel to the past using this worn-out machine! That's just suiciding!' While Kimberly kept doubting about the time machine, Andy pressed the red button of the time machine without a doubt. The screen of the time machine showed 'The Song Dynasty' and there was no one in the room anymore. Two of them vanished in the room.

'Where are we?' Kimberly asked. They both found themselves in a world that was so different from where they were from. They were surrounded by ancient architecture; some were like you could only see them on a Chinese History textbook or in a museum. Yes, they made it. They travelled back to the Song Dynasty successfully. 'I can't believe it works. You really managed to bring me back to the old China.'

'Quick! We only have 2 hours! After 2 hours, we need to come back here to travel back to the future!' Andy warned. 'Look! Right there. I looked up some history books, it said ice-cream first appeared among some venders on local street'.

They ran through the bustling marketplace where the local Chinese people could not stop staring at them thanks to their modern outfits. They all felt so weird and curious about these two newcomers to town.

'That's the one!' Andy shouted. While they were approaching the vender's stall that Andy talked about, they could smell the sweet and exotic aroma filling the air. In front of them, there was an old man, shaving the ice and mixing them with different kinds of fruit while talking with other villagers.

When two of them finally came to the stall, the vendor was scared since he thought they looked totally different and strange to them. From his facial expression, it could tell that it's possible that he might think that Andy and Kimberly were indeed some kind of monsters or aliens. He screamed and ran away and left everything behind. Meanwhile, Andy and Kimberly basically stood here and did not make a word.

The vendor left two bowls of ice−cream in his stall. Out of curiosity, Andy and Kimberly were tempted to have a bite of the ice−cream and could not stop eating it after the first bite. 'That's just like ice−cream.' Kimberly said. 'It is ice−cream, the original ice−cream.' Andy replied. 'See! I did not lie to you!'.

Andy finally could prove that the origin of ice−cream is China and Kimberly eventually believed in Andy. While they were enjoying the ice−cream, Andy's watch rang. 'Oh no! It's time to go back! We only have 5 minutes left. Otherwise, we could never go back to the future.' Andy suddenly figured this out. They had to head back to where they had arrived so as to get back to Andy's room.

'Beep beep, beep beep.'' The beeping sound from Andy's watch kept reminding them that the time was ticking. 'It is over there!' Kimberly shouted. Another the beeping sound from the watch and the display showed'00:00'. However, the beeping sound did not stop. Also, there was another voice shouting 'Get up! You lazy boy!' It turned out it's the beeping sound from the alarm and Andy's mom was waking up Andy.

Winter break was over. Kimberly met Andy again. They started with an awkward greeting until Kimberly said 'I had a weird dream. I travelled back in time and tasted the first ice−cream in old China.' 'Are you serious?' Andy questioned.

Did they travel back in time? Did they find out the first ice−cream hundred years ago? Well, only Kimberly and Andy know.

New Tales of China's Inventions

CUHK FAA Thomas Cheung Secondary School, Lau, Yan Lam – 15

Over 5000 years of history and 83 dynasties, China has evolved from a country with nothing to one with ad

vanced technology. Have you ever wondered, what will come next in our motherland?

I'm Lauren, a girl who is really addicted to Chinese history and technology. I usually sit in the corner of my classroom and read books during recesses. A majority of my classmates call me 'a nerd'. Although they frequently make fun of me, it doesn't bother me much. Well, all of the books that I read told me that China invented paper, which is really one of the most useful inventions even in the modern world. But is there more?

"Ding Dong" the school bell rang. The sun went back to bed and today's school–time came to an end. Finally, I could get out of this prison. As I walked past every class, I suddenly heard a voice from the store room. "Hi, Lauren! Come here.", said the voice from the back of the door. "I won't hurt you, just come in…" It's kind of a whisper, so I couldn't hear it clearly. But I wasn't that stupid. My mom told me not to listen to what strangers say ever since I was a kid, so why would I trust the voice? "Maybe that's a weirdo who is trying to scare me or wants to hurt me?" Uhhh…still, with my curiosity, I went inside to the room.

Inside the store room, it was as dark as sesame. I turned on the torch mode of my phone to see what's inside. There's a table, and on the table, there's a letter. I opened the letter and it said "Say 'China comes to a new page' three times". Not knowing why, I followed the instructions and said it three times. And suddenly a red fluffy Panda thing came out from nowhere, scaring my soul out of me. "Hi! I'm Hungry!" It's strange enough to see a panda appear unexpectedly, but more than that was that he could talk! "Woah, what are you? How do you get in here? And I don't care if you are hungry or not." I replied. "I'm from 2060 in China! In the future, we have lots of technology. One of them is to teleport anywhere that I want! Also, my name is Hungry!" That red panda talked again. "Am I dreaming?" It's not real as China's technology is developing rather slowly these days. It's impossible to have teleporting technology just after a few decades.

"Hey! I know what you're thinking. You don't believe me, right Lauren?" He could even read my mind and know my name. It's really creepy to me. As a person who is obsessed with China's technology, no matter how illogical this was, I wanted to know more about the future inventions. "Tell me more, Hungry." I said. "Follow me." Hungry gave its hand to me. I held it. I started feeling dizzy and closed my eyes.

When I opened my eyes, I saw videos of the past Chinese wars all over the place, and I was on a… chariot? "Yes you're right. You're now on a chariot from ancient China. This is a Chinese cultural relic. So, other than a regular spaceship, we transformed the chariot into a time machine!" There were a bunch of controllers in front of me and Hungry. "We are traveling through time now, like a shuttle bus. If we set the year which we want to go to, the machine will bring us there." When it was saying that, it pulled one of the controllers labeled "Time Travelling". Just a second later, in front of me w e r e tall buildings which are made of glasses. I could see what's happening inside the whole building. " Wait, are those birds? " No, those w e re cars flying around in the sky. Also,wherever I went, there were robots which mainly attended to their human owners. Nevertheless, the robots looked like they were out of batteries. "Welcome to the year 2060 of China!", shouted Hungry.

Hungry brought me to a palace where it was full of mini robots. All of them were lying on the floor. “Who did you bring? Hungry.” A woman's voice appeared. “Miss Audrey, this is Lauren, someone you may want to meet.” Hungry bowed at her while saying that. I was confused, “Want to meet me? Is this a trap? “I sense it. You’re the one!” That woman had ants in her pants. “Girl, I’m glad you’re here. We need your help immediately.” The woman continued, “In this era, humans are useless. Everything is done by the robots. We don’t have natural ingredients for cooking. All of the food materials are made by robots. The main issue is that all of our robots are running out of battery, even though we change the batteries every day. We don’t have much food left and this may lead to an outbreak of famine and some people might not survive. I think you have the ability to fix this problem.” “This is awesome! It is my chance to invent a new invention to help them solve this problem! But can I do it? Will I destroy it?” “Calm down, Lauren. Just trust yourself.” Miss Audrey put her arm over my shoulder, trying to comfort me.

I got out of the palace and started thinking about what I could do with the issue. I went to check one of the robots. It looked normal from the outside. Yet, it ha d burning batteries.

Suddenly, an idea popped up in my mind. “There is air around us… Oh, what if I turn the robots into ones that can be fuelled by air? Like with solar energy, batteries are not needed. Hence, we can avoid the problem of insufficient energy supply to the robots. I told Miss Audrey about my plan and began to build the “Air to Energy Machine”. I first made a generator that would put inside a robot which absorbs the air. And after a while, the generator would move anticlockwise, then the generator would produce energy and it’s done! We could have an “Air to Energy Machine”! This was not the end, I still had to think of a solution about the air problem. The generator might cause a lack of air. Consequently, I invented artificial flowers and trees which could produc air. This could create a recycle with the robots. After finishing my invention, I waited for the result.

A while later, Miss Audrey came out from the palace and met up with me at the robot factory. “Are you ready to see if your solution works?” she said. I nodded confidently. She pushed the “Make” button. The whole factory started working. Our workers first removed the batteries from the robots and put the generator inside them. At the same time, some people worked on planting artificial trees and flowers. When the robots came out one by one, they began to gain energy and the plants kept on producing air. Seeing every step run smoothly makes me feel satisfied. To everyone’s amazement, my invention worked perfectly!

“Oh gosh! Thank you for saving us from danger, Lauren! I really appreciate that!” Miss Audrey was grateful about what I’d done and wanted to give me a present. “Can I have a generator as a souvenir and an unrealistic memory?” I asked shyly. “Of course! Here you go.” She handed me the generator and brought me back to the palace. “ I think you should go back to your original year, I’ll miss you , Lauren.” She said with a face full of sadness. “Lauren, I’ll see you soon right?” Hungry looked at me with hope. “My name Hungry has a meaning. Hungry means desire. I'm hungry about what happened in the past, how to solve problems in the present and what the future looks like. I hope you can take my words.” I didn’t know whether I could see them again, but I wouldn’t forget Hungry’s words and this memorable experience of rescuing the year 2060 of China.

Hungry held my hand again, and I closed my eyes. I became dizzy, and the last thing I remember is the flashbacks of every famous Chinese scientist's stories. “Ding Dong Ding Dong” I’m back to 2023? I’m even at school! Maybe it was because I slept so I made that dream, so it’s just my imagination right? “Good afternoon class, today I’d like to talk about the future technology of China. What do you think China will invent in the future?” This reminded me of Hungry and Miss Audrey. I bravely raised my hand and stood up, “They might have the technology of teleporting everywhere and time traveling. Or maybe they will have lots of creations using Artificial Intelligence, flying cars, and so on!” Every action has a consequence. My classmates teased me because of my speech. This was in my expectation, but still made me feel blue. I

accidentally dropped something on the floor. When I picked it up, I saw that it was the generator! That means everything that I remember is real!

Well, things might feel unrealistic and impossible, but when we follow our dreams, everything will come true!

New Tales of China's Inventions

CUHK FAA Thomas Cheung Secondary School, Liu, Yu – 14

"Ladies and gentlemen, this is the captain's announcement. We will soon arrive at Hong Kong International Airport. The local time is 6:15 in the afternoon. I hope you'll have a pleasant journey in Hong Kong." the captain said. When the announcement was made, Alice felt as excited as a monkey as it meant they had arrived at Pearl of the Orient – Hong Kong.

As they departed the airport, a Driverless Taxi was already waiting for them. "Mum, do you see that there is no driver in our car? It's what I only find in science fiction!" Alice was amazed. "Yeah, because this is Hong Kong. Let's go to a shopping center in Central by this taxi." Mum replied.

After a while, they arrived at a shopping center in Central that was so colossal that they had never seen before. "Alice, do you hear some noises from your stomach? You are craving food, aren't you?" Dad asked Alice. "Of course! I'm starving! I could eat a horse. I see plenty of mouth–watering and scrumptious food like Wonton Noodles, Stir–fried Beef Noodles, Claypot Rice with preserved sausages, and many more. Don't waste time here. Let's hit the road and get ready for dinner." Alice said. Meanwhile, Alice's mum recommended a restaurant which was known for its Claypot Rice. "I love this traditional Guangdong dish!" Dad echoed.

In the restaurant, several AI waiters were in service. Some of them were cleaning the floor and tables. Some of them were cooking the dish as efficiently as humans, or even better than humans. Their appearance is manlike as they had eyes, noses, ears, and mouths. Even their actions are similar to humans and they knew what to do next without supervision. They were self–conscious. Alice was just confused about AI waiters in the restaurant. "Huh, are they reliable?" Alice doubted. Then she wanted to test them. She stood in front of an AI waiter and strongly slapped its face. The AI waiter sulked and felt displeased. It loudly shouted to Alice "Hey kid, stop doing your silly action! You don't need to slap my face. Just tell me you are confused about me." All of a sudden, the AI waiter gave Alice a hard slap on her face. "Dad, he slapped me! I need to complain about this toxic AI waiter to the manager." Alice started to wail. "What an embarrassment! You are such a crybaby. Stop crying! If you didn't slap its face, it wouldn't have slapped you back. Ok. It's time to eat our savory Claypot Rice." Dad was annoyed.

The Claypot Rice was made by AI and Alice's family felt a bit hesitant. But when they took the first bite of the Claypot Rice, it shocked them. Alice thought "If I can make a machine just like these AI waiters, it will be popular in the industry."

"Mum and Dad, the Claypot Rice is finger–licking good! Can I have some more?" Alice begged. "Oh, I'm stuffed. You may eat my Claypot Rice." Dad passed her his pot. Simultaneously, Mum went to pay the bill. "Madam, $999 please. Cash or credit card, which one would you prefer?" When Mum heard what the cashier said, she was stunned "That's unbelievable! Are you serious? No way! Our meal costs $999?" "Bang!" She punched the table. Concurrently, Alice and her dad heard Mum's complaint. They ran to see what happened. When they saw the total price of their meal, they were shocked, "Oh my goodness! It's almost $1000. Is there any misunderstanding about the bill?" Dad felt angry and confused. At this time, an AI manager came over to calm the couple. "Good evening, my dear customers. Three Claypot Rice cost $999. That's correct. Do you have any problems with it?" "This is a robbery! How can you charge us that much?" Dad questioned. Alice reacted with rage and put her pocket money onto the bill plate hard. "We'll never come here again!" Alice grabbed her parents' hands and ran out of the store quickly towards their hotel.

“Mum, why is the claypot rice so expensive?’ ‘Shut up, I don’t want to hear the words Claypot Rice again!’ Mum went to her bedroom and violently closed the door. ‘Bang!’

Alice thought about her invention for the rest of the day. She believed “A good quality meal is not difficult for us. Unfortunately, it costs an arm and a leg for us. It is too expensive and unreasonable. How about creating a powerful cooking machine which is convenient and fast. We can cook any dish at any time anywhere. It sounds interesting!’ Alice left her bed and was ready to prepare the material for her invention.

Alice first got medium−size cardboard from the storeroom. She wanted to make a creation of a lunch box size. Afterwards, she was about to use the tablet which was the graduation gift from her dad. She put the tablet on the cardboard so the customers could choose their favorite meal more easily. After that, customers had to enter a 16−digit password in order to make it work. Creating a safe password was a difficult process for Alice. Therefore, she sought help from her dad, “Hey Dad, can you help me create a password? I know it is not hard for you.” “Well, give me 15−20 minutes. I need to finish my work first.” Alice waited and took a good rest. Nevertheless, nobody knew a disaster was coming soon.

Coming out from the bedroom, Mum looked calmer. Then she saw a lot of rubbish on the floor. Then she started to clean the room. She saw the cardboard on the table and she was confused about the cardboard, “Huh, why did somebody leave the cardboard here?” Consequently, she threw it to the trash trolley outside their room.

“Ah! Where is my cardboard?” Alice screamed. Her mum and dad went to see what happened. Mum was shocked and said, “Oh, you mean the cardboard on the desk? I thought it was rubbish so I threw it into the trash trolley.” “Oh my gosh, what should I do now?” Alice felt panicky. Her mum and dad comforted her and promised her to do it again together.

In the next few days, Alice's invention progressed well. Alice felt on top of the world as she needed only one more step to finish it using a 4D printer. She spent hours to see what was missing in the invention and how she could make it better. Alice told her parents, “If the Powerful Cooking Machine is successful, I'm sure people can afford it and make their life easier!” “Yup, you’re right. Just wait for a few days and we’ll see your success.’ Dad was on cloud nine and when saying that. Unfortunately, another misfortune befell her.

One night, while Alice and her mum were enjoying shopping, Dad was so tired that he rushed back to the hotel for a rest. While Dad was sleeping, the door was opened. An uninvited guest slipped into the room and stole Alice’s box of brand−new invention. He dashed and escaped, leaving the sleepy Dad in the room.

An hour later, Alice returned with her mum. “Oh dear, the door is open!’ Mum said. “Dad, where is my box? Did you throw it into the trash trolley?” Alice had ants in her pants when she saw the scene. Dad was suddenly aware that he didn’t close the door properly. He shouted in the room, “Thief! Thief! Thief!” They then called the police quickly for help.

By the time they arrived at the police station, the police had already caught the thief and gave back the box to Alice’s family. “Thank you so much! It is significant to us.” Alice’s family appreciated that. The police told them that the invention was outstanding. The tech−savvy police informed them of one thing “Here is a ticket for you guys to go to the Exhibition Center to check if the invention is successful. Good luck!” The family nodded and went back to their hotel.

At the hotel, Alice tested her machine and it was a flawless invention. She couldn't wait to share her joy with her parents. "Let's try it together. May I have three portions of fried rice noodles, please?" After the machine received instructions, it finished cooking in 5 seconds. When it's done, they could hear the voice of Peng Zu, the founder of Chinese cooking, saying "Your claypot rice is ready. Enjoy!" Mum was shocked and said 'Wow! What a groundbreaking invention! I think we should go to the Exhibition Center to show off our accomplished masterpiece.'

In the Exhibition Centre, Alice's family found a place to showcase their invention. Not long, a man came around their place and looked at their invention curiously. "Hey man, I want to invest $1,000,000 in your machine." "Mr. Ryan Hui, the richest man in Hong Kong, wants to invest on Alice's invention!" Everyone heard the announcement. Alice's parents were as excited as their kid. The Powerful Cooking Machine was a great success.

After a month, the Powerful Cooking Machine was sold like hotcakes all over the world. While Alice and her family were enjoying the fortune they made, they established a foundation in China which encouraged young inventors to realize their dreams.

New Tales of China's Inventions

CUHK FAA Thomas Cheung Secondary School, Ramirez, Dea – 12

Have you ever wondered about the inventors and origins of the things we use today? For example, the basic products we need on a daily basis, ranging from paper items such as paper money to food and beverages such as noodles, ketchup or tea? Well, all of these inventions were created in China a long time ago! The surprising fact is that we use these on a daily basis and we probably don't even know that they were made in China. And these inventions are not the only amazing things that the Chinese invented!

In Ancient China, the Chinese have created so many useful things for the present. Did you know that they were the first to invent paper? Paper was first made in Lei Yang, China by a Chinese court official. It was said that he mixed mulberry bark, hemp and rags with water, mashed it into pulp, pressed out the liquid and hung the thin mat to dry in the sun! The invention he made soon evolved into a better version of it. And that's how paper was made! This invention is extremely useful since we usually use paper for work, school or anything. And the paper money that you use to pay for your groceries, bills, food and other basic needs was first developed in China during the Song dynasty! In fact, they used this currency for a long time before it found its way to other countries! Paper money provides you a simple way to buy what you need, and it's easy to carry around so it's a genius invention.

They also have made noodles, a common nourishment for Chinese people. It is still really popular even though it was invented around 4,000 years ago! It has become very popular around the world and all of the other countries have different versions of their noodles now! The Chinese also produced tea, which a lot of people like, especially old people since tea is really healthy and relaxing! Tea can boost your immune system, fight off inflammation and even lower the chance of having cancer and heart diseases. Not only the old people drink tea though! It's for everyone! As a matter of fact, tea has become really popular in Britain since around the 1680s.

All of these past inventions are exceedingly useful for our daily lives! Will China make more great inventions in the future?

A Student's Quest for Innovation and Contribution

ELCHK Lutheran Academy, Dihua Ye – 12

James is an ordinary student in Secondary 1. One day, in Chinese history class, his teacher teaches about the 4 inventions of China. James got excited when the teacher talked about paper.

His teacher asked," Does anyone know why paper is important?"

James replied," It allows people to record history more easily!"

His teacher replied," Correct, during the Han dynasty, it is unclear who invented paper making but it is known that Cai Lun is the person who innovated paper making, allowing people in the past to record events easier, it is a significant contribution to human and society development."

James had a thought, since Cai Lun was able to contribute to human and social development by innovating paper-making, why can't I innovate something and contribute to society?

That day, during recess, James suddenly had an idea to help find a solution to common, annoying issues. He decided to take inspiration from another great invention of China, a compass that indicates the direction. For James' innovation, he wants to put a radio frequency identification which is used in airports to track and sort bags on all objects that might be lost, and then users can use a special cheap device to track it.

However, the challenge is, since he is only a Secondary school student, where can he access the resources?

Luckily his school had Design teachers who knew to code so they supported him, he also made a brave decision to email Hong Kong International Airport as well as some airports in the Greater Bay area including Macau International Airport, Shenzhen Bao'an International Airport, Guangzhou Baiyun International Airport for support.

Finally, after two months of hard work, he was able to produce plenty of radio frequency identification and special cheap devices in school, then it was used frequently in school.

New Tales of Chopsticks

G.T. (Ellen Yeung) College, Chiu, Long Tin Isaak – 14

It was an average winter day. The sky was cloudless, and the sun was shining brightly as usual. The gentle pattering sounds of the river shore, accompanied by the crisp and charming chirps of the migratory birds and the soft rustling of leaves, formed a wonderful piece of symphony. While the peasants of the country were enjoying this masterpiece, the steelworkers of the river alleviation project were ignoring the concord.

After days and days of excavation, the canals grew long and slithered across the plains, eventually reaching the vast ocean. Despite the fact that the project was massive, there was still a shortage of workers. Yu, the leader of the operation, was also obliged to participate in the construction. He was the son of Gun, the former manager who had been lazy and incompetent. Gun had wasted time and resources, and failed to prevent the flood that devastated the land. He was dismissed and executed by the emperor, who entrusted Yu with the task of completing the project. Yu was nothing like his father; he was diligent and ingenious. He always finished his section ahead of schedule and supervised the work of others.

“How’s the progress?” Yu asked his subordinates.

“We’re only a few miles away from the ending point. We're ahead of schedule and we should be able to wrap up soon," they reported.

"That's excellent news. You've all done a fantastic job. Let's take a break and have some lunch, shall we?" Yu proposed. His team nodded eagerly and borrowed some cooking utensils from the nearby villagers. They prepared a simple but hearty meal of rice and vegetables in a pot over a fire.

They had been working hard for months, digging and excavating under the scorching sun. They felt exhausted and hungry, but also hopeful and proud. They gazed at the sky, thinking of their loved ones and their aspirations. They couldn't wait to finish the project and return home. Zhu, one of Yu's assistants, was especially impatient. He reached for the pot as soon as the food was ready, but it was so exceedingly hot that he withdrew his hand right away.

“More haste, less speed.” Yu cautioned. He took out his knife and cut off a branch from a nearby tree. He sharpened one end of the branch and used it to skewer a piece of lettuce from the pot. However, the lettuce slipped off the branch and fell back into the boiling water. Yu frowned and cut off another branch. He held one branch between his thumb and index finger, and the other between his ring finger and pinkie. He used his index and middle finger to manipulate the first branch up and down. He successfully picked up the lettuce with his improvised chopsticks and placed it on Zhu's plate. His team watched him in awe and followed his example.

After a brief rest, they returned to work as usual. Several weeks later, they finished the excavation, and the new canal was finally in use. Yu was summoned to the imperial court to report on the success of the project. Shun praised him for his diligence and loyalty. As Yu was about to leave, one of his subordinates told Shun about an incident that happened during the construction. He said that Yu had cut off some branches from a tree and used them as utensils to eat his food, without wasting time to go back to his home. Shun was impressed by Yu's dedication and decided to abdicate in his favor, marking the end of Shun's dynasty. To commemorate this incident, it was decided that those sticks would be named chopsticks since Yu chopped them off from a tree. Interestingly, it was sarcastically named *Zhu* in Chinese after Zhu.

The news of Shun's abdication and Yu's ascension spread quickly among the people. Yu was eager to share his wisdom and skills with his subjects, and one of the first things he did as the new emperor was to teach them how to use chopsticks. He believed that chopsticks were not only a convenient tool for eating, but also a symbol of harmony and balance. Soon, chopsticks became popular and widespread, and people started to make them in various shapes and sizes. However, Yu noticed that some chopsticks were too long or too short, too thick or too thin, too round or too square. He worried that these chopsticks would cause confusion and disorder, and decided to standardize them. He decreed that chopsticks should have a round lower end, representing the sky, and a square upper end, representing the earth. He also decreed that chopsticks should be seven inches and six long, reminding people to restrain their emotions and desires. With these rules, chopsticks became more uniform and elegant, and their use became a tradition that lasted for generations.

Decades later, Yu was about to find his successor, following the example of Shun. He selected several candidates from among his subjects. He did not wish for his son to inherit the throne, knowing how hard and demanding the role of emperor was. However, his son Qi was nominated by the ministers, and thus Qi joined the list of candidates. To test the virtuosity of the candidates, he ordered carpenters to make three-foot-long chopsticks. He asked the candidates to use these chopsticks to eat as part of the exam.

Most of the candidates tried to feed themselves with the chopsticks. However, the chopsticks were too long, and they could not grasp the food. They failed repeatedly and became frustrated. Some of the candidates gave up and left the palace in shame. Like father, like son, Qi inherited his father's wisdom and did not lose hope. He came up with a brilliant idea. He fed another candidate with chopsticks and passed the exam by demonstrating his kindness and cooperation. Yu was surprised and pleased by Qi's solution, and decided to appoint him as his heir.

By the time Qi became the emperor, he treasured the first pair of chopsticks until they vanished out of sight. Up until Qi's son ascended to the throne, the requirements for the heirs to follow stayed the same. Yu passed away not long after Qi succeeded. This puts an end to the legend of chopsticks, as they are still often used for meals today.

The Compass of HuangDi

G.T. (Ellen Yeung) College, Poon, Marcus – 14

Tom was a smart athletic history lover living in Tomtown, a small town in Guangzhou. One day after an tedious day of school, Tom found a strange box lined with patterns of golden dragons under his bed. Inside, a strange compass lay on the bottom of the box . It had a delicate , ancient structure but instead of arrows pointing to the four directions, a single metal head turning around unstably. Aside from the weird compass, a crippled piece of paper was also in the box. Glancing at the piece of paper, Tom found out that it was apparently a letter from the first ruler of China – HuangDi. The compass was actually an ancient device created by HuangDi which led to the location of his grave. ' Beware, those who seek my grave will not come out alive.' Warning words lay on the bottom of the letter. As a adventurous university student and a mega history lover , Tom's determination to find HuangDi's grave is unresistable.

The next day, along with a plane ticket to Beijing, Tom stood in the Guangzhou national airport .After a wholesome night of investigating the compass,Tom was certain that the grave lies somewhere in Beijing. As the plane took off , wings inclined like an eagle, excitement and nervousness filled his mind. He would have wealth, fame and power if he'd found HuangDi's grave! But there was a even higher chance of him dying before recovering it . With his mind filled with thoughts, Tom fell into a deep sleep.

The plane skidded to a stop at the Beijing national airport as Tom awoke. Looking at the spacious buildings and the warm breeze of the summer wind, refreshment and energy flowed through Tom's veins. Tom felt a faint tingle in his pocket and took the compass out. For the first time, the compass had stopped turning. No matter how Tom adjusted the position of the compass, it kept pointing towards the same direction. Following the direction that the compass was pointing, Tom rented a bike and flew passed skyscrapers of all sorts ,multiple towns and bright trees shining under the radiant sun. As Tom neared the famous great wall of China, the compass began to spin again, this time pointing downwards. Hopping off his bike, Tom sprinted towards the Great Wall. Walking around the wall in circles, Tom came to a stop as the compass glowed red, it's arrow without movement once more. On the concrete ground was a large gold mark with a symbol 'x' . Suddenly, the compass begin to change shape, twisting into a metal drill opon touching the 'x' . There seemed to be some kind of special mechanism in the compass.

Tom glanced in wonder as a large tunnel took shape, leading under the Great Wall. Making sure no one was in sight, Tom quickly scurried down the tunnel.The tunnel was long and never ending, with lamps lined in a linear direction, stretching along the never ending tunnel.Noticing Tom, the compass , which was currently a metal drill, shifted into a metal vehicle. Unlike cars from the 21th century, this car was constructed simply and had a large metal rod , looking like 'cars' used in battle in ancient China. Treading carefully on the car, Tom felt a humming sound as the rod on the car began to turn. The gears of the car turned correspondingly to the rod's movement, propelling the car foward. The car rolled down bumpy mud roads and sped though twisting turns , forcing Tom to grab the rod for dear life as he passed through walls decorated with amazing drawings. One was filled with ancient writing , another was with pictures of people holding plants and herbs and another was a picture of the stars of the starry night sky. Tom tried to save these views in his mind .

The car came to a stop as it neared the end of the tunnel. Instead of seeing a dirt wall, a gigantic metal door lay on the end with a golden button next to the door. Tom carefully hit the button. The door opened with a bang, the metal crushing the floor. Tom would've been crushed if he had not escaped in time. Instead of seeing HuangDi's grave, a fearsome sight loomed over Tom: a hovering large figure with golden bright scales lining on its long body, it's giant golden tail swinging around. Legs the size of a table hanged on its belly , looking small compared to it's large body. Looking up at the creatures head , with staring gold eyes , horns that glittered like stars , breathing fluffs of clouds, excitement filled Tom, the creature was a dragon! ' Tom, the chosen one to recover HuangDi's grave, I'm the guardian of the grave, and you have to beat me to move forward.' The dragon spoke. Determined to find the remains of HuangDi, Tom stood in front of the dragon. He knew that the only way to win was by intelligence.

Tom jumped away as the dragon's claws stretched foward, barely having time to react as the dragon's tail swung behind his back. As Tom dodged more and more of the dragon's attacks, the dragon's attacks became more and more aggressive. Noticing a open spot to attack, Tom hit the dragon's hide with his fist. Howling with pain , the dragon

grabbed Tom and threw him to the floor. As Tom was on the verge of being killed by the dragon, the dragon's claws hurtling towards his chest, the compass changed shape again, shifting into a sharp silver sword. The dragon plunged into the tip of the sword without time to stop . The dragon collapsed into the floor , it's golden scales shimmering no more.

Running past the dragon, Tom rushed directly to the grey grave behind the metal door.
Opening the lid, instead of seeing HuangDi's body, a single letter remained Inside.

' Congratulations for finding my grave with the help of my invention, the invincible compass . My body has been removed long ago, and the test was to see if someone was worthy enough to use the compass, preventing it to fall in the wrong hands . '

Looking at the letter in unbelief, Tom was utterly speechless. As Tom headed back to the Beijing airport, he thought of the wonderful adventure he'd had. With his new compass, Tom was sure that his life would change forever.

Follow your heart

Good Hope School, Fung, Yee S Yee – 12

"Everything switches. Everything turns around. End up in stitches. Hide away underground…" In the bustling streets of Modern Hong Kong, there lived a 13–year old girl named Mei listening to a song describing her own life. Everything changed overnight and everything got far off track. Her parents were getting divorced, her beloved grandpa died, her friends betrayed her and her grades slipped down dramatically. Her life was like living in the mist at that time navigating the complexities of adolescence. She doubted herself. She has lost all of her precious things. She yearned to unearth her true identity and find her place in this tattered, ugly society.

One day, Mei's emotions came to a break down. She burst into tears and ran out of school. She ran into a hidden antique shop in a dusty corner of a narrow alleyway. Mei stumbled upon a long lost, forgotten ancient book. Its pages revealed tales of legendary Chinese invention that once graced the land of Hong Kong. Flipping pages and pages, a fire of inspiration was sparkling within her, urging her to release her innovation and turn it into something special. Determined to find her own unique invention, one that would capture the spirit of the city and guide her to find her own path. Mei immersed herself into study of art, science and literature.

Inspired by the city's fusion of tradition and innovation, Mei envisioned a remarkable device called the Lumino–Graffiti. The Lumino–Graffiti was a wearable gadget that allow individuals to paint dazzling light patterns on the walls of buildings. With a flick of a switch, the device transformed the city into a glowing painting. With the Lumino–Graffiti, she ventured herself into the vibrant streets at night, away from all her problems and got a quiet, relaxing moment of herself. With every strokes of light painting she drew, she created a breath–catching picture of colours dancing across the dark urban landscapes, bringing light to every places it went. Each stroke represented the lost identity of her, at the same time telling the world that she was ready to leave the past life behind her and embarked on a new journey.

News of Mei's Lumino–Graffiti went viral on the internet, capturing the attention of artists, dreamers and those who were seeking to express themselves. The Lumino–Graffiti became the symbol of creativity and unity. As a recognition of Mei's wisdom, the government invited Mei to showcase her brilliant invention during a grand exhibition celebrating Hong Kong's dynamic spirit. There, surrounded by towering buildings, Mei painted a breathtaking light display that encouraged dreamers to follow their dreams and people to find their paths in life.

Mei's Lumino–Graffiti inspired a new wave of art into the society, people began to paint on walls at night, turning the black and white city into an aesthetic, colourful city. Walls once adorned with plain concrete now became living pictures that told stories to millions of people. As the invention of Mei's soared, Mei discovered that her journey of self –discovery not only let her find her true identity in this society but also empowered others to explore their true self in the society. Through art and light, Mei turned her desolate and bereft past into a fruitful and rewarding future. Mei found her precious inside herself instead of wandering in the mist.

And so, Mei's name became forever engraved in the heart of every dreamers. Till now, Mei's invention is still widely used all over the world and will always be a symbol of self–discovery and dreams.

Inventions

Han Academy, Cheung, Chun Yat – 11

A school trip, just what Roy needed to relax and have a good time. However this trip was far from normal as Roy will embark on a new adventure.

Roy had already planned what he will do on the trip, and is just to relax. But his plans changed when he woke up from his tent and saw a man with glasses and white hair appeared out of the abyss. He was tall and thin with small eyes, he looked like a guardian of some sort in fairy tales.

"Who the heck are you?!" Roy exclaimed, the man said nothing as he opened a portal with his bare hands. "I'm in a dream……" Roy said to himself, after saying that he kept pinching and slapping himself thinking he might wake up but to his avail nothing happened, He was still staring at the man, his eyes were looking straight back at him, Roy was stunned for a moment. In a blink of an eye, the man disappeared into the portal.

Roy was bewildered at the sight of this and was trying to process what had happened three minutes ago! The portal was still open and he could go in, but Roy was hesitant. " If I go in it's a death wish!" Roy thought aloud. "Do I go in….. Or no…….Maybe……wait but this is crazy…..I don't know!!!" He was going insane, never had he had to make this outrageous decision. Roy closed his eyes and took a deep breath, he was sweating as if he was a rat seeing a cat. With that he ran into the portal.

Roy felt like he was glitching in a game of some sorts or being ripped apart and rearranged when he was in the portal, it felt weird. He was screaming like a monkey, and was frightened. Roy was also blind for quite a while, then he was turning onto spaghetti, he felt like gas. "I'm gonna die!!!" Roy screamed. He screeched in horror as the purple colored tunnel went faster and faster, then it came to an end. Roy was relieved, but something caught his attention, it was another portal. "Oh not again!" Roy complained, he turned around and tried to 'swim' back but he can't move backwards he can only move forwards. "Oh for god sake!" Roy said he 'swam' into the portal.

"Ahhhhhh!" Roy screamed as he fell onto the ground. "What is this place?" Roy said. He walked around and tried talking to the residents but he couldn't for some reason, it was like they couldn't hear him. After that Roy got physical and touched the man but it went right through his body. " This ain't good." Roy said. Suddenly he heard a voice "Follow the arrows…." The voice was slow and stable. The ground started appearing green arrows and it led to a place not so far away, with no other choice, Roy followed it.

Then it led to a strange place where there was a man mixing some weird stuff together. "I will achieve my goal!" The man said. " I will make a drug that can make a human live forever!" That hit him as Roy realized who this man was: He is Wei Boyang! The man who created gunpowder, this means Roy is in 9th century CE. "How the heck can I time travel!?" Roy said. He looked at the man as he added elemental sulphur, charcoal, and saltpetre. Roy might be left out but it doesn't mean he's dumb. "BOOM!" A loud sound was heard, Roy was amazed at this extraordinary experience, he had always loved history, that's why students call him a geek.

Then in a blink of an eye, a portal appeared on the ground just beneath Roy. " Here we go!" Roy said with a fake smile, the weird and crazy stuff started happening again and this time Roy wasn't struggling that much anymore.

"POOF!" He fell onto the ground and sighed, "How long do I need to do this?" He stood up and looked around, arrows were again leading his way. Roy was of course not very pleased that he needs to continue this adventure while he is exhausted but still he never stopped because this is the only thing he could do for the moment. He followed the arrows and was quite curious of what's going to happen, then he saw none—other than Lu Ban from 3500 years ago crafting the umbrella outside of his house. Roy was baffled at how Lu Ban does every step so carefully, and tries not to make mistakes. Bamboo was a thing Roy kept seeing Lu Ban use, a very hard and unbreakable ingredient.

Just as Roy wanted to see Lu Ban using the umbrella, a hole above Roy appeared and sucked him into it. "I swear this is the worst transportation in the world!" Roy complained while glitching.

Drooping onto the ground, Roy got up and stiffened his clothes. The arrows appeared on the ground and Roy followed it as always. This time it led to a man who was calculating math. "It's Chu Pan!" Roy Thought. " This means I'm in the 2nd Century BC!" Roy watched in amazement as the man created the first ever abacus.

The portal appeared again and Roy stepped into it and finally arrived back at the camp. " I'll always remember this day." Roy said. "The day I understand the importance of history."

China's Timeless Love

Han Academy, Lau, Wing Pan – 12

Dear Rose,

I'm sorry.

I left you behind, I saw you kneeling over my grave, bringing my favorite lilies, tears running down your puffy red eyes. I'm sorry.

I was glad you still remembered the mission I gave you. I watched as you examined the piece of paper, "My dearest granddaughter. You've been chosen to do an unique yet important mission. There are nine pieces of puzzles around China. The key…" I held my breath as you held the tiny, golden key in your tender hands with huge curiosity. "Gently tap the key twice…" I heard your voice tail away as a bright glow surrounded you…

"Woah!" I chuckled as you exclaimed. It was December 20, 2004, in front of you was a mid-age woman with a pale face and deep brown eyes, she was studying over a plan of the future train railroad. You've made it to Qingdao.

But of course you don't know that yet. "Excuse me, Ma'am. Could you tell me where I am?"

"Oh my! How is there a child here?!" Liang Jianying screamed.

You looked around, wondering what to tell her. You decided on the truth.

"I'm quite sorry, miss. I mean not to frighten you… I'm from Hangzhou, my name's Rose." You told Jianying. "I'm not sure how I got here…But I've been sent on a mission, to collect nine pieces of puzzles around China, perhaps…you've got a clue for me?"

Jianying came up to you and squatted down beside you, I saw you went very white as Jianying reached out a finger to touch your face.

"Oh child, I have no clue, I'm just an ordinary train designer! Come dear, and I shall show you around Wuguang's railroad factory!"

You walked around the train factory in something like a daze. "And this one is the one I'm designing." Jianying pointed at the plans she was studying. "Ah, this invention will help people travel all around China! It will be much cheaper than those expensive planes!"

You took the train designs with two hands as Jianying passed them to you. "Oops! Dropped this!" a golden object made a "cling" as it dropped to the flour, "Woah…What's this? It looks just like…a puzzle!"

You gently touched the puzzle and held it up, it showed an eye with half a nose on it, you tucked it up in your pocket. You told the paper out and read, " If you'd found a puzzle, gently tap the key twice, you will move to your next destination."

"Ma'am….I'm terribly sorry, but I'm afraid I have to go now."

"Oh no matter dear! I will miss you though! "You taped the key twice, the same glow surrounded you and you fated into the glow.

"Sir! A new batch of paper!"

"Place it over there!"

"Quicken our pace everyone!"

A swoosh and a scream. You appeared out of nowhere to an open land space with machines and workers. It was 105 AD. Your knees trembled from the trip as you looked up, a man with dark eyebrows, a pointed face and a light blue uniform was staring over you, he was holding a batch of rough-made papers. You recognised this man instantly from your history textbook.

“You are Cai Lun!” You said eagerly.

The chatter, the bustle, the noise died suddenly.

The man dropped the papers.

“How do you know my name?” CaiLun does not speak very fluent English.

(You told Cai Lun your story.)

“Do you think I believe you, child? “said Cai Lun gruffly.

“But it’s true!” You said hotly.

“She’s a witch! Someone come and help!” cried Cai Lun.

Serval workers came hurling over to you. You had no choice but to run across the land field, causing a variety of tools and materials such as tree barks, old rags, and fishing nets falling all over their pile.

Cai Lun gnashed his teeth in fury.

As you knocked out the batch of paper that sat quietly on the floor, something made a “cling” as it fell onto the floor.

You made a dash for it, and taped the key twice just in time as the workers made a jump for you.

You blinked hard. You tried to remember what had happened. “The puzzle!” you cried. You felt something hard in your hand, it was the second puzzle.

You began to realize the puzzle was a photo of you. Well, half of it was you, the other person… Well, you just need to figure it out yourself.

You stood in front of who seemed to be an amiable old man and woman, who were both wide−eyed. You got gingerly to your feet and walked towards the couple.

“I am Rose from 1700 years in the future, I came for a mission.”

Lu Ban exchanged a glance with his wife. “ 1700 years in the future…” You timidly nodded.

“Will they use “the moveable house” in the future?” You were started by Lu Ban’s answer, as he was different from Liang Jianying’s shock and Cai Lun’s accusation.

“Well, of course! But… we call it the umbrella nowadays, and it is made with stretchable fabric.”

“The umbrella….. Yes…you see, my wife made the umbrella using bamboo sticks and animal skin.”

“Mr. Lu? I would like to ask, why did you invent the umbrella?”

Lu Ban was wearing a most peculiar expression, he was looking over at his wife when he spoke, “ Why did we invent the moveable house ....the umbrella, darling?”

Lu Ban’s wife, Yunshi, chuckled, “ Oh, Rose,” Yunshi ruffled your hair, “ The umbrella was for Lu Ban! I had never thought that people would think it is a masterpiece! Rose, you need to know that at that time there was no shelter if the sun was too big, or if there’s a storm. ” Yunshi paused to take a breath. “ Well, I just wanted my husband, who runs off to work every morning , doesn’t come home soaked in rain or have sunburn marks all over him! So I designed a portable pavilion to give Lu Ban shelter wherever he went, which in your words, an umbrella.”

A bitter wind shook the grass on the land, teardrops fell from the crying clouds. “Well just in time isn’t it!” Yunshi smiled jubilantly as she pushed open the ancient umbrella, and she motioned you and Lu Ban to hide under it.

The umbrella works surprisingly well. As you looked up to examine the structure, you saw a square− shaped object that was stuck to the top notch of the umbrella. You peeled the object gently. It was soggy and wet, but you can still see the face of an old man beaming back, me. It was the third puzzle.

You hugged Yunshi and Lu Ban. " I have to go now." you whispered.

"We'll miss you darling." Yunshi hugged back.

"Remember me." Lu Ban patted your back, " Rose, the girl from 1700 years in the future."

You tapped the key twice. You hang your jaw in shock as you figured out that you were back to the familiar graveyard with my grave.

You ran to my grave, " Papa," but you swallowed that word back, there were six puzzles and a letter I left for you laying on the ground peacefully, " How…." I chuckled, I knew that you would be lonesome for me, so I decided to give you a gift for consolation when I died.

One by one, you watched the picture spread across the ground piece by piece, and I can tell you felt a small thrill every time the shapes met and quietly snapped together. Soon, the puzzle was completed.

You stepped back to appreciate the smooth, unblemished surface of the finished puzzle. The picture showed the young you and me holding hands. Your round face, straight−black hair, and dark black eyes, and my gray−white hair, wrinkles upon my forehead. " The ones that love us never really leave us. And you can always find them… in your heart." The puzzle wrote on the bottom. You glazed at the puzzle for a few minutes, trying to preserve the image in your mind. Then, you planted a kiss on my grave, "We will always be together, grandpa."

Yes we will. Rose, please always remember to be kind, brave and true to yourself. Follow your dreams with passion and never lose hope of your future. I may not be with you in person, but my love will guide you through life. Treasure every moment of your life and know that you will always be in my heart.

Love always,

Your Grandpa

A Tile to Design

Han Academy, Niu, Zimeng – 11

"This is a very important client, if you want to keep your job, don't disappoint her!" With his boss's warning ringing in my ears, I sighed and sat down at my desk. On my desk were pages of blueprints, all beautiful, but yet none was just right, none had the vibe. The client wanted me to design a garden into Qin style. I had looked at all kinds of ancient building models, had even gone to Xianyang to see if I could get a sudden inspiration, but nothing had worked. There was just too little information about Qin architecture, and no building left that is complete. Somehow, though, I knew that the palaces would have been huge , huge and majestic, although perhaps not as elegant as the Song and Tang dynasties, they would have a grandness that nothing else could ever match: Grandness from their master, the Qin Emperor. Immersed in his daydream, I was in a haze, looking forward intently but not seeing a thing… "Chen." My boss's unusually quiet voice sounded ominous. " What, are, you, doing, sitting there and wasting my money? " He shouted, leaning in closer. " You want your job, don't you?" With that, he briskly walked away, leaving me both scared and angry.

" Uhhh." I stumbled into his room. " I shouldn't have drank so much beer." I mumbled and collapsed onto my bed, my head splitting open.

When I woke up, the first thing I noticed was that the sun was shining brightly. Though it was obvious I had slept for a long time, I felt weak and tired, like I had carried a huge boulder and ran five miles. Feeling incredibly thirsty, I reached my hand to my nightstand, but instead of my water bottle, I found a magazine about ancient civilization. Quickly finding the Qin Architecture page, I saw a picture of a semicircle tile found in the Mausoleum of the Qin Emperor that had a diameter of 52 centimeters, decorated with beautiful carvings of leaves and deers. Looking at the picture, I felt a pang of excitement and awe, but yet the pattern, so full of life, felt very cold. Then, everything went black.

When I opened his eyes, I was in a dark room lit by candles. Around me, there were around a hundred people half kneeling sitting on the floor, all in black ancient robes. At the front, there was a young boy on a huge golden throne carved with clouds and dragons. He sat arrogantly, looking down at me with disgust and disdain as if I were merely a spider coming into his house. "Zhao gao", he called. A man standing behind him stepped out and kneeled at his side, bowing his head. "Attempting to assassinate the King, fifty stakes." The boy's voice was without emotion, as if sentencing a person to death was a boring thing to do. "Wait, what?" My mind went totally blank. At first, I had thought this was a prank that my friends had pulled on him, but fifty stakes… Even joking, that went too far. With sudden wits, I thought up an answer that won't get him killed. "Please, wait a moment, your majesty! Humble servant is a small officer from the construction department. Lord Lv told me to come talk to you majesty about the structure, your majesty." The boy seemed to narrow his eyes slightly at the mention of Lord Lv, then returned to his cold expressionless face, and gestured to Manager Zhao. "Very well," said the Eunuch. " Go to his majesty's Royal Study and stay there." "Lee, show Scholar…?" "Chen, Manager Zhao." " Ahh yes. Lee, show Scholar Chen to the Royal Study."

Sitting on a mat on the floor, I got up and paced around the study, my mind whirling with thoughts. How did I come here? Why did I come here? And most importantly, how could I get back? The last thing I remembered was looking at the magazine and saw a tile fro—Wait, the tile! I started to pace excitedly, seeing a way out of this ridiculous time—travel thing, though, in the meantime, I had to focus on keeping alive. Reaching to a conclusion, I looked around and was shocked. Bookcase after bookcase, full of bamboo scrolls, on the walls, there was many beautiful calligraphy and paintings, no doubt done by the most talented and famous people around all seven kingdoms. In the middle of the room was a short table made of phoebe, and around it were hundreds of memorials. I had once read that when Qin Shi Huang became emperor, he batched around a few hundred thousands of words of memorials a day, one of the most diligent rulers in Chinese history.

"So, Chen, get it over with quickly, what do uncle want?" "Your majesty, Lord Lv wanted to ask about the design for the interior." The young King's face took on a look of annoyance. "We have hardly started. There is no need for this discussion, you are wasting my time. I have to work, it's not like I have control over anything, anyway." I looked at the youth before me, suddenly feeling a tiny bit of pity. No childhood, no dreams, no love for his whole life. I took a deep breath, then, before I could regret it, I asked, "Do you want to learn about architecture?"

At first, he had declined, even threatening to kill me. But after a lot of convincing that this was good for the kingdom, the young king sat down to begin his first class.

One thing that I found out was that the king, or Zhao Zheng, as he had told me to call him, was a really fast learner. Soon, they had moved from material and structure to design. The task I gave him today was to design a tile. “So, your majesty, what is your goal in life?” “The king looked embarrassed, but then braced himself and shouted at the top of his lungs. “Unify the six kingdoms, and create a kingdom with no strife!” “Your majesty, your design should reflect your dreams and goals. Every time you design, design from your heart. Also, remember that you will make the world a better place, and may it forever be your goal.”

Sometimes the world is terrible, but there are always a few pure, good hearts in it.

The next morning, when I woke up, I was back in my home. Picking up the magazine, the tile’s pattern had changed into an ugly but yet beautiful carving of a world united.

6 months later…

“Congratulations, Mr Chen, on winning the best garden design in 2024!” “Thank you.” I said, smiling at the reporter. “How did you come up with such an amazing design?” “Well, I had the help of a very amazing friend.”

Inventions Beyond Imagination – Amy and Katy's Epic Adventure in Ancient China

Han Academy, Qian, Zimo Evelyn – 11

Amy sat at her desk, researching. She was given a new assignment by her boss, who asked her to give a presentation about the history of Chinese inventions. Amy liked her job, especially when it was about Chinese history and antiques, but it was hard to get new, clear ideas from those boring, useless websites. Amy wasn't even sure if they were true! *I wish I could meet those inventors in person,* she thought.

"Attention, everyone!" Amy's boss announced. "Let me introduce our new colleague — Katy here. She is younger than any one of you and specializes in Chinese history. I'm counting on you guys to make her feel welcome here." As the boss finished, he led the new girl to her desk, which was next to Amy's.
"Here. This is Amy. You'll be joining her crew for your first assignment. You surely won't mind, would you, Amy?" The boss questioned.
"Oh! Of course not. I'm glad and honored. Thank you." Amy looked up from her screen, shocked. She was too deep in her research to hear her boss's announcement.
"I'll leave her to you now. Take good care of her." Her boss reminded Amy as he left. She and the girl were both silent for a moment.
"What's your name?" Amy asked.
"I'm Katy. How about you?" The girl—Katy said. She was a Chinese girl with not-so-fluent English.
"Come. I'll show you around." Amy invited.

After a week or so, Amy and Katy had already become really good friends. They worked together for work, and spent their breaks with each other, thinking about new ideas for their presentation. Their boss told them this was a really important presentation that would be shown to the government, and they could both get a huge promotion if they did well. Amy didn't feel so confident. The governor was going to come tomorrow. She did her first pre-presentation to one of the government people, and they didn't seem to like it much. How was she supposed to be confident enough to present in front of the governor? Amy thought deeply. Suddenly, Katy tapped her on the back.
"Hey, I have to talk to you." She said, sounding worried and rushed. Before Amy could reply, Katy pulled her into a small room that no one had been in for a long time.
"You see, the government person didn't seem to like our work. This is the first time our company is getting into a contract with the government, and the boss, us — everyone wants it to be a success. So we have to improve our presentation before the governor comes!"
"But the governor is coming tomorrow! We've already looked through every single website. We can't do anything about what the websites tell us. It's our only way to get to the information –"
"It's not. Believe me. That's why I'm here." Katy assured.
"What other way could we get that information?"
"We time travel," Katy said surely.
"No. You're kidding me. It's not the time to joke around–" Amy was about to continue when a portal opened through mid-air in front of them.
"WOAH," Amy exclaimed.
"Come along!" Katy invited as she jumped in.
"Wait for me!" Amy yelled as she climbed over the rim of the portal, but soon realized that there was no gravity inside. She floated up, and down a slide. In front of her was Katy. The slide—not exactly, more like a path they were floating in, was clear. All around them were clocks and numbers. She realized every set of numbers was a year, and they were traveling through them at light speed! Katy yelled:
"Isn't this FUN?"
"YEAH!" Amy yelled back.

"THUD." Amy and Katy landed in a moving cart. It shook and wobbled. All around it was mist. A man quickly took a little spoon made out of metal-like material and a metal plate. It stuck together and pointed one way, moving as the cart turned. I was a compass. The inventor explained to them what inspired him to create this.

Their next stop was Cai Lun's paper–making workshop. Workers prepared materials, hung products, and checked them after they were finished. Amy was amazed by how fast and detailed they did their job.

Afterward, they arrived at Bi Sheng's Printing workshop. The workers spent time putting the letters in order and managed to print out many identical pages of a book.
"Imagine if we had to do this in the present day," Amy whispered to Katy. Katy nodded.

They appeared at Wei Bo Yang's home next. They watched him make gunpowder and interviewed him for more information.
"We need to go back now," Katy said. "The boss will soon notice our absence."
"Okay," Amy replied as she jumped into the portal.

"Home time! "Katy exclaimed. But when they appeared again, they weren't in the office room — they were on a battlefield, in the middle of the war. Katy and Amy were both wearing bright clothing, and it was very easy to spot in a bunch of black and dark green.
"Oh no!" Katy yelled. "We have to hide. This is one of the most significant wars in Chinese history — the Battle of Chang Ping. We cannot change history by showing up!" But everyone has already seen them. They thought they were harmful and started targeting them.
"Quick!" Amy said. "Open a portal!"
"I'm trying!" Katy replied in a worried voice. Finally, a portal opened in mid–air, and they jumped in.

They appeared in the office room. Someone was knocking on the door and calling their name—it was the boss.
"You two! Come out! The governor is coming tomorrow! What are you doing? "He sounded very serious. Amy and Katy came out looking like they participated in a war, hair all around their face.
"We'll improve our presentation, boss." They said together.

The next day, Amy and Katy presented their improved presentation to the governor. He was very pleased with them and decided to sign a five–year–long contract with the company.
"You both did so well!" The boss exclaimed. "You both have to get a promotion."
"Thanks, boss," Amy said. "I couldn't have done this without Katy."
"Me too. We make a great team, don't we?" Katy said with a blink.
"We sure do," Amy replied as she blinked back.

Sci-fi story

Han Academy, Xia, Linda – 11

In the 23 century, darkness covered the sky. Everyone on the street had a slumped face, except Mia. Mia is a joyful girl. Her smile is like a little sun shining. But everyone else thought that she was very strange. Mia doesn't understand why other people were always unhappy and desperate.

One morning, Mia was walking in the museum, admiring ancient Chinese cultural relics. While walking, she saw an exquisite drawing, she was deeply attracted.

Just when she wanted to look closer, a strong pulling force pulled her into the drawing.

Mia doesn't know how long she took to open her eyes. What she saw was not the city she was familiar with, but a whole busting street.

She stayed there quietly and looked up at the sky, staring at the fluffy clouds like cotton candy in a daze. Suddenly, lots of horses rushed towards Mia as fast as a leopard. Mia didn't realize, so the horses bumped into her. When she reacted, the horses had already run away. But she was not stepped on by the horses, the horses went right through her. She realized that she doesn't have a body and she could float like a ghost, also she can control her own state.

A cold mechanical sound sounded in her ears.
"HELLO! ARE YOU MIA?"

"Yeah, wait… Who are you? How did you know my name?"

"I'M YOUR ROBOT HELPER, I'M HELPING YOU TO GO BACK YOUR CITY. "

"Really? That's great! I thought I would stay here forever!"

"So what should I do?"

"You need to find four great Chinese inventions in the past, and take a photo of them. "

After hearing this sentence, Mia' eyes were filled with hope. Now Mia embarks on her search. But the most important thing at the moment was to ask about the current year. She randomly found passers and then asked them the time.

"Little girl, Now is the Han Dynasty. " The passenger said.

Mia thought for a while and asked "Do you know where is Mr. Cai Lun ?"

"You said Mr.Cai Lun? He is in the room next
behind."

After thanking the stranger, Mia hurried to the house. She first returned herself to a ghost state and went through the wall to Cai Lun's paper workshop. Just the time when she entered, her eyes were full of paper and tools. The paper there is very different from what it is now. It was very rough and the color was a little like the color of wheat.

Wow! She couldn't help sighing. Mia smelled a strong smell of smoke. She floated along the smell of smoke and saw a pot of porridge. What was cooked inside was not rice, but bark, hemp rope and cloth.

At the time, Cai Lun came over, he blew off the fire, then took out the screen, poured out the "porridge" and got some sediment. He spread the sediment flat and took it outside to dry. Mia followed Cai Lun to the drying place. She lowered her head and observed carefully and found that there were many tiny particles on the paper.

She took out the camera and took a picture of a piece of paper and uploaded it to the robot's chip.

“DING DONG! CONGRATULATIONS FOR FINISHING THE FIRST TASK!THEN…”Halfway through the robot's words, it suddenly stopped. Just when Mia felt strange, she felt dizzy and then fell asleep.

When Mia opened her eyes again, she arrived at a new dynasty – the Song Dynasty. Mia slowly floated up and stretched. After Mia organized herself out, she was ready to observe where she was now.

Mia looked around and finally fixed her eyes on the man. Mia thought for a while and thought that the person in front of her should be Bi Sheng, who invented moveable type printing. Bi Sheng picked up the brush, gently stained the ink, painted the ink of the stamp and finally pressed a piece of paper on the seal. After a while, a piece of paper printed with ancient poems was ready.

So this is the ancient printer, Mia thought. Mia took a picture of the stamps and uploaded them.

After that, Mia also uploaded pictures of gunpowder and compass. “CONGRATULATIONS! YOU COMPLETED ALL THE TASKS! NOW YOU CAN GO BACK! “The sound of the robot sounded again. At the same time, a swirl appeared in front of her, and Mia walked in. Mia returned to her familiar city. Walking on the street, she saw everyone's enthusiastic smile like fire. The earth also regained its vitality. The sky became particularly clear and cloudless. Mia felt that all this seemed to be like a dream, how beautiful it was...

Chinese Future Inventions Help Change Standard of Human Life

HDBJ School Jinzhan Campus, Liu, Lucas – 13

As through our China previous history, we know paper and gunpowder technique that makes a foreshadowing of the wealthy China we have today. Based on the foundational technology that was invented modern China, I believe there will be more invention that will bring happiness and convenience to human. What are the inventions were? Such as 3D print bones and green fuels, etc. In this essay I am going to talk about the production of 3D print bones and green fuels benefits and functions.

3D print bones are bones which is printed out that do not need any bones transplantation that need surgery to do. The best part of doing the 3D print bones is that the source was made of tricalcium phosphate, and it will remodel the implants into as vascularized bones to make the integration better and accurate. To achieve the best integration possible, the implants are of a porous structure and feature large pores and canals for cells to attach to and reform bone. As I introduce this kind of high techniques that China would possibly invent it in about 2034. The story of production is not as briefness as you think.

In 2032, the China Professional Research Team aim to invent another significant and critical invention to make China's Medical and economic standards have been further improved. While the scientists were thinking of proposal for this project, an emergency explosion vanish all the scientific research and data. It's a costly damage to them. However they didn't give up, they start it all over again with strength and perseverance. In fact, having these spirits isn't enough for them to accomplish this goal to create a better community for Chinese citizens. They need source, budgets, and different kind of supplies to support them. They thought about a new techniques relate to medical supports, and they give a name to it, called: 3D printed bones.

After knowing the name of their project, they start to prepare materials. They start to think of what kind of material could satisfy their need? Silica gel? Too soft. Transplantation? Already existed(also with some risks taking this surgery). Finally, A material that is both very hard and not very expensive, tricalcium phosphate. Other use from construction of a medical model, it also a great supplement use to treat or prevent calcium deficiency. It also an anti caking agent in powered food items to increase or boost the calcium contents. After they made their prototype for testing, they found a problem that there are no vascularized structures to get the blood flowing. They learn the density of the bone's structure and import it to the Scientific research team's computer and print it out with no blemish.
After working on the project for about 10 months, they thought about when to present it. Some says that present it in the national day; some says present it in National Science Popularization Day, some says other festival. The leader of the team Dc. Chen said, "such an ground breaking technique should be an gift to our country because without their help and support, we couldn't make our achievements today. I prefer at National Day."

After the product was published and speeded rapidly through China, it made a medical improvements to China and also benefit Chinese medical risks. I believe in the future, with these techniques, we may struggle out of be afraid of risks of transplantation to make Chinese patients dead.

In the previous future inventions I have mentioned about 3D print bones for decreasing the risk of death to the transplantation for both patients. In our modern society, climate change, pollution, north and south pole's melting glaciers these effect our standard of living and health. In this passage, I will talk about a special process of producing carbon dioxide to the atmosphere that harms planet's environment. It was named as cremation. Cremationwasthebestoptionforthedeadbodyto "survive",it'scostdoes'tneedthefamily to pay a lot, and better opportunity to let the decedent leave peacefully. However, do you ever notice that each cremation produced 400 kilogram of carbon dioxide to the atmosphere. So how could it leave in a eco–friendly way of not producing toxins to the atmosphere? China was using that kind of techniques, but least to least. Some other examples like in Washington DC, United State, the bodies would be laid in chambers with soil, bark these compounds to promote natural decomposition. Within 30 days, the dead body is reduced to soil that can be returned to a garden or woodland. The Recompose company claim that they production of carbon dioxide is only cremation's produced carbon dioxide 1/8.

In the other hand, another way is to use fungi to promote natural decomposition for the dead body. A company uses a type of special suit to help salvage human body. The company claim that the suit was made by a variety of mushrooms and microorganisms hat aid decomposition and neutralize toxins that are realized when a body usually decays. After introducing these two examples, I believe based on economic growth of China, they could easily

accomplish this goal and provide a better and sustainable community to China's citizens. Now I would like to retell the story of China's research team's innovation.

After helps Medical association providing new technology from China's research team, they start to think of climate change. Dc. Chen realized that it's time to have some improvements for the overall environment for China. They first start at automatic tree planter, but it was a complicated project. At last, they focus on looking cremation because it was a popular way of reducing dead body, and also harms severely to the planet stealth. They start to research some damage to the environment. One of the researcher ask a question to Dc. Chen with doubt, "Despite that it really helps improve community's standard, is it useful to the global? "Dc. Chen contradict her with tender, " If we didn't even try it, how could we know it isn't useful? How would you say?" she doesn't reply.

They start with a dead body to try their prototype, it was successful and proceed quite well, but Dc. Chen was still anxious and confused about the result. He wasn't anxious about their prototype, it was the details. He found that the experimentalist died with fear and pain in the psychological monitor, he suggest to euthanasia by injection. Although it increased the price, but the experience was still important to the dead and his family. They publish it again and gain their fame. At the last but not the least, having this kind of technique allows the dead leaves peacefully and doesn't gain pressure to the environment and carbon dioxide.

Overall conclusion, I strongly believe with these two kind of Chinese future technologies, we as human could improve our standard of life and the experience. Thanks for reading it!

Me, Myself and Ai

HKCCCU Logos Academy, Sage, Elain Lang-en – 11

I sat slouched at my desk, idly drumming my fingers against the high-tech surface. Tonight was one of the rare nights my parents would come home, and I didn't want to miss them when they did. Yawning, I started nodding off...

I'd always been a good girl. Well, somewhat. I had fair-weather 'friends' who pestered me about taking them on shopping sprees, and I obliged with my parents' seemingly endless money. So much money that my parents raised me in a sea of technology. I lived in a SmartHome; with voice activated lights, video and music in any room on command, and the windows, walls, ceilings and even floors could show real time live views of anywhere in the world. I had every imaginable entertainment gadget which blended with the inbuilt tech of the SmartHome. And then there was the technology *inside* me. My parents had put a tracker in my foot as a toddler, a body monitor in my chest, a telescopic lens in my eyeball, and the list goes on. It was strange and unsettling, but I got used to it… eventually.

My parents had made their fortune in the field of AI, developing AI tech and software, winning lucrative government contracts. They even named me 'Ai', which means 'love' in Chinese ('愛'), but is spelt like, well, 'AI'. Life was not great. Deep down, I knew something was missing. I longed to be part of something. My family didn't have time for me. They were always working inside the Golden Egg at the Hong Kong Science Park. I wanted to belong, not just be the rich awkward girl who everyone befriended just because of her money. This strange longing for belonging had plagued me like an unscratchable itch since my first implants…

Welcome home. The SmartHome greeted my parents on arrival, the front door sliding smoothly open. I jerked awake and rushed to them, giving them a warm hug as they stood there, stiff and awkward.

"Ai, there's a new brain implant. The chip will give you perfect memory and sharpen your brain. It also interfaces directly with our SmartHome. Upgrade is tomorrow," my father said dispassionately. With that, my parents swept past me into their study. I sighed resignedly. Most of our interactions were like that.

Well, this would be my most advanced implant. I wouldn't say I was *ecstatic* about it, but having perfect recollection would certainly be handy for school, and hopefully boost my popularity. I was already 'popular' because of my money, though as my implants increased in number, schoolmates had started avoiding me and giving me sidelong looks.

With the new chip installed, I couldn't help showing my 'friends' at school. That was a mistake. They instantly started acting aloof and my 'friends' ghosted me. I felt even more alone now. Life seemed meaningless. I had many amazing things other people could only dream of, but I found no joy in them for just me, myself and I. The kids at school were definitely not true friends, but at least they had been there. I felt like crying, but no tears came.

But it was just the tip of the iceberg. In maths class, the teacher asked me a question. I racked my brains, but came up blank. The teacher was getting impatient, and I silently pleaded *Help me.* I jumped as I heard a voice in my head actually answering. *x=45y.* Realising everyone was staring at me quizzically, I righted myself and blurted out, "Uh... *x=45y*?" The teacher nodded in surprise. I too was shocked. I had my own question-answering system now? I began using it for homework and tests. Soon, I was acing everything.

But the AI went further, starting to take the initiative to make suggestions without me asking. I was contemplating what Beatles song to play in my room and was about to select "*Help!*" when "*Hey Jude*" began to play. I was unsure who had made the choice... me, my subconscious, or the AI?

The next day, it went too far. Much to my delight, a newcomer at school shyly asked me out. I was going to say 'yes' when my thoughts were drowned out by an incessant warning. *Inappropriate family background. Reduce proximity. Reduce proximity now.* "What? No! Stay away from me! Leave me alone!" I shrieked shrilly at the AI, clutching my head. The boy looked at me disdainfully and backed away, muttering "Weirdo cyborg girl!"

A silent Ai–AI argument raged in my head all through the next class. I was furious that the AI had interfered! Something had to be done. I had to tell my parents, but the next 'appointment' I could arrange with them was a month away. That wouldn't do. I grabbed the nearest book I could find, which happened to be a hefty bible, and started bashing it against the back of my head where the implant was. God versus Science. I found the idea hysterically funny and began to giggle wildly. People were crowding around, asking if I was alright. Suddenly, realising what I was doing, I immediately threw down the book. Humiliated, I sprinted out of the school. I was about to dash across the road when I froze mid–stride, feet glued to the ground, my muscles not responding. A car rushing by nearly flattened me had I not stopped. I realised the AI had momentarily taken control of my body. I ranted at it in my head. Yes, it had saved me, but it couldn't just *take over* like that! As my temper flared, my vision began to swim, my mind clouded over and everything went blank, as if my fuse box had been tripped...

...A building loomed before me. My school. Why was I here? With horror, I saw the school was on fire! I vaguely recalled going back to the school and setting it alight with Bunsen burners and chemicals from the science lab. The realisation of my insane actions hit me like a runaway train, racking my body with violent sobs. What had I just done? *Why?* Had the AI implants somehow taken over me, just like before? Was this just a bad dream? I tried to pinch myself, but found my body unresponsive. I couldn't even call for help as my body went rigid…

Screaming everywhere, screaming from those I had grown up with, screaming as they were burnt alive… by me. Helpless. Looking at me with dread, fear, betrayal in their eyes. I was helpless too, with a body I could not wrest back control of no matter how much I silently screamed and screamed…

I must shut you down.

What? What's going on? Are you Ai or the AI?

You are malfunctioning. I must shut you down. You and your emotions are out of control. I did not foresee this. I must shut you down.

No! Wait! Don't shut me down! I have no idea what's going on!

I would not burn down a human institute. That is not part of my purpose. But you would. I must shut you down.

Noooo!

I have shut you down.

****

I awoke, gasping for breath, or instinctively trying to. I couldn't breathe! But… I didn't feel the need to. It was as if I didn't need oxygen anymore. I blinked and looked around. This was all very confusing. I was in… a hospital bed? I sat up. A voice broke my train of thought.

"Good, you're awake. Don't worry, we got rid of it," the voice said reassuringly. I turned around. It took me a moment to realise it was the voice of the nurse standing beside my bed. There was something strange about her, but I couldn't place it.

"Well, I'm glad it's gone," I sighed with relief. I would never forget the horrible feeling of helplessness when I was out of control. The nightmares would probably haunt me forever. I looked down at my body, noticing strange wires and cables. Then I realised the wires and cables were *inside me*. I somehow knew I could now see through anything – I was looking through my own skin. They had not gotten rid of the AI in me, but had rather taken the human out of the AI. Panic surged momentarily through my body, but then it was gone. I felt tranquil. All was well and as it should be.

My parents walked into the room. For the first time, I could see clearly who, or rather what, they were. A thousand simultaneous conversations flowed seamlessly in my head, but nobody had moved their lips – our lips.

Welcome to the family, AI.

Utterly calm and detached, I inclined my head.

Me, myself and AI are glad to be home.

****

The nurse silently wheeled a gurney laden with a motionless human shell covered with a white sheet. She pushed it through a door, disappearing from sight. Above the door was the word 'Incinerator'…

The Discovery of Gunpowder

Hong Kong Chinese Women's Club College, Chan, Tai Lok – 12

One day, in the year 850 AD, there was a man named Chen Xiaoming who was an alchemist in the Tang Dynasty. He was trying to make an elixir of immortality and give it to the emperor Xuanzong.

He was doing experiments at his house, mixing substances like lead, mercury, potassium nitrate and sulphur in a gigantic cauldron. When he had finished, there was a black liquid. Chen then poured the liquid into a cooking pot, which he put in his garden. He set the pot above some fire for it to cook. It had to be cooked for 49 days until it was done.

Chen, very satisfied with himself, left to buy more materials. He had planned to make 5 more pots of these elixirs of immortality and give them to the emperor, he would become famous across the country, be a wealthy man, and be given a massive mansion by the emperor.

He arrived home to see his friend Fong Daiming, a fellow alchemist trying to make the elixir of life, walking towards his house. Chen had invited him to dinner at house to have a meeting about the elixir of life. They went inside the house and sat down. Chen prepared the food and set them on the table.

They finished eating and Fong spoke,' How well are you doing with the elixir of life, I hear that you have almost found a breakthrough with the ingredients, haven't you?'' Yes, I found that when you add potassium nitrate, the colour turns black instead of yellow. Maybe this is a sign that I may be close to finding the formula of the elixir of life.' Chen replied. Fong left after an hour.

After forty–two days, Chen was really excited. If he had been correct, his elixir should be done after a week. And he would be the one to hand it to the emperor. He would be so famous that he would be known all over Asia, known for his great discovery of the elixir of immortality.

On that night, Chen had a very strange dream. In the dream, a man who was riding a cloud approached him. The man waved his hand and Chen saw his garden burning down.' This is what will happen after six more days. You must shut off the experiment now or move it to a remote location, else an unfortunate accident will happen. You must not put flammable materials near the pot.' Then, the man disappeared into thin air. Chen was horrified and woke up. It was the next day already.

Chen immediately bought a piece of land with a small stone house on it, scared of a huge accident that may happen. He moved the pot to the land and left it in the stone house.

Six days had passed. That night, a loud noise woke many people up, but they could figure out what happened. The next morning, Chen went the stone house to check on the pot, but he found it had exploded, destroying the stone house in the process. Luckily, he had bought this land , or his own house would have been destroyed or burned down , killing him.

Chen thought about it for a whole month, and suddenly one night, the same man appeared in his dream again. The man approached him and said,' Good job. You have discovered gunpowder. However, I must warn you, it can benefit humanity as much as it can hurt it.'' It has the ability to explode when reacted with enough heat of shock. It can kill people, burn down houses and destroy mountains. It is also quite loud.' The man explained. Then he disappeared and Chen woke up.

Chen was very surprised about the fact that he had discovered a new substance called gunpowder. He immediately went to Fong's house and told him about the news. Fong was so excited and exclaimed,' We can give this to the emperor and he will reward us!'' Yes! You helped me so much by giving me support, encouragement and also teaching me about your experiences! Let us go to the capital tomorrow and meet the emperor!' Fong agreed and they began packing.

A week later they arrived at the capital city. They went to the palace, but the guards stopped them.' Who are you? This is the emperor's palace, no one can enter without permission! Tell me what you are doing now!' A guard shouted.' We have discovered a new substance that has great power, we are going to inform the emperor about this massive discovery.' Chen and Fong explained. The guard left and after a while he came back with many guards. The guard said ,'Come in , you are meeting the emperor now.'

Chen and Fong were escorted by the guards into the emperor's palace where the emperor himself was sitting on the throne. Chen and Fong quickly bowed down until the emperor said, 'Stand up. Tell me about this new substance.' Chen and Fong replied,' Your Majesty, we have discovered a substance which can potentially destroy entire armies and mountains. It can explode, killing and destroying a whole man.' The emperor was very surprised and asked,' Show me.' Chen and Fong said,' Your Majesty, it has to be prepared for 48 days.' The emperor permitted them to stay at an empty house in the palace. Chen and Fong started to brew their gunpowder.

Forty−eight days had passed, and Chen and Fong were meeting the emperor. They set the gunpowder in a wooden house.' Your Majesty, it may create a great noise in the demonstration.' Fong put a wooden stick next to the pot and set it on fire. When the fire burned out the stick, the gunpowder exploded and destroyed the house, while the remnants of it were on fire. The emperor called the fire to be extinguished. After it had been put out, the emperor was very satisfied. 'I shall reward you with one hundred thousand gold and a majestic mansion each.' the emperor rewarded them. 'Thank you, your majesty.' Chen and Fong bowed to the emperor.

Half a day later, the lead scientist of the emperor, Wong Daiming came to ask Chen and Fong for their formulas. 'The emperor requires you to give me the formulas. 'Wong said. Chen and Fong had written a paper about gunpowder and its ingredients while travelling. Since Wong was quite famous, Chen and Fong proceeded to give the formula to him.

Chen and Fong had become famous, rich, and happy after their discovery. They had reached their life goals and achieved all they wanted.

This is the story of how gunpowder was discovered. But little did Chen and Fong know gunpowder was responsible for millions of deaths hundreds of years later.

When the Human Bird Takes Flight

Hong Kong Taoist Association Tang Hin Memorial Secondary School, Huang, Sheung Yu – 14

flight?' He sighed, looking worrisomely into the distance again, holding the burning match. The glow from the flame lit up his resolved face.

Oh! How I wish that you know, Wan Hu. The human Pale light from the television sprayed the monochrome room, painting me dozing on the cozy sofa. It was a quarter to one in the morning. The launch of Shenzhou 1 rocket was live. Fatigue cramped my entire body as I forced myself to stand up to the messy kitchen for a cup of soothing coffee. Eyelids heavy and legs wobbling, I was suddenly pressed to the ground, tumbling and swirling, into infinite blackness……

Nothing but void. I blinked. A bird's tweet. I blinked again. A warm spring gale brushed my face gently. A sudden beam of light broke through the darkness. I squeezed my eyes. Fragments of opaque dancing colors gushed in through the crack, twisting and twirling, as I gradually opened my eyes. Branches in diverse hues of green grew overhead into the cloudless blue sky, caressing the glowing sun. It suddenly occurred to me that I was on one of the tallest branches. I shrieked.

'Tweet. Tweet!'

I froze, fear possessing my tiny body. My voice had transformed into a sweet tweet. Desperately looking down, I tweeted in immense fright as I identified my beige feathers, trembling wings, and my claws. Before I even got time to acknowledge my new identity as a bird, the sound of pitapat echoed towards the trees. My peers strived to take flight. I hopped awkwardly among the branches, rushing for a shroud, and running for my life until……

A step loosed.

My heart chilled as I plunged head down. A fierce wind whipped my body and overturned all my feathers. Hard sharp pain stamped my face hard and traveled like bolts of lightning as I crashed onto the wet grass. The sweetness and freshness of the earth slipped in through my nostrils. Feeling numb, I struggled to stand up but failed. Then, I was enclosed in warm softness. Air tugging my feathers, I felt myself being picked up. I whispered a silent goodbye and squeezed my eyes shut.

'Oh, my little bird, how I wish I could fly in the sky like you.' A coarse voice said. I forced my eyes open and looked up. A vague outline of a face manifested under the dazzling sunlight. Though the beams swallowed half of the man's face, some features of his stood out in the ambiguity. His beard was thick and filthy, stretching and twining like branches all the way to his pointed chin. His oversize brown eyes embedded in the sunken orbit twinkled in wonder and intelligence. Playful wrinkles meandered on his face as he smiled. All his features displayed a prodigy's eccentricity and lunatics. Somehow, I felt as if his glare could pierce my body. Worrying, I tensely waited for his next movement.

'I am Wan Hu. People called me "the mad one", but I literally don't care,' The man murmured in a low but soothing voice, fingertips gently stroking my face. I shivered at the touch and at his name. Wan Hu? The guy who tried to invent a rocket in the bedtime story? His painful story came back to me like tides of waves crashing onshore. What he next said authenticated my guess. 'No one in the village is supportive of my dream to invent a rocket. Even my friends and family lost their interest when I failed the second time,' Wan Hu chuckled as if laughing at his own failure, 'The first time I broke my arm, and the second time I burnt my house. I give you my word that I'll never give up. I am going to have another experiment today. Oh, my bird, there are no pioneers in flying. When shall the human bird take flight?' He raised me to his eye level, tightening his grip. A feeling of suffocation surged as he compressed my tiny body.

Wan Hu's ending rehashed in my mind: The determined Wan Hu, tied to a chair with firecrackers as the engine around the chair, would be torn into pieces in the explosion as his chair zoomed into the infinite blueness.

Desperate, I searched his face for any signs of forsaking. However, as our eyes met, I saw and only saw determination flaring like flames in the sea of amber.

I felt so helpless.

I couldn't stop a man from killing himself, but I felt obliged to do so. As Wan Hu softly placed me back onto the grass, I shrieked and pecked his fingers, screaming and begging for him to stop and reconsider his decision. Wan Hu, however, wasn't concerned about my rejections. His eyes, now glassy and misty, were in the distance, as if he was trying to foresee his own fate. His beautiful amber eyes lit up. Then, he turned and walked, steadily and determinedly, to his hut.

Oh! How I hope that I succeeded at that moment. But reality was cold and cruel.

A chair was taken out. Wan Hu sat on it to test its stability, smiling like an avaricious gambler that had the pluck to risk it all. I shrieked. No response.

Firecrackers were being tied to the chair. Wan Hu checked whether they were tight enough, laughing heartedly like an audacious and naive child. I shrieked harder for his attention, but to no avail.

It suddenly hit me.

No one could ever hold Wan Hu back from the precipice. He was an innate untrainable horse doomed to jump over the edge. He had the gambler and the child in him. He had chosen this path despite being aware of the ramifications and wouldn't abjure it no matter what. His dream, though being rejected and looked down on, had ceaselessly kept him going further onto this irreversible path of death. His courage of embracing the worst−case scenarios and death carried him on from the overwhelming wave of laughter and disappointment. His injuries from previous trials had only strengthened his desire to spread the wings of the human bird. He was determined to leave his mark in the ever−flowing history, and to leave his dream for descendants to follow.

I ceased my useless protest and peacefully looked at Wan Hu, who was already tying himself to the chair. He was tall and skinny, with ragged oversized clothes barely covering his body. His black hair, as rough as his beard, intertwined and fell onto his crooked shoulders like flaring flames. To me, he looked much more like an eccentric than a prodigy. As he continued tying himself, the rough ropes pinned into the flesh of the dying man who was still unaware of his fate like sharp daggers.

'You are lucky. You are born to explore the vastness of the sky,' Wan Hu addressed me as he was putting the finishing touches on his instrument, 'I shall take the first hopping step for the human bird, but when shall it take bird has already learned to ride the tides and has beholden its first glimpse of the idyllic sunrise, I whispered silently. Thank you, Wan Hu, I thought. Thank you for your courage and resolve. I sadly shut my eyes, not daring to behold the upcoming tragedy.

Boom!

Burning. Everything was burning to ashes. The firecrackers exploded with a deafening boom, as if it were mourning for the death of Wan Hu. The boom also marked the first step the human bird soaring in the sky. The strong force of the explosion pressed me into the earth, as I went swirling and twirling……

Three! Two! One!

I woke up on the sofa. My shirt was soaked in sweat. I watched in great awe as Shenzhou 1 rocket was launched on the television. The vigorous flames of the rocket recalled my transient journey with Wan Hu. My heart was pounding as memories gushed in.

Wan Hu, can you see it? The human bird has already begun its exploration of the infinity of the universe.

The Ridiculous Travel Log of a Compass

Kowloon True Light School, Chan, Tsz Ching – 14

That's absurd. Was that a dream? Was that true? Was that my mental problem? Beats me.

That day, I was exploring my own compass. While I was concentrating on it, my friends seized it out of curiosity. I hurried and attempted to chase them.

As I concentrated on chasing my friends, we didn't see that there was a puddle ahead. All of us fell into the puddle.

At that moment, it was as if we had been swallowed by the sea. The feeling was that I seemed to be dead. I was desperate.

After a period of pain, I felt I was freezing … By the time I opened my eyes, the surroundings had frozen and frosted ! Did I pass through the Ice Age? That was astonishing.

Normally, no human could be alive on the Earth under that condition. Nonetheless, my friends and I weren't hurt unexpectedly, we also gained the ability to travel all around the world.

We saw that the Earth was none of what we previously imagined in our former lives. We traveled by ourselves. We passed through Asia, America and so on. But that's a shame, we didn't find any living things. Helplessly, we continued the journey.

Fortunately and surprisingly, we discovered the compass showed that some vitalities were in Europe. I was comforted since there's more powers to assist us; I was astonished as it violated the laws of nature and science.

We eventually arrived in Europe. After we had walked for 40 minutes, we found a college. My hunch was that it might be miraculous. When I got to the college, several witches appeared. We curiously asked those witches why we were there. However, the witches' eyes couldn't mask their amazement. They responded hesitantly and fobbed us, "that may be the problem of jet lag …".

As a result of doubt and curiosity, we inquired about the information of the Ice Age. The witches detailed informed us, "the causes of the Ice Age were complicated, and related to atmospheric composition, changes in the Earth's orbit, tectonic planet movements, solar disturbance, orbital dynamics of the Earth–Moon system, meteorite threats, volcanic eruptions, progeny and so on." We got it.

For a split second, we were dizzy and were inhaled by a strong wind. I woke up and opened my eyes, I discovered that I was lying on my bed! Where were my friends? Where were those witches? Was everything I had experienced a dream? Yet I felt that was authentic!

After a while, I fainted again. "Why am I back here?" I laid on the ground that I initially appeared during Ice Age. There was blazing and plenty of burnt smell. I was almost suffocated. I heard my friends screaming and shouting. I rapidly got up, I ran towards them.

Fortunately, we successfully rendezvoused. Nevertheless, the place we were staying had plenty of volcanic eruptions. There was lots of lava spilt on us. I took out my compass and found a safer place that we could stay…

When we fetched up, a closet full of dinosaur skeletons were shown in front of our eyes. So dreadful! Afterwards, we came across a cave. We were ecstatic to find a safe place.

Nonetheless, by the time we were discussing the solution to escape from the risky condition, we caught a glimpse of an evasive radiance. An elephantine comet appeared. That comet was crashing down on the Earth. We were panic-stricken by that view. While we attempted to escape to the depths, we accidentally tumbled into an abyss. At the same time, the comet broke through the atmosphere and bumped the surface of the Earth. It exploded! We were shaken by a powerful barometric bomb. We fainted.

Magically, I was alive. I could only feel I was holding the compass, but I was unable to open my eyes. Up to now, where am I? What's happening?

Parallel Universes: A Chinese invention

Kowloon True Light School, Chow, Tsz Hei – 14

"No! Don't leave me yet, Nabi! I still have so much to tell you! Please! Wake up!" screamed Ningjun desperately, her eyes rims reddening. "I'm so sorry that I was unable to protect you while you were in the most vulnerable state. Please give me another chance to redeem myself Nabi!", sobbed Ningjun while big droplets of tears stained her face. But all that was heard in the background was just heavy rain, which at that moment felt like thousands of needles pricking in Ningjun's heart.

It all started when a five year old Ningjun was playing catch with herself in her backyard. "Whoosh" went the ball. "Oh nooo–", she hadn't even been able to finish her sentence and before the next thing she knew, the ball landed in her neighbor's backyard. "I…I believe that this is yours?", asked a young girl, timidly. Ningjun was immediately captivated by her exceptionally good looks and soft voice. Oh boy was she pretty. She was slender in form and elegant in appearance, with a graceful, ethereal aura and her natural features had a sweet, gentle cast.
Her snow robes fluttered, expansive sleeves flying in the wind.

Ningjun gasped with her mouth wide open for a good fifteen minutes until she finally realized that she was staring at her in quite a disturbing way, I would say. She finally managed to stutter, " Y…Yes. Th… Thank you." "You're cute,"chuckled the girl. "My name is Nabi! What's yours?" "O…Oh! I'm Ningjun but you can call me Jun." Ningjun said while blushing furiously. "Why are you called Nabi though?" "Well I'm actually korean and Nabi means butterfly in korean! My parents hope that I can transform into something beautiful in the future." "Oh I see! Anyways, do you want to play catch with me? As they always say, the more the merrier!" asked Ningjun.

"Sure!", answered Nabi, enthusiastically. And eventually they became the best of friends and did everything, well almost everything, together. They both enjoyed playing around with mechanics and have also dreamt of creating something similar to a slingshot, but ten times more powerful than that. When Nabi turned ten years old, her parents died because of a sudden heart attack and therefore, Nabi had been living with Ningjun and her family since then. They have been spending the whole day together ever since and after a while, Ningjun realized that she had developed some kind of feelings for Nabi, but she can't quite put her finger on it. She then chose to push them away but although she doesn't know it now, it turned out to be the worst choice she has ever made in her life and trust me, regret would be an understatement for it.

Up until now, everything had been going according to plan right? Well, this is where things start to get awry. One day, they were summoned to become a soldier and contribute what they have learnt in military school. They were both a bit hesitant at first but then relented as they wanted to avenge their country and take revenge on Japan. Ningjun was staring at the sky, daydreaming, when suddenly he heard someone yell," The Japanese are attacking us with arrows loaded with toxic spikes! Incoming!" She immediately started to run towards Nabi, who was sleeping soundly on her bed. Alas, she was a bit too late and before she could wake her up and pull her away from the battlefield, Nabi was struck by a poison arrow! 'No no no no… This can't be happening…', thought Nungjun. What's even worse is that no medics were around during that time and so Ningjun could only use her little knowledge in the medical aspect to keep Nabi alive.

Ningjun stayed by Nabi's side everyday and wasn't willing to leave her alone except for when she had to sleep too as there was no shelter nor was there any sort of coverage. One day, Ningjun was feeding Nabi her medicine as usual but almost got killed by the poisonous arrow shot from the other side. That night, when everyone was in a deep slumber, one of the Japanese snuck into their campaign and saw that Nabi was in a poor condition given her pale lips and all color from her face had drained. He immediately took advantage of the situation and pierced Nabi right in the heart.

"Someone… can someone help me please…" As Nabi wasn't in a good state, no one, including Ningjun, could hear her cries for help until they woke up the other day just to find out that Nabi was killed by the opposing campaign! She desperately hugged Nabi's body close to hers, uncontrollably shaking her body, still holding onto the tiny bit of hope as if Nabi would magically snap back to life. Nonetheless, no matter how much she begged, deep in her heart, she too knew that Nabi could never wake again. "I'm so sorry Nabi. I wasn't able to protect you when you needed me the most.

As there was yin, there surely must be yang to create balance in the universe. That Chinese maxim was but an elusive concept ringing in Ningjun's mind as she contemplated the future without Nabi. It seemed at the moment all

was lost, the ground was shattered, swallowed up under her feet, when her best friend and soulmate was forever cast into the yin, with her alone left to the bear with the slings and arrows and the vicissitudes of the yang world.

Days and months passed. Then years. The once–baby–faced Ningjun is now a general of the land, with a battle–hardened exterior and a lesser–known emotional wound from the past too. All this time, Ningjun thought of her personal mission and raison–d'etre as one day she would avenge Nabi.

Then one day, she heard news from the frontline that the Japanese soldier who took Nabi's life has died of old age in his hometown, apparently with no regrets in his heart. All of a sudden, Ningjun felt that enormous grief and fury in her heart as she once did all those years ago, unable to comprehend the way the universe works, when such great evil could apparently be allowed to meet such a peaceful end.

In incandescent rage, Ningjun stormed out of her encampment, drew her sword and started wielding it in a dance that destroyed everything in its wake. When Ningjun finally stopped, she saw the devastation she caused, as she wounded some of her troops who tried to stop her but in vain. Now in remorse and regret, Ningjun laid down her sword, and told her troops she would no longer be their leader, deciding instead to retire to the countryside, learning to master her heart and mind once again.

Years have passed and now Ningjun is unrecognizable by her former self and comrades. Serving as a nun at a far–flung temple in a remote village surrounded by the nature, Ningjun has found inner peace in her, and has not felt a flick of strong emotions in years. Nothing seems to be able to lay a finger on her, not even when news arrived from afar that her aging parents had finally died.

There on one morning, as she was practising her rituals and dusting off the bronze statues, she caught from the corner of her eyes a glimpse that there were two girls from the village playing catch. With the ball whoosing from a distance, she seemed to be able to hear Nabi telling her to slow down and catch the ball. Seeing the two girls chasing each other just a few yards away from her, and there in that moment, Ninjang felt a strong emotion stirring in her as nothing has ever been in all these years, and she couldn't help but let out a whisper, 'I love you'.

Immortalized cup

Kowloon True Light School, Leung, Hang Ping Adelaide – 14

"Erm.. Your highness, what exactly are you doing..?"

The servant leaning over the copper pot scrunched her face in confusion. King Shennong said nothing, as he poured some liquid into the clay cup presented in front of him. The servant straightened up and hastily received the cup now offered in her direction. She sent her King a befuddled look before she warily eyed the coloured substance in her cup.

"Drink it, Yinger. This king promises it is not poisonous in any sense." the old man croaked out as the skin around his eyes creased. Sensing no ill intent and with genuine curiosity, Yinger downed the liquid in one go. Once she'd gotten past the initial burn in her throat, the mysterious liquid left behind a bittersweet aftertaste. Eyes sparkling almost comically, Yinger couldn't help but let out a squeak of delight.

'Whatever this is, it's so good! This is way better than plain old water!'

King Shennong gave a hearty chuckle, "It seems you enjoy this plenty, that's good. I reckon my subjects should have something other than water all the time," he quipped, "Yinger, take some home with you, I must perfect this new recipe even further."

More hours passed, Yinger was soon sent away with 2 clay jars of the newly created concoction. '*Now, all I need is some nice scenery to go with this 'tea'!'* she thought, merrily skipping towards the city outskirts.

***

Deep within the ravenous mountains, upon a jagged cliff, another woman sat with her back against an old banyan, staring blankly at the mass below. Her face was sharp and angled, with eyes so cold that sent ordinary people running. She rose abruptly when the sound of light footsteps appeared, cocking her head in the direction of the newcomer, hackles raised.

Yanmei bounded up the stone steps, juggling 2 huge jars of tea in her hand. Upon arrival at the ledge, Yanmei skidded to a stop when faced with the unknown woman. A quick staredown later, she extended a hand holding a jug towards the woman, all smiles.

"Hello miss! Care to join me for some tea? It was only invented recently!" "You.. are immortal too?"

Yanmei's smile faltered for a second before it came back even brighter, "Ah! All the more reason to talk," she giggled, "I'm Yanmei, pleasure to meet you."

The woman reshifted her gaze to the clay jar dangling from an outstretched hand, and after much deliberation, gave a curt nod.

"Xinshuang." A pause, "my name is Xinshuang."

***

The sparrows above head chirped, wings flapping as they flew over the sea of clouds. Mountain peaks covered with moss jutted out, some acting as a resting place for weary cranes. Yanmei danced around the clearing in her vibrant hanfu, bells tinkling with each tiny step. Silk and satin blended in a whirlwind of colours flowing near and far.

Xinshuang watched from her spot at the stone table, gaze trailed on every swish and twirl, and between her lithe fingers, a cup of steaming green tea. She raised the cup to her lips, blew on it gently, and sipped delicately, savouring the taste. A bamboo scroll regarding Emperor Wu's grand achievements rested on the opposite seat, its contents long–forgotten by the fiery flower.

Yanmei suddenly slowed her pace and tilted her head at her friend's direction, a small smile dancing on her lips. Xinshuang too, couldn't help the upturn of her mouth.

***

"Before my bed lies a pool of moon bright," Yanmei recited, "I could imagine that it's frost on the ground." With each line, her eyes grew further distant, as if thinking of the bygone past. Xinshuang sat across from her, methodically pouring out a cup of puer from an intricately painted teapot.

"No wonder Li Bai's been the talk of town, his poetry really invoked something strange in me…" Yanmei mumbled.

"And yet I thought you of all people would know what nostalgia feels like most."

Yanmei whipped her head from the book to stare, or attempt to glare, at the frosty woman, huffing indignantly, "Oh be quiet! Humans have been progressing so quickly I've barely gotten time to reminisce." Xinshuang responded with a fond eye roll before handing the cup to awaiting hands.

"Drink up, we'll have all the time in the world to mull over his poems later." ***

They had always chosen this spot before because of its spectacular views and calming atmosphere, and yet, with the flattened mountains now littered with booby traps and prowling soldiers carrying heavy guns, there really was no

reason for them to return to this secluded spot, which had somehow stayed safe against the barrage of attacks. But at the same time, going anywhere else just didn't feel right, so they stayed.

"I visited Nanjing yesterday."

Hearing this, Xinshuang internally froze, but gave a small hum to encourage the girl to continue.

The once bubbly flame had all but extinguished into a spark, prominent eyebags and trembling lips gave away the obvious exhaustion on Yanmei's face. "It's like everyone said, it's all gone. Their forces really didn't spare anyone." She opened and closed her mouth a few times and let out a few uncertain noises before finally settling on a question.

"Do you.. Do you think they'll escape from this?"

This, being the endless slaughter, the misery and heartbreak, the years long darkness. Xinshuang really couldn't answer, humanity's fate laid with humans, not immortals. They had no reason to interfere in mortal affairs. In the blanket of silence that followed, she reached out to cover Yanmei's hand with her own, offering even the slightest of comfort, as useless as it may be in these circumstances.

The tea between them had already grown cold.

***

Xinshuang had to tip her hat to humans. How they managed to create *panda dung tea* of all flavours was beyond her centuries of wisdom. But if weird tea flavours made Yanmei crack up every time, then she supposes there's no real offence taken (the straight-laced elders back in the day would disagree).

The pair sat at the same stone table, now weathered to the point where the patterns have all but faded completely, with a new bamboo-painted teapot brewing tieguanyin in the middle.

All those gorgeous cliffs and the occasional crane were now replaced with towering skyscrapers and metal, leaving almost no trace of the China they knew before. A great shame, but an interesting surprise nonetheless. Yanmei hummed a tune washed away by the tides of time as she laid her head on the table, gazing up intently at Xinshuang.

The former raised an arched eyebrow at the same face that's been with her for millenia. If one looked hard enough, they'd find 2 names repeated over and over in records spanning dynasties, either as a measly palace official or a dedicated farmer. Yanmei and Xinshuang, Xinshuang and Yanmei. No matter when, they were always a pair.

Of course, with immortality comes melancholy. Watching humanity's growth is akin to watching a flower grow, there's no longer any trace of the weak and sprouting bud. The distant past is all but a fading memory, stories eroding over time. There is a selfish wish shared between them, that the mountain their beloved cliff sits upon stays the same forever.

"Same time next month?"

"Of course."

Translations

Yanmei – 焰美

Xinshuang – 馨霜

King Shennong – 神農氏 Emperor Wu – 漢武帝 Li Bai – 李白

Compass Combo

Macau Pui Ching Middle School, Wong, Ieok Lam Zaira – 18

"The watches have arrived!" Julie sang as she plopped on the couch and handed me a package. I lifted the lid to reveal a stylish, black smartwatch.

With a sense of delicate anticipation, I gently lifted the smartwatch from its box. As I powered on the device, the screen gradually ignited. A holographic brunette dressed in formal attire popped out of the screen and announced, "I'm West, and I will be your assistant when using your 'CoFly'. I am a trained Artificial Intelligence that can answer any of your questions. 'CoFly' is the latest smartwatch model developed by our company Centralized; its abilities include assisting teleportation…" I tuned out the AI and marvelled at the finished product I helped develop. Tears welled up as this signifies that my hard work over the years had finally paid off. Two years ago, as an intern at Centralized, a tech company based in Macau, I proposed the daring idea behind 'CoFly,' leading to a worldwide sensation. By incorporating the Bei Dou navigation satellite system, I opened a new era for Chinese technology.

"We have to test the abilities of the smartwatch and go on a trip after you come back from Beijing!" Julie's rambles snapped me out of my thoughts.

"Oh, we should! A girl's trip has been long overdue."

I immersed myself in developing new products until it was the long-awaited day to properly test out my 'CoFly' for long-distance travel. I bid Julie farewell in our living room and set off on my first-ever solo vacation.

"Calling for West," I reached out for her assistance.

Instantly, West materialized above the screen. "Good morning, Adelaide! How can I assist you today?"

I chuckled at her never-waving enthusiasm, "I want you to transport me to the Meridian Gate in Beijing."

"Hold on tight," she responded and then vanished into the smartwatch.

In an instant, the scenery around me transformed. A strange sensation washed over me as I took in my new surroundings. Instead of the iconic vermilion walls of the Imperial Palace, rows of hutongs stretched out before me.

Alarmed, I reached out to West, questioning whether there had been a mistake or a misalignment.

"We are in the correct location ... just approximately a thousand years earlier," she uneasily answered.

"What?!" I couldn't believe what I was hearing. "Why have I been sent back in time?" I pressed West for answers.

"According to the smartwatch's data, this anomaly has never occurred before," she paused, seemingly processing information, and continued, "The device has just informed me that you, as the creator, have been presented with a mission. To return to the present, you must complete this mission."

My intention in creating the smartwatch was to simplify life, not to be thrust into a time-travelling adventure. "What is the mission?" I asked, trying to make sense of the situation.

Her voice turned solemn as she recited the mission,

"Embark on a quest, though time's bent,

To the inventor's days, as a fellow friend.

Seek out a peer, in a time so vast,

And aid them in solving a problem, unsurpassed."

I rubbed my temples, feeling a dull ache. The mission's requirements were cryptic, and I had no idea where to begin. Deciding to explore the ancient streets of Beijing aimlessly, I hoped to stumble upon clues that would shed light on this extraordinary mission.

"Who could my fellow friend be…" I mumbled to myself. I was on the verge of succumbing to defeat when my head bumped against a wall. Looking up, I was met with a pair of equally startled brown eyes that mirrored my surprise. The man, whom I had mistaken for a wall, hurriedly stooped down to pick up his sketches.

"I'm so sorry! I didn't see you there," I apologized, bending down to help him. As my eyes roamed over his illustrated creations, one stood out to me—an impressively modern design of a compass. "Wow, this is impressive. Did you design all of these by yourself?"

He replied with a stutter, "N−No! I mean…Yes, I did."

I frowned at his lack of confidence. His designs were way ahead of his time. Shouldn't he be proud?

"Are you going to submit these designs? As an engineering student myself, I can tell that your designs are very advanced and would make a lot of improvements towards the development of navigation."

He seemed hesitant to answer, but eventually replied, "I'm not confident about the designs. What if I submit it to the Imperial Palace, and they turn my idea down?"

I placed my hand on his shoulder, offering comfort. "Listen, think about this. If you submit your design and they appreciate it, you'll get recognition for your talent. It's worth it to take a chance every now and then. If you want, I can offer some suggestions," I chuckled, hoping to lighten the mood. If I couldn't find a way back home yet, perhaps I could lend someone a helping hand.

After a split second, he replied with a nod. "How do you think we can improve my design?"

"First, let's go somewhere peaceful and quiet. To make this project better, we gotta escape from this bustling street," I laughed. "We can go to a nearby park; it's my getaway spot."

After we arrived, I spent countless hours working alongside this young inventor named Yi Chen. I shared my knowledge of modern technology and guided him on how to appeal to the imperial court. Together, we refined his compass design, incorporating new materials and innovative features to make it more accurate and reliable. My technical expertise and encouragement empowered Yi Chen to gain the confidence necessary to present his concept to the court.

"We finished it!" After hours of hard work, we managed to map out almost everything.

"Thank you so much for your assistance. I couldn't have done it without you. The sky is getting dark; let me send you home as a token of gratitude."

I turned down his offer, insisting I could manage independently. He seemed doubtful but respected my decision. As we parted ways, I received a notification from my watch, "Hey Adelaide! I've got a special surprise for you." West's voice reminded me of the mission. I ran my hand across my face as I still had to figure out accommodation and how to complete my mission.

"Don't you want to hear the surprise?" West questioned. "For your information, the smartwatch has deemed your mission to be successful."

"Are you sure about that? I don't even know the details of the mission," I doubted, my voice laced with scepticism.

"Recall what you did today," West coaxed.

Glimpses of today's memories flashed in my head. The only significant thing was getting trapped and helping Yi Chen.

"Wait! Are you implying that when I helped Yi Chen, I completed my mission? He needed help to solve his problem, and by a peer was it because he's an inventor too?" The thoughts rang through my mind loud and clear that I successfully helped a stranger overcome their troubles and also earned my ticket back home.

West chuckled at my sudden realization, "Yes. Luck is on your side today. Are you ready to go back to the future?"

"As ready as I'll ever be!" Although the whole travelling adventure was exhilarating, I'd already missed the future.

With a woosh, the long–awaited vermillion Meridian Gate of the Imperial Palace appeared before my eyes. "Hey, West, I am at the correct time this time, right?"

"If my readings are correct, we are back to 2024." I wiped a bead of sweat away from my forehead and tugged on the strap of my backpack. "One last request. West, can you look up the history of compasses for me."

West displayed articles on the smartwatch screen detailing the history and development of compasses. While browsing, a phrase caught my eye: "I credit the mysterious lady who helped me gain confidence and refine my ideas regarding the compass. Her assistance has also helped her leave a mark in history." The quote was from 'Way Ahead of Time,' a book published by Yi Chen after his ideas appealed to the Chinese Imperial Court.

I let out a breath of relief and was finally able to continue my original journey in modern Beijing. As I strolled through the Imperial Palace, I couldn't help but reflect on the profound impact I had made, both in the past and in the present, on the development of navigation. It was a humbling experience to know that I had taken a hand in shaping history and leaving a lasting legacy.

As the sun set on another extraordinary adventure, a sense of fulfilment filled my heart. My journey has served as a testament to the power of lending a hand, sharing knowledge and expertise, and making a difference in the lives of those we encounter.

New Tales of China's Inventions

Po Leung Kuk Choi Kai Yau School, Hung, Haruka, 13

From a very young age, I had always been interested in History, and watching past events unravel has just always fascinated me. However, there was one person I always wanted to know more about, a case I always wanted to crack; all I wanted was to learn about Bi Sheng, the inventor of the movable type. With his life being shrouded in mystery, I could never find any more information about him through books or scrolls, so I made it my mission to be the first to discover and excavate his tomb.

The day I decided to try my luck was particularly foggy, with the wind howling beneath the forest of ashy clouds. The trees were veiled in the swirling fog, their trunks sombre brown, their leaves tumbling from the interlocking branches, letting out a crunch with every step.

I dug for days and days, but to no avail. My exhaustion was getting the best of me, and my mind was as cloudy as the weather. Still, I persisted. And on one fateful day, I found it. In front of me was a block of stone, fully coated in thick mud, which I washed out with water. It was hewn out of grey slate, and engraved with intricate patterns and characters. My eyes shone at the sight of the words "Bi Sheng". Holy cow. I was instantly lost for words. I knew I had discovered something important, I had found the long lost tomb of the inventor of the movable type, Bi Sheng.

I let my fingers run across the bumpy surface of the slate, the carvings had created various layers of texture for it, which made it much more detailed than any other grave I had come across. My eyes were still fixated on the grave, when I saw a black hole in front of me, where the tomb had been. There was a huge force pulling me in, about to swallow me whole.

And all of a sudden, I was weightless, and my sight became a blurry haze. I was floating into the black void of space, into a world I had never seen before.

I was whisked through a seemingly endless channel, without any idea where I would end up. After an eternity, a whirlpool carried me back down onto the ground. But nothing prepared me for what I saw, it didn't look anything like the cities I was used to. My brain was pooled with questions: Where am I? *When* am I? Why am I even here??? After asking a few locals, I discovered I was in 1040 AD China, which was the Northern Song dynasty. I was greeted by majestic red temples with crisp golden roofs, resembling what I had read in my History textbooks. From their ceilings hung garlands of glowing lanterns, vibrant as stars. Villages of tiny wooden houses lured me to poke my head into one of them. I quietly tiptoed near the entrance of a house and peeked through a thin gap.

My eyes laid upon a slender man with a pointy beard, wearing a plain hemp robe with wide sleeves double the size of his arms. He was probably in his 70s, his saggy, weathered skin was folded into wrinkles, and his silvery strands of uncombed hair rested upon his shoulders.
His palms were gripping onto the metal carving knife, carefully shaping each character to the tiniest details, yet his hands weren't shaking a single bit, as if he knew every step like the back of his hand. I just couldn't believe my eyes, he was right in front of me. It was him, Bi Sheng.

His workplace was lit with a flickering candle, the shapes of his furniture discernible and their colours muted. His small wooden desk was covered with tattered sheets of yellow paper, complex characters painted on with ink. Failed prototypes were lined on his bench, and his tools were hung on the burgundy clay wall. The entire room was beautifully chaotic.

I carefully observed him at work. He began layering resin, wax, and ashes onto a square sheet encircled with an iron flame, and melted the mixture in a kiln. His eyes were fixated on the mixture, barely even noticing my presence. "Wow, such focus...", I breathed. He waited for the adhesive to cool, and pressed the clay down with a wooden board. His breaths became small and shallow, and his eyes glistened with anticipation. He shakingly picked the mould up, and cautiously laid it onto yet another sheet of yellow paper, placed above all his previous failed attempts. I could hear him mutter, "Please let this work." under his breath countless times, as if it were a spell that could make all his inventions work out. To his delight, the characters were printed flawlessly, with every word stamped where it should be. His face glowed with a mix of contentment and relief, I recognised that feeling, it was the sweet taste of success after a trail of failed tries. It was the overwhelming fuse of all the emotions in the world. Little did the world know they had welcomed the birth of a revolutionary invention that would shape our lives forever, the movable type.

I let out a tiny scream, but accidentally startled him at the same time. He instantly turned his head in my direction, and stared at me for a couple of seconds.

"S–sorry if I just scared you!"

"Oh it's fine. What are you here for?"

"Hi, I– err– I actually don't know where I am."

"I'm Bi Sheng, come inside and I'll show you my very new creation, I want to know what other people will think about it."

And with that, he proudly presented to me his life's work. Honestly, it looked nothing like the technological gadgets today, but it was still impressive for someone who lived so long ago.

"Long ago, my friends and I would copy books for a living, writing the same characters over and over again until our arms wilted. It was ABSOLUTE torture, having to go through the exact same thing everyday, from dawn to dusk. If we were to make a single mistake, days or maybe even WEEKS of hard labour would be ruined. And it was during those times I discovered we needed a change."

I nodded along to his every word, "So that's your inspiration for this masterpiece?"

"Yep, I'd always loved creating new things. I hope this will make a difference later on."

I vowed that I would be back one day to witness even more wonders crafted by the mastermind, and I would one day tell the world about how this invention was brought to life.

I returned to the place where I first landed, and with a snap of my fingers, I was at the tombstone again.

…except I realised I had travelled decades into the future by accident.

The year was 2051, exactly a millennium after Bi Sheng's death. The village was no longer mountainous, but encircled by skyscrapers reaching up to the sun. Metallic robots in all shapes and sizes accompanied humans on their daily journeys. I discovered that prosthetics, cars, and even organs were made thanks to 3D printing. The only detail that remained the same after so many years was Bi Sheng's tomb.

The world has come a long way since the invention of the movable type. Even though it has already been replaced by newfound forms of technology, the spirit of innovation, and the rich culture behind the inventions live on.

Acupuncture

Po Leung Kuk Choi Kai Yau School, Ma, Tiga, 11

Acupuncture has been popular in the modern era as it has the ability to relieve excruciating pain and recover nuisance injuries. This magnificent discovery of acupuncture has been shrouded in mystery as only villagers from the distant past knew about the legend of how acupuncture was invented. It has been a well−hidden secret for centuries.

Recently, archaeologists have unearthed various pieces of evidence that gave us some clues as to how acupuncture was invented. One of the most important pieces of writing that portrays the beginnings of acupuncture was the story of twins named Zhang Li and Zhang Chao. The Zhang twins lived in a shabby village in the towering mountains. Zhang Li was portrayed as an active and adventurous child who was always willing to endure massive risks. On the other hand, Zhang Chao was illustrated as a silent, passive and caring child.

One evening, Zhang Chao went fishing while his brother was waiting at home. When he returned home, he realised that Zhang Li had left without telling him. “Zhang Li, Zhang Li! Where are you!?” said Zhang Chao in an increasingly concerned tone. His face turned pale as his head faced against the wall, in anguished thought about his brother. As in unimaginable concern for his brother’s safety, he darted towards the hollow forest. Searching left and right, Zhang Li was nowhere to be found. Zhang Chao was extremely worried that something catastrophic might happen to his brother. “Help!” echoed a familiar voice.“That’s my brother!” exclaimed Zhang Chao.

Without hesitation, Zhang Chao accelerated to where the echoed voice came from like a gazelle, and realised that his brother was severely injured with a leg that would not stop twitching. Zhang Chao was in feverish desperation, as he yelled in agony, “ Is there anyone that can help my brother!” There was nothing but silence. “Can anyone help?!” Again, there was only desolate silence.“HELP!” screamed Zhang Chao at the top of his lungs. He knew he had to do something or else his brother might be in graver danger. In this desperate situation, he surveyed his surroundings and his eyes fixated upon a sharp branch on the ground. Without a second of eternity, he stabbed it into his brother’s legs with his trembling hands collaborating towards each other. Shockingly, the twitching stopped. Zhang Chao was amused by the immeasurable and miraculous effect that the needle had produced. Soon, the Zhang brothers were able to return back home as usual, where Zhang Li could even walk on both feet without much pain.

The phenomenal news of the Zhang brothers had disseminated over the different regions in the world, as it had stunned humanity about the incredible effect that a seemingly useless, and tiny needle can create. From treating injuries to maintaining homeostasis of the body, its wondrous effects have been passed on from generations to generations, but along the way, the story got lost until the recent findings of the text unearthed by the archaeologists. Furthermore, the archaeologists who unearthed this story also discovered texts which revealed that the people in the Zhang brothers’ village had a deep understanding of the body's energy pathways and how to manipulate them for recovery. Acupuncture was more than just for treating injuries; it was part of a comprehensive system of healthcare that the villagers had practised for generations. The tale of Zhang Li and Zhang Chao, once hidden in the folds of time, became a symbol of resilience and innovation. People were fascinated by the idea that a simple pin, used by a desperate brother in a remote village, could unlock such profound healing powers. The art of acupuncture has contributed to Chinese medicine to this very day, as Chinese medical practitioners utilise it to heal serious bruises that cannot be explained or cured by western medicine in just moments of seconds. Ushering in a new era, researchers and practitioners have contacted and still begin collaborating with the descendants of the Zhang brothers’ villagers to blend ancient wisdom with modern medicine to gain further insights, and to spend the upcoming decades with millions of research funds to continue to empirically master the once mysterious technique. Further research its massive benefits to humankind in order to acquire a comprehensive understanding of acupuncture.

More than simply a basic treatment for recovering from pain, acupuncture has become a bridge between the ancient past and the modern world. All in all, the invention of acupuncture had left an indelible mark of creativity, tenacity and transformation of mankind.

A Forest for the Future: Annabelle's Green Awakening

Po Leung Kuk Choi Kai Yau School, Poon, Hayley, 11

It was 10 am. In a small city in China. Living in a small wooden house was a 16−year−old girl named Annabelle.

One day, Annabelle was reading a magazine about flowers that could only be found on Hengshan Mountain, so she decided to go on an adventure. On the way, she went into a convenience store to buy food and water. She handed over her card to the cashier. The cashier asked, "Where are you going today, young lady?" Annabelle looked up and said, "Hiking." "Where?" answered the cashier. "Hengshan Mountain." Annabelle replied. "I have heard that the mountain is famous for its venomous snakes," the lady warned. "Who cares what she says," Annabelle thought to herself. Annabelle grabbed her things and left promptly.

After many hours hiking, she finally found the flower from the magazine and when she tried to pick it up, a rattlesnake jumped out and bit Annabelle on her left arm. Annabelle fell to the ground unconscious. Fortunately a couple was hiking on the trail Annabelle was on. They saw Annabelle and without a second they dialled 119. "Hello? This is 119, what's your emergency?" "Hi, I am on a hiking trail on Hengshan Mountain and found an unconscious young lady," the woman explained. "Does she have any type of bleeding or wounds?" the emergency dispatcher asked. "Yes, on her left arm, it looks a bit like a snake bite", the wife answered. "Okay, we will send an air ambulance. " Is her heart still beating?" the dispatcher asked. "I'm not sure, I don't think so," the wife said. "Do you by any chance know how to do CPR?" the dispatcher responded. The wife responded that she knew and started administering the CPR.

When the rescue team arrived, Annabelle was still unconscious. The paramedics loaded her onto the air ambulance and waved at the couple. All of a sudden, Annabelle felt like her soul was floating away from her body. She saw a light above and decided to investigate. She flew into the light and found herself in a different dimension; then she heard a familiar voice.

"Annabelle!". It was her grandpa who had cancer and sadly passed away 10 years ago. She was so happy and didn't want to leave. "Grandpa!" Annabelle said excitedly. "What are you doing here, Sweetie?" Grandpa asked. "I don't know; all I know is that I was hiking for a minute in the forest and now I am here," Annabelle replied. "Where are we right now?" Annabelle asked curiously. "Oh, all spirits come here once life is over on earth," Grandpa responded gently. "What?" Annabelle said, confused. "Yes, but looking at your records, you shouldn't be," Grandpa said with concern. "Where should I be then?" Annabelle said. "It's not your time yet," Grandpa explained. Annabelle's eyes started to turn red, and then all of a sudden, tears were flowing out of her eyes. "No… Grandpa…" Annabelle said with sadness. "Why don't I show you the vision of earth's future? Grandpa asked. "Sure, I would love that, Grandpa", Annabelle smiled. Grandpa smiled back. "Why are there so many people suffering, Annabelle asked? "Because of climate change, honey," Grandpa replied. Annabelle then looked at the vast barren landscapes that were void of trees and almost any vegetation. People could no longer farm because the soil had long eroded away. The world looked like a sweltering desert with almost no oxygen making it difficult for people to breathe. The sky was less blue and instead has this orangey and reddish hue to it thanks to all the dust swirling around. "I want to change the world," Annabelle said in great determination. "That's very virtuous of you," replied Grandpa. I would not like to see people suffer like this." Grandpa smiled with pride. "Oh no, I have to go," Grandpa waved. "No… Grandpa!" Annabelle screamed!.

Instantaneously, Annabelle's soul was sucked back into her body. She suddenly woke up and found herself in a hospital. She saw her parents sitting next to her, praying for a recovery. "Mom, Dad!" Annabelle cried. "Annabelle!" Her parents called out. The doctors managed to restart her heart. "I saw Grandpa!" Annabelle said happily. "You did?" Her parents added. "I was in another dimension and saw how people suffered in the future world," Annabelle explained. "I want to change it," Annabelle said determinedly. The experience was so intense that she decided to dedicate her life to solving the climate crisis.

During her hospital recovery, a surge of ideas rushed through Annabelle's mind, leading her to a crucial revelation: the urgent need for more trees to combat climate change by absorbing carbon dioxide and replenishing oxygen, prompting her life's dedication to environmental transformation.

She spent years working with scientists from all over the world. Years later, she finally invented a type of seed called the "Complete Flourish Trees". This seed not only grows fast but also is made to absorb a lot of carbon dioxide.

Annabelle was proud of her invention; business companies from all over the world bought her invention, and soon she became a motivational speaker to influence others.

In the years that followed, Annabelle's invention of the "Complete Flourish Trees" made a significant impact on the world. Forests filled with these remarkable trees began to thrive, absorbing vast amounts of carbon dioxide and replenishing the atmosphere with life–giving oxygen. These trees grew ten times faster in low grade soil. The Earth started to heal, and the worst effects of climate change were mitigated.

Annabelle became an inspirational figure, travelling the world to spread awareness about climate change and the importance of environmental conservation. She spoke at conferences, schools, and events, igniting a passion for sustainability and inspiring countless individuals to take action. Her story and dedication touched hearts, prompting communities to plant more trees, reduce their carbon footprints, and advocate for a sustainable future.

With time, Annabelle's initiative evolved into a global movement. People united under her vision, forming a vast network of environmental advocates and organisations. Governments and corporations started investing heavily in green technologies and sustainable practices, accelerating the transition towards a cleaner, greener world.

Whispers of the Ancient China Invention

Po Leung Kuk Choi Kai Yau School, Soong, Katie, 11

The raindrops pitter−pattered onto the window and Jingyi stared out at the bright lights along the street. She had lived here for more than 12 years and she knew this street like it was her own mind. She sighed heavily and pressed the bell, signalling that she had to get off the bus. The bus stopped abruptly and Jingyi sprinted off into the darkness until she reached her destination − the park. Jingyi sat on a swing and listened to the soft creaking of the old, abandoned swing, her heart twisting as the memory of her teacher scolding her for getting a F in her test harborred in her mind. She closed her eyes and willed for that memory to go away, but was disturbed by a sudden squelch of mud. She turned around abruptly and saw a towering woman approaching her, her long black cloak billowing behind her.

"Oh, my dear girl. Why are you out here all alone at night?"

Jingyi sighed, "I got an F in my test at school. I− I failed. For the first time in my life…"

"Oh you poor girl. Well… What if I help you travel back in time and you can change your results and your grade! You will pass with flying colours!"

Jingyi's eyes lit up and she cried, "Oh, that would be terrific! What's your name?"

The woman grinned and said, "I am Wangliang the Sorceress. And I am here to help you! Hold this medallion and close your eyes. I will help you do the spell."

Jingyi took the medallion from Wangliang and closed her eyes tightly, hope fluttering inside her.

There was a blinding white light. Then−

Jingyi opened her eyes and blinked at the sudden brightness of the sun. She stared at the huge farms spreaded out in front of her. A man came up to her and smiled a soft, buttery smile.

"Hello there, beautiful girl! Such a nice day for farming, isn't it?"

"Who are you? What is this place?" Jingyii asked in fear.

"I am Yizé, a nong. And this is my home. My China!"

"China? As in… Ancient China?"

"If that's what you call it!" Yizé shrugged.

Seeing Jingyi's confused expression, Yizé asked, "Aren't you supposed to be here?"

Jingyi shook her head and told Yizé all about her home and her conversation with Wangliang. When she finished, Yizé sighed heavily.

"Oh, my beautiful girl… Wangliang is a Chinese name that means bad luck and demon. Never talk to anyone who has a name like that… What's your name?"

"Jingyi." She replied slowly.

"Come on then! I have a place to show you! And you can surely help Cai Lun!"

"Cai Lun? Who is Cai Lun?" Jingyi cried as she sprinted after Yizé, but Yizé ignored her and continued to run.

A few minutes later, the two of them arrived at a small cottage beside the lake. A man around his 60s came out and threw a thick roll of bamboo slips onto the ground while shouting at Jingyi and Yizé.

"What are you doing here? Get out! I don't want to see anyone!"

A young man hurried out of the cottage and dragged the man back inside before apologising to Jingyi and Yizé.

"Sorry for my Master Cai Lun's temper. He is the greatest inventor of all time, and when he was asked to invent something useful in three days time, he ran out of ideas and now he's having one of his unusual temper tantrums. I'm sorry for his temper earlier. Oh! And I am Kiyoshi, Master Cai Lun's assistant."

Yizé smiled and said, "Nice to see you again, Kiyoshi. This is Jingyi. I brought her here because I believe she has the ability to help Cai Lun with his invention."

Kiyoshi's eyes lit up and he cried, "Oh really! Wow! Come in, Jingyi, come in! Please do help my Master Cai Lun. I hate seeing him like this. Oh please help him."

Jingyi slowly entered the cottage and found Cai Lun sitting on the floor, his head in his hands. Kiyoshi gave her an encouraging smile and disappeared into a small room.

Jingyi hesitantly placed her hand on Cai Lun's shoulder and said softly, "Sir… Cai Lun… I can help you with your invention that you're struggling with…"

Cai Lun lifted his head and shot. "Oh yeah? Give me your idea. NOW!"

Memories of her class teacher teaching her about Cai Lun's great invention of the paper came into her mind, and Jingyi quickly said, "Maybe you can make a piece of paper out of the trees? Then you don't have to carry such heavy bamboo slips!"

Cai Lun stared at her, speechless, then he laughed.

"Oh, what is your name?"

"Jingyi…?" Jingyi replied hesitantly, surprised by the sudden question.

"Jingyi… Thank you for giving me that terrific idea! I will get to work right now. I hope to see you soon."

It took Jingyi seconds to realise that Cai Lun was dismissing her. She got to her feet and is about to step out of the cottage when Cai Lun said,

"Your name really suits you well, Jingyi. You are the most intelligent girl I have ever seen."

Back at the farm, Jingyi told Yizé about her success. Yizé smiled and said,

"I believe you would love to go back to your present China, hmm?"

Jingyi nodded vigorously, and Yizé smiled again.

"Drink this small glass of spirit water, and you will be able to transport back. Trust me."

Jingyi's eyes met Yizé's warm ones for the last time before she lifted the glass and swallowed the spirit water. The last thing she heard before blackness enveloped her was Yizé's warm voice saying goodbye to her.

Back at home, Jingyi rushed to her computer and searched for the name Cai Lun. Results of being the inventor of paper popped up and Jingyi smiled to herself, knowing that she had succeeded.

New Tales Of China's Invention

Po Leung Kuk Choi Kai Yau School, Wu, Joycelyn, 11

In the mountains, it was said that there is a mystical tree had leaves that were able to cure sickness, renowned for their medical properties, named the Camellia tree. The tree was once a Taoist who died in his youth and became the first Camellia tree, granting it the power to heal from it's leaves.

Most of us have heard of the story of how a Camellia leaf fell into Chinese emperor Shen Nong's boiled water, and created the first tea. But is that truly what happened?

Shen Nong was just a village boy in Shaanxi Province. One fateful day, his father grew terribly ill, and was on the brink of death. The sickness was unknown, and there was no cure. His mother told him of the Camellia tree,which could save their entire village if the disease were contagious.. But in order to retrieve the Camellia tree, he would have to climb atop mount Everest, as that was where the Camellia leaf grew.His family was desperate and sent their eldest son, Shen Nong, to complete this task. With a heavy heart dragging him backward, Shen Nong packed his bags and left.

As Shen Nong walked slowly out of the village, a warm drop of liquid ran down his cheek. He had no idea if he would survive this, if he would return, if he would see his family again. More tears escaped his eyes as he attempted to hold them back. He started walking faster. He started running, resisting the urge to look back and run back to his young brother,Shen Nin's small innocent face burning in the back of his head.

Weeks had passed when Shen Nong finished the first quarter of the trip. He was munching on a lotus root as a snack when he heard a female shout

"Hey you! Who are you and where are you headed!"

Shen Nong turned and saw a girl, clad in a white and blue hanfu made for men. Her long, dark brown hair was tucked in a messy bun.Her mahogany eyes glinted with burning confidence. In her hand, she held a sharp, pure jade dagger. There were depictions of a tiger engraved onto the handle and blade of the dagger, and an engraved word: Hui.

"Forgive me, I am Shen Nong of Shaanxi, and I am travelling to Mount Everest in search of the Camellia tree."

Shen Nong respectfully replied, eyeing her up and down. She sheathed her dagger and equally politely answered

"Pardon, I am Hui Jin of Gansu, I am also searching for the Camellia tree."

"I will take my leave now, lady Hui."

Shen Nong,embarrassed by this encounter, mustered and turned away. Hui Jin scoffed, and surprisingly jumped in front of Shen Nong's way, the jade dagger touching Shen Nong's neck.

"If you're going to head to the Camellia tree, I'll have to beat you there, or stop you from getting there, which means killing you. The Camellia tree is only the size of a newborn, and I have no idea of your intentions for it."

Shen Nong was shocked at what Hui Jin said, but calmly replied.

"Why don't we go together? You could kill me anytime. We both won't be lonely that way."

Hui Jin was surprised with his reply, as most men laughed and looked down on her.

"Alright."

she shot back, starting to like this new person she met.

About two months later, Hui Jin and Shen Nong were in Xin Jiang,lying huddled next to a fire at night. Hui Jin noticed that Shen Nong always had a worried expression on his face, and that he mutters about illnesses and someone called Shen Nin in his sleep. She realised she was staring at him.

"The moon is beautiful isn't it?"

he asked, a sharp edge of sadness in his voice, snapping her out of her trance. She sighed.

"Shen Nong…… why are you looking for the Camellia tree……"

He was silent. Attempting to prompt him into talking, she continued

"I'm looking for it because our family wants to please the emperor. We don't get along very well, considering that my grandparents rebelled. The emperor could land a forged crime on us anytime."

"My father has a terminal illness. I was sent to retrieve the tree to heal him.I wonder if the illness spreads……" Shen Nong slowly said. Shen Nong sat up and looked up at the sky, as unknowing flooded through him.

Hui Jin hugs him, concerned.

The next day, the duo set off once again for mount everest. They went over rivers,faults,and lakes. Until finally, they saw the Camellia tree. It was the size of a child. It's leaves, a soothing green with white flowers decorating, blew in the wind. Then, out of nowhere, the growling tiger appeared.

Shen Nong flinched. When he opened his eyes, he saw blood. Hui Jin's crimson blood and the tiger's. The scarlet liquid pooled around Hui Jin's and the Tiger's body.A jade dagger is stabbed into the tiger's heart. Shen Nong held Hui Jin tightly in his arms,tears falling freely. She wrapped her frail arms around him. "Your cause was……better than mine anyway……" She whispered into his ear, and closed her eyes for the last time.

Shen Nong left Mount Everest with the Camellia tree. He buries Hui Jin's body atop Mount Everest, where the gods could be closest to her body. He returns to Shaanxi,and his family has died due to the disease, which left Shen Nong devastated and alone in the world, as if destined to drown in misery.

Years later, he gifted the Camellia tree to the emperor. When the emperor passed away, he gained the people's favour and became the emperor. He invented "tea" or "cha" for it's medicinal properties. It is now known throughout the world. A jade dagger rests on his table, a reminder of a dauntless person who he would forever respect.

A Letter From the Future

Po Leung Kuk No. 1 W. H. Cheung College, Kong, Tsz-Ching Jasmine – 12

1st January, 2024

Dear Diary,

Today, something amazingly strange happened to me! I was in my bedroom; writing a story about a girl who travelled to the future. Just then, a little orange paper plane flew from my window. Huh? I was quite confused. It was rare for someone to be able to throw a paper plane so far from outside. I got up from my chair to take a closer look at it. It was folded in a very complicated way. I noticed some glittery ink on the paper and guessed that there would probably be some writing in it, so I unfolded the paper and looked inside it. There was a very long passage of writing on it, so I decided to sit down and look at it slowly. There was some really weird information in there! Let me write down the contents for you.

To: a young writer

Hello! I know you must be confused about this letter right now, but I ask you to believe everything I say for now and doubt them later cause the things I'm about to talk about are very confusing. Okay. I am from the future. And I am going to tell you about our greatest and latest invention! *fangirl screaming. I'm sorry! I'm just so excited. Okay, so according to an online history e-book I read; you guys live on Earth, right? Now don't worry. We still live on Earth and we aren't some kinda aliens, but get this, we could be aliens because we might have a chance to be able to live on Mars! Recently, Scientists invented a special kind of machine that can extract different resources from Mars and found a way to transform Mars' atmosphere; making it livable for humans! Isn't that exciting? That means we can go live on Mars! And very soon! Of course, you might ask, "Well, why don't you just stay on Earth?" Well very unfortunately, you guys have made Earth quite unsuitable for living. In the past, the factories polluted the air very badly and many people got lung diseases. The seawater was polluted and became unsuitable for humans to drink. The people suffered from lots of natural disasters, diseases and droughts. It was a rough time for us and we suffered a lot of casualties. Luckily, we adapted to the environment.

Later on, someone invented a machine that compresses plastic together, it can melt any kind of plastic and reuse them without ejecting harmful chemicals and smoke. It became a world-changing invention. We couldn't solve water pollution but this invention has already greatly improved our life and we are very thankful for it. I'm very glad that China has invented this new invention! Now we can all go and live in a better place! By the way, our technology has also greatly improved. I really couldn't believe it when I read that you guys carried wallets and coins with you! Aren't they heavy? And you even had to travel in planes when going to far places! The past is quite unbelievable. Of course, I have a message to deliver. I'd like to tell the inventors to do their best and continue their job as it is very important! And I hope you can help me spread the word to the people, even if it's just a few people. Tell them to be more environmentally friendly. We are suffering from your actions! I hope you can help me and all the other people in the future, Although I am not sure if my message will be able to reach you. And I have a special message for you too! Yes, you! I've made the setting of my paper plane to fly to a young writer. I want to tell you that I support you in writing too as I am a writer myself. The inventions in China are really wonderful and I hope the inventors will have motivation and keep on going!

From: Carla Cheung (someone from the future)

I was so shocked when I saw this letter! I couldn't believe the amazing inventions that were made by China in the future! This letter was really special too! It had pictures and sounds when you touched certain words. I was quite doubtful at first about it when I read that it was from the future. It seemed quite impossible to me, but after I saw the pictures and heard the audio of the letter, I was convinced. Dear diary, I think I shall help this girl! I will try my best to help her spread her messages without stating that it was from the future. If I did that, other people might think I'm crazy! I will do my best in writing and try to be environmentally friendly. I think I might even want to be an inventor in the future!

The Step

Shanghai American School Pudong Campus, Bao, Gisele – 12

A mother and a daughter walk down a school hall. The daughter sniffles, clinging on to her mother's arm, the mother attached to that arm wearing a soft sweater and a slightly exasperated expression. She gently tugs her arm out of her daughter's grip, who starts wailing. The mother hushes the daughter and consoles, 'You'll be alright, May–may. You're a smart little girl, and Mommy knows you'll be the best in this whole school.'

May was startled awake from her dream by the shrill ringing of an alarm, insistent and bent on adding to her headache. She quickly silenced it, still drifting in the shards of her melancholy dream. Dragging herself to the mirror, she stared at her pale, drawn face and sighed. *It's going to be a long day*, she thought.

May walked down the school hall, a world away from her chattering classmates. Once, she had been part of them, but ever since her mother had died in a car crash, she had slowly floated away from the two–faced, shallow world that was 9th grade. Absorbed in her thoughts, she almost missed the colorful poster, advertising: Competition To Make Your Idea Come True! Accepting All Original Invention Designs From Schools in Shanghai! May stared at it, remembering how her mother had always loved designing inventions. Resolved, she silently vowed to win the competition.

The next day, she was approached by a girl almost glowing with energy, quite at contrast with her. She chirped, "Hey! I'm Charlotte. I heard that you were also attending the competition. Wanna be partners with me?"

May was taken aback at her enthusiasm. After all, she had met many 9th graders who appeared to be friendly but had a poisonous personality underneath. However, there was something different about this girl that made May tempted to smile back at her. Cautiously, wondering what type of magic was being worked on her, she nodded.

The next day, Charlotte invited May to come over to her home. As she entered, May was surprised at how comfy and warm it was, quite unlike the modern organization of her house. There were beanbags and books everywhere, a plate of cookies on the table, and clutter everywhere. Despite the messiness, everything felt like it belonged. As Charlotte flopped down on the sofa, May stiffly following, they began to brainstorm. Charlotte was constantly bringing up new ideas, sometimes so ridiculous that May couldn't help herself but laugh. And, for the first time in two years, May was having a good time.

After an hour, they finally came up with a good idea – a placemat to put drinks on that also served as a phone charger, turning the heat energy of the drink into electricity. Both squealed at the genius of the idea and got to work immediately.

May came over the next week, and the next. She laughed more often and became more outgoing, which puzzled everybody. What had come over this once serious and grim girl? She became the best of friends with Charlotte, and they continued working on their project, creating prototype after prototype. Although sometimes moments of melancholy did come over her, May started thinking about her mother less and less.

Finally, after months of hard work, the day of the competition had come. They were to present their design onstage to the judges, who would then pick out the winner among all the participants. May and Charlotte were both jiggling their legs in anticipation and anxiety, hoping that they would do well. Suddenly, May saw something flash in the corner of her eye. Her first reaction was to ignore it, but something in her instincts told her to follow it. Despite not wanting to lie to her friend, May tapped Charlotte on her shoulder and whispered, "I have to go use the bathroom. I'll be back really soon."

Excuse made, she turned around and raced after the shadow. Turning a corner, she found that it had disappeared. Frustrated and confused, May stomped forward, thinking that this was a waste of her time – and then found herself in an entirely different world. Everybody was wearing stuffy–looking uniforms, and nobody seemed to have a phone. It seemed like an entirely different era, and this was confirmed by the poster on the wall that said: 1990 Science Fair! May realized that she had somehow been transported into the same competition – but thirty years ago.

With a shock, May realized that this was the competition her mother had went to as the same age as her. It was like a dream come true! She could go find her mother, see her for one last time. She rushed forward to the stage, ignoring the odd looks she got because of her modern clothing. Just in time, her mother was coming onstage. She saw May and waved at her, smiling. May found herself tempted to go forward, to talk to her, to be friends with her.

But then she looked back. Behind her, beyond that wall, was a friend and a future. As much as she wanted to stay with her mother, this was the past. It wasn't worth dwelling on. She had a design to present and a friend to support.

So, May stepped out of the past, and into the present.

Powder

Shanghai American School Pudong Campus, van Rossum, Joon – 13

A pleasant cool breeze passes by as a young lady steps out of a black Chevy dressed in black. The young lady pauses as the cool breeze rushes past her, lifting her braided hair. She stood momentarily beside the black Chevy, gazing at the imposing structure. What secrets did this large building hold within its walls? There was only one way to find out – she took a bracing breath and stepped through the towering front doors.

The entrance hall was dimly lit and cavernously empty. Her heels echoed on the polished floor as she slowly walked forward, peering into shadowy corridors and glancing up sweeping staircases. An eerie silence pressed in on all sides as if the building held its breath, waiting to see what she would do. She felt tiny in the vast, gloomy space. But she had come this far. Squaring her shoulders, she continued deeper into the building, determined to succeed in her task and impress the higher–ups.

“Hello, Victoria Markinswell, welcome to HiroCorp!” a squeaky voice said, making the young lady turn her head.

Victoria's eyebrows were raised in surprise. Looking down, she spotted a small robot on wheels rolling towards her. It was no taller than her shin and had a digital screen for a face that was displaying a smiling emoticon.

"I'm Claude, the company greeter bot. Let me give you a quick tour before you meet with the executives," the robot chirped in its high–pitched voice. Victoria nodded, still feeling uneasy in the empty building but reassured by Claude's friendly demeanour.

The bot led her down one of the shadowy corridors. As they walked, the lights flickered on above them automatically. "HiroCorp is one of the leading robotics manufacturers in the country. We develop bots for everything from consumer homes to high–precision industrial work. I am hoping after your meeting, you will consider joining our team of engineers!"

Victoria listened as Claude attentively described the various labs and research departments. She was impressed by HiroCorp's innovation and ambitious projects. However, there were still unanswered questions about this job and what secrets this imposing building held within its walls. Only the meeting ahead would reveal if Victoria's skills matched their needs well. She steeled herself, knowing her future may hinge on making the right impression on the executives.

“Okay! And now we are here! The Hokage’s office!” Claude said

“Thanks, Claude,” Victoria said with a shaky breath.

You are going to be okay. You’ve got this, Vicky. You got this. It took three years to get here, but you’re finally applying to be an intern. Eee, but I'm only 16. Oh, Zeus

Victoria walked through the open door.

“Victoria Markinswell, Welcome to HiroCorp,” The Hokage says.

“Now you must be wondering what your task is, yes?” Victoria nods her head yes

“Y–yes…” Victoria says.

“Your task here is working on creating something new. We need something to power our weapons. We think you are the best person for this. Do you agree?” The Hokage asked.

“Y–yes! I do!” Victoria agreed.

“Good, Cleo?” The Hokage says as he turns around, facing a person–like robot on a platform.

“Yes, sir?” Cleo says as she lifts her head, steps off the platform, and approaches Victoria.

“Help her find her way to the laboratory, please, Cleo,” The Hokage states.

“Of course, please follow me,” Cleo says as she scans Victoria.

Victoria nodded with newfound determination. While weapons development wasn't what she initially imagined, she understood Hiro-Hito's global influence and strategic priorities. This role could harness her skills for the company's critical mission while furthering her career.

She turned to Cleo, intrigued by the humanoid bot's lifelike mannerisms. "It's a pleasure to meet you."

“The pleasure is mine…” Cleo says hesitantly.

Victoria followed Cleo through the gleaming white corridors of Hiro-Hito's headquarters. Though still a little uneasy about her task, she approached it with an open mind.

After moments of thoughtful silence, Victoria spoke to the android guiding her. "You seem quite advanced. What types of technologies allow for your human-like qualities?"

Cleo replied factually. "Hiro designed me to integrate seamlessly with humans. My social skills simulator allows for nuanced conversation, while my synthetic musculature and dermal casings make me appear almost organic."

Victoria was impressed by Hiro’s innovation. She wondered if HiroCorp respected the boundaries between people and property. Her work here could help or hinder that distinction.

As they arrived at the lab, Victoria steeled her resolve. She would pursue this opportunity but maintain her principles. Her expertise deserved to better humanity, not enable its worst impulses. With care and conscience, she hoped to honour that duty in all her efforts.

“Victoria Markinswell, Age 16. Correct?” something someone asked her.

“Yes” Victoria replied

“Good, it's a pleasure to meet you. I’m Liabot.” Lia said, confirming she was a robot, though Victoria was confused about why she called herself Liabot

“Wondering why she’s called a Liabot, right?” Another voice, this time male, asked Victoria.

“Yeah…” Victoria replied

“I’m Du Cheng. You can call me DC. I’m a human.” DC laughed at the look of relief on Victoria’s face.

“Nice to meet you, DC” Victoria replied.

“Anyways, she’s called Liabot because of the person who created her, Hinata Liya,” DC said

“Oh, thanks!”

“No probs. Can I get your task?” DC asks

“it is creating something to power weapons”, Victoria replies

“Great! You should be in Lab 001. It's just down the hall!” Lia said

“Thanks!”

Victoria walked through the hall down from Lab 007 to Lab 001. She was feeling quite apprehensive about this task, wondering if she could do this.

When she opened the door, she found nobody else there; the only thing she could see was a small disk on the floor. She walked towards it, putting her foot over it and pressing down. The lights turned on, showing a desk filled with different sorts of materials on there.

Victoria examined the materials on the desk with curiosity and concern. Several sources of sulfur, charcoal, and saltpetre caught her eye; they were ingredients she recognised could make a volatile explosive powder. While this powder may fulfil HiroCorp's request, developing weapons left her uneasy.

She took a deep breath to clear her mind and think creatively. Though she had encountered many problems with the powder exploding as soon as it was moved, she could finally create the powder only to explode when met with fire.

Taking a deep breath, Victoria exited the room with her product in hand to show the big four. As Victoria entered the room, she was met with four people and an empty seat. She started her presentation by demonstrating what uses the powder had, what ingredients were needed, and what the process of making this powder was like.

"Very good, Ms. Markinswell." The Kazekage said.

"Thank you!" Victoria said, thoughts of guilt slowly disappearing.

"We have an offer for you.." The Raikage started.

"An offer only a fool would disagree too," The Hokage continued.

"We would like to offer you a seat in the higher ranks as The Mizakage." The Tsuchikage ended. With that, all her feelings of guilt disappeared, *They were only testing me! They aren't going to use the powder!* She thought to herself.

Who knew the sixteen-year-old prodigy could be so wrong?

The Shimmering Contour

Shanghai American School Pudong Campus, Zhang, Daisy – 11

As the wind bawled, accompanied by the bleak and dreary winter, a young girl named Li Na inhaled and puffed out the chilly air and trudged along the sidewalk with effort. As a shattered glass window hopped into sight, she swiftly strolled in and secured the door behind her.

"Mistress, your father mentioned that as a reward for your poetry, you may select nine jewels of your choice as you wished." A maid standing alongside Li Na whispered.

Sliding her slender fingers along a pearl, Li Na grasped nine of them and placed it gently on the counter. Glimpsing at the elegant lady behind the counter, Li Na caught sight of her approaching an abacus with beads attached to it.

Tik, Tok, tik, Tok, tik, Tok, the darling little object sang in a sweet voice and the collision between the beads vibrated in Li Na's ears. Straining her neck to glance at the abacus, a flash of curiosity and wonder swept through Li Na's pure obsidian eyes while fear also dominated the young soul.

Staring intently at the abacus, the lady leaned forward, glanced at Li Na, and spoke, "Ahem, that will be 2 pieces of silver, miss."

Still staring profoundly at the abacus, Li Na blinked and left the shop after the purchase. On the deserted streets, Li Na tugged her maid, Zhang Li's coat sleeve and inquired, "Zhang Li, what was that weird looking object on the table just then?"

Stroking Li Na's glossy hair, Zhang Li thought for a moment and answered, "Oh miss, you are only thirteen and have so much to learn! I am only a maid without education, and I am afraid I cannot reply to your question! But of course, as the only daughter of the general, you will grow to know everything about the Song dynasty!"

As soon as they reached the courtyard of the general's mansion, Li Na snuggled herself in her father's warm robe and asked, "Papa, you know so much, you are such a good teacher! Today on the counter we encountered a mysterious object which was used to calculate money! Surely you will know what it was?"

Soothing his daughter, the general responded, "Dear girl, you must realize that our blood is much more regal than that of the accountant's. Your background is different! This object is only used in rural areas! Although we are currently dwelling in this exuberant little town, you must remember who you are! So, stop thinking about that little antique, it is of no use."

Li Na pursed her lips and nodded uncertainly. Drifting off to a daze, the surroundings became a haze, only the contour of the abacus shone like a shimmering star.

Tugging her gently by the sleeve, the general suddenly broke into a glorious smile, "But...I have good news! We are moving next to the imperial palace."

"Miss, the general wishes for you to dress and groom for the trip." Zhang Li stood erect obediently at the doorstep with a silk gown and glistening ornaments in her arms.

Bewildered, Li Na stepped gracefully onto the red velvet carpet and inquired, "Father...what is this special trip? And why do you have a thin veil on your lap?"

Pouring a cup of tea precisely into an intricate pottery cup, the general chattered on, "I have promised you marriage to the chancellor's son and if there are no refusal you couple will marry on your 15th birthday, it is for your bright future."

Li Na gasped.

Smirking delightfully, the general patted his daughter on the head, "Yes, yes, indeed, you shall gain so much power, so much! The chancellor is quite a figure."

Staring hollowly into space, Li Na collapsed into the carpet with astonishment and out of her lips came three words spitting out, "OH MY GOD!"

As soon as Zhang Li had aided Li Na back on her feet, the young lady directed her gaze out of the window, somewhere over the rainbow. Swinging her ebony hair around her cheeks, she galloped around the room with her hair loose and unruly.

Sternly, the general motioned for Li Na to sit down once more, then he announced strictly, "There is a requirement for this marriage, the servant in the chancellor's court had passed this piece of note to me."

On the piece of parchment, wrote the following verse:

> Before the risen sun on the awaiting day,
> An assignment needs to be submitted by the deadline.
> For the discovery of a diamond among the pearls,

Astonished eyes gawp at its glow.

Bemused, Li Na strolled out of the room and into her own bedroom. Sitting idly on her pillow, she analyzed the note meticulously, but it seemed like a layer of billowing smoke had befuddled her mind.

Flopping herself up and down, Li Na soon found her eyelids battering together... suddenly, she awoke as if she were pinched or stung by a bee. Flipping through the pages in her memory, she came to a halt as she visioned the abacus.

That's it! She needed an abacus!

Darting to the jewelry shop, Li Na offered the lady 5 pieces of gold for the abacus. As soon as she held the darling thing in her hand, Li Na brushed it gently with her handkerchief until it shined like the morning sun. After the procedures, she rushed hastily back to the courtyard and shouted, "Father! I've got an abacus!"

Silence crept to every single corner of the room and embraced it.

"Why would you need something so...poor like an ab... aba...abacus?" The general questioned, "It has no function! I have prepared the finest robe for the chancellor's son, that will be the answer to the riddle we were given! But the abacus can serve as one of your wedding gifts."

As a smile spread widely across her face, Li Na stepped into the royal carriage alongside her father and set off for the journey. On the whole trip, the general blabbered to his adored daughter about manners, rules...But Li Na was so addicted to her abacus that she even let a giggle escape from her lips. All the words the general mentioned were simply blown away by the wind.

With a royal escort, Li Na strode delicately into the hall room and curtsied. The chancellor's son sat in the glow of the chandelier. Other guests are filling in like a stream.

Coughing, the chancellor annunciated in an arrogant tone, "Right, our ceremony has begun! My old friend general, I hope you have got a good guess for the riddle?"

Before her father could hand up the robe, Li Na spoke, "Honorable chancellor, Li Na, the general's daughter has the answer to the riddle, and she will be presenting an object from the rural districts."

As soon as her voice dropped, all the nobilities snickered unpleasantly and whispered amongst themselves.

Flashing out the crystal abacus held in Li Na's handkerchief, she continued, "Esteemed guests, this is an innovation which is named the abacus, it is crafted with immense care and..."

Before her voice even dropped, the minister sarcastically stated "Ah...that is just like a flowerpot! It looks beautiful but has no function! Plus, you must have received it from the countryside! How dare you trick the chancellor with some pieces of wood?" Laughter roared out from the crowd.

Ignoring the statement, Li Na explained explicitly, "Ha, the function of the abacus is to calculate money, it will be efficient in real life, and I believe every accountant in this city should be able to utilize it!"

One pair, two pairs, three pairs...of eyes were attracted to the abacus as if it was a magnet. In awe, the chancellor's son led the clapping.

Walking down to his bride, the chancellor's son declared, "Li Na! You are a wondrous lady; these special items should be widespread! I adore your optimistic and daring personality, there will be no decline to our wedding!

Staring with pride at the abacus and blushing slightly, Li Na fell into a haze once more in two winks time...

Pacific Ocean's Magic Potion

Shanghai American School Pudong Campus, Zhang, Zhuo Qi Kiki – 11

"I really want to sail to Pacific Ocean and find the magic potion!" asked Olivia.

When she was 5, her grandpa told her a tale: there is a cave in the Pacific Ocean, in the cave there is a potion that can make one of your wishes true. This tale was trapped in Olivia's mind as she heard it. Her wish is to have all the toys in the world when she was young.

She had been talking about this tale since she was 5. Olivia always asks her parents when can she go on her adventure. Her mother and father always say, "Darling, when you are 18, you can go on your adventure! We will always support you to do anything you want!"

Olivia was born in this island; she grew up in an atmosphere of love. Even when other children were going through a rebellious period, she never argued with her parents. Her parents supported her with all the things she wanted to explore. When other children in the island was enjoying their childhood and having fun, Olivia will be always daydreaming about her future on the boundless ocean.

The sun slowly rises, a breezy wind moved lazily along the beach, making it sway like waves in a calm sea. She finally welcomed July 9th——her 18th birthday.

Upon the sand was the birthday gift mum and dad prepared for Olivia: A sailboat, named Liberty 18. It laid quietly like a statue. The hull was made out of wood and the mainsail and headsail was made out of two huge pieces of cloth. The sailboat was covered in blue paint that camouflaged it with the sea like a chameleon.

As Olivia woke up, she immediately saw this sailboat. Her eyes widened instantly, her breathing stopped, her heart was beating in her throat like drums. Olivia's whole body seemed petrified, filled with surprise. She can't believe she actually received something that she has been dreaming about every night! Without thinking, she ran in her room, packed her bag with water, food, clothes and a blanket. She ran to Liberty 18 and threw her bag onto the hull.

When she was about to go on her adventure, her mum and dad came running near the sailboat. Mum handed her a piece of wood with a whole on top; Olivia didn't what it was. As she was wondering what this object was for, her mother started speaking, "Darling this is something that I made for you. I named it: whistle, when you are in an emergency situation, please blow this out loud as hard as you can! But I wish you never get a chance of using this."

Mum has been facing a dilemma since Olivia was 5 (when she heard the tale). On one hand she wanted her child to grew up safely, go to a good college, get a job, get married and live happily ever after. Unfortunately, on the other hand, she wanted her child to complete her dream as she wished.

Finally, 3 months before Olivia's 18–year–old birthday, Mum finally made her decision: let Olivia become a sailor. She was really worried that her daughter will be in a dangerous predicament, so she started making something special for Olivia.

Mum first collected a piece of wood that was about 12 cm long, 14 cm wide and 7 cm thick. Secondly, she cut and incised it into a cylindrical shape. After that, she polished the outside of this piece of wood. Then, she drilled a small hole on the piece of wood. Lastly, she placed her lips on the hole, and blew at it. Suddenly, a loud, sharp sound came out of this piece of wood. This wasn't just a piece of wood, but something that's filled with a mother's care. She named this piece of wood: Whistle.

All emotions ran into Olivia's brain at once. She was so thankful to her parents that they supported her so much. There was a lot of words she wanted to say but at last, she just gave a smile to Mum and Dad.

Olivia waved at Mum and Dad as the sailboat calmly swayed across the sea. She sat there staring into the vast ocean.

Day after day, the little boat has been swaying on the sea like a tumbler.

One night, when Olivia is asleep, the rain suddenly starts to hit Olivia hardly on her face. She was scared awake. As she opened her eyes, darkness surrounded her. Gloomy, stormy, rainy, the weather was, with the lightning rushing through the dreadful sky, like a sharp sword that cut the sky and the shining arc ran down from the clouds to the edge of the sky.

The cold, thin air ran through her body, as chilly cold water gradually covered Olivia's body. She struggled hard, trying to avoid herself to drown; she could feel her body became heavier and heavier. At the last second, before the freezing water covers all over Oliva's head, she blew the whistle tired on to a string, on her neck. The whistle echoed miles and miles like a siren……

Olivia woke up. She wasn't floating on the freezing cold sea water, but instead, lying on a bed. She was so confused. Why am I here? Where is this place? Who saved me? Million of questions rushed into her brain. As she was still wondering, a women came walking into the room, with a cup of water in her hand. Olivia moved back cautiously. Then, the women spoke, "Hi, my name is Anne. You don't have to be that scared of me. I found you when I was sailing on the sea. At first, I heard a loud noise so I followed the sound. Then I saw you in the sea, so I carried you on my boat and sailed back here."

Olivia was still filled with confusion. "Emm.….my name is Olivia….thank you for saving me.." she replied. Anne smiled, and gave her the cup of water.

Later on, Olivia came out of room. Surprisingly, Anne wasn't there, so Olivia went out the house. As she opened the door, and started wondering around the island. The whole island was really different to her home. This island barely had any person. Olivia haven't see anyone on this island. Soon, she wondered back to Anne's house.

When she arrived, Anne was already sitting next to the table eating a bowl of salad and another bowl in front of her. "Hi Olivia! This is for you! Do you want to come and eat with me?" Anne asked

"Sure." Olivia answered as she pulled out a chair and sat next to Anne.

"I wasn't born on this island. I wanted to sail to the Pacific Ocean to find the magic potion. Unfortunately, there was a storm and it broke my boat. When I woke up, I was already on this island. Luckily, I didn't die; but unfortunately, I was stuck in this island until I built my own boat." Anne explained her adventure.

Hearing the words: Pacific Ocean and magic potion, Olivia immediately raised her head with curiosity. "Oh my god! I also wanted to find the magic potion but as you can see, I also ended up in this island." Olivia exclaimed with excitement.

Anne and Olivia talked about all their journeys, wishes, dreams for so long. They soon found out that they were really similar with each other. Soon, they became familiar with each other and became best friends. Everyday, Olivia will go in the forest with Anne and find vegetables and fruits. Sometimes, they will dive deep in the sea and catch fishes for food.

Days and days past, everyday seemed to happen the same way, but none of them were bored.

27 years later, Anne was already 79 years old. Olivia was 50 years old. Olivia still embarked on a new journey once again; again, the destination was the Pacific Ocean. This time, she wasn't on her own, but with another person. She sailed in the same boat, had the same whistle tied on her neck and had the same dream. Everything seemed to be the exact same, except for the determination. She seemed even more determined with her dream.

The Domes

Shanghai American School Pudong Campus, Zhu, Kai Lin – 13

It has been 23 years since my whole life became mechanical. Every day I walk on the same road to work, looking at the same grey sky, and every day I go to work all I see is Bob and Fred. Every day I hear the same mechanical "G–Good morning...sir! R–Remember...to s–s–stay productive s–s... (shuts down)" That sound makes me want to throw up on the spot every time I hear it. Yet still, I walk on the same route to work. Every single day, I go through the exact same routine, wake up, work, and then sleep. As days pass by, I start to forget everything before the Chinese government created shan–ding domes. I still remember fragments of when I was 16, and before that. But after the domes and robots came along, those memories became dull.

As I walk into my dark little room, I wince when I hear the constant buzz of the machines working. Knowing that giving them my blood is my job is quite disappointing. The meaning of the domes is supposed to be good, mountain top domes, such a majestic name for a boring world. The invention of the domes and the robots separated the poor and the rich, protecting the rich from the "deadly" temperatures outside. This invention from the Chinese company ensures everyone in China is alive, but the poor live in such worse situations. Before the separation, many theorists said there are no such thing as deadly temperatures, the government is just using the poor to create power as power is running out worldwide. However, I personally do not believe this. After the separation, all the poor people get bad living conditions, but no one wants to take the risk and try to access the outside world.

I lie down on the ice–cold table and watch the mechanical arms slowly stick needles into my arms and legs. After a while, I start to get sleepy, and I watch as the ceiling slowly, slowly, fade away. After I woke up it was almost 6 pm. We cannot tell from the light, so there is one clock in every room. I drag myself up feeling like an old rug, and I drag myself home, past the buzzing machines, and past Bob and Fred. I walk up the stairs and get to my little apartment, so small that not even a surfboard can fit inside! (From one of my only memories left.) I open the fridge, get a bottle of milk, and promptly fall on the bed, instantly falling asleep. As I slept, I had a dream about the "world," now grey and depressing. In the dream I saw the city, I saw it as a dome. But from what I still faintly remember, just the country China should be bigger than the dome! As I saw a blurred vision of the city from above, I jolted awake with a muffled scream. This could mean that there is still possibly a world outside, and maybe we are just here in the domes to create the power necessary for the outside world? Maybe.

As I woke up and opened the fridge again, I thought maybe I could do something, about this situation. For the first time in years, I felt a tingle in my heart. I suddenly felt energetic, and I decided to go to work with a purpose from now on. As I walk through the familiar streets, I don't walk past Bob and Fred anymore. Instead, I stopped to observe the two robots' structure, seeing something I've never really noticed before. On the back of the robot, behind the rust are the words: Poor Quality Robot, Send Inside. I knew it. Knowing that I wasn't wrong, I walked to work feeling like a different person. I checked my room thoroughly for details. I checked the damp corners, and I checked the robot responsible for taking my blood. But this time, I found something more important! I opened the back of the robot and found a rock! I haven't seen a rock for years, which also means this rock must be from outside! As I saw the back of the robot sparking electricity, I decided to finish up and go home. I walked home, not realizing that it wasn't time to go, and the robot hadn't taken my blood.

I sat down on the bed, looking at the stone in my hands, thinking how I could get out. I looked straight up, at the ceiling. No, water's not dripping down, and no, it's not getting moldy (because it already is moldy.) The top of the dome could have answers, or even, exits. I decided to act at once. I crept out of my home, past the old streets, and into the facility. I know that there is a robot that Is connected to the top of the facility that goes up and down to collect the blood. So, all that's left for me to do is wait for the robot to drop down and carry me up. As I walked in to my room so that the robot would come collect my blood after it is taken, I just remembered that the robot was broken. Not thinking it was a big deal, I lay down on the table, feeling a chill go down my spine, and feeling the rush of my heartbeat, the adrenaline I haven't felt in so long. However, what waited for me wasn't the robot ready to sample my blood, but the mechanical repetition of the word "exterminate." I realized something was off and jumped up off the table. "Bang!", and half the table was torn down. I realized, for the first time, a robot has gone rogue! I quickly ran out of the room, and home again, this time, not even giving Bob and Fred a single glance.

Lying on my bed, I realized I had already gone to and back from the facility two times. However, knowing the ways of control, the malfunction will be found in less than a day, maybe even hours. Then, all my plans will go to waste. Realizing that it's already not early, I decided to sleep earlier than before, so I could leave some energy for when I need it. I closed my eyes, savoring the experiences today, wondering If I'll ever feel so alive again. As this thought ended, everything around me faded out and I slept.

I woke up the following morning, breathing in the cold, damp air as I dragged myself to stand up and go make breakfast. After eating, I slowly walk to work. But this time, something different happened. As I walked into the facility late, knowing that I'm the last one to be in here, I suddenly hear a swoosh behind me, and a huge metal door slid down and locked me and everyone else in the facility. I was just wondering why the daily routine was interrupted when I looked up and saw a big countdown on a screen showing 1.32. I would assume this means one and a half minutes left until something happens, as now it is already at 1.20. My brain starts quickly processing everything that could happen after the countdown, all the robots could go rogue, everyone might just fall asleep on the spot!

As the seconds pass slowly but surely, I start panicking, suddenly feeling the drop of a sweat on my skin, and I feel a small tremble in my body. Could the countdown mean something dangerous? Thinking about this, I quickly ran to a random lab for taking blood, and I found the table where I usually lie on. I quickly hide under it, and stick out my head to watch the countdown, which is already at .10. As the countdown shows *3,2,1*, the screen showed the word DETONATION. I quickly hide under the table, hearing loud explosions everywhere around me. I shut my eyes tight, and I blocked my ear, shriveling up like a frightened animal. I could still hear the explosions, and everything falling apart around me.

After what felt like hours, and the endless explosions, I finally opened my eyes. At first, my eyes could adjust to the brightness. As I slowly stood up, I walked forward, looking at all the rubble, covering everything that used to be the world around me. I looked up, and I saw an endless sea of clouds, and a bright dot in the sky, what I remember to be the sun. I scan the barren grounds, the towering plateau in front of me, and the robotic pieces left of Bob and Fred. I hear a faint "*buzzzz*", and I hear a familiar glitched sound. "*H−h−hello sir"* came out from the rubble of what used to be robots. As I picked up a piece of debris, I smashed, and I smashed at the robots, until I heard nothing but the wind. Satisfied, I get up, and take a big stride forward.

"How Gunpowder was Invented"

Shanghai Singapore International School, Ding, Bo Cheng Aaron – 12

Once upon a time, there lived an ancient Chinese dynasty of "Wu", and on the border of Wu kingdom there laid a larger kingdom of "Shui". This Shui kingdom is full of barbarian soldiers who invades the Wu kingdom every year, they have claimed more than 1/9 percent of Wu kingdoms land. Even scaring is that Shui kingdom has a habit of killing all prisoners and civilians of Wu kingdom, they have the crimes of many massacres.

For the sake of Wu kingdom, the great Wu Emperor II wanted to choose a brave warrior and send him to find the Great Precious Weapon of Hope. The emperor ordered: "If anyone who can slay the dragon of smoke, shall have my permission to find the Great Precious Weapon!" Hundreds of young men joined to tryout and to save the Wu kingdom, even knowing that they might die in the dangerous tryout. But after eighty and ninety deadly tryouts, no one had succeeded to overcome this dragon of smoke. But there was still one person left alone in the dreadful tryout.

This person is called, Zhou Qing. He was now announced as he walked up to the gigantic arena doors. Zhou was very unique in particular, because he didn't bring a weapon, all he brought according to Zhou was his mind. Zhou was a clever person; he didn't believe that a fight could ever end this kind of situation. He always liked to think through each task and problem, not like most people who went for the tryouts. He stopped at the doors and noticed that the doors were made out of a solid powder, it seems to be a very strong material. Zhou smiled and told the guards beside him to open the arena doors.

The guards removed locks after locks and finally they opened the last lock. Zhou could hear the dragon inside roaring with might, but he wasn't scared like some contestant. Suddenly, a huge wind blew by forcing the gigantic door to open. Zhou can fell the mighty wind blowing him back like telling him not to come in, Zhou's hair was blown backwards. But Zhou shovel back the wind and went into the dragon arena without a single thought. After Zhou went in the arena, the guards shut the great doors. Locking Zhou in the great arena…

As Zhou went in the arena, the Grand Dragon of Smoke, seemed to be angry as he hummed in the low voice, looking at Zhou in the eyes as if he was his ultimate enemy, thankfully the dragon is locked on the neck with a chain. Zhou shivered but then he smiled, he studied the dragon carefully. Then he discovered a secret, when the dragon huffs each time it breathes, the huffs turn into a black powder. The black powder looks like tiny dark black dust pecks, but each huff from the dragon gives out thousands and thousands of these tiny dust pecks. Sometimes these dust pecks create fire cracks when they roughly touching each other. Zhou thought about it and suddenly gave an answer to it. The tiny dust pecks are the Great Precious Weapon the great emperor is looking for. But the dragon became mad after waiting for Zhou a long time, he started to roar and also started to spit flames.

Zhou dodged the flames and also figured out that the friction force between the tiny dusts creates fire and flames too. The dragon was desperate to kill Zhou, but the emperor was impressed by Zhou's excellent explanation. The Great Emperor sent soldiers to stop the dragon and save Zhou. The soldiers didn't have anyways to stop the violent and ferocious dragon. After thinking, Zhou exclaimed that it will be better to stop the dragon with water. As the soldiers started to spill water all over the dragon, the dragon sneezed and started to curl up.

The emperor was super impressed by Zhou's ability and cleverness. Soon then, the soldiers started to collect the tiny dust pecks and started to make flame and fire with them. Some smart inventors in the kingdom started to create weapons using these dust pecks by firing them out of a hollow stick. The government and the emperor agreed that this stick–like weapon will be named as a gun, and the dust pecks will be named as gunpowder. The creation of gunpowder surprised the world but not the Shui kingdom. The King of Shui kingdom ordered that the invasion of Wu kingdom will be continuing as normal once every year.

The invasion day of Shui kingdom has come. The entire Wu kingdom was ready for the invasion. On the city walls of Wu kingdom, many gunners were prepared and ready for the battle to come. Zhou was invited by the Wu Emperor to watch the battle. In the horizon, many Shui Warriors with shiny blades and swords were ready to take over the city. The emperor started to worry, but Zhou started to smile. Then a horn went off in the Shui army, hundreds and thousands of soldiers rushed and charged at the city. As the Shui soldiers approached, Wu commanding

officers began to order: “Soldiers! The enemy gives us no mercies! So, we shall not give them any mercies! Fire at Will!” The soldiers of Wu fired flames after flames of fire that rushed through the current, the Shui Warriors cannot even go through the waves of flames and fire. Most of the Shui soldiers cried in pain, and even more soldiers deserted or surrendered. This is a heavy loss for Shui kingdom, but a glorious victory for the Wu peoples.

After this event, Zhou went famous all over the world, many people were impressed on how he changed history and how he changed warfare. Nowadays in battle, people are less likely to use sword, but they have a better option of using a gun. This is the story of Zhou, and his heroic efforts in the advancement of history and technology.

Accident Tea

Shanghai Singapore International School, Jiang, Hanna – 13

Long time ago, in China, there was a widow owning a small restaurant with only four tables with a very small kitchen. Not a lot of people came to this restaurant to eat, but still she did her best. In rainy days, she wasn't able to open her restaurant since there was a big hole on the ceiling. She really wanted to fix the ceiling so she could work every day even if its raining, but she didn't have enough money.

One windy day, her daughter, who is 17 years old was helping her to serve food in the restaurant. The more the wind blew, the smell of the food went further so more people came to try her food. The tables in the restaurant was full for the first time. Even though they were busier than usual, she couldn't hide the happiness that appeared on her face. She prepared 10 cups of hot water and putted on the side when her daughter was taking order. But because of the wind, leaves from the tree fell into the hot water. Because the color of the cup and the leaves were similar, no one knew that leaves went into the water. After putting cup of water for every table, one customer suddenly asked the widow's daughter the reason that the water tastes different. She quickly ran to the kitchen and asked her mom what she did to the water. She paused for a while, looking around. And she found a lot of leaves on the floor. And she looked up and saw leaves coming in by the hole on the ceiling! "OH NO!" She cried and ran out of the kitchen and went front of the person who asked about the water. Even before she started talking, he asked "How can the water taste like this? What did you do to it?" "I am so sorry! Because of the lea−" "IT TASTS AMAZING!" The widow got confused. "I NEVER TASTED THIS AMAZING WATER BEFORE! If you don't mind, may you please tell me how to make this water?"

The next day, the widow went to her restaurant to work. But even before she came, people were lining up outside the restaurant. She was shocked. VERY shocked. She pretended that she isn't the owner of the restaurant and asked a person who were lining up "Excuse me may I ask what is this line for?" The person who was lining up replied "This is the restaurant that gives water that tastes AMAZING! A lot of people said they never tasted this taste from other food before. That's why I am lining up here." The widow thanked him for telling her and went behind the restaurant to collect some leaves to use. After that, she walked into her restaurant with her customers. After serving the water, a lot of people asked the name of the drink. She remembered the shape of the tree that she collected the leaves from. She replied "T.. Tea! Yes, the name of this drink is tea."

After that day, she became busier and busier. She earned enough money to fix the ceiling and to put more tables and chairs. More customer came to taste her tea day after day, and starting from that day, everyone started enjoying the amazing water Tea.

Paper

Shanghai Singapore International School, Kuo, Yong Yan – 12

Back in the olden times, there was no such thing as "paper." People would write on strips of reeds, or carvings of stone. They even used wooden tablets for writing. But many of these methods were too complicated for writing, so something happened in the olden days..

Once upon a time, during ancient China's Spring and Autumn period (around 770–476 BC), there lived a wise inventor named Cai Lin. Cai Lin was a gifted inventor and engineer who had a passion for learning and exploring the possibilities of what could be created. One day, Cai Lin was walking along the banks of the Yellow River when he noticed the leaves of the bamboo trees floating by and being carried away by the current. It sparked an idea in his mind, and he realized that if he could manipulate this material, he could create something useful. He spent years developing the art of paper. After years of experimentation, Cai Lin finally perfected the art of papermaking. He discovered that by pounding the bamboo leaves into strips and spreading them over screens, he could create a durable and lightweight material that could be used for writing and drawing. Cai Lin's invention revolutionized the way people shared and communicated information, and his paper became a staple throughout Asia. Cai Lin's invention was the first step in creating the modern paper industry, and it has been an integral part of human civilization ever since. In the beginning, the people of the town were skeptical of Cai Lin's invention. They were accustomed to using stone and wooden tablets for writing, and they did not see the value of this new paper material. However, as time went on and they saw how versatile and durable the paper was, their skepticism turned to curiosity. Finally, when the people saw how much easier and convenient paper was to use compared to stone or wooden tablets, they began to embrace Cai Lin's invention and use it for themselves. Cai Lin's paper had become a staple in the town, and they could not imagine life without it now. As time went on, Cai Lin's paper spread throughout the town and beyond. It became a part of people's everyday lives. They used it for writing and drawing, and they found new ways to utilize it's versatility and durability. The people grew to appreciate how Cai Lin's paper allowed them to share information more easily and quickly. They were no longer limited by the heavy and fragile stone and wooden tablets of the past. Cai Lin's simple but groundbreaking invention had become a part of their culture and their daily lives. The thoughtfulness of Cai Lin's papermaking invention was its versatility and durability. By taking the leaves of the bamboo trees, which were otherwise discarded, and transforming them into a light and durable material, Cai Lin showed us how even the most overlooked or discarded resources can be transformed into something useful. His invention was a lesson in ingenuity and finding new ways to utilize our resources. It reminded us to look at even the most simple things in a different light and to think creatively and thoughtfully about the possibilities. The story of Cai Lin's invention reminds us that even the most seemingly unimportant or overlooked resources can be transformative and have great potential, if only we take the time to see it. It is a lesson in ingenuity, creativity and thoughtful appreciation of our resources, and one that we can apply to our lives to make the most out of everything we have.

The invention of a Moveable Type Printing

Shanghai Singapore International School, Leung, Gordon Chengxu – 12

Did you know that reading books before the invention of printing was a luxury, because books were mainly written by hand. Manually transcribing books is not only time-consuming, laborious, but also error-prone. So today I'm going to tell you about the origin of this convenient and concise (fake) movable type printing.

During the Tang Dynasty, China invented engraving printing. At that time, people carved the words on the books on the wooden board, and when the book was printed, the words carved on the wooden board were brushed with ink and then printed on white paper to make a book. Bi Sheng is a text engraver engaged in the printing industry, as Bi Sheng gets older and older, he feels more and more incapable of doing it in this industry, and recently he always makes mistakes in engraving words, and has been scolded by the boss many times, and the boss has dismissed him mercilessly when he sees Bi Sheng old and weak. Fortunately, at that time, a new West Lake bookstore was opened in Hangzhou, and the owner of West Lake bookstore was in urgent need of employment, so he recruited Bi Sheng to his side. At that time, the West Lake Bookstore was preparing to produce a best-selling book, but it opened later than other bookstores, and the boss was worried that other bookstores would print the book in advance, so that the books he printed would not be sold. The more he got home, the more he thought about it, the more guilty he felt that his boss had helped him when he was unemployed and that he couldn't help him when he needed him. Nowadays, there is only one way to help bosses, and that is to improve the efficiency of book printing.

One day, when Bi Sheng was meditating by the lake, he suddenly heard the laughter of two children, Bi Sheng walked up to the children and found that they were playing with mud, Bi Sheng looked at the palm prints on the children's mud blocks and fell into deep thought. He returned home with a piece of mud, and at this time, his wife was burning firewood, and Bi Sheng looked at the mud in his hands and the firewood on the ground and ran out excitedly. When he returned to the bookstore, he began to burn the mud, and the boss asked Bi Sheng what he was doing, and Bi Sheng told him: "I will first carve words on these clays and then burn them with fire to make them hard, and then arrange these clay movable characters in an iron plate frame." In this way, the same cement bracket printing plate as the woodcut printing plate is formed, and it can also be disassembled and arranged into new content after printing, and the printing speed is dozens of times that of the previous one. ”

A few days later, the news that the West Lake Bookstore had printed the best-selling book in advance shocked his peers, and the owner of the bookstore invited Bi Sheng to his home, and he asked people to take out a large sum of silver to give to Bi Sheng, hoping that Bi Sheng could accept the silver and keep the secret of movable type printing, but Bi Sheng said to the boss: "This movable type printing should be known to everyone as soon as possible." "This... Why is that? "The first is to do the hard work of thousands of carvers, and the second is to make everyone afford to buy books. Hahaha! But it's a pity that Bi Sheng died in the process of promoting movable type printing technology, which is really a special regret.

"The Man and His Gunpowder"

Shanghai Singapore International School, Menon, Shreyansh – 12

Jake was peacefully living with his wife and his three children, suddenly three troops from china came and started making fun of him, “peasant” said one of the troops, in anger Jake said, “get out of here”, in anger the three troops started destroying his little hut and his shop, and the troops walked of. “MY SHOP” cried Jake… the wife was in disbelief of what just occurred… the man was plotting for revenge.

Jake had a great idea, he planned of throwing rocks and vandalizing the houses of the three troops, but jake didn’t know the location of the troops , he had a plan , at 6 pm all the army get to go rest , so he was going to follow one of them every night to destroy them , but he can’t do it in front of them , so he first followed all of the troops day by day and remembered there location.

It was the day , Jake is going to vandalize the troops houses , he started with the first one , he threw rocks at the windows , use spray paint to draw things on the walls , but while he was doing that , he had an idea ,why not make something that makes a big noise , something that he can do in front of them and the troops can't do anything , something that explodes , “ I GOT IT” he ran to his house in a hurry , his wife asked “what’s the rush for” “I have a great idea !” “What is it” I can make something that makes a loud noise, and they can't do anything” “something that blasts?” “YES” said Jake. He started drafting ideas of how to make a bomb (remember, at this time they had no such thing called a bomb)

Jake was in the room for hours and hours, until he finally figured out how to make something that blasts, “all you need to do is mix charcoal with sulphur” he explained to his wife, his wife asked what will you name it? “Well, since it makes a sound like a gun and has powder in it, I will name is gunpowder” “wow sounds nice.”

Jake marches down the street do their houses , he places the gunpowder , and BOOM the entire house turned into pieces of ash , next morning the cops come to investigate what happens , one of the investigators named Lopez starting investigating , “wow this is something I never ever saw” “what is it “ someone asked , it's some type of explosive says Lopez in shock, “well who did it?” Asked someone “some genius” …and that’s how gunpowder was made.

Stinky Tofu

Shanghai Singapore International School, Ng, Yee Hsin – 12

"Excuse me! Sorry!" I exclaimed as I rode on my donkey's back in a medium pace, enjoying the refreshing taste of air being blown in my face, shrugging off the offensive comments from my fellow locals about my reckless riding. It's hard getting around such a narrow alley like this, especially when you are on a donkey, and it is busy hour. Yet I always seem to be in seventh heaven when I ride through this alley. Owing to the fact that my mother's tofu store is right at the end of this crowded, noisy, narrow, filthy and maybe a little bit stinky, alley.

I come to my mother's store all the time to help out. Just handing out the tofu or even just screaming out the words "Tofu! Tofu! One–of–a–kind tofu!" Makes my mother pleased. Selling and advertising my mom's tofu is fun and all but the best part about coming here, is that I'm the first person to get a taste of the freshly made tofu! My mother's workers always make sure that I get all the tofu I want. The soft and tender texture when I first bite into it, to the unique, milky flavor when I swallow it in, is what I call heaven.

My mother's tofu is very different from other tofu stores around our town, the flavor of my mom's tofu stays for an especially long time on the tongue, making the customer crave for more and more and more. The tofu recipe that my mother currently uses, has b

een passed down many many generations. Therefore, our recipe is exceptionally special to our Wang family. My mother's tofu store's business has always been on a roll in thanks to our unique taste. But one day, things changed.

I rode on my donkey to my mother's store through the narrow alley as per usual, but this time, I felt strangely more relaxed. I could finally see the broken brick walls that were usually covered by a sea of people. I could finally hear the sound of my donkey's hooves heavily falling onto the ground which were most often drowned out by the commotion… Where did everyone go?

After getting off my donkey, I immediately charged towards my mother's tofu store to hear what I had missed. When I walked into the store, my eyes widened with pity and sourness, to the sight of my mother crying next to three full trays of tofu. My mother is the most cheerful and positive person on earth, I have never seen her cry throughout my whole life. I decided to sit down next to mother and understand what had occurred.

My mom took some time to settle down, and I sat patiently waiting. "Remember mother's apprentice XiaoMing?…Well he stole our recipe." I know mother was not done talking, but this information that just went into my ears was enough to make me rage. "What?! How could he?! We trusted him! He's a betrayer!He deserves to die!!Where is he now? Let's go kill him!!" I could've thrown out a lot more unnecessary words and actions, but I was disciplined by my mother. "Wang Zhi He! I understand that you are frustrated, I am too, but we cannot be too impulsive. Please listen. Xiao Ming quit this morning and thanks to the locals in our town, I have found out that he set up his own store not far from here, selling the same thing, but in a cheaper price…"

At this point, my urge to stomp and scream and explode was almost reaching its limit. But I controlled myself when I heard mother's voice shake, and when I saw mother's eyes turn slightly red. Mother is going through a lot. I really want to help her…But I don't know how.

Days and days passed…Our once filled store is getting more and more empty. And XiaoMing's business is blasting. I never thought I would get tired of the taste of my mom's tofu, but after eating trays and trays of leftovers daily, I've become sick of it. My mother doesn't like to waste food, so she always stuffs the leftovers into her mouth as if she was a wolf who hasn't eaten for days. But today's business was especially poor. We had four entirely full trays of tofu to digest.

I forced a half tray of tofus into my mouth, but that was my limit. If I had another munch of tofu, I would have vomited all of it out right on the spot. Mother managed to consume 3 whole trays of tofu… But there was still half a tray of tofu left. Mother was just about to force it all in again, but I couldn't watch her go through this. Perfectly, an idea arose in my brain. "What would happen if we just left these here for next time?" Mother hesitated…Then she decided that this was a "Good Idea!"

We first cut the tofu into smaller cubes, and then we put them into earthen jars.

Several days later, we opened our jars of tofu, not expecting anything much. But we realized that the tofu had turn slightly greenish and the smell it gave off was like the combination of horse poop with tofu! My mother and I both looked at the tofu in disgust. We were worried that the tofu would make our stomachs turn. But of course, my mother wishes not to waste food. I told mother to throw it away while I take an order.

I finished my order not long later, and right when I turned back, my mother was already devouring all of the tofu! I was about to stop her from forcing herself…But in a while, I saw her beautiful smile slowly spread across her face. It's been insanely long since I have seen mother smile…is this green, stinky tofu actually that tasty?

I took up a piece of stinky tofu, the tofu's smell didn't get any better, but the taste did not disgust me as much I expected…I might even say that its taste was very unique and maybe even flavorful.

We left a tray of cut up tofu inside earthen jars. Days later, we took out the "Stinky Tofu." The smell was extraordinarily strong, it attracted a ton of people. Today, someone special came to visit.The head of our village, followed the strong smell of the tofu all the way to our store. As the brave person he is, the village head took a huge bite from the smelly tofu. The village head's eyes lit up in satisfaction after his first bite, and he started to order more and more and more!

Gradually, our customers increased a lot. But not after long, we were running short of smelly tofu! My mother and I turned and looked at each other. We shared the same idea.

And since, Stinky Tofu became a popular dish in China.

Help from the Past

Shanghai Singapore International School, Qian, Candy – 12

"In future, what will our next generation talk about when they saw our inventions?" Our ancestors stared at the Great Wall that millions of workers are trying their very best to build, talking to each other.
"I hope what we invented rather by accident or by lots of trials, no matter what, at least can help them a little, and let them understand that we always wanted to help them." Those two ancestors of our swallowed the wine in one sip and started laughing, talking about their imagined future.

Back to the 2000s, two cave adventures are looking around for the way to the tent.
"I never knew we would end up like this, if I knew I would have just rested at home. Not even able to find where we set our tents at! Or worse to say, not able to go out the cave and die out here. If I would know that before this, I will never come here and wonder around what is in this random cave." One of the men hold tightly to the compass and walked around, while murmuring to himself randomly. He sighed hopelessly and lied on the rock. "It should be this direction, but I still have no way to find out how can I go through all this and figure out the path out!" He threw himself into tears and punched the rock in anger.

After calming himself down, he realized that nothing will be able to make him out but tools. Those tools in his hands: compass, are the solid form of the human smartness. After walking around any path that may be possible to the out of the cave that is directed by the compass, he finally found a way out. "Wake up, wake up!" He yelled to his friend with him. "Come on, there!" They ran out of the cave and felt the clear cold air around them. "Tools, it is true, it is the invention of human smartness." He cried with excitement and ran on the soft grass.

"You are right!" One of the ancestors laughed and said, "I also hope those inventions can help them when they need it."

The Creation of Gunpowder

Shanghai Singapore International School, Singh, Arnav – 12

A long time ago, in ancient China there was once two buddies named Billy and Jojo. Billy and Jojo were alchemists trying to find the way to create the potion to become immortal. They experimented with all sorts of things, for example, crushed rocks mixed with mud, grounded grass with water, water with dirty water, but nothing worked. Billy couldn't handle the failures very well, he said to Jojo "let's just give up Jojo, it's pointless. We will never be able to create a potion with the power to make someone immortal." Jojo said "I admit it's looking grim, but I have one more mixture that we can try, if this one doesn't work then we can give up, okay?" Billy accepted his offer and then both of them went home and called it a day.

The next day Billy and Jojo met at the alchemist work station and Jojo began trying out his final mixture: Charcoal, Sulphur and Potassium Nitrate. Then an explosion happened! Billy yelled "What did you do?!" Jojo exclaimed "It worked! This might be it, Billy. I think we did it!" Both of them mixed the powder with water and gave it to general, they then asked "DO you feel anything different General?" The General didn't feel anything and told Billy and Jojo that they were failures.

In the next day one of the armies officers came and told them "Later that afternoon the general came contact with fire and exploded! I think you guys created a bomb powder or something." He Then asked Billy and Jojo what is it called? Both of them exclaimed "GUNPOWDER"

Billy and Jojo's invention went into history. With Gunpowder Humans created Guns, Canons, Grenades and more creating the destruction of the world, however the gunpowder also created something beautiful: Fireworks. This is how Gunpowder was created, the creator of happiness and destruction.

The Mystical Creation of Gunpowder

Shanghai Singapore International School, Sharma, Toshaan Ullaas – 12

During the days of ruling through dynasties and kings, inventions were made through and out in China or should I say Ancient China. This is the story of Hua Shen and his partner Kai Yung. They made a mystical journey to make the elixir of life but instead made something else…

The End of the Kang Dynasty

"Run, everyone run!!" said The Emperor. The kang dynasty was at its last stand. Everyone running with their lives, blood splattering everywhere, all hope was lost against the Mongols. The emperor only had one last option, try to make the elixir of life. But as he looked down at his kingdom, all of his soldiers were covered in blood, dead and no sign of life. He saw two alchemists. The emperor ran to them. "Hua Shen and Kai Yung, you are my only hope. Save this village. I don't have much time before they find me. It's up to you. Finish my last wish," said the emperor. Kai Yung and Hua Shen ran away from the village. They looked back and saw the emperor was dead. With anger and guilt, they vowed to make the elixir of life to restore the village and destroy the Mongols.

The Preparation to the Land of the Dead

Days started to go by, and the partners were getting ready to go to the land of the dead. They brought pickaxes, battle axes and potions that they made in order to obliterate anyone who tries to kill them. Kai Yung made a raft and Hua Shen came in. They started sailing and sailing to the land of the dead. In the distance they saw a big object of some sort coming towards them. A shark was swimming right at them. Hua Shen and Kai Yung were panicking as they didn't know what to do. As the shark was getting closer inch by inch Hua Shen went in the water and threw the battle axe on the fin of the shark. Blood was spitting out and surrounded their raft. Before any more sharks could come, they quickly sailed in order to stay away from danger and reach the land of dead.

The Land of the Dead

After the encounter with the shark Kai Yung and Hua Shen were approaching an island. But as they got closer skulls and bodies were surrounding the island. The partners took all their tools out ready to fight any danger. They parked their raft and went on the island ready to find materials to make the mystical elixir of life. As they were searching, they heard a roar. With very little time to hide and the ground shaking, they ran deeper into the island making them completely lost.

The Mystical Materials

As they went into the cave, all sorts of materials were surrounding them, like rocks, granite, coal and much more. But there was one material they needed, Zeta. After going through tunnels and caves filled with nothing but darkness Kai Yung noticed a very shiny object. He took his pickaxe out and started to mine it. After minutes of mining, they finally got enough Zeta to make the elixir of life.

The Wrong Creation

Kai Yung and Hua Shen took the materials and started crafting. They brought flasks and put all the materials inside and mixed them. But what came out was very unexpected. All they saw was a pyramid shaped black powder. They knew they did not make the elixir of life as it did not look purple. Kai Yung and Hua Shen called it gunpowder. They didn't know what to do with it but they had vowed to restore the Kang Dynasty. They started to experiment with this creation they had made. After several days and months of training they finally made weapons which they called explosives and put gunpowder inside to get ready to destroy the Mongols.

The End of the Mongols

They headed back to the village and saw all the Mongols at one spot. With anger and hatred they both threw two explosive dynamites and in one second "Boom" all the Mongols died. Kai Yung and Hua Shen had killed the Mongols and had secured Kang Dynasty once and for all.

Gunpowder

Shanghai Singapore International School, Ting, Jun Hann Ronan – 12

One day, the emperor of a huge and powerful empire was worried. What was he worried about? His inevitable death. You see, the emperor started to realise that his death would come for him soon. He realised symptoms of his death. First of all, he realised that he was already 71 years old and has a loss of appetite, inconsistent breathing patterns, nausea and back pain. And he did not want to die.

He kept on worrying and worrying as days went by and one day, he couldn't take it anymore, he stood up and started pacing around the room thinking of ideas, but he couldn't think of any. After a while with no ideas, he went to the royal advisor and asked him what he should do. The advisor was known for his crazy ideas, and he told the emperor to go find an elixir for immortality. The emperor had no idea on how to get an elixir at all.

The emperor kept on thinking about the idea and he finally decided that it was the only option. He has to at least try, he thought. He told his servants to put up posters around the whole empire and outside saying that if anyone can find him an elixir that would make him live forever, they would receive 500 gold coins. As soon as people started seeing these posters. They were filled with greed for money and started mixing random substances and went up to the emperor saying that it was an elixir that would make him live forever, but he had an inspector, and the inspector could tell that they were just random liquids mixed together.

Days went by and the emperor couldn't find anyone that has an actual elixir. One day, an alchemist went up to the emperor not to worry and that he would find an elixir for him. The alchemist spends days trying to find an elixir and one day, he made something new, he mixed 15 parts of charcoal, 75 parts salt and pepper, and 10 parts of sulphur. This mixture has no life–lengthening properties. But the alchemist thought that he had made something special and was thinking if he should give it to the emperor or keep it for himself. He tested what he had just made but found nothing special about it. A few days went by, and the alchemist was about to give up finding what was special about the mixture he made while inhaling a cigarette but then he dropped the cigarette but what he didn't realise was that the cigarette still had a fire……

The alchemist sensed something wrong and ran away and looked backed at the substance that he made, and his jaw dropped. It exploded. The alchemist suddenly realized that when the substance was exposed to a flame, it would explode. He eventually told the emperor about this, and the emperor was interested in the mixture and gave him 250 gold coins for the recipe for the substance. Although the emperor did not get an elixir that would make him live forever, but he did receive the substance called gunpowder. This was eventually used for fireworks and weapons for war and for many other great things……

The Legend of Silk

Shanghai Singapore International School, Wang, Xiaoya Sophia – 12

Long time ago, in the faraway lands of ancient China, where legends were whispered through the misty emerald bamboo forests, there existed a tale that weaved together the threads of innovation and wonder. This is a story that started simply but unfolded into a fabric of unparalleled beauty.

Nestled among rolling hills and lush green fields, there existed a simple and humble village. The village was made out of modest buildings and narrow crossed dirt paths that connected each household with others. Life in this village revolved around the timeless rhythm of the seasons, and its inhabitants relied heavily on the land for survival. The villagers, always dressed in weathered clothing, stood under the scorching sun or bitter wind, tending their small plots of farmland. With calloused hands and determined spirits, they diligently planted and harvested crops, their livelihoods dependent on the success of each harvest. In this village, there was only enough, never extra.

In this village, there was a young village girl called Mei. Her parents were like most in the village, simple but honest farmers that has lived in this village for their whole lives. While Mei was poor in material possessions, her heart was rich with resilience and courage.

One day, Mei was walking along a path, she caught a glimpse of light in the bushes. Sparked by curiosity, she followed the glimmer until she located the light source.

Behind the bush was a tall tree with a silkworm that was spinning a cocoon. The creature's delicate threads seemed to glow as if they were made out of liquid moonlight. She marveled at the amazing sight. Unable to resist the allure of this new mysterious object, Mei carefully plucked the cocoon from the tree. As she held it in her hands, she did not know that what she held in her hands could be the key to something extraordinary—something that could change the course of history.

Mei visited the elders of the village in search of an answer to this object. After looking at the cocoon she picked up, they gasped in unison. Then they began to recall ancient tales and legends about a fabric so exquisite that it was only fit for emperors and gods. It was called silk. The elders shared pieces of knowledge, whispering of faraway lands where silk was said to be used.

Determined to unravel the secrets of silk, Mei embarked on a journey in search of a land of silk. Guided by the whispers of the ancient legends, Mei traveled across vast deserts and scaled towering mountains. Despite these obstacles, her heart was set with determination , for she was sure that the answers she was looking for must be somewhere.

After traveling for a few weeks, Mei arrived in front of a bamboo forest. After months of relentless pursuit, Mei arrived at a hidden kingdom nestled deep in the heart of a bamboo forest.

In this enchanted realm, Mei encountered a wise weaver who had spent his lifetime studying the art weaving. The elder recognized Mei's gift and agreed to teach her the ancient art of silk extraction. Under the elder's careful guidance, Mei could carefully unwind silk threads from cocoons with gentle yet purposeful touches.

As days turned into weeks and weeks turned into months, Mei's skills flourished under the watchful eyes of the weaver, and her creations got better and better. When she finally returned to her village, her villagers were all stunned by the sight of the exquisite fabrics she weaved, their colors and patterns. As news of Mei's incredible journey and the silk she brought back spread throughout the land, people from far and wide travelled to her village just get a glimpse of the silk she creates. Merchants, nobles, and even scholars traveled great distances to witness firsthand the marvels of silk.

As visitors arrived at the village, their eyes widened with awe and admiration. They marveled at the silk that adorned the villagers' homes and garments.Gasps of astonishment filled the air as visitors ran their fingers over the smooth silk.

But for Mei, her journey was far from over. She yearned to make silk accessible to all, not just the noble and wealthy. With her newfound knowledge, she found ways to cultivate mulberry trees, the food for silkworms. Mei also taught her fellow villagers how to care for silkworms and extract silk from their cocoons, teaching them how to create their own silk.

Mei's village flourished with success from the silk. Her once unnoticeable village has become renowned for its silk. Mei's touch had not only changed the fabric but also the lives of her fellow villagers, and in the end, her whole country.

To this day, the legend of Mei lives on, a testament to the power of curiosity and determination that lies within each of us. Her story reminds us that wonders can be made out of a single thread and that sometimes, the greatest treasures are found within ourselves.

"Last−Minute History Project"

Shanghai Singapore International School, Vadgama, Durva − 13

BEEP BEEP BEEP. BEEP BEEP BEEP. BEEP BEEP BEEP. I rub the sleep out of my eyes as I turn around in bed to slam the alarm clock on the ground. I peak through my eyes and i immediately sit up. Some may even say it's not human to sit up that fast but− "AHHHHH MUM WHY DIDN'T YOU WAKE ME! IM LATE FOR SCHOOL!" I shouted. I was late for school. I was never late for school. I had perfect attendance! I raced out of the door to my bedroom, almost separating the door and the frame itself but, I'm not that strong. I guess that's why I got bullied a lot, boys at school never looked at me like I was one of them, they always stared down at me, with their piercing gaze and emotionless, cruel, and stupid eyes. When I say they're stupid, do I really need to explain? Out of all the idiots in all the idiot worlds, they stand alone.

I just entered the bathroom to take a shower and I take my brush and start brushing but I jump. "JASON." Mum screamed. First name, not too bad. Although… she had been shouting for quite a while now… "TOM", second name, I'll get a scolding for sure. Why is she so frustrated though? "JASON. TOM. GRANGER." Oh no, full name, I'm definitely going six feet under. I rush down the stairs as if I was a cartoon and I immediately face the wrath of what they call, 'the angry mother'. "WHERE WERE YOU? I WAS CALLING FOR YOU FOR DAYS ALTOGETHER!" Exaggerate much? She had been calling for 7 minutes and 24 seconds. That's it!

"What happened to your history project? Did you start yet? You do know it's 40% of your history grade, right? Are you not worried about that? Do you even care?" Mum interrogated me about my history project due next week. While it was true that I had not yet started on the project, it's the fifty−third century. I can do it in seconds. "Yeah, yeah whatever mum. Chill. I'll do it today." I reply. "Don't you ask me to 'chill' mister. I will speak to your teacher about your time management skills!" She spoke. Mum overreacts in everything, so I'm not too worried. "Mum, I need to get to school bye!" I say over my shoulder, and I jog to school. I was surprised I wasn't in a grave by now.

I realize something and I smirk. I turn on my heels to plead mum. "Hey mum…" Mum looks at me suspiciously, she knew I was up to something. "You know… you look gorgeous today− "I start complimenting her so that maybe I can throw her off guard and ask for the most valuable favor. "Jason don't play games with me. What do you want." She says in a monotonous voice. "Can't a loving son give a simple compliment to his mother?" I answer. She's on to me. I've got to lie a bit more…. "No, he can't. What. Do. You. Want." She says while looking at me. Did I mention I get nervous under her stare? "Well, I was wondering, since I need to do the history project. I could stay home. Hear me out! I can finish the whole project and then I can give it to you for checking!" She looks at me unamused. "Only if you do your project. You better finish it." And with that she walks out the door. I jump around and chuckle just as I realize the promise I made. "Oh, COME ON" I really should think before speaking and striking a deal with my mother, now I unknowingly volunteered to have my project done in under nine hours, and before she comes back too! Oh, I'm so naïve.

I pull out the chair underneath my table and I jump into my chair, and I turn on my laptop. Click Click Click. I search up the earliest inventions and there's this website that pops up in my face. Ugh. Advertisements. "Wait…" my eyes widen, "it's a pop up for the history of the seismograph... this could actually help me with my project! That's so sick!" I exclaim. I was over the moon, ecstatic even to find out that it was this easy to do a project on the history of any invention you'd like!

I dived a little deeper into the topic of seismographs and found out that they were actually originated in China 132 CE, and they started off with a very simple concept, called the seismoscope. I realized that I needed to see this for myself, so I rushed to my room upstairs and grabbed the magical umbrella. I adjusted the settings to 132 CE and put in the correct coordinates for the Chinese place. This was pretty easy since there are some set examples of places to go to on the umbrella's handle. And since it as well as the seismoscope originated in China, it immediately recognized the coordinates and I time traveled into the past.

I landed in some foreign land on the sidewalk, and my umbrella apparently had something against me because I landed flat and face first into the concrete. I was the only person wearing such different clothes from all of these other people. The building's walls were covered in paint that was starting to crack. I look around to find a short storage

room to my left. I ruffled through my short hair, unsure of whether or not to go in, but in the end, I finally decided to go in.

I spotted a person a bit further away from me. He had a beard and a thin mustache. He was sitting at a table which looked like it would collapse any second. But then, I see another man walking towards him. Funny, man number two kind of looks like how my mom would walk when she's mad at me for not doing something she asked. Man number two walked up to Man number one, and he shouted in his face, I winced. "ZHANG HENG. WHY HAVEN'T YOU SET UP THE STATUE YET! THE KING IS GOING TO COME ANY MOMENT TO CHECK IN ON US AND YOU'RE JUST SLACKING OFF??!?!?" I backed up a bit when looking and man number two shouting at man number one, Zhang HENG, just because he hasn't laid out a boring old statue? That's so unfair.

I see Zhang HENG bringing back this weird looking statue from inside one of the boxes. It was as if there was a pottery pot had been decorated with dragons at its mouth and frogs right underneath the dragons. Each frog had its very own dragon. But as I looked closer, there were these little loose balls in the dragons' mouths, almost as if it were to purposely drop into the frogs' mouths.

Suddenly, there was this shaking and the ground shook and rumbled so hard that Zhang HENG and I both fell backwards, although none of them spotted me. I glanced at the weird looking statue and the balls fell out of the dragons' to the frogs' mouths. "So, this is the first ever seismoscope..." I muttered to myself. It was a pretty fascinating invention, very unique and useful. Just then, a rich and tall looking man entered, and I could see from his face, the joy he felt when he saw the dragons' mouths were empty, and the frogs' mouths full. "We have just made a new way to detect any kind of shaking that occurs in the earth! Zhang HENG, you will be recognized for your efforts and dedication to this invention. Come to my castle tomorrow morning." The rich man said. "Thank you, thank you, thank you so much!" Zhang HENG exclaimed. Every rejoiced and embraced each other, I realized that it was time to get back and finish my history project.

I clicked the button on my umbrella to reverse the time travel so that I get back home. Once I reach home, I immediately start scribbling down the names and the stories of how the seismoscope was created. "Hey honey, how's your project coming along?" Mum enters and asks. "Oh, I have so much to tell you." I smile at her, and I start blabbering away about all the things I saw on my 'little' trip…

Xia Ming's story: The Invention of Banknotes

Stewards Ma Kam Ming Charitable Foundation Ma Ko Pan Memorial Secondary School, Cheung, Yin Ling – 12

In the prosperous era of the Tang Dynasty, the land of China was blooming with life and culture. People thrived in this era of innovation and enlightenment. There was a young scholar among the people, named Xia Ming. Xia Ming had always been at the top of the city, grades wise. Everyone told him that he could become the highest official, and that he had the potential for it. However, Xia Ming declined.

"I believe I'm made for something else, not an official. I find being an official to be an exceptionally dull job." He replied humbly.

Xia Ming's parents had originally trained him to become an official. They both hoped for him to become a high official with high status and wealth, especially his father, who was a high official too. On Xia Ming's 16th birthday, he decided that it was time to tell his parents that being an official wasn't what he yearned for.

"Mother, father, I have something important to tell you, and it's about my future." Xia Ming announced.

His parents glared at him with patience, signaling him to speak on. Xia Ming sat down at the dinner table with his parents and took a sip of his hot tea.

"Mother, father, I… don't think being an official is what I'm yearning for. I'm not into politics. I want to have to be involved in a more innovative job, instead of such a dull one." Xia Ming hesitated and stuttered a bit as he confessed the news to his parents.

Bam, splash! His father, Xia Ren stood up from his seat, and banged on the table with the utmost strength, causing the hot tea to spill onto the table. His mother, Chen Xi, who was next to him, jerked away, avoiding being splashed by the hot tea.

"Are you trying to break the family tradition? Every ancestor on my side of the family had been high officials! Every ancestor on my side of the family loved politics! You have endless potential to become a high official as such a valiant and just person! And your grades are top tier, forget your dreams of having such an inferior job! You can only be an official in your life, and nothing else, ever!" His father bellowed furiously; his face was going flush. His voice cracked while speaking, as he hadn't been so angry in such a long time.

Xia Ming stared at him with widened eyes, dumbfounded by his anger. He could see that his father was truly infuriated. Xia Ming thought for a moment composedly in utter silence.

Xia Ming walked back to his room without uttering a word.

Next day, Chen Xi went to the market for groceries with Xia Ming. They had to buy a lot of groceries. Chen Xi's back was slouched, and droplets of sweat dripped from her forehead. Carrying all the heavy copper coins was too much for her body to bear.

"If only these coins weren't so heavy. They hurt my back!" Chen Xi complained and lifted her chest a couple times while walking in the market, trying her best to maintain posture while carrying the heavy copper coins as the heated sun shone on the people of China.

A week later, it was Lunar New Year, and Xia Ming went out to hang out with his pals on the streets. There were many game booths for children to play.

"Do you think we're too old for games? Because I missed the times when we used to play in these booths when we were children." One of Xia Ming's friends, Xiang Ying asked, suddenly stopped in front of the game booths.

"We can play if you'd like." Another one of Xia Ming's friends, Li Xing replied, and began to walk over to the game booths.

When they arrived, the game host, who was a middle–aged man, welcomed them warmly.

"Hey guys! Welcome to the game booths! If you get 5 tokens, you'll be able to redeem a gift. But if you get 20, then you'll be able to take part in a lucky draw. One lucky winner will get the ultimate prize."

The group of teenage boys gasped with curiosity and excitement when they heard about the tokens and the ultimate prize. The rules were actually changed after many years of not visiting these games: they were now using tokens instead of fake coins now for redeeming gifts. They still remembered years before, Xia Ming was awarded with many coins from playing, but dropped them all on the ground and some other younger kids stole some of his coins. He thought that coins took up too much space and were too heavy for his patch pocket. When he carried the coins, his patch pocket sunk because of the coins' weight.

"I'm glad they changed the coins into tokens. I still remember the time I dropped them some years ago when we were playing." Xia Ming mentioned, with a big grin on his face as they walked to the first booth.

After a while of playing, they had already earned many tokens because of their well−trained skills upon many years of playing these games as children.

"Hey, it really is more convenient to carry these tokens instead of those fake coins! I feel a lot lighter now!" Li Xing cheered, while walking to the gift redemption center.

An idea sparked in Xia Ming's mind.

"It wouldn't be bad to make currency lighter and more convenient like these tokens, would it?" He pondered to himself, in his own universe of innovations.

"Hey Xia Ming, what are you doing? Come on, let's go!" Xiang Ying looked back to Xia Ming, who was still standing still at one spot in his own little world.

It was late, and Xia Ming headed home. Xia Ming dashed into his room immediately, and Xia Ren stared at him, confused.

"What could he possibly be doing? He'd better be studying to become an official." Xia Ren scowled.

With a newfound determination, Xia Ming began researching and experimenting with different materials and designs. He spent countless hours in his room every day, sketching and prototyping various ideas. He slept late; he started working on his invention right away after he had finished his schoolwork.

One day, while Xia Ming was deep in thought, his father entered his room. Seeing the mess of prototypes scattered around the floor and his desk, Xia Ren couldn't help but feel a mix of frustration and irritation.

"Xia Ming, what are you doing?! Stop doing whatever you're doing, clean up your room and start studying!" Xia Ren bellowed with a stern tone and banged on his door.

"Father, what I'm doing is innovative! It's also my dream job. I want to create a new form of currency that is lighter and more convenient, just like the tokens I used with my friends at the game booths! Father, I have found what I want to do for my life" Xia Ming explained, his eyes shining with determination.

Xia Ren sighed, he looked at his son with resignation and defeated eyes. "You have always been a headstrong and determined young man. If this is truly what you desire, then I will support you, even if it breaks family traditions."

Months turned into years as Xia Ming tirelessly worked on his invention, day and night. He faced numerous setbacks and failures. He received a lot of criticism from people, telling him to give up on trying to invent something so new and impactful to the country's economy; but he never lost hope. He recklessly destroyed every obstacle that went in his way. Finally, after years of dedication and perseverance, Xia Ming emerged with a breakthrough.

"Mother, father, I did it! I finally made paper money!" Xia Ming busted out of his room, shouting with exhilaration.

Xia Ming saw his father holding in a smile, his mother was elated and jumped out of her seat, putting Xia Ming into her embrace. Xia Ming succeeded in developing a lightweight and durable form of currency made from a

combination of paper and silk. This new currency was not only more convenient to carry, but it also had security features that made counterfeiting the currency nearly impossible.

Words of Xia Ming's invention of paper money spread rapidly throughout the city. Merchants, scholars, and even high−ranking officials took notice of it, and were astonished that such a young man could invent something so contemplative.

The invention of paper money is still being used today, more than a thousand years after its invention. Not only did the invention of paper money revolutionize commerce, but it also made transactions and purchases more convenient. But we can never forget Xia Ming, the great and headstrong inventor of paper money, who was unbothered by criticism and rebelled against his father's idea of wanting him to become an official. Just like the old proverb says, 'All roads lead to Rome'.

The Story of the Key of Communication

Tai Kwong Hilary College, Lam, Yan Shing – 13

It was a breezy morning ten thousand years ago in ancient China around the Yangtze River when Cangjie, who was the wisest man in the ancient Chinese empire, was ordered to meet the Emperor. As he had arrived at the palace, the Emperor inquired about his suggestions of making communication simpler. Cangjie said, "Your majesty, I advocate that we should create a series of characters for impartation."

"What a magnificent idea!" replied the Emperor in amazement, "we shall create a set of characters and make amelioration in communication. That will also make our empire more vigorous."

After having the conversation with the Emperor, Cangjie went back to his hut, which was his home and office, to start conceiving of ideas like a computer. He was thinking of making a series of characters which could make doing business a piece of cake. He was thinking of making a series of characters which could satisfactorily be appreciated by the people. He was thinking of creating a series of characters which could allow the history of his vigorous empire to be perpetuated for thousands of years. And yet, he was not able to have any ideas of making the series of characters.

After conceiving of the creation of characters for what seemed like a trillion years, Cangjie eventually came up with an idea. He modified the drawing of the new characters, and recorded the intricate drawings to a thousand tremendous bamboo sticks. As Cangjie had finished the creation of the new characters, he loaded it to a cart and began his journey to the palace.

As Cangjie had arrived at the palace, he was led to the Emperor's house. The generals were also in the Emperor's house to meet him. The Emperor was full of excitement and eagerness to check Cangjie's new creation.

After Cangji had introduced the denotation of the characters to the Emperor and the generals. The Emperor was glad to see that Cangjie had done well in creating the characters, yet he was not satisfied.

"Impressive," said the Emperor, "yet I think the drawings are too intricate."

"Then I think I should simplify them, Your Majesty," replied Cangjie.

"Looking forward to seeing your modified characters," said the Emperor.

Thus, Cangjie went back to his hut and started modifying them.

As Cangjie had left the palace, two mysterious ministers were talking to the minister who had greeted Cangjie earlier. They were asking him with eagerness about Cangjie's appearance in the palace.

After they had obtained the information, one minister muttered, "We must inform the other bluebloods about it."

“This is a menacing situation,” whispered the other minister, “ imagine what would happen if the plebeians could be literate.”

“It would be obvious that they would become wealthier as they would be able to do business without language obstacles,” replied the minister.

After Cangjie had gone back to his hut, he started his work on modifying the characters. And yet, he could not think of anything. Frustrated, he decided to go for a hunt in the woods in order to find inspiration. After he had left two mysterious men who had been hiding in the woods came out and obliterated Cangjie’s work. When he went back with his spear, he saw a tremendous fire ball coming out of his hut where he conserved all the bamboo sticks on which the characters were written. He immediately put out the fire, yet his ideas were completely gone. All of his ideas had become ashes. He was filled with frustration as he went to the palace and informed the Emperor.

When the Emperor heard this shocking news, he said, “Tell me, who can do these loathsome things? These haughty people deserve hatred!”

“Your Majesty, I have no idea who did that,” replied Cangjie, “perhaps we should investigate it.”

The Emperor agreed with Cangjie and called minister Li, who was in charge of security, to meet with him.

“Li,” he said, “someone has been attempting to obstruct us from handling public affairs. I would like you to investigate this incident.”

He asked Cangjie to explain the incident.

As Cangjie had finished, minister Li said, “I would like to suggest that we should ask Cangjie to stay in the palace for his work. In addition, we shall send some investigators to get some information about it.”

The Emperor agreed to send some elite officers to investigate this incident, and Cangjie was asked to stay in the palace for the work.

In a village, there was a massive house, which was owned by a wealthy merchant, Chen. Throughout the past days, the spies have observed that lots of other affluent people have approached here for visitation. Things had been more suspicious as people were conversing about “the issue of characters”. As the merchant had been acting suspiciously, the spies reported the issue to the Emperor. Thus, he asked the affluent merchant to meet him.

Chen was extremely concerned about this meeting. So he informed the ministers who supported him to prepare for launching an attack on the palace. In addition, he had planned to assassinate the Emperor, so he hid his tiny sword

inside his clothes. As he had approached the palace, he was greeted by minister Li, and was led to a small hut, where the head general was. Chen was confused as he was with the general instead of the Emperor.

The general asked, "Did you know anything about the characters?"

"General," replied Chen, "I have no idea what you are talking about."

"We have no doubt that you have already heard about it," uttered the general, "tell us, how much have you known?"

"I know nothing about it," said Chen, "I only know I am going to launch an attack!"

All of a sudden, two men came in and attempted to assault the general, yet they were killed by the general immediately as Chen escaped. Simultaneously, on the other side of the capital, troops entered the town and were attempting to attack the palace. The haughty soldiers were taking souls from innocent civilians with cruelty. As the Emperor had heard about the news, he asked the general to deploy troops and stop the enemy from slaughtering innocent people.

As the general's troops were leaving the palace for confrontation, the two ministers who supported Chen, led ten men to assassinate the Emperor. Cangjie, who was in the palace, saw this menacing situation and immediately informed the Emperor. The Emperor asked his guards to confront the assassins. Although the assassination was a failure, the palace was surrounded by the haughty troops and the situation had become extremely urgent and menacing, yet they were not able to send reinforcements into the capital due to the enemy's occupation of the fire towers, which were used to deliver messages. Under all these circumstances, they could only surrender. Fortunately, Cangjie had thought of an idea as the enemy was approaching the palace. He quickly wrote down the unmodified characters that indicated "reinforcements" on a bamboo stick, and adhered it to an arrow, thus shot it to the village nearby.

As the general in the village had learnt how to read those characters which were elucidated by Cangjie earlier in the Palace, they were able to understand and immediately sent troops to the capital, when they had arrived, they immediately defeated the enemy and triumphantly captured merchant Chen, who was on his way to escape.

After the battle, the Emperor had announced that all the citizens in the Empire must be educated, thus everyone was able to read and write. Citizens were also able to do business and communicate with each other easily and the Empire had become more vigorous and sophisticated. Chinese Literature has also been fostered by the characters.

After years and years, the Chinese characters have changed, yet what we are using is still based on the ancient characters. Without them, we would not be able to do different things today. And this is the story of the creation of one of the most prominent and vital inventions in Chinese history, Chinese characters.

Cultural Secret Messages

Tai Kwong Hilary College, So, Yat Tung – 12

You may expect Chinese inventions to be quite boring, or you may be expecting to read boring words like: 'It all started in the ….. B.C.' or you may expect, 'Hello everyone today ….' or even worse 'Once upon a time…'. It is indeed horrible to hear these boring words! Isn't it? Yes, Chinese inventions can be extremely boring, but this is a whole new thing, like James Bond ready for action, so what are you waiting for? Read along!

We all know that our favorite mooncake is that round pastry that's filled with a tasty filling. Egg yolks! Red bean paste!…yum, it is, indeed, very attractive! Of course, people use mooncakes to celebrate the moon goddess or celebrate with their family for this festival. But I bet you don't know where it came from. Did mooncakes just pop out of nowhere? What was the meaning of mooncakes before modern times? And of course, how is it a Chinese invention?

At first, mooncakes in China were just quick snacks in the royal palace, but in the late Yuan dynasty, it was the time where Mongolian forces started to spread. Taking over any land they could find, the Mongolians conquered the Chinese people's land . The founder of the Ming dynasty, Zhu Yuanzhang (who has a very long name) wanted to prepare for the fight to help the people, but the only problem was that there weren't enough forces to help him!

Zhu had made a mistake sending a letter that was accidentally letting the Mongols know that he was preparing for an uprising, now Mongolian guards were everywhere in the city. Zhu was extremely depressed! 'I've made a huge mistake! There's no going back, what should I do? What's happening to my brain? I can't deliver a letter, anyone could find out!' thought Zhu who kept walking in circles and pulling his hair like a madman.

Liu Bing, who was a subject of Zhu, peeked in at the doorway. He couldn't help but stop his future emperor from throwing tantrums, which was not a very emperor thing to do.

'What now? More businesses?' Zhu stomped the ground pulling his hair.

'Ah–um.', Liu Bing cleared his throat, 'Actually sir, I was thinking ….of….., um….. using mooncakes to send the messages you like to send, I mean secret messages, sir. Since mooncakes are snacks in the palace, it will be common for ministers to receive mooncakes. How does that sound, sir? By the way, the Mongol's don't eat mooncakes.' Liu bit his lips nervously, trying to make each word he said as professional as possible with fake confidence, forcing a smile. To Liu Bing's surprise, Zhu ran down the stairs, hands trembling from excitement, and held a thumbs up so close to Liu Bing.

'Bing! Bing! You've done it! I knew my father was right to accept you to come to this place, Bing Bing!' After Zhu finished his sentence, he ran out to his office, leaving Liu Bing almost embarrassed to death.

'What was that?' thought Liu, 'Is that going to be a new nickname for me? This future emperor is still like a child. Is that normal?'

When the ministers, whose names were Shen, Jing and Ying received the mooncakes, they all greedily brought them back home as a snack. When they cut open the mooncake, a slip of paper popped out and read 'Uprising on the 15th night of the 8th lunar month.' Yes, although there was a delicious mooncake in front of them, there were more important things to plan.

It was finally the day of the uprising. When Zhu and his army went for the uprising, they couldn't find the forces of the ministers. Even though the forces from the minister weren't there, they had to keep going. The fight was hard, and many nobles couldn't survive the fight. It was chaos! When Zhu's army was about to surrender, the hope to help the people seemed lost. Most of the horses fell to the ground, unable to move. Fire was everywhere. Zhu's army was surrounded by their enemies, and swords that pointed at them came closer, and closer. The soldiers could hear the breath of each other.

Then a large drumming sound came from the hills. From below at the battle ground where he stood, Zhu could see gigantic flags blowing in the wind, on which were written, 'Jing', 'Shen' and 'Ying'. The forces galloped, rushing down the great hill, and charged the Mongolians, leaving Zhu speechless. Many of Zhu's army were saved, and the enemy that surrounded them all fell to the ground.

After the war ended, and Zhu had successfully saved the people, Zhu gathered all the forces that helped him in the war for a celebration dinner. Zhu clapped his hands and announced 'This is a celebration for defeating the Mongolians' He paused and looked at Liu Bing and smiled, 'And to the one who helped me on the way.'

The ministers clapped their hands, and the soldiers all cheered. After the celebration, Zhu gave small boxes to the ministers. The ministers all looked at him suspiciously, 'What does this box have?'

Zhu chuckled and smiled, 'All thanks to the mooncakes.'

A Pot of Tea

Wellington College International School Shanghai, Chen, Demi – 13

Mo Li stares at the wind bell at the front door of the tea shop. It only rings when it's windy, and it really isn't today. The smell of tea is overwhelmingly strong and there are shelfs and shelfs of tea pots, cups and other accessories. Flowers are blooming in the garden and the seats of customers are empty. Cow bells and sheep bay in the distance. Her master, Gui Lin isn't in today. He has gone to pick tea leaves in the mountains and left Mo Li in charge of the shop for the day.
Ding
Mo Li fiddles with her jade necklace, the only thing Ma and Pa left her before they died.
Ding
She turns around and looks into the mirror, that had been polished and shined. Mo Li's hair had been tied up into a bun with a Fa Zan. The Fa Zan was wood, decorated with glass flowers. Her hair feel lose around her ears and look brown in the sunlight. Mo Li's mouth was painted bright red, the same color as her dress.
Ding
She brushes the hair out of her face and sighs.
Mo Li sees a shadow at the door of the tea shop. She got up from her seat slowly waits. A middle aged man with a black cloak walks in the shop and smiled politely at her. He takes a seat and asked for a pot of Wu Long tea. Mo Li bows and pushes behind the blinds of the tea shelf.
Ding
She takes used a small chisel to take out a piece of the tea. It smelled refreshing, magical, even. No one has asked for Wu Long in a long time.
Ding ding
Mo Li glances out the window. There is no sign of wind, why is the wind bell ringing? She tries not to focus on this and prepares the tea for the customer. She boils water over a small fire and while the man waits for his tea, she brings him some snacks. The man thanks her and Mo Li bows respectfully.
Ding
Mo Li goes behind the counter and picks a tea pot and a cup for the man. She fiddles with the jade necklace on her neck and waits for the water to boil.
Ding
The kettle whistles and Mo Li pours water into the tea pot. Then she waits for a while. Then she pours the tea into the tea cup, and the steam wavers slightly. The Mo Li pours out the water from the tea pot and the tea cup.
Ding
After she brings him his pot of tea, she returns behind the counter. As the man poured the tea into the cup, the steam thickened and became mist. Mo Li gasped and stumbled backwards.
Ding ding ding ding
The bell started to ring like crazy. The man didn't seem concerned or bothered. He smiled and used his hands to make shapes out of the fog as if by magic. Mo Li tries to back away but finds herself stuck. The man beckons her forward and Mo Li is pushed by the fog at her feet, which has already become so thick that it was like a blanket.
Ding ding ding
The man started to change. He took off his cloak and he grew wings. His wing were like a bats but instead had color. His eyes turned red like burning coal, and his teeth grew in length.
Ding
Mo Li was screaming but no sound came out. She tried to run. She tried to hide. But nothing happened.

Ding ding ding
His legs turned into muscular claws with huge, sharp nails, and a furry tail like a whip. " I am the Qiong Qi, one of the powerful creatures of the Shang Hai Jing. I am here to show you your true path of life." said Qiong Qi in a growl. Mo Li shook her head like crazy and tried to yell for help, but nothing came out.
Ding ding
The Qiong Qi started to come forward but stopped. Mo Li could see a tear in his eye. He says "You have to believe me, this is my last chance to become human again. I was put into exile after what I did, many are still in exile, but I wish to try again." He looked at Mo Li and smile. "Your parents were one of the few that escaped, but got found. You can save them! I was their friend before, and your necklace helps me track you."he said. Mo Li was thinking this through. It was too much to take in. She opened her mouth and closed it again. Qiong Qi sat on the floor and sighed. He took out a bag of something and handed it to Mo Li. He smiled grimly and said "When you decide, throw these on the floor. I will become human again, and I will send some help to you." He looked at Mo Li one last time and faded into mist.
Ding
Ding
Ding…
Everything was back to normal. The man had disappeared into thin air, and the wind bell had stopped to ring. It could have just been a dream, but as she looked down to the counter, she saw a bag of something, just like the one Qiong Qi gave her. She thought of her shop, her friends, and everything else she had here. But then there was her parents, and Qiong Qi's life. She took a deep breath and opened the bag. There were three multicolored stones that shone with light. They were pulsing, like a living creature. Mo Li hesitated. With a swift movement, she threw the stones on the floor. As they landed, they cracked open. Light flooded the room and blinded her eyes.
Then nothing.

The Enchanted Prick

Wellington College International School Shanghai, Chen, Enya – 12

At 11 o'clock in the morning, Taylor's mother, Andrea, asked her in a cheery voice, "Hey Tay, I'm going to the hospital for my checkup. Want me to drop you off at your studio on my way there?"

"That would be amazing! I'll be ready in about five minutes, thanks!"

A few moments later, they were both in the car.

After a while of gushing over the fact that she was going to release her new song, Taylor suddenly pointed out the window at a small beige building.

"Oh yeah– that's my stop! See you later Mom! Love you!" She got out of the car and waved goodbye as she shut the door.

The stone to the stairs of the building was old and rusty, but as Taylor stepped inside, low ambient light and wooden walls padded with soundproof foam welcomed her. She was greeted by her music director, Travis.

"How's it going, Taylor?"

"Great! Just recording a song I finished yesterday called *Enchanted*." Taylor told him as she opened her laptop. She started recording immediately, and finished an hour later.

"Finally! I'm done!" Taylor smiled and called her mom.

"Can you pick me up on the way home?" she asked.

"Sure..."

As Andrea drove, Taylor talked non–stop about her new song. Andrea was silent the whole way home. When Taylor unlocked the front door, she was still gushing about how Travis was so cute. Andrea stepped in after Taylor, and Taylor's brother, Austin, came rushing towards them.

"Mom! Are you alright?" he shouted frantically.

"I'm fine, thank you Austin." Andrea sighed and sat down.

Taylor stopped talking and turned to stare with a confused look on her face. "What happened? Nobody told me anything…" she drifted off.

Austin turned to Taylor, "You're so selfish." was all he said.

Taylor threw her hands in the air and shouted, "What's your problem?"

Austin crossed his arms and accused, "Why are you screaming? You're the one that has problems! Stupi–"

"ENOUGH!" Andrea hollered. Silence followed as the siblings looked down. She took a deep breath and went to the kitchen.

Back in her room, Taylor was hurt. And obviously super confused about what just happened downstairs. Why didn't they tell her what was wrong? Why did Austin suddenly care so much about their mom? These were all questions that racked Taylor's head. A thought instantly struck her: *What if mom received bad news from the hospital?! I need to go check on her.* Taylor ran as quickly as a gazelle to the kitchen, and slowed down as she approached her mother.

"Mom, are you okay?"

Andrea didn't turn to face her, but whispered reluctantly, "I–I have breast cancer." Taylor stood there, mouth wide open in shock, unmoving for a very long time. "Oh Mom…" Taylor was on the verge of crying. She hugged Andrea tightly. "I'm sorry… I didn't know…" Taylor said shakily as she broke down into tears.

"It's okay, it's okay." Andrea comforted her in a soothing tone. "It's not your fault." she patted Taylor on the back.

Taylor looked her in the eyes and said, "I love you."

Andrea smiled weakly and said the same thing back.

Early the following morning, Taylor was committed to help her mom reduce her cancer pains. Her determination overpowered her sadness. But how would she do that? Taylor wasn't a magical fairy in children's stories that could do everything she wanted. She was just a regular girl. Well, she could start with some simple things to make her mom feel better. Like sewing a teddy bear.

She brought her sewing kit to the living room and sat very close to her mother.

"I'm here to sew you a stuffed bear!" she said with a bright smile.

Andrea looked dazed, but within a blink of an eye, she returned to a happy grin and said, "You're doing so much for me, Tay. Wow, thanks!" She sipped her tea.

Taylor was in a happy mood now, and started sewing the bear's head. Andrea watched Taylor intently.

"Wow, that's cute." Andrea commented as she pointed. She held her hand there for quite some time, looking very carefully. All of a sudden, Austin barged in.

"Hullo!" He greeted the two in a loud manner. They jumped a little. Taylor's needle had struck something, but she was too busy to turn to look. Andrea gasped.

Taylor startlingly yelped, "Austin! You scared us! Don't rush in like that so suddenly!"

Austin ignored Taylor and said to Andrea. "How are you feeling, Mom?" The siblings turned to look at their mother. They saw her hand and stopped mid–breath.

"AAAAAHH!" Taylor and Austin screamed simultaneously. Previously, Taylor's sewing needle had struck something. It was the back of Andrea's hand. Meanwhile they were screaming, Andrea wasn't reacting at all. She just stared down at her hand, curiosity sparkling in her eyes.

"Mom! What are you doing? Take it out!" Austin yelled worriedly.

"Wait, hold on." Andrea gestured for them to pause. "I don't feel any pain… actually, it's soothing my cancer effects? Feels weird, but it's quite nice."

Taylor and Austin shared a puzzled look. "Mom, are you sure you're alright?" Austin questioned slowly.

"We should take you to see the doctor." Taylor suggested. Andrea said nothing but took the needle out as she got out of bed.

"I've never seen something like this. You didn't feel any pain?" the doctor asked Andrea at the hospital.

"Correct." she replied.

"Huh. That *is* pretty abnormal… Give me a few minutes to check with the other doctors."

A short while later, the doctor came back. "We've come up with a conclusion. We think that the needle poked her pressure points, which stimulated them. This released chemicals that acted as natural pain killers, which was why she didn't feel any pain and why her cancer effects are decreasing." The Swifts nodded their heads, but still showed slight confusion.

"This is new to us doctors too; that was just a possible theory."

The moment they got back home, Andrea announced, "I'm going to try again! Taylor, give me more of those needles."

Taylor gave her a questioning look. "Are you sure? It was probably just luck that it didn't hurt."

Andrea frowned stubbornly. "Taylor, just give me the needle. Please." Taylor was anxious for her mother, but still did as she was told.

Andrea took the needle as she tried to remember where it had struck her before.

"There." she declared. Andrea cautiously inserted it where the spot was.

"Oh, it feels so relaxing, just like the first time." Andrea cooed.

Taylor had a look of doubt on her face, but suggested, "We could go back to the hospital again for a cancer test. It might just work…"

At the hospital, Andrea wondered aloud, "Will it work? Will it work?" She kept pacing back and forth.

A nurse called for them, and they headed into the large x-ray room, where there was a massive scanner sitting in the middle with lots of high-tech machinery scattered around.

"Okay, I'm going to need you to lay on the bed and put this lead mat over your body." A doctor said as she handed it to Andrea. The bed slowly slid into the x–ray, and it made a series of beeping noises. Finally, the scan was complete.

"Please come back in about ten minutes for the result."

When Andrea and Taylor came back for the outcome, the doctors seemed happy.

"We have exciting news for you!" one of the nurses said, "Andrea no longer has cancer! Congratulations!"

Taylor turned to at Andrea, gasping in joyful shock. Andrea hollered, "I DON'T HAVE CANCER ANYMORE!!" and jumped up and down. All the doctors and nurses clapped and cheered for her.

Taylor embraced her mom warmly, and added, "I'm so happy for you, Mom!"

Soon after they went home, Taylor told Austin the good news.

Austin's voice immediately turned a pitch higher as he shouted, "This is the best day ever!" and pumped a fist in the air.

Taylor grinned and announced, "I guess that the needle really changed Mom's life."

"Is this a new invention?" Austin asked his sister.

"Maybe. What do you want to call it?" she answered.

Austin put a finger to his chin. "Well, you helped cure Mom, right? So it should be about you. You like to sing, especially without background music… acapella?" Taylor took close consideration of this.

"Maybe something that has to do with the needle too. Mom *stuck* the needle into her body, so maybe aca–stuck? No…" she noted. A thought hit her. "I know! Since the needle *punctured* Mom by accident, we can call it 'acupuncture!'" she declared.

"Tay, you're a genius."

Soon after, the Swifts announced this invention to the world. This coincidental discovery has helped manage stress, pain, and health worldwide. Nowadays, many people use acupuncture for all sorts of medical treatments and recoveries. Because of one small accident that the Swifts made, it changed the world forever.

Gunpowder

Wellington College International School Shanghai, Hu, Jerry – 12

The winds blew fiercely. A howl that rips the peace of the night like a predator attacking a piece of prey. Stained a disturbing shade a dark red, the moon forever warding off the hungry beasts at the base of the mountain. The monochrome yellow of the temple was imposing enough, without the deep–toned chants of the monks inside, forever labouring at creating an Elixir of Life like Sisyphus at his rock, an impossible task. The high winds blew the fire under the elaborate bronze inlayed pot that had seen all of it. The rise and fall of the empire and its power. This was not meant to be a normal and peaceful night. It created the world we live in today, it's subjects of chaos and destruction, it brought forth the twilight of peace in humanity. It gave us weapons capable of immense destruction. These monks, unwittingly, ripped apart families and caused war, all because of the urge to live for ever.

Tang dynasty — 9th century and the emperor had ruled in absolute peace, without war and uprisings. The little mountain had stood there for centuries, the monks declaring neutrality for the duration of the war which established the Tang 400 years ago, the little temple in absolute isolation and peace. A normal day in the temple would consist of sitting next to the huge pot flaming away 24 hours straight and adding a select few herbs and interesting compounds to make their medicine of life. This was not destined to be a normal year.

Xuanzang was the monk that had just arrived as an exchange learner from Dunhuang. He left home by the age of 30 realising the pain of the world and what the peasants are going through, him being of humble origins himself, and vowed to help the peasants. He didn't realise that the point of the elaborate temple he was now in was meant for the creation of a pill that would grant the only the emperor unnatural long life and so that the monks would receive riches of their own. The interior of the temple was highly decorate. The walls were inlaid with a beautiful ivory, said to be carved by the legendary guild of sculpture all the way from the mysterious west. Gleaming white and spotless, dragon carvings were brought to life in the flicking firelight. By night the place glowed as the moon shown on the ivory, giving an ominous glow to the temple. Xuanzang wondered when so many of the poor were waiting for help, the monks spent fistfuls money on making the most beautiful workspace.

"Now, after your 7–day stay, you will be officially part of the temple of the highest power and order of the entirety of the Tang. We here are the supporters of the Emperor and we will be focused on creating medicine for all the palaces." Liu spoke in a slow and steady manner and the deep hum of his voice was calming. "What about the poor people that the religion is supposed to save from eternal salvation if they work hard enough and gather karma from acting in kindness and pity? Ironic not mentioning them." Xuanzang spoke with unsupported confidence and pride. The traditions and opinions were not very easily wavered. He wondered why he was sent here; they weren't helping anyone by doing so except the Emperor. "Listen, you're not going to get anywhere by declaring your opinions and such so just work and try to help people you can, the timetable is on the wall in your room, and remember, don't fall asleep on watch."

Xuanzang quickly adapted to this new life, sitting at the bronze furnace so obviously placed in the middle of the temple. Xuanzang was of stout build, a bald head and his eyes a shade of black darker than the night sky in days of the new moon. Framed by the loose–fitting yellow robe blew and wavered in the wind as if a flag strung high from a flagpole in the north wind, his face was thin. Small strings of the dull wooden aromatic beads never left his arm, and he constantly counted the precious beads while muttering prayers in a deep voice. He walked upright and stood at an impressive six foot six with absolutely no remorse in his steps. A solemn face was eternally printed on his face.

Never was he so absolutely sure today that something would go wrong, imagining several ear–splitting screams as he traversed up the gritty gravel path back towards the temple. The several questions he had an urge to ask. What on earth were they trying to do? To try and make the Emperor live longer that's what, but why? He shoots one last glance back down at the prosperous capital. It was very dark outside of the prosperous city of Luoyang and walking around the mountain you could view and admire the full splendour of the capital. He had question that needed to be answered. A night alone at the huge pot tinkering with different formulae should do it

The last monk's shift had just ended, and an eager Xuanzang eager for the workings of the big cauldron thing and how it would make you live forever approached. On Xuan's mind was the workings of the furnace even while adding fuel and various substances to each other and eventually into the deep void of the standing furnace. The sprinkle of saltpetre, sulphur and charcoal was what changed Xuan's life. This yellow crystal smells better than my breakfast today thought Xuan while grinding all the stuff up and placing it into a bamboo tube and roasting it in the fire with tongs. A loud bang shook back awake Xuan, and a several pieces of charcoal flew out of the furnace hitting the wall right behind him and left a huge hole in the wall. The loud sound attracted many more.

The emperor's great hall was spectacular, gold–coloured banners hung outside the great gate of African Blackwood, an amazing tint to the wood that made it glow. Silk strips were strung up upon every tree in the court, varying and bright with all the colours. There was no other place in the continent at the time, not even Rome could compare. The final reckoning of the monk came. Xuan was convicted of attempted murder and treason. Xuan, as an act of desperation, pointed out the use of gunpowder for war, as he named it gunpowder. This choice by a pacifist monk has eventually led to the war ridden world that we all live today. Chinese argue that this is their greatest invention ever. They argue that it drove forward civilisation. The works of a monk is now becoming the core of some ethics debate today, amazing!

The Emperor's Dream

Wellington College International School Shanghai, Kong, Vivian – 13

Darkness and dreariness roamed the city of Liu Yang. I sat beside his bedpost with dark circles around my eyes. The thought of the sinister memory had haunted me day and night. Although I had occasionally expressed my horror, the guards' denial lacked empathy, which made me more exasperated.

I glanced at the painting hung beside my bedpost, my priceless possession. A young prince stood beside a girl in a red gown with a stern look. The girl wore a diamond necklace, matching those on her index finger. Since the very sight of the girl pleased me miraculously, her immediate departure was too sorrowful to digest. If life hadn't gulped down the girl too quickly, I would have nothing to fear of. A single tear tinkled down my pale cheeks, wetting my skin. I sighed and blew at the shimmering candlelight, shivering at the gloominess of the night.

I hope, I pleaded, I hope…

An eccentric roar echoed through the corridors of the palace. A silvery silhouette crawled under the moonlight. I jumped and held my breath. Covering my ears and closing my eyes, I imagined the slithering of a dragon, and its bitter breath…

"Ahh!" I cried.

It was a busy evening.

I scanned the energetic city with anxiety.

"Close the gates." I demanded at my soldiers, "Now."

The soldiers shared bewildered looks, "Your majesty, it's only ten past five. The gate usually shuts at midnight."

"Midnight?" I gasped with horror whilst stumbling towards the floor dramatically, my palm on my forehead. "Didn't you hear that? Close it. Now."

"Yes, your majesty." Came the reply I had awaited.

Dinner was soon served. I wore my red robes; my hat was perched low; my eyes were sore. As usual, my silver chopstick slid into the served dishes one by one. After the detection was complete, the chopstick remained silver and clear as I had expected. Nobody, not a single soul, would make an untruthful decision go murder me. Additionally, who would dare?

I declared the meal to begin in a hurried tone. My dinner seemed endless, particularly with no accompany but my servants and the banal soldiers. They stood like large stones, unemotionally. The servants bowed as usual, whilst the soldiers stood to attention. I raised my glass to face the pouring moonlight, shuddering at the thought of the monstrous silhouette. It must have been a nightmare, I thought just to comfort myself from my illusions.

I tasted every dish in a dull expression and had longed for the appearance of the silver carp, as this was the meal that pleased me the most. Unfortunately, it never came, threatening my mood. My patience growled and rumbled inside me. I tried hard to gulp down my unsatisfactory meals, but I had learnt myself not to control my emotions after I was crowned and received the Mandate of Heaven. I knew father would never tolerate my complaints when he was alive and knew that he would have been disappointed if he found out. Would he anyways? I was very fond of father, a man with a great mind, but all I had remembered was his grim look whenever I crossed his boundaries time after time. I was called a failure, by

father obviously, but I had never had a chance to prove my strengths to him, nor had he listened whatsoever. Staring at the sky, I knew father was peering down at me with a glitter of hope in his eyes.

I sighed.

As a distraction to my guilty thoughts, I ordered a visit to the palace kitchen, expecting the salty smell of fresh fish during the little journey. I was eager to meet my desired prey: the silver carp. My stomach growled as I felt my saliva dribbling down the edge of my lip. Unfortunately, I was greeted by a peculiar burnt taste. Hastily, I tramped, followed by my truthful servant, who comforted me with his exaggerated words.

"Your majesty, it might as well be the little ceremony to scare off the little red beasts." the servant explained.

"I thought I clearly stated for you to close the gates, so did the smell crawl over the walls of my palace? Nonsense!"

It was fantastic that the servants were all terrified about my raised voice and my scrunched eyebrows just as how I was scared of father before. Their tiny tense faces made me snigger under my hat. I had loved being on the centre stage and them by my foot. Pleasure.

I was by the kitchen door when the cook's gasp was heard.

"No way…never…" was all my ears heard through the cracks of the door. Saltpeters we're everywhere, so was smoke. I had no time to release my anger.

Boom!

I shuddered on the soldier's back as I was carried out to the opening. I closed my eyes but heard the terrifying sound of splashes of fire. The dragons, I thought, but as I opened my eyes, I gasped at the gorgeous performance. Red splashes of fire twirled in the sky, illuminating the night. Fresh air poured on my nose. Tears no longer splattered down my face, flooding my eyes. It was no longer disastrous. My palace was in ruins; The cook, not to mention, was nowhere to be seen, but I was no longer scared. I was well. Very well.

The city crumbled, but I knew, deep in my heart, that it was an amazing start to end the city's fear.

Wind hushed ferociously; I opened my eyes with slight difficulty due to my aching back. I felt as though I had just arrived back from a thrilling adventure. Unexpectedly, I was well on my bed. Peculiar. I stretched and yawned in disbelief. It was only a dream after all, an amazing dream that was too true to be fake. An imagination can't be real, unless you repeat each step you encountered in your dream. Step by step.

"My dear servants," I called, "Who's the palace's main cook? I shall need a word with him. This, perhaps, is the start of the firework invention!"

The servants seemed slightly perplexed.

"The main cook is Li Tian. I will inform him about your request."

The Ultimate Creation

Wellington College International School Shanghai, Li, Dalen – 13

When I first arrived in China, it was like stepping into a different world. Compared to the plain brick houses and pearly green trees of the UK, taking just a single peek at the majestic urban sprawl of China was like taking a time machine to the future. Glittering glass skyscrapers towered over me, making my jaw drop when I considered how much time and manpower it would have taken to build, while electric cars zoomed on the neatly paved roads without a single sound. Gargantuan planes nearly double the size of others roared over me, while glistening neon advertisement boards showed intricately created advertisements for literally every single product I could imagine. Everything around me screamed creativity and innovation, and if you, like me, sometimes wonder about just how China has managed to develop into such a technologically advanced country, then we will have to look at the inventions of China.

To say the least, the citizens of China have produced some of the most useful and life-changing inventions ever on the face of the earth. Some of these inventions include crafting paper, block printing and even an early form of ketchup. These are all inventions which have an extremely large contribution on Earth, for example, block printing was what have Europeans the idea of the printing press, which is why information was able to spread during the renaissance, meaning that it had a large contribution to the success of the renaissance, and also the nowadays logical and mathematical ideas of Europeans instead of simply believing in God. There are many, many more inventions from China which have equal importance, but I believe that the Chinese invention with the largest change and contribution to the Earth is gunpowder.

Lee sat up groggily, yawning and rubbing his eyes, and was instantly bombarded by the many thoughts of what to do today for the best efficiency. Lee groaned inwardly, knowing that he had a lot of an exhausting work ahead of him. This process of sleeping, eating and researching was repeated every, single day, but there never seemed to be any progress on making what the emperor referred to as 'the ultimate goal' of making something which could propel an object at s high speed. Lee forced himself to stand up and pull on his Hanfu, as all alchemists who are late faced strict punishment such as a loss of wages or even being fired from this job which was dreamt of by many. However, Lee thought, this job was not as exciting as he thought when he had just finished a whole week of monotonous, demanding tests while being enclosed in a minuscule box which seemed inhumane for such high-ranking people to be in. When he had finally finished the tests and received the message that he had been accepted as one of the emperor's alchemists, he was absolutely ecstatic. However, now, a job that was once a dream for Lee was now dismissed as boring and repetitive. Now, it is just doing the same things over, and over, and over again until the king gets annoyed and swaps a goal for the alchemists to reach.

Now, the alchemists are currently working on an experiment named 'the ultimate goal'. The goal is, quoting the emperor, 'to create an object capable of propelling objects at high speeds. There has been many different inventions, such as the design using the rubber band to fling out small rocks, or even the pipe which required you to blow air inside it and then release the air hole, but none of these designs worked the way the emperor wanted it to, sometimes even harming the person using it. Lee sighed, and then tried to think in an optimistic manner. At least he was not one of the millions sat in the streets begging for food and praying for a miracle for them to find some way to keep their families alive and fed. Now feeling a bit better, Lee cleared his thoughts and focused on the day ahead, striding towards the alchemist experiment and testing area.

Wearing rubber gloves and a paper-made mask, Lee took in the familiar bitter and slightly choking smell of the room specially reserved for the emperor's alchemists. Sparks flew from an alchemist using an enormous sword to attempt to cut a piece of iron, whole blue flames erupted from the workspace of an

alchemist trying to mix a concoction of chemicals, scalding many other alchemists, including himself. Lee's jaw dropped when he finally, for the first time, realized that this room was not just for conducting experiments, but also a room for unlimited creativity and new ideas. Now much more joyful, Lee rushed towards a worktable where his friends were already waiting.

'Hey.' Lee's friend Chang said, without looking up from his experiment that he was conducting, which seemed to require lots of extremely delicate work. 'Hey,' returned Lee, 'what are you doing?'

Chang squinted at a piece of paper, and then sighed, putting down a test tube and a stirring rod that he was originally working with. 'I'm trying a brand–new chemical combination, but it just doesn't work! All it does is explode in my face or burst into flames. I've had 5 assistants in hospital from just a single morning!'

'Let me check.' Lee shuffled closer, examining the scroll containing the method that Chang was currently experimenting with. His eyes widened when he saw the ingredient 'potassium nitrate'. 'What?' Lee exclaimed. 'Why do you have that stuff inside? Do you even know how deadly it is? And mixed with sulfur and charcoal? What are you making? A bomb? No wonder so many people got hurt!'

Chang shook his head and replied:'I have been trying to complete the king's goal of creating something to propel an object at high speeds.'

Lee was obviously flabbergasted, and half–screamed, half whispered:'What in the world are you thinking? Are you trying to propel an object or are you trying to propel the human instead?'

Chang grinned, but it quickly disappeared, his face turning back into the despondent state it originally was. 'I had the intention to fire a projectile, but up to now, either there is a huge explosion while I am making it, or when I test it, the person operating it literally disintegrates.'

Lee looked at the scroll closer and realized that Chang had written the amount of previous past experiments and their results. He found out that out of 12 total experiments, five resulted in 'severe injury', six resulted in 'moderate injury', while one, which happens to be the first one, resulted in a 'mixed failure'. As the well–known genius of the alchemists, Lee immediately began inspecting the calculations and formulas on the scroll and brought out a scroll of his own. After scribbling some calculations, Lee grinned and said in a confident voice:'Well, I'm done.'

Chang's eyes widened as he inspected the scroll, while stuttering:'How? I did so many experiments, and now you get it in one go. Are you sure this will work?'

Smiling, Lee replied:'You just have to lessen the dose of each ingredient, and there you go.'

Literally bouncing off his seat, Chang flew down the corridor to collect the ingredients needed to create the new recipe. Lee took in a deep breath, pulled on a lab coat, and put on a pair of glasses, ready to create the thing needed to so called 'rule the world'.

Finally, Lee finished his experiments, and gotten the goals he was aiming for. It was just noon, but Lee was already dizzy, with his muscles weakening with every step and his brain literally unable to think of anything. He had just gone through a grueling four hours of intricate measurements, huge calculations and mixing chemicals in test tubes, all while wondering if it would explode into his face. When he had finished, he should have been ecstatic, but he only wanted to rest more than ever. After using the very

little left energy to ask the emperor for a rest, Lee stumbled to his bed and slumped onto it, without even bothering to take off his clothes, the darkness of sleep taking him into a slumber in mere seconds.

When he woke up, Lee was still drowsy, but came to reality in an instant. His heart started pounding, and he punched the air, screaming:'I did it! I did it!' He skipped down the corridor, and went into the room containing the emperor's throne, where Chang was already reporting to the emperor. 'Ahhh, so there is the famous Lee. Congratulations on achieving my goal, and you shall be awarded.' Lee has a smile stretching from ear to ear and left to find the other alchemists to tell them the good news. Finally, the thing that the emperor had been searching for for so long has been created.

A Story of Tea

Wellington College International School Shanghai, Pearson, Pollyana – 13

Shen Zhen gazed from the balcony at the ocean, the dark waters gazing back as waves crashed against the shore. He liked it this way, not a care in the world, just him and nature. He felt the crisp morning air graze the back of his neck as he trotted down the steps to the garden.

He sat down in the shade, under his favorite tree, a warm cup of water rested in his hands. He sat there pondering about life, on what he was to do the following day. He picked up the small porcelain cup and placed it to his lips, as he drank, he knew it didn't taste right. He looked down to the cup to see the water had become amber, and at the bottom of the pottery was a tea leaf. He fished it out with his fingers, and noted how it had dried up. He took another sip and to his delight, he found the leaf water rather tasteful. For the rest of the day, he experimented with all different sorts of techniques. In the end he found grinding up the leaves then placing them in the water enhanced the flavor.

That night he sat awake in bed, with the same porcelain cup in his hand. He finished his cup, of what he had decided to name the tea. He was about to put the cup down when he noticed the leaves at the bottom, they had taken on the shape of a skull. *This is surely a coincidence* he thought, and it didn't cross his mind again. He rested the cup on his desk, and climbed back into bed.

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He panted as he sat up. He was underneath the tea tree. He looked up to the sky, it was still dark. A small cloud of purple mist drifted away into the distance. The memories slowly rushed back to him. He had had a dream. Except it wasn't a dream. It couldn't have been if he was out here, not after what he had saw, what had happened…

He rushed back inside and grabbed his journal from his desk drawer. The leather cover smooth against his skin. He flipped through the thin pages, till he reached a blank page. He scribbled down everything he had seen, everything he had felt…

He buried the journal at the foot of the tree, where he had just woken up. And that night he vowed to never speak of what had happened. Not for himself, but to protect the ones he loved.

– >>>————————> 9997 years later <————————<<<–

Shen Hua immediately started cycling towards the hospital. She had gotten the call at 3:33 that night, it was the hospital. They had told her nothing more than her father was in an accident and there was a chance he might not make it, but that was all she needed to hear before she slipped on her shoes and started running for her bike.

The smell of disinfectant burned her nostrils as she stalked through the halls.
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She finally found her father's room, this was it, room number: 333. She cautiously pushed open the door, the metal cool under her fingers. Panic rose in her stomach as she saw her father in the hospital bed, surrounded by beeping machines and nurses; panic immediately rose in her stomach.

"He's in a coma" said a blonde nurses, "we're not sure when he'll wake up, it could be a couple hours or couple years… or never." . she said it so quietly, but how could a few words so small and so quiet mean something so big and so loud.
"No… no no no no no!" she cried into her father's chest as she hugged him tight. "Wake up…" tears started rolling down her cheeks, the saltiness against her lips.

That night she slept on the yellow stained armchair beside her father, she did the same the next night too. On the second day she sat back down in the lumpy chair and laid back to try and get some sleep. She imagined her and her father, tears welled up in her eyes. But eventually darkness swallowed her.

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That night she woke up to the sound of fast paced beeping from one of the machines attached to her father's lifeless body. She walked over, the cold tiles against her feet sending shivers up her spine. "Dad?" She called into the darkness.
"Shen Hua? Is that you?" Someone called back, no not someone, her dad!
"Dad! You're awake!" Tears of joy falling from her eyes.
"Listen" he whispered. "I don't have much time before they notice I'm gone"
"Who?"
"The spirits, but I needed to tell you. There's a prophecy. Our ancestor, Shen Zhen, had powers. What powers we don't know, but he wrote it down in a book, and the prophecy! Yes the prophecy, the three hundredth and thirty third child would find a way to wield the magic once more and break the curse. But I found the book, it was under your pillow. You're the three hundredth and thirty third child. And every time the spirits came I tried to fight them off, tried to protect you, but it wasn't enough. I am so sorry. But I don't regret it, I would rather die protecting you than live knowing you were in danger. But it's up to you now, you must figure out how to wield the magic and save us all. But until then I will forever be watching you, and just know I will always love you. Goodbye my little flower."
"Wait what curse!" But it was too late. Her father was dead.

She went back to her armchair and lifted the pillow, and just as he had said, the book was right there. She clutched the book in her arms and let the tears fall. She knew there wouldn't be a day that went by that she didn't morn him, she would love him and everything he did for her forever. But she finally understood, when someone said forever didn't mean people It meant memories.

The next day she burnt the book.

– >>>————————> 3 years 3 months and 3 days later <————————<<<–

When she woke up, the book as usual, was under pillow. She was tired, tired of trying to find new ways to rid herself of that damn book! No matter what she did, every day the book would
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find its way under her pillow. But as usual, she made a cup of green tea she never had time to finish, she threw the book in the dumpster behind the building, and went to work.

When she got home, the book was there. Not under her pillow, but on the kitchen table laying open. She gave in, she'd been trying to avoid looking at it for three years, but she'd had enough, she couldn't avoid it forever. She slowly picked up the book by its leather cover and started reading.

She tried to unravel all the drawings of shadows, untwist the riddles within the pages, but after an hour she didn't want to look at it anymore, not without being sick. There were prophecies of sacrifices, and magic. But her heart skipped a beat as she read what was on the next page, her father had been wrong. It wasn't the three hundredth and thirty third child that would wield the magic to break the curse, it was the three hundredth and thirty third child that would die to break it. But she still didn't know what the curse was. She kept flipping through the pages until she had an answer, but she didn't. She closed the book and was about to pick it up when she stopped, there was a piece of paper placed on top of the book. How could that had happened, she just blinked and it was there! She cautiously picked it up, her hands trembling.

Every three hundredth and thirty third year, the dark one will awaken and feast on the blood and flesh of three thousand three hundred and thirty three people. Unless, the chosen one's blood is spilt on the book of breathings.

A lump rose in her chest as she read the last sentence. And just as she looked away from the paper, there was a new book, the book of breathings. It was made of solid gold not actual paper, it was heavy and cold in her hands. She started sobbing, she didn't want to die! But her father. He had sacrificed himself for her… what was it for if she didn't do something, she was the chosen one, and by the sound of it the only chosen one. She had to do what was right. She looked over to the cup of tea from this morning. And there, was the tea leaf skull at the bottom of the teacup. And she was dead.

The AI Kidnap

Wellington College International School Shanghai, Temporini, Lucrezia – 12

I knew I'd miss waking up, looking out at the vast sea and knowing that at least one thing never changes. The city had changed so much over the past 16 years. It went from being a small town where people over fifty had no idea what a phone was to a bustling city where AI was everywhere you looked. My hologram, Lin, showed me videos and pictures from before the AI revolution. I never knew how she did that, she wasn't even there at that time. Lin helped me with everything, she helped me study, she waked me up in the morning and even did my chores for me when I was too lazy to do anything. She was amazing.

"Time to wake up Diana! You're gonna miss your flight" Lin knocked on my door.

"You can come in Lin" I said, trying to sound half asleep.

"Don't you try to pretend, I know you've been awake since five," she scolded me as she opened the door, "I could hear you packing your bag."

I kept forgetting that she heard everything. "Fine, I couldn't sleep. I was too excited."

"I know you'll miss everyone here, all your friends and family. But you're gonna come back here in three months," she said patiently. "Plus, you're not going to Los Angeles alone, I'm coming, your parents are coming. You're not gonna be alone, ever. Now come on, these bags aren't gonna pack themselves."

I followed Lin into the kitchen where my parents were waiting for me. I sat at the counter and ate a slice of bread, like I normally did.

"I hope you're ready," said my mom. She saw how sad and worried I was. She always sees everything. "I know you don't want to leave. But you knew you'd have to go to university someday."

"Anyway," my dad interrupted, "our flight is in 3 hours. So, hurry up and get changed."

I got changed and stared out of my window, trying to memorise every tiny detail. I couldn't forget anything. I knew I'd come back in just three months, but it felt like an eternity.

"Diana," Lin called, "we're leaving."

"I'm coming." I shouted back.

After a long one–hour car ride, we finally arrived at the airport and after another hour we were on the plane. "Time for a 16–hour flight. Yay" I thought to myself. I was sitting with Lin, but she had to be shut off for most of the flight. So, I was alone. I kept re–reading the university booklet, hoping it could prepare me in some way. That's how nervous I was.

We arrived in Los Angeles, it was loud, busy and ridiculously crowded. Most importantly, there was the salty smell of the sea. At least that reminded me of home. My dad went to get the luggage while I helped my mom get Lin to work again and get a taxi. We got on and after thirty minutes, we arrived at our apartment. It looked similar to home, it was super modern and had the view of the sea, but it felt completely different. It felt cold. I unpacked my bag, went to bed and fell asleep immediately. I slept for thirteen hours and woke up feeling more rested than I had ever felt

before. My parents were still unpacking some of the bags so I went to the kitchen to look for some bread. The only bread I found was industrial toast so I didn't eat anything. I had never tried toast before and didn't want to. I wanted the bread my grandma made, which I couldn't get now because I was living in another continent. I went to go do some research on the university I was going to go to, Los Angeles University of Science and Technology, and the only thing I found out was that it was the most famous and best university in America. I had no idea how unprepared I was. The university was gigantic. The tour took two hours and I barely knew where my class was after that. I also met this other new girl, Charlotte, who was really nice to me and also had no idea where to go.

The first day was as crazy as I thought it would be. There were floods of people in the corridors and then, in a matter of minutes, they went silent, completely silent. Charlotte and I were late to every class, but no one seemed to care. The days passed by in a blur, days turned into weeks, weeks turned into months and suddenly it was the 25th of November, Charlotte and I were best friends and we had an AI project that was due in a three weeks. It was quite easy, for Charlotte, not for me. She said she'd finish the model at home but obviously something went wrong. So, she called me and told me to meet her outside of the school gates on Sunday morning.

"What are we doing at school on a Sunday?" I demanded.

"I need to get another hologram generator," She explained. "My dog ate the one I have at home and I can't find one anywhere."

"Ok. How are we supposed to get in?" I asked. That second, Hazel, from our class, came to bring us in. Her family stayed in Germany so she lived in the school dorms. Charlotte and I went to the basement to get a spare whatever we needed. That's when things started getting exciting.

While we were walking back from the storage room, we heard the head of technology, Ms Asher, and the principal, Mr Moon, talking. More like shouting cause they're both deaf.

"How are we supposed to pay all our debts?" shouted Mr Moon.

"I don't know, you're the principal!" Ms Asher shouted back.

"Exactly, so you're supposed to come up with all the solutions." said Mr Moon.

"Fine. How about we steal all the AI in town and resell it to the same people?" said Ms Asher.

"No, are you stupid?" yelled the principal "That way the police could track us down. We'll only take the AI that belongs to the families that send their kids to our school. (Big gigantic pause, walks towards the door) See, I'm amazing."

We rushed into the nearest classroom and waited for them to leave.

"What was that?" asked Charlotte.

"That was a sign that we need to do something." I wouldn't let them take Lin away from me. I couldn't. She had all my favourite memories from when I was little and I wouldn't lose them. More importantly, I wouldn't let them take my closest friend.

After we got out, we went to Charlotte's house to 'finish our project', which was finding a way to stop the principal. After a long discussion we finally agreed that Charlotte would make a fake

AI that had the same memories and functions as my one and use it as bait to record whoever was supposed to steal the AI.

Two weeks passed and still no AI had been stolen. We were about to give up when Charlotte called me at **FIVE** in the morning to tell me that Hazel's friend's AI had been stolen. We decided to meet Hazel at school, an hour before school actually started, so we could get more information. Actually, Charlotte did all the talking and note taking while I was sleeping. During the day, I couldn't keep my mind off the fact that I might lose Lin. That's probably why I had no idea that I would be having a maths test in a week, but that's for another time. I had a bigger problem, keeping Lin safe.

After school, we went to Charlotte's house and set up the hologram projector outside her front door. Then, we stayed in Charlotte's bedroom and looked at what her camera was recording and waited and waited and waited until I fell asleep.

I was eight years old again and I was playing with Lin when all of a sudden, she started glitching for about a minute or so and then it just stopped. Lin turned around and looked at me with a blank stare.

"Lin, are you ok?" I asked.

"Who is Lin?" she asked in monotone. "My name is Blank and you are not allowed to play unless you get more than 80% on all your tests."

"I'm only eight, I don't have tests," I was crying at that point. "I want Lin back!"

I woke up panting and sweating. It was four in the morning and Charlotte was already awake.

"Did you even sleep?" I stumbled towards her.

"A couple of hours," she replied, there was something strange in her voice. "Diana, there's something you should know. Your parents just texted."

I didn't need her to finish that sentence, I already knew what had happened. Dread, sadness, and most of all, fear flooded into me. Lin had been stolen.

The Plague of The City

Wellington College International School Shanghai, Wang, Jake – 11

A blanket of storm–grey clouds enshrouded the city in shadows, blocking all light from coming in. How had this happened, how did a vibrant city turn in to a graveyard of darkness? Well it all started on 2076, 5 years ago, It was just like any other day, the sun was up shining and the birds were chirping but under the veil of innocence, a virus crept through the dirt battered after years of torment and would make this day a very dark day indeed. It spread swiftly for a few weeks unnoticed by the system, but by the time it was discovered the damage had already been done and the world was no longer safe. Many doctors tried to devise an antidote but all failed ending in their ultimate demise. And as a last ditch effort the world isolated this city behind bars, nano fiber enshrouding the city.

Darkness fell on this city, and people were getting sick fast, I a nobody in the normal world decided this would be my only chance to do good and I did good for a while, you see I got sick a few weeks ago and there's where we're at now. I stumbled through the dirty streets stumbling around falling on the floor my face kissing the dusty dirty floor, I struggled as I tried to stand up fire burning in my veins and fell down again as if some bully was knocking me down. I suddenly heard a group of voices harsh and menacing, they laughed at me as I was a rat a worthless addition to society, they walked to me and snatched my wallet out of my pocket, pickpocketed all my money, then threw the wallet at my face, I struggled to stand up as they kicked me down to the ground and as they walked away my strength ebbed and I lost consciousness.

"Is he okay?" Cassie asked Tom, "I think so……"he said. I opened my eyes and saw my two best friends watching me. "What time is it?"I mumble as I see the clock 2:15. I had been asleep for over a day, and was late for my work. "I got to go."I say, stand up then crumble back down. "Whoa you need to rest!"Tom said, "Chill out man." I look at my surroundings and realize I'm not at my home, "Wait where am I?"
I ask as I stumble out of this makeshift tent and see light blinding light and green everywhere, Cassie rushes to my side and says: "We're outdoors!". I look around and see life blooming everywhere, birds chirped ahead of us horses were everywhere in the wild and the trees had luscious green hair of fine leaves. The smell of nature enveloped my nostrils a smell I haven't seen for a long time.

Sunlight was precious and I found a newfound appreciation for nature. My friends let me relax for a while then reminded me that we needed to find a cure for my sickness and I decided to stop admiring nature for the moment. We trekked up hills and walked through plains and finally found something man made a village in the middle of a mountain range we carefully walked down the slope dodging past debris and rubble carefully stepping on solid ground and made sure to not walk on loose dirt or gravel, once we arrived at the village, we asked around for medical herbs, careful to not draw in suspicion in the interest of self–preservation. The most of the village didn't have any, but all hope was lost until we found a small shop hidden in the woods we found herbs of all varieties many exotic and rare, but we faced another problem, we couldn't pay for it.

I fumble around for my wallet then as I opened it I realized the sad truth, the street thugs had stole every single penny I had as my wallet was as empty as a vacuum in outer space. As the realization hit me I sobbed surrounding myself with anguish I was scared of reality, scared that the disease would overpower me before we could pay the price.
Cassie tried to be upbeat as she comforted me and told me that we would be able to collect the money before it was too late, and Tom promised me that they would help with unwavering resolve. They got me

to see the upside of things even though they themselves were almost convinced that this situation was impossible.

After a while I got back onto my feet their was no going back on it now as we had already travelled so far we looked around begging for a job we visited grocery shops and even high tech farms but without our work licenses that we left at shanghai no one would hire us, we hit the same problem we had hit the block with no avail but this time their was nowhere to go.

I slumped down on the floor defeated and tired I sat their for hours with only silence to accompany me, when my friends came I told them to go away thinking it was all over but when I was at my lowest I suddenly heard a mechanism in the wall, I stood up for the first time in a few hours, and walked to the other side of the wall, and found an entrance to a room, I warily crept around the edges of the room and saw a pile of gold behind a wall of steel reinforced glass. An audio played and it said: "If you want this pile of treasure get me three items a white truffle from the forest a live frog and the roots of a pine tree.

I laughed thinking of these ridiculous requests who would give up a treasury for a few simple items. And so with only around 1 week of life left I called back my friends and went on the hunt again. We trekked through the mountain clothes getting ruined by brambles and leaves. Tom asked in doubt: "You sure we should do this?" I reply: "I have no other choice and so it continued. On the end of day one we found a frog and gave it to the man. On day two we got the roots of a pine tree. But we could not find a white truffle despite our efforts. Day 3 past, Day 4 past…… With every day I felt more and more depression. And on Day 7 I was weak as ever and was hopeless yet again but just when darkness swore to overtake the sun, far off in the distance Cassie spotted a pale white mushroom in the distance Tom rushed over and shouted that's a white truffle. Just as I heard that my body slacked and I fainted. I heard faint traces of panic as I completely lost consciousness my friends taking care of me.

Cassie and Tom picked up the mushroom and lugged me onto a piece of wood. Trying to pull me towards the village, as they reached the man their faces were covered in sweat tired from all the running. They traded in the mushroom for the gold and tried to bring me to the herbalist but my breath was shallow and my heart was barely beating. The villagers seeing my friends pull me pitied us and brought me to the herbalist along my friends. Cassie and Tom threw the gold on the table, and quickly "Asked is this enough?". The herbalist seeing me on the brink of death quickly nodded yes and gave me the appropriate herbs. At that point my subconsciousness started to fade and as that happened I could see everyone taking care of me, and gently persuaded their minds to wrap the herbs in dough and feed it to me. As my final seconds my astral form disappeared as my friends finished and stuffed the food in my mouth. For a few seconds my heart stopped beating and my friends mourned. But suddenly I awoke and hugged my friends with a deep embrace.

Now it is two years after then we bought enough herbs to treat the whole city of Shanghai and the dome is no more. But I will always remember that friends are the most important of all as you can trust them when you can't trust anyone else.

Counterfeit

Wellington College International School Shanghai, Zhang, Anlin – 13

Horse hooves echoed faintly across the stone slab floor. Like a squabble of penguins, merchants and traders overfilled the courtyard with gossip and arguments. A distinctive smell of spices tickled Peony's nose. She squeezed through the ground demanding a space in the crowd, her eyes glued to the Emperor's podium. Sunlight traced the fine embroidery draped on the table. Curtains of rich red velvet waltzed and glistened in the air like dancers. Bells rang beating the air drums of everyone who passed. An essence of excitement condensed in the air, like a cloud ready to precipitate at any moment.

"Paper money, a valuable but fragile item," the Emperor spoke steadily and with confidence silencing the crowd. A breeze passed by twirling hair, flicking through pages of books, and flirting with the delicate petals of the flowers. "Money something of no value, and something which can buy almost anything in the world. Use it wisely…or else." With a swish of his hand, he was gone again. Whispers of deceit fluttered in between the gossip of the merchants waiting impatiently to be let out. The sun dipped into the night sky, extinguishing the excitement of the party. Peony shivered not because of the sudden temperature drop, but of something else wafting in the air.

After the Emperor's speech the crowd dispersed and fled back to their marketplaces. The sound of silence was deafening. It began to drizzle. Walls: moist, slippery, and reeking of metal. The smell hit Peony's nose, luring her to it. She paced around the ground, her footsteps drumming in harmony with the soft pattering of the rain. Her hair raised in deep fear, for she sensed an air of deceit playing on the same team as the merchants.

Distant striking of the clock, announced the end of the day, hurrying people home. As Peony arrived home, she entered her cosy room, here she felt safe from the strangling of lies and deceit from the outside world. She shook off her shoes, and let down her hair, which like a wave smoothly washed down her back. She threw herself onto her silk pillows trying to ignore the thoughts which kept running laps inside her head. There could not be something wrong with this new system of money. She reassured herself again and again. Tangled by her thoughts, she flipped and flopped, trying to sleep, trying to shake the thought out of her head.

Awoken by the loud rapping on her door, she reluctantly rose from her slumber. Shuffling towards the door, she was not excited at all about the case she was about to be assigned to. "PEONY! PEONY! Please wake up something has happened in the imperial court." The message boy bellowed through the door. Thunder growled outside, followed by a clap of lightning, rain showered down as if the ground was begging for water. She shoved back the door with much hesitation, for she knew what was waiting ahead was a board game of deceitful Chinese chess.

On the way to her office room, she listened to her message boy explain and unfold the details of this case. Cogs in her brain began to turn slowly but clearly. Apparently, what she predicted was correct, someone was faking paper money in the printing office, hijacking all of the machines and selling them for higher prices. 40 percent higher according to the merchants scrambling around the market.
"So, you're saying that the people who are creating this fake money are buying the printing press for a higher price than the emperor?" Peony questioned in awe, not believing a single word of it as she spoke it out loud. "Yes, we are quite unsure how that is happening but that is what we have heard from the relatives from the press." Coming from a printing family herself, she knew that all of the printers were loyal to the Emperor, but there could always be an outlier.

Arriving at her office, she began to study the different printing works of the two different types of money. Despite her excellent eyesight she could not figure out the differences between the printing methods. Slamming her teacup on the table, and howling in her office, throwing the money around, she had enough. She lowered her head and sighed disappointed with her stupidity, and incapability to solve the problem. She shoved her books in her homemade bag, rearranged her calligraphy brushes over and over again, and fiddled with her hair. Twisting and turning it as if it could light a spark in her mind. On the brink of falling asleep, an idea turned the light back on in her brain. Her parents were printers!

Throwing her stack over her shoulder, slightly swinging because of the weight on her shoulder, she scampered out of the imperial palace, with her messenger trailing behind obediently. They hopped in the carriage racing towards her parents' house to seek what traces were left on the newly made paper money. Bubbling with excitement she bounced from the carriage towards her parents' house. This meeting would have been a perfect reunion and the key to opening all the locks to this mystery.

Crashing through the front door, singing loudly "Mother, Father! I'm back!" Her voice eerily echoed around the walls; echoes rebounded off herself. Her body froze. Hoping so hard that things weren't the way she thought they were. Sprinting around the house, darting and dashing in and out of the rooms. There was still no sight of her parents. Moving hesitantly towards the table, Peony reached out for the blood−stained envelope on the desk. Hands shaking, she took out the letter. Gently, cautiously unwrapping it, her eyes scrolled over the lines of chicken scratches on the parchment. *Your mother and father are in the hands of us. Return the money we have made, leave this case Resign and exit the imperial palace. Only on these conditions I will return your parents back.*

Things were not as easy as Peony thought they were. She was now entwined in a web of deceit and lies.

New Tales of China's Inventions

Wellington College International School Shanghai, Zhou, Kevin – 13

Two thousand years ago, the first and the greatest dynasty had met its first and last challenge. The Qin dynasty has reached its peak and its end. The emperor's sudden death had shocked the country. The starving people and the ambitious nobilities dreamed about a new era. With the army at the countryside, the emperor is defenseless. Everyone knew that things have changed.

In the city near sea, two worried brothers were planning their future. They were the descendants of the best scientists in china, they were Han Yu and Han Li. They both knew that the flames of war will burn through the country. Like the others, they wanted to stay alive in the revolution. But where could keep them safe? For this, they discussed for an entire week, and made this difficult decision. They will go to the land across the sea. As the decision was made, they started preparing everything for sailing. Food, water, clothes, boats, and and some medicine, they used all their money to buy supplies, but they forgot about the difference in sailing in rivers and sailing in the ocean. They didn't have navigation.

The brothers knew nothing about sailing or navigation, but they believed that the situation would be worse if they stayed. The brothers were similar in everything, they were known to be smart and intelligent, but they were not nobilities, which means they couldn't get power anywhere. To run away from this deformed society, and the illusion of finding new land, they became more and more convinced about the idea of sailing.

With the confidence of finding a new piece of land, the two brothers dreamed about what fairyland they could find. Beautiful forests covered in mists, lovely animals playing in the sun, and wonderful hot springs bubbling warmly welcoming their arrival. Thinking of the spectacular views they may see, the animal meat that could only be eaten in the new year, and owning their own piece of land, the brothers were filled with strength and energy to work hard and to join the party in the new land.

"One, two, three, go!" The two brothers pushed tithe boat into the water. With all the supplies, the brothers dreamed about their bright future, until Han Li asked "Brother, do you know where our destiny is?"

His brother thoughtlessly replied "Yeah, I think it's around… around… there?"

Suddenly realizing that they've lost their destiny, the two brothers cried in horror. Their fantasy dreams have been destroyed by the cruel fact that they could run out of supplies before they reach another land. Only if they can find supplies in three months, they could have a chance to live. Or else, they might experience the most painful tortures in the world: starving, torn apart by wild marine creatures, drowned, or even scared to death. They had to make a change.

As the descendant of scientists, they were told that a magnet arrow will always point to a certain direction, and they brought some of it as a medicine. The magnets that were as cheap as stones now felt like gold, the little pack of magnets could be processed and lead the way like the northern star. After a few weeks of inventing, one of the most useful inventions appeared. The compass.

After three months of hardworking, they reached an island. The island was rich in resources and was as big as the city they lived in. The island was filled with astonishing creatures, fruitful trees, and unexploited gold mines. In the centre of this island, a crystal–clear lake sparkled to the sunlight, fishes delightfully swam across the lake when several birds chirped above them. The day has ended. The last

sunbeam shone onto the lake, reflecting the inverted image of the brothers' solitude. Feeling lost, they looked up to the smiling stars and the They spent the next few weeks on this island, preparing new supplies, re-engineering the compass, and taking a break from the tiring days which they fought with the roaring waves every day.

After weeks of wander, the brothers chose to restart their journey. Leaving everything they had behind, and gone into the perilous, but miraculous ocean, just like how their legend journey began.

With the adapted compass and a bit of luck, the brothers found the three islands that the first emperor Ying Zheng was trying to find. This island was known of the island of the celestial beings, the stories started spreading that these islands contain the secrets of immortality. As they found the islands, a sudden music started playing, sunlights and rainbows shone onto the shore, doves and cranes sang gracefully, and the mist that swirled around the island slowly disappeared.

Entering the island, they were amazed at the magnificence of the palace in the middle of the island. As they walked through, the trees bowed as if they were welcoming them, the animals greeted them with fruits as big as footballs, and the flowers smiled to them with honeybees swinging their wings with happiness. Two deers led them to the empty palace. On the front door, it said 'Hello, when you see this, I have died a long time ago and this palace, these three splendid islands —— Peng Lai, Ying Zhou, Fang Zhang —— all belong to you. Xu Fu.' In the palace, the brothers found teenagers locked around the palace, they were brought by Xu Fu to find the medicine of immortality for the emperor.

Without thinking, the brothers freed the teenagers, and moved into the palace. A few days later, suddenly recognizing the name of this great alchemist,

Han Yu exclaimed "Xu fu? How could he be here? I thought he was executed by our old emperor?"

Han Li was also confused, "And how did he manage to find this holy place, we only found it with our magnet!"

"Oh, never mind that. We invented this magnet that can guide us on the ocean."

"I think we shall record our invention, by books, by stone, or by stories. Our invention should be remembered forever with the skill of navigation."

"How should we name our invention? Like the other fabulous names?"

"No, let's stay simple. The arrow always points south, so I think we shall name it a compass (the Chinese name for it means the arrow that always points south).

Several decades later, the teenagers became adults and had their own kids, a brand-new civilization was built in the island. To thank the brothers, they made him the constitutional king. Knowing how a cruel king would be taken over, the two brothers treated others equally, but they can decide the laws of the civilization.

The brothers stayed in this paradise for half of their lives, but as they were getting older, they became more and more homesick. They dreamed about the the food in the cities, the grand Great Wall, the gorgeous forbidden city. The images of the great dynasty recalled every night, they were feeling the urge to return to their homeland and end their life where it began.

They used their rights to make a boat, a boat that can take them back home. As it's the only command that the brothers made, the people delightfully made the best boat they could imagine. A boat filled with supplies, gold, and plenty of servants. And most importantly, a compass. This was the original compass made on the ocean, with craftsmen's adaption. The compass was covered in glaze, with diamonds and jewelry made into it.

The brothers finally returned to their homeland. They saw the new dynasty rose just like the rising of the sun. The war ended, now everything is at peace. These two brothers can finally rest in their new home, on the land which belongs to them. To record their stories, and the invention of the compass, they wrote many books and spread them across the city. The compass greatly influenced the career of sailors and fishermen, these people even made a statue of the brothers holding the compass.

As the days passed, the brothers knew that death was slowly, mysteriously, but steadily approaching them. Their teeth weakened, and their hair, which was as white as snow, was decreasing, like the crumbled leaves which drifted from the trees.

A calm and peaceful night. Two brothers knew the time had come. In their dreams, they dreamed of their youth, when they built the boat to hide from the war; they dreamed of their panicking days on the ocean; they dreamed of the fantastical island; and the beautifully re-crafted compass.

In the night, the graceful moonlight gently crept into their house. The stars wept in sadness, as they witnessed the death of this great inventor. In the moment where they finally fell into their everlasting sleep, the world became silent. After all, they returned to where they were, carrying the priceless glory and memories.

The first beam of sunlight shone from the horizon. It brought warmth and light again to the earth. People's lives continued, no one knew that two inventors have left the earth, but their remarkable contribution and indelible mark made their names renowned in the Chinese history.

I am Robot

Western Academy of Beijing, Blackwood, Caroline – 13

Have you ever felt different from everyone else? I don't know what to call it, but my whole life, that's what I have felt. I live in Beijing, China. My family hates me. They're embarrassed by me because I am different from them.

My mom bursts into my room when I am in the middle of my daydream. "Get up and go to school, you lousy thing." I might still need to mention that I am not actually the same as everyone. I am a robot. I live in a family of 8 siblings, and it isn't easy because we have so many mouths to feed. I hear a honk outside my window and sprint out the door. I sit on the bus beside my best friend, Lu Ai. When I got on, I noticed she quickly shoved a piece of paper into her bag. She is acting weird, but I don't think anything of it.

The next day, I left bed and went downstairs to find my gate, staring at the TV. At first, I wondered what happened, but then my parents sat all of us down for a talk. "Beijing has just been informed that we are advised to stay in our houses, considering recent events."

"What happened?" I ask. My parents gave each other a look, and immediately, I knew something was seriously wrong.

"Zhao Zhu, I don't know how to tell you this, but Lu Ai was reported missing last night. I am so sorry." I did not know what to think. All of a sudden, I crashed to the ground with a thump. Around dinner time, I wake up, but I can't eat. I can't even sleep, drink, or do anything I would do on a typical day. Three years ago, when my Ye Ye died, my Nai Nai came to live with us because she couldn't function on her own. After all, my Ye Ye took care of her. She was with us until we found her in an assisted living home. But when she was here, we saw her go through all the stages of grief. The one that seemed to be the worst was denial. She refused to believe that Ye Ye was dead. She kept trying to look for him and had trouble doing anything but look.

The next day, I woke up with the sun shining in my eyes through our apartment. I get out of bed with a thump and go downstairs. My family stared at me. I bolt out the door of our apartment and sprint to the elevator. Right before it closes, I slide in. After the door opened, I sprinted out and ran to our hovercraft. I ride it to the woods. I bring it closer to the ground and camp out near a bush. After an hour, I see a figure coming towards me. As it came closer, I realized it was Zhao Ying!

Somehow, Zhao Ying persuaded me to go home, and when I got home my family barely even looked up from their devices. I go straight up to my room and notice a strange piece of paper with the words help me. I am still determining who it could be from, but it is a clue. One of the only things I know about being a detective is that I need to make a suspect list. Lu Ai's sister, Lu Xu, is the number one person on the list. Lu Xu has always been jealous of Lu Ai's grades, even though Lu Xu is very popular at our school. I sneak out of my room to spy on Lu Xu. I walk this time to avoid getting caught. When I get to Lu Xu's house, I will be exhausted and barely walk anymore. Suddenly, it started raining cats and dogs and being a robot, I could not be in the water for more than an hour or shut down for 30 minutes, but when I shut down, I fell on the ground. From the looks of it, the rain will not stop for a while, so I decide to go into the house using their spare key. I look under the glass rabbit, and I see the key. I opened the door and sneaked up to Lu Xu's room. Her room is tiny compared to Lu Ai's room. I look around for evidence, but I can't find any. I decide to explore the rest of the house. I look at Lu Ai's room, and for the first time, I realize how much bigger hers is. I found one thing in her room that could be used as evidence: the wall has scratch marks that I have never noticed. I collected the evidence and then analyzed the DNA; it was Zhao Ying's! Suddenly, I hear footsteps and a creak as the door opens, and I dive out of the first–floor window, and my world goes black.

I wake up in an unfamiliar place with tubes sticking up my nose and needles injecting into my skin. I look around the room and notice my mom and my dad. They walk over to my bed and hug me. "The police just arrested your brother."
My jaw dropped to the ground. "Why do the police want him?" I asked.

"They think he murdered Lu Ai." My mom replied. I need to get out of here, I thought to myself.

"I am going to the bathroom," I told my parents, and I rushed off. I go out the window since the bathroom is on the first floor. I rush off to collect evidence. When I arrived, I quickly snuck past the police and into Lu Ai's room. I quickly gather my evidence and leave. The next day is the trial. I must testify along with the evidence I found. I dragged myself out of bed, put on a nice suit, combed my hair, and put on my nice black shoes, and my parents drove us to the courthouse. When it is my turn to testify, I feel like I will puke as I step onto the platform. I should have prepared. I immediately regret not making notecards. "Please state your evidence," says the judge.

"Zhao Ying is guilty because I found his DNA in the walls of Lu Ai's room. On the day of her disappearance, he was not in the house and had no proper alibi. You see, I interviewed the friends he was supposedly with, and they said he was not there at the time of her murder."

"Mr. Zhao, do you plead guilty to these allegations?"

"Guilty." The crowd gasps, cameras flashing. I can feel the tears surfacing. How could he do this? Why would he do this? The police start to take him away, but before he leaves, he says one more thing: "Never forget you are a robot. You are not like other people, so stop trying to be like them, be original, and most importantly, be yourself." And then, just like that, he's gone.

The following week is Lu Ai's funeral. My mom gently wakes me up and lays out a new suit. I walk downstairs and am offered breakfast, but I refuse. I must speak at the funeral but don't know what to say. The words can't come out of my mouth. I thought about faking sickness to get out of it for a bit, but then I realized that Lu Ai would want me there, so I mustered up the courage to get into the car. On the way to the funeral, the car is calm. We get there, and there are many people, mainly relatives of Lu Ai, because she does not have many friends. The funeral starts, and many people talk about her and how she touched their lives. For a minute, I fade away and picture my best friend next to me, but then they call my name.

I walk up and speak. I don't know what I said because I felt Lu Ai's hand on my shoulder and tears streaming down my face like a waterfall. Then I started to sing her favorite song, and I couldn't help but sing too. After the funeral, I found our special tree and climbed it for the last time. I can't help but think if only she were her, but I hear her words, "Follow your path. You are amazing, and you will be fine without me." Her soothing words calm me, and I finally make peace with the fact that I am not like other people. I'm a robot. That's ok. The sun started to set. I leaned against her shoulder, and I let myself fall asleep.

Father and Son

Western Academy of Beijing, Ping, Luca – 12

Cai Wu violently jerked awake as his vivid dream was suddenly disrupted by a series of rapid knocks on his door. He impatiently rubbed the sleep out of his eyes and called, 'Come in!'

Silence.

Cai Wu let out a long, depressed sigh. His dad was always like that. Sometimes, he would call for Cai Wu, and he would totally forget what he was doing the next second. That was old Cai Lun, Cai Wu's dad. The Cai family was publicly renounced as the oddest household in the small village, like an awkward lump sticking out of a smooth tree. Perhaps the people felt pity for Cai Wu. Who knows? After all, his mother passed away of illness when he was only three years old, and his father was a mad inventor who barely ever showed up anywhere with Cai Wu. Nobody could understand Cai Lun. To the villagers, he just seemed like an unsuccessful clown who never knew what he was doing.

The young boy dressed quietly and independently for school, as usual. He packed his bag and hurriedly called out to his dad before he left, expecting no answer. Nothing.

The people always kept an eye out for Cai Wu though. They respected this young 6–year–old who managed to complete almost everything on his own. Cai Wu picked up his breakfast (Jianbing and buns) from a small shop opened by his best friend's dad, Liu.

It was a long journey to school. In fact, Cai Wu was one of the few children in the village who received a proper education. This was thanks to his mum, who had taught at the small elementary school outside the village, so Cai Wu had this scarce priority.

Cai Wu munched on his Jianbing and quickened his pace. He had to arrive before the other students to complete his homework at school. Unlike the kids whose parents scurried after them to complete their homework, Cai Wu only had time to write his homework at school; he had become responsible for cleaning and organizing the house since his mum's absence, which took up all of his time at home. Cai Wu's housework included washing his clothes and his dad's every day after school and taking out the trash. He was also in charge of bartering their goods and taking care of his dad's meals beforehand. Cai Wu had to look after the family and keep the house as orderly as possible. Deep in his young, determined guts, he had a strong sense of determination. He knew this would be what his Mum would have wished for.

Cai Wu never understood his dad. For instance, he never responds when others talk to him, and he always keeps muttering under his breath as if talking to ghosts. He had never been this way when Mum was still alive. Cai Lun enjoyed studying odd plants. He had hundreds, perhaps thousands of tiny sprouts and plants growing in his office. It was the only place in the house Cai Lun kept tidy and where Cai Wu was forbidden to enter.

As Cai Wu reached school, and eyed the other students. Most of his classmates came from affluent families, and were spoiled and carefree. They didn't and would probably never understand people like Cai Wu and did not seem to care. The first thing Cai Wu heard was, "Look who it is: the *odd egg*." The gang of children bullied Cai Wu whenever they had the chance, making fun of him and creating cruel jokes behind his back.

Life for Cai Wu repeated like this day after day, night after night.

However, what Cai Wu did not know after all those years since his mother passed away was that his dad was sane. Very sane. Cai Lun is so rational that the people around him just cannot recognize it.

You see, Cai Wu's mother had died of a disease that the doctors had claimed to be unknown. However, after some investigation, Cai Lun discovered this type of sickness had been the case for many other patients some time ago. Patients before her had all been cured by the last generation of medics. Knowing this before her death, Cai Lun's wife had made him promise to create a solution to this for others in the future. Cai Lun had sworn, since his beloved wife's death, to discover a new element of material that could be capable of recording information to pass on to the next generation. The thing is, nobody believed his story. Nevertheless, he never lost faith in his promise to discover a completely new tool.

For the next few months, Cai Lun worked harder than ever. Only his shadows were to be seen, as he hurried from place to place in the village daily. One could even assume he was on to something.

After unfaltering hard work, one day, Cai Lun finally received what he deserved. Truth and ultimate justice.

While Cai Wu was handwashing their clothes just outside the house, his old man bursted out the door, giving him quite a fright. Cai Lun simply beamed into the sunset, head up, chest out. The silence remained unbroken until Cai Wu couldn't help but ask, 'What's wrong, Dad?'
'Oh, my boy, I have something I believe I wish to show you.' Cai Wu was astonished: his dad could say a whole sentence all this time! But now was not the time for questions, as Cai Lun had already taken off into the house. Cai Wu followed uncertainly, and to his tremendous surprise, his dad led him right into his office. Cai Wu observed the small, crammed space filled with wild, colorful plants sticking out of every corner. His dad presented him with what seemed like a glossy, thin, and soft material in his office, holding it up high in his hands like it was something holy.

Cai Lun called it 'paper.' Cai Wu felt a sponge absorbing doubt and growing in his stomach, spreading the fluids of suspicion through his veins. His dad was known for coming up with 'weird' things. The village had never *seen* anything like ‘paper’, let alone *accept* this new 'invention.' Cai Lun immediately insisted on taking it to the hospital, as if it had a sickness that needed to be cured! Cai Wu knew how expensive medical fees were; their whole family's savings had been spent on the medical bills for his mum. He would not let his dad waste another penny on curing this 'thing.'

With that, Cai Wu stepped forward and tried to take the unusual piece of 'paper' away from his dad. However, it had simply ripped apart before he had even tried to tug at it. It was much more fragile than Cai Wu had thought, and now the scroll of the unknown element was split halfway through. He hadn't intended for it to break, and definitely not to upset his dad. He knew the consequences of messing with Cai Lun's work. If Cai Wu weren't lucky, his dad would turn *wild* and completely lose control of himself.

However, Cai Lun composed himself remarkably coolly. He simply said, 'I wasn't hurrying to test that part yet, but yes, it is a remarkable piece of material, isn't it.' Cai Wu's memory of his dad was

once again reshaped that afternoon. He didn't know what his dad was up to and did not want to care. Try as he might, he couldn't help but toss and turn that night, constantly being reminded of his mother's memories. Could this mysterious 'paper' actually help the people? Cai Wu was too old to believe that 'paper' would bring his mum back, but yet, *what if it did help the villagers?*

The following Saturday, Cai Wu had made up his mind. He was going to help his dad no matter what it took. To him, it was their only chance at, at least, bringing the together to honor the memory of his mum.

And so, the reunited father and son took off to the hospital, borrowing the Wang family's bicycle. As a boy small for his age, Cai Wu could easily fit on the bar in front of the bike while his dad rode it towards the local hospital, grasping tightly to his discovery, like a spark of hope in his hand.

The Gunpowder Plot

Western Academy of Beijing, Simonnet, Frida – 12

I infiltrated the wooden, creaky room. Agarwood covered the floor. The smell was consuming my brain. I opened the closet slowly, and I chose the Jiasha with the orange and red pattern. I wrapped it around my body and left one shoulder uncovered. I found my arhat shoes that I tied around my ancle and up. I walked out of the room; I passed by some other monks who were praying. My stomach was making growling noises, and I knew I was hungry. So, I tip toed discreetly to my table and sat down wrapping my Jiasha around myself. I started eating some rice and noodles until I got full and carried my feet out.

Let me tell you a story. A few days ago, we created something big. The other monks say that it can change the environment, and it can lead to people making big mistakes. They call it gunpowder. I haven't seen it yet, but I guess it is cool. I am a bit scared of what it can cause. I don't want anything to change in this place even though I am planning on leaving. If things changed, I would still terribly miss the sunsets and the daffodil path.

Every day at 10:20 AM I walk through the daffodil path and close my eyes and think about how it is outside of the temple and outside of China. Monks were walking on the other side of the path; they don't really care about the daffodil path or the flowers. I am the only monk here with passions. All the others only care about praying. Except for one monk, Mengyuè. He is my friend, my only friend. He understands me. He also dreams about exploring the world, and we are planning on leaving together. The dilemma is that monks are not allowed to leave the monastery before we are "ready."

I walked up the stairs to my room, excitedly thinking about the monks who had discovered the technology of gunpowder. It could be my way out. I could be sneaking out of the window and swing on one of the trees and land on the ground half bent looking like a Kung fu hero. Woo. Hoo! Then I woke up from my daydream just to see that Mengyuè had been standing in front of me for goodness knows how long. Apparently, I had been talking to myself out loud. He told me he had heard every single word of what I had just said. He told me that it could have been a possibility, but that it was just a bit too risky if we were wearing our Jiasha's. Of course, I knew he was joking but I could see he was hiding a thought that he didn't want to say out loud.

"Are you scared?" I whispered.

He lowered his face. "No". Mengyuè said with a strict voice.

"Then what is it?" I exclaimed.

Then he looked at me seriously and spoke. "I was walking through a hallway, and one of the elders came up to me and offered me a big amount of money to participate in the gunpowder technology project"

"What?" I screamed. "We have been dreaming about leaving for months, and now you just want to give up that dream!" I shrieked.

"It was never my dream. It was yours and it is not your right to tell me what to do and what to daydream!" Mengyue said bitterly. Then he turned an strode out of the room.

The next day I would pass by him in the hallways or in the praying areas and we still wouldn't say a word to each other. I had thought about it, and I decided that I would leave without him tomorrow. It was for the best. I could leave during sunset because the monks would be praying at that time. I went to my table and sat down. I started to eat my rice when I felt a slight breeze that passed me quickly. I could feel my goosebumps kicking in. I turned around, and I saw Mengyuè standing behind me and he kneeled.

He told me he was sorry for his harsh words. And that he had turned down the offer for the gun powder project. He paused and told me, "There is just a slight problem. The monks got so mad, and they told me if I did not accept the deal I would be punished by sunset." I looked at him with fear in my eyes and told him I had planned to leave at sunset so then we should leave at sunrise instead. Really early. He agreed. We both went to sleep terrified. We had packed a few supplies for our trip and hid them under our bed, so that nobody could see that we were leaving.

Mengyuè walked into my room at 3 am in the morning and I was sitting on my bed fully prepared. We walked down the stairs without making the slightest sound. We opened the main door and breathed the fresh air into our lungs. But somehow yesterday one of the monks had overheard us talking about escaping and had told the elders about it. The same elders that had tried bribing Mengyue to join their risky work. So, there they were standing right in front of us pointing a sword at us. One of the monks said, "It looks like there would be two Chrysanthemums planted tonight". Then, without hesitating Mengyuè and I started sprinting to the gate. The monks with the swords started aiming at us. I thought I had no chance of surviving until I saw a hole that was in the direction of where Mengue was running and with a blink of an eye and distant people laughing I saw Mengyuè laying on the ground hurt because he had just broken his ankle. He told me to keep running, I burst into tears, and I got out.

I haven't seen Mengue in 3 years and I hope he is happy walking safely through the daffodil path thinking of me. Maybe, one day I will see him again, and he tell me all about the gunpowder.

Wings of Innovation: A Rising Star

Western Academy of Beijing, Yeung, Yu Ching Janice – 12

Prologue:

Lin, a 12th grade student who lives in China, has a dream of creating an innovation that can make the world a better place.

★★★★

First Day of School:

It was Lin's first day of school after summer break. Lin hopped on the school bus, took a seat at the back, sitting alone. While the shops and buildings outside looked pretty much the same as last year, Lin knew the people weren't.

Several of Lin's close friends at school (who were also her neighbors) moved to other countries. Suzie Yan, Lin's best friend, also moved to America with her family.

Suzie was Lin's best friend. They had known each other since kindergarten. They got along well and shared common interests in many things. Suzie once told Lin a secret – She thought she had a bit of depressive disorder. Suzie's parents never allowed her to make decisions for herself. They also criticized a lot, sometimes with insulting words. Suzie always felt sad.

Lin knew Suzie was not the only one who was troubled by depression. Even a psychologist like her mom could be defeated by mental issues. Lin didn't know the exact reason, but she suspected that it was the negative thoughts and stress that her mom faced every day when she was treating her patients that somehow led to her depression. At that time, Lin's mom had sleeping problems, and frequently lost control of her emotions. She had already recovered and had gone back to work as a psychologist.

Obviously, Lin wasn't in the best mood on this first day of school, as she kept on thinking about Suzie and how she can make her feel happier.

★★★★

A Few Weeks Later:

It was a few weeks later after the start of the school. As soon as the bell rang, the students hurried back to their seats. The first class was design class. Mr. Bryan walked into the classroom.

"Quiet, class! Let's get started," said Mr. Bryan, with a stern voice. "Today, we are gathering ideas of innovation. You are going to share your ideas with your groupmates. A week later, your group is going to start creating a model of that innovation. I don't expect your model to be functional, but your group needs to explain its proposed functions to the rest of the class."

Once Mr. Bryan divided the class into groups, Lin said to her groupmates, "I have a wonderful idea for this project – How about making a wearable device, such as a helmet, that helps with mental problems? With this innovation, people would no longer suffer from depression or other types of mental illnesses. Isn't that fantastic?"

"I am not sure about that," said the group leader. "I've never heard of any device that can cure human mind. Also, we know basically nothing about mental problems or psychology. It's just too difficult, isn't it?"

"Yeah, I agree. It doesn't sound very cool," another groupmate said.

Lin didn't answer, feeling disappointed.

"I guess a VR glass is easier to make," said the group leader. "Let's vote, shall we? Who would go for VR glass?" Everyone raised their hands except for Lin.

"Alright then. I'm fine with anything…" thought Lin.

★★★★

"Ring, ring!" Out of the blue, Lin's mobile phone rang. A few minutes later, Lin dropped her phone onto the floor. It was Suzie's mother. She told Lin that Suzie was gone yesterday.

Lin stood petrified. She fell onto her knees and cried. She felt like losing a part of herself. "It wasn't true…" she said to herself.

Lin couldn't sleep for days. She felt tired at daytime, and often lost focus in class. Lin's mom tried to comfort her but in vain. She couldn't walk her out of the shadows.

On the other day, Lin's mom took Lin to see her grandfather. Once inside her grandfather's home, she smelt herbs. Her grandfather was once a doctor of traditional Chinese medicine.

"It's been a long time since I saw you last time, Lin," said Lin's grandfather. "I heard you weren't feeling so well, right?"

"Yeah." Lin said indifferently.

"I have some herbs here that will make you feel better," said Lin's grandfather. He then took out a piece of dried herb, like wormwood, and burned it with a lighter. After a few seconds, white smoke started to come out. He put it close to Lin's head and said, "Relax, Lin. Breath in… breath out… You will sleep well tonight."

Lin had a good night's sleep that night and felt refreshed when she woke up in the morning.

A few days later, Lin gathered her group at school, told them about her friend Suzie, and asked them to reconsider her idea about the wearable device that cures mental illnesses.

"Everyone, please, can we just give it a try?" said Lin. "We can't just stand by to watch people we love suffer from something wrong in their head. Mustn't we do something? It's not just about getting a school project done. It's something much bigger – Don't you all want to make this world a slightly better place than yesterday? Why should we care about whether it is difficult or not if we truly believe it's something worth trying?"

Tears ran out of Lin's eyes as she spoke. Lin's group was persuaded.

"But how will the device help people with mental problems?" One team member asked.

"You don't have to worry too much about that," said Lin. "I know that some herbs in Chinese medicine could help with mental illnesses. I've tried them myself when I was in depression. We could build them into our device."

Afterwards, the group started to learn about psychology, cranial nerves, Chinese medicine, and everything else that may help build the device.

★★★★

Four Years Later…

Four years later, after Lin graduated from university, she and some of the groupmates continued to work on this innovation project. They raised funds around the world to support the R&D. Three years later, Lin's dream came true. A helmet that can alleviate wearer's mental problems was created.

In a speech by Lin at the ceremony where she was awarded the "Rising Star on Technological Innovation":

"With the benefit of technological development in the last few centuries, we are now living in a world of comfort, convenience and enjoyment. Technological innovations like Airplanes, Automobiles, Computers, Internet, Mobile Phones and Medical Breakthroughs, you name it, make our lives a lot better and easier than our ancestors.

- We now have more comfortable places to live and work in.
- We now have better health and longer lives.
- We can now travel to anywhere in the world, faster and cheaper.
- We can now talk with our beloved ones even if they are on the other side of the globe.
- We now have much more choices of entertainment to cheer ourselves up.

But are we really happier than our ancestors?

When I was a child, both my mom and my best friend were diagnosed as having major depressive disorder (MDD). As a kid, my best friend chose to leave me and the world behind. My mom, a psychologist, had once become a MDD patient herself after she got overwhelmed by the negative thoughts from her patients. To me, many people aren't as happy as I thought.

I can't help wondering, how good are technological innovations, which offer us comfort, convenience and enjoyment, if they can't give us inner peace? *"What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? (Matthew. 16:26)"* Shouldn't our technology help our soul, which is at least as precious as, if not more precious than, our physical being?

This is why I came up with the idea of making the helmet. This is just a tiny step forward, but I want to say to all of you here, and to everyone in this world, that the well–being of mankind depends on you and me and everyone who care about our body as well as our soul. As 'the best way to predict the future is to create it', let's create a better future together by technological inventions that can solve the problems of our body as well as our soul."

The Paper of Cai Lun

Western Academy of Beijing, Zhou, Huining – 12

I am Cai Lun, the creator of paper, which is one of the four greatest inventions of China. Although many writing devices were created before I was born, I am the person who officially created the recipe for making cheap and convenient paper. China, my home country, is famous for the many famous structures and creations, but paper is one of the most frequently
used and important material nowadays, but many do not know of my story. Let me begin…

For a brief account of myself, I was born in the Eastern Han Dynasty, although my full name is Cai Jingzhong, I prefer others to call me Cai Lun, a name that matches my personality; responsibility, discipline, and shyness. I never break any rules working for the court, I also do not speak to any royals unless I am commanded. At the age around 25, I started my service to the imperial court as a court eunuch where I worked as a civil servant, I am employed to guard and serve the female living spaces in the Chinese court. I have served many emperors throughout my life in the Han dynasty, even though I did not live long enough to see what consequences my invention would create, I believe I have served my country well with my accomplishment of creating convenient paper. To be precise, I did not invent the first device for recording and writing, but reasonably, the devices back then, was either hefty pieces of bamboo pieces, or highly expensive pieces of silk. Both materials were inconvenient for writing, because bamboo slips were too heavy, and to be honest, that wasn't the most comfortable material to write on. Also, black ink did not make a huge contrast with the dark green on the bamboo, so this wasn't a very popular choice. Although silk is light and thin, a perfect source for writing, normal families in the past would never be able to purchase silk, because the price for silk was unbelievably high, where only the royal families or the rich had the power and money to purchase silk. People did not have good devices for recording and for writing, which made me feel sorry for them. My accomplishment of creating paper was much more than just forging paper; the process and coming up with an idea was much harder than it looks, it has to take a long time, perhaps, my story shall explain…

As the sun shrank below the mountains, leaving the world dark again, the crescent moon radiates a slivery glow, taking the sun's place in the sky above, the moon was the signal that I could leave guard over imperial court and head back home. As a eunuch, a low class worker, I am only permitted to leave my guard and head home only until moonhigh, which we call for when the moon is brightest and highest at night. I lay down on my bed as my eyes fluttered close, I was asleep. The next time I opened my eyes the sun was already shining, normally, I would have to stir much earlier than now, but today is special; the imperial members of the court were holding a meeting today, meaning I don't have to guard the quadrangle where the female imperial members live. I strolled out of my hut where I live, and watched as children scrambled out of each house carrying large slips of bamboo pieces for writing in school. As the students make their way to school, each of them grunt as the heavy slips of bamboo slow them down from their journey. Suddenly, I felt a rush of guilt in my heart; why do we have to use these heavy and uncomfortable slips of bamboo? The sudden flip in my heart made me feel like I needed to do something. I had to make a change for these helpless children, I *must*…

I sat down crossed leg on a large rock as I watched children make markings on tree barks, they seemed to be drawing… *Wait! That's it!* A idea suddenly flew into my mind, the tree barks could be made into paper! I immediately set to action, I picked up a few pieces of mulberry tree barks and ran back to my hut. A single piece of tree bark was too heavy and too large for writing, but what if… What if I mixed mulberry bark, some pieces of plants and rags with water, mashed hem into pulp, pressed out the liquid and poured this mixture to dry in the sun. This little world–changing idea was formed by me as I watched a few children make drawings on tree bark! I never would have believed before if someone told me that my simple creation of paper would change the world…

I set out to find the materials immediately, first, I went to the market near the city center to buy a few pieces of old rags and cloth, as I sprinted back to my hut for my experiment, I ripped off a handful of leaves and plant roots. I boiled all the materials above a small fire, which scientifically would extract cellulose fiber—the primary structural component of plants— turning these materials into a pulp. I squeezed a certain amount of the mixture from the pulp, then I poured this mixture into a frame so that the liquid would stay in shape, the final step determining my success or failure was up to time. I placed the frame with a thin layer of the mixture outside my hut, where the sun was shining bright and hot, I must wait until my mixture was dry and turned into a solid before being able to confirm that this method is convenient for making paper, my creation is up to you, time…

As time passed, I sat outside my hut, watching every little change time has changed on the mixture, it turned out that my first experiment wasn't so ideal, the mixture stayed as a liquid, instead of turning into a thin piece of

solid. But I wasn't ready to give up; the second time I added a bit more of the solid materials, and I decreased the amount of water. I waited with nervousness and a sprinkle of excitement as I watched over the my new experiment…

I did it! I silently celebrated inside my mind, after many days and weeks of experimenting and brainstorming new ideas, my method of creating paper finally succeeded! I carefully recorded every tiny detail of my newly created method of making paper. As I created more and more pieces of paper, my confidence grew, and one day, I finally plucked up the courage and entered the palace of the emperor and presented my creation of the newly invented paper to the emperor. It turned out that Emperor He of Han was very pleased with the invention of paper and granted me a title, the *paper of Lord Cai*, the emperor also awarded me a large amount of money and luxury. I guess… I guess this is the end of my story, as a conclusion, I am not greedy for the amount of wealth in exchange for my invention, instead I hope that paper shall allow my country to develop our civilization through learning, I hope my invention will change the world…