

Fiction

Group 1



Zheng He Voyages

A.D. & F.D. of Pok Oi Hospital Mrs Cheng Yam On School, Au-Yeung, Sunnie – 6

Zheng He was in China. One day the King asked Zheng to lead the troop and go for voyages.

The first voyage was in 1405. The second one was in 1407. The third one was in 1409. The fourth one was in 1413. The fifth was in 1417. The sixth one was in 1421 and the seventh one was in 1431. Zheng was cool.

Dream with Zheng He

A.D. & F.D. of Pok Oi Hospital Mrs Cheng Yam On School, Ng, Veronica – 8

In a very hot afternoon, I stayed at home to read a story book. The name of the book is 「鄭和下西洋」 (The story of Zheng He). However, I was so tired and fell into sleeping.

I made a dream. I saw a man who was not tall and wore ancient Chinese clothes. He could play Kung Fu like Bruce Lee. He could tumble and jump up and down very quickly. I'm very interested in his Kung Fu fight and felt very excited. I asked his name, he is Zheng He. I asked him to teach me Kung Fu and we talked about Kung Fu so much. We became good friends. Unfortunately, the king ordered him to go to Southern of China, visit countries and make business trading. I wanted to go with him too! I asked if I could travel with him and he accepted my request. So we wrapped up our luggage and started our voyages.

We had sixty big ships and over hundred small ships. Our crew had about four thousands people. We planned to spend one year for this voyage.

When the ship was sailing in the sea, we could see lots of seagulls flying and following our ships. The waves are so huge and the wind was so strong. I felt very excited. During night time I laid on the deck and saw a lot of stars, they smiled to me and twinkled like diamonds. Then I fell into sleep. Later on, I woke up. The sun was rising from the sea, the sky was in orange colour, it was very beautiful. Suddenly, Zheng He shouted loudly. He saw an island nearby us. We moved towards the island. There was a very beautiful place. We parked at the shore and walked around the island. There were some animals and plants. We took some rest and played at the beach. Suddenly, a big wave came and attacked me. I was fallen into the sea. I was very scared and screamed. It was very dangerous and I was yelling for help.

After that I found I was laying on the sofa. It was a dream only. I told mum about the dream and decided to learn swimming so that I can swim in the sea.

Pirates Come

A.D. & F.D. of Pok Oi Hospital Mrs Cheng Yam On School, Wu, Tiger – 7

When Ming Treasure fleet passed the Strait of Malacca, Zheng He encountered a group of pirates.

The pirate's leader was Chen Zuyi, who own the biggest fleet in Asia. They usually robbed merchant ships, killed businessmen and did lots of bad things to local people.

Chen Zuyi was greedy at the treasure in Zheng He's boat and decided to rob Zheng He's fleet. But on the other hand, Zheng He also wanted to destroy them to benefit the trading and local people.

Chen Zuyi firstly wrote a letter to Zheng He, and promised to surrender, but secretly prepared to attack the ship by night.

In the night, more than a dozen pirate ships were quietly heading for Zheng He's fleet. The pirate ships were small, diving flexibly and running fast. Chen Zuyi was very arrogant. He clenched his sharp knife, his two greedy eyes started at the tall and magnificent treasure ship, and his brain was full of treasure. But Zheng He got a secret report early and prepared for the battle in advance. When the pirate ships entered the ambush circle, a red light rose on the high mast of the treasure ship, followed by many lantern torches. The dark sea turned to be a bright day. The pirate ships were surrounded by a large ship fleet. Less than an hour the pirate fleet was defeated. Chen Zuyi was captured. Zheng He also pushed the advantage and took off Chen Zuyi's pirate base in the old port of Malacca Strait.

By the moment, the biggest pirate fleet in Asia was destroyed completely.

The Chinese Adventure

Bradbury School, Guo, Joshua – 6

Getting Ready

On a stormy day I move all my important things onto the ship. My ship is called Evan 1. The most important things to bring are the gold and silk because I will give them to all different countries for making new relationships.

I am the captain of Evan 1 and I feel excited about this adventure. This time I will bring some shooters to fight, two chefs to cook, and some sailors to look out for evil pirates.

Swapping Things

Now I am sailing to Japan to give away some of the gold and silk. Before we get to Japan the evil pirates suddenly came to attack the ship in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. The evil pirates blocked my way to the island of Japan. My sailors started to attack them back and defend the evil pirates. The Japanese sailors came to help me and we won and defeated the evil pirates.

After that my sailors and I arrived at the island of Japan. I came here to give the gold and silk to the Japanese because I want to thank them for helping us fight the evil pirates together.

Crossing the London Bridge

After eating sushi in Japan my sailors and I started our next journey to London. I found out that my chef forgot to bring food so now we needed to swap things to get food.

When we have enough food we gave it to the chef and the chef started to cook. Then we give them some gold and silk because they gave me a lot of food.

After that we crossed the London Bridge. Now we are ready to go to other countries to give the gold and silk away.

Going Back Home

After visiting a lot of places now we will go sailing back to China. On this adventure I feel happy because we ate sushi and we gave a lot of gold and silk to many countries.

New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

Bradbury School, Kaur, Jasmin – 9

As Johnny Depp said , “ Life’s pretty good and why wouldn’t it be? I’m a pirate after all!”

Well, pirates used to travel the seas looking for precious items. But in the early 1400’s a fleet of ships set sail from China. I carried boxes and cargoes of gold, silk and other precious things for the people on board to give away as presents. There were seven voyages by the Ming treasure fleet.

Sometimes they met nice and peaceful people and gave them the presents they had brought. In other times they had to fight battles and deal with nasty pirates. Luckily the ships also had weapons.

But this group of travellers did a wonderful thing by winning themselves a place in history. Historians, looking back, said China truly ‘ruled the seas’ in those days.

African Adventure

Chinese International School, Sun, Isabella – 7

Our ship arrived on the east coast of Africa. It was very hot and dry. The captain took five crew members with him to explore the new land. However, by the next day, they still had not returned.

It was my job as the ship's detective to find them. I took three soldiers and the captain's dragon with me. When we reached the shore, a group of dark-skinned men marched toward us and spoke using funny clicking sounds. We could not understand them. But luckily our dragon was able to translate for us!

"We have captured your captain. If you want him back alive, you have to give us all the food and treasures on your ship" they demanded.

"That is not fair" I replied and made a signal to the soldiers. They threw a gunpowder bomb near the Africans, which exploded with a loud blast. The Africans were very scared. We made them take us to our captain and crew members to free them.

But because we were kind and generous explorers, we asked the Africans, "Why did you try to take our food and treasures?"

They explained that previously their country was peaceful and there was enough food for everyone. But an evil, cruel, and powerful pirate named Blackbones had come to power and things changed. He was so selfish and greedy. He and his men took all the food and goods from the Africans.

After we talked with the Africans, Captain Tang and I came up with a plan. We took many gifts from our ship to give to Blackbones, such as silk, porcelain vases, and tea. We gave them to him and he was pleased. However, because he was so greedy, he wanted even more. So we invited him to come aboard our ship. We had a plan.

Once Blackbones was aboard our ship, he was distracted by all the treasures. Our ship's doctor quickly stuck acupuncture needles into Blackbones' body, and suddenly he could not move at all. He knew he had no choice but to surrender. We forced Blackbones to give back all the food and treasures to the Africans and his pirates had to leave the country.

The Africans celebrated their victory and threw a big party for us. They wore colorful costumes made from bird feathers and danced for us. There were fireworks and music. The Africans cooked a delicious feast including animals such as antelope and warthogs. Our cooks showed the Africans how to make Chinese noodles, which they loved.

After a few days of exploring the African lands, it was time to go. Our new friends gave us two giraffes to take back for the Emperor. We set sail for our next adventure.

New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

Creative Primary School, Chan, Kavan – 8

In the Ming Dynasty, the Yong Le Emperor initiated the construction of the treasure fleet. He asked Zheng He to lead the fleet to get treasures from different countries.

Zheng He first went to Vietnam and made friends with the king. The king welcomed Zheng He's treasure fleet with elephants to ride to his kingdom. He gave them pearls and precious stones.

Next, Zheng He led the treasure fleet to India, but while going to India, they met large waves and nasty pirates. They fought the pirates and won, but failed to catch the leader. When they arrived in India, the ruler of India gave them a vase, baskets of pineapples, silk and ivory.

After their voyage to India, they went to Africa where they brought animals like leopards, ostriches, giraffes and zebras.

On the sixth journey, they met those nasty pirates once again. However, this time it was not only a few men, but an army. Zheng He was losing and just when all hope was gone.....Bam! An elite team of heroes came from another dimension to stop the fight. There was a knight named Blast Zone, Wash Buckler the pirate, a tornado birdman who went after the name Wet Ranger, Magna Charge the robot, a wizard known as Hoot Loop, a cowboy named Rattle Shake, 3 martial artists: Stink Bomb, Night Shift and Fire Kraken and last but not least, a skier named Freeze Blade.

They fought side by side with Zheng He and captured the leader together.

They finished the seventh journey and went to China, where Zheng He said goodbye to the Swap Force. When Zheng He sent the gifts to the Yong Le Emperor, he thanked them and the Swap Force and was very impressed with their success on the voyages.

New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

Creative Primary School, Fung, Michelle – 8

I am Captain Ariana, a graceful voyager aged 23. I especially like hunting for treasure and sharing it with my crew. Everyone called us 'Ming Treasure Voyages Fleet'.

One day, I was ordered to see Emperor Shan with my assistant, Cora. Shan said, "Good day, Captain Ariana. I have a little mission for you."

"What kind of mission?" I asked.

"Last time I dreamt of my father who told me to get the rainbow seashell from the sea world 'AQUARALL'. The rainbow seashell has the technology to show how to make ships, speedboats and even submarines. Once you know the technology, I will promote you to be the leader and give you more people to build bigger teams. To enter the sea world, you have to get three keys from Africa, India and Arabia."

We set off to the first stop, Africa. The African people greeted us gracefully. We explained to them the purpose of our voyage. "Good day, young lady! Let me bring you to our village where the Drum Dance Challenge is held." an old man replied. We followed him and found other teams there too. "These are the rivals you must defeat to be prized the key." the old man reminded us. After all drum dances ended, the results came out and.....we won! We got the heart-shaped key.

We sailed off to the second stop, India. There, we saw women in pretty dresses. One of them spoke, "Hello my dears, I bet you are here for the Silk Embroidery Competition to win the special key." We nodded then followed her. All rivals started sewing when the bell rang. Luckily, we won again and got the star-shaped key. Off we went to the last stop, Arabia.

We followed the town's people to the Coffee Making Race. I told my crew that I did not know how to make coffee. Cora spoke up, "Captain, I have been studying how to make coffee for years. I can make it if you allow me." When the race ended, we all smelled aroma from Cora's cup. The judge announced, "The winner is.....Cora!" We were given the seashell-shaped key.

Finally, we could enter the sea world 'AQUARALL' with three keys. There we saw a sea turtle guarding the rainbow seashell. It said, "Hi, I am the wise lord turtle. I know you want the rainbow seashell, but to trade, you must turn in the three keys." The wise lord turtle put three keys together which magically turned into one big shining pink pearl.

The wise lord turtle continued, "A creature in our kingdom had stolen the pink pearl and broken it into three keys. Now we can save our kingdom. Thank you!"

Back at Emperor Shan's palace, we reported, "Your Majesty, we accomplished the mission successfully.

"Well done! I will carry out my promise" Shan said.

Being a leader, I was ready to learn the technology to make different transportations to build the strongest 'Ming Treasure Voyages Fleet' ever.

A Mysterious Island

Creative Primary School, Lee, Bridgitte – 7

Wong Yue Jia was an intelligent and brave young boy. He liked the sea and always dreamed of going on a sailing adventure. One day, a Sea Captain came to Jia's village asked the villagers to join the Ming Treasure Fleet to sail the Seven Seas to help spread the joy and kindness of the Emperor. He promised the meals were free and the sea would be full of adventures. Jia decided to join.

The next day, the Captain set sail for the Seven Seas. Jia was excited as his dream finally came true. But a month passed, and the Fleet met no one or saw any land. The crew was bored, and some wanted to return to the village. Suddenly, Jia yelled from the lookout, "Land!". While the sea was covered with a thick mist, Jia was able to spot some green grass and white shells on the island. All the sailors were happy to see land again and they all wanted to go to the island. They wanted to walk on solid ground and meet some native people. But the Captain was afraid the island was dangerous, and he needed someone to stay on board to guard the treasures of the Emperor. The Captain asked Jia to explore the island as he was the smartest sailor on board. Jia could also pick seven other sailors to go with him.

The sailors rowed a small boat to the island. The island was round and slippery, but there were many shining shells and shimmering pearls on the island! Jia also found many precious gemstones like sapphires, diamonds, emeralds and rubies stuck in the rocks! "Wow! We will be rich!" all the sailors cried. While the sailors were busy digging out diamonds from the rocks, Jia felt strange vibrations from under his feet. Suddenly, the whole island was moving! It must be an earthquake! The sailors were petrified, and they all screamed. Jia told the sailors to run back to the boat. But it was too late, the whole island was shaking, and many sailors were thrown into the sea. Then a giant head appeared and growled. This was not an island but a giant turtle! Jia and the sailors were standing on the back of a giant turtle! The Sea Captain quickly ordered the sailors on the ship to shoot cannons at the turtle. The turtle screamed louder and shook its body even harder. Jia did not want to hurt the turtle and signaled for the Captain to stop shooting. Jia asked all sailors to be quiet and he started to sing! Jia had a lovely voice and he sang beautiful lullabies to soothe the giant turtle. Finally, the turtle calmed down and stopped shaking. Jia and the sailors ran back to the small boat and rowed back to the ship.

All the sailors thanked Jia because he was brave and clever. "Whew! What an extraordinary adventure!" Jia smiled. Now he was looking forward to the next adventure ahead.

New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

Creative Primary School, Mok, Aquila – 7

During the “Injim War (1592–1598)”, the Koreans, with no hope to expel the “Wokou” from their land, turned to the Ming (Chinese) Emperor for help. Wokou were Japanese pirates who rifled through the coastlines of China and Korea at that time.

Young–Wook, only 16, was an ordinary ***Sowi*** in the Korean’s troop. ***Sowi*** was the most junior officer rank in the army. His taekwondo impressed no one so he decided to join the army. He was not a born hero but he had a special gift with animals. He could whisper to dogs, understand cat meows, talk to birds and hypnotize a sheep.

At the break of day when Young–wook was still slumbering, a pigeon came through his window, he scooped up the bird and unhitched the secret note from its claws, “My troops will visit Jinju on the first day of winter.” Young–wook realized that disaster was about to strike so he ran as fast as his legs could carry him, all the way to the castle.

The Korean emperor was stunned because even his top advisors were running out of ideas, he needed to send his messenger to seek China’s help. On hearing Wokou’s evil plot, the Ming Emperor immediately ordered Zheng He to bring 5000 men and 50 junks to rescue Jinju and they arrived only two weeks before winter began.

It was the first day of winter, the Wokou army arrived at last, the Koreans pretended that they were not prepared at all for battle. The Wokous were completely thrilled because they took down the city in record time. They plundered the place and brought all the valuables onto their ships. The triumphant Japanese pirates celebrated all night. On the next day, they set off for home.

After sailing for half a day, the Wokou’s fleet was confronted by Zheng He’s crew. The pirates wanted to escape but they were in the middle of nowhere. The troops settled in a nearby island and the real battle began.

Zheng He’s army was the finest at sea yet they were not familiar with fighting on land. Young–wook had a plan instead as he spent a lot of time communicating with all the wild animals onboard during this voyage. In the middle of the night, he sent the panicky antelopes and zebras to chase the enemies out of their tents. The petrified Wokous sped with their tails between their legs but the fierce lions and leopards were greeting them in all directions. The Wokous wanted to head for the shore but it was too late, the hungry rhinoceros were awaiting. This time, Yong–Wook led Zheng He and his team to victory. The pirates reluctantly gave in and once again, peace and prosperity spread across the land.

New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages: Mission to the Outer Edge of the Universe

Creative Primary School, Wong, Jasmine – 7

Once upon a time, an astronaut called Zheng Yuet from Earth was sent to explore and bring back riches from the seven planets.

After ten hours of traveling, Zheng Yuet finally landed on a rocky planet. It smelt of petrol, something the Earth was short of. She stepped out and met Petroly, the President of the planet.

“Hi, are you living here?” Petroly asked.

“Um, I’m not, but I come to explore!” Zheng said cautiously.

“Do take some petrol as my humble present of friendship.” the President said chucklingly.

“Thank you.” Zheng Yuet replied, overwhelmed by the alien’s generosity as she carried buckets of petrol away.

She quickly drove her spaceship to the second planet. Once arrived, the Leader Hydrolen cheered, “A visitor! How wonderful!”

“Uh, hello...” she said stepping out to a sea of clean, sparkly water.

“Are you sure... you are going to exploit this beautiful planet?” she muttered under her breath. Then she thought about her mission. “Alright, getting some fresh water won’t do any harm.”

When she landed on the third planet, she found so many of Earth’s endangered animals.

“Hello!” said Pedana, the Chairman of this place. She gave Zheng Yuet a hug.

Completely forgetting her mission, Zheng said, “Do you mind if I exchange this I-pad for that Chinese pink dolphin?” “It’s OK!” Pedana laughed. They agreed on the mutual trade.

Next, she went to the fourth planet, which was covered by forest. Tlee the Village Chief greeted her.

“So many trees here... I’ll take some!” Zheng Yuet stammered, offering Tlee a computer.

“No problem, my friend.” Tlee said, packing the trees and flowers in a lavender bag.

Oxmen the Commander on the fifth planet welcomed Zheng with an airy voice.

“Oxygen. Oh! Oxygen,” Zheng sang elatedly while Oxmen was pumping the air into a huge tank of her spaceship, neglecting even the idea of fair trade.

She arrived at the sixth planet and met Nongevity, its Tribal Head.

“I want some long life, please?” She asked impudently.

Nongevity took his wand and bellowed, “Lony Tiffano!” Some smoke flew into a bag. He wrapped ‘long life’ up and gave it to Zheng Yuet.

“What can still quench my thirst to exploit?” She grinned when she got to the seventh planet. It was a dry, cold and ruined piece land with only a few habitants. A shabby child called Evol stood in front of her. “Do you want to stay in our cabin tonight? It is warmer there.” he said with an innocent welcoming smile. All of a sudden, Zheng Yuet felt the fatigue from this long journey. The spaceship was fully loaded with ‘treasures’ but something was still missing. She spent the night with the poor kid and his family, and gave them all the clean water, fresh air, plants, animals, energy and longevity they needed.

“I discovered I come all the way here to find one thing, love”, Zheng Yuet told herself as she decided to make this exotic planet her home.

New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

Diocesan Boys' School Primary Division, Bok, Nathaniel – 8

It all began in the second year of emperor Yong Le's reign when His Majesty ordered Chief Envoy Zheng He to take care of the infamous and cruel dwarf pirates, the Wokous, who had been looting our ships and killing our citizens, even old women and children, near the East China sea.

"You've to make it back, at least, for your family, who are longing for you to come..." said Envoy Zheng he before we set for the trip. Yes, I don't want to leave my family, Zhu Xi was still two and a half and how could he know what his father looked like if I hadn't make it back home?

The ship jerked violently along the angry waves. But suddenly----- our compass had broken as the heavy wind. Oh god! How would we go there without the compass? And more unlucky, the Wokous were just dashing to us, in their ship, behind us!

Our gunner fought with them bravely. But the Wokous had firearms better than us, and the shooting sound was everywhere. Envoy Zheng He drove away quickly from them as fast as he could, and I pulled the string between our and the Wokous' ship, and we escaped from them.

The wind was growing much stronger. And our compass? We could only use the map. The boat sailed along to the Arabian sea, and I saw many army of enemies, the Wokous, what should we do? The bloody battle finally began again. Some people there shouted and snarled. There was a huge commotion.

It was a difficult battle and I would be ending my life if Envoy Zheng he hadn't help me. He was a very admiral fighter. He helped us win! The Wokous haven't done yet. It was lucky for us that their weapons are in the hand of the unskilful pirates. Zheng He was not only a good fighter but also good at plotting our fight against the Wokous. With his help, I was confident to follow his directions.

The cargoes and golds and treasure are all taken by my friends. We went back to the ship without being noticed and sailed all the way back to China.

His Majesty loved the trip. But the Wokous did not finish. I continued seven times sailing to the ship of the Wokous. The gold was taken back every time. The war was hardy every time.

It was a few months later and I had won the Wokous. The nasty Wokous had disappeared. And China is like the past, a glorious country.

New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

Diocesan Preparatory School, Ng, Ho Yin – 8

Trust me, I had been on the Ming Treasure Voyages two times. I went to Africa and Vietnam.

On the way to Vietnam, we encountered some strong waves that led us to put into a beach quickly. Soon, we walked to the nearby town, I was surprised to see almost everyone was at home facing some big black boxes showing some crazy moving pictures.

It was very difficult to find the palace, so we tried to ask if some people would tell us if there was a king in this country. I thought that was impossible because we were not in China. However, that guy knew what we were saying, and even answered us. He said that there was no “ruler” there. So, we thanked him by giving him gold and silk. I didn’t know why, but he let us go to his house and gave us a black box. He said it was a television, or TV for short. Carrying a TV with you while walking a long way is not a good idea. Unluckily, that was what I and some of my crew members had to do.

On the way back, the strong waves were still there. It shook our ship back and forth randomly. The TV flew off the ship and landed in the sea.

Since we did not get anything during our first landing, we continued to Africa instead of going back to China. Once we disembarked, we only saw grass, trees and animals. It was very quiet until some of us went back to the ships, three crocodiles chased after us. Nobody got hurt because those giant crawlies were very slow.

We hid from them in a village. I was hoping the villagers would not kill us for being strangers, and a second later I remembered the crocodiles. I peeked out of the village to see if the crocodiles had quit chasing us. But when I did, a huge one stared at me. I entered the nearest house and showed the crocodile to a villager.

After he saw it, he grabbed a spear and yelled. Not long after, all the villagers ran out of their houses with spears. Then they battled the nasty reptiles until they surrendered.

For saving us, we gave tons of gold to them. The villager chief was so happy that he gave us plenty of cooked rabbit, potatoes, carrots and bread. When heading back to our ships, almost twenty rabbits appeared before my eyes. Most of the people in the crew used to catch rabbits, so they were running big circles.

Back on the ship, I was hungry. I meant extra hungry, so I ate some food the village chief gave me to help myself survive on the way back to China.

Ming Treasure Voyage

Dulwich College Beijing, Alwadi, Daniel – 6

As the Ming treasure ship 'Bahadad' floated on the rocking oceans filled with bucks of shiney gold and jewals .There was a sudden shout of" land ahoy "!"All the sailors rushed to the deck and jumped on some little boats and started rowing with excitement.In the of the excitement there was a little cabin boy who spends his time peeling potatoes and washing sailors smelly socks. His name was Leo. The captain called captain Smollet rode on a great horse with a map in his hands.When they were passing by they even saw some crazy villagers which wanted to fight them.Luckily they brought weapons with them.It was a savarige battle until the last crazy person was killed

Smollet took a look at the map it said that there was a treasure box about 2 miles long hidden deep inside the ground!Smollet was desperate to get the treasure.He thought he would get the treasure himself but he was wrong !Everyone wanted the treasure so they set off.....When they rounded up the treasure spot they just saw a big black hole with bugs!Smollet was full of furi he threw the map on the floor and stabbed It with a sword and screamed useless there must be someone stealing our treasure someone called.We will never sleep until we find it said the captain.After they looked for a while they suddenly heard some Laughing all around them.what "should we do " asked a sailor "what do you think we should do " said another sailor "RUN" he shouted everyone started to sprint as fast as he could they stopped at the shore and was panting very very hard.the captain said to load the ship.

After they finished loading the ship they set off to sea.They we're going up and down up and down until disaster struck!The ship bumped on a big rock and started sinking!Everyone was running around like crazy. Luckily they had a smaller boat but it couldn't fit all the people. Everyone said there would be someone that would sacrifice himself. All of the sailors looked at a big fat sailor he said he didn't want to but the crew lifted him up and threw him down to the rocking ocean.There was a few bubbles there was a huge big last bubble until there was silence silence silence our junk gigantic splash of water up roads are in Normas huge green slimy and smelly the sea serpent. It crashed open the boat and split it into half! Everyone drown except for Leo and captain Smollet. They had nothing left all of their treasure has drowned. But thank God they were holding a wooden plank and they were not dead. After a while kaboom thunder and lightning danced around the sky Leo and Smollet held tight as they could to the wooden plank. It was like it was raining cats and dogs are they lucky enough to survive?

When The thunder stopped they were soaked it was such a relief and they drifted safely back home .

The Voyage

Dulwich College Beijing, Li, Damien – 6

Glaring at the bustling museum hall, Percy sighed: “This is going to be boring!”

Following his mother into the Ancient China exhibit, Percy walked to the center of the hall, where an exquisite vase with swirling blue patterns and vivid drawings of sail ships was displayed.

“Who did this vase belong to?” Percy wondered as he walked closer to the vase.

Suddenly, there was a whirl of colour, a flash of golden light, and a gust of strong wind. Percy was sucked into the vase.

THUD – Percy landed on the dusty deck of a gigantic ship. Dancing in the air, a yellow banner with the Chinese character “Ming” hung on the mast.

“Where is mum?” Percy wondered with butterflies in his stomach. Around him were hundreds of ships lined up on the crystal-clear sea.

An arrogant looking, middle-aged Chinese man dressed in a long robe with fine embroidery interrupted his thoughts. “Are you spying on us?” he yelled in a deep voice.

Trembling in fear, Percy responded in Chinese: “No! My name is Percy. I am from Whistler, Canada. Can I join you? Please?”

“Canada? Where is that? Does everyone in your place have blonde hair, pointy noses and pale skin like you? I have led me fleet to 30 countries in six expeditions but never been to Canada. You will take us there.” He beckoned Percy closer and nodded, “On behalf of the Great Ming Dynasty, I, Zheng He, sail to our neighboring countries for the seventh time to deliver silks and porcelains, trade for herbs and spices and reunite our friendships. And from now on, you shall be my guide to Canada!”

Hoping to find a way home, Percy nodded reluctantly: “Yes my Lord!”

As days went by, Percy followed Zheng He to amazing places like Java and India, met people speaking different dialects and tasted scrumptious cuisines.

However, one gloomy day, a panicked shout came from the deck: “Pirates! ARRRRRRRRGH!!!!!!” Percy ran up and saw greasy pirates jumping onto the ship. All of a sudden, a long-beard pirate grabbed Percy and put a sharp sword to his neck.

Percy closed his eyes in agony: “Mum, I can’t go home anymore...”

“Let him go! He is only a boy!” Zheng He bellowed as he charged to the pirate, armed with a broadsword.

Hours later, Percy woke up gradually on a blood-soaked deck. Not too far away, Zheng He, with a sword piercing his chest, leaned against the mast. Tortured by the unbearable pain, he said his last words: “I always knew dying on the ocean was my destiny. I will never make it to Canada. Please take the vase from my cabin and give it to your king as a present of friendship from Ming.”

With tears all running down his face, Percy limped to the cabin, found the strangely familiar vase and held it gently. Suddenly, he was sucked into the vase again and THUD—back in the museum.

“May you rest in peace!” Percy mumbled.

Voyage Story

Dulwich College Beijing, Lu, Nini – 6

“I can’t believe it!” I yelled. “We’re going to Africa!” It was a sunny day on our ship, one of the Zheng He boats. Finally, I knew where we were going. Oops, I forgot to introduce myself. My name is Harry Menzies and my father is Gavin Menzies and he is the captain. That night, the cook, who is an expert at cooking, made us clams and salmon for dinner. After a few weeks, the sight of land filled my eyes. “Land ho! Land ho!” So we walked off the ship, packing everything. A new adventure was about to begin.

Soon enough, we found ourselves in a small village. “We come in peace.” said dad. Just at that moment, a voice yelled “Charge!” Five seconds later, spears rose into the air. We began to fight with our swords. Soon the villagers ran into their huts. “But what are we going to do next?” I asked dad. “Egypt.” He said. “Brilliant, but why? I’m confused.” I continued. “Because then we can find some nicer people we can build an alliance with. We can also get some other cool stuff that can’t be found in China.” “Great! Let’s go!” Everybody chorused.

The day after the next day, we were packed up and ready to go. The ride was a long one. I have to admit, even though I went on some really long ones before. In fact, this one was the longest ride on land I’ve had before. It made us really thirsty and we stopped from oasis to oasis to set up our camp.

About a month later, we were in Egypt. The Nile roamed across it and the sky was as blue as an ocean. Finally! Dad offered all kinds of things to the people, but none of them enjoyed it. Then the chief yelled something. Amazingly, a wall made of soldiers appeared right before our eyes. A battle was starting. Soon, I heard swords clashing, screaming and yelling. The battle seemed endless. There was a week of fighting. Finally, the battle ended. It ended when one of our members snuck up behind the chief and scared him. He went crazy and ran away. Seeing their leader gone, the Africans retreated and ran away. The word of victory spread as quickly as wind. We also had a feast to celebrate. The next day, we left for our ship.

About a month later, we were back on our ship. We sailed peacefully for a day or two but on the second day, a horde of pirates attacked. “Oh no, not again!” I yelled. My dad told me to be quiet as he gave the signal to head forward at full speed. But the pirates were already firing their cannons. Luckily, they were arguing about who would get to keep the loot. While they were distracted, we quickly sailed away. When the pirates realised what happened, they yelled even louder than before. Meanwhile, we were sailing off to China.

Ming Treasure Voyages

Dulwich College Beijing, McIntosh, Leo – 7

As a raging battle went on in the distance, the ship sailed peacefully and headed off to the west [Arabia]. As the wind blew, the tired sailors got up to do their jobs. As I trudged up to the main deck sleepily, I heard the captain call my name. “Joe come over ‘ere”. I ran up and walked towards him and asked what it was. He told me I needed to clean “the birds nest” right now

I said I would and climbed up the ladder to get to “the birds nest”. I thought “When will there be some excitement?” I got the mop and brush out and started cleaning. When I finished, I went to the captain to ask where we were heading. “To Arabia lad”! I went to my room and took out a map. There was a while to go before we got to Arabia. I went to bed and said to myself “This is going to be a rough ride”. Finally I went to sleep, snoring softly.

When I woke up, I looked out of the window and saw a horde of ships swarming towards us. I ran to the captain’s deck and knocked on the door. He asked “Who is it”? I replied “Joe, sir”. He sighed, trotted to the door and opened it, and pulled me in, closing it afterwards. He asked me what it was. I gasped “There are loads of ships coming our way”! He stared at me for a bit, then went to see for himself. His mouth dropped open. He then shouted “Get the weapons out, we’re going to send them to Davy Jones’s locker”! There was a huge huddle to get the weapons. I simply just walked round them, pushed past some people and took a pistol. There were no cannons left, only rifles and guns.

I ran to the side, I was ready to fight. Well, first I hurled. I put a bullet in the pistol and fired with a shaky hand. I saw it hit a man on the ship and quickly ran to the left in case his friends saw me. I felt worried and scared because I was afraid that I would get shot.

I looked around and saw bullets flying everywhere. I saw a cracked tile at the bottom of their ship. I aimed my pistol and shot it powerfully. BOOM! The ship gave way, plummeting into the water. I heard a lot of screams, cheering too. My friends ran to hug me and I got a pat on the back from my captain. He said “great work Joe.” There was still one more ship left. This was bulkier, more powerful and carried more men. The captain whispered in the ear of the cannon man, who nodded his head and shot a cannon ball towards the side of a nearby mountain. The impact caused a rockslide which rolled on to the other ship and sank it. The men cheered and celebrated.

Harry Potter and the Ming Treasure Voyage

Dulwich College Beijing, Rong, Jason – 6

I am Lele Zhu, Captain of an entire fleet of vessels of Ming Treasure Voyage. The mission of the voyage is to give out gold and silk as gifts to other nations.

Here the story begins... It was the year 1424 and I was 32 years old. One day I was onboard thinking ways to improve our military readiness when suddenly a sailor shouted: "Pirates, Pirates!" It was true. Our ship rocked as a bomb exploded near our ship. As the captain, I had to shout: "All hands onboard! Do not panic!"

I tried to light a torch to tell the other ships that pirates were attacking us. But just as I stepped onto the deck, a light blinded me and the crew onboard. A child about 18 years old stepped through as if it was a portal. He was carrying a stick. When onboard, he pointed his stick at the pirates and cried: "Expecto Patronum!" Little waves came out of his stick and got bigger and bigger. When the waves finally hit the pirate ship, it overturned the ship with an unbelievable force.

Seeing that the pirates were defeated, the boy turned to us. "You are in immortal danger." "What? Why? How can I thank you for saving us?" "Now *that* is a little thing." He grinned at me. At least I learned one thing: That stick was a wand. The boy stayed with us for a long time and I found out that his name was Harry Potter.

One day, it was noon and I invited Harry to lunch. He said he could make lunch for us but we needed to escape from a person called Voldemort after we finished lunch. Some of my crew didn't believe him. "Rubbish!" One shouted. "Stupid zit!" There were boos all around the table. I shot them a look and they immediately shut their mouth. After all, it was Harry who saved us. I tried to make up for what they said: "Err... sorry. My crew—" "No need." "Then can you please start cooking?" He, of course used magic to cook.

The next morning, we went whale-watching. We all saw a lot of whales but when I saw the last one, I fainted. It was faintable to humans, so I have to let Harry write: *I got my Nimbus 2000 broomstick and went searching. I wanted to find it... But it found me. I attacked it with spells but nothing happened. Then it attacked me. Terrified and scared, I pierced a sword...In the end, I won.*

"Land!" A sailor shouted. Once we made onshore, we carried bags of treasure to the land, ready to give them to the people living there. But the indigenous people thought we were pirates and tied us up. They threatened to burn us alive. After some explanation, we convinced them that we were sent by the mighty Ming Emperor. At the end, we made good friends.

Voyage

Dulwich College Beijing, Soldati, Valerie – 6

It was an exciting morning for Annie as her class was going to the Asia Art Museum to finish their topic “The Great Ming Empire”. Plenty of exhibits were displayed in the museum but the most impressive one was an enormous ancient vase cracked but still gleaming, reflecting the girl’s wavy red hair. It boasted an amazing picture of the Ming Treasure fleet. Annie had a strange feeling – the vase was inviting her to touch it. Of course, it was forbidden but she couldn’t help it. To the girl’s amazement, her hand drained through the ancient ceramic. Soon her whole body was in.

Once her eyes opened, the girl realized that she was on an ancient vessel which looked familiar to her. It was the ship of Zeng He from the vase. At that moment, the mariners spotted Annie and froze to the spot. According to a legend, one day a red-haired girl would bring them luck. The seamen gave her warm welcome.

The ship was sailing peacefully, when suddenly the tropical sun faded, thunder rumbled fiercely. A dark gloomy rainbow arched in the distance. The boat got caught in a strong current which brought it under the rainbow. It was a gate to the Sea of Nightmares. Soon everyone was fast asleep, everyone but Annie. Who’ll navigate the ship?

From bad to worse: in the distance jagged rocks emerged from the grey fog and were approaching menacingly. The girl had to act quickly or the ship would crash into a rocky island! She desperately looked around for help, but all she could see was sleeping seamen. Suddenly, a fresh breeze caressed her hair gently and whispered, “You must burn an enchanted feather, and the magic smoke will wake up the sailors”. “Where could I find the feather?” cried the girl but silence was the answer.

Foggy air grew colder making the girl shiver and deepen her hands into the pockets. Her fingers, almost numb of cold, felt something smooth and ticklish. To Annie’s surprise, it was a small feather of her pet budgie. The enchanted feather to burn! Luckily, in her scout camp there was a class of how to start a fire. She just needed to rub small pieces of wood which Annie had spotted earlier in the quarter deck. Shortly, green smoke swirled from the burning feather forming an emerald cloud around the ship. One by one the sailors started to move, their minds emerging from the depth of nightmares. Before long, the men crowded around Annie and Zeng He stepped forward, “The legend was true you saved our lifes, Red-haired Girl, thank you!”

Soon the life on the ship was back to normal. Annie was helping the steersman when something sparkling on the head deck caught the edge of her eye. Her curiosity brought her behind a stalk of barrels. There a rainbow stairway shimmered in the sunlight. “Where does it lead to?” a question flashed in her mind but she already knew the answer...

Dingding's Voyage

Dulwich College Beijing, Wang, Emma – 6

Dingding was a smart boy with a brave heart and lots of creative ideas. He dreamed being a famous sea explorer. He has an old book about the Ming treasure voyages. He read it many times.

One dark night when he read it again, he found something glowing on the floor. It was a golden key! After he picked it up, the house started to rock side by side with huge waves outside. Suddenly a huge, dark shadow rose towards Dingding.

When he woke up, he was in a cozy room with a warm blanket. Just then a soldier came in. He said: "You were sleeping for 3 days, we thought you would never wake up. I am not exaggerating." "Are you a movie star? Why are you wearing a strange costume?" asked Dingding. The soldier laughed: "What the movie mean? You looked more unusual." Suddenly Dingding realized the old book had brought him to the ancient times. "Where are we?" Dingding kept asked. "We are in 1406 and this is Zhenghe's ship." Dingding was shocked.

Zhenghe was very proudly to introduce Dingding around. "We have more than 200 ships, half of the ships carried 20000 soldiers and rest of the ships were store the food, drinking water and the horses." They became friends.

They were following the voyage map for couple of days. On the sunny morning Zhenghe saw an immense green island full of coconuts trees. The local people did a warm greeting when they landed. They help the soldier to amending sails, cleaning the deck. The island emperor gave them a shiny twinkling diamond. Dingding advised Zhenghe to organising a fest to celebrate the friendship. They prepared traditional Chinese food and puppet show. The emperor said "Thanks for everything! Your food is delicious especially the steam rice. "Just then Dingding whispered to Zhenghe : " we could send people to teach them planting and cooking rice. ""Good idea!" said zhenghe. Since then, all the islanders could have steam rice on their tables.

One morning Dingding saw a grey shadow far away. He ran to Zhenghe and called: "There is a shadow on the horizon" Zhenghe trained his telescope on the horizon. The pirate ship was towards to the fleet. Zhenghe asked the crew rush to prepare the cannon, load their pistols and practice their sword fighting. They drove closer to the pirate ship in the high speed. "Kill them!" Ordered by Zhenghe. They began to fight with the pirates. With a gigantic BANG. The powerful fire bomb target the pirates ship. It scared the pirates run away. "We won!" Everyone shouted.

On the lazy afternoon Dingding was fishing with Zhenghe. He saw shiny object looks like diamond in the fish mouth. It was the golden key! Dingding know it was a time to go home. "I will miss you little man ! "Zhenghe sighed. They hugged each other tightly. Suddenly the key began to grow, dingding back home with his parents again!

Voyage

Dulwich College Beijing, Wong, Ashton – 6

One early morning, the burning sun rose above the sea level, the bright sky turned orange. Suddenly a mysterious ship slowly appeared near the sandy beach. The next day, the ship was still there! On the ship was a man called Goldbeard the pirate. He was finding treasure, until he heard a shout it was Blackbeard the pirate.

Blackbeard the pirate roared as loudly as he can, he got angry, Blackbeard got a mighty pistol and shot Goldbeard but it missed. He got so angry and mad and he got on his large, cool ship. He was very smart, he aimed for another good shot it nearly shot him but hit a green tree. Blackbeard screamed and yelled he got so grumpy. He argued with Goldbeard and challenged him.

Goldbeard had a trick, he put some oil, some sand, mud and ice. Blackbeard slipped and shot himself, he fell and landed in a shark's mouth. Blackbeard was gone!!! Blackbeard escaped. Blackbeard ran away but there was a trap. He fell in the trap, and got eaten by another shark. He got so furious and angry.

Later that day, everyone cheered and they were all so joyful. They were so delighted that Blackbeard vanished! Everyone yelled at Goldbeard and laughed "you are the best", some people praised "bravo", even some screamed "you are a hero". Goldbeard got a reward. It was a nice, pointy, sharp sword. He suddenly found a letter in his pocket. It said "On December 31st you will have a competition. It was a competition that was about whoever pull out the sword will be the king of the pirates. Everyone tried until Goldbeard pulled out the sword. He was the new king of the pirates. So many people celebrated and cheered for the new king, Goldbeard!!!!!!!!!!!!!! They all loved Goldbeard. 7 years later he got so tired. He didn't give up, he still treated people very kind. Suddenly there was a loud sound, Goldbeard sent out his pirates. They charged and saw a pirate dragon!!!!!! It was Blackbeard's dragon. It was huge, it attacked. Goldbeard shot a bullet from his pistol and the dragon vanished. He was so proud of himself that he said "I can do it!" Suddenly at the back came a loud sound it was Pisty the captain. He was one of the Blackbeard's best friends. Pisty said I have come here for the revenge. They both started to fight. Some of Goldbeard's pirates fought too. They shot each other. Pisty and Goldbeard had a duel. Goldbeard used his one last bullet and shot Pisty in the chest.

Everyone went back home and celebrated their best day ever. They were so happy and delightful, that they celebrated it for the whole entire lovely night. Even Goldbeard and his pirates celebrated their best day ever. Goldbeard and his pirates went back on their lovely ship and had a very nice feast. The next super day it was the first day of 2019. Everyone in the lovely village was so happy. They even had gatherings with their kind villager friends. They suddenly found out that one of the pirates were in disguise. The chef put some ice and soup on the floor and pirate slipped and was locked in prison. They were so happy that, Goldbeard and his teammates danced, sang, played and chased. They couldn't stop playing, dancing, chasing and singing until the next morning, and lived happily ever after!!!

Ming Treasure Voyages

Dulwich College Beijing, Xiong, Alan – 8

On a sunny day, I looked out of the window and saw the blue sea. It looked like the waves were slapping against the boat swiftly. Every time it slapped the Bottom half, A satisfying splash! Sound would ring into my ears. Then me I was a gunner on board. Oh, no. The worst gunner on board.

Suddenly, I heard a shout: “land! LAND!” I moaned: “Oh, not again.” In the last few weeks, we had went to more than a dozen islands but they all seem to be uninhabited. “We were trying to give out gold.” The emperor said but we thought we were trying to waste food. When we went out, the captain’s first mate, Yum li, who was a big gruff, muscular guy who was said to have his toe cut off in a battle and no one dares to ask unless you want to have a sword in your head. Said: “Hey lazy snail, you better get out or you will be eating maggots for every day.” I grumbled. He uses disgusting threats against us every day.

As I climbed in one of the rowboats, my cabin mate eagle beard said: “Hey, Rotten maggot, you taking that big o’l hand book of sea monsters again? Awhh! Why are you bringing that old book? Awhh!” “Just in case, you know.” I replied. Then the person shouted again: “this is blue!” What is blue? Questions filled my head. As we rowed towards the island, I giant monster appeared. It was a monster! Not an island! : “Who dares to wake the Yemocha from its sleep! This monster was just a squid with wings. I looked in the handbook I saw the Yemocha and began to search for the category weakness. Weakness... Oh! Here! It says that the Yemocha was afraid of eagle sounds. Where do we get an eagle? OH, I think I know where? A cabin mate does an annoying noise, and it’s like awhh! “I said: “Hey! Eagle beard! Get here right now ! ” “Coming! Awhh!” He replied. As soon as the monster heard “awhh ! “He hid under the waves and never appeared again.

Ahhh. That was quick. I know you’re asking: “Hey! What happened to the handsome guy ever since? Okay, guys, thanks for the compliment. Well I learnt something, which is when you do something, always get as much information as you could about that thing first. In other words, always be cautious. After sailing ten peaceful years, we arrived at a land. But that piece of land was not blue. It was normal, well except people who came out of nowhere and said: “I am going to kill you.” Well, that is another story to talk about.

The Quest of the Ming Treasure Voyage

Dulwich College Beijing, Yao, Circle – 7

One Sunny morning, Amelia was playing with Sam and her cat Goldie. They were playing happily when Goldie spotted something. Amelia rushed to her and Sam followed. In the middle of Goldie's tiny paws was a magnificent, golden key on the ground. Amelia was curious about everything unlike Sam who was a bit scared and doesn't know what to do. Amelia picked up the key as it shimmered in the bright sun, but an amazing thing happened! The key began lifting itself up and, in a flash, they were standing in the middle of the vast ocean. "Meow, meow" came a voice, Amelia looked around and saw Goldie meowing at a silver sword lying in the sun. She looked up and saw sails dangling from the top. "*Oh no!*" Amelia thought, "*We must be on a pirate ship!*"

"Pull the sails!" Came a shout out of nowhere. Amelia knew that it was the pirates, so she quickly hid under the nearest piece of sail. Unfortunately, the people found them. A knot tied in Sam's stomach as Goldie began to hiss and she quickly hid behind Amelia. "Hello," said the man, "I am David and I and the captain of this ship"

"Then why are you so nice if you are the captain of the pirate ship? Pirates are nasty!" said Sam surprisingly, "They stole things and....."

"Oh, we're not pirates!" said the captain, "We're from China and we give out treasures as gifts. Let us show you around our ship." They followed them around the ship. As they went, they saw tons of treasures and some weapons too.

Suddenly, out of nowhere came a 'bump'. The ship hit an island but luckily, it didn't wreck. So, they continued until Goldie began to meow. There was a ship far away, but it was a real pirate ship! All of them quickly got out their weapons and prepared to fight. The pirates attacked rapidly and the voyagers, who were not good at fighting, were no match for them. Then, Goldie grew angry and knew she must help. She jumped on the pirates. The pirates had never seen a cat, so, were frightened. Goldie pushed some into the water to die. The others were bitten and killed. Some of them who didn't get caught ran to their ship as fast as a cheetah and sailed away. "Good job Goldie! That was clever!" Amelia said as she gave her a fish. Goldie purred and started to chew. "Your cat is clever. Let's sail again." So, they continued until they again heard a loud and scary, worrying and fierce voice sailing behind them. Goldie again jumped onto their ship and took all their weapons away. The pirates sailed away unhappily. David gave a golden ball to Goldie.

They traveled five days and they got to the shore of India. At that time, the key glowed and took them home. It was the end of their adventure.

Escaping the Pirates

International Christian School, Chen, Lucas – 9

As pirates invaded a Ming Treasure Boat in China, they found their victim, Jacob, hiding as pirates stole his phone. When a flickering red light filled the ship, Jacob found himself in a tiny and dingy cell. As the boat sailed rapidly on the dangerous waters, Jacob tried to keep his balance while taking out a hidden knife from his shoe. Staring at his scratches and bruises, he raised his knife. When the thoughts of death suddenly twirled in his mind, he thought of Sandra his wife he left behind. As he finally could raise his knife before a thought zoomed in his mind, he sliced the unsecured cell gates into several parts. When the cell tumbled down, Jacob crawled out cautiously as the pirates ignored him.

Hiding from the guards and flickering red lights, Jacob opened a trapdoor that led to the lower layer of the ship. When he saw more red lights in his way, he immediately reacted by jumping and crawling over and under the lasers like a bandit. At the the next stage, Jacob gazed at a robot, he recognized the face, the body, everything, he knew that robot's name, Natural. Immediately leaping on the robot, he landed head first on the floor. As Natural moved in front of him and creepily stared at Jacob, "Something needs to happen." he thinks.

In the meantime, a group of pirates gathered to drink wine to celebrate the capture of their victim. As the bottles of wine tumbled down the stairs, Jacob heard the sound of stampeding feet charging toward him. As a pirate appeared down the staircase, a wine bottle he threw flew in the sky charged toward Natural hitting him in the face. When the wine bottle accidentally hit Natural, Jacob sneakily ran away as fast as a leopard without the drunken pirates noticing him.

Reaching for a random vault in his way, he pushed and pulled the hexagona door barely making a difference. When he noticed a code bar, the bar showed the numbers "16, 18, 5, 19, 19, 0, 17, 0, 1, 14, 4, 0, 26". As the numbers swirled in his mind, he finally figured out the code. The numbers meant "Press Q and Z", "Will something *horrible* happen to me?" he thought. Finally after a long decision, "Yes." Jacob thought, so he typed "Q,Z" in the code bar.

When the vault automatically opened, he saw a boat with 2 paddles, a pile of Renminbi, some armor and a scythe. With his scythe, he crafted a hole in the wall and rowed away from the pirates' ship using his boat and paddles. When a larger ship appeared, Jacob saw another Ming Treasure Fleet Boat appearing! As he stepped on the ship's stairs, he demanded to set off for Beijing. When Jacob returned to his homeland, he lived in a mansion he bought with the pirates' stolen Renminbi and lived happily ever after.

Ming Treasure Trouble

International Christian School, Law, Caleb – 9

On the dusty, deserted, streets of Germany, Professor Goberg drilled a bolt onto his nearly finished robot. As metal and steel tools clanked loudly, the professor screwed on the last nut. Standing in the sunlight, his robot, Nachocheese, gleamed like gold. As the professor walked off for a quick water break, Rivyener, the professor's rival, flipped open the front panel and started rewiring the robot. As he caught a glimpse of Goberg returning, he quickly muttered a few orders to Nachocheese, closed the panel, and ran. When he returned, Goberg pressed the on switch. As lights flashed and Nachocheese's eyes widened, he obliterated the professor's handiworks. As the robot hit, a piercing scream from the professor filled the air. Nachocheese cackled. As Nachocheese's jetpack soared into the air, Nachocheese said: 'Next stop..... China!!! The gold will be all mine!'

Meanwhile in China, the Ming Treasure fleet prepared for departure. As admiral Zheng He yelled 'Prepare yourselves,' the crew pulled up the anchor and set sail. Peacefully sailing, the boat cruised across the clear waters. Relaxing and singing, they celebrated day after day on deck. As a helpless voice from a lady slowly flowed into the ears of the crew, they quickly sped to a rock, where a broken ship lay. 'We'll help you!' Zheng He shouted as they carried the girl to the ship.

After a night of good sleep, the admiral woke up, only to find that his precious collar disappeared! 'Where's my jewelry?' Zheng He zoomed off to search for his collar. Running on the boat, the admiral finally found his collar on top of the mast. As a thousand thoughts whirled inside Zheng He's head, he headed the ship toward Beijing.

Many miles away, the wrecked boat in which the Ming treasure fleet rescued the girl, transformed into an electronic plane that glinted.

As the ship approached the harbor, Zheng He screamed: 'We have arrived at Beijing!' While the crew loaded the cargo off, Emperor Yongle congratulated the crew as servants took the girl to a room inside the palace. Later that night, a fire sprung up in the throne room. After the crew hurried to put out the fire, they skidded to a halt seeing their rescued passenger standing in front of them, holding a torch. As the girl said 'Give me all your gold and weapons,' she morphed into the robot Nachocheese! While troops shot and fired bullets at the robot Zheng He pounced on Nachocheese and his crew rushed out of the palace carrying the emperor. With a thousand bombs flying in the air, Nachocheese detected severe damage. With a shriek, he flew away screaming 'I'll be back.'

Several days later, Zheng He's mood lightened as he walked to the emperor. As Emperor Yongle placed a medallion on Zheng He's chest, the crew cheered loudly for their brave, courageous leader. 'Zheng He,' the emperor declared, 'Leader of the Ming Treasure Fleet.'

Pirate Adventure to Madagascar

International College Hong Kong, Ashby, Eli – 8

This is the story about two of the most courageous, adventurous, and brave pirates who worked for the Yongle emperor in the early 1400s. Captain Fan, and Seamate Lam.

They went on a voyage under admiral Zheng He's command to look for a very special treasure buried somewhere in Madagascar, on the east coast of Africa. In fact, the place was so much trouble that no pirates could return. People believed there might live a monster, and they called it Tremours. Finally, Captain Fan and Seamate Lam boarded a treasure ship and everyone was very worried.

As they docked, they packed their supplies. A gun powder bomb, matches and knives. They camped on a sheer cliff in the jungle for one night so that the Tremours does not attack them.

Both Captain Fan and Seamate Lam were walking across the plateau in the morning, and they slipped down a hole the Tremours had made. The monster's size was bigger than their ship.

"Ouuuooow", said Seamate Lam.

"Can you walk?", said Captain Fan. "Yes", said Seamate Lam.

"Let's go and find some treasure." said Captain Fan.

They walked along a big dark tunnel and suddenly felt the ground shaking.

"Let's run!", said Captain Fan.

They ran until they saw another tunnel on their left, and they ran down it.

"Why is this tunnel so small?", said Captain Fan.

"And the other one is so big".

"Look", said Seamate Lam.

"There's an egg".

"It looks like this one is smaller so that the babies have to go through it", said Captain Fan.

And the baby Tremours can come out but can't come back in as they grow so fast.

"Look!", said Seamate Lam.

"There is the treasure!" Captain Fan said.

When they were stuffing the treasure into their bags, the eggs were already starting to hatch.

"Let's run!", said Captain Fan.

And every second the baby tremours grew bigger.

They found themselves running back into the big tunnel. Suddenly, they found a big Tremours slithering in the tunnel. Quickly, they got out their knives and stabbed the big Tremours, so that they could hold on and ride it to escape.

"I've got an idea!", said Captain Fan.

He got out of his gun powder bomb and matches from his bag, and lit it.

Captain Fan threw the gun powder bomb into the air, and it exploded. It made the roof of the tunnel collapse on the baby tremours. The big Tremours was heading right out of the tunnel. By then, the baby ones came out through the dirt, and they looked very angry. They jumped off the big Tremours and ran and ran toward their ship. The baby tremours were very close to Captain Fan and Seamate Lam and they were very close to the ship. One of the sailors brought up the anchor then when one tremours was about to eat them, they jumped onto the ship just in time.

Sailing away, they both said. "We are not going back there again!"

Adventure for Gold

International College Hong Kong, Bentote, Ethan – 7

It was around the 1400s, just before the Ming Dynasty.

One night a mysterious magical pirate wizard came and turned some little kids into pirates. “Arrr,” said the Wizard as he turned them into pirates.

There were six of them. Three who were mean and nasty and three of them who were good pirates. They found Chinese junks and sailed away. They were never seen for 1000 years.

Chapter 2 “ At Sail”

One day the good pirates; Zhang Pe, Ping the Shapeshifter and Pheng Er were sleeping. And the bad pirates attacked the ship. The good pirates woke up because they wanted to know what all the commotion was about. When they went out to see, they saw the bad pirates. Then the good Pirates decided to attack wearing their pajamas!

They fought for day and night, years, even decades and centuries. They used swords, they used axes. But those good pirates just couldn't get those bad pirates off their ship. And do you know why they wanted to attack? Because they have gold, they have Copper Chinese coins, they have whatever sparkly stuff you can imagine. Then Ping the shapeshifter turned into a whale and blasted those mean pirates away! Zhang Pe and Pheng Er said “good job Ping”!

The bad pirates swam so much they swam all the way back to their ship. They sailed away again and they really really wanted that treasure chest. So they sailed away back to the good pirate ship. As normal the good pirates attacked again and again and again but those bad pirates would not give up. And then the good pirates went to treasure island and hid their treasure behind the wishing tree and sailed back away. They then hid in a Wifi cave where nobody could find them ever again. And those bad pirates were looking so hard they did not check their phones or their weather app so they didn't know there was gonna be a big storm. It was brewing in the Indian Ocean. On that day the storm arrived, they went into a whirlpool and got sucked in and were never seen again!

The good pirates knew they wanted to look at their phones because they were just sending a message on Pi-mail. They looked on their reminders and saw something on “pirate dead”. They went into “Pirate Dead” and saw under names of pirates dead; Pheng Shi, Shing, Captain Crook. “Hurrah!” shouted the good pirates

Zheng He and the flying ship

Island Christian Academy, Cheng, Alethea – 7

On the seventh day of Zheng He's voyage to Siam, his ship was in a raging storm. Everyone on deck was soaked. The wind was so ferocious that the rudder kept on spinning and no one can find the way. Worst of all, there was a dark shadow coming right for them! It was Captain Hook's fleet! The crew was very scared. Zheng He had 300 men while Captain Hook had 100,000 men! Zheng He was greatly outnumbered. Captain Hook's fleet was coming closer! Zheng He thought of a plan. Half of his men would sneak onboard Hook's fleet and his other half would fight the pirates. Zheng He had to deal with Captain Hook. Zheng He and his men sailed towards Captain Hook's fleet, ready to strike.

Zheng He's plan worked! Half of his men sneaked onboard Hook's fleet while his other half fought the pirates. Zheng He marched onto where Hook was standing and drew his sword. Hook and Zheng He were like angry tigers. With one swift move, Captain Hook knocked Zheng He's sword out of his hand. It looked like Captain Hook was going to win.

Peter Pan arrived! Peter Pan quickly sprinkled Zheng He's ship with pixie dust. Quick as a flash, Zheng He leaped onto his ship like a kangaroo. There was on other problem, Zheng He's nine ships were still on the sea! His ship was rising fast! Zheng He quickly thought of a plan. He would tie all his ships together. Then, he asked Peter Pan to sprinkle some pixie dust on his nine ships. Soon, all his ships were floating in the air! Captain Hook looked at the sky with fury! When Peter Pan wasn't looking, he grabbed Tinkerbell and sprinkled some of her pixie dust, Captain Hook wasn't very smart. He had left nineteen ships on sea! Soon, the sea battle had turned into a sky battle! Zheng He and Captain Hook were fighting on the plank! But, Captain Hook wasn't looking where he was walking and slipped off the plank! He got eaten by the sharks.

After Hook was killed, they freed Tinkerbell. Zheng He and his crew shouted, "Hooray!" Peter Pan said, "Could I take you to Neverland?" "Yes!" Zheng He said excitedly. So Peter Pan and Tinkerbell led them to Neverland. As thank you gifts, Zheng He gave him pearls from Africa, silk from China, vases from Malacca, pepper from India, and his own travel diary of all his voyages. Peter Pan was delighted and gave Zheng He a bag of pixie dust so he could come to Neverland whenever he wants. Soon, they set sail for China and said goodbye to their friends.

Dairy of Admiral Zheng He's Voyages

Kau Yan School, Wan, Kalysta – 8

It is the 15th day of the 9th lunar month. Today we saw some strange shark-like creatures. Admiral Zheng He said they were playful and entertaining. They jumped out of the water every few seconds and made sounds like a mouse squeaking.

It's the 19th day of the 9th lunar month. Today a storm came suddenly, it rocked the boat back and forth and ripped one of the sails. Sailors were busy mending the sails. Before sunset, Admiral Zheng He said, "Some giant boats are following us! They look like pirates." By then, most of the crew were tired and asleep.

Everyone was wakened up by the pirates yelling "Charge!!!!!" as they ran across the plank from the Pirate Ship to the Bao Chuan. The soldiers on board tried to kill the pirates by cutting the plank of wood that connected their boat to ours. Eventually the plank began to fall and quite a number of pirates immediately fell into the water. However, one despicable pirate managed to jump and grab hold of the rope and stay on the lower deck of the Bao Chuan without alerting us.

When we all settled down to sleep again, the pirate climbed quietly to the upper deck and crept into the Treasure Room. In the Treasure Room he saw our Giant Panda and lots of glittering gold. He was distracted by the panda. It looked like a huge monster to him. He screamed loudly, and woke up the sleeping guard.

The guard quickly caught him, tied him with stiff ropes and woke up Admiral Zheng He.

Admiral Zheng He told the guard to lock the pirate in the cage next to the panda.

The pirate was terrified to be in a cage next to the big, fat monster who kept chewing on juicy bamboo leaves.

Admiral Zheng He asked, "Where do you come from?"

The pirate, with big round eyes and teeth chattering from fear, said, "The Paracel Islands, Sir."

The Admiral looked at the pirate and saw that he was actually very small and had a piece of rope tied around his waist to keep his trousers from dropping down. Admiral Zheng He said, "We will take you back to the Paracel Islands, but you must never be a pirate again!" The pirate promised.

It's the 20th day of the 9th lunar month. Admiral Zheng He told us that we didn't have enough bamboo leaves for the panda so we needed to go faster. We dropped off the pirate in the sea near the Paracel Islands and let him swim ashore. The boat was too big to go too close to the Islands as the water was very shallow.

Admiral Zheng He said, "We need one more sailor to go faster. No more writing, Scribe. You are one of the sailors too!"

So this is my last entry in this interesting diary as we sail towards Mogadishu to present the Giant Panda to the important ruler there.

The Voyage of Speed Smith

Kau Yan School, Yeung, Adrian – 7

It was a sunny day. Speed Smith had a crew. They were going to the west, England. He, aka Speed Smith, set sail. He was bringing a golden cup, a golden sword and many mini golden statues to the emperor. One day, they saw a pirate ship. They battled and battled. And then it came the Kraken! It destroyed everything except Speed Smith and his crew. The pirate ship was destroyed. The Kraken was gone. They sailed and sailed again. Suddenly, they saw a gigantic tornado. They sailed away from the tornado fast. But they could not outrun it. It spun them in the middle of the sky. After spinning for a while, they were pulled back to the sea. Luckily, no one was hurt. And, they sailed and sailed again. Speed Smith saw a crocodile. The crocodile attacked the crew in the lower deck. And Speed Smith took out his powerful sword to kill it by stabbing the sword into its mouth. The crew was saved. When Speed Smith thought it should be almost in England. The crew saw the land. “Oh yes, we are here.” Speed Smith shouted out. They finally delivered the golden cup, sword and statues to the emperor successfully. The emperor was very happy.

The New Tale of the Ming Treasure Voyages

Korean International School, Mok, Chelsea – 8

“HELP! HELP!” Zhen He was drowned. Thousands of voices were calling from the stormy sea on the Ming Treasure Voyage to India. All the men were drowned but luckily all of them together with the treasures they brought from China were floated towards the shore one by one.

When they woke up, they found their jewels sparking like diamonds on the shore. Nobody had any idea of where they were until Zhen He laid out his leather map. It was India! So the fleet gave some of the treasures to the King there. The King was so pleased and decided to invite Zhen He to his Sultan Palace to have dinner together. There was a huge feast on the golden plates, however Zhen He did not feel well during the party. He told the King, “I am sorry, we better leave now because I am not feeling well and I don’t want to infect you”.

The King ordered his vizier to take him to the public bath to take a hot bath with some India spices. The spices were known to have a healing power and the King thought that it would be the best medicine.

During the bath, Zhen He felt a bit better, and he said to himself, “Awesome! The spices must be working and I must bring some back to China!” After that, he said to the King, “Thanks so much ..Arc...Arc....Archoooo!!!” The King knew that Zhen He must have caught a cold, so he asked his pretty daughter dressed in fine silk with veil to prepare some India herbal tea plus some ginger for him. After drinking, he felt much better and prepared to say goodbye to the King to continue their voyage. While they were leaving, the King invited Zhen He to marry the Princess and he accepted delightedly because the Princess was so pretty and caring.

So Zhen He, the India Princess and the fleet continued their journey to their next stop. Unfortunately, on their way to Africa, they got another obstacle. A gigantic tsunami approached. The fleet tried to change direction of the ship to turn back to India but it was already too late! The water tornado damaged the ship with a little hole and sea water started seeping into the ship. Luckily there was a little naughty child called Tau-Tau crept into the ship when they set sail. Tau Tau was the only one in the ship who was brave enough to dive into the ship body to block the leaking hole to save the entire crew. Everyone cheered and clapped their hands like a long procession of parade when they landed Africa safely.

The fleet gave the African King their treasures and the King was very pleased. The King asked Zhen He if he would like to marry his daughter. Zhen He said, “Thank you but I am not worthy for your greatness because I had a very beautiful and caring wife already!” the King understood and they became good friends forever...

New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

Korean International School, Wong, Ho Wang – 7

One day, the king from China told Zheng He to deliver presents by using a smelly ship. Zheng He was excited because it was the first time ever to board a ship. He invited two of his best friends, Tai and Chu to join the journey.

The journey eventually started after few months of preparation. The ride was choppy and it went up and down. Chu was furious. "I don't like it here and it's so smelly!" He shouted out crazily. Suddenly, a heavy rain started to pour." Zheng He! There was a really big rain coming to us!" One sailor screamed. " On no! What are we going to do?" Zheng He cried out loudly.

The waves crashed the ship and washed all passengers including Zheng He off to a desert island where it was dirty. "Why is this island so dirty and how are we going to get out?" Zheng He questioned yet no one answered.

When everyone was trying hard to figure an escape plan, "Ahhhhhh! It's a cobra and its venomous, run!" screamed Zheng He as loud as possible. But the cobra only travels one mile per hour, it came up to Zheng He's smart mind. He ran up to the cobra and stepped on it, the cobra was dead. "Hooray! I killed the cobra!" shouted Zheng He. Yet they were still stranded on the dirty and horrible island filled with all the dangerous animals and plants. "I guess we would be here forever " Zheng He thought. Suddenly, Tai screamed. "I am trapped by a gigantic pitcher plant, it is eating me up!" Zheng He rushed to the plant and tried to open the pitcher plant, but it would not budge open. Suddenly, Zheng He got an amazing idea, he grabbed grains of sand and threw them inside the pitcher quickly via it's slits. The pitcher plant was sick and the person trapped inside pushed the pitcher plant opened and finally was saved. Zheng He jumped happily. But they were still stranded on the deadly island. "I want to leave here, I m starving. " Chu claimed. "Don't be so worried, our ship might come to our way as the current suggests." said Zheng He. They waited for hours and hours but no luck.

On the second day, luckily, their ship was washed to the nearby beach by the dirty island, everyone saw the ship from the distance and screamed. When the ship finally arrived, everyone shouted, "Hooray, we can go home now!" As soon as Zheng He boarded the ship, he decided to continue the journey and he mastered to deliver colossal pile of presents to all of the designated countries on time.

Finally, they sailed back to China and Zheng He told the king what has happened and the king was very delightful. Zheng He was thrilled because he completed his mission. The king praised him as a true warrior and named him as "Best Sailor".

The New Ming Treasure Voyages

Korean International School, Yun, Zia – 7

Once upon a time, a long time ago, there were seven pirates. One day, they went on a trip. They were delighted that they had gained lots of gold until there was a big storm. In a massive wave, the ship sunk. Everyone except for Chris was on a big part of the boat. Chris was on the plank. He jumped overboard and swam toward a nearby island that he spotted. A huge styrofoam chest floated to him. He grabbed it in the shallow water and dragged it to the island. Chris opened the chest and found camping supplies and a torch. That night, he got some coconuts from a tree and cracked open with a piece of wood. He made a camp with the supplies and started feeling better. The other people in the crew were still at sea, with no land anywhere to be seen. The captain whose name was Ming Chang said, "Toko, Suki, Orlando, Jazzman, Jackie and Chris. Chris? Where in the world is Chris?!?!?" Said Ming Chang. "Captin!" Said Jackie, "Chris is gone! WHAT?" Said Ming Chang. Ming Cang threw Jackie off the boat. Good thing Jackie was a great swimmer. Jackie swam for hours until she saw an island. She went on the island and saw Chris. "Jackie, how are you here?" Asked Chris. Suddenly, the island started moving. "Chris, what is going on?" Asked Jackie. "This is not an island, this is a whale!" "WHAT?" Asked Jackie. The two went off the back of the whale and swam away. The rest of the crew found a little village. They robbed everything in town until nothing was left. Jackie and Chris were on the open seas until they met with the rest of the crew Ming Chang was out of his mind, so he asked to have a fight. WAIT! "if you be bad, bad stuff will happen to you." Said, Jackie. I don't care, get her!! Shouted Ming Chang. Chris grabbed his sword and said, "if you do anything to Jackie then you go off this boat." Chris pushed Ming Chang of the boat. Hip Hip Hooray for Chris!!! Shouted everyone. After, Chris returned every single piece of gold Ming Chang stole. Chris lived a happy life while Ming Chang was eaten by a shark.

New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

Marymount Primary School, Lau, Hei Yan Zita – 8

My name is Sia Chau, a.k.a. Chueng Chau. I am the captain of a fleet of seven treasure ships because my father is too old to be captain, so he has appointed me to look after the fleet.

Actually I am a girl, but I have to disguise myself as a man when I am not in my private cabin. My fleet of treasure ships are used to trade things from countries to countries in exchange of treasure and bring them back to China.

Join me as I travel the world! Just step into this diary and I will be waiting for you inside! Let me tell you a secret – I carry a bottle of poison wherever I go in case somebody finds out I am a girl. You know what I mean if you understand how dangerous yet adventurous my journey is.

Day X (Tuesday) rainy

Disaster! We have just met some nasty pirates who are plotting to rob our ships! They sneak into our ships and take the loot. We have no choice but to cannon against them and...BOOM! Luckily, I do not need to use my little bottle of poison this time.

Day Y (Saturday) cloudy

We have arrived Vietnam! Guess what? There is a rumor that their streets are paved with gold, it seems the country is rich, so we decide to greet the King and see what we can exchange.

We present lovely bowls, vases and cups made of jade to the King in return for some fruits that I have never seen before – they call those fruits as “melons”, “bananas”, “pineapples” and “rambutans”. We also see some white elephants which are very rare in China, on the way to the palace.

But I have a headache when I see many golden statues of idols which are unknown to me. I reckon as a waste of gold, just like the Chinese decorate their houses with gold. Maybe the Vietnamese and Chinese share similar culture of using gold to express their social status but it is useless on me!

Day Z (Monday) stormy

I am very excited about a newly invented bug poison! The idea comes when one of the pesky bugs bit my arms which caused me a bit dizzy when we arrived the Philippines. Since some local people have been killed by this kind of pesky, poisonous bugs, I decide to invent a new type of poison to kill the bug and, it works! My father must be very proud of me.

Ending:

After all these experiences, I can tell my father that I am capable of surviving in other countries like the other strong sailors do. This is a dangerous yet adventurous journey which I will never forget. Now I really miss my home and maybe it is time to take a rest for a while. I will miss all the people and places which I have visited but no place is as warm as my home. Goodbye!

New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

Po Leung Kuk Choi Kai Yau School, Chan, Charlotte – 8

My name is Zheng He. I am the commander of the Ming Treasure Voyage. It was just a common day, no one would have guessed it was the day His Majesty the Emperor Yong Le would let us set sail. He heard that we wanted to travel to the end of the world, which is said to have infinite treasure. However, the crew on the Ming Treasure fleet mostly just want to go to the end of the world, finding answers to the mysteries of Earth and the truth about everything. Whenever we see a kind village or home, we give treasure to the inhabitants. Sometimes we will need to battle other pirates, who snatch gold and gems and especially of the latter. Let me tell you an account of what happened in the first voyage.

We set sail the very next day. Luckily we did not enter any raging storms. Unfortunately, we bumped into the mythical hooked snake. The snake is said to be vicious, but easily tricked, as it will do anything for food. Unluckily, we did not have food, let alone food that a hooked snake would appreciate. As the commander, I was expected to solve the problem. The crew panicked and my heart was beating like a drum, as the hooked snake struck, again and again, until the boat was battered. Suddenly, I had a stroke of inspiration. I called out to my most trusted friend of the crew, “Yang Zhen, get rice, a pot, a fishing net and make a fire.” “Yes, Commander Zheng He,” Yang Zhen replied with a salute. After he finished, I began to put the pot over the fire, the rice in the pot and the fishing net over the pot. I let the rice cool, and told the crew to pretend to sleep. The hooked snake tried to take the rice, but got stuck in the fishing net, so we managed to get passed it.

After many days, we finally saw a village. The few inhabitants wore thick animal fur coats. The land was cold, barren and desolate, as if it was blowing its frosty breath at us. Of all the gossip and rumours I have heard, of all the scrolls I have read, of all the countries I have been to... Never, never have I known such a place existed. I could tell that the other crewmembers felt so too. The inhabitants warmly welcomed us to their home and offered us hospitality. As the day turned to night, in the sky not very far away, I began to see beautiful, divine lights, the colourful ribbons of smoke waving from the sky. Or were they flames of the good and evil dragons battling in the heavens? I desperately yearned to know the answers.

Chu Chu

Po Leung Kuk Choi Kai Yau School, Ching, Hayley – 7

In ancient China, when the Ming Dynasty was as strong as ever, there was a little boy called Chu Chu who was living in Nanjing, one of the biggest cities in the Dynasty. He dreamed of becoming a pirate and he wanted to sail a boat to the ocean. One day, he asked his parents, “Can we go to the ocean?”. His parents said, “Of course not! There will be sharks jumping around trying to eat you! It is so dangerous.” Chu Chu was very disappointed and so he sneaked out during the night.

On his way to the ocean, he met some pirates. “May I join your group? I can help you cook a delicious meal” Chu said. The head of pirates replied “Of course not! We will not let a seven year old boy cook for us. It won’t taste good!”. “I’m nine years old, not seven, you silly pirate!” Chu yelled back. The chief felt insulted and was very angry, so he swiped his sword at him. He caught Chu Chu and put him into a prison cell in his pirate ship.

Chu Chu was locked in the cell for almost a year. He only knew the ship was sailing but not its destination. One day, there was a lot of shouting and yelling inside the pirate ship. A group of soldiers suddenly appeared and rescued him. The pirates were all caught. The soldiers brought Chu Chu to their leader.

“I’m Zheng He, the leader of the soldiers who just rescued you. We are travelling around the world!” Zheng said. “We can only take you home after we finish travelling, and it might take a few years”.

“Alright. May I travel with you then?” Chu Chu asked. “Sure, but you have to listen to me” Zheng replied.

So, Zheng continued the voyage with Chu Chu. They travelled all over the oceans and explored different countries. Chu Chu was very excited at first but he began to get bored, and so was not able to help with anything. One day he asked Zheng, “May I help you with something?”.

“Perhaps you could play a Chinese game with the local children, so they will know more about our culture?” answered Zheng.

Since then, Chu Chu had been playing with local children every day. He taught them how to play Chinese chess and freestyle shuttlecock. He realised that he loved this job very much. Chu Chu had a great time and enjoyed meeting different people and learning about different cultures. He travelled around Eastern China, South East Asia, India and even to Arabia.

A few years later, Zheng finished the journey and went back to China. Chu Chu was taken back to his home. His parents were so surprised and relieved, as they thought Chu Chu was dead. “Oh, honey, where did you? You should tell us all that has happened” asked his mother.

“Well, I travelled all around the world. It was a fantastic journey” Chu Chu explained. His parents did not believe him at all and they did not let him out of their sight again.

The Ming Treasure Voyages

Po Leung Kuk Choi Kai Yau School, Fung, Bethanie Mei-yu – 6

Long, long ago in Ancient China, there was a young and handsome voyager called Zheng He. He was born in Yunnan Province in 1371. He was very smart and served the Prince well. Later, the Prince became the Emperor of China. The Emperor wanted to show the rest of the world the power and glory of China. He named Zheng commander of a fleet and told him to explore the world.

Zheng He started to pack Chinese food and gold to show people in different countries. He wanted to show how good Chinese people are to the people he would meet. They traveled for a long time across the ocean. One day, after the pouring rain, the weather became much better. Suddenly, a pretty rainbow appeared in the sky! Zheng He asked the Chinese people on the ship where they were; the Chinese people said they had arrived in Africa. They left the ship and saw one African person. He gave the traditional Chinese food and beautiful silk to the African person. He greatly thanked Zheng He, and he decided to use the silk to make a warm coat for the elephant. Then, the other animals got jealous and angry! They all chased after Zheng He. The African people stopped the animals and apologized to him. They asked him if he needed to go back home and he said yes. Finally, Zheng He said goodbye to the African people and went back to China.

The Ming Treasure Voyages

Po Leung Kuk Choi Kai Yau School, Puhar, Aaron – 8

A long long time ago, in the 14th century, Zheng He commanded a colossal fleet of ships which set sail for India, looking for a famous palace which housed fine supplies such as silk, gold, silver and other fine items. Near the Indian coast, whilst looking into his telescope, the Captain spotted a mud-brown wooden ship, with ten sleek white sails, just ten kilometres away. “That merchant must be affluent and ripe for the picking.” Zheng He muttered to himself. He ordered his sailors to disguise themselves as merchants and then, when they were close enough, they would put a heavy cannonball inside the old, bronze cannon and, with an ear-splitting BANG, the merchant ship would crumple, allowing Zheng He’s sailors to steal all the glittering gold.

As they neared their target, the sailors were as busy as beavers, one aiming a cannon at the merchant ship, one colouring the sails in beautiful colours and changing the name of the ship, and one looking out to sea with his telescope, checking for other merchant ships to steal.

Coming silently alongside, suddenly Zheng He signalled his men to halt the boat and ready themselves. They loaded their guns, polished their swords and sharpened their arrows; they were ready. They all then clambered carefully and quietly onto the merchant ship. A few seconds later, the captain of their target vessel looked around and was astounded to see such a devastating sight. He Zheng He and his burly crew, with mighty guns, swords, bayonets, and sticks, ready to charge. The sailors of the merchant ship were frozen to the spot and all Zheng He’s men had to do was to tie them up.

After that easy battle, Zheng He told four of his sailors to keep guard whilst the others gathered all the fine goods and supplies they desired. Hauling them from the merchant’s ship deck was not easy, but they finally managed it. Drenched in sweat, they hauled all of the divine goods, food and other supplies onto their own marvellously decorated ship, where some of the crew had already started celebrating with rum and a huge feast at the grand table. Delicious smells of roast pork and rice wafted from the steamy kitchen, as they wolfed down the sumptuous food in a trice.

A month later, upon arriving back at the lavish palace of the Chinese king, Zheng He and his men were all awarded a gold bar each as a reward for finding such bountiful treasure. They were rapturously happy to receive a compact, sparkling and extremely expensive 24 carat gold bar each – and so ended Zheng He’s successful plundering voyage to India.

New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

Po Leung Kuk Choi Kai Yau School, Wong, John – 8

One day, I found myself on the bed of a ship. I looked around and found everything was made of wood covered with antique Chinese silk. Then I looked at myself and I was shocked because I was dressed like a Chinese admiral of ancient times. On the way to the deck, everyone bowed to me with great respect and called me Admiral Chou. I grabbed one of my underlings and asked, 'What year is it?' He replied looking oddly at me, 'Sir, it is 1408!'

I was directed to the main cabin by Lieutenant Cheng. All the commanders and generals looked worried and they were discussing about the attempt of the pirate ship approaching us quickly. One of the generals told me we had lots of golden jewels, precious hand-made silk and lots of porcelain and china in the treasure chamber and they were gifts for the Japan Royal Family from the Yongle Emperor. Our mission for this voyage was to bring those treasures across the East China Sea and deliver them to Yokohama port.

While we were planning our defence strategy, suddenly, a pirate cannon shot at our control tower. Then, the pirates started boarding the front deck and a big fight started. Our front team was hit badly so I asked everyone else to gather around the middle and started shooting back with our full strength at them. However, they were much more skilled and well planned, therefore, most of our crew members got killed and I needed to retreat to the emergency chamber. I heard them banging the doors, searching around and around, but they didn't seem to find the treasure chamber.

Suddenly, I saw a beam of light shining through the door and someone opening it – "BOOM! I found him!" said one of the pirates. They had caught me.

Their captain ordered a few strong men to tie me up, splashed me with cold water, whipped me with spikes and hit my head with an iron-made pistol. They also threatened to kill me with a sword if I didn't tell them where the entrance to the treasure chamber was. I was cold, scared and helpless, hoping my mom and dad were here with me to get me out of this mess.

Out of nowhere, I started feeling a warm stream of blood pumping out from my heart flowing through my body. I could also feel a pair of gigantic hands grabbing my arms, shaking me and then I felt totally dizzy. I closed my eyes wishing everything would be go away quickly. When I opened my eyes, I saw a big round chubby face right in front of me. "Dad!" I shouted.

I was overjoyed to find myself lying in my bed within a close distance to my mom and dad. However, big trouble was ahead of me because it was already nine o'clock in the morning and I was very late for school. When I jumped off the bed, I saw a bunch of my medals that I treasure a lot, lying at the corner of my bed. Then I asked myself: was it a dream or did someone really try to find my treasures last night?

A Fight Till India

Regents Primary School of Shenzhen, Chang, Zhe Han Devin – 6

My name is Zheng He and I am known in China as one of the most successful marine explorers, diplomats and fleet admirals. When I was young, the most esteemed Yongle emperor wanted to establish diplomatic relations with the southeast countries in the west Pacific. He trusted me with this mission. I was made in charge of the navigation, and was given my own fleet to set sail. Although I was initially afraid and doubtful about whether I could be successful in this voyage or not, I was equally excited, primarily because it was my first time to sail.

After setting sail, the journey went very smoothly. Aside from some waves and what felt like a never ending horizon to explore, the endless sea was generous and we were blessed with the calm waters throughout most of the journey. However, this peace and quiet ended to an abrupt halt upon entering the Indian Ocean. Sounds of the canyons and the sight of black flags from the pirate ships alerted us that we were under an attack. ‘There is a group of pirates in front of us,’ a soldier reported to me anxiously. I gathered up the courage and replied, ‘Don't worry, our fleet is well-equipped, our soldiers are brave and we will not be back down without a fight. Now let's defeat the pirates!’ Two hours later, our soldiers and crew of the ship were able to defeat the pirates, and eventually forcing them to retreat.

‘Long live the emperor,’ the voices echoed the ship. It shocked me and made me understand the meaning of ‘Unity is strength’. There is no enemy that we can't defeat as long as we fight together as one.

After the battle against the pirates, we sailed through the calm waters and finally arrived at India. It was a relief to land in the territory of India safely with the crew and soldiers on board. This voyage was truly meaningful and an experience I will never forget.

Sharks and Pirates

Regents Primary School of Shenzhen, Hu, Rui Harry – 6

I followed Lord He to the south of the Atlantic Ocean, and it was smooth until one day...

On this day, we were caught in a very rough sea. You could see, there were sharks all over the sea, and these sharks were huge. They were swimming around our ship. We all stood around the sides of the ship to watch. We were moving forward, and the sharks were following us.

All of a sudden, a few big ships came up, with skulls and crossbones sign on the bows, and the crew of the ship shouted, 'Oh no, pirates!' Lord He immediately came to the bow to look, 'Yes, they are the pirates, we are ready to fight!' For a moment, the crew was ready, and the gunners were in position to lift the awning that sheltered the muzzle, adjust the muzzle position and mount the cannon. We were ready to fire!

All of a sudden, something strange happened and we saw the sharks rushing towards the pirate ships. Some of these sharks were hitting the ship; some were trying to jump onto the ship. The pirates also continued firing as we heard the sound of guns. We stopped the ship and watched. After being hit by a pirate shell, the sharks experienced extreme pain but they still kept going forward and rushing to the pirate's ships.

'Wow, it was amazing and crazy!' We all looked silly!

After a period of fighting, the pirates retreated. They turned around and ran away. The sharks were still in the water, cruising around and playing as if they were celebrating a victory!

In order to thank the sharks for their help, Lord He ordered us to throw the beef, horse meat and mutton off the ship to the sharks. The sharks were very happy to enjoy the delicious food. We steered the ship and continued to sail the Atlantic Ocean!

Friends Adventure

Regents Primary School of Shenzhen, Kim, Ji Hoo – 7

Zheng He, a brave explorer of the Ming Dynasty, dreams of traveling the world. ‘There are many kingdoms in the world and I desire to congregate with their rulers. It is important to affiliate ourselves with others in order to call attention to China,’ said Zheng He. He went to the palace, persuaded the king and finally got his permission to build a ship.

Upon reaching the approval of the emperor to set forth on his mission, he first meandered through the woods to cut down trees to build his ship. He ended up experimenting and testing different wooden materials as he later found out that not all kinds of wood were able to float upon putting weighted goods on top of it. Zheng He went through trials and errors but never gave up. To his surprise, he finally got the idea from eating bamboo rice one day. He wound up using bamboo to build his ship. He was able to finally set sail!

Down in the city, a young wide-eyed boy named Cha Cha took the sailor recruitment test but was declined. He was too young and short but they determined to become a sailor. One night, they slowly and curiously sneaked onto one of the voyage ships, not daring to make a sound to avoid being detected. Suddenly, a sailor popped out and shouted, ‘Thief! Thief!’ They scurried hurriedly and tried to escape from the sailors, running all the way from the supply ship to the warship where they ended up in a ship that carried all the horses. He was exhausted and he slowly crept into a dreamless sleep. Not long after, the peaceful sunrise shone in the barn and woke him up. Cha rubbed his eyes and cleared his sleepy vision. From the window of the barn, he could see the endless rivers, beautiful villages and gigantic mountains. He finally landed on an island with the other crew members. Later on, they started to trade goods with some local people...

A powerful storm was bearing down on the island at dawn the next day. They told the local people on the island that a tsunami would be coming. Knowing how dangerous the tsunami waves were, the local people took no chances and boarded Zheng He’s ship to escape from its’ wrath. As the tsunami tore through the nearby lands and shook the ship to its core, there was a sudden gush of water that entered the lower deck of the ship. The ship was punctured and the sudden influx of water made the ship start to sink. It was so dark, so cold and so scary. Everyone was panic but Cha stayed calm throughout the ordeal. Thinking quickly on his feet, Cha bravely blocked the hole and saved everyone. When the storm and tsunami stopped, the local people gave Zheng He a unicorn as a gift of gratitude. This horse that had a horn was a precious treasure. The Chinese people had never seen such a unicorn before, and so when he took it back they were astonished. Due to the success of this mission, talks began for the next adventure to other lands. Zheng He and his crew were overjoyed and looked forward to their next big adventure.

New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

Regents Primary School of Shenzhen, Kim, Kyung Min Kai – 8

‘Zheng He is planning for a new trip!’ When I heard the news I was thrilled. I went to see Zheng and asked him if I could go along with him.

‘I have many talents. I can help you, Mr. He, I’m a kung fu boy. My secret weapon is my yo yo and the function of my weapon is awesome. I can climb everywhere and see things that no one can. I can be your spy.’

‘Can you give me a demonstration?’ Zheng said .

So I showed him my talents.

‘Ok !! You can come with me, I need people like you’ Zheng added.

The next day, we started our voyage. At the beginning, the sea was quiet, calm and tranquil, but suddenly a storm appeared out of nowhere. The lightening and thunder became very scary. Moreover, it disappeared in a second. I was very scared. ‘What happened?’ I asked. ‘Don’t worry! It’s just a storm.’ Zheng replied. Zheng ordered us to set sail to the nearest island.

After a long scary night, I was hungry so I went deep into the forest to find food. I found lots of fruit there. While I was picking the fruit, I saw something move behind the trees. I swung my yoyo toy towards the trees and I saw what it was. They were the native people. Many of them were holding swords and slings. They were wearing clothes which I had never seen before and they looked scary. Some of them were eating unicorns and there were blood stains on their clothes. I did not understand how could one eat unicorns! They are so pure and nice creatures!

I remembered the legend that says if you drink their blood you would become immortal. So I went back and told Zheng what I had seen. Once he heard my story, he said, ‘Humm!!! I have an idea!’ Let’s save the unicorns. Let’s divide our army into four groups and surround the native people.’ We have come in peace but now we need to fight with these people.

When the fight started, I found a place to hide myself. Then we came up with another idea. We decided to go to the other side. I could hear the natives shouting. I hid in a hole and saw ten of them coming towards us. So we started to fight back harder. Finally, we won the battle and we saved the unicorns. The unicorns thanked wholeheartedly and said good-bye to us.

Our journey continued, the new horizons were to be discovered and I was so happy that we could save the unicorns. It was an unforgettable experience for me. I know we were blessed by the unicorns and I wish they could be with us in our next battle.

The Sailing Missions

Regents Primary School of Shenzhen, Lin, Zi Hao Horace – 7

Early in the 15th [century](#), a huge fleet of ships set sail, and I was in this fleet. It was the first of a series of voyages in China and also it was my first voyage.

The voyage was led by Zheng He, the most important Chinese adventurer and one of the greatest sailors the world had ever known. I admired him when I was a child, and I was very excited to experience this voyage with him. I wanted to share one of the most dangerous adventures we have been.

I remembered one of our seven voyages: Before we set off, the sea was still calm, but when we left for several days, the sky was dark suddenly and then came the storm, we were all preparing for the storm, and suddenly a giant megalodon shark swooped at us. And the ship was constantly shaking. Zheng He kept us calm. Then I saw him stabbed the shark's head with a sword when the megalodon shark came back to us again. The megalodon shark's blood stained the sea. We were all happy, but a gust of wind hit, and there was a whirlpool that rapidly moving towards us. Zheng He quickly turned around the ship, but it's too late. We were all sucked on the ship.

Time passed slowly, we were too tired and we all felt asleep. When we woke up again, we were in the Devil Island. Altogether Zheng He, ten soldiers and I left on that island. After a few minutes, two soldiers stepped onto the vampire tree vine. They screamed and died all of a sudden. Although the rest of us gazed in horror, we didn't know what was going to happen next. By that time we were hungry and so we kept looking for some food. Suddenly a big snake appeared in front of us. When we fought with the snake, three soldiers died. Zheng He got injured also when he was trying to protect me. Luckily, I killed the snake with the sword in the end. We got a key and a map from the dead snake unexpectedly. We walked into a cave and accidentally found a treasure box. We opened the treasure box with the key and there we found a nautical topographic map inside. We then tried to merge with the large forces using the map got from the snake. With the help of the nautical topographic map, we successfully completed the next seven sailing missions.

We had experienced many adventures. The first adventure was the bad weather, we met the storm and the battle. The second adventure was the pirates, and with the help of the weapons, we defeated them at last. The third adventure was the dangerous animals such as the vampire tree vine, the sharks and the snakes. The fourth adventure was the people from other countries. Some people were hostile.

Of course, we did many preparations before we set off. Many tools facilitated us a lot for the success of this voyage, such as compasses, ocean maps, and weapons. But the most important resource was our good sailors.

Through this voyage, I learned to face all kinds of difficulties and challenges bravely.

New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

Regents Primary School of Shenzhen, Wang, Hei Chen Anna – 6

As the chief officer of this ship, I have many duties, including the navigation of the ship in the break of dawn. When I am on watch, I need to give my full focus and concentration when it comes to maneuvering the ship to safely avoid traffic and navigational obstacles. What I love most about my job is the idea that it helps me achieve a better understanding of the responsibilities I hold and the repercussions of what my leadership can bring. I know that if I do my job right then it will bring me incomparable glory.

Life on board is multifaceted, it broadens my horizon, opens my mind and brings with it a lot of unique experiences that I would never dream of experiencing on land. With this ship, I am able to travel around the world with the prestige and power of the Ming Treasure Fleet. I have seen different spectacular sceneries, met with different people belonging to different countries and enjoyed the beauty of different cultures and customs around the world. It has truly been a rich but humbling experience.

The sunrises and sunsets at sea were the most beautiful especially when the sunset transcended into different colours as it descended in the horizon. It is one of the most amazing and grandest sceneries that I had ever seen in my life. However, life at sea was not always pleasant, sometimes we encountered gigantic waves driven by gales with a height up to dozens of meters. These gigantic waves had left an indelible impression on me. The impression was felt so deeply that it made me realize how both destructive, powerful yet awe-inspiring Mother Nature could be.

While we journeyed across the seas, we carried with us a large quantity of gold, silk and other precious goods from our homeland. Whenever we arrived at a different land, we sent these materials as gifts to the local people to show them our kindness and sincerity, hoping to ease a path for diplomatic relations in the future. The locals tended to be moved deeply by these presents and in turn showing us with hospitality in the form of grand parties and celebrations. They served us with their delicious food and sent us all kinds of gifts. I thought the most interesting gifts were zebras and giraffes that we got from Africa during our first voyage. I had never imagined that there can be such a majestic animal whose height could reach 4–6 meters. When we returned to our homeland, all of the people were amazed to encounter these animals. These giraffes were subsequently sent to the Imperial Zoo. We successfully formed new relationships with many countries. They were amazed at the richness and power of our country. Many countries in turn, promised that they would send representatives to visit our country to show their admiration and strengthen our relationship with one another. It truly was a rewarding journey.

I would never forget the life in the Ming Treasure Fleet. These memories would be forever cemented as the best treasures of my life. The fleet continued to sail and was set to carry on its seventh voyage. I looked forward to reaping the rewards of what this new journey entailed on to another adventure!

New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

Regents Primary School of Shenzhen, Xu, Zi Yun Cloudy – 8

In China's Ming Dynasty, there lived a great explorer named Zheng He. He led the largest fleet and crew in the ancient world history and made seven voyages which lasted for 28 years at the sea.

After years of preparations, Zheng He's first voyage departed in 1405. At the beginning of the voyage, they loaded the ships full of fine Chinese silk, porcelain, and goods and gifts and trading with the locals. On the eve of his departure, Zheng He thought pensively about his upcoming journey and remembered the blue and white porcelain pot that his father brought back from Mecca. Comparing with the other blue and white porcelains at home, the pot looked special because its blue colour was vibrant and rich. His father explained that the secret of its vivid colours came from a special kind of blue pigment. However, he didn't know where he could find it as it was a long lost secret. With the location of its origin in his mind, the stunning blue and white porcelain appeared in Zheng He's dream that night. He decided to go abroad and find this special material. He wanted to produce the beautiful porcelain with the stunning blue colour in China, too.

The second morning, the fleet set sail. On that day, the sea was calm, and many sea birds flew in the sky. Everyone was busy doing their own things, some people were watching the weather, some were studying the route, and some were writing their diaries. Staying on the sea for days and nights, the sea changed drastically in an instant, at times it was calm and at times it was suddenly stormy. Once the terrible weather struck, Zheng He and his crew weren't afraid. All of the ships kept in touch during their voyages. The sea howled like a wild horse, and the waves rushed madly at the fleet, as if to tear it apart. Faced with such a dangerous situation, Zheng He remained calm and commanded the fleet to sail forward bravely in the billow.

The fleet passed through many islands and Zhang presented the gifts to the local kings for every visit as well as told stories about the Chinese culture. They also exchanged goods with the local residents, from whom they bought many special local products. When the people heard of his dream, they all helped Zheng He by bringing him many types of materials from their hometowns.

The fleet returned to China. Zheng He gave different types of materials that he collected from his trip to the porcelain artists to try, but none of them could make the special blue colour. Later, Zheng He and his fleet made several other voyages. Zheng He never forgot about his dream. Many new samples of materials were brought back to China for testing.

Finally, Zheng He heard the good news. The materials he brought back from Persia were what he had been looking for years. Since then, lots of materials were shipped back to China. They were used to manufacture the famous blue and white porcelain of the Ming Dynasty. Zheng's dream became true.

After all, Zheng He's voyages have been circulating all over the world.

The Great Voyages of Zheng He

Shanghai United International School Wanyuan Campus, Cao, Zachary – 8

This afternoon, I walked to my garden as usual. Suddenly, I noticed a small house on top of a tree. I was curious, so I climbed inside it. I saw a note on the floor. It said, “I can send you anywhere.” These days I was learning about Zheng He, so I told the note, “I wish I could go to Ming Dynasty.” The tree house started to shake and then everything was still. Absolutely still.

You would never guess where I was now. I found myself standing on a boat. No, it wasn’t a boat, but rather an enormous ship. The Captain of the ship, you guessed it, was the famous Zheng He. While on this ship, I found myself just as a Chef. I cooked a famous traditional Yunnan dish, steam pot chicken. I remembered that he came from Yunnan Province. Very quickly, I was summoned to see the great Zheng He.

He smiled at me and said, “You did a good job. You cooked well and made me think of my hometown.”

I felt happy.

“For this reason, I can answer you two questions,” he added.

I felt honored. My heart danced with delight.

I asked Zheng He the first question excitedly, “My master, you’ve been to many foreign countries, which is your favorite country? Can you share with me?”

He looked at me for a while and said, “This is a good question. I like Africa most because I brought back a giraffe. I was born in Yunnan in 1371. There are many rare animals there but I have never seen such an animal. It looks elegant because it is very quiet. It not only has a long neck but also beautiful large eyes and long lovely eyelashes. It’s amazing. You know, in 1405, I set off from China for the first voyage. We visited South–East Asia, the Middle East, and even the east coast of Africa. But I’ve never seen giraffe before. I like giraffe very much.”

I was shocked, but I managed not to show it. In fact, I didn’t think he liked giraffes so much because he didn’t look after them every day.

Then I asked Zheng He the second question anxiously, “My master, this is the seventh voyage. What do you think of your voyages?”

He laughed and replied proudly, “My voyage developed trade between China and foreign countries and also encouraged the exchange of cultures and technologies. China is now very well–known from my voyages.”

“Always be brave, and follow your dream.” Zheng He looked at me firmly and spoke.

I looked at him and nodded, too excited to say a word. I couldn’t agree with him more.

Ring, ring, ring!

“Zach, it’s time to get up.” A voice said loudly. It’s mum.

I suddenly woke up, looked around, and saw an open book called The Great Voyages of Zheng He lying on the desk. I smiled and said, “Wow, I dreamed a wonderful dream.”

The Great Voyages of Zheng He

Shanghai United International School Wanyuan Campus, Li, Cindy – 8

It was Saturday morning. I was doing puzzles. It was very hard so I didn't do any pieces. I was so tired that I went to sleep.

When I woke up, I realized I wasn't in my bed. I was on a ship!

Whose ship is that? I thought. I climbed the ladder. I saw a tall and strong person so I asked him, "Whose ship is it?"

"It's my ship. My name is Zheng He. Are you new here?"

"Yes," I fibbed. Just then, I heard a loud sound which sounded like something broke.

"Oh! My china!" shouted Zheng He. He started to cry.

"Don't worry. I know what to do."

First, I put some beans between the china. Then, I watered them. "Wait and see!"

The first day, the beans grew bigger. The second day, the beans grew so big that the skin split. The third day, I saw some yellow buds appeared. A week later, bean sprouts were fully grown. "Wow! The bean sprouts are soft so that they can protect our china. It's awesome." cried Zheng He.

Suddenly a sailor ran to Zheng He, "Captain! Someone has a serious illness!"

"Let me see," replied Zheng He. We went to the room where the sick person stayed. I saw a man who looked very tired and his nose and mouth were bleeding. I didn't say anything about it. I quickly went to the room where the china put in. I picked some bean sprouts and cooked them. I ran back to the room and told the sick person. "Eat it!" The next day the sick person recovered!

"Amazing!" cried Zheng He! "Why are the bean sprouts so helpful?"

"Bean sprouts are rich in vitamins and minerals. These nutrients are essential to human health." I replied.

"Pardon?"

"In short, the sick person couldn't eat any vegetables or fruits on the ship, so he was ill. The bean sprouts cured him of the disease!"

"FANTASTIC!" shouted Zheng He. "The bean sprouts cannot only protect the china but also cure disease! I sincerely appreciate your help. These are the diamonds from Turkey! Here you are."

"Thank you very much!"

I woke up. This time was real. The sun was shining in the sky and my puzzles were mysteriously finished. I saw something shiny. They were the diamonds that Zheng He gave to me! I looked inside. Some diamonds were still diamonds but some diamonds turned into gummy candies! I picked out the gummy candies and shared them with my friends. After we ate the candies, I told them my dream and asked, "What do you think about my dream?"

My friend Lisa stood up, "I think this dream is trying to tell you the real Silk Road stopped but the Silk Road in our heart continues!"

I agreed with Lisa, "It is a road of wisdom. It is the best of times."

The Golden Ship

Shanghai United International School WanYuan Campus, Liu, Emily – 8

It was a stormy day, Zheng He and his crew were lost in the middle of a big typhoon during the voyage with their vessel. After the storm, they unfortunately met a pirate ship. There was a strange captain on the pirate ship. He had a hook in place of his hand and a patch over one eye. He was taller and stronger than Zheng He and seemed very scary. Zheng He was afraid of the captain, but he was smart enough to deal with him.

After a while, an idea came across Zheng He's mind! The pirates love gold. He can decorate his vessel in gold. When the pirates go to the vessel, they will hide for a while and fight with them until the pirates get tired of finding gold. So they did. Zheng and his crew decorated their vessel in gold.

Just like Zheng expected, the pirates were crazy about the gold and paid no attention to Zheng He's crew. Suddenly Zheng and his crew jumped out and attacked the captain and other pirates by surprise. His crew fought bravely with the pirates. Because the pirates didn't prepare, Zheng He won before long.

In the end, the pirates drove their ship and ran away. Zheng He protected their goods safely. His crew cheered and jumped for joy! After that night, his crew respected Zheng He even more than ever for his wisdom and bravery.

Zheng He Goes To Indian Ocean

Shanghai United International School WanYuan Campus, Wang, Amber – 9

Zheng He was a navigator who lived during the Ming Dynasty .He was open-minded, determined and trusted. Zheng He had 62 vessels .His vessels were the biggest ships in the world at that time .He had 26,000 crew members.

In 1405, Zheng He started his first voyage. That day was a windy day .The wind was howling, the sky turned dark and the waves in the sea were like towers. "Oh My! The hurricane is coming!" Zheng He said shocked. The crew ran here and there, but Zheng He didn't run. He knew he was the captain and he will protect his crew.

He pulled the rope against the strong wind by himself .The crew saw Zheng He pull the rope so they helped Zheng He to fight against the hurricane. Tower walls of water were driven down slamming against the vessels. At the same time, he was trying to find a way out. He observed the hurricane carefully and suddenly, he saw the eastern side direction of an island had a very high cliff that could be a safe shelter for them. He ordered his crew to drive the vessels there at full speed, as fast as they could. They stayed there until the hurricane went away. The rain stopped. The wind stopped howling and the sky turned blue again.

They survived, with their courage and wisdom, and went on their voyage.

The Great Voyages or Zheng He

Shanghai United International School Wanyuan Campus, Wang, Matt – 9

Chapter 1

Once upon a time, there was a person named Zheng He. He was a famous navigator. He was a determined, open minded, smart because he had a lot of knowledge about the sea and everyone trusted him. Yong Le was the emperor of Ming dynasty and who made maritime silk road. Yong Le let him to explore the sea. First, Zheng He was afraid. With people's encouragement, he wanted to explore the sea.

Chapter 2

At that day, Zheng He shouted "Bye-bye!" to his country. He went into his boat with his mighty, domineering fleet. His fleet has 240 boats. Soldiers, oil supplier, food supplier and sailors included in the fleet. Zheng He was on the middle boat in the fleet. Half month pasted, suddenly, an arrow shot on a soldier's boat.

"My boat got a shot!" Pay attention to the pirates!" the soldier shouted. Just then, Zheng He saw the pirates are attacking his fleet.

"Fire the pirates!" Zheng He commanded. Then, many arrows shot out, all the pirates got a shoot and they died. Zheng He's fleet was safe again.

Chapter 3

They came to a mysterious country. It was eleven o'clock at night, so everyone was sleeping. They didn't tell anyone they came here. They slept on the grass near the boat. Next morning, some noise woke them up. Zheng He opened his eyes and he saw a crowd around them. "What's going on?"

"Stand straight!"

"Pay attention!" Then, Zheng He saw the king.

"Where are you from?"

"We are from China. We are the merchants."

"Go away! You silly merchants, we don't welcome you." The soldiers from China got really annoyed, they began to kill people!

"No!" said Zheng He, "If we have a war, we will have no food or boat, maybe no life! So, don't get into trouble." Then, they run away fast and got into the boat. They drove the boat quickly. They escaped from the country.

Chapter 4

Soon, they came to a country, Tai Wan. Really loved goods from China, silk, porcelain, bronze and some sculpture. They used jewelry to trade. Day by day, Zheng He and his fleet lived hard and happily after. Bad things happened and good things happened. He and his tremendous, durable and firm fleet sailed on the maritime silk road. They went through the important trading posts. Muzina, Mombasa, Alexandria, Constantinople and Rome. They had been across the Indian Ocean, Arabian sea, Red sea and he Mediterranean Ocean. And they arrived at the terminal –Rome.

"Hooray" They shouted, "We have arrived the terminal! Let's go trade for five days."

After five days, they need to go back to home. So they got on the ship and back to China. They reported the great adventure to Yong Le.

The Tempest: Zheng He's Trip to Turkey

Shanghai United International School Wanyuan Campus, Wang, Steve – 9

In 1381, my grandpa's grandpa's grandpa was born. My favorite time in children hood was listening to the story of him. His name is Link. Here is the story, give me some water please.

It's 1400, Link was the guard of Zheng He. One day, they were in Emperor Yongle's gigantic Palace, Emperor Yongle sent them for a great journey.

Yongle said, "It's a great opportunity for you guys, with such an honor to explore the whole world using these ships. To do or not to do, you choose!" I was shocked, Emperor Yongle said the same sentences 100 years before William Shakespeare. "Yes, my majesty." Zheng He prepared for several years and Link was on the same ship with him.

One sunny morning on the sea, the sunshine was on Link's shoulder. Their next destination was Turkey. He was worrying that none of them can speak Turkish.

Suddenly, a soldier reported, "We just saved a people from the sea, he wants to see the General Zheng for something very important."

"Send him in.", said General Zheng He. The man come in, he kneeled and said, "Please save my lord, our ship encounters a tempest and many of our people dead, my lord may still alive."

"Let me think about it!" Zheng He said.

One of the commanders said, "We cannot go, we need to arrive Turkey on time, and we are not sure if his lord is still alive. If we go for them, we may also encounter the tempest. We are on emperor's mission and cannot spent time to save people we don't know."

"On the sea, every life is important. If we encounter tempest, I do hope someone will save us. Let's go for them now." Zheng He said.

They spent one week, finally they found the survived people on a small island. This saving task delayed our whole plan to Turkey.

"Bang.... Bang.... Bang...." The bell of arrival rings.

Before landing, Zheng He called a meeting, "We need to be careful as we are delayed, and we still not yet have a good translator."

After Zheng He said this, the lord we said raised his hand, "My father can help!"

Zheng He's team followed him, but they finally arrived the King's castle. "Why are we here?" Link asked. The lord smiled, "Thank you, I am the prince of Turkey."

Many years later, when Zheng He's fleet come back to China. They brought back lots of treasures. But most important, team of fellowship from different countries. They have deep appreciation and they brought different cultures and technologies to China.

That's one of my favorite parts for the story. Give me some beer, I will continue.

<Zheng He will come back next season>

The First Giraffe in China

Shanghai United International School WanYuan Campus, Xu, James – 9

My grandfather told me the story about Zheng He and how the first giraffe come to China, which happened more than six hundred years ago.

It was the fourth time Zheng He came back from the Ming Treasure Voyage. He was the commander, with a total of 27670 people on the ships. This time the giant fleets visited Java, Sumatra, Maldives, India and the Persian Gulf. Zheng He presented gifts of gold, silver, porcelain and silk on the way, and received a lot of novelties in return.

There was one gift which gave him a really deep impression. It was a giraffe! He never saw such a strange animal and thought it was the tallest animal in the world. At first, there were two giraffes on the boat. The giraffes were leashed to the keepers and were arranged in the cages. They were fed with leaves. The ship was as big as a football field, and there were enough space for the distinguished guests. It was the first time for the giraffes to travel on the sea.

Unfortunately, one giraffe died because of the scare, but the other one survived. After landing, Zheng He led the giraffe to the imperial place. On the street people looked at the monster in a strange way. Yong Le emperor looked the monster up and down carefully. Zheng He was nervous and worried about if the emperor would like it or not. The animal had the head of a dragon, the antlers of a deer, the skin and scale of a fish, the hooves of an ox and tail of a lion, and obviously a long, long neck. After a few minutes, Yong Le emperor smiled and considered it to be a qilin (a kind of animal) which would bring good luck to the country and people. Of course, the emperor gave him a big reward. After that, the first imported giraffe lived in the imperial zoo in Nanjing.

Last Sunday, I went to Shanghai Zoo. I went to the giraffe area and I wondered to myself: are there any later generations of the first imported giraffes from the Treasure Voyage in Ming Dynasty?

In the Book with Zheng He

Shanghai United International School Wanyuan Campus, Xu, Jessica – 8

Slurp! I was reading a book about Zheng He while doing a reading reflection. I wrote that I learned he was a great navigator who had gone on 7 expeditions. He was great at trading, how generous. Whoop! I was so bored doing these things on Sunday! So I fell asleep fast.

Soon, I opened my eyes. I saw that my home had become a huge, azure sea, and my desk had become a coarse plank! I was terrible because my dress was a mess, and my hair was almost like a “crazy hedgehog’s thorn”. The water was ice-cold, so I couldn’t stay still. I wanted to swim, but my legs were sore, what could I do? I could yell for help, I thought. I climbed up to the floating plank and exhausted all my strength to yell, “Help!!!!”

I thought I was going to die! No one replied me at all! How sad I was...Oh...

Suddenly, I saw a huge fleet. It was exactly the same as the one in the book! Was it Zheng He? They saw me! Hooray!

One man carried me to the ship and he exclaimed, “It’s a girl! It’s a girl!”

“Don’t be noisy, Kwack.” said another handsome man in a long scarlet cloak. “You’re a young girl. Do you want to help?”

“Yes, I can do whatever you want, if I can”

“Can you eat, drink and sleep?” said Kwack.

I glanced at him, he was very fat and annoying. I don’t like him.

“Be quiet, Kwack!” said the man, “Hello, I’m Zheng He, Nice to meet you!”

“Hello, I’m Jessica... You said you’re Zheng He, right?”

“Yep. What’s wrong?”

“Holy moly!” I gasped, “I’m your biggest fan.”

“Sorry! I don’t understand what you’re saying, but you like me, right?”

“Uhhhh...Mmm... Like that, maybe...” I shuttered.

After I had been working with Zheng He and Kwack for ten years, Zheng He told me that it was time for me to go home. I had stayed so long! I was depressed but I knew I had to go, so I hugged him tightly and left. I was crying on the way home because I wanted to see him. He was brave, generous and very nice to me. I liked him but not Kwack.

I sat down in my bedroom and suddenly, I heard a loud “unnice” sound, “Ding!Ding!Ding!Ding!Ding!” I woke up. I cannot believe it’s just a dream!

The next day, on the way to school I saw a man smiling at me. He looked like Zheng He and told me he was my uncle! Suddenly I recognized that he was my uncle lost for 10 years! I hugged him. “I know! You’re my uncle! Can I call you ZhengHe?”

“Why?” he asked.

“Because you look like Zheng He from my dream last night” I said.

“That’s Okay,” he said, “You can call me whatever you want”.

“That’s great” I exclaimed.

Do you think Zheng He is my uncle?

The Expedition to India

Shanghai United International School Wanyuan Campus, Yu, Ruby – 8

“BANG!!!” The drum was banging. Zheng He found a new island because he heard some unfamiliar powerful music was louder and louder. It was India!

They got off the fleet and exclaimed “WOW!” They saw a beautiful view. Everyone had dark skin. The women had big eyes, long hair, beautiful clothes and shiny jewelry.

At the very beginning, the Indians thought the visitors were an army because there were some knights. Just then, Zheng He heard someone whispering Emperor Yongle’s favorite song. He thought, “we can sing songs, so that these local people can know we won’t attack them.”

It worked! The Indians knew Zheng He and his fleet wouldn’t attack them. They chose a person to lead the way for Zheng He because they needed to talk with Bahobali and Tiposhina (the King and the Queen of India). Bahobali and Tiposhina met them formally in the palace, and talked about trading goods between India and China.

When the meeting was finished, Zheng He ordered some people to carry out the goods. When they were preparing, Zheng He explored India. He used body language to ask and the Indians used body language to answer. He learned that men wear dhoti, and women wear sari. Their transportation was oxcart.

When Zheng He finished his exploration, everyone was ready to trade. There were jade, silk, bronze and china. One man liked jade, so he traded for it with some tea. Someone else liked jade too, so they asked, “where did you get it?” The man pointed at the shop. More and more Indians came to buy the jade, silk, bronze and china. They used tea, spices and curry powder to trade.

A week later, it was time to leave for the next stop. Zheng He met Bahobali and Tiposhina again to say goodbye. Tiposhina was very curious about China, so she sent her most trusted envoy called Gary to stay with Zheng He and his fleet. “My envoy will send my best wishes to your country and your emperor,” said Tiposhina.

In the whole life, Zheng He made 7 expeditions across the Atlantic Ocean. He explored lots of countries. When Zheng He thought of this trip, he was so proud of discovering this fantastic country and meeting the kind and polite Indians. “I am so happy that we do not only trade, but also learn! We learn songs, new ways of crafting beautiful things and cooking yummy food!” he said with a big smile on his face.

The Strangest Person in the World

Shrewsbury International School, Sham, Pius – 8

'Mission impossible!' Admiral Zheng sighed, showing me the parchment with the royal seal.

'Bring me the strangest person in the world,' I recited, 'or your head. OOPS!'

'Alright, squire,' Admiral Zheng gazed at me, 'This will be our eighth voyage and I swear there won't be a ninth. But where shall we go?'

'Wait, I've heard of the yeti when we travelled to Calicut. He has long wool and big feet. Go ask the sultan!' I suggested.

And there we sailed...

'I am so sorry!' the sultan said, 'The yeti is so elusive that all we have got is his wool!'

'Yes sir, yes sir, three bags full!' his minister joined in.

'Wait, I've heard of the zombie when I travelled to Africa. He will do whatever you tell him to after you cast a spell. Go ask the wizard!' the sultan quipped.

And there we sailed...

'I'm so sorry!' the wizard said, 'The zombie lives in Africa West but here is Africa East!'

'Yes sir, yes sir, why don't you buy some of these spotted camels or striped horses instead? They'll make excellent souvenirs!' his wife joined in. Honestly, we thought they painted the brown spots and black stripes to try to make a fortune.

'Wait, I've heard of the hole-in-chest guy when I travelled to Champa. He puts poles in the hole in his chest when he travels. Go ask the guy!' the wizard remarked.

And there we sailed...

'I'm so sorry!' the guy said, 'I travel in a sedan chair that makes it look like I've poles in my chest, but I've no holes in my chest!'

'Yes sir, yes sir, the writer of the Curious Journal who interviewed him twisted his words to boost sales!' his friend joined in.

'Wait, I've heard of the short people when I travelled to Palembang. They hunt giant rats and dwarf elephants in a nearby island. Go ask the hunter!' the guy pleaded.

And there we sailed...

'I'm so sorry!' the hunter said, 'We haven't traded ivory with them since my great-great-great-grandfather! Maybe they moved away.'

'Yes sir, yes sir, we call them Orang Pendek!' his companion joined in.

'Wait, I've heard of the forest people when I travelled to Borneo. They have arms much longer than yours but legs much shorter than yours. They have hairy skin but bald head. They make funny face and noisy speech. Go ask the locals!' the hunter recounted.

And there we sailed...

'I'm so sorry I missed that scene!' Admiral Zheng exclaimed. 'The Emperor must be fond of them!'

'Yes sir, yes sir, they followed us on board just for a bunch of bananas!' I joined in.

Months later in Beijing...

'The Emperor is fond of them! He spends hours babbling with them! We made a fortune!' Admiral Zheng told me. 'Wait. What did the locals call them, squire?'

'Orang utan, sir!' I answered.

(The End)

Attack of the Reptile Pirates

Shrewsbury International School, Zarin, James – 7

CLANG! The sounds of swords clattering together was deafening. SHING! BANG! Gee and his friends were delivering food to South Africa when a bunch of muscular pirates named after reptiles attacked them. BOOM! Gee and his brother, Yee, who had a robotic hand, were accompanied by their two best friends, Yang and Woo, who quickly jumped out of the battle to sharpen their weapons. Suddenly the reptile pirates set their ship, the Zhang, on fire. When they walked out of the Armory, all of sailors they travelled with were dead except Captain Ming. He was injured and dying. When Captain Ming saw Gee, Yee, Yang and Woo, he whispered urgently. “Can you get the mission done? It would be very kind of you – Farewell, my friends!” Before he fell noisily to the floor.

Yee, Gee, Yang and Woo were all squeezed together in a filthy canon. The reptile pirates got them! Cobra, one of the reptile pirates, marched up to them. He lit the cannon and then Captain Komodo, the leader of the reptile pirates yelled to them, “We’re going to blast you far away!” The next thing they knew, they were blasted off high into the sky.

Gee opened his eyes slowly. When he woke up, he saw that he had landed in a bush! He could see Yee was unconscious to his right and Woo buried in sand to his left, but where was Yang? Unexpectedly, there was a loud crash which woke everyone up. Yang had fallen from a tree! They quickly made a raft big and strong enough to hold them all. It was on this raft that they managed to get all the way to China!

It was a rough and hard journey. When they reached China, they told the Government about their adventure. A funeral was arranged for Captain Ming. Some sailors continued the mission of bringing food to South Africa while others went to deal with the reptile pirates. Thankfully, the evil pirates ended up jumping into the sea because they were so scared!

Later that week, Captain Ming’s burial procession arrived at the cemetery. As everyone gathered around they heard a familiar voice behind them. “Hey! What are you guys doing giving me a funeral? I’m not even dead. This is one of the reptile pirates that tried to kill you guys,” he said, pointing to a pirate on the floor. “You’d better lock him up. I also learned how to swing from tree to tree. Monkeys nursed me back to life. They are unique, clever and have a secret language. You should get to know them. Now, I’m going to have a short nap if you don’t mind.”

Captain Ming fell to the floor and started sleeping. Everyone thought his speech was hilarious and started laughing hard. The villagers went back to their homes and went on with their lives. They never heard of the reptile pirates again.

The Missing Treasure

St Margarets Co-Educational English Secondary and Primary School, Chan, Casey – 8

A long time ago, there was a courageous merchant who sailed from China to exotic countries. One silent and dark night, Captain Shi Hong was sailing on the glittering deep blue water beneath the illumination moon. After sailing for days, he found an exotic island with soft sand which glowed like jewels underneath the bright sun. There were juicy fruits with a very powerful taste and pine needles with an emerald colour. When Captain Shi Hong explored the land, he found precious metallic gold. As he was collecting the gold, he spotted some fearsome looking pirates sailing a worn out and rusty ship with a Jolly Rodger on top. The pirates were holding pointy daggers. When they got closer, Captain Shi Hong got his razor-sharp sword out ready to fight the bloodthirsty pirates. The pirates were there to steal tons of gold, emeralds and jewels. At that time, the captain thought of an idea... “If I could distract the pirates and tell them to go somewhere with more gold, I could escape!”

So Captain Shi Hong shouted, “Hey pirates! I know a place with tons and tons of gold and riches!” The surprised pirates replied “tons of booty?” Captain Shi Hong nodded. The pirates quickly sailed away, meanwhile the captain hurried to his boat to escape the island. He set off to explore a new land. One foggy night, Captain Shi Hong was on his ship searching a map for new exotic places. Suddenly, he saw an enormous sea monster. The monster was behind his ship! It was so close he decided to swing his anchor at the sea monster. When the sea monster was gone, the captain sailed for land as fast as he could. When he arrived, he noticed six long ships on the beach. Vikings! Captain Shi Hong courageously fought against the growling Vikings. He remembered he had a wondrous and magical rock. He threw the precious rock into the water and the Vikings followed it deep to the bottom of the sea. Captain Shi Hong decided to sail back to China. He planned on building a village for homeless people, but he was also planning where he could search for more gold!

The Voyagers of the Sea

St Margarets Co—Educational English Secondary and Primary School, Johal, Jasman – 8

700 years ago, there was a group of good voyagers from China who would travel around the seas and discover new places in the world. One day, the voyagers were called in to the palace by the Emperor of China for an important and special task. When they arrived, the Emperor welcomed them and asked, “Dear noble Voyagers, I would like you to travel around and donate containers of gold and silk to the people of India, Africa and Arabia. We want to make good relationships with them, and also learn different cultures from them. Would you all be kind to do that for me?” without thinking for a second, the voyagers started their journey across the seven seas to donate gold and silk to the countries.

The voyagers first travelled to India, but on their way, there was a group of greedy pirates that went on their ship and tried to steal their gold. They fought the pirates courageously, and luckily the voyagers won the fight and continued their journey. When they all arrived in India, the captain, named Zu, gave 3 big containers of gold and silk to India. The Indians felt very grateful for what they did and as a token of thanks, the Indians taught the voyagers how to make traditional curry. The voyagers also took some curry and traditional spices so that they could share them with the emperor.

After that, the sailors continued their voyage to donate the valuables to Africa. When they arrived, they were shocked and surprised to see that Africa was full of trees and greenery. They had to fight their way through a jungle to get to a village. Fortunately, there was a kind villager that led the voyagers to their home. Whilst they were walking they saw many beautiful plants, gigantic canopies and many exotic animals too!

Finally they had arrived. However, captain Zu fainted! The other voyagers started to panic and shouted for help. Luckily the kind villager knew how to heal people with herbal medicine. So he rushed to the forest, grabbed some leaves and mashed them up into a drink for captain Zu. Zu drank it and woke up! The others were amazed and cheerful for what happened. They also thanked the villager for his help. They gave 7 large containers of shining gold and smooth silk to the village chief. Before they all left, the villager taught the voyagers how to make medicine so they could use it back in China.

At last, they travelled to Arabia. The voyagers donated their last few containers of riches to the Arabians, and in exchange, the Arabians gave them fresh delicious coffee beans! The voyagers set sail to return home and present their exotic gifts to the emperor.

A Pirate Tale

St Margarets Co-Educational English Secondary and Primary School, Lee, Jayda – 8

The sound of the ship creaking through the large waves made the sailors sleep soundly. The sun was rising and the crew were waking up. Morning came. “Arr!” said a loud shipmate. “Captain me matey! We encountered an island!”

“Then we shall make sail for it and find rest!” said the captain. But little did they know that the mysterious and exotic island was actually a resting sea monster!

The captain was first to step off the ship. When they set foot on the land, the island started to move from beneath them. Their ship was drifting farther and farther from the island. Too far for them to reach. They had nothing but each other. They were lost in the deep dark seas. When they had nearly lost hope, some bloodthirsty pirates were encountering the island too. The sailors silently sneaked onto their ship. Night time came, survival mode was on. It was a dark and stormy night. The thunder roared out loudly as the sailors and pirates were snoring as the ship rocked them back and forth in the roaring waters. There was something huge, something dangerous coming from the deep depths of the ocean. When it rose up it shook the ship violently. The pirates woke up and took their mighty weapons to fight the monster. “Crew, we must fight harder, said the captain.

“Aye aye” replied the crew. Using their strongest weapons, the creature sank back into the darkness of the ocean. The captain asked his crew to find materials to cover leaks in the ship to stop it sinking. They saw an island emerge with a town on it. “My crew, we must take our treasure and bring it to the island or our boat will sink!” they took off in a raft and set sail for the town. A man came and greeted them kindly. “Bonjour! How may I help you” he asked. “We want to stay for a few days and buy a new ship” replied the captain. The kind man led them to his house.

“Where are we? What is this island” the captain asked curiously. “My dear friend, you are in La île tropicale!” he said gleefully, the days passed slowly until it was time for them to leave the island and say their last goodbye. As they set sail they wondered about their future adventures and who they would encounter next.

Treasure Voyage

St Margarets Co-Educational English Secondary and Primary School, Wong, Kaitlyn – 8

A long time ago, courageous voyagers sailed across the deep, dark sea. They were on a hunt for treasure. Unluckily they had already been sailing for days and days without reaching land. One day, big waves made the ship rock furiously. A sailor on deck called George saw an island! He felt ecstatic, and screamed excitedly “there’s an island!”

Everybody woke up and rushed out so fast and crowded on the deck. Everyone was thrilled. The captain immediately steered the boat to their island. When they got closer they saw that the island was gorgeous! It had a forest full of tall pine trees with bristly pine needles, and the sand was sweet and glided beneath their feet. The captain set the anchor, then one by one the voyagers jumped off. George was over the moon that they had found an island, but they didn’t know if this land had treasure. Suddenly he heard a joyous cry “I found it!” George turned around to see a young sailor raising up a map and waving it rapidly. “It’s a...treasure...map!

George saw that they had to go through a tropical forest, arrive at the dark and gloomy cave and find a tree marked with an X. He gathered everyone and they set off between the trees. Suddenly they heard some scary and mean voices coming from the beach. They heard “hmm, it seems like someone is here already!” another gruff voice said “then we will be faster than them”.

The captain whispered frantically “oh no! I think it’s the Vikings!” They decided to go and find the treasure, whilst some of the crew fought the Vikings. George reminded them “we have each other, so we don’t have to be afraid”. They kept on going and not long after they arrived at the cave. Inside the dark cave, the light was getting dimmer and dimmer. A few minutes later no one could see anything. The voyagers didn’t know what to do, so they huddled together for warmth. They thought the crew was caught by the terrible Vikings! Not long after, the crew got to the cave! They all screamed with excitement and joy. Together they found the exit, and they saw a quicksand road. One by one they stepped on rocks to cross the quicksand. Suddenly, a sailor called Samuel slipped and fell into the quicksand! George told everyone to stay calm. A sailor took a vine from a tree, they swung it to Samuel. Luckily he caught the vine! The voyagers pulled and Samuel flew into the air, right into a tree marked with an X. Samuel had landed on the treasure! They all began to dig and dig and dig. At last they felt something hard, so they carefully pulled out a chest. They opened the chest and saw tons of sparkling gold! There were crowns and coins, diamonds and rubies! Everyone felt ecstatic. The voyagers brought the jewels back to their ship, and happily they sailed for home.

The Stolen Treasure of Doom

St Margarets Co-Educational English Secondary and Primary School, Wong, Starrie – 8

Once upon a time there were three sailors called Sun, Moon and Day. They liked to use their collected treasures to help poor people all over the world. One day, they fought their enemy Captain Richard. They won and not only took over his empire but also all the valuable including gold and silver coins.

This time they decided to bring them on their voyage to help the poor people. They sailed for almost a month without spotting land. Suddenly they saw a mysterious land with bright green palm trees, shiny sand and also brown coconut trees. They slowly sailed to the mysterious land and prepared to take rest.

After a long day, Sun got on the sail boat and decided to use a telescope to see the beautiful scenery. Moon wanted to see and checked their valuable treasures. When she opened the treasure box she found it had all disappeared! They all felt terrified. They went to the boat cockpit and continued to sail and look for their missing treasure. Sun, Moon and Day passed a lot of countries on their journey like China, Russia, Britain and Japan. They asked different people where the treasure may be. In Japan, a man called Jun who was also a sailor and lived in a dense forest for over a hundred years said “Maybe the treasure is in a cave, but there is a horrible sea dragon inside”. Sun asked, “Where is the cave?” Jun said, “The cave is inside a village, there is smoke and a haunting sound coming out! Be careful, the sea dragon is very powerful and no one can defeat it.” Moon thanked him, and they continued their journey to find the treasure.

They walked across the land, climbed over mountains and after a few days they spotted a dark and gloomy cave. Moon and Day decided to courageously go into the cave and search for the treasure. After a while, they heard a strange and horrible ROAR! They followed the sound to see if the treasure was there.

Suddenly the sea dragon came out. It was humungous with long, pointy and sharp tail. It was dark black and its eyes were dark green. Moon whispered, “Hey, the treasure is behind the sea dragon!” Day jumped on its sail and Moon jumped on its neck. They cooperated together and hit the sea dragon as hard as they could.

The sea dragon used its big mouth to breathe lightening fire. Moon was hurt, but Day stabbed his sword into the sea dragons’ skull. They quickly grabbed the treasure and rushed back to their ship.

They were so happy that they were bursting with joy. Later, they shared their treasure with poor people across the world. Together they continued their adventurous journey.

The Amazing Adventure with Zheng He

St. Paul's Co-educational College Primary School, Leung, Suet Ching – 8

I will never forget that day.....

I got lost with my family when I was exploring in a dark cave. I saw a stone glimmering in the dark. I reached out to touch it. Suddenly, there was a flash of strong light. VOOM!

When I woke up, I saw people with odd clothes and I had changed my clothes too! “Oops! Luckily my backpack is still here!” I thought to myself. I saw a man nearby. I ran to ask him where I was and who he was. He said, ‘My name is Zheng He. You are on one of my decks.” I was surprised! I bowed my head quickly. “Nice to meet you, Zheng He. I am Jasmine and I am from the future.....”

Zheng He brought me to Yongle the Emperor. We went into a huge pier. There sat many big boats! Yongle the Emperor said, “Zheng He, these boats belong to you now! Explore the world and trade precious presents with people you meet.” “WOW! Such SPLENDID ships!” I whispered. Zheng smiled and proudly presented,” Yes, kid! We have ships to carry treasures, horses and even troops!” For the following months, Zheng and I travelled around the world on our ship!

One day, we saw a big black ship sailing in front of ours. “HOLD BACK! PIRATES! Chen Zuyi and his devil crew!” Zheng was stunned and shouted loudly.

“Long time no see, mate!” Chen laughed cunningly! The two armies stood on their own ships facing each other. Zheng’s troops were prepared to fight.

“BOOM! BOOM!” The wicked pirates beat the drums fiercely. I saw Chen murmur something like spells. A giant monster suddenly popped up from the sea! “Watch out! What is this octopus-like monster?” I screamed with a trembling voice.

Zheng’s troops tried to hold a long rope to trap the Sea Monster. “Try our best to fight, mates!” shouted Zheng. They used all the arrows and cannonballs they had to fight with the furious Monster.

I took out my chocolate bars from my backpack. “Hey, look here!” I shouted at the Sea Monster and threw the chocolate bars into its big mouth. The Sea Monster opened its mouth wide! “IT got my CHOCOLATE BARS and dived back into the ocean!”

“Hurray! Hurray!” Zheng’s troops captured Chen and his team finally. They took the wicked pirates back to Yongle the Emperor and put them in the dungeon.

Yongle the Emperor was very pleased with what we had done. He wanted to give me some precious gifts as rewards but I refused. “Please donate these precious gifts to the poor, my Majesty.” I bowed. “I do miss my family and friends so much! I have to say goodbye and go back to my time.” I blinked at Zheng.

“Goodbye, my little hero!” Zheng smiled, and I saw his tears rolling down his cheek.

In a flash, I was back to the dark cave. I would never forget this amazing adventure with Zheng He in Ming Dynasty

The Untold Eighth Treasure Voyage— in memory of my beloved Godfather, Zheng He

St. Paul's Co-educational College Primary School, Yuen, Fe – 8

Dear Godfather,

I did it! I have just realised your lifelong dream of circumnavigation, to prove that Earth is round! Hope I have made you proud. I missed you dearly and regretted incredibly for my absence at your funeral, as I learnt about the tragic news¹ only recently when my fleet reached *Quanzhou*.

Ten months after you embarked on your seventh treasure voyage, *Xuande* Emperor ordered me to lead an expedition of circumnavigation. The emperor thought previous voyages focused too much on the display of wealth. He believed a global circumnavigation could demonstrate the superiority of China in scientific exploration in the region. The emperor ordered us to keep the plan a secret, and understandably so.

As it was the first time I led an expedition of this scale, I wanted to stay modest. Instead of a more ambitious plan of a complete east–west circumnavigation, I planned to circumnavigate north–south, just around the ocean² outside the East China Sea.

It was May 1431. My fleet left the port of *Liujiangang*, travelled northeast, and passed through the strait between *Jin* and *Wo*. Based on the methods described in *Zhoubi Suanjing*, my crew and I duly observed the midday sun to track our latitudes. The fleet reached the farthest north as it navigated past the Kamchatka Peninsula. Since we had been travelling in a reasonably straight line, the changes in latitude made us believe that we had been moving on a curved surface instead of a flat one. The evidence for a spherical Earth was emerging.

In November of the same year, we discovered a new world. It was vast, occupied by very friendly *Ohlone* natives. They were delighted to receive treasures from us, and in return, asked us to give their place a toponym. We took the opportunity and named it “*Xuande*”, after our emperor.

After leaving *Xuande*, we kept navigating south. We reached the farthest south on our journey in September 1432, encountered a continent, covered entirely in ice and occupied by exotic animals — bird-like animals that waddle and live in colonies. They were very agile swimmers, in contrast to some lazy, gigantic species which laid still sunbathing near the shore.

Everything sailed smoothly until a thunderstorm hit us in April 1433 and wrecked one of our ships. Luckily, we found a nearby island where we took the time to reorganise. Finally, the critical moment came on 18 June 1433 when our fleet approached *Liujiangang* northbound, the opposite of how we departed. I murmured to myself in disbelief, “Earth is indeed spherical!!!!” Everyone on board burst into tears of joy.

It has been a long two years, and I am glad to be home. Last night, I dreamt of us to be the very first global circumnavigators. After waking up, I keep wondering if the eighth treasure voyage were the world-first³... Anyway, I shall bring the good news to the emperor tomorrow. Wish me luck!

Sincerely and respectfully yours,
En-Lai

¹ I role-played Zheng En-Lai (鄭恩來), Zheng He’s godson, when writing *The Untold Eighth Treasure Voyage*.

² Some believed Zheng He died in Calicut, India during his seventh voyage in the spring of 1433.

³ Today’s Pacific Ocean.

⁴ *Jin* (辰): Today’s South Korea.

Wo (倭): Today’s Japan.

⁵ *Zhoubi Suanjing* (周髀算經): the earliest books on astronomy in Chinese history.

⁶ *Xuande* city was renamed to “San Francisco” by Spanish colonists in 1776.

⁷ The Magellan–Elcano circumnavigation completed in 1522, 89 years after Zheng En-Lai.

Ming Treasure Adventures

St Stephen's College Preparatory School, Cheung, Elana – 6

Xiu Ting was only six years old when her older twin brothers, Li Ming and Li Hang, left their small village to become pirates in the imperial Ming Treasure Fleet. Her brothers had always dreamed of seeing the foreign world, so when they heard that the Emperor was looking for a crew of young men and women to sail the seas, they immediately sent a letter to the imperial capital of Nanjing declaring their interest. Within weeks, they had packed their bags and were ready for their journey.

However, both brothers did not have any sailing experience. Therefore, they were assigned roles onboard the ship. Li Ming wanted to know how to make the cuisine of the world, so he joined the cooks. As they travelled around the world, he learned about the different spices and dishes from the local people. Li Hang, on the other hand, wanted to learn how to fight to protect the ship from dangerous pirates. So, he trained until he was ready for battle.

During their voyages, Li Ming and Li Hang explored many new places in the world. They visited Java, a beautiful tropical island, and saw lots of interesting wildlife and beautiful scenery. The people there were friendly, and had a colourful culture full of traditional music and dances. Li Ming and Li Hang danced and sang with the local people for many days until it was time to leave. To thank the people, they gave them gold, silk, wine and precious jewellery. The local people were very touched and thankful.

However, not all the people they met were friendly. On the way to Ceylon, pirates who wanted to steal their treasure attacked the Ming Treasure fleet. But, Li Hang fought bravely with the other soldiers and defeated the pirates. Luckily, when they reached Ceylon, the nice local people gave them delicious curries and thanked them for defeating the evil pirates. Li Ming learned a lot about cooking spicy food from the local people, and when they left the island, the people of Ceylon gave them different spices to take back to China. Using these spices, Li Ming was able to cook a lot of delicious curves for the people on the ship.

Li Ming and Li Hang sailed the seas for seven years with the Ming Treasure Fleet, and visited as far as Africa. When they came back home, Xiu Ting was thirteen years old. They told her of their many adventures, and of everything they learned from the people of the world. “You can learn a lot of fascinating people by travelling the world,” said Li Ming. “I also saw the most breathtaking natural scenery and manmade architecture. I’ll remember it forever.”

From then on, Xiu Ting also decided that she wanted to become a pirate on the Ming Treasure Fleet like her brothers. She studied hard at school, and when she was finally eighteen, she had her very own adventure.

New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

St Stephens College Preparatory School, Cheung, Michelle – 7

In the 1400s, a fleet of ships set sail from China to their neighbouring countries. They brought lots of gold and silk in the ships as gifts in order to build up friendship with the people of the countries they visited. There were altogether seven voyages.

For the first two voyages, the ships from China brought gold, silk, tea and also fruits and gave them to people of the nearby countries. People there were happy because they were poor and they did not have all these precious items. They asked the Chinese ships to come back and bring more things for them.

The third time they went, there was a big storm at sea. The ship was too fragile and not strong enough. Sea water kept getting into the ship and the ship almost sank. Some sailors fell into the sea but luckily they were saved by a mermaid called Amira and her sisters. Amira was the eldest mermaid princess lived in the castle under the sea. She had six younger sisters. All of them had magic powers. Amira's mother was called Queen Abreyshia and she had the strongest magic power. Amira and her sisters saved all those sailors who sailed into the sea. The sailors felt very happy to have pretty girls helping them. They did not know they were mermaids, but they wanted to see them again.

The ship went many times to these countries but they did not see the mermaid again until the seventh voyage. This time the storm in the sea was very huge and the ship was tossed around in the sea. The captain also lost control of the ship and the sailors felt very dizzy. This time the ship sank into the sea. Amira found the ship sinking, but this storm was too big, even Amira and her sisters couldn't help. Amira and her sisters were very kind, they asked Queen Abreyshia to help them to raise the ship out of the water. Queen Abreyshia agreed to help, she used all her strength to lift up the ship, Amira and the other mermaids drained the water from the ship. The sailors saw the mermaids through the portholes of the ship, they were very surprised because they thought they were human beings but they were not, they were "Mermaids!"

The sailors went back to see the emperor, they told him about the things that had happened in their voyages. The emperor asked the sailors to bring the mermaids back, so he sent the sailors to find the mermaids. The sailors kept looking for the mermaids and they did see them swimming in the water. The sailors shouted "Thank you!" to the mermaids from the ship. The sailors did not catch the mermaids because they liked them. When the sailors saw the emperor, they told him mermaids couldn't live on land and so they did not bring them back.

Since then, no one ever saw the mermaids again.

A Lucky Fall

St. Stephen's College Preparatory School, Chu, Charlotte Tsz Ying – 8

The mighty China Ming treasure fleet sails in the South China sea and beyond, and is led by the most famous admiral Zheng He of China. I am a young sailor in the China Ming treasure fleet. I was born in a little village next to the ocean. It was my childhood dream to sail to different parts of the world. I am honoured to be a member of the China Ming treasure fleet. Our mission is to meet with different people around the world and exchange goods. The fleet is famous for its size and the treasures it carries such as gold bars, Chinese silks, jewellery, jade sculptures and much more. However, the voyages can sometimes be dangerous because there are pirates everywhere!

We had been at sea for weeks, and one hot summer's day, I was helping mop the floor and clean the deck when suddenly, I heard screaming from other sailors. They were yelling "PIRATES ARE COMING!! RUN!!" Instead of running away, I ran to the back of the ship wanting to see the pirates with my own eyes. I saw five pirate ships sailing towards us. The huge pirate ships had cannons, and I heard loud noises like claps of thunder and saw smoke coming out of the pirate ships as cannon balls flew towards us! Luckily, the cannon balls narrowly missed us. Frightened the pirates would sink our ships, I was about to run and hide, when I heard a strong voice saying "Stay calm!!" "Every sailor on deck gather your weapons. The pirates are here for our treasures and we must protect them!" It was Admiral Zheng He and he ordered his men to arm themselves and prepare to fight the pirates. The Ming treasure fleet began to turn around and head towards the pirates. As we got closer to the pirate ships, we fired back with our cannons. Our cannon balls hit some of the pirate ships and badly damaged them. Our fleet ran straight into the pirate ships and our armed men jumped onto the pirate ships then attacked them. Admiral Zheng He shouted "Attack and destroy their ships". I followed the Admiral as we boarded the pirate ship. I swung my sword wildly with my eyes closed because I was so scared. The next thing I knew, I had tripped and fallen into my Admiral! I heard the sounds of the fighting continuing. Many pirates were injured in the battle and some fell overboard. At the end, the pirates were outnumbered and retreated. Some pirates abandoned their ships and some were captured by us. Zheng He claimed victory and everyone cheered.

That night, we had a big feast to celebrate our victory and the Admiral told me that I had saved his life by falling into him and knocking him out of the path of a bullet! The next morning, we repaired our ships and we set sail for more adventure on the mighty China Ming treasure fleet!

Voyage to Africa

St Stephen's College Preparatory School, Chu, Yan Kiu Carina – 6

Yesterday, my Daddy told me a story about Zheng He, our China's great admiral about five hundred years ago and his adventures in seven voyages to India, Arabia and Africa.

At night, I had a dream about Admiral Zheng. He was as tall as a door. He was strong, muscular and can carry very heavy things. Admiral Zheng led a large fleet of ships. The main ship was enormous. The shape of the ship resembled a dragon. It was ten floors high ten basketball courts long. It had more than hundred rooms and could accommodate about 1,000 people.

I was a Chinese doctor working on Admiral Zheng's ship during the voyage to Africa. My job was to do acupuncture and herbal therapy for the crews. I made herbal medicine to treat diseases like diarrhea, sore throat and even measles. One day during the journey to Africa, Admiral Zheng asked, "Doctor Carina, do you have any idea of what we could help other countries?" Then I replied, "hmm, maybe I could try working on developing a new Chinese medicine to cure Malaria as Malaria was a serious illness in Africa." Admiral Zheng nodded his head and looked at me with a smile.

Admiral Zheng was a nice and knowledgeable man. Sometimes, he talked to me about interesting stories of navigation at night.

After three months of travel, we finally arrived a town along the East coast of Africa. I was very excited. The weather was hot and dry. I saw many stone houses. People wore clothes made of cotton and some wore goatskins. We have visited a number of coastal towns in Africa. We gave porcelain, silk, in exchange for tortoiseshell, leopard skins, ivory, giraffes and elephants. I shared my Chinese medicine formula to heal Malaria to people there. I tried to collect indigenous plants in Africa to make new herbal medicine.

On our return trip back to China, near Somalia, we noticed pirates approaching us in a small boat and tried to get onboard of our ship by ladders. They are armed with handmade weapons and swords. The pirates wanted to take away our gold, silver, silk and food from us. Admiral Zheng and his soldiers fought fiercely with the pirates. I was scared and attempted to hide up. Suddenly, I saw an arrow shooting towards me. I yelled "Help! Help!" I woke up and realized it is only a dream.

The Ming Pirates

St. Stephen's College Preparatory School, Ho, Sophia – 6

Once upon a time in a dangerous place called China there were three pirates. There was Pirate Ho, Pirate Chang and Pirate Pan. They were kind pirates. One time they went to the treasure cave on their ship and they went to the magic cave. They used their hands to open it but the magic door was locked! Pirate Chang had a key so she looked to see if it was the right size. The door said, “You must use a password.”

Pirate Pan had come here before, so maybe he knew the password. He said, “Mappy mop, moppy map, help me find my gold!” The door suddenly opened and they went inside and saq a treasure box. Pirate Chang had another key so she used the key to open the box. It had a lot of beautiful gold that that shared together! They were rich!

The Ming Pirates

St. Stephen's College Preparatory School, Hsu, Caitlyn – 6

Once upon a time there were two pirates called Pirate Zheng and Madam Ching and they had a big ship. They were very kind pirates. They went to a different country to visit the king and exchange treasure and silks. When they went to India they went to a palace and exchanged gold. India was beautiful. They ate some naan bread.

After, went to a cave to look for treasure. They dug and dug and dug. Finally, they found the treasure that they wanted. They opened a big treasure chest and found silver and gold coins inside. They also found a lot of jewels inside too.

They sailed back to their homes in China. They were tired but they also wanted another adventure!

Molly and Zheng

St Stephen's College Preparatory School, Lai, Hailey – 6

Once upon a time, a mermaid named Molly was living on the coastline near Thailand. She was only 16 years old. One day, Molly looks out of the window of her dolphin house when she hears a huge sound, 'BANG!' After a while, a sailor looking man sailing on a small boat containing many shimmering jewels and gems approaches. Molly is afraid this man is a pirate who wants to take away her treasures, so she swims quickly to find her best friend, the little penguin, Snowflake.

Snowflake is a very clever boy who loves to help other to solve problems. He is very familiar with all the dangers that appear in the sea, he is a good helper to all the sailing ships, that is why he is so well known to all the sailors when their ships are having trouble.

When Snowflake gets to Molly's dolphin house, he was so amazed. "Admiral Zheng! Is that you? Am I dreaming?" said Snowflake.

"Hello Snowflake! It is nice to see you again. I am coming to say thank you for helping my sailing team many years ago. Remember, you helped us escape from the gigantic tsunami? You helped us survive!" said Zheng.

Snowflake felt astounded that he could see Admiral Zheng again. When Molly and Snowflake looked out from the coastline, Zheng was leading his tremendous sailing fleet to bring food, valuables and most of all, love to them. Zheng's biggest dream is to make friends with everyone in the world.

Molly and Snowflake invited Admiral Zheng and his fleet, Land of Paradise to have a party before they set sail to other places. At the party, Molly's best friends, the three monkeys – Do, Re and Me, did their favourite tricks for the sailors. All the sailors enjoyed the tricks and were very willing to give the monkeys bananas as rewards. After the monkeys show, Admiral Zheng showed them all how to design their ships in a clever way to avoid sinking. He told tales of all the funny things that happened in their sailing adventures. All people on the Land of Paradise were having a great time, telling to stories, watching tricks and listening to the seagulls sing.

When the sun rose the next day, Molly was the first one up. She felt a little bit different and felt her tail that was heavier than usual. She heard a voice telling her to get up and walk. She looked down and her tail had disappeared. With her two new gifts, she was able to marry Zheng He and sail around the world with him, bringing love and hope to the world.

The Ming Sea Voyages

St Stephen's College Preparatory School, Lam, Edwin – 8

A long time ago during the Ming Dynasty, China was very powerful and wealthy. The emperor appointed Admiral Zheng to build friendships with other countries. The emperor gave him a fleet of five boats and some of his men to start off the expedition: chefs, sailors, herbalists, mechanics, merchants, soldiers and officials. They planned to sail through the South China Sea, Indian Ocean, and Persian Gulf to East Africa, giving out gifts like silk and porcelain to foreign countries.

In 1405, the first expedition began. Among the many people was a little boy called Abo. He was 11 years old. He was short and thin, with long black hair and big round eyes. He was a housekeeper of the ship. He had a lot of crazy ideas and possessed secret super power. He kept a pet monkey with him called Mink. It had golden brown fur and was very clever. He always helped Abo in the adventures.

After several months of sailing in the South China Sea, they eventually arrived at Sumatra. Sumatra was always attacked by pirates. Prince Sam of Sumatra requested help from the Chinese troops. Admiral Zheng agreed and launched a battle against the pirates. But the pirates were too powerful and mischievous, and the soldiers were too tired to fight after the sailing. They were losing at the beginning. Abo decided to show his superpower. He created a tornado wind and it hit the wooden deck of the enemy's ship. It crashed. Then, he launched his secret weapons, banana bombs and a fire launcher. Mink used his banana lightsaber and threw banana bombs and BOOM! Another ship exploded with bananas flowing into the sea.

The soldiers shot fire arrows and cannon balls towards the pirate's ship to set them on fire. They threw dusty bricks at the pirate ships to sink them. They defeated the pirates. Prince Sam was very happy.

Then they set sail to India and the days were back to normal. The soldiers continued their battle training, and the officials took notes of the journey, and Abo and Mink had fun on the ship.

Finally, the fleet reached Ceylon. However, the fleet was not welcomed by the people there. The King of Ceylon was rude and hostile. He was known as the Snake King because he wore snake skin with a snake crown. He kept a lot of poisonous snakes in his palace as weapons. He was the worst villain yet.

Admiral Zheng was invited to the Snake Palace. The Chinese fleet was suddenly attacked by the snake troops. Abo shot the lasers at Snake King but he threw Abo into the swamp full of poisonous snakes. Admiral Zheng saw it and he threw the grapple hook towards the Snake King and BOOM! The Snake King fainted.

They cheered and celebrated the victory. They returned back to China and the emperor rewarded them with gold.

Ming Treasure Voyages

St Stephen's College Preparatory School, Lam, Natasha – 9

Hi, I am Li Ming, a slave from the Ming Treasure Fleet. Here is my story about my journey.

The first thing I did was I carried gold, silk and other precious items to the boat. After we finished loading it with the precious items, we sailed off into the sea.

The first country we went to was Korea. We came at the perfect time because we saw the beautiful yellow, orange and red autumn leaves slowly fall from the trees. It was the most extraordinary thing I have ever seen! But after a few hours we had to leave.

This time the waves were furious. We could not even steer the boat properly because of the waves. Finally we reached Malaysia. At first we thought no one was there but then a person popped out behind a rock with a bow and arrow. Then we knew we had to have a war. We took our weapons and started to fight. After a few hours all of us got so tired and we ran back to our boat.

Finally, we reached India. Indians were so joyful and caring. They helped us heal the wounds from the war. When we were in India, we also learned their unique culture.

Once again we had to leave. This time the sea was calm and peaceful on the way to Africa. We also met so many sailors on the way.

Later that day we did not know where to go. Then I saw land as I was looking out of the boat! Suddenly before I could say anything, I heard a shout and the shout was from the island I just saw. I did not hear what they shouted but I thought it was a bad sign. When we got to the island we were welcomed very nicely with some flowers and their handmade chocolates. They let us stay for a night. Then we said our one goodbyes and thank you to them and we sailed off into the sea.

Later we hit something and the next thing I knew was the boat was sinking! Everyone started to panic because we did not have those mini boats for an emergency. Our captain said we have to swim to shore and walk back to china.

Later that day it was beginning to get dark and after all that swimming everyone got so hungry. We were in the forest and all we could find were some fruit we had to eat fruit for dinner. After a few days we got tired of eating fruit but I had to eat it to survive. We had been traveling by foot for weeks but we still had not arrived at china.

2 months later we finally arrived! Everyone was so happy we made it back to china. I told everyone the great journey I had. I know I did not go to the end of the world but it still was an exciting journey.

The Big Voyage

St Stephen's College Preparatory School, Ling, Alicia – 6

Once in a faraway magical land named Crystalcross, lived a girl named Emily. She was eight years old. She loved sailing and it was her favourite hobby. The magic school she went to was the best magic school ever! She learned lots of magic spells and she also learned sailing from Professor Zhenghe.

During the school summer holiday, Emily and her two classmates, Lia and Sophie, decided to go sailing and explore beyond Crystalcross Coast and make new friends. They conjured up a ship that was rainbow-coloured and covered with glitter, brought with them a treasure chest full of precious stones and departed from the port. Crystalcross Bay shimmered beautifully in the afternoon sunlight. It was a happy and peaceful journey. The girls threw a tea party and watched TV.

Shortly after, their ship approached an island, and the kids could not believe their eyes! In front of them was a magnificent, huge golden palace with fairies fluttering around it. A fairy fluttered towards them.

“Hi!” she said, “I’m Kylie the Ice Fairy. Who are you?”

The girls introduced themselves and made friends with Kylie. Kylie invited them to the palace for tea and showed them around. Before Emily and her friends left, they gave Kylie some of the precious stones as a token of their friendship and asked Kylie if she would like to visit Crystalcross. Kylie joined the girls and headed toward Crystalcross.

The journey continued happily until a fleet of nasty pirates came by. The pirates had weapons, the girls did not, but they had magical powers. With the help of Kylie and the magic spell she cast that froze the pirates, the girls were safe again.

“Hurray!” the girls shouted. “We won the battle!” they cried.

They returned to Crystalcross safely with Kylie their new fairy friend. What a wonderful journey!

Dear Diary

St Stephen's College Preparatory School, Luk, Kacelyn – 6

I'm Kacelyn, the little cleaner. I would like to share two very exciting days of my voyage!

February 11th, 1410

We had a big party on Captain Zheng's ship. This ship is the biggest in the fleet. That means a lot of work for me, the little cleaner! I am sad because every giant sailor was drunk! They ate lots of food and drank lots of rum. That means lots of cleaning work for me!

When I was busy cleaning, I heard something rumbling – I ran to the deck, I saw a thunderstorm and big waves coming. "Wake up! Wake up!" I shouted loudly. All the sailors woke up. Captain Zheng ordered every sailor to prepare for the big waves and rain. The ship started to rock up and down on the waves. Now, I was very dizzy but I still needed to do work, so I told myself to stay strong and be brave.

The rain and sea water started to spill into the ship. I was very busy clearing all the water with a mop. Finally, the ship and the fleet passed through the storm. Everyone was safe. I pretended to play the guitar with the mop and I sang, "we are safe! Let's celebrate!" Everyone laughed and went back to bed after such a crazy day.

February 12th, 1410

I woke up early in the morning after the big storm. "Hurrah!" I said, "It is a beautiful sunny day!" I took out the map to the deck and looked at it. Looks like we are heading to Africa!

Captain Zheng walked by and said, "Good morning little cleaner, we are almost at Africa! Are you excited?"

"Yes! I am very excited!" I yelled as I jumped up and down.

When I was relaxing and resting on the deck, enjoying the sunshine, I saw a very big ship with a tall black flag with a skeleton on it... "PIRATES!" I screamed, "Pirates are coming!" Sailors, get your weapons and get ready to fight!" The pirate ship came closer and saw that we have many ships in our fleet, a huge army and many sailors with weapons. The pirates looked us and became very scared. They returned back to their base. Everyone was so happy because the pirates were gone.

I took out my telescope to check if we were near Africa. I couldn't believe my eyes. I saw people with dark skin waving at us on an island. I was so surprised to see people with a different skin colour. Captain Zheng shouted to all the sailors that we had arrived at Africa.

We brought gold, jewels and silk to make friends with the African people. We didn't understand them, but they were happy and smiling. They invited all of us to a party. We ate, drank and danced together. We had a great time. This is how Captain Zheng makes new friends around the world.

New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

St Stephen's College Preparatory School, Ma, Nathan – 9

This story is dedicated to my ancestor who worked on one of the Ming Treasure fleets in the early 1400s. At that time, the Yongle Emperor was trying to make friends with neighbouring countries such as India, Siam Africa and Arabia. The fleet carried a lot of precious treasures such as gold, silver, silk and gemstones. Together they made seven voyages across the Indian and Pacific Ocean. They had to fight against local pirates and foreign enemies. Even though they fought many battles, they won most of the time and returned safely from their journey to China. The Chinese admiral who guided them was called, 'Zheng He' and he had won many awards from the emperor and the respect from the Chinese People.

The first three expeditions were so amazing because they carried the most military weapons, thousands of sailors and passengers. As the ships arrived at the port in Champa, the king greeted the crew members with local treasures and gifts in exchange for Chinese silk and gold. Sailing to the island Java, the fleet faced many dangers and threats by pirates. However, the mighty power of the fleet led them to victory. They even sent the pirate chief back to Nanjing for punishment. They met the King of Calicut and received a stately welcome at his inauguration. They had a long feast and food to take along for their journey.

During the last four expeditions, they saw many types of western ships. They traded crewman with each other to learn foreign languages. New battle ships were made and constructed, the Chinese Emperor became more powerful and rich. The officials from Ceylon, Cochin, Hormuz, Sumatra, and Mogadishu sent their ambassadors to the capital city, Beijing for commerce and more language training.

At that time, many young people followed alongside Zheng He on a maritime adventure to become a sailor. When they first got on, they often had motion sickness. They were given Chinese medicine to settle their stomach. After that, they were given a variety of jobs on the boat such as cleaning the decks, halls, toilets and kitchen. Besides that, they had to build stalls and coops to hold the pigs, chicken and sheep for the crew to eat. The young men were extremely welcomed by the crew and they listened and obeyed every order. They helped loading cannons and preparing weapons during battles. They learnt how to fight alongside admiral Zheng He. When they travelled to the next port, they picked up other supplies for the fleet. The young men were extremely grateful that they could travel the Indian and Pacific Ocean for free and received free meals and drinks.

There were dangers at sea especially traveling to Calicut. A few men got lost at sea without notice when they lost balance climbing on the rope. If they fell into the sea, they usually drowned before the ship could rescue them. However, the long journey was worth making because they were recorded in the history books.

New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

St Stephen's College Preparatory School, Mui, Megan – 6

Chapter One: The First Voyage: 1405 – 1407

In a thunderous night I was summoned to come to the royal palace. His Highness Yongle Emperor could not sleep. He eyes were swollen as he yelled in pain saying, “I could not sleep and I am having these nightmares that my nephew will be coming back seeking his revenge. Our spies reported that he disguised as a monk and left the country on a large fishing boat a few months earlier. We thought that he hid somewhere in the South Sea. Gather a fleet and hunt him down.”

In early spring 1405, we set sailed with twenty ships and two thousand sailors. It was like a picture painted in blue with our treasure boats scattered like little dots in the sea. Our fleet sailed straight through the Indian Ocean following rumours on the whereabouts of Jianwen Emperor.

We were not able to locate Jianwen Emperor but we ran into a local priate named Chen Zuyi at Palembang on our return trip. He was a priate who dominated the Malaccan Strait. He sent his pirate ships to attack our ships with arrows and fire bombs in the middle of the night. We returned fire and destoryed ten of his boats and captured another seven. Chen sped quickly knowing that he is no match to our fleet. Chen and his lieutenants were captured and publicly executed on 2nd October 1407.

News spread quickly and our victory was widely publicied. We returned to Nanjing at the end of October; two and a half years after we left. Members of our fleet, the local officials and the people in the vincinities staged an extravagant welcome for our return. The city put up dazzling fireworks during the night to celebrate our return. That night gitters lit up Nanjing while we enjoy our feast. Dancers performed in front of major municipal officials and local mandarins from the vincity. Scores of people came out to congradulate us on our victory as the local establishments gave the sailors free food and drinks.

We brought foreign envoys from Calicut, Quilon, Semudera, Aru, Malacca, and other smaller nations along the sea routes that we visited. We went back to Beijing with the envoys two days later. We were invited to visit the Ming court to pay homage and present tribute to the great Yongle Emperor. His Highness ordered the Ministry of Rites to prepare generous gifts for the foreign envoys to show his appreciation.

Everyone in the court was amazed by exotic animals such as monkeys from Malaysia; Tapir and Orangutan from Indonesia. We asked the natives to teach the cooks in the royal courts how to prepare food with the spices we brought back. Everyone but the Emperor seems to have forgotten what the underlying objective of our trip – to hunt for the fugitive Jianwen Emperor, who is still at large. But before we were able to indulge on our success, His Excellence asked us to plan our next trip and set sail as soon as we can.

The Treasures of the Sea

St. Stephen's College Preparatory School, Ng, Isis – 8

The Ming Dynasty navy looked for a group of pirates who were led by a very cunning and nasty pirate named Captain Shark because they stole the gold from the government, which was used as the grant to the refugees after a super storm. However, Captain Shark's fleet was too sneaky and the national navy could not catch them at all.

"Captain, our fleet has searched for pirates for almost a month but we still cannot find them, all the sailors are tired and how about we go back to our navy base to take some rest?" said a sailor.

"Never give up! If we cannot get back the gold from the pirates, all the starving people in the fishing village will die, you don't want see that happen, do you?" said Captain Ming with lots of worry on his face. "Oh...I almost forgot my best ocean friend; he must help me!"

Captain Ming played wonderful music on his magic flute, and the sailors saw some flying creatures flying toward their ship. "Flying dolphins!" said all the sailors.

"My friend, are you looking for me?" said the biggest flying dolphin.

"Indeed, I need your helping hand, John." said Captain Ming and he let John know his problem. "Um...many of my ocean neighbors got tummy-ache because a fleet of ships threw lots of trash in the ocean and the ocean was got polluted, do you think they are the people that you are looking for?" said John.

"Oh, yes, only Shark's fleet will do this nasty thing, thank you John." said Captain Ming.

"Sailors, let us follow the trash and start our journey!"

After Captain Ming's crew set off for a few days, they met five sharks which were swimming upside down. He knew Captain Shark's fleet must be nearby.

After Captain Ming's clever thinking, the national navy finally found the pirates fleet. "Shark, surrender or die!" said Captain Ming.

"We hid so well, but how could Captain Ming find us?" said Captain Shark to his pirates. "Let's escape immediately!" said Captain Shark in a quiet voice. The pirates would like to escape but their fleet was somehow stuck by the trash they threw and therefore captured by Captain Ming. All the pirates were put in jail, the gold was taken back and exchanged for food to the refugees. The national navy also helped the refugees to build a new village.

"Captain, the Emperor must be very pleased that we have captured the most cunning and nasty pirates." said a sailor.

"Please accept our sincere thanks, my friend, the ocean is clean again after you punished the pirates to clean up all their trash." said John. "All the flying dolphins and ocean animals thank you and your sailors."

"Not at all, John, we not only saved the refugees by retrieving the treasure from the pirates, but also protected the greatest treasure, a clean ocean which can be passed to many generations after!" said Captain Ming happily.

A Sticky Situation

St Stephen's College Preparatory School, Ng, Kaylen – 6

“Help!!” I yelled loudly until my throat hurt.

“Let go of me! I am not one of the sailors!”

I was trying to explain that they got the wrong person but they just didn’t listen. I didn’t understand why this was happening to me. I was supposed to be fishing with my mom and dad.

Two hours ago, we were casting our lines. We were on the shore not too far away from Zheng He’s fleet. We had been there for a long time but the fish weren’t biting so I got bored and I walked away.

When I got onto the ship, I was asked to climb up a long ladder and one of the sailors followed me, making sure I didn’t escape. When I had almost reached the basket, the sailor pushed me hard and I fell into the basket! He took out a key and locked me up! I was so scared that I cried all day long.

I looked around and found weapons, such as swords, shields and bombs! Beside me, there was a long tube. I didn’t know what it was and I was curious to find out what was inside, so I looked inside. WOW!! I could see a very small stone on a remote island! Now I knew it was a telescope. I was asked to watch the sea to make sure no pirates would come to steal our jewellery and weapons. It was such a boring job to stay in the basket every day.

One hot and boring summer’s day, I saw a big dark shadow swimming in the water 20 meters in front of our fleet. It swam closer and closer, I was petrified and started shouting,

“Beware Everyone! Something massive is in the sea!” Everyone rushed out to see what was happening. The shadow was at least five times bigger than our fleet.

The black shadow slowly rose from the sea, everyone started to step back. The object became bigger and bigger. All of the sailors ran away but I was not able to escape as I was high up in the basket.

The object raised one of its ugly black arms! I heard some of the sailors yelling, “It’s an octopus!” Everyone was worried that it was going to kill us. Some of the sailors started to cry, some of them started to pray and some of them started to scream. While everyone was trying to escape, I could not move at all as my legs had gone numb. I closed my eyes, and hoped and prayed that I would see my parents one last time before I died.

Suddenly, I felt something wet and slimy run over me from head to toe. I opened my eyes and saw the whole octopus rising from the sea in front of the fleet. It..... actually smiled at me!!! It was his arm running over my body!!! I could not believe what I had just seen. The octopus did not want to hurt us, in fact, it only wanted to say HI!!! Everyone was shocked but glad that we were still alive.

The octopus brightened up my boring hot summer’s day and I was already looking forward to the next adventure!

The Inquisitive Tortoise

St. Stephen's College Preparatory School, Tam, Alma – 8

Strolling leisurely around the deep and mysterious woods, Mr. Tortoise grinned from ear to ear as it was a gorgeous day. “If only I could fly in the sky, it would be fantastic!” He wondered to himself blissfully. Mr. Tortoise had a heavy spiral shell on his back and he was extremely tiny. Mr. Tortoise was overjoyed and wore a cheerful grin on this face.

An instant later, Mr. Tortoise caught a glimpse of a gigantic pheasant soaring in the sapphire blue endless sky. The pheasant spread open its wide wings and glided gracefully with the mighty wind. Mr. Tortoise found it unbelievable because he wanted to fly too! “Woo!” he gasped. “That was absolutely amazing!” He felt extremely shocked, so his mouth hung wide open. Mr. Tortoise wanted to imitate the pheasant badly. All of a sudden, a fabulous idea flashed into his mind.

In no time, Mr. Tortoise attempted to imitate the fierce pheasant because he wanted to fly! He gathered all sorts of twigs and leaves and stuck them on his spiral shell. The huge mollusc used them to make fake wings! He tried with all his might to clamber up the mushroom. Soon afterwards, he crept slowly up the stalk of the spotted mushroom. Mr. Tortoise was thrilled to bits, so his eyes lit up. He imagined that he could soar and glide smoothly just like the graceful pheasant. Mr. Tortoise took off from the mushroom and fluttered his fake wings. He hoped that he could fly.

“THUD!” Unfortunately, Mr. Tortoise stopped in mid-air, tumbled down at lightning speed and smashed into the hard ground. Mr. Tortoise felt sore, and he was slightly bruised. He was disappointed, so he hung his head in shame. In great despair, Mr. Tortoise stared at the clear blue sky. Suddenly, he noticed that a massive hot air balloon was floating in the sky. An idea struck his mind, “A balloon is great for me, I want to have a second try!” He muttered to himself. Mr. Tortoise took a multi-coloured balloon from the pit excitedly and tied the balloon tightly around his hand. Before long, he hastily clambered on the mushroom stalk, took a gigantic deep breath, counting “one, two, three” and took off from the mushroom with full confidence. He believed that he could fly. Regrettably, Mr. Tortoise fell down at breakneck speed and smashed down with a thump. Mr. Tortoise shook in fright, let out a whimper of pain. His heart was breaking and he fainted.

When Mr. Tortoise awoke, he learnt that he was perfect just the way he was! He realized that he had his unique talents to be proud of. He was strong enough to carry his home on his back, and he could hide and protect himself from danger. He never needed to be in a hurry and could enjoy his life. At last, Mr. Tortoise stared at the sky again and murmured, “I’ll never try to fly again!”

The Secret Voyage

St. Stephen's College Preparatory School, Teoh, Amelia – 9

There was one time the Emperor stopped Zheng He from travelling overseas. But, Zheng He and his loyal shipmates secretly stole a boat from the port, and packed supplies. But, unfortunately one of the men betrayed Zheng He and told the Emperor. Surprisingly, the Emperor didn't care. He didn't care because he was jealous of Zheng He being a hero to the Chinese and planned to kill him. But, he thought the pirates in the sea would kill him.

At last, Zheng He and his crew were ready. At the break of dawn, the crew set off. The sea was unusually calm. This normally meant a gang of pirates were coming to attack them. Nobody was worried because with Zheng He, the fearless captain, everything would be good in their way.

The second day of the trip, the pirates finally came. Either way, it was a bad day. Storm clouds were like a thief, creeping over. The wind was blowing hard like a giant huffing and puffing after running. First, the pirates tried to use cannons to blow a hole on the side of the ship. By fighting back, Zheng He also used cannons, but better ones. The pirates saw things weren't going well for them, and went on Zheng He's ship to fight. A lot of pirates died during this bloody battle. Some of the crew of Zheng He also died.

But it wasn't the pirates that were the worst, it was the storm. Five days after the battle, there was a terrible storm. The storm raged for weeks. One day during the storm, the crew couldn't see the way through the mist. So, they accidentally crashed on a rock. Fortunately, Zheng He managed to climb on a lifeboat and to fish out some of his most important crewmen. Zheng He wanted to save more men, but he knew if he saved more men, his boat would sink. In the boat, there were things like Chinese buns, a few bottles of water, ropes, and approximately 30 axes. The crew and Zheng He rowed for weeks and weeks. Until suddenly somebody shouted "Land ahoy! Land ahoy!" Everyone rowed hard and they finally landed on the island.

Zheng He split the crew into four groups. The first group was for fishing using nails and ropes. The second group was for climbing trees to get coconuts. The third group was for cutting trees down using axes. The fourth and last group was for making a big sturdy boat for going back home to China.

At last, after 2–3 weeks, everything was finished and Zheng He and his crew were ready to go. During this time, it was amazing nobody had died. Luckily, on the way back to China, everything was peaceful. When Zheng He and his crew arrived, all the villagers in China greeted them as heroes. Even the Emperor was proud of Zheng He this time and gave him gold, silk and tea.

Zheng He's Eighth Voyage

St Stephen's College Preparatory School, Timmermans, Ariel – 8

In 1432, Zheng He received an order from the Chinese emperor to return to China, but Zheng He was not yet ready to return to China. At that point, the fleet had already reached the East coast of Africa. Perhaps he beautiful sights made him want to stay. Maybe he also wondered if he could befriend some of the animals, such as zebras, giraffes, lions, tigers and elephants. So Zheng He faked his own death and continued on his way. He had a group of trusted sailors with him. They built a new ship and sailed West in hopes of finding new lands.

They sailed South of the African continent and saw many exotic fish. Zheng He was constantly asking the people of Africa what they were, his favourite fish were the Shaggy Anglers, Clown Triggerfish and Ribbon Eels. Eventually, they entered what is now known as the Atlantic Ocean. On their way, they saw a frightful monster! It turned out the monster was actually a Sperm Whale. The whale was friendly and led them to the Amazon River to find the Whale's turtle friend, Turty so that he could lead them to the local's favourite spot. When they arrived, they mingled with the locals and they told Zheng He about a hidden treasure that was said to be found in the deep and dangerous Bermuda Triangle.

Zheng He spoke to Turty about this treasure and Turty warned them but he was adamant about finding this treasure. Turty led the to the Bermuda Triangle. When the neared it, Turty said he was scared and wouldn't go any closer. They parted ways and Zheng He thanked him. As they neared the Bermuda Triangle, the sea became quite rough and stormy. As they moved through the waves, Zheng He spotted some sort of bottle. He leaned over his ship and grabbed it. There was a note attached, it said: Zheng He, I beg of you, drink me. If you have found this note, my greatest wish has come true. Drink this and you will live forever. From, Yong Le, the ghost of the emperor.

Zheng Le took a sip, and woke up on the deck of his ship to his comrades calling his name. It was just a dream he thought to himself until he looked overboard and saw small turtle that looked like Turty smiling at him.

Tasty Tale

St Stephen's College Preparatory School, Tong, Kristen – 9

In the early 1400s, Chinese pirates discovered the route from China to India. They decided to gather their belongings, collect food and set sail to India on their ship.

When they arrived to India, the Indians greeted them happily and guided them to the palace. When the king saw Captain Zheng He, he wondered what he and his crew were doing in India. Captain Zheng He said, “How do you do your majesty? I have come here with my crew from China. If you would be so kind, can we become friends? I will give you some gold to sweeten the deal?”

The king looked at Zheng He up and down and replied, “I don’t want gold.”

Captain Zheng had never been spoken to like that before. He stared back at him and asked, “Then what do you want?”

The king shook his head desperately, “My son has lost his appetite. He won’t eat anything we cook for him. If you could bring back his appetite, only then we can become friends.”

Zheng He pondered for a moment as they stared at each other. A girl named Ling who was part of the crew whispered into the captain’s ear, “We still have a few leftover ingredients from last night’s dinner. There is enough to make a few dumplings for the king’s son.”

After listening to the Ling’s idea, the captain thought they could give it a shot. So Ling quickly made the dumplings that her mother had once shown her how to make when she was little, perfecting the folds as she went. When she took the meal pack to the palace she told the king, “Here, let your son try these. See if his appetite will be back.” The king’s son had smelt the dumplings and his eyes grew wide. He had a small bite, and then gobbled it whole. The King was amazed at how his son finished the dumplings in less than a minute.

The king looked back at Zheng He and smiled. He walked over to him and embraced him. He agreed to make friends with the pirates, on one condition. The condition was that Ling had to teach them how to make those decadent dumplings for himself and his crew.

A lifetime experience of the Ming Treasure Voyage

St Stephen's College Preparatory School, Wong, Leah – 8

“Leah! Come and see this gorgeous painting of Zheng He!” My mum called out in the China Historical Museum. I quickly darted to her and caught sight of an enormous painting. It showed Zheng He and one of his giant, nine-mastered “treasure ships” on which he made seven voyages around the Indian Ocean.

The painting was so vivid that I couldn't help myself by secretly touching that massive ship when no one was looking. Suddenly, a flash of lightning came out of it! I was so terrified that I shut my eyes. When I opened my eyes, I was on a stupendous ship with a pair of dragon eyes on it. Seconds later, someone shouted at me, “Dr. Wong! Please help! Someone is dying!!”

“Huh? Are you calling me?” I questioned.

“Yes! YOU! Dr. Wong!” he cried as he dragged me into a small room.

I was still confused about everything as my eyes couldn't believe what they were witnessing. I saw a sailor lying on the floor, he was very pale and weak, his teeth were bleeding and his body was shaking. The sick sailor said, “I can't move my arms and legs, my body is in pain. I have tried all kinds of herbs but they didn't work. Unfortunately, most of my sailor friends are suffering from the same disease...” He explained and his eyes started shutting. I felt helpless and I didn't know how to respond. I quickly ran out to seek help.

I was panicking and running around like a headless chicken. Suddenly, the air filled with a familiar smell. The smell led me to a tiny storage room filled with tributes from other countries. There were weird stones, species, furs and some plants. I surprisingly found a box of lemons labelled, “from Vietnam”. All of a sudden, I remembered that my science teacher had mentioned a type of disease called Scurvy. The best remedy to cure this disease were the lemons! I grabbed them and gave them to the sailors, I explained the benefits of eating lemons every day. I also suggested that they grow lemons on the ship. The sailors were so stunned by this discovery, but they decided to try it.

After a few days, all of the sailors recovered completely. They were extremely thankful for me. However, I was in deep thoughts worrying about my return home and started to feel homesick. My sailor friend, Ping, approached me and said, “Dr. Wong! Admiral Zheng He wants to see you now!” I was overjoyed about finally meeting my hero, so I walked to his room immediately. Suddenly, a flash of lightning came out of the wall and I blacked out.

Seconds later, I found myself on the couch of the museum and my mum dashing towards me. “Where have you been?” she exclaimed.

“I guess...I was dreaming?” I replied.

Before we left, I admired the painting once again, I saw Zheng He grinning at me, as if to say thank you Dr. Wong!

The Most Amazing Fruit

St Stephen's College Preparatory School, Wong, Vanessa – 8

“Captain Zheng, we’re running out of food. We’ve been sailing for 200 days. Our sailors are starving,” said Xiao Ma, my assistant who had been serving me for more than 10 years.

“We must keep sailing and find a place to refill our supply,” I looked at the sky and commanded.

“There is an island over there!” another sailor shouted.

I took the telescope. “This island looks like a snake.” I thought.

“Set sail!” I commanded.

We stepped onto a dark island and went into a haunted forest.

Hiss....Hiss....Hiss....

“What is that sound?” someone whispered. “Monster!” We were surrounded by thousands of half human, half snake creatures. Suddenly I saw many stars and I felt like I was in outer space. When I woke up I was no longer in the forest. I was in a gigantic cave with Xiao Ma.

“I am the queen of Python Kingdom. Why have you come to our kingdom?” said a beautiful half human, half snake woman.

“My beautiful queen, we bear no malice. We have come seeking food. I am going to present some gifts,” I exclaimed. “Xiao Ma, bring the treasure boxes!” I said.

The queen was amazed by the silk, silver, gold and jewels. “What would you like in return?” she said.

“We will be grateful if you can give us some food,” I replied.

“Food? We only eat the migratory birds that rest on this island,” The Queen laughed. “Aha! There is a kind of thorny fruit on our island. You can take as many as you wish,” she continued.

We found the fruit and loaded thousands of them onto our supply ships. Their odor could be smelled from miles away and no one dared get closer to them. I took one and gazed upon it. “Bring a knife to me!” It smelled like pig dropping and was so rotten that no one on this universe could bear it.

I cut the thorny, ball-shaped monster and found some creamy substance inside. I took a deep breath, bit the golden yellow flesh and then closed my eyes. Surprisingly it was soft and smooth. It was a strange combination of smelly, sweet and creamy.

“This fruit tastes heavenly! This is the most amazing food I have ever had!” I exclaimed.

The sailors, looking incredulous, took their first bite. Their contented face proved that they agreed with me. Our ships sailed off to our home and the fruits saved our lives. After two months, we were finally home.

“My Majesty, may I present to you the most amazing fruit in the world,” I kowtowed to the Ming Emperor. The Emperor took his first bite and was delighted.

“Zheng He, it tastes wonderful! What is the name of this fruit?” the Emperor asked.

“My Majesty, this is Durian,” I answered.

“Very well, I am fond of this fruit and I command you to prepare for your next voyage. This time, bring back more durian!”

Xiao Ma and I looked at each other and smiled.

Wormhole

St. Stephen's College Preparatory School, Yeung, Blevins – 9

It all started one afternoon when our rocket was about to take off. I was super excited because I was in this mission with my two astronaut brothers! Never have I thought it would become an extraordinary adventure...

I was an astronaut and our mission was to explore Saturn for our country. Our rocket blasted off as planned. After we left the atmosphere, something went wrong! A strong, mysterious force pulled our rocket away from the track. When our rocket finally became steady, we found ourselves travelling through a dark tunnel, our compass had lost its function and we were heading to an unknown direction.

"Where are we?" I asked.

"I think we are in a wormhole!" my smart brother replied.

"Wormhole? I can't see any worms outside," said my dumb little brother curiously.

"Not the hole with worms, people say wormholes are secret passages that makes you travel through time," I said.

"What?" my brother was shocked.

"We don't know yet, but we've got to stay calm for now," I replied.

The rocket began to twist and twirl like we were inside a tornado! In a blink of an eye, we found ourselves in a cabin on a wooden sailing boat crossing the ocean.

We saw ourselves in sailor uniforms and there were hundreds of sailors and other boats around us. We found out from them that we were in the Ming dynasty! There was no way we could escape because we were in the middle of the ocean.

"I see land, is that home?" asked my little brother.

"That's not home, it's India. Have you forgotten that the king commanded us to offer gifts to other countries? India is next!" a sailor told us.

We went back to our cabin and started discussing our escape plan. We decided to be disguised as sailors until we found a way to escape. We believed that was the safest option.

We followed the crew as they carried jewelry and goods for the Indian king. There was no way for us to escape from there because we didn't know their language and neither did they. The fleet then sailed to Africa to continue the journey. However, we weren't welcomed there. The Africans misunderstood us as enemies and the battle between us was fierce. My brothers and I managed to keep ourselves alive by hiding inside the cabin over the four days of fight.

After we left Africa, we went to Arabia. It was so hot there and crossing the desert was impossible. We carried loads of goods to the Arabian king and it was a long walk. We accidentally walked on quicksand and sank quickly together with some goods and others. We were terrified and thought we would die.

Suddenly we found ourselves in our rocket on the track to Saturn! We did not know how that happened, yet, all we knew was that we were going to have a few sailors joining us and loads of goods to Saturn!

A Lovely Journey

St Stephen's College Preparatory School, Yip, Gracelyn – 6

It's a sunny day with mild wind breeze. My very good friend and I, Zhang He, got on our boat, ready for our adventure. It was a very big boat made with wood, ordered by our Emperor Yongle.

We started sailing, we needed a lot of sailors to paddle and it was slow. There was not much to see in the first 20 days. We were just eating, reading and sleeping on the boat all day long. And then we started to see a lot of fish and dolphins. They were very shocked when they saw us at first because I believed they had never seen any Chinese people like Zhang He and myself. After a while, the dolphins flipped their tails waving to us to say hello. As we didn't know exactly where we were going, we asked the dolphins to show us the land. We followed the dolphins for another 20 days, then we saw the land.

We got off our boat, a lot of people were staring at us and pointing their swords to us. They looked very frightened. To show them we were good, we showed them the treasure that we brought from our own home. They looked at the vases, jewels and coins. We tried to make our hand gestures to show them these were the gifts for them. They knew we were friends. They took out their own treasure and we exchanged.

We were very happy making new friends. We ate a dinner with them and then we got on the boat and ready to go home. On the way back home, suddenly the pirate Chen Zuyi and his people were attacking us, trying to take away our treasure. I and He fought with them and caught them finally. We tied them with ropes and took them back to our home country.

We took Chen Zuyi and his people to meet our Emperor, and he sent these bad guys to jail. And then we showed our Emperor the treasure that we exchanged with our new friends. Emperor Yongle was very happy. He said I and He did a very good job. He ordered us to go on a second adventure.

I enjoyed sailing with He very much and I wanted to go again with him next time.

The Friendly Pirates

St Stephen's College Preparatory School, Yiu, Marcu – 8

Not all pirates are hostile! This story happened in the 1400's. While most pirates stole treasure for their own benefits, a crew of pirates did the exact opposite! They were called "The Ming Treasure Fleet". Their ship carried cargo of gold and silk from the emperor to give away to the poor people.

The Ming Treasure Fleet was sailing across the sea. One night, the ship accidentally hit a rock. Crash! The captain, Harry, suddenly woke up. 'What happened?' Harry asked. The night crew captain, D.J., replied 'The ship accidentally crashed into a rock and it put a dent on the bottom part of the ship.' Harry commanded 'Repair man come here now, please!' The repair man, Iggy, was a greasy man. Some of his body was covered in grease because all of the repairing he had done. He said 'Repair man at your service. What do you want me to do?'

Harry replied 'See the dent at the bottom of the ship. Tell me how big the dent is. If it's very big we have to stop at that island to fix it. If it is just a little one, then tell me.'

A moment later, Iggy reported how big the dent was. 'Captain, the dent was very big. Looks like we need to stop at the island.' So, Harry commanded the ship to sail to the island.

When they arrived at the island, there were people. Harry said 'Great. There are people that can help us repair this dent.' So, off the crew went giving gold and silk to the helpful people who helped repair the dent in the ship.

After a few hours, they were sailing again. Suddenly, a ship sailed by. Harry recognized the ship. In the past, they had fought this hostile ship. Harry ordered the crew to set fire to the cannons. A moment later, the cannon balls went shooting like a bullet towards the hostile ship. 'Bang!' Went the cannons. 'Crash!' Went the cannon balls. The ship sunk into the bottom of the sea. While on Harry's ship, Harry and his crew were celebrating. They had a party. While they were celebrating, Harry went to his bedroom and slept.

The Ming Treasure Fleet kept sailing towards its destination and the exciting experience continued...

A Tale of the New Ming Treasure Voyages

St Stephen's College Preparatory School, Yu, Nicole – 8

After two months of sailing and trading goods, our crew, led by Admiral Zheng He, found ourselves in a ferocious storm. Waves crashed against our fleet of ships and everyone was seasick for weeks. After the storm and rough waters cleared, we didn't know where the storm had blown us to. We completely lost our navigation. We were heading south at first yet ended up going east. We had to use different instruments and stars to guide us back on track.

I was travelling on the main ship, commanded by admiral Zheng He. It was four hundred feet long, and was very large in comparison to the other ships. Sometimes I was terrified, sometimes excited and sometimes even both at the same time when I was on board. As a young sailor, I learnt how to sail when the storms came, and assist as a crew member. When the fleet was sailing on calm waters I would do chores.

There were several different types of jobs such as sweeping the decks and cooking. My job would sometimes be filling gun powder in the cannons and carefully aiming them at our enemies. But the most interesting job would be hoisting the sails, as you needed to control a lot of different ropes and tug on them with all your strength simultaneously at the same time with the rest of the crew. We would hoist and lower the sails a few times a day.

The different sights were incredible to see. Occasionally, I saw a pink dolphin and a massive whale shark. When the fleet sailed to Arabia, the crew were amazed by what they saw. Magnificent towering cliffs and thousands of birds that filled the sky making it dark during the day. Even though the cliffs loomed over the fleet creating spooky shadows, it wasn't half as scary as battling hostile armies and dangerous pirates of the more usual treasure-stealing and ship-attacking sort.

While sailing to Arabia, I discovered that Mongols were following us. So we broke into battle, firing muskets and cannons at each other. Zheng He's fleet usually won and we captured the Mongols who were later executed on return to the Ming Empire. We discovered that the Mongols had been trying to steal the goods and treasures we carried.

When the fleet arrived in Arabia, the peaceful people there greeted us with a welcoming ceremony. This was the only time we traded goods. They agreed to trade some of their jewels in exchange for tin, Indian cotton cloth and corals. Other times, such as in India, we offered our goods for free. These were guns, resins and rhinoceros' horns, which were gratefully appreciated and the Indians gave us curry in exchange.

This was as far as we explored in the seven voyages. I was happy to collect all these goods from different countries and to offer the wonderful goods from our dynasty to the world.

The Last Voyage of Max

St Stephen's College Preparatory School, Yue, Sherlock – 8

Chapter 1 – Max abroad the ship

It was a peaceful morning in Beijing. Max just woke up at six p.m. He knew today would be a special day. Max is a fourteen years old boy. Since he was six, he learned archery. Today the emperor asked Max to go to the ship for training people about archery and prepare to fight with enemies. When Max went up to the ship, Cheng He told the other archers that Max was the instructor of archery. He also told Max that they were going to the Middle East. They prepared the ship with loads of foods, weapons, supplies and armours. The most important thing was to trade precious things that belonged to China. The captain showed Max his room. Max tidied up his supplies and went to the breakfast room and eat with the other sailors.

Chapter 2 – The Pirate Encounter

On the way to the Middle East, we had to pass the Pacific Ocean. There was a storm in the wide path so we had to go to the narrow path to avoid the storm. However, the narrow path is where the pirates hide. “There is the narrow path in front of us! Prepare the powerful weapon and get ready to fight!” shouted the captain. The pirate spotted us and started to launch the fireball to our ship but Cheng He already knew that would happen. So he commanded the soldiers to fire the water cannons. Max and the other sailors defeated the pirates.

Chapter 3 – Trading in the Middle East

They were almost at the Middle East. It was in the afternoon but then someone spotted an island. The people in the island talked a different language called “Arabian”. Cheng He did not understand but he made some actions that people knew what he was talking about. The King invited Cheng He and the sailors to have tea in the palace. Cheng He said that they would like to give some precious items from China to where they travel. The King wanted to trade special items including Camels, gold, silver with the Chinese fleets. They became good friends and the King decided to send some people to visit China.

Chapter 4 – Back to Beijing

After they went to the Middle East, Cheng He decided to return to China. When Max went to his room, he found that something was strange. There was a cloth on the table which wrote, “Pirates ahoy! We stole some of your precious things and throw them in an island. I told my boss to get that treasure in one hour by now. Yeah! The gold is ours. It’s in Korea. Ha Ha Ha.” Max told the other sailors and they all agreed that they need to take back the gold. Max and Cheng He turned the ship to stop at Korea and took back the gold. After many days, they went back to China. They went to the Emperor’s palace with the camel and the Arabian people and the Emperor was pleased to see that Cheng He and Max brought back camel and the Arabian visitors. And then they wanted to take a break because they had travelled for so long and didn’t take a rest. They ate something and all went to bed.

Chapter 5 – The Last Look of Cheng He

The next day, the Emperor brought them to see Cheng He because he had bad news to say. Cheng He said, “Take a last look of me, I’m dying but I’m happy because I went the seven voyages with you guys. I’m really proud of you all.” The sailors all cried and their faces were full of tears. Cheng He said that something very important. He wanted to be buried at sea. When Cheng He was dead, the sailors did what Cheng He told them. Max remembered all the trips and voyages they had spent together. Max lived happily ever after.

I’m an eight year old girl from the Kingdom of Lanka, a beautiful island country in the Indian Ocean.

People call me Blue–Elephant because every day, I help, a “Saint”, elephant to take bath in the River of Orchid, to eat and play. This is near to the Temple of Tooth where I live with monks.

We are safeguarding and serving the most important treasure in Lanka, The Buddah's Tooth.
Every year, hundreds of thousands of people come here to pray.
Where does the Budda's Tooth come from? It comes from India as a gift from thousands of years ago.

We always wanted to take the Tooth back to the people of India but we didn't have a ship big enough.

One day, Monk Master and I went to a harbour nearby for a visit.
He asked: "Do you want to go on an ocean adventure?"
"Of course, but we need a ship," I answered.
Suddenly, I couldn't believe what I saw!
I saw a giant fleet in the sea, with seven large ships. Each ship carried a flag with golden words "Ming".
A smiling captain was standing on the deck waving to us.

"This must be the famous Ming Treasure Voyage from China to India and Africa!" Master said to me.
"And the captain looks very friendly," I shouted out.
We ran to ask the Captain: "Can you take us on your journey too?"
"Of course," says the Captain.
"Great!" said the Master: "Can you help us to take the Buddah's Tooth back to India for a tour?"
He added: "After that, we can show it to your country too!"
"Good idea!" Captain answered: "but our fleet can only take three more people."

We went back to put the tooth into a small treasure chest, and carried it onto the ship.
We set out for our next adventure!

We sailed many days and nights on the ocean.
We went through a lot of beautiful sunrises and sunsets, but also thunders, storms which were very dangerous!

Finally we arrived at India and we took the tooth to a hotel nearby the sea.
At night, while we were sleeping, some pirates came to try to steal our treasure!

I was woken up by the sound and jumped up to stop them.
"How dare you!" shouted the pirate, captain Goldbeard.
"No, stop!" I shouted.
I battled with him bravely..., before Master and Captain come to rescue me.
At last we won!

I asked Goldbeard to give back the tooth.
"It's a hope for many people in many countries!" I tell him.
"Stop stealing, and we can become friends."
"Yes, Blue-Elephant, thank you for pardoning me and the love! Sorry!"

In the end, Goldbeard and myself joined the Ming voyage after India tour. We became ships captains and sail among China, Lanka and India.

Suddenly, a tropical lizard woke me up and I jumped to my feet. I was actually reading a pirate book on a Maldiv beach! It had been a dream!

The Magic Adventure of Blue–Elephant

St Stephens College Preparatory School, Zhang, Audrey – 8

I'm an eight year old girl from the Kingdom of Lanka, a beautiful island country in the Indian Ocean.

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A Captain's Diary

Victoria Shanghai Academy, Chan, Alwyn – 8

Day 1

Today is a special day – We started the Ming treasure voyage. There were big boxes of treasure, food and water everywhere. I've never seen so many boxes of treasure before!

We're about to go on the most famous trip in the world!

Day 15

We've been sailing for 15 days but seen nothing. I felt worried.

Suddenly it got foggy and dark. The crew were scared and didn't want to sail anymore. The General asked me, captain Leung and a few brave sailors to continue on a small boat.

Day 20

The small boat was very shaky. We were tired and sick. Suddenly a storm came and blew us towards an island ... BOOM! We crashed into the island.

We lost our consciousness.

We woke up finding strange people staring at us. They had a yellow face, yellow beard, brown skin, and white spots on their skin. "AHHH! Who are you?" I said, scared. They said something, but we couldn't understand. They weren't speaking Chinese.

These people seemed pretty nice: they helped us fix our boat. Tomorrow we will go back to tell the General what we saw. I am excited.

Day 30

Today I led the fleet and returned to the island. The islanders saw me and welcomed us immediately. "Here is some treasure. Thank you for helping us." I said, handing over the treasure.

They happily took the treasure.

Day 31

Today we introduced our instrument Dizi (Chinese flute) to them. We also taught them how to play it. But they weren't very good; they blew too hard.

Later, they introduced an interesting looking instrument to us: a didgeridoo. It is a big long hollow tube. When they blew it, it sounded like a long and low boat horn. They played some songs with the instrument.

I never heard of such beautiful melodies.

Day 33

Today we introduced our food to them. We prepared some noodles, rice, and turtles. They drew some symbols on a rock. I think it meant they liked our food. But they didn't eat any turtles.

For dinner the islanders prepared kangaroo jerky, crocodile meat, and local plums. The plums were sour. Chinese plums are sweeter.

My favourite was kangaroo jerky. It was chewier and juicier than pork jerky.

Day 35

Today we were preparing to go. I was sad to say goodbye because it was fun learning about their culture.

The general gave them a Dizi as a gesture of friendship.

Day 36

Today the general came and asked me if I would like to stay and be China's ambassador to this island. I said "Yes!" immediately. I was so excited!

The other person selected was captain Leung. "It's going to be a fun three years!" I told captain Leung.

We planned to learn more about their culture and pass this information to people in China so that they know the world is not just China; there are other places just as good as China.

The Stolen Treasure

Victoria Shanghai Academy, Chan, Pearly – 8

Where am I?

“Finally! I get to read my book on ‘Ming Treasure Voyages!’” Mia collapsed on her bed, grabbed her book, and flipped through the pages. Immediately, she was sucked inside the book. “Help!” She yelled. But no one heard her. When the spinning finally stopped, Mia looked around and immediately recognized this place as Malaysia. She looked up and saw herself staring at a scary forest. Mia wanted to explore, so she bravely got on her feet and walked into the forest. Then, suddenly, she heard a rustle and peered through the bushes...but saw nothing.” Ha! It’s just the wind! Nothing can scare me! Said Mia. She kept on walking. BOOM! Mia whirled around. “Nothing but the wind, nothing but the wind,” Mia reassured herself...but then...A metal-looking human was staring at Mia...But was it *really* a human? That was when Mia spotted buttons on the creature... and lights flashing on his head. Then Mia at once knew who that creature was... A robot was in front of Mia.

Trapped!

“HELP!” Mia cried. Too late. The robot swallowed Mia in one gulp. Mia was worried. She was in a cave-like mouth. Mia looked around, hoping to find something, but instead she heard a noise. She walked over to the noise and... “Hello?!” a voice said. “Anyone there?!”

“Oh!” thought Mia. “There’s someone here!” Mia bravely walked to the noise...and found herself facing a warrior!

“What are you doing here?” They both said, confused. They looked at each other...then Mia started to panic. “Oh! Well, I was swallowed by this giant robot!” said Mia.

“Hi! I’m Zheng He!” replied the warrior. “Well, I’m here to look for the legendary gold. My home, China, has sent me to get it. I’m not sure if it’s here, but the map I have in my pocket says so. So I let the robot eat me. Then I can look for the gold! Do you think you can help me?”

“Sure!” said Mia.”

They started looking. But they couldn’t find the gold! At last, Mia gave up. She sat down on what looked like a clean spot, but it was covered in saliva. So she stood up. She looked around, hoping to find a clue or at least a place to sit and.... she found a piece of cloth in the corner. She walked to the piece of cloth and lifted it. She found an open chest covered in jewels. Gold coins were scattered around the chest, there were also necklaces and bracelets inside it.

“The treasure!” Mia yelled.

As Zheng He was running over, she found a gold coin with a skull on top. As she was closing her hands around it, there was a flash of light and Mia was immediately back in her room with the book “The Ming Treasure Voyages” on her lap. “Whoa! What an adventure!” She thought. She put her new book on her bookshelf and smiled a secret smile to herself.

Lost in Space: The untold story of Admiral Zheng He

Victoria Shanghai Academy, Chu, Christina – 8

Once there was a man called Zheng He, he was a famous Admiral in China long long time ago. He was famous for his adventures and brought many beautiful things to China. The history books tell us that he had sailed more than seven times to Africa and the Middle East, but nobody knows that he had a secret journey... until now !

On one sunny day, Admiral Zheng He his friend Zheng She, his god-daughter Zheng Me and his dog Zing Zing, were sailing in the famous treasure ship called the 'Chicken King'. Suddenly the weather turned bad and the sky turned wild and purple! Strange objects like green peas and Chinese dumplings all crashed into the sea together with lightning and thunderbolt made of toothpicks. While everyone on the ship were panicking, a tornado sucked up the ship ! The tornado was in fact a Black-hole! Everything started to stretch like noodles and spin around like a carousel. They were travelling through the Black-hole at the speed of light, then suddenly everything stopped.

'Everybody brace yourselves! Let's get out of the ship and explore!' said Zheng He.

The Black-hole had taken them to a strange planet called TTA 8813. It looked like a garbage dump full of giant squids which were actually aliens. The aliens were eating disgusting stuff such as slug pies, purple ink and chewing bubble-gum made of horse poop. The aliens called themselves names like 'Europa', 'Galli-storm', 'Lo', 'Nose-picker', 'Chatterbox' and 'Poop-eater' Zheng He thought the aliens might eat them, so they hid behind some slug slime.

Just when Zheng He thought he and his friends could quietly return to their ship, something unexpected happened. Zing Zing barked at Nose-picker because it looked like a sausage! The aliens tied up Zheng He and his friends with pony-tails and forced them to eat their disgusting food. Zheng Me tried to be polite and took a bite of the horse-poop bubble gum. She hand started to shake, her face turned green and she turned into an alien! They called her 'Greenie-pie' and wanted to eat her! Just when the aliens turned their backs to get the knife, Zheng He and his friends ran away in time and got back into the ship. Zheng He went to his cabin and took his magic wand that the King of Africa gave him as a birthday present. He waved the wand at Zheng Me and said "hullaballo !", she turned back into human. Suddenly their ship started to spin and the Black-hole took them back to China. Zheng He said to his friends, 'this is the worst adventure ever! Let's not write it down in the history book because people might think we are very crazy!'

Guess where his next adventure will be?

The Magical Violin

Victoria Shanghai Academy, Lee, Erin – 8

Finally back to China! thought Zheng He. As he stepped into the Golden Palace to attend the ceremony arranged by the Ming Emperor to celebrate the triumphant return of the Ming Treasure Fleet, he heard a clang. He knelt down and picked up a miniature model of a violin that made him think back to the moment that made his journey unforgettable...

It was a normal day out at sea. But suddenly, the wave began to roughen. Zheng He closed his eyes as he tried to steady himself. Just as the wave began to calm, a powerful force sucked him into the water...

Zheng held his breath as he tried to swim. Suddenly, he realized he could breathe underwater. He also found that whenever he swam, he would hit his head. At last he knew where he was. He was in an underwater prison. He felt around the room until he bumped into something and he knew it was not a rock. "Who are you?" It said.

"I am Zheng He. Who are you?"

"I'm Violet," whispered the girl. "I was brought here by a big storm. The only thing I have here is my magical violin." Just then, they heard some heavy footsteps approach them. They looked through the tiny window, terrified as the 10-foot shadow went past them.

Violet drew out the violin from her bag and began playing. A sweet melody drifted out of the prison and reached Bubble, the smartest swordfish in the ocean. In a split second, Bubble arrived and tried to use his pointy sword to unlock the prison door. As they were about to celebrate, the giant sea monster appeared! Violet immediately played "The Flight of the Bumblebee" (a fast, rhythmic piece that was her favourite), hoping to attract every single fish in the ocean to rescue them. Without any disappointment, a troop of fish arrived. Zheng He picked up a big seashell and blew into it. As intended, the fish saluted him as their leader! Zheng He commanded the troop to enter the mouth of the sea monster and keep blowing bubbles. The monster expanded and expanded.... Suddenly they heard a POP! The sea monster had burst and shrunk into a giant sea turtle. Everyone was very grateful to them and then decided to make Violet their new ruler. Violet happily accepted and as a token of thanks, she gave a miniature model of a violin to Zheng He. He had then continued on his journey...

Suddenly, a tap on his shoulder interrupted his thoughts. He turned to see an official waiting. "Zheng He, the ceremony is starting. The emperor has invited a famous musician who says she is the ruler of the Aquatic Empire." The music began to play, and the fast, rhythmic piece that had once saved his life echoed through the palace. *That's got to be Violet!* thought Zhen He.

The Ming Treasure Bottle

Victoria Shanghai Academy, Sze, Kristen – 8

“Ugh.” Stephanie was at the beach with her mom cleaning up rubbish from Typhoon Mangkhut. “I hate volunteering! Why don’t we just throw the rubbish back in the water?” Stephanie complained.

Dragging herself along the beach, her foot hit something hard. She picked it up. It was a glass bottle containing a Chinese model ship. She was fascinated, and unknowingly stroked the bottle several times. She felt dizzy, and it seemed as if the world was fading.

Stephanie was woken up by the sounds of fighting and water splashing. The first thing she saw when she opened her eyes was a flag with the word “Ming” printed on it. She got up and looked around. Stephanie was on the deck of a Chinese sailing ship!

“Stop the pirates!” The ship captain shouted while his men scurried around the pirates trying to stop them stealing the gold the ship was carrying.

“Take all the gold! Chuck everything else OFF THE BOAT!” The pirate leader screamed.

Whoa! I have to do something! Stephanie thought.

The pirate leader was standing close to Stephanie, and she found that the pirate was standing on a sheet of silk. Being smart, she grabbed the sheet and pulled with all her might.

The pirate leader stumbled and tripped and he fell overboard.

Realising what happened, one of the pirates made a face and cried “Cap’s down! RETREAT, RETREAT, **RETREAAAAAAT!!!!!!**”. The ship’s captain and his men chased off the remaining pirates until they were all gone.

The ship captain recognized Stephanie’s heroic deed and praised her. “You are a true hero. If the pirates were not stopped, they would have ‘chucked everything OFF THE BOAT!’” The captain chuckled and Stephanie joined in on the laughter. “That would have been quite catastrophic, and would definitely end the beautiful beach and most sea life around here.” Turning towards the horizon, the captain said “We need to respect the sea.”

Stephanie pondered at what the captain said, and suddenly came back to her senses about her own situation.

“Wait... where am I? And who are you?”

“Why, I am Admiral Zheng He and you are onboard my great expedition of course.”

Stephanie was in disbelief and held out the glass bottle. It shone a great blinding light and everyone closed their eyes.

When Zheng He opened his eyes. Stephanie was gone, leaving behind in her place the glass bottle. Shocked, he picked up the bottle wondering if Stephanie was a spirit sent to help him.

“Bury this bottle on the beach.” He ordered his men.

Approximately six hundred years later...

“Stephanie! Stephanie! Are you okay?” Stephanie’s mom yelled as Stephanie sat up, still clinging onto the bottle with the Chinese model ship.

“I’m alright, mom. Let’s continue with the beach clean up!” Stephanie said, blinking but enthusiastic as her mom looked at her puzzled.

Stephanie placed the bottle carefully into her backpack. For a moment, she thought she saw little figures running around on the model ship inside the bottle.

Suspicious Pirates

Yew Chung International School (Primary), Cheung, Latisha – 6

Pirates usually fight travelers and steal their precious gold. But in the early 1400s, a band of pirate ships did the opposite! They traveled to India, Africa and Arabia. When they got there, they received gold and silk and other precious things. Sometimes, they meet kind people and gave away their lovely gold. Other nasty pirates would fight and sink their ship.

Fighting is hard work. Pirates would die from it. The two fleets sank each others' ship. But the soldiers of the pirates are the people who work the hardest. They are the people who get rid of the nasty pirates. They use hooks and swords to fight each other. But the weapons are dangerous too. If they're too heavy, they sink the ship.

Blackbeard was a fierce pirate. He was also handsome. He beat a lot of pirates but one. Mayfield has a lot of pirates. There were so many that Blackbeard couldn't even stand it. He was shot five times before he was killed. But silly Blackbeard was famous for a longer time than he was alive. Today Blackbeard could be in books, in computer books and in legends.

Other nasty pirates use a trick called Tortoise. A tortoise is a trick when you hold up your shields and form a tortoise shell. It would be hard to look and fight though, but they don't even mind. They repeat this several times. The helping pirates practice every day to beat those nasty pirates.

Anxious pirates won't be brave enough to fight those ridiculous pirates. They sleep and stay in sailing ships. Do you know that they eat tree skin and don't die? They have got secret underground hiding places to sleep. They also hide weapons in their hiding place too.

Pirates will be fewer than helping soldiers' pirates as they just have a wooden club and an animal's soft and harmless skin. Others have hard armies and harmful swords when their journey ends. They sail back to Arabia, Africa and India. Sometimes a terrific sunset will fall and the pirates will enjoy! They meet their families and will have a great feast.

The Pirate World

Yew Chung International School (Primary), Wang, Angela – 7

Once upon a time there was me, my brother and my friends and the Ming Treasure Fleet started in Hong Kong. It took the children 3 years to get to America, then they started to fight because they are enemies of the pirates. The pirates said “I’m going to steal your treasure!” The children shouted “No you are not!” They continued to go to America. Everyone was feeling nervous because they knew they were about to fight each other. Their hearts were beating fast.

The pirates made the first move to fight. One pirate came behind me to try to steal my stuff. I quickly turned back and shouted “Hold on! You are not going to steal my treasure. I’m going to push you in the water!” Ahhhh! SPLASH!

Everyone on the boat heard the very loud surprising splash and the pirates ran to see what had happened. “Oh no! Man down in the water!” shouted a pirate with a rope. They threw the rope to the drowning pirate, but it was too late. He was too tired to pull.

The children said “Hooray! One pirate down!” The children ran to continue the fight with the other pirates. Then another pirate said “I will fight with those little children” and me and my brother said “You can’t do that because you are a nasty pirate. HA HA HA!”

We decided to push him down into the water. My brother was smart and used the sword to cut off the bad pirates head and he was gone. We felt happy and said “Yay! Another pirate is dead!”

We continued to sail to America until we almost got there and then we met another whole ship of pirates. They were much stronger so we had to make a plan. Our plan was that some of us would do gymnastics and some of us would do kung fu. We’d surround the pirates at once. At first we didn’t win but we kept trying and trying and then at the end we did it! We won the battle! We were feeling so happy that we cheered. We kept sailing and made it to America. When we got there, we saw pirates taking other people's stuff. We had to fight with them until all the pirates were in the water. Once they were in the water, we gave all the sparkly gifts to the poor people that didn’t have them. We also gave other people gifts because the nasty, mean pirates had stolen everything from their homes. The people felt happy with the Hong Kong children gave the sparkly gifts to the people in America.

Fiction

Group



The Final Truth

Quarry Bay School, Barton, Luke – 9

"Sir! Ship sighted!" called a sailor on board Admiral Zheng He's flagship, *The Liberty*. "Do you think they're traders from across the seas?" Zheng He shouted across his ship filled with cargo as he took in a big whiff of the smell of beautiful flowers and spices. He was back in the Straits of Malacca for another treasure voyage two years after they had killed the infamous Cantonese pirate Chen Zuyi. "We have no idea, sir," another sailor answered. "Look! They're raising a flag!" It was the dreaded flag that all traders hated and feared. The Chinese flag with yellow skulls instead of stars. It only meant one thing: Cantonese pirates.

Another flag was then raised. It was the terrible red one that signified death for all. No one on the fleet was to be spared, especially the Admiral. The mysterious pirate across was thinking of the most excruciating death imaginable for Zheng He, while looking at the massive treasure fleet. It may look glorious and beautiful now, he grimaced, but it would be more befitting when reduced to ashes. Already he could smell the burning embers of the treasure ships after he has had his way. He ordered his fleet into an almost invincible flanking position.

Meanwhile, Zheng He was studying this pirate as he ordered his crew to prepare the cannons and man the decks. "Prepare for battle! Get to your stations!" Admiral Zheng He hollered. Whoever this pirate was, he thought to himself, he knew he was facing an opponent as skillful and intelligent as he was.

The pirate mastermind also ordered his men to load the cannons in anticipation of the major victory that he had envisioned. He gave command for all of his men to charge forward. The famous Admiral countered this attack by ordering all his combat ships to turn to their portside and open up on the cannons, with smoke billowing in full force. At first the battle was not going well for Zheng He. He had started with a moderate fleet of combat ships but in no time he was down to around half the number. But Zheng He had wisely ordered his crew to keep the treasure ships away from the battle in case the pirates sank them.

However, the pirate had taken more casualties despite seeming like he had the winning edge, due to his recklessness. He had started the battle with a superior force three times larger, but unbelievably in a few hours it was almost a draw between the two sides. To counter this, the pirate had ordered every single ship to hit portside hard and fire their cannons with maximum power so smoke rained down on everyone. This resulted in the destruction of a few more of Zheng He's ships and even more suffering severe damage, leaving him with only a handful of battle-ready combat ships.

The pirate was feeling extremely smug about the outcome of the battle. He was gloating too much to realise that half of Zheng He's remaining ships had managed to outflank his own forces. The Admiral felt his hopes rising as he witnessed his enemy's errors.

Zheng He's plan was beginning to come together. The famous Admiral's fleet had now surrounded the larger, more powerful enemy fleet. It continued bombarding the opponent, obliterating some of the pirate ships. But the pirate retaliated by blowing up even more of Zheng He's ships. It dawned on the Admiral that the tide could be turning against him and called out: "Men! Whoever this pirate is, his fleet is far too strong for us! We will retreat now but we will return!". The pirate mastermind began laughing his loudest at Zheng He's retreat and his crew celebrated their supposed victory with heavy drinking and merrymaking.

Several hours later, Zheng He and his crew had recouped for a final all-out battle. His fleet sailed back in heavy mist and his men began firing the cannons while the mystery pirate and his crew were still asleep. They took out even more of the pirate's ships. The enemy crew awoke with a start and jumped up to duty, bumping and pushing each other overboard to man the cannons. They steered the flagship in a drunken stupor, crashing some ships and leaving them with an even smaller fleet..

The *Liberty's* heavy firepower took out some more of the pirate's fleet. Now the heat was really on. It came down to just the two flagships fighting for survival. The pirate ship fired fiercely, which saw *The Liberty's* sails being damaged but the ship remained standing. Zheng He remained calm and ordered his men to fire the only ammunition they had left to blow a tiny hole in the hull of the opposing flagship. There was no

way they could win now. Zheng He went to face the devilish pirate. "We surrender, but I have a proposal for you. I will give you my ship, my cargo and myself on the condition that you spare the lives of my crew. Do you accept this generous offer?" The corrupt, nefarious pirate laughed hysterically in victory. "I accept! Do you realise this is my revenge for you killing my father Chen Zuyi? For I am the shrewd and cunning pirate Chen Hanyi!" Unbeknownst to Zheng He, the anger and hate for him lingered in the Chen family. The mastermind pirate had turned out to be Chen Hanyi, who had spent months hunting down his father's killer to seek vengeance.

A few hours later, Zheng He was tied to a mast for maximum security. He had just witnessed his enemy blowing up his ship and stealing his cargo. With all the pirates getting drunk and falling asleep, Zheng He stealthily whipped out a small knife to cut through the rope and finally broke free.

He crept to the cargo hold and found it, filled with barrels of gunpowder. He also found some tough wire and a lit candle. He stuck one end of the wire in one of the gigantic gunpowder barrels and he brought the other end to the top of the stairs. He grabbed the candle and lit the wire, and dropped it on the ground for the fire to spread. He could smell the fuse burning as he ran. He sprinted across the massive ship and quickly got in a tiny rowing boat which he unclipped and as fast as he could, rowed half a mile away across the freezing, icy seas with his heart pounding. He waited for what seemed like an eternity. Suddenly, his concentration was interrupted by a massive explosion. His plan had worked and he breathed a humongous sigh of relief. He stared intently as the entire blazing ship sank.

New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

Quarry Bay School, Maxwell, Yu Miller – 10

1407, April, Tuesday

I looked out to the horizon and saw the first rays of sunlight. Slowly the fireball rose out of the ocean and a breeze flowed through the air. What I've learned as a sailor is that it's an advantage to get up early. That way you get some time to yourself without other sailors picking on you. And I did get picked on. A lot. Especially because I was the only female on board. Women weren't allowed to sail, but I had to make money for my family, so I managed to sneak on-board as a man. And by the time they figured it out, we were well away from the port. Soon we'd start our daily mission of searching for foreign lands to give gifts to, to show how strong and wealthy China is, and earn allies. I felt a tap on my shoulder and someone calling my name, Lin Ling. It was my best friend Wang Wei. We became friends when I saved him from drowning. He'd been thrown overboard by the furious waves, and I grabbed a rope and hauled him out while everyone else cowered in their bunks. He was the only boy who didn't bully me for being a woman.

"Hey!" He said grinning at me. "Ready to swab the deck?"

"Oh yeah!" I said grinning with equal enthusiasm, despite the boring task at hand. There's no such thing as a boring task with a friend. We started swabbing. It was tedious work, since our ship was huge. Wang and I chatted as the rest of the sailors got up. Soon, the air was filled with cries of, 'Tighten the mizzen mast!' or, 'Get me a bowl of fish!' Quite normal.

Suddenly, I heard shouts of, 'INCOMING FLEET!!!' Wang and I ran to the bow of the ship. All I could see was our accompanying fleet of boats. Then I saw it. Among the haze, I spotted a group of wooden ships, filled to the brim with soldiers. And, on the main mast of the biggest ship, a black flag. As I was the first to see the flag, I quickly showed Wang, who ran off to inform the Captain. Within minutes we were all in armour and bristling with weapons. Except me. I wasn't allowed a weapon, because I was a woman. I watched as the commanders shouted at each other.

"WHO ARE YOU?" bellowed our commander.

"WE ARE CHEN ZUYI'S FLEET!" a gruff voice boomed on the other side, presumably the commander of the approaching ship. "GIVE US ALL THY GOODS IF YA VALUE YE NECKS!"

That's when an arrow flew from our ship. It sailed through the air, and embedded itself in the wood next to the Captain. There was a moment of silence. Then, chaos broke loose.

"NOBODY ATTACKS ME AND GETS AWAY WITH IT! SOLDIERS, ATTACK!" The opposing captain threw a spear with some string attached to it, and it stuck deep into the wood of our boat. I watched in terror as the pirates started scooting up the rope and boarded our ship! Cannons fired, and arrows tore through the sky. Weapons clashed, and sparks flew. I started running.

As I leapt across the deck, I was quickly met by a pirate with a chipped broad blade in his hands. He charged me and I narrowly dodged his sword. This continued until I was at an open hatch at the end of the ship. Then, quick as lightning, I got an idea. As the pirate smiled a smile with far too few teeth, he charged me sword first. I stood my ground for as long as I could, then ducked to the side. The plan worked. He tumbled straight into the hatch, dropping his sword on the way. I locked the hatch, and snatched up the sword.

Turning around, I clambered onto the poop deck, the tallest point on the ship apart from the masts, figuring it would make a good vantage point.

“Well, look who decided to join de fight, eh?” I recognised the accent as the commander of the opponent’s ship, and I turned to face him. He held a dagger in each hand, and wore an eye patch. Classic. I was doomed. I had only a broad blade that I had no idea how to use. Sure enough, he ran towards me, knives trailing behind him. I scrambled onto the mast and started climbing away from him. Following suit, the commander pursued.

Soon enough, there was nowhere else to climb. We had reached a small platform at the highest point of the ship, hundreds of feet above the deck. The commander looked at me menacingly, grasping his knives tightly.

“All right!” I barked at him. “You clearly want me for something, so what is it?”

“Ye want me ta tell ye? Well, it just so happens that you are a women,” he said simply. “And women, are obviously not worthy of a place in dis world. Dey are weak, pests that should be slaves. Come to my ship, and serve me. Or ye die.”

“NEVER!” I said instantly. Now I was angry. Very angry. And then I did one of the stupidest things I’ve ever done. I fell into what I believed to be a fighting stance. The Commander did the same. Simultaneously, we flew at each other.

We locked blades. I was surprisingly fluent with a sword, but the commander was strong. Rage powered me, but soon my sword flew to the sea below. I faced him and waited for the end. The knife rushed forward and I steeled myself. Right before it hit, his knife slanted to the right, just missing me. Then, he tipped and fell to the sea.

Behind him, was Wang, fist at the spot where the commander just stood.

“Wha? He fell... How?... Why? You saved me!”

“Because you’re my friend. And that’s what friends do.”

Friendship Knows No Bounds

Regents Primary School of Shenzhen, Chan, Ka Ying Cherry – 11

Zheng He's voyage to the west in a historical event in Ming Dynasty. This is also a very famous story.

One day, when Zheng He arrived at the East Indian Ocean, there was a very powerful storm at sea. This was a storm that Zheng He and his friends had never seen before. Whirlpools on the surface of the sea like gates. The sea breeze howled, the wind howled. Suddenly, the ship was turned onto its side without control.

Zheng He was knocked unconscious for seven days and nights. When he awoke, he found the new place was quite different from the place he used to live in. He found that all his companions were missing. He decided to cheer himself up and found his friends. He went out and walked around. He learnt that this was the fishermen village. He saw his companions on the beach and brought them back. Zheng He learned that originally, it was the year one thousand three hundreds and nine, and he had travelled for one hundred years ago!

Zheng He found it very hard to sleep. The next day, he went to the fishermen and thanked them for taking him in. Then Zheng He left the village. He was determined to find his way back.

Zheng He came to the seaside with his compass. He saw a ship at the seaside. They seemed to be prepared to go to the sea. Zheng He talked to the captain and asked for his permission to work on his ship. The captain approved and soon he showed him around the ship. 'Hello! I was the captain of this ship. My name is Tommy. There are four people on board, including me. They are Joe, Tim and Tom. Tim and Tom are twins.' 'Look, this will be your room. Next to Joe's, Tom's and Tim's rooms.'

'Wow! That's good!'

'This is the deck, stern and this is where we eat.'

'Ok, I think your ship is really cool.'

'Next step, let's go!'

'Ok!' Everyone said.

Zheng He fell asleep in his room. Tok tok tok...Tim tapped on the door of Zheng He's room, in a hurry.

Zheng He was awakened by a knock at the door. 'What has happened?' he asked when he was opening the door. 'The captain is looking for you, it's urgent, you'd better hurry.' Zheng He found Tommy. His face was filled with confusion and fear. He called Zheng He into a small room. He said, 'Zheng He, when I looked into the sea, I saw something terrible. It's so terrifying and scary but I am unsure of what it is exactly.' Tommy explained that he asked Zheng He to his room because he had experienced sailing and maybe, hopefully, he had come across these creatures before. Tommy took him to the deck and instructed him to look carefully into the deep blue sea. 'That is a sea monster!' Zheng He said in shock.

'Sea monster?' Tommy asked.

'Yes, they're sea monster. They're very ferocious. Keep your voice down or they would feel annoying. They hate it when the people interrupted them during their sleep.' Zheng He whispered.

'Wow, you know so much,' Tommy said.

'What are you doing?' Joe came out and asked.

'Hush!' Zheng He and Tommy said.

But it was too late. The sea monster woke up. It roared in anger. The noise made Tim and Tom come out of their room. They were startled.

'What's happened?' Tim and Tom asked.

'There seems to be a sea monster in this part of the ocean,' Joe said.

'That's terrible, how are we going to escape from being hurt?' asked Tom in a trembling voice.

'There's no way,' Zheng He replied.

The sea monster rushed to the ship in a crazed frenzy. Zheng He took out his knife and stabbed the sea monster's abdomen.

'Whined!' The sea monster gave a terrible cry and fell down...

Zheng He saved everyone.

Tommy said, 'Zheng He, thank you, otherwise our voyage would have been ended in devastation.'

'It was at least I could have done in return for your kind hospitality.' Zheng He replied.

Over the following weeks, Zheng He became more familiar with Tommy, Joe, Tim and Tom. Their friendship was growing from deeper and deeper. Their journey was drawing to an end. All the places they planned to visit had been ticked off their list. Zheng He also slowly found that the gate-like whirlpool had been on the sea. He understood that he had come to this world because of the disorder of time and space. He told his partner, 'In fact I have come from another world, and now I have to go back. I hope you can continue to take risks. Tommy, you can be a better Captain.'

'Goodbye everyone!'

'Goodbye, Zheng He!'

Then Zheng He jumped down into the whirlpool...The next day, Zheng He returned to the reality and lay on the ship of his friends. They continued their voyage.

Zheng He's Voyage to the West

Regents Primary School of Shenzhen, Cheng, Hei Tung Yuko – 10

I was the last and the youngest sailor that the great explorer Zheng He recruited for his voyage to the west. I am lucky simply because I was picked up right by the pier. Our voyage departed from Nanjing, travelling across the Chinese territory and finally assembling in Jiangsu Province.

Our plan was to make a long journey to the Western Pacific and Indian Ocean, and to visit about 30 countries and regions. By the end of this journey we would visit various places like Java, Malacca, Sri Lanka and Pengheng! We would also visit the East Africa, the Red Sea and the State.

'Hey, kid! What's your name?' Zheng He said to me.

'I... I don't know,' I hesitated for a little and said. Zheng He patted my head with a broad smile and said, 'Let's pick a new name for you. How about we call you Hope?'

I nodded my head and Zheng He laughed.

'What a meaningful name! We use the word 'hope' when we are desperate but still hope that something good may happen!' Came a low thick voice from old Zhang. He had been following Zheng He for many years. He was known as the most ill-tempered officer on the voyage.

Zheng He touched my head and said, 'Yes! Hope is the best gift I can give you, right? And you are our new member. Will you accept the commands of the captain?' Without hesitation, I said, 'I will!' Zheng He laughed and said, 'Let's stop wasting time and get started quickly.'

I soon picked up the skills of handling ropes on the deck. I got to know most of the crew members very well as time went by. My favourite part was playing Chinese chess with the Marine boilers in the engine room. There was a time old Zhang caught me when I was goofing around in the engine room. 'What are you doing here?' yelled old Zhang. He grabbed my clothes and lifted me in the air. I was soon pulled out from the room and locked in a stinky fish tank stored in bottom of the voyage. To my surprise, he started to tell me his story, 'I was a naughty young boy like you when I first joined the crew. There was a time I dropped the end of an anchor line because I was not focused on my job when we were parking on the pier, so Zheng He brought me here to this ill-smelling fish tank. Instead of punishing me, he taught me the skills of anchoring patiently. It was a new start for me...' said the wise old man. We spent many days on the sea and we finally arrived at the island of Java. There are a lot of beautiful natural resources and plenty of cultural sites, but after a few days we went to the next destination.

Along the way we passed Sumatra, Su Lu and Peng Hang. However, before the next destination, we encountered a huge storm.

That morning, the sea was still calm but by noon it became rough. Zheng He said, 'This means that the storm is coming, everyone hurry up and prepare the ship for the upcoming storm and to take all precautionary measures.'

I had never experienced a storm while on the sea before, and I was so frightened that the ship would roll over from the huge waves. The members on the ship told me to keep clam and drink a bowl of ginger soup. 'This will help relieve your worries and keep you calm!' I nodded and took it all in, but I still couldn't conquer my fear. I was shivering and believed this was the scariest moment in my life.

Two hours later, a strong wind started blowing towards us, and we all went to the cabin. We hugged the railings and pillars tightly. The strong wind blew my hat away and the wooden stools on the boat fell down. The ship swayed violently, and I was totally unstable. Soon, it started raining, and the pillars next to me suddenly broke. We just held it up for about an hour, and after that we felt the wind was weakening. At this time, Zheng He said, 'The storm will be over soon, hold on a little longer'. Soon enough, after ten minutes, the storm stopped and I felt a total relief.

Because of the storm, many members of the ship got seasick, and everyone vomited. Only several other members and I who drank ginger soup didn't have any problems with seasickness. We helped Zheng He's to clean up the boat. At this time, the sea was calm and we could finally see the blue sky hanging above our heads as the sun was shining again. I felt much more comfortable and everybody finally could get some rest.

The beautiful sunset plunged through the sea, and the fish were jumping out of the water. The flying fish were so mesmerizing that all sailors on the deck thought it was a miracle. They were so amazed by the scene that played out before them.

Soon we arrived at our next destination Zhen La, where we stayed for a few days. Throughout that time we were able to taste the delicious food and met the friendliest local people as we tried to understand the simplicity of their ordinary lives. But not long after, it was time to set sail again. That day we were ready to sail off, but in a few moments it became a downpour. As I looked out the window I could only see the awful weather and nothing more. I was so excited because my thoughts were already somewhere else, in some other parts of this beautiful world.

Diary of a Young Girl

Regents Primary School of Shenzhen, Huang, Zhou Jun Chloe – 9

At 10, I thought how old 60 would be. Now at 60, I think how young 10 was and how much I have learned. I am turning to 60, opening my diary. I quietly read the familiar messy script detailing my experience. Ignoring my grand-children's shouting screams, throwing toys and jumping on and off furniture, I started to read...

Now I use my time machine to travel back to the Ming Dynasty. I am so excited that I couldn't fall asleep. I am going to meet Zheng He who is the leader of the Ming Treasure Voyages. As we all know, from 1405 until 1433, the Chinese imperial eunuch Zheng He led seven ocean expeditions for the Ming emperor that were unmatched in world history.

At 8 a.m. on Monday morning in May in 1405, we were going to start our voyage to the first station, India. The weather was fine enough to set sail. A lot of citizens standing on the shore were waiting to send us off warmly. Later they disappeared in our eyes. I was sure this would be a great voyage in the history of the world. I was the assistant of Zheng He. As the leader of this voyage he was very busy from early morning till late night. His goal was to help someone who was in need and give them food and silk as gifts. Also our mission was to know more about the world and got some useful information that could make the Ming Dynasty more powerful.

At 6 p.m. on Tuesday afternoon in August, we finally arrived India. Zheng He told us that we should be polite to give others a good first impression. At that time the sunset was so fantastic that it made the people's faces look like red apples. We were warmly welcomed by the local people in India. Look! Some of them were dancing and some of them were singing, some of them even gave us a lot of nice fruits which I had never seen before. They were very friendly and helpful. The only problem was we couldn't communicate very well with each other. We could just only use hand signs to try to tell them what we thought. Sometimes it was embarrassing and funny.

The next morning Zheng He told us that we were going to set off to the next station, Africa. We reluctantly left India at 6:30 in the morning and set sail to Africa. On the way to Africa, we met some nasty pirates and they wanted the treasures we had on our ship. Fortunately, we were carrying military forces and weapons. We scared them away. The ocean current was complicated during the trip to Africa. One of our boats sank into the sea. But Zheng He was brave all the time. He always believed that we could make it out.

At 11 p.m. on Tuesday in December, we arrived at Africa. The people there we saw were black. The weather was very hot. We only needed to wear shirts. We were very curious about the weather there. We also met a lot of peaceful people there and gave away the wonderful presents. We brought back the African zebras and giraffes as gifts for our Imperial Zoo.

We arrived in China safely in March the following year. The King of Ming Dynasty was very satisfied with what we had done. He rewarded me a house and I lived there for more than 40 years...

Twist in the Tale of the Ming Treasure Voyages

Regents Primary School of Shenzhen, Liu, Guang Hao Steven – 11

In Chinese history, there lived a very famous eunuch named Zheng He. He was famed for his skills in navigation. He was a Chinese mariner, an explorer, a diplomat and a fleet admiral. Aside from these accolades and achievements, Zheng He was also smart and possessed a kind heart. He was always faithful to his friends, but he tended to have friends that end up betraying him.

The Emperor Zhu Li liked him very much, because he had an attention for details and was meticulous about everything. The Emperor was at ease in delegating him the responsibilities. This time, the Emperor asked him to travel the seas so as to strengthen relations with the foreign countries. Zheng accepted the arduous task. He carried 27,000 people, 200 ships and started travelling from Nanjing.

Zheng He was excited and nervous for his trip. He had no idea what was going to happen but he was ready to accept this arduous task. Early the next morning, the sound of beautiful waves woke him up. He rubbed his eyes and looked up to the sky. The sun shone on his face. The clear sea wind blew and he inhaled fresh air into his lungs. Zheng's ship was in charge of leading the fleet and he had an eagle's eye on the horizon. 'Hand me the telescope and the map,' he instructed the crew. 'We're about to reach our first destination! Aha! Full speed ahead!' Some time later, they arrived to their first destination, Champa Kingdom.

When Zheng directed them to exchange goods, a man walked to him. 'Hello! Mr Zheng He, can I work on your fleet?' he asked with his squeaking voice. Zheng thought him as strange, and paid no attention to him. The next day, they prepared to go to Java. The man woke up before the sun rose. He put a bird on the ground and took out a roll of paper to let the bird catch it. He patted the bird gently and it flew away. The strange man later appeared once again, this time he was walking on a corridor. The man saw Zheng in his periphery and immediately scuttled away. 'That was close, he almost caught me!' The man whispered to himself. Due to the long distance from JangCheng (Champa Kingdom) to Java, it took them at least six days to arrive by the ship.

On the fourth day, the weather turned worse. The fierce waves beat against the boat. It was raining and the sounds of thunder rumbled. The waves made the ship rock vehemently and Zheng fell violently ill! Suddenly, one of the young sailors pointed forward and shouted, 'Look at the huge ship! That is the biggest ship I've ever seen! Wait, a skeleton? Hey! A pirate ship is coming towards us! Everybody, run!' Everyone froze in their place. They didn't know what to do. Only an old man ran to the helm. He turned the helm 180 degrees and the ship immediately took a sharp turn. Because of the heavy rain, the fleet was dispersed in different locations. One of the pirate's cannons hit on Zhen's ship. 'Boom!' With the sheer force of the cannon, the hull started to break. Unfortunately, this was compounded with the waves that hit the ship again with deadly and continuous blows. The ship started to sink. Even worse still, two more pirate ships appeared over the horizon. The situation continues to get worse! 'Boom! Boom!' Two shells flew over Zheng's head. Two more shells hit the ship. Suddenly, a pirate captain shouted, 'I want them alive...'

At this point, the pirate ships accelerated. The pirate ships drew closer to them. 'Launch the rope! Pull back!' The pirate ship was attached and boarded the ship successfully. They pointed their swords at them and told them not to move. At that moment, the man whom Zheng thought was very strange stood out.

'Good evening, my honorable Mr. Pirate Eric. It's my honor to help you with your work. '

The pirate captain touched his head and said, 'Nice work! I am going to take down this fleet and I am going to be the greatest pirate in the history.'

'You will never make it! Look at your dirty beard, it's covered with fleas and all kinds of worms. Sick pirates!' Zheng retorted bravely. But with a clink the pirate knocked him unconscious with a bat and everything in his vision faded away.

The sound of the water droplets woke Zheng. He found himself and three other crew members locked up in a dark room. There were many cobwebs and the room was so dirty. Zheng looked out through a crack from the iron door. He looked over his surrounding and saw a pirate standing in the doorway. There was a set of keys hanging on his trousers. Thinking of the dire situation he was in, Zheng pondered for a long time and thought of an escape plan. He waited patiently and thought of executing his plan during nightfall.

At night, it was very dark. A cry came from the room. 'AHHHHHH! My stomach hurts so badly! I am going to die! Who can help me!'

The pirate nearby looked curiously and opened the door to examine the ruckus. Suddenly, Zheng lunged at him, tied him up and gagged him as they slipped out quietly. Zheng instructed the other three crew members to leave. He stayed because he still had plans to exact revenge. He meandered through the rooms and found the captain's room. Inside, the pirate captain slept like a pig. Zheng slowly tied him up, slapped him awake and said triumphantly, 'I just said that you could never make it! Goodbye, sick pirate!' and with those last words, Zheng left the room but made sure to throw a match, watching as it burned into flames. He looked at the fire and thought, 'These are the consequences of your betrayal.' Exhausted but undefeated, Zheng set sail back home, next to the Emperor.

A Trip to the Sea

Regents Primary School of Shenzhen, Long, Ho Sen Mathew – 11

The brave explorer, Zheng He, had just experienced his first voyage, decided to embark on another journey to the seas. This time, he was requested by the Emperor to escort ambassadors of Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam back to their countries. In order to avoid any unexpected situations happening, Zheng He took a myriad of treasures including precious silk, which was an extremely valuable commodity at the time. He believed that the value of this product could help him solve any problems that they may encounter during their voyage.

The sky was clear and the breeze was mild on the day when Zheng, his sailors and three ambassadors set off. 'It's a good start! This trip will go smoothly as expected,' thought Zheng. One of his sailors controlled the rudder, others stayed on the deck to safeguard the voyage. Zheng and the three ambassadors sat inside the cabin, drank beer and exchanged their opinions on worldwide issues of politics, economy and culture.

The weather was beautiful. The motor of the ferry was powerful. All the sailors were taking rest in turns. The one who controlled the rudder was tired and he closed his eyes. Suddenly, a thunder boomed. Everyone in the ferry stood frozen and stared in shock because of the sudden loud noise. The sky loomed as it got darker and darker. The ferry started swirling, wagging from side to side. Suddenly, there was a shot of white light that blinded everyone's eyes. In the twinkling of an eye, lightning came one after another. Unfortunately, the sailor who stood in the watchtower was struck by the lightning and died afterwards. All other people were frightened. Some of them huddled together and cried. Some of them knelt down to pray. Some of them held the treasure tightly. What a mess it was in the cabin!

Zheng looked around and noticed that everyone was scared. Being the caring leader, he wanted to go around and comfort them. He gathered everyone for a meeting. 'Listen everyone! I know things look bleak right now, but things are going to get better. This too shall pass. God bless us! Stop crying! Cheer up! You are not alone— I'm here!' All the sailors and ambassadors were touched and this speech enabled them to restore their morale.

Zheng went outside of the cabin, pacing back and forth, trying to figure out a solution. Then he found a small gold shiny point in the distance. He was afraid that it was a dream. He kept rubbing his eyes to check if he was dreaming and alas, the small gold shiny point remained in the distance. 'Oh My God! This is not a fantasy! It's true! Island ahead! We made it!' thought Zheng, his eyes were widening. He rushed back to the cabin and told the good news to everybody. They all looked out of the windows. A statue was standing right there. The statue's body emanated a halo of light extending around him for two meters. The lines on the statue's palms were long and deep. Its face was long and beautiful! Its eyelids were well proportioned. Its hair had long curls. The ambassador of Thailand shouted excitedly, 'That's my Buddha that I believe in! My home!' Zheng asked the experienced sailor to control the rudder and keep moving forward.

Four hours later, they arrived at the pier. Everyone was relieved. 'Finally, we have made it! We are safe!' The ambassador of Thailand led Zheng and his sailors to the Emperor's Palace. In order to thank Zheng for all he had done, the Emperor held a grand party at night to celebrate their success. Zheng and his sailors enjoyed this big feast and wanted to give away the gifts to Thailand. 'Dear Emperor of Thailand, here are our most valuable treasure from our country: silverware and gold jewels, ceramics, silk, seeds and a golden cookbook. I want to give them to your temples and share them with the Thai people because the Buddha gave us hope when we fell through hard times during the voyage. Moreover, our Ming Dynasty Emperor wants to build a good relationship with your country. So we are friends now!' said Zheng. 'Thank you, Zheng! We wish you good luck! Cheers, my friend!' replied the Emperor of Thailand.

The next day, Zheng and his sailors set off early. 'Go, friends! Let's head to another destination!' He looked through the horizon with a proud and knowing smile on his face.

A Fairy-Tale Adventure

Regents Primary School of Shenzhen, Wei, Yu Fan Amy – 9

Zheng He's voyages in the South Seas were adventurous, exciting and he went as far as to Africa...

I was one of the few privileged members of the crew of this fleet. As far as I remembered, it was one of the most exhilarating and challenging experiences I had ever had.

The first place we visited was a remote but beautiful area called Jewel City. Jewel City certainly lived up to its name, the place was filled with jewelries, and it made the city dazzle from the various gemstones littered around it. They were so shiny that if you looked at them for more than a few seconds, you'd become mesmerized from the way it glimmered under the light. It was such a unique sight that I did not think you would experience anything like it anywhere else. Aside from the glitz and glamour of Jewel City, it was also the people who made the city such a magical place. They were so friendly that you wouldn't feel homesick from travelling at all. At the end of the day, they were happy to share their riches and urged the crew to bring gemstones back to our homeland as presents to our royal emperor.

The second place we journeyed to was a place called the Green Mountains. It was an enchanting yet an enigmatic place. It was a magical place inhabited by fairies and other enchanting creatures. The fairies were so tiny that they could fit into the palm of your hands. Upon entering the mountains, we congregated with the Queen of the fairies and she bewitched us by helping us turn into the same size as the fairies and having our own wings to fly with. In this way, we saw so many different kinds of birds with all kinds of colours around the mountains. They always flew around this land. It was one of the most magical and out of this world experiences I had ever had.

The third place we travelled to however, was the most frightening one. It was an area filled with pirates. We were sailing on the quiet sea, enjoying the gentle music played by our lovely violinist, and dancing with each other happily on board when we suddenly noticed five pirate boats surrounding us, menacingly circling our ship. They appeared out of nowhere that we were all shocked and surprised. We were so scared that we stood frozen in our place. They climbed up onto our boat and grabbed the jewelries from Jewel City. The servants shouted loudly, 'Your Majesty, be careful!' 'Protect our ship!' I yelled to the crew members and instructed them to take their stands to defend the ship. Somehow the memories of Neverland came flooding to my mind. I remembered how brave Peter Pan was, and how he taught us to fight with pirates. I quickly led our crew to battle and we all fought bravely against them. However, the pirates were successful in looting the treasures from Jewel City. After this frightening and exciting moment, it was time to go back to our motherland.

We sailed back to China. When we arrived, Ming Cheng Zu was there. He proudly welcomed us back home. It was a big celebration. We had parties all night and drank a lot of special drinks that the fairies taught us how to brew. However I did not drink them because my Mum said I was too young to drink. The second morning, every one woke up feeling strange, they forgot everything that had happened on our voyage. This is the reason why our adventures were not in any history books or records.

But the most curious thing is that why am I the only one that could remember the adventures?

A Hero's Story

Regents Primary School of Shenzhen, Wu, Nicholas – 11

Once upon a time in China, there was a great and powerful Emperor. He was revered across the country and ruled most of the land. His life was perfect, he had unlimited amounts of gold, controlled many kingdoms and had everything he ever wished for. It was a natural consequence that he would be proud and happy of what he had attained. However, not even all the riches of the world or the material goods he possessed were enough to make him be contented.

There were times when the emperor felt empty. What was the problem? He couldn't figure it out. So, one day, he gathered all the officers and wise men to congregate in his palace. He told them how he felt discontented and was yearning for something to fill the void that he felt. One of the Emperor's officers in the meeting was called Zhang He. He wanted to prove that he was trust-worthy, so he said, 'Your majesty, I would like to be of service and help you.' 'How?' inquired the Emperor. 'How could you help me not to be so empty? 'I will make you the richest Emperor in all of the history! I will travel half the world to find you all the treasure!' This claim was certainly no easy feat, so the Emperor was naturally skeptical, but since he felt he had nothing to lose, he trusted Zhang He and said, 'I have made up my mind! I trust you will bring me the treasure you mention and I declare that all the officers have to answer to Zhang He!' The next day, Zhang called for a meeting. He was going to travel by ship. He ordered the officers to prepare two hundred ships. He needed to be sure that he had enough spaces to put in all the new treasure he was going to discover. But the problem was, would his plan work?

Zhang couldn't sleep. He kept on ruminating about his plans. It was a great responsibility that he embarked on. There were two outcomes: if he succeeded, he would bring glory and fame to his country and his Emperor. But what if he failed? The consequences of his failure would lead to a fate worse than death: shame. 'I will succeed!' with this thought, he fell asleep. When came the day of the journey began, Zhang felt proud.

They travelled for days. At times the sun was so scorching hot that walking by the deck felt like walking on a bed of charcoals. He scoured and looked for signs of land, but to no avail. Zhang started to wonder if the map was correct. But when all hope seemed lost, an officer shouted, 'Island! Island! Island dead ahead!' Zhang immediately got up to look at the island. It was Egypt! They went to see the king, who lived in a big palace made of stones. The two leaders had a long conversation about their countries. Finally, Zhang said, 'With all due respect, your majesty, I have bought some gifts from China. I wonder if you had any gifts from Egypt?' Later on, the king's servants brought a big statue of an Egyptian God. In exchange, the king received silk, gold and valuable vases that Egyptians had never seen before.

As night fell, Zhang and his army returned to their ships. They were unaware that pirates had been watching them. The ships were undefended, it was a perfect time to strike. They silently tried to board onto the ship, but Zhang heard their voices. So, thinking on his feet, he gathered his army quickly and quietly, and right when the pirates were about to attack, they rushed into battle. The pirates were surprised. They didn't expect Zhang's army to be pre-emptive. Under the leadership of Zhang, the pirates fell one by one. The pirates retreated, but Zhang kept attacking. The pirates who escaped thought they were lucky but their luck was about to change for the worse. Zhang fought them back to their boats. After a long battle, the pirates that survived became captives of Zhang. He noticed the pirate's ship was shining, so he and his men went on board. Nothing seemed special on the ship but suddenly, he stepped on a secret switch that opened a secret room. The room was filled with gold, crystals and jewelry!

After Zhang's crew packed away the treasures, they sailed home in victory. They travelled for days but it was too hot. They heard a gunshot, it was the pirates again! The pirates' captain shouted, 'Revenge! Boys, kill'em all!' Zhang's army was attacked, and the pirates were too strong. Then Zhang shouted, 'Retreat!' The crew members all jumped onto the other ships. The pirate's captain was happy, but he quickly realized that all the other ship canons were aimed at his ship. 'Fire!' Zhang ordered. 'BOOM!' A huge explosion caused a huge wave, causing the entire ship to sink to the bottom of the ocean. Later that day, the Emperor received the treasures and heard of their heroic story. But he was curious: 'If the entire ship sank, how could they have the gold?' Zhang laughed and replied, 'I actually never put the treasure in the main ship, because if there were any enemies, they would always target at the main ship.' The Emperor understood and realized at the same time why Zhang succeeded. He was a man of great intellect and instinct.

The celebrations were festive, the stories of Zhang's heroic journey spread through the city like wild fire. They chanted and shouted in unison, 'Zhang He! Long live Zhang He!' echoed through the streets. Zhang He was proud. He had received one of the greatest honors: gaining the Emperor's trust, recognition and applaud from his fellow countrymen. The whole city, the whole of China knew his name! But with a hint of a smile on his face, he looked up and thought, this is not it, 'My journey has just begun...'

New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

Regents Primary School of Shenzhen, Zheng, Man Ching Wendy – 9

‘Zheng, can you find out what the west is and tell me the stories and happenings during your voyage?’ Zhu Di grinned.

‘Yes, my emperor,’ said Zheng He.

In a grand palace, a man knelt on the ground, talking to his emperor, respectfully. The new emperor, Zhu Di, had just beaten his nephew, Zhu Yunwen, a few years ago and tried to consolidate his domination. Emperor Zhu walked down slowly; bent down a little bit and whispered, ‘there is one more secret mission I want you to complete...’

The man went out of the palace, with great excitement. He was just a nameless eunuch in the Ming army, but Zhu Di discovered his potential to lead an army. His name is Zheng He. He won many battles in JINGKANG and was awarded by treasure and power. And now, when Zhu needed his help, Zheng accepted his command without hesitation.

‘I must complete the mission in order to show my gratitude to Zhu.’ Zheng murmured.

Zheng had planned for the voyage for a long time, and now, his dreams finally came true. Zheng stood on the huge flagship, looking at the crew below. What he did from then on would be written into the history books and would be eulogized by the descendants! He overlooked the ocean, commanding in a loud and exciting voice.

‘Here we go!’ said Zheng He.

Everything seemed to go well with sufficient food, nice weather and powerful crew in the first two days. However, an unexpected record-breaking hurricane hit the ocean. Zheng and his crew were really shocked. They tried really hard and utilized all the solutions which they could come up with to fight against the disaster. They packed all their goods and food up and buried them under the dock. Zheng led his excellent crew to drive the ship to another direction in order to escape from the storm. This ‘fight’ lasted for approximately 56 hours. Finally, they landed on an island and survived. Although they had lost some packages and the ship was damaged, in a few days they could continue their journey. They celebrated the success of the first fight that night, begging for peace for the journey and then encamped at the coast to have a rest.

On the second day, they were awakened by bursts of gunfire. The sentry reported that they landed on Java, the local people divided into East Java and West Java who had a civil war. It also described the miserable condition. Zheng gathered the crew without hesitation in order to stop the people from killing one another. Zheng got onto a hill and asked a soldier to shout at the people, ‘We are from the great Ming and travel on the sea in order to bring peace to the countries nearby. Now, in the name of Ming, I command you to stop shooting at us.’

But the battle was so dreadful that the Java people ignored Zheng. The java army slaughtered 170 people of Zheng’s crew. The battle lasted for 4 hours and the king of the West Java was going to win the battle. However, Zheng showed his army force at the coast, making the king so scared. He decided to invite Zheng to sit down for a meeting. Zheng accepted without hesitation.

‘Force can never be the solution,’ Zheng accused the king of killings,’ only when you implement wholesome policies can the people in your country worship and respect you.’ Zheng was so angry at the war because he experienced an extremely fierce civil war a few years ago, making the previous emperor disappeared. Zheng had a long speech and found many solutions instead of fighting against in the war. The king of the west listened to him carefully. The army was in such silence. When Zheng finished his speech he stared at the king angrily.

‘Easier said than done, Zheng,’ said the king calmly. ‘Just take you as an example. You are showing your great force in order to bring peace for us and ask us not to force anyone any more. It’s not convincing at all.’ Zheng was speechless and contemplated for a long time. He left Java a few days later.

'I also went to India and exchanged goods with them. They greeted us with such friendship. Also, we built monuments with some local countries and brought technologies for them...' Zheng knelt in the palace, representing his great adventure.

'OK,' said the emperor. 'It was a great adventure I believe. How about the secret mission?'

'I had found him, my emperor,' said Zheng. The emperor was shocked at his words. Then the emperor asked in such a great worry, 'What did you do to him?'

'We also went to Java and they were having a fierce civil war. I asked them to stop but they told me that I brought force to them by force, which was not convincing. Actually, I thought of the event for such a long time and couldn't answer them. Could you please answer it, my emperor?'

The secret mission was to find Zhu Yunwen, the previous emperor of Ming, who had disappeared after the civil war. Zhu Di was afraid that he would have a bad influence on his domination and wanted Zheng to find him and kill him.

Zhu was lost in thought.

Zheng went down in history, for his seven voyages, bringing peace and technologies selflessly to the countries he passed by.

Zhu didn't concern him with the previous emperor any more.

An Exciting Adventure

Sacred Heart of Mary Catholic Primary School, Chan, Adam – 11

Pirate John usually travelled the seas for gold to steal. He was a rude man, he always made up stories and said bad words. He had a big nose, a small mouth and a pair of big ears. He was also very greedy. Even though if something was old, if it could be sold, he would steal it anyway.

Pirate John had a lot of pirate ships and he also had a lot of minions. He had a lot of treasure chests too. He always carried a lot of gold, escaping from enemy ships and then selling gold on the black market.

One day, Pirate John's enemies found out he was stealing gold from their treasure chests. They sent some soldiers to fight him. Even though they had many people, Pirate John had been a general before he was a pirate. He was very strong and powerful. He could knock out anyone. His enemies felt very angry about that, so they decided to fight him by himself with their strongest team member. At the same time, Pirate John also called his team for the battle. Pirate John had more than one million sailors and soldiers. Even though the battle hadn't started, his enemies were scared by his army and ran away.

Pirate John went to an island with some of his sailors. They found cannibals on the island. The cannibals were very hungry, so they decided to kill Pirate John and his sailors. "There is not enough time to leave here," said Pirate John worriedly. "There are more than one million cannibals on the island!" Pirate John took out his 'final weapon' – it was a gun. He shot at them. But there were too many cannibals there. Even though Pirate John kept shooting at them, they kept staying alive.

At that moment, Pirate John had a brilliant idea. He took out his phone and made a call. "Hey!" Pirate John said. "How can I help you?" replied the nearest Kingdom-U-Kingdom.

"Can you help me? I am stuck on an island which has many cannibals. Can you save us, please? If it works, I will give you \$1 million" said Pirate John.

"No problem!" replied Kingdom-U-Kingdom. "Please wait for five minutes," they said.

Pirate John felt very excited about this great news. But suddenly a big snake came out from a cave. "Oh no, start running!" said Pirate John to the sailors. The huge snake was chasing them!

Suddenly, Pirate John turned around to face the snake and fired his gun. The huge snake died and the cannibals also went away. "This is a great adventure!" said Pirate John. "A good pirate should be brave like me, ha ha ha!" laughed Pirate John.

The Selfish King

Sacred Heart of Mary Catholic Primary School, Chan, Zachary – 11

On a long summer's day, King Billy was very bored in his castle which he called Brave Castle. He looked around the outside of the castle and he saw a bigger castle in the distance. He thought to himself, 'There will be a lot of gold there'.

King Billy went to the bigger castle and asked their king, 'I'm the king next door to your castle, it's called Brave Castle, can you give me some gold?' The other king answered, 'No! Go back to your castle!' So, King Billy went back to his castle.

King Billy sat on his throne and looked around again. He saw that next to the bigger castle there was a town. A princess had been stolen from the town by a dragon. Billy thought, 'If I can save the princess from the dragon, the other king will maybe give me a lot of gold.' So, Billy called Prince Peter to save the princess.

Prince Peter then came to see Billy. Prince Peter asked, 'King Billy, how can I help you?' King Billy answered, 'Can you help me save the princess from our next-door castle's town?' Prince Peter thought for a minute, then he said, 'Okay, but how do I save the princess?' Billy answered, 'I'll prepare a lot of soldiers for you.' Prince Peter said, 'Okay'.

Prince Peter went back to his room and thought 'Why did King Billy call me to save the princess? What do I need to do? How can I save her?' Prince Peter thought of a lot of questions.

The following week, Prince Peter brought a lot of things for the rescue. King Billy said, 'Peter, you are a prince, so saving the princess is your job. If you can't save the princess, you can't come back to Brave Castle!' Prince Peter was so scared he couldn't come back to Brave Castle, but he said, 'Okay'. Prince Peter left.

At first Prince Peter needed to go into the castle so that he could go inside the town. He ran into the castle without the soldiers seeing him. He then went into the town. The town had a lot of steps, so he needed to climb up them, which took a lot of time.

Then Prince Peter saw the princess, but the dragon was very fast. He tried to attack Prince Peter. Prince Peter took out his sword and attacked the dragon. The dragon fell down and Prince Peter saved the princess. The dragon asked Prince Peter, 'Why do you need to save her?'. Prince Peter answered sadly, 'I don't know. King Billy called me to save the princess,' The dragon was angry and said, 'Oh!' that is a selfish king, he only thinks about himself'. Prince Peter said, 'I think it too'.

They went to Brave Castle to kill the king. King Billy saw Prince Peter had brought the dragon and asked him, 'Prince Peter, why have you brought me a dragon? Where is the princess?' Prince Peter didn't answer. Then he said, 'Dragon, fire!' then the dragon killed the king.

The villagers were very happy that the selfish king was dead, so they chose Prince Peter to be the new king of Brave Castle.

The Prince and Pirate's War

Sacred Heart of Mary Catholic Primary School, Keung, Daniel – 11

In the corner of a dark castle, a sailor tried to find a place to cry. The sailor was Paul and he always cried. He was a tall, thin boy with small eyes and small ears. Although he was handsome and hard-working, he always felt sad, like his brain made him cry for no reason.

He had found somewhere to sit and hide, but then he saw something in the sky outside the window. He decided to follow it and chased it all the way to the forest. The thing landed on the grass. It has a box. Paul opened it and he saw a ring, he put on the ring.

“Boom!” an explosion happened, Paul found out that personality had changed, he didn’t know what had changed though. He had stopped crying. He felt brave and strong. He did a few air punches and he saw that he was now punching fireballs! He thought, “The king needs someone that is strong to help him. I should go to the Strong Man Competition so I can help the king.”

The next day, Paul went to the Strong Man Competition. Paul needed to do a test to see if he was strong enough to join the competition. Most of the sailors tried to join the competition, but they were too weak to join, only the strongest sailor could join.

Paul went to the test and someone said, “You’re too weak to join the competition, now get lost!” Paul said, “I look weak, but I am really strong.” He showed the person how strong he was, and he passed the test to join the competition.

Through the competition, Paul took down the strong sailors one by one, all the sailors taken down by just one hit of Paul’s punches. But there was the strongest sailor in the castle left and his name was John. John was pretty strong; nobody could take him down at all. He had helped the king for fifteen years.

Paul and John were both really strong. They fought hard and it took about ten minutes until John was tired. Because of the power of the ring, Paul did not get tired at all. Paul won the competition and he helped the king to do all kinds of stuff like build a bigger castle, take down the beast in the caves and more.

Every day they were doing something new. Paul got rewarded every week and lived in a better room than any other sailor. He now thought life was very good.

Cicilia's Adventures at Sea

Sacred Heart of Mary Catholic Primary School, Kwong, Elvina – 11

In a very quiet palace, there was a girl who suddenly ran out of it and went towards the harbour. Her name was Cicilia and she was the daughter of a rich treasure ship owner. Her exciting adventure was going to start.

Cicilia put on boys' clothes to go onto the treasure ship and she hid in a box. After a few hours someone opened the box and shouted, "Oh! Why is there a boy in here?!" As Cicilia jumped out of the box, her hat flew off and her long hair came down. So, the sailors found out that Cicilia was the daughter of the treasure ship owner and they told him that his daughter had gone onto the ship.

When Cicilia's father arrived, he wanted to take her home, but Cicilia told her dad that she wanted to go to have an adventure, to steal treasure with other sailors and to become a captain. Her father agreed she could go, but she needed to bring the most important treasure back, a diamond, before she could become a captain.

Cicilia started her adventure. At first, she and the sailors went to a country that always had wars. Cicilia got very hurt in the wars, but she still helped to steal many things. After that, she went to more countries. Then she went somewhere where there was another huge treasure ship. The sailors in the huge treasure ship wanted to steal their treasure!

When the captain and the sailors climbed onto the ship, Cicilia threw some wooden buckets at the sailors and many of them were killed by Cicilia. At last Cicilia fought with the captain who wanted to steal the treasure and she killed the captain. They then threw all the sailors from the other ship into the sea. Cicilia helped to win the war and everyone was happy. Cicilia learnt that being a sailor of a treasure ship was very hard and challenging, but it was very exciting.

Two months later Cicilia went back home, but she forgot to bring the important treasure back for her father. But her father said, "The most important treasure is here already, that is your experience". In the end Cicilia had become a strong captain and everyone knew her name.

Killing The Monster

Sacred Heart of Mary Catholic Primary School, Leung, Jordan – 12

Killing The Monster

Steven was the greatest king in the world. He liked playing sports as he was very strong and fit. Things went horribly wrong when a monster snatched a princess and took her away to the forest. The monster then returned to damage King Steven's castle. King Steven was very scared. Then a boy called Jordan came and talked to the king. Jordan said, 'I can help you to fight the monster, but you need to give your castle to me.' The king thought and then said, 'Yes, if you kill the monster and bring the princess back, I will give my castle to you and the princess will marry you.' Jordan and King Steven shook hands and Jordan went on his way.

Jordan wanted to have a good sword to defeat the monster, so he went to the weapon shop and talked to the owner. Jordan said, 'I want to have a good sword.' The owner replied, 'I can help you to make the sword, but you need to give me a lot of gold. I love gold.' Jordan gave a lot of gold to the owner. The owner felt very happy and excited. Then the owner gave Jordan a good sword. Jordan could use this sword very well and he loved it.

After that, Jordan rode on a horse and went to the forest. He wanted to bring the princess back and kill the monster. In the forest, he saw some bad people and they were fighting with some villagers.

Jordan helped the villagers to kill the bad people. Some people said thank you to Jordan. Then someone said, 'I can help you find the monster, but you need to kill the monster because the monster always kills our villagers. We hate it a lot.' Jordan said, 'Okay, I'll go there because I want to kill the monster.' Jordan helped the villagers to do many things. Although Jordan was very busy, he loved it.

After that, the villagers took Jordan to the monster's home. It was very dirty. Nobody liked it there. Jordan saw the monster and used his sword to fight the monster. The monster fought Jordan too, but Jordan was better than it. The monster was furious. It wanted to kill him. Then Jordan used his sword to kill the monster.

In the end, Jordan took the monster back to the castle and talked to King Steven. Jordan said, 'I killed the monster and brought the princess back. So you need to give your castle to me.' The king said, 'Oh! You've done it, but I don't want to give you my castle because I like this castle and thought you wouldn't bring the princess back.' So Jordan killed King Steven as he would not keep his word.

The Magical Ring

Sacred Heart of Mary Catholic Primary School, So, Daniel – 11

In the corner of a dark castle, a sailor tried to find a place to cry. The sailor was Paul and he always cried. He was a tall, thin boy with small eyes and small ears. Although he was handsome and hard-working, he always felt sad, like his brain made him cry for no reason.

He had found somewhere to sit and hide, but then he saw something in the sky outside the window. He decided to follow it and chased it all the way to the forest. The thing landed on the grass. It has a box. Paul opened it and he saw a ring, he put on the ring.

“Boom!” an explosion happened, Paul found out that personality had changed, he didn’t know what had changed though. He had stopped crying. He felt brave and strong. He did a few air punches and he saw that he was now punching fireballs! He thought, “The king needs someone that is strong to help him. I should go to the Strong Man Competition so I can help the king.”

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Paul and John were both really strong. They fought hard and it took about ten minutes until John was tired. Because of the power of the ring, Paul did not get tired at all. Paul won the competition and he helped the king to do all kinds of stuff like build a bigger castle, take down the beast in the caves and more.

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Saving The Princess

Sacred Heart of Mary Catholic Primary School, Ye, Steven – 12

Ken was a poor 19- year- old man who lived in a big city. He was thin and tall with blue eyes. He was brave and outgoing. Although he was good-looking, he did not have any money. He never had enough food to eat.

One day, Ken met a wizard under a tree. The wizard sold a magic book to him for \$10. After that, the wizard disappeared. Ken opened the magic book and got sucked into the book, passing through to a forest.

Ken wanted to get away from the forest, but the forest was so big, he couldn't get out; he was lost. After four days, he was very hungry and thirsty. Then he saw a village. He saw an ugly man running towards him. Ken pleaded, 'Please give me some food, if you don't give me any, I will die.' The ugly man said, 'I can give you food, but you have to help me to do some things.' Ken agreed. Then Ken stayed at the ugly man's home.

After one day, Ken felt great, the ugly man said, 'I want you to help me save the princess and bring her to me. She's locked in a big castle and there is a wicked wizard. I have some food and water, I think you can eat for 6-7 days.'

Ken dressed in his clothes and went out to the village. Ken could see the castle, but it was too far away. After five days, Ken went to a river. He saw some crocodiles there. He was lucky, he was able to swim across the river and no crocodiles ate him.

Ken arrived at the big castle. He got inside the castle and saw the princess in a cage. The princess said, 'Help me! Quick! The wizard is coming here now!' When Ken was opening the cage door, the wizard used magic to turn Ken into a bird.

The princess kissed the bird and he became Ken again. They passed through to the forest. The magic book disappeared, and Ken and the princess enjoyed a new life together.

The Greedy King

Sacred Heart of Mary Catholic Primary School, Yeung, Jason – 12

In a golden palace high up in the mountains, there lived a greedy and proud king. He thought he was the smartest man ever in the world. One morning, while he was lying on a bench, he suddenly had a bad idea – to steal gold from another country! Then he started planning...

Two months later, the king had prepared 20 ships and an army to carry out his stealing plan. At the last moment the queen noticed something strange, that there were many ships on the harbour. She asked the king what he was doing. The king was dishonest, he lied, “Erm... I... I am going to mine some... gold”.

The queen thought that the king was making up a story, so she said, “Please don’t tell me lies, I need the truth!”.

The king was surprised that the queen knew he was telling lies, so he said, “Okay, I am going to steal gold from another country. Will you join me?” The queen answered, “Absolutely not! If I join you, maybe we will meet some pirates and then they will kill us!”

The king said, “Oh honey, please come and join us”, but the queen said, “No!”.

The king was upset, he said “If you stay here, you will get bored”. But the queen warned the king, “You may die if you go!”.

“Okay, that’s fine. I will go and you will have to stay here!” the king yelled. “I will stay here and you need to be careful”, the queen said.

Two months later, the king set off for the gold. As he arrived in a nearby country, he went to the countryside and set off some cannons. Then he killed the guards in a bank and robbed it for money. Finally, he tried to rob the government but without success. He was defeated!

The government of the country said it would kill the king if the queen didn’t give \$10 million to the it. So the queen gave \$10 million to the government and saved the king.

“Oh no, I was defeated, and I lost a bunch of money in this war! This is not enough for spending!” the king complained. The queen shouted, “I hate you! I spent \$10 million to save you... and I don’t have enough money to live”.

“I am sorry about that... but how can I save the country?” the king replied.

“You don’t need to save the country because you are not the ruler anymore!” the queen laughed.

“What?” the king yelled. “You can’t kick me out because I am the king now!”

“You will not succeed...” replied the queen, “...because the whole city hates you!”

“No... this can’t be happening... no...” the king said. He became crazy and suicidal.

This story teaches us a lesson – do not be a greedy person.

The Seventh Voyage

Sha Tin Junior School, Chiu, Jennifer – 9

No more medicine.

No more money.

Sick mother. I had all these things worrying me now.

“Little Lotus, my sweet tangyuan, we have no more to... spend or buy. I am too weak to work... but you cannot take a chance in the workforce. I don’t want you to suffer!”

Wheeze, wheeze, wheeze. That was all Mother did these days. We had spent all our money on our food and the farm to keep it going. The medicine my mother needed had been too expensive for us to afford. So we had to sell the farm. Father had died, well no, disappeared ever since Zheng He came back from his sixth voyage.

So someone had to do something or else something bad might happen.

And that somebody was ME. “I refuse to let us sit home and get poorer and poorer!” I fumed. “Someone has to do something and no one else will do it for us! I know you love me Mother, but I also care about you from the bottom of my heart. I need to go to work. Please. I don’t want you to die! You are my only hope left! I am going to get a job as a sailor on the Seventh Voyage Ship! Then we will have enough to buy medicine!”

“But my little lotus, you know that you are too young and a girl. *wheeze* You need to be over fifteen.” protested mother pleadingly.

“I will disguise myself as a boy and will fool them easily. I am quite tall if I say so myself.” I bragged.

“Fine.” Mother shot out. “But, remember” She softly whispered, “I love you from the bottom of my heart and beyond. Stay safe.” She placed one kiss on my cheek and began a long, peaceful much-needed sleep.

A few days later, it was time...

I waved goodbye to Mrs. Chau, our kind neighbour and shouted “Take care of mother! Tell her I love her and I will come back safely!”

Mrs Chau saluted, “I will, my little soldier!”

I saw a sign on the docks that answered my questions about where to go: *Sailors needed for cooking and cleaning. May take two years of training for swordsmanship and engineering. Please follow the arrow and ask for the name Yang when you reach the 6th Pier.*

Yang was a tiny, awkward man with an even tinier brain. He accepted me as a boy over 16 years of age without question. *Yes. I thought to myself. Not bad. Now that I’ve deceived the registrar, what could possibly go wrong?*

Two Years Later...

Training was tough and every day I faced strict discipline and rules. I also learned swordsmanship, engineering, knot tying, how to preserve food and how to defend ship cargo. We were on the edge of the Arabian port to trade silk and spices for bows and arrows when something seriously unbelievable happened. I was checking the rudder for barnacles that had latched there. As I turned around I hit someone smack in the face.

IT WAS MY FATHER! All at once I felt a wave of happiness, frustration and hope wash upon me.

“Father!” I quietly shouted. Except this man didn’t look like my father anymore.

His great height had turned into a shrunk back and his once neat blackish grey hair had aged into a huge, untidy white mass.

“Lotus? Oh, my darling girl! Listen here. Not long after that blasted man Zheng He arrived back from his sixth voyage, six armed guards showed up at our farm in the middle of the night. You and your mother were asleep at the time so you didn’t witness anything. Anyway, those terrible guards told me to follow them to the docks or to witness you and your mother die a slow and terrible death. I didn’t want anything bad to happen to you, so I slipped away from the house with those guards. Once when I was at the docks, They gagged me... and.” he sighed, “I can’t tell you the rest or else we will be...”

“Ssshhh!” I silenced him. “There’s an officer coming. Let’s check the rudder.”

All of a sudden, there was a cry of “Pirates!” and all was silent for a moment. Then there was a harsh cackling and a clunking sound of wood on wood.

“Well, well well!” a deep, evil voice pinned everyone to the spot. “Look at this lads! If my eyes don’t deceive me, it’s the emperor’s pet, Zheng He!”

“If my eyes don’t deceive me, Then it’s the dirty-cheek rascal Makasarra Al-Abdul!” another voice rang out, a deep and heroic voice.

“Well, lads, what are you waiting for? Go get...” Makasarra started

“Them!” Zheng He cried.

All I remember next was the sounds of clashing swords and cannonballs waltzing dangerously.

My crazy old father had already drawn out his sword and plunged into a raging battle cry.

I managed to see what was going on. I plunged my sword into the hearts of a quarter of the pirate fleet and I found some of the sailors thanking me. When I finally got to father, he was prepared for the pirate king to give his last sword strike when I plunged my dagger into Makasarra’s wretched back at the same moment father pushed his sword into his heart. The deed was done.

Zheng He’s voice cried, “Please, spirits from heaven, tell us your names!”

“Ling Han-Qun” replied father.

I said with steadiness, “I am a girl!”

Gasps of astonishment rose from the crowd.

“Sir. You and your daughter deserve something you most desire.” Zheng He shakily said. “ what is it you want?”

“Well that is easy,” Father replied. “We want to go home.”

Forty-three days later

With money from our adventure, we could finally settle down with a happy life. Mother was no longer sick, and there was a lifelong guarantee from the emperor that we could enjoy undisturbed happiness.

The Tale of How China Became Famous.

Sha Tin Junior School, Chu, Cyrus – 9

There once ruled an emperor named Yong Lee. He was always dressed in an irreplaceable, flaming red cloak, passed down from many generations of emperors and a spotless, shiny, sparkling golden crown. He was a fine man and a loyal leader to his citizens.

One day, when he was scoffing down a delicious feast, without warning a war raged over his palace and the villages. BOOM! A enormous cannon ball exploded in front of the palace. It shook the entire village! As the Mongols continued attacking, fighting for pride and power, Yong Lee and his guards escaped just in time before the palace collapsed behind him. He ran through the burning villages until finding an underground bunker to hide in with some other villagers. They all waited patiently with a heavy heart, as they listened to the war raging loudly outside.

The next morning, the war had already finished plowing through the innocent village. Yong lee strolled cautiously outside, searching for survivors throughout the barren villages. Sadly, he only found some workers and homeless citizens hidden inside a small makeshift bunker. He tried to see if there were any other survivors inwards of the area, none unfortunately. However, he found a secret vault room full of loads of treasure and gold in a connecting tunnel to a sewage system. That suddenly sparked an idea for the emperor. He realized China needed to form powerful alliances with other countries, extending its influence beyond its borders, nations all protecting each other.

The next day, the emperor raised the plan of sharing his wealth and commodities with other nations, forming a trusting relationship to the army and his men. The surviving men and soldiers all obeyed in agreement. Getting to work swiftly, a factory was being built next to the coast and a dock was constructed for the fleet to be. All seemed to be going well, little did everyone know, while the emperor explained the rest of the plan to the workers and soldiers, an unnoticed crew of pirates were spying on them. The leader, Peng Chen and his filthy men over heard about priceless goods that were to board the ships. They wanted to steal it for themselves. Soon, Peng and his crew were devising their own plan to conquer the emperor's fleet.

Months later, the ships were finally complete, the emperor sent Admiral Zheng He, a brave and mighty man, to lead the crew out at sea. While other ships of the fleet were touring the closer, neighboring countries, the leading ship with Zheng He was set to venture out to further nations. Suddenly out of nowhere, two pirate ships collided with the admiral's declaring a battle. "Arrrrrgh! Get 'em boys!" bellowed Peng Chen. "Aye cap!" followed Ho Chan, the first mate. An enormous battle broke out between the ships and although the emperor's ship was heavily armed, they were no match for the cunning pirates. "We won't make it through this!" yelled Zheng He as his men began to fall one by one. But it seemed as if fate was on their side; a terrifying storm began to rage ahead of both pirate ships. Peng Chen and his crew started to drift into the enormous storm, their efforts to change direction were futile, the winds were too powerful. "Call for backup!" commanded Peng Chen, but it was no use. The crew tried to blow their horn, summoning the rest of the fleet, but the desperate call was drowned out by the booming thunder. "We will be back!" yelled Peng Chen, their boats disappearing in the blazing storm. They were never to be heard or seen again.

Not long after, Zheng He's ship arrived at the villages of India, the admiral was relieved that they had all survived, "We are our country's pride and finest, the emperor would be proud of us too." They pressed on and headed for the capital of the country, offering their gifts to India's royal family. "We thank your emperor for his generous gifts, please accept some of our very own rare native spices and fine materials. I hope this is the start of a wonderful alliance." Spoke the Indian Emperor. "You're welcome your majesty. It has been a pleasure. And it's all a good deed." the admiral and his crew returned back to their ships and stayed there for the night. In the morning, the crew began their journey to return to China.

Once Zheng He saw the coast of china in the horizon, he knew he was home. He felt upbeat and lucky and felt as if a huge weight has lifted of his shoulders. The emperor was delighted to see Zheng He and his men “Amazing work! You never ever disappoint me!” That night, they left the factory and celebrated in the streets of Shanghai with all the villagers for Zheng He and his crew’s bravery and success. They had cake, dumplings and many other scrumptious delicacies. Dancing all night, everyone watched the performance of the legendary tale of the Ming Treasure Voyages. Decades have passed from that day and the story has since been passed down, far and wide to many different people and countries, not just in China. Everyone knows the legendary tale of the Ming Treasure Voyages.

Tang Li Jing 唐理静

Sha Tin Junior School, Fung, Abby – 10

My brother Li Yong and I were the only ones left in our house, excluding our dog Li Li. Our father was a merchant and he was trading goods in India as far as I knew, our mother had recently disappeared. Her disappearance made me stressed because I was responsible for EVERYTHING. Something else also added to my stress. A secret dream. Since the first time I'd seen the ocean, I wanted to be a sailor. Except I can't. I'm a girl and girls aren't allowed to be sailors. Still, I kept thinking about it. Could I make this come true? Ideas crammed into my brain. Could I be a boy in disguise? Could I style my hair like a boy's, borrow Li Yong's clothes and register to be a sailor in the treasure fleet? But could I leave Li Yong for so long? Could I run away without telling him? Probably not. I was terrified to tell him I was leaving but not telling him would make me feel guilty. Then he would tell everyone I was missing and I didn't want that to happen, so I knew I should tell him before registering.

Soon, it was the last day to register and I knew I had to tell Li Yong that I was joining the fleet.

"Tang Li Yong?" I shouted several times around the empty house. He was outside playing with friends. I called him in and closed the window blinds. We were having an awkward conversation.

"I'm going to leave for a few months and I want you to stay here. Don't worry about me. You have Li Li."

"Where are you going?" He asked.

"I'm going to explore undiscovered lands."

"So you are going to be a soldier on the treasure voyages?"

"Sailor, not soldier."

"But how can you? You're a girl. Are you going to break the rules?"

"Sort of."

"No! Don't go. You can't leave me alone! Please?"

"You are already 15! I'll only join this voyage and come straight back. It's just for a few months. I have to go. This is my dream. Please let me go. Please don't tell anyone about anything."

"You promise you will be back in a few months?"

"Yes," I promised.

Li Yong left to fly his kite and I went to register. Thinking about it made me less sure about leaving him alone but I knew it was something I had to do. On the way to the market, I decided to use Li Yong's name as my new name.

When I got there, I went up to the least menacing looking servant and started talking.

"When are the ships leaving?" I asked.

"Three weeks." He said. "Are you thinking of joining as a sailor?"

"Huh? Oh, yes." I replied, distracted by all the commotion.

"How old are you? Not big or strong by the looks of you."

"I'm seventeen," I replied confidently.

"You look small for your age. Are you sure?" I was offended by this but replied.

"I know I look small but I am seventeen." This was the truth. "My name is Tang Li Ji – I mean Yong."

"Oh well. We do need more people on board." He replied exasperatedly and scribbled down my name. "Li Yong, you are on a Bao Chuan. Count yourself lucky. Not many sailors as scrawny as you get on one. Be here at 8 am on the day."

He shoed me away. I turned and skittered home.

The next few weeks flew by quickly. During that time I continued with my chores. On the day we set sail, Li Yong walked me to the market early in the morning. We walked in silence. When we got there I could feel the excitement prickling my skin. Hundreds, no thousands of people were there. I said goodbye to Li Yong and told him he would be fine. For a moment I nearly went home with him but I knew I had to go. "Sailors! We're leaving now!" A loud voice boomed overhead, "we are walking by foot to Liu Jia Gang and there we will set sail." He listed out names to check we were there. We marched off.

We arrived at the port at noon. There, a staggering fleet of 317 boats greeted us. The boats were big and sturdy and looked like nothing could penetrate through their massive hulls. People from thousands of villages were chattering at once.

“Sailors! Onto your boats now!” Someone bellowed. I squished through the crowd to the nearest Bao Chuan. I stumbled on to the boat and admired the breath taking view. The people below us were tiny and up here you could see everything. The sea stretched out forever. Someone squeezed in next to me. He looked way older than me. Yet he looked quite familiar. Before I could ask who he was he had already turned and walked away. Bong! That meant we were leaving. The last of sailors scrambled on board and we set off. The rest of the day was spent scrubbing the decks and doing chores under the glare of the sun. For the first hour, I was on the crow’s nest looking for pirates. It turns out that I was on a boat with Zheng He. Wow! I was on the same boat as Zheng He, the greatest captain in Chinese history. Night came and soon we were enveloped in a layer of darkness.

“Everybody into a cabin!” I went into the nearest cabin along with five boys. We exchanged names. I slept in the lower bunk and Yang Bi Ming slept above. It was impossible to sleep because of the rocky movement so I went up to the deck. Suddenly I saw a figure appear. It was the boy from before. As he came nearer I realized he looked like my mother. It *was* her. Why is she here? Why did she run away? A loud shout interrupted my thoughts.

“Pirates!” The boat rocked violently.

Life Under the Ship

Sha Tin Junior School, Kuong, Bryan – 10

I was not the only one who had been thrown overboard into the gaping depths of the South China Sea, by the sailors aboard the Admiral Zheng He's ships. But, I *was* the first one ever to survive. Using the anchor when it was still hoisted, I pulled myself back up onto the hold of the ship and secretly hid in the spacious unused area under the floorboards.

It was a cold, rainy day out on the fleet. I, being a slave was forever kept to the damp, worn floorboards of Admiral Zheng He's massive ship. All of us shared the same target: stealing gold from Zheng He's treasure ships. Never had anyone ever succeeded in doing so. Many have tried but all ended up dying in the hands of Zheng He's crew. While I worked, the commotion up on the decks was muffled, but I could still make out a few words. Zheng He called out to one of his crew "Sound the horns! Tell them that we are changing course to Java!"

"Aye aye, captain!" shouted the crew member, and started climbing the ladders. Soon, the sound of the horn rose up of above the noise of the sea and wind; 3 long and 2 short blows, meaning a change of course.

Just as I was about to wash down the windows a voice called down to us, "All hands on deck! Get up there now, no questions!" By the time we all got up on deck, a strong wind had started blowing, throwing debris around the decks like a fish in a current. "Take them to the treasure ships with the living quarters and keep them on the lower decks. Be sure to keep them secure if not, you know what's going to happen." Admiral Zheng He commands, shouting over the howling wind.

"Yes, captain." the crewman said, and turned to our direction. "Line up one by one and follow me!" We shuffled nervously into line, with me leading at the front. Then the massive array of the treasure ships came into view. I could make out the massive billowing masts, and the sleek shape of the hull. A ship capable of holding a couple million tonnes of treasure yet still cutting through the water with no problem. Spacious wooden decks stretched out as far as the eye could see. It appeared like it was a piece of land, I estimated it would be about 130 meters long and 60 meters wide. The crewmember lead us hastily onto our assigned ship. Glancing at the others I could tell that the only thing on their minds was the treasure. Right beneath our feet could be a lifetime supply of, gold, and other precious gems. The crewman led us down into the hull of the ship, pointing to a cluster of beds in the corner of the room.

By dawn, the distant shout of soldiers rang out in the whispers of the vast sea. I could vaguely hear the shuffle of the soldier's boots above me on the deck of the ship. My senses were sharp and aware after the intricate planning of theft the night before. The screws on the crates were loosened (with splinters of wood found on the walls), just enough so that even a slight pull on the crate would open it, which would hopefully spill loot on the ground. Everything was prepared. Footsteps thudded closer towards our quarters, and the sickly smell of mouldy bread filled my nostrils. The sound of a lock scratching against the hatch was followed by a squeak. The same tough crewmember entered the room, holding a loaf of mouldy bread and a bucket of water. He placed them roughly onto the floor, a bit too roughly. The crates fell open. Gold and silk spilled onto the floor, carpeting the floor with eye-blinding gold. I ran forward, grabbing the bucket and scooping up as much gold as I could. As if immobilized, the others just stared, wide-eyed, their mouths dropping open. The guard rushed at me, trying to stop me. Reflexively, I grabbed a piece of silk and threw it over the guard's head. He shouted, blinded, tripping to the floor. As I looked up, three guards charged at me, knocking me onto the ground with a thud. My forehead throbbed, my vision went blurry and I blacked out.

When I finally woke up, my hands were tied together, a gag in my mouth. I looked around, I was in a barred room. Tied up on the right side of the room. In my periphery, I could make out someone coming towards me. "Ah, there you are, thief. Zheng He's waiting for your demise." I could sense a hint of smugness in his voice. I tried to retort, but all that came out were muffled sounds. Pulling me to my feet, the unfamiliar soldier pushed me onto the deck of the ship, where Zheng He was waiting. His confident smile was curved into a sneer, and I could see that a gangplank was already prepared. A polished piece of unused wood balanced treacherously on the side of the boat. With a rough shove, he pushed me off the side

of the boat. The freezing water engulfed me. Panic burst into my mind. there was no way to survive. The only thing that saved me was the anchor. I used the rope and that tied my hands together hooking it onto the anchor, and using whatever strength I had left, and hoisted myself up. The rope snapped from the strain. Taking a flying leap, I grabbed onto the side of the ship, kicking into a porthole, and tumbling into the bottom most floor of the ship.

This is where I have been living since. Surviving only on the food and water some slaves sneakily give me at night. Zheng He and his crew are definitely going to regret throwing me overboard once I take my revenge.

Zheng He's Secret.

Sha Tin Junior School, Liu, Helen – 11

"Somewhere—somewhere, in the coasts of Africa. Find him. **KILL HIM!**" He whispered menacingly... Gasping for breath, I woke up with a start! Blindly grabbing my silky Qipao, I slowly stepped out of bed as I listened to my crew bickering loudly in the distance.

"Gosh, you don't need to be so salty! Captain Zheng probably just woke up!"

I smiled, with pride. I'm just 27, and already a captain of a royal fleet. Quickly shaking my dream out of my mind, I walked confidently out of the cabin. Enjoying the wind that was whipping my face, while the wrath of the crashing waves surrounded the vessel with a murderous tone. I sighed, *Well, I'm just following the "king's orders" since I want this voyage to be a success. I mean, people are depending on this job to get money.*

"Don't forget your true mission...MISSION!" A thundering voice suddenly ringing in my brain.

"*Kill him...KILL HIM!!!!!!*"

Then it came to me again... Those red, *red* eyes, filled with blood. And that smile... Why is the king like this?

"Captain!" It was Ma, our lead astronomer and my old friend. I quickly snapped out of my scary flashbacks from the dream.

"There's gonna be a storm tonight, so we might have to hurry up and stop on a nearby the African coastline city to find shelter and food. Your choice!" he said cheerfully, holding the pearly ivory telescope he had got from Vietnam. *How can he be so happy when a storm is coming?* I thought questionably to myself. I dreamily gazed to the dark—clouded horizon entangled with the ferocious waves that hit each other. We didn't make it to shore...

The ferocious waves slammed onto the rocks nearby, creating snow—like water, flying to the deck.

"Prepare the sails!" Sadly, these desperate attempts to communicate were uselessly swallowed away by the slow tearing sound of the wooden boards, and the screams of the howling wind. I desperately grabbed the wet railing of the boat as I squinted at the sight of my men. That was when I heard a shattering scream, followed by other high screeches.

When I turned around, It was Ma. He was slowly pulled down by the waves that were once my friends. Now they were a mere hooded stranger sucking the lives out of countless men. I tried to cling on to this tiny speck of hope that was left. But at last, my thin cord of perseverance finally broke. Why Ma? A drop of water came down my sleeve as water filled my eyes. *Why... Isn't this all your set up, Yongle Emperor?*

Uggggg, my head hurts, I can't move! I struggled to get to my feet, while people next to me murmured quietly "Who is this?"

"Why is he here?" Slowly gaining consciousness, my mind started swirling, flashes of Ma getting grabbed by the ferocious waves dotted my visions, I started panicking, *was he really gone?* I sat up in the speed of light, beads of sweat tickled my cheeks. *We really sank?*

"Well, who have we got here?" a soft voice whispered next to my ear. It was weirdly familiar, like Yongle's. I slowly opened my salty eyes, squinting to the blurry sight of that mysterious voice. It was him! Whatever his name was, he had a long—bearded nose, with a moustache pointing in both directions and a large scar at the side of his pointy cheek.

"Where am I?" I quickly sat up, the realization of the earlier disaster clearer than ever,

"Well, just to tell you, I found you lying wet on the ground, then I brought you to my home." that familiar voice again. "My pleasure, General Zheng."

"Y—you know me?" I stammered

"Well, I became a low ranked general in China in my early years. You can call me Zhu"

I stared in disbelief, *A general in China?*

"It would be a pleasure for you to stay in my house for a while before the rest of your fleet arrives. I'll send a pigeon." Zhu finally announced, "You know, you are pretty safe even amongst us Africans." The general announced

The Heir, it was him.

Midnight it was when I snuck out of bed as quiet as a mouse. I walked the dark corridors, winding around the shade of the shadows. I wanted to give my life saver a surprise gift as he was not home tonight. But when I stepped into the minor general's bedroom, I saw something extraordinary glittering under the beautiful moonlight. It was an expensive moonstone charm that only royals could afford to have. My eyes widened as I saw the Ancient letters carved in the delicate moonstone. *THE HEIR* Why does he look like this now? I thought he was supposed to be the last king's successor? So is this who the supposed to be successor the king wanted to kill because he doesn't want this Heir to take his throne?? But... He was so nice, if he knew that I was sent by the king, he could've killed me anytime! Now that I thought of it... Why listen to Yongle? Didn't this poor heir perish because of Yongle's selfish soul? Slowly, great bravery flooded into my veins maybe I should help him, instead of the selfishness of Yongle! As the sunshine shone on me vibrantly. I thought about the glory days. *The king's orders are nothing!* I spat, *let's take back this throne!*

10 years later...

"Captain Zheng! A letter!"

"Bring it to me!" I commanded loudly. My hands trembled quickly as I slowly ripped open the imperial seal of the letter, the parchment was bright red, meaning it was good news. I sighed...

To general Zheng, I have contained my spot on the iron throne and therefore welcome you to my grand ceremony. I thank you for helping me take back the throne. Happy journeys!

The past heir

Tears splattered, blood spread, and friends lost. But victory had never tasted so sweet!

The Last Battle

Sha Tin Junior School, Lo, Kaiden – 10

Somewhere in the early 1400s, a day of danger appeared out of the dark grey looming clouds...

Zheng He was China's bravest captain of the Ming treasure voyage fleet. He had travelled far distances and been on world-famous journeys. He had never failed any of his adventures. It was his duty to create peace. On that very day when the biggest storm in China's history appeared out of the sky, he had been warned by the emperor not to travel, but he did anyway. In the middle of the seas, Zheng He the royal captain and his crew were far from safety. The sky turned to a frightening black colour, the ocean water was wild, waves splashed onto the deck. It was everyone's worst nightmare. Without warning a sharp bolt of lightning shot through the clouds and punched onto the pirate ship. An army of lightning began attacking at the boats. Things became intense and at the end, many lifeless bodies floated across the seas. However, the surviving sailors with Zheng He chose not to stop, as there was nothing that could stand in their way.

A few years went by as the Ming Treasure Voyage fleet went and returned. On an unexpected evening Guang Yong, the brave little boy and his friends were at the shoreline pretending to be imaginary pirates. Suddenly they stopped playing and noticed ships were about to leave. The ones that were boarding the huge ship were the greatest sailors of all time: the Ming Treasure Voyage fleet. As the ships were about to leave, one of Guang Yong's friends suggested an exciting idea. They snuck past the guards and crept onto one of the smaller ships and onto the bottom deck where no one was around to see them. The ship sailed off, creating a loud honking noise, Guang Yong and his friends entertained themselves by playing hand games. After a few hours, the crew ships made a sudden stop. Silence. Then BAM! BOOM! Cannonballs fired everywhere sending ships to flee and sink. The friends looked at each other nervously while the intense battle was going on, frightened as porcupines. They should've obviously shouted and screamed, but they didn't. Instead, they went onto the deck and something got caught in the corner of Guang Yong's eye, something small and shiny: a glass bottle with a message inside it, the enemy suddenly stopped firing. They fished it out of the disgusting sea water. It said, "GIVE US ALL YOUR TREASURE OR WE WILL MEET AGAIN." When they looked up to see the enemies ship, they were gone...

Thousands of ships returned back to China with an extra surprise: little kids and a message from the fog. Zheng He showed it to the emperor. As he showed it, he felt a tingle in his hands, then saw a vision of the world exploding in front of his eyes. He then snapped back to the real world. 'What could that mean?' He thought. He shook that thought away, for it might not be real. A few moments later, the emperor said strictly "We will have to go to WAR." The Chinese citizens never thought this day would come, packing and leaving their hometown. Millions of pirates from the ship crafted swords, working as a team to create a massive cannonball that can take down huge ships, but they didn't think about the fact that the most exciting moment in history was about to commence!

With their weapons, they were sure to win the battle. In the battleground, the ship waited until... BOOM! A cannonball fired at one of the weakest ships in the fleet. Immediately the enemy ships came out of the fog, it was a huge surprise. The enemy ships were from Africa but one thing made China laugh at them, their ships were so tiny. However, they were not to be underestimated. They had the most advanced technology, with the power to send China's ships down into the bottom of the deep blue sea. They did the best they could, using bows and arrows and spears, but in one hour at least half the crew was gone. Seconds went by, then minutes, finally only half of the African pirates were defeated but only ten pirates from China's ships were left. One by one they fell to the ground until Zheng He was the only one left. Sweat rolled down his cheeks, down his neck. His arms were trying to fight but, his brain was telling him to stay in position. Then, China's allies came out of the fog to help. Zheng He thought, 'Oh my, I should have thought of that: finding help.' But wait, his thought suddenly hit him, this was the very place he saw his life coming to an end. They are going to die as well!

Swoosh! The last one of the African army had been shot! "But that isn't right, You guys aren't even professional pirates" Said Zheng He. Guang Yong had a cheeky look and said: "I knew I could help." When they went back onto land that is when the Emperor's palace exploded. Everyone's mouths were wide

open, tears flowed down from everyone's sorrowful eyes. Zheng He was so miserable that he kneeled onto the hard sand ground and then PAM! A bullet shot Zheng He, it was an enemy that snuck onto their boat. The person who shot him said only these words " WE SHOOT 'CAUSE YOU GIVE NO TREASURE TO US". They continued to shoot the other ships as they wanted no other Chinese sailors to ever sail the seas. Guang Young thoughts of escaping were interrupted as he remembered something: the ship carried a giant bomb that could wipe out the earth. Unfortunately, the enemy was not told about this, the last bullet was shot, causing the ship to explode...

BOOM! The earth as we know it. Gone. One small mistake and that was the last time Chinese sailors ever existed.

Lifesaving Voyage

Sha Tin Junior School, Ma, Grace – 10

As I waved goodbye to my family, the ship's horn honked, shattering the distant chatters in the crowds on the deck. The boat pulled away whilst I was busy adjusting the humongous, crimson-red sail of the boat. As the madding crowd gradually disappeared from sight, all I could think about was my dear family and how they would be for the next two years.

I had spent half a year of tough training with the boat team on basic operations of the boat, mending and defence systems. Finally, it was the day of the real thing. It was no longer a training session. I felt nervous, like what if I did something wrong that caused the ship to sink or I forgot what this lever did. Life on the boat was actually hard. I had to make sure that the floors were always clean, no enemies were about to invade, the sails were tight and facing the right angle, we were going the right direction... and if I made one tiny mistake, something terrible could eventually happen. Zheng He had a giant boat crew, with about 200 boats filled with delicate silk and china, elite soldiers and horses, engineers to help with repairs and even cartographers to figure out where we were going. These valuable goods were for trading with the other countries in order to get their native goods back to present to the king. That's the reason why we were sent to this voyage.

It was a few months from the mournful departure, and I was used to the homesick and tired feeling on the boat. So far, the weather had been fine, no huge waves nor pirates. The thing I enjoyed was the delightful view of the sunset as nightfall came. The sky would turn into a rainbow of reds, yellows, and navy blue. But when the moon came up, I felt homesick. It was like Li Bai's poem when he misses his hometown at night. Luckily, I slowly got used to this feeling, and my mind focused on the positive side. Trading, receiving new goods and even learning new languages. It was not too bad. Trading with people from different countries and cities was interesting. We gave them gunpowder, ceramics and silk and in return, they give us various gifts. Once, the people in Africa gave us a giraffe! I was immediately surprised by how long its neck was and worried about where should we keep it. We had to keep the precious yet rare giraffe alive and healthy for our king to see. It lived on the storage boat with a wooden enclosure to keep it safe. I looked after it to keep it safe, and it soon felt like I had a new animal companion with me on the boat. This put everyone in a determined and positive mood. But there were strong winds in the middle of our trip, but I liked the refreshing breeze and the way the waves rocked the boat. While I was taking a break from anchoring the boats. This seemed to groom the giraffe's messy hair while continuously tickling its extraordinarily long neck. This hilarious scene always made me laugh.

Occasionally, we stopped on islands to rest or stock up on food and supplies. I really enjoyed the pleasant views of the sea and how friendly the people are. I learned a few of those new languages, which sounded really unusual. However, a huge, raging, uncontrollable storm broke during the return trip. The sky gradually turned from light blue to grey. Storm clouds floated around and buckets of rain began splashing and pouring down from the skies splashing on the sea. A few moments later, there were ferocious winds and colossal waves leaping out of the ocean and crashing onto the rocks on the reef and our boat. The giraffe sadly stared at the rainy sky and wailed. A rapid bolt of lightning slashed the sky in half, followed by booming bangs of thunder. A terrible thought came into my mind. My family! Our house wasn't strong enough to withstand this destructive storm. Mom had a lack of survival skills. Meng isn't strong enough to rebuild the house if needed. And what about Mei? She's only 3 years old! Completely devastated and anxious, I began to cry.

The crew might become stranded near the sea, unable to go back home, lost forever I thought. As I looked up, I saw my crewmate, Chan, frantically waving two red-and-white flags, signalling the ships were sinking. Another patch of lightning illuminated the sky, flashing vigorously. There was absolutely no time to worry or think. I speedily packed the valuables, including my emergency kit and the giraffe, which I pulled with an old rope. I saw one of the army battleships dramatically, yet slowly sink and crashed onto some rocks then shatter into pieces.

I jumped into the water. My robes and uniform were drenching wet and felt tight and baggy. Suddenly I saw a young girl and a mother with a toddler on her back. I knew who this had to be. My family! I signalled all the crew to swim towards the people. In the freezing cold water, I suddenly ran out of breath and began sinking! When I woke up, I was in one of the 50 remaining boats, completely confused and baffled by what had happened. But when I saw my family, I immediately knew how I got from the middle of the ocean, to here. They told me the tragic story: “*And when she leapt in and grabbed you, you were drowning!*” I saw a tear trickling like the rapid glimpse of time after my drowning, down my mother’s cheek. This voyage was broken by the storm but saved from my beloved family.

My family had come to save me. Despite being sort of faint from drowning, but I knew it was all too clear how complex this trip was.

The National Gallery of Exploration – Exhibit 87 – The Ming Treasure Voyages

Sha Tin Junior School, Tan, Shannon – 10

1410, January 13th
31.027640, 120.699072

The winds were in our favour as we departed. Our ship, a Green Eyebrow surged ahead, the hull cutting through waves. The oarsman's veins pumped, and Liujiagang was merely a grain of rice on the horizon. I dutifully carried out my chores – scrubbing the deck, sweeping Commander Wang's quarters and when I had time, I set about exploring the vessel on this, her maiden voyage.

We're off to win over the world. The Chinese will be respected, worshipped, honoured. Our riches, achievements, sophistication will wow those barbarians. No one can defy us.

1410, October 24th
2.196, 102.2405

Just when I think I have seen everything we arrive at yet another exotic land. Towering beasts with nasty-looking tusks and rough, saggy skin. Black pandas who effortlessly clamber to treetops. And a lumpy pomelo! A taste and texture so meaty and tangy, what bliss! The natives are fascinated by our luxurious silk and soothing tea. I'd assumed they were cavemen. But in truth, they're much like us. I have seen the world with new eyes.

But my senses are on high alert tonight. I have a feeling something is astir with Commander Wang. Ever since we have neared Ceylon, he seems distant and aloof. Perhaps it is a bout of homesickness.

1411, February 3rd
6.927079, 79.861244

As I soundlessly scratch out this entry, I peep through the bamboo floorboards into the galley. I hear muffled tones below my sagging hammock. I thought it must have been the cook... but he was in the doctor's office, getting treated for a grotesque gash. So who was downstairs?

This is what I overheard:

"So, Zheng He and his troops shall be lured with some imperial order to King Alakesvara and His Majesty's army will cut off the old seadog from the fleet. Then we just sail off!" Wang's distinctive ShanXi accent declared with his trademark aura of authority.

"Wha-what do we tell the Emperor?" a meek whispered reply. It sounded much like my half-sister, Song Jiang, who was also on board.

I have no time to waste. I have to alert Zheng He! I shall be back soon, hopefully with good news.

1411, February 4th
6.927079, 79.861244

Alright, the dilemma I am facing is anything but *good*.

As I ran in a flurry to the bobbing rowboats, I heard cursing interrupting the serene night. Wang's lean figure charged like a bull at me. "Where are you going, Tai? You know the boats are off limits while we're docked!" he hissed, spittle flying everywhere.

He caught me glancing back at Zheng He's treasure ship. "Aha! You little snitch! It was Song, wasn't it?" There was nothing else I could do but valiantly defend my sister and let him dump me in the hold where I am currently locked inside.

It is over for Zheng He. This King Alakesvara they spoke of strikes terror in the hearts of the Ceylonese. The unsuspecting Admiral will be marooned and erased from history forever. At least I have this logbook I'd discreetly pocketed. At least someone will uncover the true story someday.

1411, February ?
6.927079, 79.861244

The days wear on so reluctantly even a snail can outrun it easily. I have been holding my wretched breath ever since I'd heard Zheng He leave. To secure diplomatic ties and whatnot, Wang insisted he must leave and fed Zheng He a load of lies. Nobody was too sure. Zheng He tramped off anyway.

1411, February 27th
6.927079, 79.861244

I was pacing the room when a bone-rattling BOOM! The floor shook. I was thrown off my feet into a corner where I violently bashed my head. Fireworks exploded in my brain.

That's when I heard the army. Like a stampeding herd of buffalo, footsteps thundered overhead. Battle cries in a tongue-twisting language echoed in my drumming ears. Suddenly, like a guardian angel from the heavens, a filthy boot knocked the flimsy door open.

"Hey, you I to free?" The man demanded in broken Mandarin. I nodded vigorously. What else could I do? He looked me over with piercing onyx eyes. "You come." Freedom! Fresh air! The soldier probably had the wrong guy, but here was my chance. I obediently tailed him.

"Tai, Tai. Thought you could sneak away, huh? Well, you won't escape me again." The scent of gunpowder. A gun cocking. My head swivelling. A stone striking me, hard, on my temple. The world going dark.

When I came to, I was back in the prison of my nightmares. I blindly groped around for my logbook, but with no avail. It had tumbled out when I was blacked out. Then again, for the second time today, a filthy boot knocked the flimsy door open. Except it wasn't a tanned, linguistically challenged young man who barged in. It was Zheng He himself.

"Admiral! Admiral sir?" I blabbered, forgetting how to speak.

"Hello, young lad. I just wanted to return this to you," he boomed, handing me my tattered logbook. "But first, would you be so kind to let me flip through?"

"O-of course, s-sir." I stammered as he skimmed through pages.

He smiled momentarily. It must have been my recounts of his courageous voyages. But suddenly his face contorted into horror and he stormed off without another word. He returned with Wang in tow. "Wang, you will stay here locked up. Don't even think about tricking me ever again."

Needless to say, we arrived home quite safe and sound.

Exhibit 87: Tai Sun's logbook detailing the events of the third voyage of the Ming Treasure Fleet. For more information about Zheng He, see Exhibits 100 ~ 103. – The National Gallery of Exploration.

Translated from Chinese to English by Jackie Lee.

Life At Sea (the third voyage of the Ming Treasure Fleet)

Sha Tin Junior School, Xu, Amy – 10

"We need sailors!" Calls and shouts to the emperor's people rang throughout the city. I hesitated, then strolled toward the announcer.

"When does the fleet take off?" I asked, "I want to join as a sailor."

"In 2 weeks' time." the man cast an inspecting look over me. "How old are you, boy? Not very likely to get a good job. Not very big and strong"

"I am 19," I answered, a bit louder than normal, seeing that this man did not like me much. "And also, my name is Yang Bi ming (楊碧明)!"

"I am not deaf, you know." He said, disapprovingly. "The more sailors, the better. All that want to can get on a boat. You'll be on a Bao Chuan, the same one with the great man himself, Zheng He. Powerful man. I would have put you on a horse boat, but that would be unfair. The emperor says everyone should get chances. Be grateful for that, and work hard! Now go!" I scurried off, relieved. I had always wanted a life of adventure and travel, life on the sea. But what would sister think about me going on long journeys, travelling on a huge boat? I was petrified to tell her. But when I got home, I knew I had to.

"Yang Ying Yue?" I mumbled, "I have something to tell you."

"Yes?" She answered, not even looking up.

"I found a job. I'm going to sail away on a huge boat too far off lands and explore the unknown." I said, shaking more than ever.

"So you're going to be a fisherman?" she said with a laugh, "And 'explore' the seven seas on a small, scrappy boat? Oh, you can be funny sometimes."

"No! Not that! I'm going to sail on a Bao Chuan with great Zheng He and will return with stories of far off lands that no one has yet ventured to."

"You're not joking, are you?" she stared at me with that look, like she did when I was still a little boy.

"You're not lying to me, right?"

"No, I'm not! I have never lied to you!"

"When you were 6, you lied that you went to school! But guess where I found you? Fishing with your bare hands in the pond infested with algae! And when you were 2..." trust Yang Ying Yue to remember *all* of my flaws.

"I'm going to set off in 2 weeks!" I continued, "And guess what? I won't be back for 2 years!"

"Really? Bi Ming, you're such a silly little boy sometimes! Don't you know it's hard to earn money here? And now you leave me all by myself? I'll have to wait for 2 years until you can bring your money back! Can't you be more thoughtful?" My sister was only 10 years older than me, but she acted like our long lost mother sometimes. I felt ashamed for a second for not thinking at all before signing up.

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A few weeks later, I stood in the middle of the village, a buzz of excitement and anxiety in the air. Announcers were calling at the top of their lungs, "Sailors! Sailors! Come out anyone that signed up! We're leaving!" I said goodbye to my sister, regretting for an instant. But a new confidence took over me as I marched behind the announcer, knowing that I could earn more money, whispering that I would be back soon.

We arrived at Liu Jia Gang, where the boats would set off a few hours later. There, a majestic fleet of 62 boats was waiting for us. Thousands of people from villages all over China were crowding around and gaping at the fleet of boats.

"Get on!" People shoved us towards the boats. "Bao Chuan here!" I quickly squeezed on, taking in the surroundings, stunned to silence. The boat was the most majestic I had ever seen. My thoughts were interrupted by a voice.

"Stop blocking the way!" I bolted off.

For the rest of the day, I did backbreaking work. Scrubbing the deck, raising the sails, hauling the anchors, waving semaphore flags like crazy, and much more painstaking work. I couldn't spot anyone I knew on the massive boat. The boat was trapped in a cage of silence (except for the shouting of orders) as it roughly floated on the waves, no one wanting to talk to the strangers amongst them.

“Get in a cabin! Faster!” Someone shouted at us. I scurried into the closest cabin, stumbling a bit as it was nightfall already. There were already 5 people inside. These were the new people I would share a room with for the next few years. I stared at a rat outside our cabin with disgust. I hoped I wouldn’t be on the bottom bunk. “I’m Yang Bi Ming,” I said anxiously. We all introduced ourselves simply. The other people in the cabin were called Li Ming, Chang Yi, Ying Di Qi and Tang Li Yong. I shared a bunk with Li Yong. I guess he was nice enough. But I was still a bit disappointed that they were all strangers in my room.

The boat rocked side to side as it continued on with its journey, even in the dark of the night. I tossed and turned on the top bunk, not able to fall asleep. After a while, I could tell that the others were asleep. Although asleep, I could sense they were all restless. I couldn’t see Tang Li Yong, but I could feel movement beneath me, so I knew he must be awake. In the dark of the night, he crept out our cabin. I followed silently, but only to the door. I peered out the crack of the door, moonlight shining onto the sea. Our boat headed swiftly forward. Li Yong was staring hard at something. Staring at *someone*. Who was he staring at? Suddenly, a shrill shout echoed around the boat, startling everyone on it. A sailor’s nightmare. “Pirates!”

# When the Battle Began

*Shanghai Singapore International School, Gosain, Shimona – 11*

“GET THE CANNONS READY! THEY ARE ABOUT TO ATTACK!” My voice screeched across the ship as I ran towards our largest cannon. Soon enough, acidic smoke filled the air. I tried my best to look strong and confident from the outside, but I was terrified and unsure of what I was doing from the inside. I don’t think you understand. Let’s start from the beginning.

It all started when I agreed to go on my first ever voyage as captain of The Ming Treasure Fleets, Captain Zheng He. The Chinese king thought I was capable to be captain. He said I had to deliver back the jewels that were stolen before. We were headed all around South–East Asia, going to Vietnam and Indonesia, and then returning back to China. We were ready to set off to Vijaya which is in Vietnam. There, we met the minister. He gave us a tour of his palace and even let us keep some of the gold we were supposed to deliver. He was so generous to the villagers. He was so kind. After a long and tiring day, I went to check where we were going to next and saw that we were going near Indonesia, and my mind drifted into deep thoughts. Shen Chen walked up to me, “What are you thinking about, captain?”

“Oh. Hello, Shen Chen. I was just thinking about Chen Zuyi...” I dazed off as I answered.

“Chen Zuyi? Who is she?” asked Shen Chen in bewilderment which you could see by the look on his face.

“Well... ‘HE’ is an evil pirate who always attacks ships like ours, bigger than his own, and somehow, has not been defeated. If we come across him and his crew, we are doomed.” I explained with a slightly terrified but stern look on my face.

“Oh. In that case, you don’t have to worry. We have the best crew members ever and a great captain to guide us. I believe in you, captain.” His words flattered me.

The next day, I woke up early, so early that the sun was nowhere close to rising. I got dressed and got to the kitchen for a midnight snack to take my mind of Chen Zuyi. Not so soon after my snack, we docked at Palembang, Indonesia. There was no sign of Chen Zuyi, and I was relieved. I was so worried, I didn’t sleep. I tossed and turned all night. Finally, the daylight shined in my room. I changed into my clothes for the day and went to wake up the others. The king had sent us a chariot. How kind of him! The royal guard took us to the king’s palace. It was huge and mostly red and gold in color. We stayed there for hours, touring the city before heading back to the ship.

As we docked from Palembang, I was so happy that we had not come across Chen Zuyi yet. Famous last thoughts. The ship suddenly stopped. I went to where the ship was being controlled and there was a BIG problem.

“Well, well, well. If it isn’t the pesky little fleets. Give me the gold, and you won’t die. Don’t give me the gold and you die!” Chen Zuyi commanded as he pointed his sword at me.

“Look, we don’t have any gold. We are just heading back to China and don’t mean any harm so please, please just let us go,” I say, trying not to get any fright in my voice.

“Alright, fine! We will let you go.” He waited for us to move away a bit before yelling, “FIRE AT THEM!” We turned around, surprised, but luckily for us, they had tried to use a broken cannon. I ran across the ship, my voice screeching, “QUICK! GET ALL THE CANNONS READY! HURRY EVERYONE!”

Smoke, fire and destruction filled the air, and all I could see were the foggy figures of my crew. The canon fire got louder and louder. I crouched down, moving my hands to cover my ears. I just wanted to go home, but I knew I had to stay strong for my team. Within a second, I stood up. I glanced at my team with faith, “It’s time. We need to use it.”

“Are you sure, captain?” Shen Chen shrieked through the sound of the battleships. I nodded with certainty. I knew it was risky, but I knew it was the right thing to do. Our secret weapon: The Golden Cannon, the biggest, most explosive cannon ever invented. Shen Chen fired it up, giving me the most confident smile I’d smiled in a very long time. It flew across the ash–filled seawater and blasted the ship right through the middle. We sunk all their ships, killing more than five thousand people. My crew and I were jumping with joy, hugging one another, when Shen Chen pointed to a man in the waters, “How? That’s Chen Zuyi!”

Some men from my crew jumped out into water and dragged Chen Zuyi by his wrists up the ropes towards the ship. We brought Chen Zuyi back to China and he was be–headed. I was so proud of my crew, and they were proud of me. The mission was difficult, but my crew and I are always looking forward to adventures.



# The Diary of Zheng Lian

*Shanghai Singapore International School, Kao, Yung Wai Candace – 11*

Oh, the sea, the endless sea, when will our journey end?

My friend Li An Xi assisted me in scrubbing the deck as my daily job while ‘Oh—I—am—above—your—level’ Ma Zhu and my brother Zheng Zi stood around scoffing. I really wanted to smack them in the face! While Li and I were busy cleaning, Ma Zhu mocked us viciously. “You are so stupid. We already finished our chores! Oh, and little maid Li An Xi, would you do me a favor and lick my shoes clean?” I knew that Ma only did that because Li is his step brother, the child of the woman Li’s father married after he was widowed. I saw Li trembling with rage, and before I could stop him, he rushed at Ma and landed a heavy blow on his jaw. Ma’s jaw was dislocated, but my brother fixed it back again with a sharp click. As payback, we stood outside our brothers’ cabin yelling abuse at them, accidentally waking up father. I am currently in hot water.....

Goodnight, fair diary!  
Zheng Lian

Mother, I miss you so much! I wish you could see this, but sadly, my diary is not magical. Yes, believe it or not, your 17-year-old son actually wrote in a diary that he misses you. Today, we are sailing across the sea to visit the leader of Indonesia. Zheng Zi, Ma Zhu, and father have thrown up more than 20 times in the past 5 hours, as Li and I just sit here getting nauseous while watching countless crew members vomit in the water. How entertaining. I am being sarcastic, of course! How fun would it be? I have asked my fellow crew members for the date, and all they say is that they do not know as well. This journey feels like it is lasting for thousands and thousands of years. Who knows if we will make it off this boat alive?

Goodnight, diary!  
Zheng Lian

I wish we could now go and sail off to visit other countries instead of waiting for the night to pass (hopefully leaving Zheng Zi here). Speaking of that, I think it is his turn to keep watch—I need to get a rest to get ready to help the crew tomorrow. Who knows if we will run into Chen Zu Yi and his pirates? Oh well, I better go get some sleep and stop fretting, eh? I think I can see the dawn light approaching in the distance!

Goodnight, fair diary!  
Zheng Lian

Today we are setting off to another country! Is it just me, or do I hear thumping? Is it another ship arriving? I will go check and see if there is any need to go and sound the alarm. Oh, dear god, I can hear them coming! I need to go sound the alarm! Please, save us, ancestors watching up above! This can’t be our destiny to die!

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Father is lying on the brink of death, and Zheng Zi is dead! The merciless Chen Zu Yi boarded our ship a few minutes after dawn, taking us by surprise. His cruel pirates brandished blunt shards of metals, swords, and some fired cannons on us. One of his leading pirates had set fire on our boat, burning Ma and Li badly. Ma is fighting against his looming death, expelling high pitched wails of, “I don’t want to die! Who will take care of mother?” Chen Zu Yi’s crew killed around a quarter of our crew, injured most of them, and stole some treasure. If brother hadn’t leapt onto the other boat and stolen some of the weapons, we would be dead by now. Please let him live! Our crew...all of us have lost something. We are all grieving. I think I should elaborate on how the pirates attacked?

Everyone was sleeping. The pirates attacked seconds after I sounded the alarm. Our people woke up and drowsily entered their defense positions. The Admiral challenged Chen, asking him why he was doing this. After that, I felt woozy. The pirates shot a strange liquid into me, knocking me out. Then I heard Li dragging me into the Admiral’s cabin like he had ordered him to, and I fainted. Li then poured a bucket of icy sea water on me. I sat up immediately and whispered that someone was approaching. I grabbed the admiral’s wine bottle and his broken sword. Li did the same, finding bits of metal and glass. As one of Chen’s goons broke in, bruised and bleeding, we attacked without mercy. Within minutes, he fell at our

feet, dead. We tossed him overboard to the hungry sharks and hid, waiting for some idiots to walk into our ambush. The two of us killed many pirates! I am exhausted!

My father has...gone on. I am alone. How will I explain to mother? She will blame me, and go out of her mind! How are we going to cope? We have no more money—no father, no Zheng Zi. It's all my fault. Why couldn't I have died instead of them? There is only one thing that can console me. The fact that my father died doesn't mean that I will not survive. I have to survive for their sakes and mother's. Li An Xi has also lost his step brother and his father. Not only that, his step mother hates him. I told him that if there is any problem, he can go live with his grandparents or us. He is less dejected already!

Goodnight,  
Zheng Lian

This will be my last entry in this diary. I will have to toss you out. You did nothing to deserve this, but you bring back many bad memories. I suppose I should burn you up, but I decided not to, as you are just an innocent diary. Goodbye, and thank you for being there when I needed you!

Goodbye forever,  
Zheng Lian

# The Fierce Battle

*Shanghai Singapore International School, Kolhapur, Aneesh – 11*

“Watch out Zheng He! Chen Zuyi is about to attack you. Quickly, get ready for the fight. We need to win,” someone shouted.

In 1407ce, Zheng He was continuing his journey back to China after he had gone to collect goods from Bengal, Ceylon, Southern Vietnam and Malaysia. While he was returning to China, Chen Zuyi, the Guangdong Pirate, attacked him. The fierce battle went on and on for hours until the pirates had taken over the bases of the Ming treasure fleet ships. Chen Zuyi killed many Ming forces and stole all of the goods from the ships. The Ming forces were weak, but Zheng He didn't give up. He tried to use canons to blow up the ship, but since the treasure was on the ship, he couldn't fire bullets and the canons weren't working properly. Chen Zuyi sailed up ahead. Then Zheng He told his crew members to catch up with the pirate ship and attacked them. They all had to agree with Zheng He because they had no other plan to retrieve the goods and beat the pirates.

Zheng He started to sail and speed up against them. Zheng He said, “Stick to the ship and throw the fireballs!” After they started to throw the fireballs, more and more pirate ships came to protect the main pirate ship. Then Zheng He started to sail at full speed and he instructed them to bump against the main pirate ship. Zheng He jumped onto the pirate ship with some crew members helping him. They all used swords to attack the pirates. Zheng He said, “ATTACK!” and they started to attack the whole ship. Other pirate ships were coming. They were being outrun, but some of the Ming forces were still alive so those forces attacked and battled with the pirate ships who were about to kill Zheng He and his crew members. Zheng He had to face up against Chen Zuyi.

The battle between Zheng He and Chen Zuyi was fierce, and the crew members faced up against their worst enemies. Zheng He defeated Chen Zuyi, but the crew members didn't beat the other pirates, so Zheng He defeated the other pirates and gained back his crew members. They all took the treasure back and defeated the Guangdong Pirates. They had blown up the bases of the pirates in Palembang.

During the journey, the Wokou pirates had raided the Ming forces but the Ming forces were able to defeat the Wokou pirates. They had a rough journey through the western ocean. The storm had caused most of the damage and a lot of crew members were lost in the ocean. Zheng He was fine, but he didn't notice that the Wokou pirates had stolen the goods. When he went down to check the goods were still there, he just saw empty boxes. Zheng He said, “Everybody come down right now! We have lost the treasure!” Now everybody was shocked. Ma Huan the scribe was surprised that the treasure was stolen. Zheng He was wondering who had stolen the treasure. When he remembered, guess who it was? It was the Wokou pirates. They had tricked him into thinking that they surrendered and then stole the treasure.

They followed the tracks of the Wokou pirates and eventually found them. They had a fierce battle for two days! The Wokou pirates suffered a big loss, same for the Ming forces, because many people died in the big battle. They got the treasure back after the Wokou pirates really surrendered.

Well, we all know that there is traitor in every single story. A few of the Ming forces were teams with the Wokou pirates and the Chen Zuyi. While both pirates are enemies, the traitors had a fight between all of them because they all wanted the luxurious goods and treasure. Both teams' heads secretly called their big boss. One of them was Cheng Zhou Lian, the Wokou pirate, and Chen Zuyi. They were stepbrothers. They went near ship and the traitors threw the treasure on ship. Zheng He saw the traitors, so he took action. He killed the traitors and kept Cheng Zhou Lian and Chen Zuyi captive. After they reached China, Chen Zuyi and Cheng Zhou Lian were sentenced to death. Zheng He was the imperial hero of the Ming Dynasty because he had a lot of bravery inside him. Finally, after so much fighting everybody was happy and peaceful.

# Story Of A Violent Storm

*Shanghai Singapore International School, Ma, Chung Ho Joe – 11*

Whoosh! Whoosh! The bigger storms told me that someone called Zheng He was coming to the Indian Ocean for his first treasure voyage. It was the Ming Dynasty and the other storms told me, “Hey little storm, if you can crash Zheng He’s treasure ship, you can be a bigger storm.” I thought of the reward and decided to give it a shot.

Finally, one day, Zheng He’s fleet of ship sailed to the heart of the Indian Ocean to find treasures and build relationships with other countries. The bigger storms told me not to show mercy to humans. I was hesitant but eventually agreed because humans kept fishing from the ocean. Many of my friends lost their family members. Before I finished my thoughts, Zheng He’s ship arrived. I saw the smaller scout ship nearing land followed by the bigger ones. The biggest treasure ship, as big as the palace, with Zheng He inside emerged!

I began to doubt myself. Will I be able to conquer the treasure boat? I was a pretty small storm, the bigger storms told me that the bigger the ship was, the slower it would turn. I was reassured. I mustered all my strength and with a puff, the waves churned! As soon as Zheng He saw me, he ran into the treasure ship and without a warning, they turned out of my way. I was hard on the heels of his ship and tried to suck it into my belly. Finally, reward was not too long, I paid the sweat to reap the benefits. Parts of the fleet were in my belly. I tried to devour the entire fleet, but I did not have such a big appetite. What I could do was only to destroy a small part of Zheng He’s fleet and watch him and the rest retreat and sought refuge on land. I tried my best, but still was unable to change the result.

About a year later, the other storms told me that Zheng He was making for his second voyage. “This is my chance to prove myself,” I was determined. I went over to wait for Zheng He and his fleet to come. It was then probably the last time I would encounter Zheng He because when I got there, a typhoon approximately four times bigger than me had arrived earlier than me. She was already demolishing the fleet. I thought she was there to claim her reward. I needed to have my share too. I reckoned it would just be a piece of cake for her to destroy the fleet, but to my surprise, the typhoon was also unable to devour the treasure ship because the ship was very steady albeit losing steam to fight back. I saw a glimpse of hope and plucked up my courage to attack. I found out that the typhoon was definitely not very smart, so I threw some war ship that were just a little smaller than the treasure ship to twenty meters away. To my expectation, the typhoon raced to the war ship, leaving the treasure ship free to be attacked by me, solely.

“I did it! I did it! Woohoo! .....” I cheered as I flew towards the bigger storms.

# Mal de Mer

*Shanghai Singapore International School, Pan, Qi – 11*

“I will never go overseas again!” Even though Zheng He had just regained consciousness, he was deep in thought. He had just fainted from exhaustion. Zheng He and his followers had just come back from Java Island, Indonesia. Java had been caught in a civil war between Java East and Java West, and Zheng He and his crew had been suffering in a Western jail. At last, when Java West had won, the emperor of Java finally found out that Zheng He was from “China.” He nervously apologized and sent a lot of gold and jewels back with him.

When Zheng He and his crew finally returned to their ships, they set sail. Afterwards they figured out that in total they had lost eight ships and a quarter of his crew, destroyed by the war. On the ship, Zheng He and all his crew were exhausted, especially Zheng He, who soon became extremely seasick and regretted getting on the ship. The ship’s crew was deeply homesick, which added to Zheng He’s misery until he finally fainted. There was chaos!

The weather did not help either. There was a thunderstorm for two nights, and they lost another two ships and almost one sixth of their crew. Zheng He was lucky to survive; the furious waves almost threw him overboard, but his trusted aide, Wang Jing Hong, pulled him back onboard in the nick of time. At first he thought Zheng He might be dead since he was unconscious, but they were relieved to see him breathing.

During the time that Zheng He was unconscious, the news of his coming sailing ships spread throughout the whole Samboja Kingdom, near Palembang, Indonesia. “Tap, tap, tap, tap……” The notorious pirate Chen Zuyi was deep in thought, tapping his fingers on the table. As a cunning plan gradually developed, the smile on his face expanded. He had already snatched many ships, and had never failed. From his spies, he had learned that Zheng He was skilled only on land, and also suffered from seasickness. Most importantly, he knew that Zheng He was now weak. Now was the time to strike.

Chen Zuyi loudly announced, “My dear crew, Zheng He and his lovely ships are coming our way. Don’t be afraid about their numbers. They’ll cause no harm since their captain is sick! Let’s deceive them!” Chen Zuyi was confident, but he didn’t notice the shivering black shadow standing behind the curtain, which never belonged to there.

After the storm, the weather cleared and Zheng He finally woke up. His assistant Wang Jing Hong told him that while he was asleep, they learned that the notorious pirate Chen Zuyi had been nearby, but had died due to sickness. Wang Jing Hong said that since Chen Zuyi’s crew had lost their leader, they were tired of the pirate life, and they wanted to go back home. The people in Samboja confirmed that the evil Chen Zuyi’s time was finally over!

No doubt that Zheng He believed Chen Zuyi’s trap. Zheng He’s crew went to visit the Samboja “villagers.” However, the “villagers” were really Chen Zuyi’s crew!

After lying to Wang Jing Hong, Chen Zuyi’s crew headed to trick the town villagers. Chen Zuyi’s plan was perfect, airtight. Still, nothing is COMPLETELY perfect.

Zheng He’s ship stopped near Samboja, and he was about to rest. Suddenly, a mysterious dog appeared, and Zheng He stared at it. It had beautiful blue eyes, golden fur; it was a golden retriever. The dog looked Zheng He right in his eyes, as though trying to tell him something. Zheng He was perplexed. It looked so similar to his own dear old dog. It could have been his little brother. Following the dog, he went down through the ship and the complex passageways, finally discovering a mysterious man with a black cloak. There was only a broken lantern shining in the corner. Just before the light went out, he spoke. “Chen Zuyi did not die. He was lying to everyone. He was trying to get you……” The light faded. The man melted into the darkness, and disappeared.

The next day after checking drawings of Chen Zuyi’s face so they could recognize him, Zheng He’s crew headed to Samboja. There were six pirate ships flying skull and crossbones waiting. Zheng He was ready to board Chen Zuyi’s ship. Chen Zuyi pretended to be Chen Zuyi’s “son,” but still Zheng He figured this out and thought of another plan for his crew and for himself. The other crew members should enter the other five ships. Then, if the ship Zheng He was on got into trouble, the crew would burn the other ships.

As Zheng He went into the ship, it smelled like rotten old socks. There were rats everywhere. Going into the meeting room, Chen Zuyi, pretending to be his son, was waiting. “My father died because of a disease, it was from rats (sob)! No matter what we do, we can’t get rid of the rats.”

But Zheng He was not tricked and shouted, “Chen Zuyi, save your speech for the devil!” Ten knives flashed and thirsted towards Chen Zuyi and his crew.

Chen Zuyi stuttered, “Wha—what is this fffor, you’re wrong! I’m his son! This is a mistake!”

Zheng He continued, “We will see if this a mistake when we check with the villagers. Bring them back onboard!”

Zheng He secured all of the ships, killed half of Chen Zuyi’s crew, and took the ships they needed. Once back to China, they cut Chen Zuyi’s head off along with the rest of the crew.

For Zhen He, he had the honor of being praised by the Emperor. Then he finally traveled home and got his much needed rest. While Chen Zuyi’s ships burned and sunk to the sea floor, the story of Zheng He became inscribed in the history books.

# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

*Shanghai Singapore International School, Park, So Yeon – 11*

It's been 20 years since it happened. I'm lucky to be alive and writing this. Many of my pals and respectful elders weren't as lucky as I was. Praying for my dear friends, I will unravel the story that has haunted me almost every night for the last 20 years.

My name is Hung Li. I was only 17 then. I was called to set off on a trip. A lot of you might know, it's called the Ming Treasure Voyages. We had to set sail for India, trade goods, and come back safely with chests of valuable presents. Of course it was a frightening, daring voyage. We might have a shipwreck, or face the possibility that the country refuses to take us in as friends, or—worst of all—we might encounter pirates

Since I was the youngest and strongest man on the ship, I was the one pulling up the goods for trading. As I stopped for a rest, I saw the captain on the deck, gazing out into the blue sea.

"The day sure is good for sailing, isn't it?" I said, grinning.

The man jumped. He looked at me as if I was a weird, three-legged monster, then shook his head slowly, "You must be new if you think that. We've got a long journey in front of us. This," he gestured at the open sea, "is fake. An invitation from the sea monster. Who knows how long it will last..."

He went back to his deep thoughts, and I quietly clomped down where things were still being loaded. Worries and fear wrapped around my guts. I hoped we would return safely.

The journey began! With a sudden jerk, hundreds of ships set off from the main dock. People waved good bye and good luck. Some of us on board stared silently at the people at the dock. But most of us got working right away.

Unlike the captain's worries, the journey to India was fairly smooth. No shipwrecks, no pirates. Now the only worry was whether India would take us in. If they didn't, there might be a battle between us.

"Hung Li! What are you doing over there! Come and help! No use standing there like a fool!"

I whipped around. Four sailors were pulling on a rope. One rolled his eyes when he saw me.

"Come now, it's no use standing there. Captain didn't call you for that!"

I strolled down and swiftly pulled down the rope. A sailor guffawed.

I smiled and shuffled away back to the deck. I spent most of the time there.

Soon we were in India. We strode down the wooden steps and stepped onto the sandy ground. The people of India stared at us. Our captain spoke to someone who looked like the chief. After what felt like hours, the chief nodded and said,

"Bharat me aapka swaagat hai!"

That meant 'welcome to India!'. So we were friends with India now.

We were led to a castle. It was beautiful. Swirls of colours filled every single room, with antique vases and pictures decorating the hall. We marched across the thick carpet and stopped in front of the king. The chief explained something to the king. He nodded and gestured to the slaves. They scurried away to what looked like the treasure room.

The next morning, we left with soft silk, special spices, and exquisite jewelries piled onto the ship. This was when the scariest part of the trip began.

We sailed across the Indian Ocean, happy and contented. I sighted a small dot floating towards us. However, it wasn't a dot. As it got closer, I realised it was a ship. And it didn't look friendly. There was a moment of silence amongst all our ships.

Pirate attack.

"Captain?" I whispered, "What are we going to do?"

"Hush! Everything is under control!" he reassured. But I could tell by the look of his face it wasn't.

The pirate ship loomed closer until it was in front of us. Three men jumped off. They each had a beard and tattoos. Long silver swords dangled in their hands. The sailors looked for our weapons. We had swords too. And shields. One of the pirates walked towards us. One step, two step. And swiftly, he slashed his sword across the neck of a sailor who was standing nearby. We raced.

“Charge!” our captain shouted. There was a frenzy of screaming, red liquid, and slashes of swords. That was when I saw the canon ball on the pirate ship getting turned towards our ship.

“Everybody get off the boat!” I yelled at the top of my lungs. I dived into the ocean.

When I woke up, I was lying face down on a sandy beach.

“Thank god you woke up,” somebody said, “We have already lost many sailors. I can’t bear to see another die,” I sat right up. It was the captain. He smiled. I looked around. There were about 15 of us in all, most of them leaning against the tree staring off somewhere, some of them not yet conscious. Wait. Where were we?

“Are we on an island?” I asked. My voice surprised me. It was more like a dry, creaking noise. The captain nodded, then got up to take care of another sailor. I tried to crawl to a nearby tree, but I felt a sharp pain in my right leg. Trying not to look at it, I slowly scooted inch by inch to the tree.



# The Pirate's Attack

*Shanghai Singapore International School, Rao, Tanvi – 11*

Many years ago, a Chinese mariner named Zheng He made seven voyages with his treasure fleet. They gave treasure bags and gold coins to people and they sailed to the South China Sea, Indian Ocean, Arabian Sea, Red Sea and along the east coast of Africa. They travelled around the world during the years between 1405–1433. During those years, they experienced many difficulties and miracles. Now, people in China and other countries still remember Zheng He and his miraculous adventures. I will tell you a story about them, while they were on their way back to China from the first voyage.

Zheng He was born into a noble family. When he was born, he was named “Ma He,” but when he received extra military trainings, he became a trusted assistant and advisor to the emperor. That’s why the emperor gave him a new name, Zheng He, instead. He was a hardworking boy and because of the extra military trainings, he wasn’t scared of anything. His parents also taught him to be a kind and a well-mannered man.

During the first voyage, Zheng He and his treasure fleet set sail from Liujiagan Port in Taicang of Jiangsu Province and headed westwards, but while coming back, they faced a problem. They saw a big ship in front of them and on that ship, there was a symbol that related to the mean-spirited and inconsiderate man called Chen Zuyi. Chen Zuyi and his pirate fleet were on the ornamented boat. There were over 500 men on Chen Zuyi’s ship, so Zheng He’s group was scared, but Zheng He was not. Zheng He was still confident, but not over-confident, because he knew that if he was overconfident then he could fail.

First, Chen Zuyi made a wicked face and told Zheng He, “Zheng He, give me your treasure and if you don’t, I will say ATTACK.” Zheng He replied, “I am not a servant who when you ask for something will give it to you, so I am not frightened of any words like ‘attack’ or ‘get away’ or ‘run’ or....”

Suddenly, Chen Zuyi closed his eyes with so much anger that smoke was coming out of his nose. He raised his hand to Zheng He and shouted to his crew, “ENOUGH! What are you looking at? Do I have to tell you what to do, or are you going to do it yourselves?” and at last he announced attack.

As soon as he had spoken, Zheng He made a quick move of the gear and went in a direction where the pirates couldn’t catch them. The pirates also ran at bolt speed to get their ropes so they could throw them to Zheng He’s ship and pull it next to their ship. Suddenly, Zheng He’s ship made strange noises and stopped. Zheng He sent one of the members in his team down below the ship’s deck to the engines to fix the noises with the ship. Since the ship was not moving, the pirates caught Zheng He’s ship. The members of Zheng He’s team became more hopeless, but still Zheng He was brave.

Chen Zuyi told all his pirates to attack Zheng He’s ship at once, and they took out their swords and went to Zheng He’s boat, aiming to kill Zheng He so that they could get the bags of gold. When they jumped to Zheng He’s ship, the members of the treasure fleet took out their weapons and started fighting with the pirates aiming to kill them. Zheng He was the one who was in charge of making sure that no pirate stole their treasure. As the pirates tried to attack the bags of treasure, Zheng He took out his weapon and tried protecting the bags by blocking them so that the pirates couldn’t steal them, but since the pirates all came at once, he slipped down the edge of the ship. He nearly went into the sea, but he held on to the corner of the ship. He waited patiently for one of his team members to appear and hoped that no pirate appeared in front of him. Suddenly, Chen Zuyi appeared in front of Zheng He.

He lifted his feet and was about to step onto Zheng He’s hand, but suddenly the member of the treasure fleet who had gone to fix the engine shot an arrow at Chen Zuyi. He laid on the deck, asking for help and shouting in pain. Meanwhile, that member pulled Zheng He up into the boat and Zheng He was rescued. He was so grateful that he thanked god.

Zheng He took out another sword and started fighting with the pirates. He was trying his best not to kill, but he killed some pirates. Overall, Zheng He killed 200 of Chen Zuyi’s pirates. Even though others were happy about killing the pirates, Zheng He was not because he was a good man and he didn’t want others to be killed as per his early life. Chen Zuyi also killed many of Zheng He’s treasure fleet members, which Zheng He was sad about. Later, Zheng He remembered a wheel barrow that the emperor had told him to take with him throughout the journey, so he took out a rope from below deck and tied all the leftover pirates together, including Chen Zuyi, and put them into the big wheel barrow. He pushed the barrow into the pirate ship and untied them. He didn’t kill the pirates because if he did, there will be no difference between him and Chen Zuyi, and he ran as fast as a cheetah back to his ship.

Zheng He and his members of his treasure fleet returned safely to China in their ship. They had a very good journey. Stories about them have been passed on to us and are still told now.

# New Tales of The Ming Treasure voyages

*Shanghai Singapore International School, Roine, Kai Kustaa – 11*

I was a crew member of Da Ming's treasure ship, we had gold and silk and other exclusive items to give out to other countries for exchange. We aimed to build relationships with other countries so that we would not be enemies.

One day the emperor commanded us to sail to the west to explore and collect more exotic items that we have never seen before. So we set sail. On the first week, we only traveled under a hundred kilometers as some crew aboard felt ill. They have gotten seasick and had to be rushed off the ship and went to a nearby city for the rest. We had another ordeal the following week as a storm struck our fleet and almost swept everyone off the ship. When our food supplies ran out, Zheng He ordered, "I have explored many species of fish in the sea. So let's try to fish to get food to eat." Everybody appreciated the idea and we ate fish for about ten weeks.

Suddenly some land emerged not far from my sight and I exclaimed, "Look! We're not far from land. Let's be ready to get there. Let's steer our ship there. So we packed our things and about an hour later, we arrived at Siam. The local people saw us and welcomed us there. We gave them our luxurious things and built friendship with them. In return, we received an Asian elephant I had never seen before. We took it aboard and locked it in a cage in case it attacked humans. We continued our journey and we passed the Malay Archipelago and headed toward Burma. Everything was made of gold even the pagodas. On the way to India, a greedy pirate saw that we had lots of fabulous things and he wanted murder us to get those treasure from us. I steamed up and fired a cannon on his poor ship which left the ship sinking like a piece of melted ice on a hot pot. Everybody cheered! Kai fired the evil pirates down! I beamed with pride.

About two weeks later, we arrived in India. It was not easy to deal with them and they did not like us so they attacked us. We did not take revenge due to the high damage to our ship after the encounter with the pirates. When we left India, we headed to Ceylon. We chose Ceylon as it was one the nearest countries to India and Persia was also nearby. Neither people from India nor Ceylon welcomed us so we traveled to Persia, a country in the middle east.

On the first day traveling to Iran, we fished. A couple of weeks later, we continued to eat the same fish. A man tried to affect the morale of the crew by saying, "Oh gross! This food stinks!" Then he intimidated everyone, "There's poison in the fish, don't eat it!" Everybody started groaning, "Come on this fish stinks. How long will it take us to finish this fish? We want to get to the glorious city of Tehran." Zheng He got really mad, he punched the man's face and he raged, "What in the world are you doing here?" The man replied, "I am a spy sent by the sect who is opposing the Ming emperor." Zheng He ordered the man to be thrown overboard. Then next day we arrived in Tehran. We met the Mirza who welcomed us. We sat down and started to ask the Mirza, "Can we rest a day here around or in the palace?" He replied, "Sure, there is a very comfortable place behind the palace. You can rest there." We returned the favour with gold and silk. The Mirza was a nice guy. But that is not true about everyone. Some tried to chase us out of the city. They sneered, "Even there is the Mirza's permission, you still can't come. Look at your clothes! They are like people who do farming. Beggars are not allowed or welcomed to this city. If you don't leave you will be severely punished." An arrogant man almost attacked Zheng He but he was stopped by the imperial guards. I tried to appease him by giving our luxurious things to him and his gang. Zheng He thanked me for resolving the conflict but we lost some precious silk and other treasures. I told him that I gave them some aluminum cans coated with gold paint. He was impressed by my quick-wit.

We still had not travelled to Oman, Yemen, Saudi Arabi, Somalia and Kenya. I had heard some stories on these lands. Somehow, we reached Somalia and there were lots of unusual looking things. We saw giraffes and lions that never existed in Ming China. We asked the locals if we could take these incredible animals from this grassland. They answered, "Yes, you may." The crew members had to secure the animals in case they escape. We really liked the presents. On the way to Kenya, Zheng He got seasick and also had illness so he could not come with us inland. I had to lead the rest of the crew and searched for outrageous things. We caught a Hippopotamus and brought it up the ship. The crew said, "It is so hard. We can't do this." I burst out my fear and roared, "Hang in there! You can do this with your strengths and wits!" We got most of the treasures and set sail home. Unfortunately, half way through the journey, Zheng He suffered as he accidentally ate the poisonous part of the puffer fish. He passed away onboard at 61 years old. We could not do anything to keep his body so we threw it into the sea. Even though the was his last place, we kept his shirts and belongings but in 1480, people took out the things and burned them. His exploration left behind treasures for people up till this day.

# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

*Shanghai Singapore International School, Yang, Si-Han – 11*

I had joined the Ming Treasure Voyages when I was five years old. Even though six years had passed, the memory of the voyages was crystal clear. The leader of the trip, the great Zheng He, had told his crew to pass on the great and unusual story of the Ming Treasure Voyages to our children. Well, I don't have any children but I could tell this unordinary story to you, right?

I am Zheng He's most loyal dog, Tian Tian. On July 11, 1405, we prayed to Tian Fei, the goddess of protection for sailors. Despite being different in size, I closed my paws and prayed for safe travels.

It was a marvelous sight to see millions of people clapping for us as we set off. Some were holding brightly-coloured flags while others were praying for our safe return. The Yongle Emperor was there in his yellow robes with intricate designs. He had a long sooty black beard and a special black hat on his head. He was the one who had sent us on this special trip. He strutted towards me, I was a bit fazed, thinking something bad was imminent. Looking into my eyes, he whispered, "Take care of Zheng He and be safe." That would be my mission throughout the voyage.

The ship was brown, like the colour of dark chocolate, and was tall and massive. It had enough storage for thousands of people and chests of gold and treasures. The sail resembled a dragon's tail, with ropes pulling it upright. On this ship, we sailed to unique lands and had epic adventures. However, the journey back to Nanjing was most unforgettable.

We had beaten a hasty retreat from Ceylon because the ruler there was hostile. He thought we were enemies and tried to attack us. After that belligerent trip, we went to the west coast of India, the city of Calcutta. The emperor there was much friendlier. As I jumped off the ship, I could see the people's confused faces. The indigenous people were not used to outsiders. Some were staring at Zhang He and the other sailors' unusual clothes with misery, while some were whispering. Mothers grabbed their children tightly. Their native ruler came and Zheng He commanded his men to bring out the gargantuan amount of gold and pottery. After offering the precious items to the emperor, the latter invited us to the palace.

Along the way, I saw people donning different clothes. Some women were wearing red pieces of long cloths wrapped around flimsy blouses. Xu Li explained that it was a 'sari', and was India's traditional clothing. Some women were wearing three pieces of different cloth wrapped around the main blouse. I discovered that it was called a 'Mekhela Sador'. The men were wearing special clothing too, such as the 'dhoti', a long and big piece of white cloth wrapped around the body and sometimes had a belt at the waist.

In the palace, the native emperor, Akbar the great, served us with a Bengali cocktail called 'Kaal Baisakhi'. I would like to taste some but Zheng He waved his hand in my face and drank till the very last drop. I knew I was barking up the wrong tree, so I begged Xu Li for a sip. Big mistake. I swore never to try a cocktail again. After receiving gifts like gold, spices and tea from the emperor, we left Calcutta gaily and began our return to Nanjing.

"Prepare for attack!" the sailors suddenly yelled.

"What's happened?" I wondered nervously.

Xu Li told me that it was Chen Zuyi. I remembered the gruesome pirate. We had met him and his crew when we first begun our voyage. I followed everyone and started barking at the sailors and officers, commanding them where to go and where to hide. Everyone was busy preparing for the attack.

Chen Zuyi's pirate ship arrived, but Chen Zuyi did not fire any bombs or weapons. Instead, Chen Zuyi jumped onto our main ship. He looked apologetic.

"I surrender."

The crowd let out a gasp. But Zheng He didn't look convinced.

"I realised that it would be a lost battle fighting against your strong army. I have learned my lesson and won't mess with you again."

Zheng He's pensive expression softened a little. "I believe you will not bother us again," he bellowed.

I didn't trust the pirate; this situation was fishy. I followed my gut instinct and bolted to the storage room.

I was right! I saw three men attempting to steal our treasures! I bit and scratched like a lion. The pirates yelped, retreated, and hobbled up the stairs, with looks of regret on their dirty faces. When the sailors and pirates saw the three escapees, they gasped in shock.

“Attack!” Chen Zuyi suddenly yelled.

From nowhere, a myriad of pirates appeared and bombs were fired. Boom! Ships were sinking, blood was everywhere, and pirates jumped onto the ship.

Boom! Boom! Boom! Zheng He’s army retaliated. I watched the pirates scream in terror as their ship sunk deep into the ocean.

I knew I had to do something. I ran towards Chen Zuyi. He was battling Zheng He. I leapt and snatched the gun from his hand, just in time before he fired. Zheng He grabbed the rope lying on the deck and firmly tied him against the burnt wooden pole.

“Ouch! I’m sorry! Let me go!” Chen Zuyi cried.

“Too bad,” Zheng He boomed and patted my head.

Crash, bang, bong! Another ship had sunk. Wait a second, it was the ship Xu Li was on!

“Woof! Woof!” I barked as tears cascaded down my cheeks.

“I’m sorry buddy.”

I wasn’t sure how the battle ended. I was wailing for Xu Li throughout the journey home. I could have saved him. I felt ashamed of myself.

Today, although I am still left with a void having lost a good master, I yearn to experience such adventures again.

# Zheng He's Fleet: The Last Treasure Ship

*Shanghai Singapore International School, Zhou, Yi Chen – 10*

The emperor had died.

The man who had once supported his voyages the most was gone.

Nobody cared about the old man and his fleet anymore. They were fighting over the empty throne like hungry wolves fighting over a poor lamb.

However, one day in 1430, the new emperor Xuan De declared that Zheng He would be starting a brand-new voyage! Why? The emperor was making the announcement to other countries—of course by Zheng He—that a new emperor had been throned.

I was supposedly tasked to write diaries of the grand voyage. Can you imagine how excited we were when we watched the endless coastline! It went farther and farther until it disappeared out of sight. I was on the massive treasure ship of Zheng He. The ship was so big that there would be no difficulty fitting a running track and a stadium on it—Olympic sized ones (Do not ask me what is 'Olympic' or 'stadium', I merely dreamt about the future.)!

However, I had an odd feeling that the voyage would not turn out all right... or maybe I was just too nervous. After a delicious breakfast one morning, we arrived at the first country. It had been awhile since the last voyage, but the people recognized Zheng He, so they greeted him politely. We exchanged information such as the emperor's enthroning, and goods like silk and spice. Then we moved on to the other countries.

For months, it was the same work. It was never dull, but I dreamt of more adventurous moments, such as encountering pirates like during the first voyage. There were also rumours that Zheng He himself had another reason for the voyage. We were kept guessing until finally, the answer was revealed in our last planned stop—Mecca. Yes, the great explorer was a Muslim!

Being told the adventures of his father and grandfather, Mecca was Zheng He's dream place since young. He had worked so hard for fifty years, had encountered countless catastrophes, and the hard work had now paid off—he was sailing towards Mecca!

Unfortunately, all his powers and perseverance were spent during the seven voyages—he died when we sailed past Coulee. The odd feeling! Coulee was the final stop for his first voyage. Now it had become the final stop for his life and historical achievements.

And that was the end of my story too.

# Bloodbath's Arrival

*Shrewsbury International School, Zarin, Henry – 10*

"We are approaching Japan," yelled Yang the Lookout.

"Yay!" shouted the Ming team with joy.

They were aboard the Golden Boy ship (the ship wasn't actually made out of gold or boys, because then it would sink or be cruel).

"Excellent work, team," exclaimed Captain Ming, a seven-foot tall adventurous sailor with a six-pack stomach. He looked tough and mean but was actually a big softy who loved butterflies and unicorns.

Yee was the team scout and secret agent. His hand was eaten by his greedy pet goldfish which was named Chubby because of his round shape. Now Yee has an automatic grapnel rope as a fist instead of a hand. He was very relieved that they made it because they were on a mission to give gold to poor Japanese people. He wanted to give gold to poor people because his Aunt Po once said, "With bionic grapnel fists, comes great responsibility."

Suddenly, the world-famous pirate Bloodbath appeared on the ship in a puff of red smoke. As quick as lightning, Bloodbath slammed his spear (also named Bloodbath) into the deck, causing a ball of fire to appear. It started rolling all over the place as if it had a mind of its own. It was really fast, and the adventurers could barely dodge it.

Mong the Chef was not as sure-footed as the others so every time he jumped out of the way he fell on his face. Yee used his bionic grapnel fist to pull himself up to the lookout.

Meanwhile, Captain Ming was fighting Bloodbath with powerful punches in the face while Bloodbath was kneeling the Captain in the nose. Mong the Chef was throwing gallons of "Buddha Jumped over the Wall" soup (that's an actual soup, which the Buddha really enjoyed trying) at the ball of fire, trying to extinguish it.

Bloodbath magically teleported up to the lookout and pushed Yang into the red smoke. Yee had to save Yang so before the red smoke disappeared, Yee thrust his grapnel fist into the devil cloud and was sucked in. Suddenly, Yee found himself falling through an endless red abyss. Two seconds later, he found his body five feet deep in snow. He quickly jumped up from the snow prepared for battle. In the distance, he saw a lot of huge, towering, snowy mountains but did not see Bloodbath or Yang.

Shivering, Yee slowly began walking towards the mountains. Halfway there, he heard a distant howl that scared him. He slowly turned around and saw a pack of snow-white wolves staring at him. He knew that there was only one option – RUN!!

Yee ran for what felt like an eternity. Just when the wolves were about to bite him, he saw an avalanche coming down from the highest mountain. The wolves did not seem to notice it and Yee ran straight towards the avalanche. Just when the snow and ice was about to hit him, he flipped out of the way and the avalanche knocked the wolves unconscious.

At last he accidentally found glowing red footsteps in the snow leading up to the highest mountain around. On the top of the mountain stood a dark red fortress surrounded by a layer of fog. Exhausted and shivering from frostbite, Yee finally reached the top of the mountain which he could now see was made out of blood red ice. Guarding the fortress was an eight-foot tall, red furred Yeti, wielding a giant spiked flail. Yee knew he had to defeat it to get inside the fortress. He ran toward the Yeti and yelled, "For Yang!"

When he realized he had left his weapon at the ship and was unarmed it was too late to retreat. The Yeti kicked Yee to the ground and started swinging the flail around to get more power. Just before the flail hit him, Yee rolled out of the way. While the Yeti tried to pull his mace out of the ground, Yee ran up his arm and kicked the Yeti in the eye knocking him unconscious. Yee ran past the Yeti and saw Yang tied to a pole.

Yee bit through the rope and freed Yang who whimpered, "Bloodbath teleported somewhere else." In a rage, the two adventurers started wrecking Bloodbath's throne when they discovered five tons of treasure hidden underneath.

Suddenly, a portal appeared with their ship on the other side. Smiling, Yee and Yang jumped into the portal with all the treasure planning to give it to the poor.

In a different ship, The Siwang, Bloodbath swore he would have revenge on Yee for stealing all of his gold. He started scheming his master plan.

# Life on an Explorer's Boat

*Singapore International School, Chia, Rachel – 10*

Once the boat sets sail, there's no turning back. Getting sea sick is not an option and neither is bad weather. Admiral Zheng He looked back at the shore with the wind howling loudly at his ear and the thunder rumbling. It was now a thunderstorm and the lightning flashed above him. Rain poured down on him and he looked up at the dark, cloudy sky and sighed. Tonight's sailing was not going to be smooth at all. The waves were bumpy and the crew were checking that all the systems were working. The first mate directed the third mate, the two engineers and the two bosun's mates as they all ran around the ship, fiddling with levers and dials of all kinds.

"Sir! All systems are working!" exclaimed the first mate. Zheng He nodded as he carefully watched the second mate maintaining up to date navigational information.

"We will arrive at Champa in a few days" the second mate announced with delight. The wind seemed to swallow his words but Zheng He could still hear a far-away like voice. Zheng He nodded once again and went into his cabin to rest for tomorrow. Zheng He turned and tossed in his bed, not able to fall asleep. The thunderstorm was still going on but was slightly stronger than before and the ships were tossed about in the waves. And at last, rocking with the waves, Zheng He fell asleep.

The next day, Zheng He woke up to the sound of heavy rain and thunder. Flashes of lightning appeared in the sky and rain heavily poured down the cabin window. The thunderstorm was still going on but it was worse than the day before. Zheng He scrambled out of bed and went out to the deck to see how things were. The cook and cook's assistant were in the kitchen preparing breakfast, and the first mate, bosun and the two bosun Mates, the chief engineer and second engineer were preparing the ship for a coming storm that the first mate had predicted. Zheng He looked around and turned to see a piece of rigging that was supporting the ship's front masts and sails loose. He gasped and ran towards the loose piece of rigging and tried to secure it, but the wind was just way too strong. He needed help. And fast. In no time at all, the ship's mast and sails would fall and the ship would stop moving and go off its course, making it even harder to reach Champa along with the terrible weather. Zheng He immediately ran towards the quarterdeck, hoping to find the crew members there.

"Guys! It's an emergency! The rigging for the front sails and masts are loose! The ship will be out of control and we will go off our course! We might not be able to reach Champa then!" yelled Zheng He as he pounded on the door of the quarterdeck. A few moments later, all the crew members came running out of the room and to the front sails and masts.

"Yes, Captain! We're here!" they saluted. Zheng He ordered the engineers to check that all the equipment were working, told the second mate to constantly check when the storm was going to arrive, and finally, told the bosun and the two bosun mates to follow him. They arrived at the sails and began to work. They tied secured knots on the masts, connected the sails to the masts by tying dead knots onto them, and at last, made sure the riggings were tight.

"Captain! We are on course! We will arrive at Champa hopefully around tomorrow at midnight or so." exclaimed the second Mate excitedly. Zheng He nodded happily and went to check on the engineers.

"Captain! All systems are working down below! We should be fine. Tell everyone that the first mate said we will be approaching a storm in about twenty minutes!" the chief engineer shouted. Zheng He nodded and gulped. The storm was coming soon.

Twenty Minutes past and the ship was going to go through the storm. Lightning flashed and thunder roared. Rain poured heavily down the windows as the wind howled loudly. "Everyone in their cabins except for me and the captain. Zheng He, meet me at the ship's wheel!" commanded the first mate. Zheng He ran to the ship's wheel as the first mate waited impatiently. "Come on! We've got to steer the boat out of the storm!" Zheng He and the first mate grabbed onto the ship's wheel and tried to control the boat. The waves rocked the boat violently and the boat tilted side to side. Suddenly, the first mate accidentally jerked the ship's wheel to the left and the boat tilted to the right. Zheng He and the first mate were flung from one side of the ship's wheel to the other. Zheng He however managed to grab the ship's wheel and pulled the first mate back to the helm. Moments of anxiety passed from then on, they had almost made a big mistake



and could not afford to do it again. The whole boat's safety was in their hands. Half an hour passed and the boat was out of the storm. From violent and rocky sailing, it became smooth sailing once again. At midnight, Zheng He spotted a faint glow coming from an island. Could it be Champa? Zheng He thought. He reached for his binoculars and immediately spotted a port filled with boats of different sizes. They had made it. Alive.

The boat stopped at the dock and Zheng He lowered the gangway. Zheng He smiled as he stepped onto the ground. They had made it to Champa. Now all they had to do was sail back to China after trading with the people.

# The Mad Storm

*Singapore International School, Lin, Xiyao – 11*

Zheng He looked out across the sea where his fleet of ships would soon be sailing to Africa. He swore inwardly, “God, these Eunuch are so slow, taking all the goods. I need to be at sea in three days time!” He cast an anxious glance at the sky. He could see a storm brewing in the not too far distance.

“Admiral Zheng He,” bowed a young Eunuch, “His majesty, the Emperor would like to speak to you.” The Eunuch stepped aside politely and Zheng He walked towards the Emperor, Xuande.

He kneeled down and asked, “Yes, your majesty?” The Emperor rose from his throne, above Zheng He.

“Admiral Zheng He, this is a very important mission. You have to bring the African ambassador, Johannes Mahlangu to China. I have great trust in you, so do not fail me.” he barked loudly.

“Fail me, fail me, fail me...” echoed the stony wall.

Three days later, the whole sea was swamped with ships.

“There is a boy on the ship, Admiral Zheng He!” an Eunuch said loudly, “Hey boy, get out of here! Stop hiding.”

He dragged the boy out, and brought him to Admiral Zheng He. Admiral Zheng He stared at the boy, eyebrows furrowed. The frightened boy looked down at his shoes timidly and scared of what Zheng He was going to do to him.

“Throw him overboard.” Admiral Zheng He spoke quietly. “We have no time for a stowaway.”

“No, no, please spare me.” begged the boy with fear and panic in his limpid eyes.

Suddenly, a wave several storeys high crashed against the starboard of the ship, sending it lurching to one side. Admiral Zheng He stumbled across the cabin. The sky had turned ominously dark with heavy black clouds. It was as if someone from high above had turned on a switch for the downpour. The rain and wind lashed out violently on the unsuspecting naval men.

“Bring the mast down!” yelled the second captain, blinded by the biting cold rain. Several men climbed up, but were flung into the sea by strong winds. The lower decks had been flooded. Everyone rushed to the top deck.

Admiral Zheng He could see a violent tornado was aiming in their directions. The ship was swaying precariously like a seesaw, as the sea threw its cold spray across the threshold. The men staggered across the deck, fighting to keep their balance. The tornado caught up with them, taking the whole ship and men swirling in mid-air.

Other men were shouting and struggling in the waters. The ships were gone, only left with furniture floating on the surface of the waters.

Vium!!!

Everyone were caught in the storm, as if they were flying in mid-air.

“Where are we?” asked one of the Eunuch.

“I don’t know.” Admiral Zheng He said slowly, quietly observing the surroundings. All the men blinked in the bright sunshine taking in their strange surroundings. They were nervous and unfamiliar to the surroundings and were all just frozen there, not knowing what they were going to do.

A mom and a boy walked past them and looked at Zheng He and his men strangely.

“Mom, are the men shooting a movie?” a modern boy tugged the corner of his mom’s shirt curiously.

# The Missing Stone

*Singapore International School, Lui, Jun Yang – 10*

Before the dreams descended upon him, Professor Woods was breezing through his week, who being the busy propounded historian, famous archaeologist and popular university teacher he was, wasn't really saying that much. He had just wrapped up a lecture on the treasure voyages of Zheng He, and was looking forward to a well-earned night's rest. The cloudless night sky was patched with countless stars, glimmering as if luminous lights had just been randomly sprayed. Woods crawled into bed, and lay still under the warm heavy blankets, soon to drift off to sleep, when suddenly, a voice spoke in his mind,

"Take me home". It was barely audible, but it was clear as anything in the silence. "Return me", it rasped.

"Where?" Woods demanded.

"To the place where I belong, where the vile Chinese Hasat removed me from." Then, all fell silent again.

Woods sat bolt upright, his spine tingling with a feeling of dread. He surveyed the area, examining everything with care. The old bookcase stood alone in a corner, he looked to the other corner, and his gaze rested on an antique collection shelf. Squinting, he focused his vision onto the variety of strange looking rocks and stones, illuminated in the dim light of the moon. Wait, illuminated? He stared at the glowing stone that sat on the topmost shelf in awe, wondering if he was dreaming or hallucinating. The rock was a rough stone, jutting out at odd areas, which seemed to be glowing faint gold. He studied it with great precaution, then

"take me home", "to the place where I belong!" Woods was sure now, in three big strides, he had marched over and gingerly retrieved the stone. He turned it over and over, now he remembered, this was a stone that he had recovered from a Chinese shipwreck.

"Is that where your home is?" he wondered aloud, relieved there was no one to see him talking to a stone. No reply. He inhaled deeply and sighed "Well, it's worth a shot".

A few hours later, they were seated in a plane, on a hastily booked flight to Indonesia, where they would switch to boat and travel back to the shipwreck. The suitcase felt heavier than usual in its position on Woods' lap, as if the five layer bubble wrapped stone was sharing his excitement and anxiety.

"Are you sure you want to do this?" questioned one of his colleagues, Prof. Birch, the hundredth time. "Are you certain it wasn't just a dream?"

"No," Woods patted his hastily packed suitcase and replied firmly, "I haven't quite gone senile yet." "Ok," Birch replied half-heartedly, "whatever you say."

"You chose to come. Why would you question it now?" demanded Woods. Birch decided to shut up.

The boat trip wasn't too pleasant, after hours of the ship tossed around like a rag doll on the choppy waves, the sea slamming repeatedly into the hull, and the Captain singing TV theme songs. A dive with a talking stone into an abandoned Chinese shipwreck didn't seem like a bad idea. After changing into diving suits, the two professors dived into the sea. The water swirled and swallowed them whole, as they went under, and glided towards the giant hunk of rotting wood. Suddenly, Woods jerked sideways, the pouch he was keeping the stone in started shaking violently like something trapped in there wanted to get free. Then, it glowed gold, and the stone burst out, burning a hole through the pouch, and speeding towards the opposite of the shipwreck. Woods lunged and felt his hands wrap around the rough surface of the rock, felt the currents sweeping at him, then, the stone erupted out of the sea, dragging Woods with it, hanging on for dear life. The stone rocketed up and down, soaring over the startled crew who yelled and ran, but it just shot higher. It bounced around, several times almost throwing the professor off, rocketed skywards, and then, suddenly went into a nosedive. The wind sliced at Woods' face like knives, as the stone hurtled towards earth as if drawn by a magnet. Woods closed his eyes and braced for impact, which never came. Just before plummeting to the ground and making a mess, the stone jerked sideways, and tossed Woods off onto the grassy fields. He looked up and realized that the stone had tossed him onto a cliff. While observing about him,

"Hello," came a raspy voice.

Professor Woods had been in many interesting situations, but none was as strange as registering that the stone's home was an abandoned island housing an old man.

"Who are you?" Woods managed.

The old man laughed, "I am the chief or I used to be, of a tribe. When a Chinese admiral came and convinced us to support some emperor, we accepted and gifted him our sacred stone as a gift. We were foolish, yes we were, but alas, the stone is magical. It cast a wicked curse upon that poor fellow, who died in a few days from diseases. Most people would not know the true story, and would not believe. The old man gazed at the sun, and exhaled,

"Mistakes, Mistakes" then, turned, and walked into the cave, the stone floating after him.

"So, that's it?" marvelled Woods as he pulled himself up and shook his head. "That's the end? "That's how Zheng He died?" "Because a stone wanted to go home?" Woods patted the dirt off, and dashed after the old man.

The old man had disappeared, but the stone had not. It sat on an altar, resting contentedly. Upon his return, Woods reported what he heard, but no one was willing to believe him. The island however was investigated and explored, resulting in marvellous and unpredictable rewards. But for now, he was safe. He had changed the wordings on his research on Zheng He, to the real reason only he knew. It didn't matter if they chose to believe it, or not.

# Pirate Conflict

*Singapore International School, Takafuku, Yumi – 10*

Ben mopped the floor of the deck silently, thinking how stupid he was to think that a group of seventeen-year-olds will be able to sail a ship, defeat pirates and find treasures all by themselves. It all started with his admiration for Zheng He, a trusted naval officer of an emperor in the Ming Dynasty...

Ben admired him for his courage and resilience, wanting to be just like him, and so did his friends. They knew how to control boats very well, being taught by Ben's father, a skilled sailor, for more than five years. When Ben told them his plans for the "little adventure", they eagerly agreed. They rented a small boat and sailed but they were caught by a pirate crew within an hour, where they were forced to clean up an entire pirate ship.

"Let us go!" Ben could hear his friend, Zach shouting. "We didn't do anything wrong! You captured us when we didn't even harm you! Why should we be your servants?"

But the man only replied in his hoarse voice, "Shut up and get to work! Or you can choose to have your head chopped off! All of you are my servants now and you will never be able to escape! If you try to do so, then the next thing you know is that you'll be walking the plank blindfolded." He grinned.

Ben glanced at him. He had long hair past his shoulders like a girl, an eye patch around his left eye, a moustache, a black hat, a hook on his hand, and a green parrot on his shoulder.

"A pirate," Ben thought and continued to mop the floor.

During their break time, they gathered together, sitting at a corner of the deck.

"We have to escape!" Zach whispered, but Ben and his other friends shook their heads.

Ben replied, "Are you mad? It's a crazy idea! To think we can get out of here – a pirate ship, no way!!"

Zach glared. "I'm not stupid, you idiot," he said. "I'm not going to live like this forever."

Just as Ben was about to reply, the same pirate with an eye patch walked towards them and yelled, "Get into the dungeon now!" and shoved them into a small empty room. "Here is your dinner and breakfast for tomorrow," he added, throwing two loaves of bread and a quarter-filled bottle of water onto the ground.

"Here is your dinner and your breakfast for tomorrow!" The parrot repeated.

"What!?" Zach shouted, "Are you crazy? You're just stupid, how are we supposed to do with so little? You made us your servants when we did not do anything to you at all, and --"

"Shut up," Tom whispered as they noticed the pirate's face beginning to change from a red tomato to eight different dark shades of purple.

The pirate clapped three times in a row, and when two muscular men appeared, he whispered something into both men's ears.

Nodding, they grabbed Zach by the arm and leg, and dragged him outside. Ben and his other friends anxiously ran outside behind the muscular men.

The pirate grabbed a sword and followed behind, grinning.

"This is your end," he cackled, and the parrot repeated what he said.

Ben whispered nervously to his friends, until he saw the pirate holding a sword. He opened his mouth and desperately tried to scream but no voice came out.

Zach tried not to giggle when he saw the pirate swing the heavy sword weakly and he could not even hold the sword properly! He was well-trained in Martial Arts, and he tried to turn his laughter into a fake cough.

Zach dodged effortlessly and moved swiftly as the amazed pirate tried to stab him. When the pirate went left, Zach moved right, and when the pirate went right he dodged left...

This went on for quite a while which shocked the 'spectators' and caused the pirate to feel very exhausted. Zach watched sweat trickle off the pirate's face and laughed. At last, Zach decided to just snatch the sword from the pirate. He felt bored as what he called the "game" was getting too uninteresting. He snatched the sword from the pirate's trembling hands and kicked him, which caused him to fall down. Zach was about to kick him again but he stopped as he heard a

"STOP!!!!!! Argh!!! I surrender!"

"Okay, I'll stop," Zach grinned.

Tom and Ben ran towards the pirate and sat on him to make sure he would not be able to move while Zach pointed the sword at the shocked pirate crew and shouted, "If anyone dares to step forward, I will fight you like him!"

He whispered an address into the sailor's ear, and the pirate ship turned to face the direction of their village. Halfway through, they spotted an old, small brown boat floating in the middle of the sea, and Ben recognised it immediately—it was the boat that they rented! Quickly, he ordered the sailor to sail towards the boat.

The sailor turned the direction of the ship cautiously towards the small boat, and when the ship was next to the boat the boys hopped off the ship into the boat, waved a goodbye at the furious pirate who was still swearing at them, and then continued their journey home.

Later, they returned the boat at where they rented it from, and imagined their parents' faces when they told them about their adventure! They gasped and dropped the cups of tea they were having and the cups shattered into countless ceramic pieces. To Ben and his friends, it was a huge 'accomplishment' and this will definitely not be their first and last adventure!

# The Last Pearl of The Sea

*Singapore International School, Tan, E-Shyan – 10*

Heaven, he thought. This must be heaven. The soft, warm sand and the sun rays wrapped around him like a warm hug. The salty smell and taste of the ocean. The light breeze tickling his skin. The symphony of waves crashing onto shore and the call of seagulls. Heaven.

“Admiral! Admiral!”

Admiral Zheng He’s eyes shot open, the blinding bright light stung his eyes, burned it. Then he felt the throbbing pain in his head, he could feel the hammer chipping at his skull. He winced. After blinking a few times and shaking his head, the pain subsided. He surveyed the area and saw it was not heaven, he and the remaining crew were washed up on the island! Instantly the pain in his head came back. They had encountered a fierce storm on their way to the Kingdom of Thailand. All the treasure that they were supposed to give to the King is lost! How could he have failed Emperor YongLe so easily! Guilt poured into his heart like a flood. He looked up and saw his trusted first mate, Li Wei, stumbling towards him.

“B—bring me to the wreckage.” Admiral Zheng ordered, trying to sound confident.

Admiral Zheng ordered the surviving crew to salvage what they could from the damaged ship and build a raft for them to head back to China. Admiral Zheng told Li Wei to take charge and he went to explore the island. As he walked deeper into the jungle he could not believe the beauty found within it. Flocks and flocks of rainbow coloured birds fluttered from tree to tree. The birds were so fast it just looks like a blur of colour. The lush vegetation bore large juicy fruits of different shapes and colours that he has never seen before. The trees were so tall and the branches and leaves on the treetops spread out so much that from below it was a roof of green. And you can hear the endless song and hum of the animals.

As Admiral Zheng was blown away by its beauty, he noticed smoke coming out from a cave on the side of a rocky cliff. This island should be uninhabited.... Out of curiosity he started climbing up the treacherous cliff, relying on small holes and ledges to put his foot on or hold on to. After much effort, he finally reached the cave. He was surprised to see an old man sitting by a fire at the entrance. His clothes were tattered and filthy. The man noticed Zheng looking at him and he smiled.

“I am General Wang. I was sent here 12 years ago to retrieve the Infinite Pearl of the Sea”, the man pointed into the cave, “it’s right inside, but it is guarded by fearsome monsters. They have killed all my men...but I am not giving up. I have been guarding this cave ever since, waiting for my chance.”

“Wait”, Zheng interrupted, “You are the famous General Wang that went missing years ago? I will help you retrieve it. Let’s finish this mission!”

Wang guided him into the cave, the deeper they went, the scarier it became and they could feel it radiating evil. Finally, they came to a large area, the core of the mountain. The place was filled with mermaids. Now these are not those kind of mermaids in fairy tales. They had no pupils and had claws three inches long. Their mouths were filled with razor sharp teeth, and they had scratch marks all over their body, some were bleeding. Worst of all, their tails were decorated with bones; human bones. The two looked up and saw that the entire place was decorated with human skulls. At the centre of the core was a glowing object. The ancient treasure, Zheng thought.

The minute the mermaids saw them, they lunged, screeching, demanding blood.

“Quick!” Wang yelled, “Get to the treasure!”

Together, the duo ducked and sprinted towards the treasure. Several mermaids lunged at Zheng but he managed to defend himself with his sword. All the screeching and slashing attracted more and more mermaids to fight him. He backed away and slashed his sword wildly in desperation, as the mermaids howled in delight at the thought of human flesh and blood. Soon the mermaids cornered them. They kept coming closer and closer until he could feel their horrid breath on his skin...

Suddenly, Li Wei jumped in wildly swinging his sword. The mermaids were taken by surprise and howled even louder.

“How did you know where to find me?” Zheng cried with relief.

“You were gone too long so I came to find you, I figured you were here when I saw the smoke coming from the entrance.” Li Wei replied with a smirk. “The raft is ready to sail!”

Together, they fought as one, shielding and slashing, drawing blood. While the mermaids were distracted with Zheng and Li Wei, Wang sprinted to the pearl and snatched it from its place. Immediately, a powerful force of white light burst out, throwing everyone back. When they recovered, to their horror, they noticed that the cave was collapsing and huge rocks and boulders were crashing down all around them!

“Come on! We need to get out of here!” Zheng yelled.

The trio sprinted to the exit, dodging falling rocks and blinded by the dust. Finally, they threw themselves out of the cave just as a gigantic boulder crashed down and sealed the exit. They cried with joy. They could still hear many hungry mermaids screeching from the other side. They hurried off to the beach and got onto their newly built raft with the crew. As they sailed into the horizon, Zheng held out the Infinite Pearl to the sun. He thought of the story of the old man Sai losing his horse.

“This is turning out to be a great day after all!”



# The Adventures of Admiral Zheng He

*Singapore International School, Wang, Jiamu – 10*

“Now you go and find Zheng, I have an assignment for him,” the Ming Emperor, Zhu Di, demanded of his administrator.

“Yes, my Lord.” the administrator replied while bowing and retreating.

“Now that we have overcome our enemies and gained control of the land surrounding us, we need to extend our sphere of influence and venture to foreign lands so that they too can know that China is a powerful but friendly nation. They will then show respect to us and pay tribute. I want you to go to the four corners of the earth and take with you animals, plants, silk, dye, tea, and other items that we can trade with them.” the Emperor ordered Zheng He.

“Yes, your highness! That task is well within our compass.”

“As you have obediently prepared the entire fleet, I want you to leave at sunrise on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day from now!”

Two days later, Zheng He set off from the Nanking harbour. Over 1000 vessels and over a hundred thousand men set sail – a sea of red sails and an array of different-sized vessels proceeded through to the open seas and sailed south. “What a site it was!” Zheng He thought excitedly.

But not everything went as planned. The responsibility was daunting and the work demanding as the commander in charge of such an expedition.

“Rise and shine, sailors!” yelled the first shipmate onboard Zheng He’s first flagship. There were four flagships. It was the second day at sea and it was a new day. The sailors went about their duties efficiently. Soon the vessels had been at sea for a week.

The weather had been calm for most of the journey during the first week until that horrendous day. Jia Jing, Zheng He’s best friend, was onboard as one of the officers in charge of the ship. He was captain. It was about 0300 hours in the morning that day when the some of the watchmen had practically nodded off, when one of them pulled himself together and muttered,

“What is wrong with me?” Zheng He had been awake and was pacing anxiously back and forth up and down his quarters before looking worriedly out of his window. He observed that the sky looked blood red. He then heard a loud Bang! It was from one of the sailors.

“Admiral, you might want to see this...” The watchmen’s voice trailed off as he quailed under Zheng He’s furious but disturbed look. The sailor directed the Admiral to a large funnel-like cloud that was approaching.

“Tornado! Go and wake everyone up!” Zheng He contemplated.

Within a few minutes, everyone was yawning and grumbling on deck, facing Admiral Zheng He. Their faces were concerned.

“Men! Quickly! Fold the sails, and secure all loose items before retreating to their quarters!” Zheng He commanded. He then thought of his friend Captain Jia Jing.

“Jia Jing is still in his quarters sleeping!” Zheng He bolted along the deck hoping to find his friend in his cabin. He saw him sleeping soundly. The tornado began to turn the huge 100 metre long flagship around as the sea began to swirl. Eventually Jia Jing woke up. He glared at Zheng He furiously.

“Admiral! Captain! Get underdeck!” a sailor shouted.

“Now Go!” Zheng He yelled at Jia Jing as he dived underdeck.

After a while, Zheng He did not see even the shadow of his friend, so he poked his head up casually onto the deck. There, he saw his best friend holding onto the mast. Whoosh! The ship had been teetering in and out of the tornado’s absorption circle for too long.

Too long.

The tornado came upon the ship like a roaring lion, ripping and tearing everything in its path. The center mast which Jia Jing was holding onto collapsed and Jia Jing was forced to let go. “I must save him!” Zheng He thought. But as he was going to climb onto the deck, the wind blew him beneath! All he could do was watch his best friend get sucked away, and drawn out to sea.

The tornado wreaked havoc on the deck and headed underdeck for more. The ship was ripped cleanly into halves like a giant had torn it in two, not the wind. Zheng He yelped trying to escape, scampering wildly but was not successful. The ship fell apart. Everywhere, you could either see sailors struggling to keep afloat or sailors clinging onto pieces of driftwood to save their lives. Zheng He himself was flung into the sea.

After two weeks of arduous survival, drinking nothing but seaweed and sleeping on a piece of wood shorter than two meters, he arrived at a seashore. He leapt joyfully onto the shore. He found a small village not far from where he was, and got many strange looks and whispers from behind.

“Excuse me, will you be so kind to tell me where I am?” He asked.

“Welcome to our humble village – Shell Village,” a woman replied politely. “I believe you are one of the survivors of that Great Shipwreck!”

“Yeah, I am one survivor,” Zheng He muttered. After that, he found out he had landed right back where he started!

“My Lord! Zheng He has survived the Great Shipwreck!” A servant notified the Emperor. The Emperor demanded the servant to bring Zheng to him.

“Well, Zheng! You failed this mission.” The Emperor glared at him, “But you have shown bravery beyond that of my own.” The Emperor paced with his chin up high. “But, much merchandise has gone to waste and been damaged at tremendous cost and sacrifice, so we will become unpopular among our subjects. This unfortunately cannot be undone. You’d better set off again immediately after you are nursed back to health.”

“Yes, my lord!”

*(Zheng He was a great voyager who sailed with three other Chinese admirals to the four quarters of the earth c. AD 1421, appx. 70 years before Columbus.)*

# The Unexpected Experience

*Singapore International School, Wong, Derrick – 10*

“Splash!” Glancing down into the water, Zheng He sighed to himself. This was the last part of this voyage, but for the whole time he had been the Admiral on the ship, nothing exhilarating happened throughout the journeys he had been requested to command. “Bring me a cup of tea please, Shao,” Zheng He said quietly with a wave of his hand. Shao was Zheng He’s loyal servant, who always followed Zheng He and respected him a lot.

“Don’t you think these voyages are a little too boring?” Zheng He asked Shao.

“Yes sir, I agree. They are unbearably boring. I wouldn’t even mind if there was a tremendous storm in the seas, as long as the experience is exciting.”

“Mmmhmm...” Zheng He nodded and gazed towards the horizon, watching the sunset, and Shao did so too, making himself comfy on a bamboo stool beside his master.

After a while, Shao placed a cup of tea on a desk beside Zheng He’s bed, then skipped down the steps of the Admiral’s compartment back to his own tiny compartment on the side of the ship, where he spotted a note on his bed. He started reading it. The note said:

Dear Shao,

Thank you for the lovely tea you have given me today.

Please meet at my compartment tomorrow at sunrise. Thank you!

Zheng He

However, little did they know, that something disastrous and terrifying would happen tomorrow afternoon...

The first rays of sunlight shone dimly through the windows and it was drizzling. Shao stretched his arms, and trudged to the Admiral’s house after drinking a warm and delicious cup of tea.

“Sir, I am here.”

“Great. We can finally start.” Zheng He exclaimed, and rubbed his hands.

“Wait...” Shao squinted, looking out onto the horizon. “Sir, I see a peculiar black dot far away.” Zheng He instantly whipped out his pocket telescope and peered eagerly into the lens. However, the excitement written on his face quickly melted into dread as his face darkened, his eyes wide open at what he saw. “The Pirates of the East— They are one of the most feared pirates in the world, and they have no mercy for anyone. Hit the Great Gong at once.” Zheng He ordered, his heart beating so hard his ribcage almost cracked.

“Yes sir,” Shao replied as he bolted as fast as he could to the Great Gong and smashed it using all his might. “BONG!” The sound rang through the ship and the whole crew scrambled out to find out the reason behind sounding the Great Gong. “Pirates, the Pirates of the East,” Shao breathed rapidly, a shiver crawling up his spine.

Zheng He commanded, “Everyone must prepare. Soldiers, prepare to battle. My dear oarsmen, row as hard as you can. Shao, come with me. ”

A tense atmosphere filled the ship as everyone rushed to do their duties, hoping that their lives would be safe.

“I spy a giant ship! Wonderful to attack!” Captain Horman shouted with glee. “Let’s go full speed!”

Captain Horman demanded, “Fighters, get ready! We have a ship to hijack!”

“This is going wonderfully,” Assistant Nosmos cackled.

“Yes,” Captain Horman saw eye to eye with his assistant.

“I have an ingenious idea. Other people can fight while we go into a petite boat, sail to their boat and start climbing up to attack them by throwing a rope up onto their ship, and then we will steal some of their food and money,” Assistant Nosmos began imagining the scene.

“That’s a marvellous plan! Then I will ask them to carry this plan out.” Captain Horman grinned from ear to ear and so did his assistant.

“The ship is ahead of us right now!” Assistant Nosmos screamed.

“Let’s put Plan A in action!” Captain Horman bellowed.

The fighters on the pirate ship fought and started shooting when some soldiers from the Chinese Treasure ship began catapulting rocks. Meanwhile, Captain Norman and his assistant had got into the boat and had sailed to the ship where Admiral Zheng stayed. “Lasso the rope!”

Unfortunately, when Captain Norman and his assistant nearly reached the top, a shark appeared and began biting on the rope to drag them down. “Help!”

Admiral Zheng heard the cries and he and Shao hurried to the source of the sound. Admiral Zheng and Shao used all their might to pull them up, and Captain Norman and his assistant both felt ashamed and guilty that they plotted to attack these kind and helpful people, and decided that they no longer wanted to battle them.

“Thank you so much! You saved our lives! I’m incredibly sorry for attacking your beautiful ship. I will command my crew to stop.”

Admiral Zheng smiled politely, and told his crew to lower their catapults.

“Crew! Stop attacking! They will not harm us. They saved our lives!” Captain Norman ordered.

Even though Captain Norman’s crew wasn’t sure why they had to lower their guns, the pirate crew still lowered their guns slowly.

“I need to leave now. Just keep this white stone so you would remember us. Thank you for helping us. We are extremely sorry. Bye!” Captain Norman and Assistant Nosmos waved goodbye and climbed back down to their ship. They sailed away to their pirate ship in their tiny boat, red in the faces, feeling deeply guilty.

After returning to China, people cheered and clapped to congratulate them on finishing their journey. Admiral Zheng arranged a big feast, for two reasons: not just celebrating the knowledge they brought back with them, but also their wonderful experience that would be unforgettable.

# The Zheng–Chen Sea Battle

*Singapore International School, Wong, Shang Le – 10*

On 7 October 1407, the great admiral Zheng He was anxiously pacing around his ship. He was due to return to China by year end. Zheng had yet to destroy the pirate Chen Zuyi as ordered by Emperor Yongle before his return to China. The pirate was endangering trade, killing Chinese nationals and causing chaos in the high seas.

Suddenly, one of his crew shouted, “There is a large fleet of ships coming toward us. They may be a pirate fleet. There are about 17 ships.” Then they heard loud shouts came from those ships. His lookout yelled, “I think they are trying to tell us something.” An arrow thudded onto the mast of his ship with a message attached to the arrow, which said “This is a robbery. Send three men with all your valuables to the main ship or die. You have until tomorrow afternoon.”

Zheng sent his right-hand man to gather his crew from his fleet for a meeting. During the meeting, Zheng strategized in destroying the pirates. They concluded to send three men to the pirate ship with fake diamonds and jewels to trick the pirate into lowering the guard and letting them go. This would give Zheng’s navy the opportunity to attack them with the full force of the mighty Chinese armada. The pirates would be crushed, and either be taken as prisoners or killed.

When Zheng’s men presented the treasures to the pirates, the pirate chief became suspicious that the jewels were not as sparkling as other gems they had looted before, so he locked up Zheng’s men.

Upon learning his men were locked up by the pirate, Zheng kept calm and decided to stick with his original plan. However, Zheng did more research and found that the pirate chief was none other than the legendary Chen Zuyi. He was overjoyed with his good fortune in finding Chen. Zheng learnt that Chen had terrorised the seas of Southeast Asia and ruled several cities including the Indonesian city of Palembang. At Palembang alone, he had 10 ships and 5,000 men. Chen was also one of the most feared pirates to terrorise the Strait of Malacca and had amassed a following of over 20,000 pirates and 30 ships. Zheng muttered “No wonder Emperor wants him dead.”

Zheng knew that Chen was not an enemy to be taken lightly and unnecessary bloodshed could be prevented by having the pirates surrender to his fleet. Therefore, Zheng sent a messenger to ask Chen to surrender peacefully. Chen read the message and thought: I could attack Zheng’s fleet from behind if I pretended to surrender. Then I could destroy his fleet and plunder Emperor Yongle’s treasures.

Later that day, a Chinese official from Java rushed onto Zheng’s flagship, panting and yelling, stuttered “Chen ... trick ...” Zheng said to the official “Calm yourself down first. Have some buns and tea.” When the official felt good enough to speak, he said “Pirate Chen will launch a surprise attack on you tomorrow. He will attack you with 17 ships and 8,000 men.”

The official had been overseeing a fishing boat when he saw the pirates and overheard what they were saying. He was able to pass undetected because his boat was small. Zheng replied “Thank you for your information. I will make your contribution known to Emperor Yongle. If I had not known this, our navy would be crushed even with our superior firepower.”

Zheng thought: “How interesting, Chen and I are deceiving each other with our false surrender. If the official did not come, we would both been surprised.” Although both fleets were similar in size and strength, Zheng believed he had the upper hand because he knew about Chen’s plan.

Zheng summoned his officers and told them about Chen’s plan. All his officers were outraged at the thought that Chen would attempt to trick the intelligent Ming naval officers.

On the fateful day of the pirate’s pretended surrender, everyone on both sides were nervous. The Ming soldiers were stricken with fear by having such an infamous pirate as their adversary. The pirates were fearful that Emperor Yongle had sent such a powerful naval fleet to destroy them.

Zheng attacked first with his archers which showered flaming arrows and burnt six ships. The pirates retaliated by firing 50 cannons and sunk five warships. Zheng’s eyes were ablaze with fury as he recalled how pirates would torture their defeated enemies and let them die. He ordered another round of flaming arrows and burnt another four ships.

At that time, the pirates were overwhelmed with fear, as the mighty Ming navy had yet to unleash their full destructive power without firing any cannon. Chaos reigned on the pirate ships. Zheng ordered the soldiers to raid the pirate’s flagship and to capture Chen.

It was a long and bloody battle, resulting in heavy casualties on both sides. Although the pirates fought zealously, they were no match to the powerful Ming navy and fell to Zheng's scheme. Over 7,000 pirates were killed, 10 pirate ships were burnt, and seven pirate ships were captured. Chen and his lieutenants were taken to Nanking to be tried and executed. When Zheng returned, he was greeted by crowds of celebrating citizens who had heard of Chen Zuyi's defeat by Zheng He. Emperor Yongle was also impressed by Zheng and continued to fund his future voyages

# Pirates' Tyranny

*Singapore International School, Wu, Audrey – 10*

What a stormy night it was: lightning flashed, rain attacked, wind roared and whipped the hulls of the Ming treasure fleet, howling with vexation when they refused to give in. Standing tall and proud on the flagship, Zheng He, the captain of this fleet, was ecstatic for they had received many priceless gifts and alliances from the countries they visited. He marched towards his advisors, expecting them to share the joy of surviving the storm, but instead, they were muttering feverishly towards each other in hushed tones.

"What's the matter?" Zheng He boomed with ardor. "Aren't you joyful for the news we'll give our Emperor?"

An advisor stepped forward hesitantly: "Er... Captain, we've detected some...pirates."

"Pirates?" He repeated skeptically, facing the advisor with an arched eyebrow. After an earlier encounter with them, he knew that pirates always preferred brawl over brain. "Well, avoid it, then. No need to worry."

Another advisor shook his head. "I'm sorry, sir, but it's not a fleet of one, but over a hundred ships, and they're heading our way! They even switched route – they obviously want a fight."

Zheng He nodded slowly. "Alright. Alert all ships to prepare for battle, stop our ships in a semi-circle, and to gather ten soldiers per ship to man the cannons of 100 ships," Zheng He commanded briskly. The advisors promptly saluted in unison and, looking gratified to be doing something useful instead of dawdling fretfully around, marched away.

He sighed and turned back towards his quarters. It had been a long time since he'd fought, but he trusted that his skills were not rusty; after all, pirates' solution to everything was to fight. He grabbed his golden breastplate, and opened the cupboards to the rest of his armor. As he donned his ivory-silver helmet and gingerly lifted his sheathed blade, there came a furious series of knocks on the door, and barely a moment later, a squadron of black-armored soldiers rushed in and knelt down. The leading fighter stepped forward. "Admiral, we are approaching the enemy fleet. All soldiers have been notified, but we are useless without a plan from our leader," he began, his solemn voice slightly muffled by his helmet. "Tell us what you want us to do."

Zheng He allowed himself a grim smile. He'd pondered over all the possible battle plans against the pirates, and after debating them with every criteria, he'd created a final strategy. "Find every soldier. Separate five hundred soldiers per wave. I want every wave to go when they see my signal. The first two waves will go together. Men who aren't fighting try to stay at the front, and don't do anything rash." The soldiers nodded and hurried away. Zheng He didn't want to spill any blood; he would try to reason with them, he decided.

Zheng He burst onto the top deck. Stretching all the way to the horizon, he stared at the pirates, dumbfounded: countless faint outlines, standing fearlessly on pirate ships, a hand wielding a glinting weapon barely visible. Zheng He shivered. Convincing the leader of this powerful fleet to stop would not be easy.

He stepped onto the bow of his ship and took a deep breath: "Pirates!" He called at the top of his lungs. "We do not seek to harm you; we prefer peace over war. Please, let there be no bloodshed."

The pirates collectively turned to look at a man at the front of the army. Although Zheng He was far away, he could feel that this particular pirate radiated an intense energy, like that he ought to be in charge. Zheng He could see how the other pirates had "fallen under his spell". This man was obviously the captain.

The leader stared back at Zheng He and started yelling in a foreign language. Although he could not understand the pirate, he heard fury from his tone. These pirates were obviously hungry for a fight.

But then Zheng He turned back to his own army: thousands of loyal soldiers, swords at the hand, waiting for his command. Warmth gushed through Zheng He. He ripped the scabbard off his blade and yelled, "Attack!" and pointed his gleaming sword towards the pirates. Despite the fierce cannon fire from the Ming treasure fleet, the swifter pirate ships got into position and closed in quickly.

All around Zheng He, he could hear the sharp sound of metal clashing. He parried a sword and stunned his attacker with a jab on the ribs. After twisting and stabbing for a few minutes, he suddenly remembered his battle plan and signaled to the soldiers in reserve, who immediately rushed into the fray.

The battle raged on. Now all of the Ming treasure fleet were battling for their lives. As Zheng He slashed at two pirates, he suddenly stumbled onto something. He instinctively looked down, and instantly wished that he hadn't: a soldier was limp on the deck, sprawled in an awkward way. Dark blood was pooled around his neck, mouth and injured hands, and more crimson liquid was slowly pooling out of a deep, huge gash on his chest. His dented helmet was lying a few feet away, exposing his ivory eyes. His tongue was lolling out like a pink, fat worm, with milky-white spit bubbling around his lips. Zheng He's stomach flipped.

Zheng He's hands were suddenly clammy with sweat and his tongue seemed to have disappeared. More soldiers would perish, like this unfortunate soul, if he didn't do something quickly. Zheng He tried to raise his voice. "My soldiers!" The sound of his weak voice barely escaped his lips. Drawing in a breath, Zheng He tried again. "My soldiers! We must drive these pirates back before they do anymore damage to our fleet!" The soldiers raised their swords with renewed spirit and rushed towards the pirates. As the tide of battle turned, and more pirates fled, Zheng He smiled proudly. His crew really was the best he could ask for.



# Bottled Up

*Singapore International School, Yao, Elisha – 10*

I was thrilled to be chosen as a member of the crew on the second Ming Treasure Voyage. When we set sail, I felt an adrenaline rush as I set off for a new adventure. Having turned eighteen a few months earlier, in 1407, I was one of the youngest crew members and my naïveté showed. The ships were so colossal that they engulfed a large section of the sea. Ninety of us were on board each one, and there were thirty boats altogether. My ship was one of the longest, at nearly 100 metres long. However, after a while, the novelty began to wear off. The sweltering heat, bumpy sea, a lack of food, and being surrounded by frustrated, aggressive, perspiring men twice my size began to make me wish I'd never set sail.

But one day, around a year ago, as we approached the beautiful island of Java, Indonesia, the most dramatic day of my life occurred. We were preparing for war. We had an infamous history with the King and residents of Java. Some of them would love nothing more than to murder us all. However, we had a mission in mind. To improve relations, allowing for peaceful trade between our two regions. My best friend on board the ship, Lee Boy, came running into my cabin.

“Sam! Quick! The captain has sent us to get food reserves for the crew. We need to get our energy before the final approach to Java.”

I was hesitant to go. I knew that they always sent the weakest members of the crew on these errands, because it's so dangerous that we might die. Lee Boy, however, seemed to have no fear whatsoever. He threw me onto a wooden boat previously attached to the side of our ship and jumped on after me.

“We're heading to that coast!” he shouted buoyantly as the wind swirled gently above our sail. Ahead, I saw the long, sandy bay of a beautiful beach. The sky was blue and the sun shone above. I might not have been looking forward to the errand, but I was sure looking forward to eating some real food!

As we approached the bay, the weather changed faster than I'd ever seen before. Blue skies turned gloomy in a matter of seconds and the gentle winds became so strong that pieces of wood began to crack like the branches of trees in a tornado. A wave sent us flying three metres into the air and came crashing back down, the ominous taste of salt water filling our mouths and noses. A storm was upon us! We landed with a huge thud back into the ice cold sea.

The last thing I remember from that storm is a sudden bolt of lightning striking the boat and filling the air with the acrid smell of burning wood. When we woke up, it was dark and calm. I could hear the gentle waves lapping against the surface of our vessel like the quiet tick-tock of a grandfather clock. We must have been unconscious for a while. I tapped Lee Boy on the shoulder.

“Wake up, Lee Boy!” I said, urgently.

There was no sound.

I shook his body to awaken him but it was limp and cold. All the blood rushed from my head and I felt dizzy as I staggered back. I felt for a pulse, and there was none. He was gone. I was alone.

As I looked down at the swirling seawater, I realised the gentle calm of the night was deceiving me. I was not safe. Below me I saw the dark fins of several sharks weaving between the waves. Not only that, but I hadn't realised I was up to my ankles in saltwater. The boat had been badly damaged and I surely only had ten minutes before the whole thing collapsed and I became a snack for a shark.

Just as I began to give up hope, I heard a deep rumbling sound. Vibrations seemed to make the whole ocean quiver. I looked down and was confronted with a truly horrific sight. I was looking at the contorted face of a creature so huge, I wondered if I was hallucinating. The width of its head was at least

two metres with eyes bigger than my stomach. Its mouth opened wide and I saw what seemed like hundreds of teeth, as sharp as blades and each as long as my arms. I tried to run, but my feet were blocks of ice. With a deafening murmur, its entire head lurched forward and its jaws closed around me. I saw giant tonsils, felt slimy flesh and that was when I knew my life was over.

I squeezed my eyelids tight and prepared myself for the deathly journey into a cauldron of acid.

I waited.

But I didn't move.

Then the entire creature moved forwards in the water, gracefully. I could see only darkness but could feel steady movement. Why wasn't this monster swallowing me whole? What was happening?

What seemed hours later, the jaws opened again and the tongue on which I sat lowered me gently and softly onto a patch of sand. I turned to say goodbye, but she had gone already. My saviour. Not a beast at all but a gentle giant of the night.

On that island I remain today. I have been here for 365 sunrises and sunsets. I live alone, with no other human life, but I thank the gentle giant every day for allowing me the chance to live at all. The island is lush and fertile. It has life, which is all I need, having trodden a path so close to death. Every day I look out of the window and the clouds wave at me, the gentle breeze calls my name and the trees rustle to the beat of my heart.

If you find this note, please come and find me.

# The Attack of Fireclaw

*Singapore International School (Hong Kong), Chan, Ying Yong Grace – 11*

“What’s that?” someone asked, pointing towards the clear blue sky.

Was it a bird? A huge insect? Some random new invention by man? As it flew closer and closer I could slowly make out its shape. Gasping, I realised what it was. It was the legendary dragon of China named Fireclaw! It was invincible and could take out anything in its way. We would be dead for sure.

I ran inside, breathing heavily. Being the “mighty Admiral Zheng He”, I was always responsible for everything that happened. But in this situation, I had a dragon to defeat, with only a small army on a ship to help me.

A few seconds later, I could hear frenzied shouts and footsteps of people scurrying along the deck, running everywhere. Not long after, a few of the officers found me and ran to my side.

“Admiral, what are you doing here? We need to face that horrible beast!” worried Officer Tian.

“It is no use. We will never be able to face Fireclaw! Even if I tried to stop it, it could still kill us, and it would all be my fault! Emperor YongLe should have never put me on this mission. We have not even started our voyage to any of the other cities or countries, and our voyage is already coming to an end.” I replied sadly.

The officers shook their heads and explained, “Although there is a high chance that we may not succeed in defeating the dragon, you have to have faith in your army, and have confidence in yourself, and the determination, courage and perseverance in defeating Fireclaw. After all, if you do not try, we would lose for sure. If we give it a shot, we at least have a chance of winning.”

I considered the officers’ wise words. Even if we could not make it, we still had to try and not give up.

All of a sudden, a wave of heat swept over us, and we instantly knew what it was: Fireclaw’s fire.

“Quick, Admiral! You have to make your decision now! Fireclaw is attacking!” cried Officer Chen. We had no time to waste.

“Let’s go!” I shouted determinedly.

We ran up to the deck, and there Fireclaw was. It had long, pointy horns; blazing hot red eyes the colour of fire; sharp fangs that could cut through almost everything; majestic, large wings; and bright yellow scales glistening in the sun.

Taking a deep breath, I said hurriedly, “Everyone, listen up! I want the soldiers to get their weapons immediately and start attacking the dragon. Sailors, maybe your team could make sure that the ship remains in working order and try to steer the ship towards Indonesia. If we go far enough, Fireclaw may return to China and leave us alone. Officers, umm... maybe...” My voice trailed off as it was overcome by panic, fear and nervousness.

The officers shot me an encouraging look. I smiled back, regaining my confidence.

“Officers, go and hide our precious Chinese treasures from Fireclaw, and defend the treasures from it, because its main mission was to steal our treasures in the first place. We must not let Emperor YongLe down. Remember, we are all on one ship, so if you have materials or knowledge that may be useful, please help others. Most importantly, stay calm and do not panic. Start now!” I shouted.

“Come on! Let’s go!” one of the soldiers yelled. They all grabbed their weapons and began fighting. Gunshots were heard and Fireclaw roared, not backing down. There was chaos everywhere. Bang! Slash! Swords cut through Fireclaw and fresh red blood squirted everywhere, but Fireclaw did not seem the least bit concerned. Guns rapidly shot out deadly, explosive bullets strong enough to kill a whole army of humans. Fireclaw got really furious and began to lose its temper. Fiery bolts shot out from its mouth, scalding the people who were near, burning down half of the ship and spreading the fire on the water all around the ship. After all, it was one of the legendary, most powerful dragons in the whole world.

Fireclaw came closer and closer to the treasures.

“No!” someone screamed.

My heart was pounding in my chest and I broke out in sweat. What were we going to do now? Fireclaw is going to kill us! I paced around the deck nervously, trying to remember what my grandmother used to tell me about the dragons of China. I just needed to concentrate. I took a deep breath and closed my eyes.

She used to say, “There used to be many, many dragons in China, but thanks to the brave leaders and soldiers, most of them were killed or captured. One of the dragons still alive is the Fireclaw. It is red in colour, can breathe fire, invincible towards gunshots and swords, but most importantly.....”

ROAR! My thoughts were interrupted by Fireclaw, ready for another attack. I needed to focus! I cleared my mind, blocking out everything in sight and all of the noise.

My grandmother continued, “.....most importantly, it is powered by fear.” That was it! Fireclaw came to our ship because it sensed my nervousness and gained power from it. I had a plan. I ran up to the deck, addressing all the remaining soldiers, sailors and officers.

“Everyone, Fireclaw is actually powered by fear. Step forward and do not be afraid. Just be brave and have confidence in yourself and others around you.” I commanded.

Slowly and steadily, everyone stepped forward and formed a circle, not at all bothered by Fireclaw’s menacing glares or bolts of fire. I joined them, glaring right back at Fireclaw.

“Fireclaw! We are not scared of you anymore, so stay back and back down! Do you hear me? We are not afraid of you!” I screamed, punching a fist in the air.

One by one, all the soldiers, sailors and officers started to join in.

“Yeah, Admiral is right! Back down, Fireclaw! Get out!” everyone yelled, smiles creeping up on their faces. This was truly the power of teamwork.

Fireclaw’s jaw dropped down. It was shocked. How dare these people treat Fireclaw, the mighty dragon, this way! It had to make one last attempt. Fireclaw flapped its wings and flew into the sky. It took one huge breath and blew as hard as it could, but only air came out of its mouth. It was defeated at last. Shooting us one last furious look, it disappointedly flew away, most likely back to China.

Everyone cheered loudly, clapping and hugging each other. I smiled. We were safe. This was just the beginning of a whole new journey, and there was more to come. Now, I am ready for anything that comes my way. Let’s d

# Belly of the Beast

*Singapore International School (Hong Kong), Chen, Kee Fay June – 11*

A stocky, grizzled sailor, perched on the tip of a rocky samba, strained his eyes surveying the horizon ahead. Hong was a veteran of Admiral Zheng's Nanyang fleet. His hair was greying and receding rapidly and his eyes lacked that killing flair he had when he was young. In his mind, he tried to picture the fearsome creature that he would encounter soon. According to the local village elders, in the forbidden island of crashing waves, there dwelled a giant mystic beast that blew fiery fires. It guarded a hoard of treasures beyond men's wildest dream. *Emperor would surely be delighted if I acquired it*, Hong thought.

His thought was disrupted by a violent jolt as the samba came to a rest near an alcove jutting out of the island.

Grabbing a bow, Hong jumped off his trashed ship, sprinted past the pink sand beach, arriving at a jungle bristling with noises he had never heard. The sounds of exotic insects chirping, a breed of dwarf deer chorusing and oversized oxen grunting overlapped to form a beautiful melody, each perfectly complementing the other. Then a jagged note disrupted the music, followed by another and another. Verses were left hanging in mid-air and the entire tune raised to a higher octave. Birds took off, the deer and oxen darted for cover. A snaking figure emerged from a cavern to let out a low growl, a sign of dominance before retreating back into its cave.

That must be the beast, Hong thought, loading his bow. Lowering his stance, Hong crept towards the opening of the cavern.

Though Hong was known for his bravery and recklessness, he couldn't help feel panicked staring down the dimly-lit passageway. Taking deep breaths, Hong tried to assure himself that going in was the right choice. He was nearly bankrupt and desperately in need of money. Just as he was about to enter, he heard a faint murmuring in the jungle behind him and the sound of leaves crunching underneath boots, but he didn't spare it a second thought and plunged himself into darkness.

The beast's lair seemed endless, filled with forks and dead ends. Just as Hong was doubting whether he took the right turn at the last crossroad, a serpentine hiss filled the tunnel, bouncing off the rough, course walls and amplifying to an excruciating volume. Panic started to set in. The thought of looting the beast's lair immediately wiped off of Hong's mind as all he cared for was to get out of this nightmare, yet no matter where he ran, the hiss seemed to follow.

Suddenly a low, human voice resonated through the cave, "Shoot her!"

Hong wasn't alone.

Turning another two rights and sprinting down a narrow passageway, the hisses only intensified. A moist, slippery tongue brushed Hong's ankle, leaving a burning sensation. Hong turned and in the dim light managed to make out his attacker.

The monster was like a lizard on steroids fitted with a monstrous head. Two amber eyes the size of dinner plates stared unblinkingly at Hong, sizing down its opponent. A forked tongue slid out of its nightmarish mouth, crazily licking its lips. Two pairs of legs jutted out from the sides of the creature's snaking body, each bulky and muscular. A beefy tail curled up by its legs, twisting and weaving as if it had a mind of its own before curving back to land squarely on Hong's chest.

The wind was knocked out of him. Stumbling back, Hong slammed into the rock walls, sliding to the ground. Stars appeared momentarily in front of his glazed eyes, circling him like a halo. Returning to his senses, Hong fingered the trigger on his bow, squeezing off six shots in quick succession, yet none could pierce the creature's thick hide, bouncing off and embedding into the ceiling. Infuriated, the monster lowered onto all fours, ramming its crocodilian head into Hong's chest. Dizzied and a nabbing pain in his torso, Hong threw down his weapon, sprinting towards a blinding light at the end of the passage. Not giving up, the beast charged towards Hong, jaws gaping revealing a set of serrated, yellowing teeth, growling in discontent. Never had prey caused it so much trouble, evaded it for so long. Then suddenly, the growls stopped. A giant blaze of red appeared behind Hong. The smoke and heat was almost unbearable. The distance between Hong and the exit never seemed to decrease for when Hong finally emerged into the buzzing jungle, it was as if he was born again.

"Hey!"

Ten men appeared from the cave, the lead carrying a flaming torch. He was a short, stocky man in his late thirties, draped in expensive cloths and wearing an elaborate headdress atop neat, jet black hair. But his most striking feature was the emblem engraved on his cape – the mark of the Emperor.

“His highness did mention a certain sailor fetching treasures for him but he later thought that he needed somebody more trustworthy and with more men,” Zhenghe, the great explorer, began. “I really should get going, I’m due back in a week. This second voyage was exhausting.” Pausing for a moment, he looked down at the crippled figure laying on the ground, “Also, you might want to know. The beast was only guarding her egg.”

And with a wave of his sleeve, Zhenghe and his men disappeared into the jungle.

Beaten and exhausted, Hong rested against a large, sandstone boulder, watching the sun set on the desolate island, contemplating the worthwhileness of the expedition.

# Perfect Timing

*Singapore International School (Hong Kong), Choi, Yun Xi Chalsie – 11*

It was his fifth month, twenty-fourth day and fifth hour onboard the ship, the Sail-breaker when Admiral Zheng He spotted the skull and bones motif. He was lounging on deck when he saw the skull and bones emblem, embroidered on a blood-red background, the symbol of the very thing he had dreaded glaring bright against the bright, hot noon sun.

“Sir, pirates are nearing,” a sailor boy skidded to a stop in front of him from his perch in the viewing mast.

The admiral rubbed his chin, contemplating. “If it is a battle they wish, ready all that can wield a sword, and tell those who can’t to defend the treasure.” With that, the boy ran into the decks below.

The pirate’s alliance stretched far and wide, to China, all who joined them boasting a tattoo of a bleeding skull and bones. He had fought them tons of times—the pirate alliance, or called the Valew. With that, he held his prized, ancient horn and blew deeply into it.

The sound signalled, *a battle. Be ready.* And so they readied.

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## *The Battle Begins:*

The pirates were upon them less than twenty minutes later. The Valew’s arrows aimed at the ship.

“They’re shooting arrows! Shields up!” General Killian commanded the soldiers. He shouted in English, though, and thankfully the majority of the soldiers knew basic commands in multiple languages. One of the generals from far away, and keen to help guard the treasure and had good battlefield healing skills and knowledge, he was general for a reason, lethal cunning helping him to claw to the top. It didn’t help that he was also a kind and charming person. Zheng He definitely didn’t want to mess with *him*.

Zheng He himself followed the orders given, though his bow was in a hand and an arrow was nocked.

Arrows rained down upon them, the majority of the arrows blocked and gathered into quivers.

“Our turn,” General Killian grinned. “Bows up,” bowstrings groaned as the soldiers obeyed. “Arrows nocked,” he continued. “And... VOLLEY!” He bellowed as dozens of arrows flew and found their mark.

Impossibly, the Valew ships sailed closer, until Zheng He could see the whites of their enemies’ eyes.

“They’re coming onboard!” The scouts yelled. Even though their gangplank was raised, the Valew either swung across on ropes or hoisted a plank to get onto the Sail-breaker.

Within seconds that seemed like an eternity, the Valew had swarmed the deck of the boat. Lethal, ruthless, and heartless, they overpowered some soldiers, slaughtering them mercilessly. Most of the soldiers were engaged in combat, and as time went by, blood stained the floor, slick and red. Zheng He observed for a second, then plunged into the fray.

When he had gotten at least ten cuts and his clothes were bloodstained, he received a huge slice to the thigh that sent him collapsing.

His vision spotted, black and white dancing over his vision as he faded into eternal darkness...

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## *The Healer:*

“Sir, I could help.” A petite, dark haired young girl hesitantly approached him when he woke and bobbed a curtsy. He was groaning in pain, a huge cut slashed down his entire thigh, slicing through skin and muscle, with a slimy green substance dripping from it. Poison. The girl knew immediately what it was, apparently.

“Poison?” Zheng He rasped before gritting his teeth tightly. She gave a grim nod.

The girl knelt before him, and wrapped her small hands around his leg. Slowly, the poison leached from his leg, dribbling out in a way that made the general retch. Gradually, muscle knitted together, and blood scabbed, as the wound healed.

“It would scar, but otherwise it would be completely functioning in a few days of rest,” the girl whispered in a small, sweet voice, and left.

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## *The Warrior:*

A door banged open with a loud bang, as a girl with cobalt blue eyes and black hair braided into a coronet stepped out onto the gore-filled, bloody deck.

“Aww, I missed all the fun!” The girl pouted. Mei An, city guard for the royal family and self-appointed hunter to feed her family. She was a skilled swordswoman, and was fine with a bow. Perfect timing.

She fought in the midst of the chaos, bow cast away, her sword drawn, engaged in hand-to-hand combat, well sword-to-sword combat, deadly sharp knives tucked into her boots and belt. She made the fight a lethal dance, weaving around the Valew Zheng He was pretty sure was a lord, which means that the Valew was one of the best fighters. She was skilled, both in physical training and her “ability training”, so bone-shattering shadows crept unseen and destroyed places her jagged sword failed to reach, and shields protected wherever her defences failed. She was a whirlwind in a fury, a maelstrom.

However, despite her skills, she soon got a slice to her upper arm. Red blood flowed freely, blooming on the embroidered tunic she had been wearing and had not gotten a chance to change out of, and dripping onto her prized vambraces. She snarled, some feral instinct she kept on a tight, tight leash slipping. She leapt onto the pirate and she brought her sword down...

The Valew’s head just fell off and rolled around the deck, as the people in close proximity retched and looked away.

She continued the fatal choreography until the bodies of dead soldiers lay scattered by her feet, her blade a wine red, blood-spattered head to toe. She turned away, and began hauling the mauled bodies into the water.

That night, she fell asleep under the stars, lulled to unconsciousness by the voices cheering “*Mei An! Mei An! Mei An! Mei An...*”

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### *Epilogue:*

*As the sun sets, tears are forgotten.  
Though loved ones were lost,  
None were broken.  
The heroes were tossed  
Into the air  
As cheers sounded,  
Everywhere  
People stumbled towards bed  
To celebrate the precious dead.  
In one night, things changed  
The tides turned.  
For good, or for better,  
Only time will tell.  
~ Chalsie Choi*



# The Gold-crusted Book

*Singapore International School (Hong Kong), Dong, Jane – 11*

“ Hey , you children! Shhhhhhh !” The librarian glared at us with her swollen eyes that narrowed to slits from her old-fashioned brown, rusty counter as she left the room for the toilet .

Alexander was with his friends Rosy and Luke, researching on the YongLe Emperor in the library until a girl wearing pink Luke had a crush on walked by and sat down at a table with some of her friends chatting about something he couldn't hear. . .

Suddenly , the rusted ship sailing in dangerous waters pictured on the page Luke had just flipped open from a gold-crusted book with a dragon imprinted started flipping back and forth , rustling , shooting out gusts of stormy , aggressive wind every now and then . The usual chill in Alexander now started shaking like a dried leaf about to fall off . He stole a glance at the others , who were spooked , feet rooted to the marble-tiled floor as this had never happened before .

The wind that had come out of the book now all gathered around Luke , Alexander and Rosy , swirling around them like a tornado , sweeping them off their feet and propelling them inside the book. Their screams for help were drowned out by the water that had suddenly filled their mouths as more seawater came pouring down on them . All this had happened in less than a fraction of a second but seemed to happen to them in slow-motion.

“AHHHHHHHHHHHHH! Where are we ? ” They all gasped for air on the surface, legs treading water

“ Whatever ! We can find that out later ! Oh no! ” Alexander exclaimed , pointing at the black clouds gathered up , the howling wind blowing at them from all sides.

“ What should we do ? We can only tread water for this long before we all get swept away by the waves that are about 3-storeys tall !” Yelled Rosy , struggling to keep herself afloat.

“ Wait , where's Luke? They both turned around but couldn't find their friend anywhere.

“ Over here guys!” Alexander and Rosy's heads turned at the sound of Luke's voice and saw him swimming ferociously towards a ship that he had sighted in the distance but kept disappearing out of sight due to the fog around it. They instantaneously followed his example and paddled towards it , determined to get on that boat.

“ Man overboard ! Man overboard ! ” Someone onboard the ship bellowed into his loudspeaker as the rest of the crew threw down ropes and let down the anchor in a jiffy as the ship came to a stop . Rosy was so relieved when a sturdy man hauled her up onto the deck , even though she usually acted very confident and brave , she was actually terrified inside .

Luke , Alexander and Rosy had expected a welcome and a nice hot bath with some food from the ship's crew but what came next was greatly unexpected .

“ Blimey! What are these people wearing !?” Several crew members uttered in surprise at the sight of the children's clothes , for they were like nothing they had ever seen before.

Suddenly , there came a collective silence as the gang made way for Admiral ZhengHe who strolled out the cabin doors and came to take a look at the newcomers.

“ Who are you and what is your business here? ” Admiral ZhengHe demanded , and Luke knew to tell the truth .

“ We come from another place called Hong Kong and we have absolutely no business here , we don't even know you or any of these people ! ” Luke gestured around him .

“Ok , this is definitely not Narnia,” Rosy muttered under her breath , “I was hoping to be queen Susan ! I guess next time . . .”

“ Ha! Definitely a spy from the Indonesians ! Such a good disguise ! Who ever thought of someplace as weird as Hong Kong ! And just look at their peculiar clothes !We should try to send some of our own spies in like that too ! I knew they were going to send someone to steal our treasure sooner or later . . . mustn't trust them sir ! ” A skipper shouted out .

“ We don’t even know who you are ! How are we spies? ” Alexander argued.

“ Then how did we find you in the middle of the Indian ocean , as if it was a coincidence ? ” He retorted.

“ I TOLD YOU ! We are NOT from here ! ” Luke shot back .

“ Enough !! Back to your positions ! My eardrums are about to burst ! Li , throw them in the lowest and smallest cabin and lock them in! ” Admiral ZhengHe roared in a menacing tone , then , turning to the children he stared into their eyes , “ I’m watching you . ”

After being locked in , Alexander , Rosy and Luke tried their best to pick the lock , but finally gave up and sat down stubbornly , out of hope .

There was a knock on the door and a dark haired man threw an overcooked fish harshly onto the ground , “ Ye’ food ! ” then left .

Before the children even had time to get a wisp of the smell of the fish , a gold–crusted book fell from the wobbling shelf to the ground , opened up it’s pages and started counting down in a robotic voice “ The portal will close in 10 seconds...10....9.....8...7...6.. ” The children looked at each other , nodded , and jumped inside with absolutely no clue where it leads to , they just hoped that it was better than where they just were.

“ Ewww , what’s that smell ! You guys smell like fish ! ” A girl wearing pink covered her nose and tried in vain to swat away the nasty stink coming towards her.

“ I have to go to toilet ! Meet you somewhere later whatever! ” Luke stammered and ran off , leaving a trace of dust behind him .

Rosy threw back her head and laughed out loud.

# Eye of the Hurricane

*Singapore International School (Hong Kong), Koh, Xin Yu Cheryl – 11*

“A storm is coming from the portside!” The nervous and anxious shouts ricocheted through the thick walls of the ship, immediately alerting me. I got up, hastily putting my uniform on. I was about to leave when the frazzled commodore dashed into my cabin.

“Admiral Zheng He!” he exclaimed frantically, “The men reported that a storm is spotted on our portside!”

“That I am more than aware of,” I replied as I exited the room, the commodore trailing behind me. Some men were running every-which-way, while others were looking around, unsure of what to do. Their faces screamed confusion. Needless to say, disorganized was an understatement. “Commodore, please gather all the officers on board. I will be at the wheelhouse.” He nodded curtly, swiftly rushing off.

Shortly afterwards, the officers gathered. I hurriedly gave them brief but nonetheless specific instructions as to what to do. Efficiently and promptly, they carried out their roles. The plan was to steer as many ships as possible away from the hurricane. As the men scurried around, notifying others as to what was happening, the confusion subsided. Soon, everyone in the fleet was on standby, ready to carry out the next order.

“Alert! Alert!” Someone hollered, “The mothership is headed directly into the storm! ALL HANDS ON DECK!” Chaos broke out once again, upon the crew knowing that the mothership had been engulfed by the tropical cyclone. Despite the pandemonium, men remained on task, adjusting the sails, completing whatever tasks were assigned to them. The storm seemingly grew bigger, and soon, the other ships faded into nothingness.

A tumult of screams and bellows rang out as the ship started rocking vigorously on the rough waters, leaving men nauseous in its wake. “GET OFF THE DECK!” I roared loudly, my voice barely covering the shrieks and shouts. Men struggled to crawl off the deck, most barely managing to escape the raging waters. Some clutched their stomachs tightly, sweat sliding off their crinkled brows, while others were puking at each step. Weaker men passed out, and even those who didn’t get seasick easily were pale and uneasy. The furious waves whisked away multiple men leaving only echoed cries for help behind. It had objects and treasures, some worthless and others sacred, tumbling into the dark waters, taking my clear vision with it. I could barely see anything as I once again thundered to get off the deck. My sight felt worlds away as everything became a blur. Things crashing onto wooden floors, tables tumbling and things sliding from side to side were heard through deafening *clangs* and *booms*. Silently, I put my hands together and prayed for a miracle to bring us to safety. Over the ear-splitting commotion throughout the ship, I could barely hear my own thoughts as I wished for the best.

But despite my prayers, we were still cutting against the raging ocean, dizzy from the noise and sheer fear from how lethal the cyclone was. I felt useless, unable to do anything to help.

Suddenly, a divine glow took to light the tips of the huge mast, allowing me to regain my sight. The people on the ship quickly went from being in turmoil to gawking in pure silence. In a daze, their eyes wide with hope, they tried to observe the unworldly light from wherever they stood.

“Admiral!” One of the officers called out, but it was too late. I was already climbing onto the deck, wanting to investigate the cause of this strange phenomenon, as ready as ever to face whatever was before me.

*Were my prayers answered?* I thought to myself, *What could possibly be the reason behind this? Is our journey protected by the gods?* I took a step forward, feeling the wind wrap its arms around me. My thin cloak was scarcely wrapped around me, and the cold bit at my fingertips as water and wind swirled around me. I was unaffected by the harsh conditions as I beheld the barely visible fire that seemingly burned at the mast. Everything else faded away as I stared at the godly occurrence in awe. It was truly a glorious spectacle. The unreal glow wasn’t put out by the waters of the storm, but instead grew more and more radiant, along with the world seemingly becoming brighter and warmer...

“The storm has subsided!” someone exclaimed abruptly. I regained my composure, straightening myself almost instantly. I looked around me and saw men slowly coming back onto the deck, most barely standing on their feet, their faces reading many different emotions. Some were still in awe, others joyful. Some were bittersweet, while others had solemn, unreadable expressions. It was incredible that we had survived the storm, but nonetheless sad that many capable men were thrown overboard by the ferocious cyclone, nothing of them remaining.

Gradually, the other ships and men of the fleet came into view, but none were even close to being as dishevelled as my ship's crew. One of my officers counted the number of ships and nodded at me, indicating that we weren't short of any ships.

Without delay, I took note of my surroundings; things were sprawled across every surface, either wet, broken, or both. I couldn't bring myself to imagine how I looked when I observed men stained with salty water and vomit, hair tousled, clothes damp and damaged. Their faces were drained of colour, their eyes tinted red. I noted that many of them were being held upright by fellow companions, or even carried by them. It was a pitiful sight, seeing so many men weakened to the point of fainting. Still, they should get used to the nauseating waters.

This encounter with such an otherworldly sight signified that we were guided by the gods. We were able to overcome such an impossible storm, we could and would overcome even more. And thus, we continued to sail, to venture on to our next location, India.

# A Close Call

*Singapore International School (Hong Kong), Lau, Yih Tong Adele – 11*

The ship sailed on, battling against the waves. Bit by bit, we pushed on, our determination not wavering. I stood on the bow of the ship, as we headed for new land. I held my head high, many supporting ships behind ours. The pattering of light rain created a steady rhythm. I looked over my shoulder, the sudden murmuring breaking my train of thought. The crew was shocked, but for what reason I did not know. A wave of gasps came over the crew. I followed their gaze, and glanced up, then it hit me. We were approaching our own doom.

The dark, gloomy clouds lingered over us ominously. A flash of forked lightning tore through the clouds, a great clap of thunder following afterward. A sudden shower of rain then came upon us. I was not surprised, as a feeling of *déjà vu* came over me. I walked down to my cabin, my hand sheltering the rain from my eyes. Then, a speck of black caught my eye. It seemed to get bigger and bigger as I blinked my eye repeatedly, wondering if my eyesight was letting me down. Desperately, I was hoping it was.

As the blackness grew bigger and bigger, the dot started to take shape. The dot morphed into a ship, fully painted black. A grey skull was painted on the front, its hollow eyes as dark as a black hole. At the front stood a lady, her dark hair flowing in the wind. A sheath attached to her belt was empty, and in her hand was the shimmering sword reflecting the very few rays of light. It was raised, the tip pointing upwards, as if she was directing our attention to the approaching storm. But there was a deeper meaning. They were the storm.

I looked around, but we were trapped. Stuck, in the midst of a storm, under attack by pirates. “You know what to do,” I grumbled, my eyes closed, trying sound as brave as possible.

“But, Admiral Zheng, couldn’t we—” argued my advisor.

“I will not tolerate rudeness! I am your commanding officer, and my word is law! Now get it done!” I insisted sternly, interrupting his speech.

In a instant, the mahogany sails imprinted with the Royal Ming Emblem was soon replaced with white sails. We were surrendering. A loud boom rang in the distance, causing a commotion. The pirates lowered many of their own onto our ships. They shouted out orders, and we proceeded with following them. We stood with our hands behind our heads, as we watched silently, our chests filled with treasures being loaded onto the pirate ships.

“Ms Chen... I mean, Captain. The loot has been safely stowed away. I have found the Admiral, as you requested,” he stuttered as he prodded me with his finger, nudging me forward.

I looked up, their leader observing me. “Now, now. Listen carefully. Don’t you even think about escaping. I know who you are, I know your ways, Zheng He. You will tell me everything you know. Everything. A little mistake, and your whole fleet gets it,” she said, her eyes penetrating through me, as if she was reading my thoughts. She gently caressed the the cool metal blade of the knife on my cheek, a smirk across her face. “Take him away!” she shrieked, putting the knife back in its sheath.

Oh no.

I’m doomed.

The pirates threw us in separate jail cells. I sat in solitude, as my comrades whimpered and complained, fearing for their lives. I thought about escaping, but I wanted no life in danger. Outsmarting them wouldn't be easy, it would take time to plan and I did not intend to test their patience. What would such mighty pirates want?

Power?

Fear?

Treasure?

A day later, with my plan in mind, I sat at a table, waiting patiently to decide the fate of my men. I did not know how likely my plan would succeed, but it was the only way. Chen approached, her men behind her. They bore firearms, but I showed no sign of fear. She pulled the chair away and sat, leaning on the backrest of the chair. Dramatically, she stabbed her knife into the wooden table. Failing at threatening me, she asks, "Tell me, Admiral. What is the real reason you asked to see me? To secure a deal? Fat chance."

I took a deep breath, "Why, you are certainly correct. You have something I would like, and I have something to offer in exchange for it."

Chen stared me down and nodded, beckoning me to proceed.

"I want my men. You have my men. You want to be feared. I can help you with that. I have a life to spare. Mine. I do not seek the treasure you took, just the lives of the loyal and innocent. In exchange, I will let you take my life," I continued, my voice confident.

"Deal?"

"No tricks, Admiral,"

"Certainly not. So do we have a deal?"

"A deal it is. I've got my eyes on you, Admiral. No tricks. I've got a knife at your throat,"

My men were released, and Chen's men handcuffed me, placing me under their control. I was given a last chance to say my goodbyes. Even if my plan did not work, I would be honored to sacrifice my life for these courageous men. I was dragged onto the pirates' ship and as I silently said goodbye to my people, a cannon boom rang in the distance. As a ray of light came across my face. There was hope.

The Royal Naval Fleet.

Just before we were captured, I commanded my men to release an emergency flare into the sky, hoping to attract the attention of the Naval Fleet. We had encountered such situations, but never encountered such a close call. The Fleet came onto the pirates ship, and released me from the pirates' captivity. Captain Chen was captured, along with her crew.

As I approached Chen, she stared me down with a deadly look in her eyes. "I've got my eyes on you, Captain. No tricks," I quoted, using her own words against her.

# Heroic Adventures with a Ming Dynasty Companion

*Singapore International School (Hong Kong), Tang, Sze Ching Caitlyn – 11*

*On the coast of South China Sea lies a sunken shipwreck, believed to have been part of the Ming Dynasty Treasure Fleet...*

"I've found the shipwreck!" I cry, gesturing madly to the shipwreck ahead.

My fellow archaeologists and I swim towards the shipwreck. As we near, I realize it's far from bulky. It's enormous!

Circling the shipwreck, I realize on the ship's body is an inscription, saying 1433. 1433? That is almost 600 years ago! To my surprise, beneath a floorboard is a box covered with intricate carvings.

Click! The box opens. Inside is a musty book.

"Quran..." I read.

But before I can even think, a whirlwind of seawater flings me about as I hang onto my precious find. What's happening? I kick my legs out frantically. Then my world turns black...

I soon awake. Blinking woozily, I make out the silhouette of a seven-foot tall man against the glaring sunlight.

"Where am I?" I clumsily sit up, astonished to see the man dressed in old-fashioned uniform.

"Who's he?" I inquire.

A sailor, surprised by my ignorance, cries, "He's our honourable admiral, Zheng He! He leads our mighty fleet of 300 ships on naval expeditions!"

I am greeted by a 400-foot long flagship, followed by a massive fleet of 300 ships following behind. Red sails, high masts... Everything astounds me.

"All aboard!" shouts a voice far ahead.

I see Zheng He addressing us. "We shall set sail on our seventh epic voyage, as far west as Africa, bringing back exotic goods for Emperor Xuandi! We must show the world the Ming Dynasty's power, and develop a rich network of trade with neighbouring countries!"

"What's your name?" Zheng He asks me.

"I'm Abbo," I reply.

"Call me Sanbo!" Zheng He replies, chuckling.

I am appointed the role of translator, because of my ability to speak many languages. Despite having been on this ship for so long, I often get lost. I am so impressed that Zheng He can navigate the ocean by observing the stars. I think to myself, "Even with today's GPS, I still cannot get around easily!"

One night, a storm breaks out. Panic-ridden, I stumble onto the deck. Cries of anguish erupt as many of us are flung into the raging ocean.

Into the distance comes the deafening roar of a pirate ship approaching. This is pirate Chen Zuyi's ship! The Treasure Fleet seems to brace itself from the impact, its hackles raised as it approaches. Boom! The ear-splitting crack of a cannonball rings out in the air as war brews between the fleets.

Zheng He is barking out orders. We stumble across the deck to appointed positions. I am a gunman. We load up cannons, firing with all our might. Zheng He takes the helm, swerving the boat away from the cannonballs expertly.

"Fire!" he cries as cannonballs whiz through the air. Then, I see the cannonball flying towards us at a frightening speed.

"Watch out!" I scream, just in time for Zheng He to spin the helm in another direction.

As the last cannon is fired, the pirate ship erupts into fiery red flames.

We sail towards Africa as we mourn the loss of brave sailors. It isn't long before we arrive at the coast of East Africa.

I step off the ship with Zheng He. King Abuja is waiting for us. Looking at the huge fleet of ships, his jaw drops.

Zheng He presents the king with gifts of silk and porcelain.

The king seems to gasp, gazing at the gifts, before thanking us profusely. Then, he says, "Please follow me. I have something to show you."

We follow the king into a safari, where some dancers are performing.

The king says, "This dance, Tamenaibuga, means friendship. It represents the friendship between China and Africa!"

After the dance ends, we are led around the safari. Zheng He looks curiously at the animals, taking in the sight of lions, zebras and giraffes with awe and wonder. This is his first time seeing them!

The king speaks. "I shall send these animals to Emperor Xuandi. Send my warmest regards to him."

"What animal is that?" Zheng He asks, pointing at a giraffe.

"That's a giraffe." I reply, grinning.

After we thank the king, the animals are led into cages to be brought back to the Emperor.

On the way back, Zheng He amuses me with stories of encounters with notorious pirates and exotic species he had found. He also tells me childhood stories and his humble beginning as a poor Muslim boy.

Months later, we arrive at Nanjing, where Emperor Xuandi receives us with a feast.

"I heard that you had an eventful voyage," he announces. Zheng He launches into stories of combat with pirate Chen Zuyi. I am surprised to hear Zheng He say "I must thank my good companion Abbo for saving my life. If it wasn't for him, I wouldn't be here today." I nearly faint in pleasure of being given such high praise in the presence of the Emperor!

Shortly after returning, Zheng He falls sick, passing away in 1433. Before he dies, he gives me a book.



“Read it after I’m gone,” he’d said tearfully.

Zheng He is buried at sea along with his favourite ship. “1433” is inscripted on it for the remembrance of his passing.

After his funeral, I take out that book he’d given me. “Quran” it says. I open it, seeing the familiar scrawl “To Abbo” written on the first page.

Suddenly, something fizzles inside me and my vision blurs...

As I break the surface of the water, cries of relief explode.

“Where have you been? ” my teammate cries.

I just smile silently.

At home, I sit down to write a story, “Heroic Adventures with a Ming Dynasty Companion” to honour the memory of Zheng He, noble admiral of Treasure Fleet, and Sanbo, the bravest friend I’ve ever had.

إنا لن أنساك أبداً

(I will never forget you in Arabic)

# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

*Singapore International School (Hong Kong), Wang Rahman, Safiya – 11*

“Zheng He!”

One of the sailors sprinted towards Zheng He within a heartbeat.

“Zheng He!

“Yes?” asked Zheng He impatiently, obviously being in no mood to be disturbed.

“There are a bunch of pirates that want to raid our ships! They’re right there in that giant pirate ship!”

The sailor pointed at what looked like a big blob of dirt heading straight towards the ship with the pace of a snail. It was a very pathetic sight compared to the Emperor’s 300 ships.

“Tell everyone to get their weapons and get them over here, now!”

The sailor did as he was told, and within five minutes, everyone had their swords ready while Zheng He kept giving them orders to get ready for attack. While the pirate ship got close enough to see the pirates clearly, the pirates and sailors immediately started attacking each other.

After a good 20 minutes of people getting stabbed with swords, Zheng He and his team eventually won the battle with no problem. With over 27,000 sailors, how could you lose?

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“Stop the ship!”

“As you wish, Zheng He.”

It has been two days since the pirate attack happened, and Zheng He and his team stopped at an island that they had visited around 10 years ago. When Zheng He’s crew released the plank, Zheng He started walking and jogging towards an old looking cottage.

“Hello? Anyone there?” Zheng He shouted, banging at the door frantically as if wolves were chasing him.

The door slowly opens as a short redhead greeted Zheng He.

“Zheng He, it’s been a while...”

“Look, I only came here for your help, the emperor needs you to help give some of his treasures to the rest of China to make some new alliances, and he thought that you could help, but you cannot take any of it for yourself.”

“In that case, then no, I won’t help you.”

“Well, then I hope you’ll have a great time rotting on this island for the rest of your life!”

Zheng He furiously stormed off, his heart filled with guilt and disappointment, knowing that this mission would have to be a lot longer than planned.

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Being the leading boat, the boat accidentally fell into a gigantic whirlpool. Shouts and screams couldn’t be heard over the loud crashing waves hitting the ship.

“Everyone, do not panic, we just need to steer the ship around!” Zheng He shouted, still in his pajamas.

However, no one could hear him, so everyone started running around everywhere and panicking. Zheng He narrowed his eyes as he started to slowly make his way up to the steering wheel to turn the ship around.

After all that mayhem, Zheng He decided that they should ask someone to take a midnight shift just in case there was any danger ahead.

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Three days later, the ship finally reached an island that they haven’t discovered on the southeast of China, this island seemed to have an emperor ruling it, so Zheng He managed to meet the emperor and convinced him to befriend the emperor of YongLe and became their ally. In fact, it went so well that even the emperor gave a gift for Zheng He to give back to the YongLe dynasty which was a new fauna that the people of the YongLe dynasty has never seen and 142 of his greatest warriors in return. Zheng He thanked the emperor as he started to walk back to the ship with the fauna.

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After another week, the 300 ships came back with more treasures than they had before. YongLe emperor was very happy that Zheng He and his fleet of ships managed to earn so many goods through this journey and was amazed by the story they had. However, 1 month later YongLe emperor was found dead in his palace, which meant that Zheng He wouldn’t be able to get more recruits and allies without the emperor’s treasures to bribe the other dynasties, so Zheng He was only able to go on adventures every 1 year instead, until he unexpectedly died on a voyage to India. This upset many people because he was friends with almost everyone, which made Zheng He one of the greatest admirals that YongLe had ever had.

# The Little-Known Voyage of Zheng He

*St Peter's Catholic Primary School, Kuo, Kin Lok Darren – 10*

A long time ago in China, the emperor wanted his people to voyage to the western seas to spread his imperial influence. Therefore, he designated his minister, Zheng He, to be the fleet admiral of this voyage. Then, Zheng He started the preparation for this voyage.

One day at a shipyard near the emperor's castle, the fleet was preparing to sail to the western seas. The emperor told Zheng He and his fleet, "Your main purpose of this voyage is to spread our Chinese culture and showcase the strengths of our majestic nation. You also need to establish good relationships with the western countries." "It will be as you wish, my majesty," replied Zheng He. "Has everyone prepared?" shouted Zheng He seriously. "Yes, we are all ready to go!" the sailors replied in high spirits. "Open the door to the shipyard," shouted Zheng He loudly. Then, they set sail and waved goodbye to the emperor.

On the first few days of the voyage, the weather was pretty good. The sun always shone above the fleet and the breeze blew softly in daytime. However, the sky turned grey gradually afterwards. "Oh no! A thunderstorm is coming. I think we have to take preventive measures," thought Zheng He. He called all hands on deck. A sailor asked, "Admiral Zheng, why did you call all of us to come over?" "A powerful storm is coming. I've prepared some garlic and ginger water. They will help you to avoid sea sickness," replied Zheng He.

However, the captain refused and said, "I hate both garlic and ginger. They stink!" "Please try some, or you will have sea sickness when the storm comes," said Zheng He. "No way! My body is strong and I'm a pro at sea. I ain't afraid of a little storm! This is just a piece of cake!" shouted the captain. Then, the wind and waves got stronger and stronger, and the boat also swayed side to side. A waterspout formed in a flash and it suddenly swallowed the whole fleet! Everyone felt dizzy.

After some time, the storm stopped and the ship was floating in the air! Zheng He woke up and was transfixed by the wondrous view he had before him. He saw countless colorful nebulae all around! "Is everyone alright?" Zheng He asked weakly. "Our ship is uncontrollable," a sailor said. Zheng He opened his star navigation handbook to check where the ship was. As he looked around, he saw enormous bright and special stars shining in the starry space. Most of the stars had not been seen before and not even found in his star navigation handbook. He thought, "Where are we?". Finally, Zheng He remembered an ancient astronomy book mentioned that there was an unknown dimension in space. He just realized that they had fallen into that unknown dimension!

Suddenly, a strange force sucked the fleet towards an unknown planet. They landed on the surface of the planet and saw many small elves wearing red metallic clothes. "Well, I think our visit to the western world has begun," thought Zheng He.

The elves took Zheng He and his sailors to see the ruler of the planet, Buddha. "Welcome to Planet Leshan," said the Buddha. "Greetings, we are the envoys from China on planet Earth. We want to have cultural exchange with your planet. Here are some presents for you," said Zheng He as he handed over many precious treasures to the Buddha. "Wow, thank you. It's my honor to receive your gifts and share our cultures with each other. Please let me give you a present too. We will teach you how to build structures such as city walls, palaces and statues. I also want to send our envoys to visit and learn from your planet too," said the Buddha. "That's very impressive! We will report to our emperor about the friendliness of Planet Leshan," said Zheng He.

Then, the Buddha took Zheng He around the planet with their super-duper space ship. After that, the Buddha sent the whole fleet back to Earth together with his envoys. Zheng He safely went back to China and told the emperor everything about their incredible tour on Planet Leshan. The emperor was very amazed at what Zheng He said and he praised Zheng He for his effort and bravery. Meanwhile, Planet Leshan's envoys taught them how to build various infrastructures. They then returned to Planet Leshan after the people in China had mastered the building skills.

In the following years, Zheng He instructed many people to build and fortify their structures including the boundless city walls and the royal palace. Afterwards, those city walls helped them to defend their country in many battles. Zheng He and the emperor were happy about that and were very thankful to the Buddha. Then, the emperor named the fortified walls as "The Great Wall of China" and the palace as "The Forbidden City". They became the biggest city wall and the greatest castle groups in the world. To show their thankfulness and respect to the Buddha, they also built an enormous statue of the Buddha to commemorate him. The emperor named this statue "Leshan Giant Buddha". Zheng He hoped this biggest Buddha in the world could help the people on Planet Leshan to spot their location easily and visit China again in the future.

In fact, Zheng He thought the Buddha was highly intelligent and had advanced technological skills. Therefore, he believed that the Buddha was actually a god. He spread the word out to all the people. Since then, the people of China had been building a lot of statues and temples of the Buddha. It also became one of the biggest religions and that is why Buddhism has been passed on from generation to generation in the Chinese history.

Zheng He had done a very wonderful job in leading the fleet. Now, he is known as a very famous voyager, explorer and diplomat in the Chinese history.

# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

*St. Margaret's Co-Educational English Secondary and Primary School, Del Mundo, Giuliana Sero – 11*

On the 11<sup>th</sup> of July 2405, Zheng He and his crew stepped nervously inside NASA's Space Voyager. They put on their helmets, the same colour as their silver spacesuits, and walked into the cockpit.

A voice spoke through the TalkBox, "T-minus 1 minute, 30 seconds," Zheng He fiddled with some of the controls and buckled on his seatbelt.

"This is it," he thought.

"T-minus 1 minute," the boosters started, ready to launch.

"T-minus 30 seconds."

He gulped.

"10, 9, 8..."

He glanced back at his crew, who looked as nervous as him, their faces as white as the clouds they were about to shoot through.

"7,6,5..."

"I'm ready," he said with determination.

"4,3,2...1!"

And they blasted off!

A few days passed. As Zheng He scanned the area, he noticed a strange planet in the distance.

"What is THAT?" He pointed towards a planet with dark blue spots all around its yellow surface.

"Let's land," suggested a crew member.

"Yes, let's inspect it!" replied an eager Zheng He.

The spaceship suddenly shook vigorously, causing the crew members to scream in fright. Zheng He held onto the emergency lever and the spaceship gradually stopped shaking.

"Strange," mused Zheng He. "That has never happened before."

They landed on the planet. A small sign read, "Welcome to Champolia! Enjoy your stay!"

"Champolia sounds familiar. I must have read about it in a book..." Zheng He pondered. "It's the former name of Vietnam!"

He pointed towards a citadel and a moat surrounding a small, ramshackle village. "Let's go there!"

They marched to the citadel, passing through the village. The villagers looked like just like them. The villagers, confused and suspicious, started murmuring to each other as they stared at the astronauts.

"Who are they?"

"Where did they come from?"

"Why do they look like us?"

The crew stepped inside the enormous citadel. It was decorated with yellow and red sparkles and floating candles. At the center of the citadel was a king, proudly sitting on his throne, dressed in red, yellow and cerulean satin.

"Who are you?" He asked.

"We are humans from Earth!" said a proud Zheng He.

The king's eyes widened. "The myths are true! Show me how you got here!"

They led him to the Space Voyager, as commanded.

The king gasped. “We have never seen this type of magic before!”

Zheng He laughed. “It’s not magic. It’s technology!”

“Sounds interesting,” said the king. “Could we possibly trade anything for this... technology?”

“Could we have your cape in exchange?”

“Ah, not my cape, but we have the fabric!”

Zheng He nodded and pulled out the latest iPhone XX. It had a hologram screen and an accurate voice detector. The king’s face beamed.

“Splendid! Very well then. I will prepare the fabric.”

When he arrived back with the scroll of fabric, Zheng He taught the king how to use the iPhone and contact Earth.

“Thank you so much.” Zheng He replied courteously, receiving the fabric with admiration.

“No, thank *you* for this technology!”

They filed back onto the spaceship, waving goodbye to the king.

“Farewell!” yelled the king, looking down at the phone in his hands with wonder and fascination.

They flew back to space, searching for more planets. The spacecraft wobbled again, this time with more strength. Suddenly, some of the doors of the ship opened! Zheng He whipped his head around to look at the doors, mortified.

He looked around and noticed a crew member, Yu Shen, looking too relaxed, on a seat with a control panel. Zheng He instantly knew he was the culprit.

“Abort, abort! Yu Shen is trying to hijack the spacecraft! Do you copy?!” screamed Zheng He into the TalkBox while trying to hang on. The culprit initially looked shocked at his accusation, but the incredulous look was quickly replaced by a sly smirk. After he sent the message, the doors closed and the spacecraft stabilized.

Zheng He stood up and rushed towards Yu Shen.

“You!” scolded Zheng He. “You almost killed all of us! Why on earth would you do such a thing?”

Yu Shen laughed. “I was supposed to be the legend. The myth. But then *you* came. I was going to be the captain shown in every history book. YOU stole the chance from ME! Do you know how MUCH I wanted to do this since I was a child?! Do you know how important this would be, to finally force my family to acknowledge someone they call a nobody?”

He tried to strike Zheng He with a tool he was holding.

“Don’t do this!” gasped Zheng He, but he ignored him.

The tool was a split second away from hitting Zheng He when another crew member, Lin, hit him first.

Yu Shen gasped and toppled over, falling to the ground.

“Thank you, Lin,” said a relieved Zheng He.

“No worries, really.” said Lin.

They landed the spacecraft soon after the brawl. Reporters and police officers surrounded them, noticing Yu Shen, handcuffed and under observation by Lin.

“Take him away!” Lin shouted to the nearby officers. “He violated protocol. Take him into questioning!”

He was arrested then and there.

“You!” snarled Yu Shen, full of spite. “You are not going to see the end of it!”

He was pushed inside the police hovercraft before he could say another word.

Reporters crowded around Zheng He, spilling out questions.

“Who was that young man that got arrested?”

“Did you see aliens?”

“What did you trade?”

“What do you think of the voyage?”

He looked at the reporter. “This voyage was truly an eye-opener. We now know that life exists on other planets. We traded our technology for various goods only known to those on other planets. I want to share my experience around the world so that we can conduct another voyage,” said Zheng He, live on TV. He then looked at his crew with pride. “Loyalty is valued in every mission. I’d do it again with this team!”



# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

*St. Mary's Canossian School, Liu, Rachel – 11*

Looking up to the bright blue sky, a young lad sat on the deck, taking a break. He was meeting with Zhou Gong when...

"Land ahead! Throw the anchor, we are getting close!" the lad's friend, Old Chan shouted. The lad woke up in a fright. "L...a...n...d, finally..." He stammered with joy. He hadn't smelt any dirt for 2 months and 18 days already! This was Leung's first journey but had already been Old Chan's fourth. Old Chan had been on board the Treasure Fleet since Zheng He's first expedition. "Are you slacking off again, Leung Yue?" "I've finished all my work... And how many times have I told you not to call me by my full name, old man?" Chan chuckled as the Treasure Fleet stopped rocking.

Leung and Old Chan were from the same village and he heard that Old Chan was going on for another adventure. Old Chan had, by that time, risen to the rank heading the caretaking of livestock. Yes! Zheng He took a lot of livestock on board before setting sail to ensure the dietary requirement for his crew could be satisfied while they were at sea. Leung had thus begged Old Chan to take him on board. Old Chan, unable to withstand Leung's constant bombardment, gave him a job on the fleet --- assisting Chan to take care of livestock on the ship. That's how Leung became a shipmate for this voyage.

Leung, given his low rank, stood far behind Zheng He as he followed him off the ship. A man whose skin was as dark as coal welcomed Zheng He with arms on his chest and spoke in an unknown language. "Do you know what he is saying?" Leung whispered to Old Chan, who was examining the area in great curiosity. "Of course....Not a clue..." Old Chan replied. Leung was amazed how Zheng He could communicate with the man.

"Soldiers! This is the Patriarch of Malindi! Respect this man the same as you respect me. Take out our finest silk and treasure!" Zheng He commanded. Old Chan and Leung both stared in awe as the soldiers carrying fine china, stacks of jade, several coral trees, piles of silk and boxes of gold and silver stood in line.

The Patriarch's eyes glinted a spark of excitement. After the soldiers had placed the goodies with care, Leung watched as the Patriarch spoke to a servant. Moments later, the servant came back, leash in his hand. Behind him was a creature whose neck was long and thin. Its skin had brown spots and on its head, was something that seemed like two mini deer's antlers. The crowd didn't know what to make out of this exotic being when suddenly Old Chan shouted, "It's the mythical Qilin!" Murmurings spread through the soldiers.

"Is it really THE Qilin?" "It doesn't look like the Qilin my great-grandfather told me when I was young." "I have waited for this day for so long! People said that you will SURELY rise to heaven after you have seen it!"

"SILENCE!" Zheng He yelled angrily. His attitude completely changed when he turned his back towards the soldiers and thanked the Patriarch with a big grin on his face for such a great blessing to have a Qilin on the fleet. A few days later, after they had replenished their supply, Zheng He bid farewell to the Patriarch and the Treasure Fleet sailed away from the port.

Old Chan and Leung were put in charge of taking care of the 'Qilin' since Chan was the Head of livestock and Leung was his personal assistant. At first, they thought it was an honour but...

"Its droppings smell so bad!" Leung complained as he cleared the dung. "Quit complaining and make sure the Qilin stays healthy and happy before we reach Shuntianfu, young man! Or else, your head won't be able to smell anything after we reach home!" 'Clever' Chan had used two fingers to stick up his nose, trying to block the stench while Leung stuck his tongue out in a silly face.

What seemed like years later, they arrived back home on the eighth day of the seventh lunar month in the thirteen year of Yongle, almost two years since they first set sail under the imperial order. A crowd formed when the fleet parked in the port and the soldiers marched off in different directions, meeting up with their wives, parents and children. There were tears of joy but there were wails for the fallen during the journey. Leung was one of the first people off the Treasure Fleet. He found his wife in the sea of people and learnt that she had given birth to a healthy son. "Where's Old Chan?" an old woman asked Leung. His face darkened. The woman buried her face with her hands, "N-no... He promised... His daughter is still at home waiting..." "Surprise!" Old Chan appeared behind her, "Did I scare you, old woman?" She looked up and cried, "I thought I had lost you forever..." she punched him on his chest and cried as Old Chan's fingers ran through her silky white hair...

Weeks after the journey, a messenger came and told Leung and Old Chan they were summoned by the Emperor. They were both terrified. Had they done something wrong? Would they get executed? They couldn't help but shiver from the thoughts of the many punishments they had heard about. They hurriedly went to the Palace with the messenger and bowed before the Emperor, expecting him to shout, "Guards! Take these men to be executed!" Instead, the Emperor said with a smile, "Well done for taking good care of the Qilin during the voyage! Guards! Give these men their reward!" Bags of gold dropped to the floor. Leung was startled. Old Chan bowed and thanked Emperor Yongle for his kindness. Happily, they went home, sharing their adventures of their recent journey with their family and neighbours.

## And the Journey Continues...

*St. Paul's Co-educational College Primary School, Sung, Jacqueline – 9*

I was one of the sailors on Captain Zheng He's fleet of ships. We brought cargos of gold, silver and other fancy jewelry like jade on our ships. They were for us to give out to different countries, to show that China was in peace with the world.

I really missed home after a week. Some sailors even had tears in the corner of their eyes. We sailed to some remote islands that no man has ever found. There were only different kinds of birds and rare animals on those isolated places. As Zheng He loved nature and wildlife, he decided to set foot onto one of the islands. Suddenly, the sailor with a pair of sharp eyes shouted, "Hey, why is there a ship?" He pointed to the horizon. At first, we thought the sailor was pranking us. Then, we saw a tiny lump that resembled a ship! Everyone, including Zheng He, gasped. "Why would there even be a ship except for us in this part of the ocean?" Zheng He wondered aloud, astonished. I guess he thought that the ship was just passing by, because he told us to continue exploring the island. We lost sight of him when we became more and more enthusiastic in looking at the birds that we had never seen before.

In the blink of an eye, the sky turned dark. "It's almost nighttime," one of the sailors called. "We should return to the ship." Some of us objected. "But we haven't seen Zheng He yet!" "I want to see the puffins a little more!" they argued. "Maybe Captain got bored and returned to the ship," I said hopefully. Then, something bad and unexpected happened...

When we returned to the ship, Mr Co-Captain ordered us to search the ships to see if Zheng He was there. He "assigned" another batch of sailors to search the islands nearby. Then, the bad news came. Zheng He was missing! With a pang, we realised that either Zheng He was kidnapped, or he drowned, which was very unlikely of him. Zheng He was clever enough to be careful of "the traps of Nature". "Maybe Captain was kidnapped by the people in the ship we saw earlier today," I said. "Let's hide our ships in that channel over there and send some sailors to search for him."

Mr Co-Captain sent three of the bravest and smartest sailors, including me to find Zheng He. Everyone wished us good luck as we set off eagerly at dawn the next day. We lost sight of them quickly. We trudged along the rocky path, with a leather bag full of food and water. Suddenly, we heard some footsteps approaching. "Quick! Let's hide in that huge underground nest of the puffins!" Chan, my teammate whispered urgently. We slipped into the hole and covered it with heather. Unfortunately, Ping, another teammate was too slow and was found by the enemies. We saw him get tied up and dragged away. Hopefully he would not give us away and get us caught as WELL. Now, only Chan and I were left.

A while later, I heard the footsteps again. Chan had enough sense to keep quiet. I strained to hear what the enemies were saying. "Psst...that Zheng He...he probably has a lot of treasure from China in his fleet...the cave in that lagoon-island..." A chill went down my spine. I quickly whispered what I heard to Chan. He gasped. "We must go to that lagoon-island NOW! I'm sure Zheng He is tied up there and possibly Ping!" he exclaimed. I nodded. The problem was, we had no idea where the lagoon-island was.

There were so many islands, and with those huge, pointy rocks around them, it was impossible to find the lagoon.

When we told Mr Co-Captain our story, he suggested us to get on a cliff and see if we could spot the lagoon. "What a good idea!" I thought. "That way I can get a bird-eye view of the islands!"

The next morning, we set off again. I hiked up the cliff and squinted at every detail of all the islands. "There it is!" I shouted to Chan in excitement, pointing to one of the islands. I took out my compass and saw that the lagoon-island was in the North. We went back to the channel to get a boat. We started rowing as fast as we could to the lagoon-island. When we reached there, we were exhausted. We decided to sleep in a hidden cave near the shore. No one would know we were there.

I was the first to wake up. The sky was still dark; it must be very early. I woke up Chan and we tiptoed around the island. As we reached the enemy's base, we hid behind the bushes, listening and watching intently. We heard a very, very welcome noise: snoring. Even the guard at the door of the base was having a sweet dream. I peeked through the window. To my relief, I saw Zheng He and Ping tied to a pillar. They noticed me waving at the window. Chan, who was beside me, put a finger to his lips. Zheng He and Ping nodded. I opened the door and went in as quietly as I could. As quick as lightning, Chan untied the ropes on their arms and legs.

I led Zheng He and Ping to our cave. We immediately rowed back to the island where our fleet was waiting. The sailors cheered. They threw their hats in the air and whooped and danced. Zheng He kept us quiet because the enemy might hear us. We sailed away and the journey continued...

# Crypto War – Year 1432

*St. Paul's Co-educational College Primary School, Wai, Hon Hay Evan – 10*

The sky was an expanse of sapphire blue, dotted with silky and fluffy white clouds. The crimson fluorescent sun was shining vividly at the sea like a crystal shining mirror. The cool breeze blew between the refreshing air as a colossal ship emerged from the depths of the glimmering water, eagerly heading towards its kingdom – the Palace of the Emperor of China.

“Ah... Welcome back my fellow comrades. It is an immense pleasure to have you back from your extraordinary endeavor,” the Emperor roared with intense enthusiasm.

“Thank you, your Honour! I have given plentiful amounts of generous gifts to newcomers whom I have found during my voyage,” Zheng He acknowledged proudly.

As the conversation continued, the weather suddenly turned ominous and a towering shadow emerged through the murky fog. A giant ship sailed across the scurrying sea. An invasion was rising and a battle was impending. The alarms blared throughout the city as the kingdom awaited its calamitous doom and peril.

The kingdom had many citizens living there, with many prominent people such as Zheng He, and the renowned and famous Yongle, the Emperor of that dynasty.

Zheng He was a very reliant and respectable follower of Yongle and was the captain of the journeys at sea. Emperor Yongle was powerful and renowned in the nation as he had made many great changes and improvements to the kingdom. The ancient and historical kingdom was vast and flourished as it contained a mysterious gem that was rumored to bring to its owners' good fortune and immortality.

For a long time, there had not been one battle or outbreak, but finally, an enemy blossomed, wanting to capture this treasure, and break the history of its eternal peace. The enemy's name was Captain Crypto, a nefarious man who led a myriad of devious and evil minions named the Cryptonians.

Mammoth-sized ships detailed with royal navy blue colours sailed across the ocean as it moved towards the kingdom with evil intentions. Iron fiery cannon balls catapulted out of the invading ships towards the kingdom. A kaleidoscope of artillery and mayhem whizzed at barreling speed like the piercing wind. The screams of the citizens, the bellowing and clamoring of rage by the soldiers ready to attack and the distraught wails from mothers and children traversed across the kingdom as war loomed over their heads. An alarming attack was on the way and the end of history and peace had arrived.

“Sire! Our kingdom, IT'S COMING TO AN END!! Peace has finally been broken from its chain. Sir, an enemy, something that has not come upon us for over centuries has arrived. We are totally done for!” Zheng He bellowed towards Yongle.

“You have got to be kidding me, Zheng He. This has to be a...a mistake...this can't be! The peace in our kingdom must not end but we have no choice but to...” Yongle stuttered. “Fight!”

“Yes, my lord!” Zheng He replied hastily.

A cacophony of angst and trepidation exponentially spread through the city as the voice of the incoming ships echoed on and on.

Yongle announced, “It's time to fight for our city! We will not stop until we triumph... Summon the army...”

“Assemble the cannons!” Zheng He commanded as the war against Crypto began.

“Yes sir!” the army replied.

“Attack!”

“YES SIR!”

The battle proceeded as the enemy ships landed at the shores. Hordes of ferocious Cryptonians plummeted towards the rumbling sand as rage twirled and danced in the air surfing along the wind.

“Cryptonians, attack and conquer!” Captain Crypto ordered.

The city trembled with fear as the Cryptonians began to gain power of the battle. The Cryptonians were very powerful, slashing and slicing through any obstacle it encountered. Emperor Yongle was in deep trouble now, but he wasn’t ready to give up yet. A stampede cascaded into the kingdom, raiding the valuables and searching for the gem.

“Gather the archers and bring death towards the enemy!” Zheng He announced.

An assortment of archers lined up horizontally across the top of the castle wall with burning arrows aiming at the enemy.

“Fire!”

Zooming and lacerating the air, a trail of flames leaped towards the souls of the enemies.

The battle became extremely tense as the Cryptonians receded from the entreating searing arrows and suddenly Captain Crypto took to the stage.

“It is I, the famous Captain Crypto. I have returned to take vengeance upon this city. I have returned to take the powerful, immortal and desirable gem. Yongle, surrender while you can, or meet your and the world’s annihilation. Hahaha!” the invincible giant blasted.

“NEVER!”

“Fine then, keep it like that,” Captain Crypto said. “Eradicate the kingdom. Now!” He commanded the Cryptonians.

“Where is this stupid ge...?” Captain Crypto shouted, anxiously looking around him. Before he could finish the sentence, the fearless Zheng He took aim at Captain Crypto’s heart, pulled his bow tautly and let go of the arrow with a loud shout. The soaring arrow pierced Captain Crypto’s heart and he slumped slowly onto the ground, clutching at the weapon impaled upon him.

“Hurray!” Emperor Yongle victoriously shouted, rushing towards Captain Crypto. “VICTORY is ours!” roared Yongle’s army.

Seeing that their captain had been killed, the shattered Cryptonians scrambled towards their ship, trying to escape from their conquerors. But the Emperor’s army was too fast for them, and in no time, the Cryptonians were captured and put into the Kingdom’s prison.

Peace was once again restored in the kingdom. With the precious gem safely in its possession, Emperor Yongle and the citizens of his kingdom enjoyed peace and prosperity for many years to come.

# The Ming Treasure Adventure

*St. Stephen's College Preparatory School, Aprea, Arianna Kalista – 9*

After a long, tiring day of boring history lessons learning about the Ming Dynasty treasure voyages, I went home to study for the first test about one of the voyages of Zheng He and his men. It was already eleven o'clock and I was trying not to fall asleep as words floated in my mind. *The first voyage... Chinese Emperor... massive ships ...*, suddenly, the room started to change. My bed melted away, the curtains and blankets turned into heaps of soft silk, and the cabinets crumbled to bits of coins and jewelry. The colorful painted walls were disappearing into thin air. All of my books, notebooks, school notices and homework were forming into powerful weapons. That was not all, I was shrinking! I looked into the mirror quickly before it vanished and saw that I was actually a real teeny weeny mouse!!!

It was unclear where I was as the floor beneath me suddenly rocked from side-to-side. There was a round window which looked out to the ocean. It was clear that I was on a boat! I looked up and saw a man next to me. It was fleet admiral Zheng He! It was hard to believe my eyes. A rush of excitement ran all the way down my fur. Zheng He wore drapes of long red silk reaching all the way to his ankle, elaborately embroidered with gold dragons. He was trying to estimate how much further the ship had to sail before reaching land. A while later, from one of the portholes at the lower deck of the ship I recognized the land we were heading for, it was Malacca! I knew that it was Malacca because my family and I visited during the summer holidays.

"We are arriving in Malacca, lower the sails. We have to be very polite to the people there," Zheng He ordered as he got ready to get off the ship. As Zheng He stepped off the ship with me hanging to the back of his shoe, a young prince was already at the pier awaiting the arrival of visitors.

"Welcome. What are you doing here?" the prince asked curiously. He was wearing a gold suit with heavy jewelry around his neck.

"I am Zhang He. I am bearing gifts from the Chinese Emperor. Why aren't there many people here for trading?" Zheng He replied as he looked back at his men.

"There have been too many pirate attacks, very few traders dare to step on our land." The prince said sadly. Then the prince let out a loud scream. I realized I had been spotted. "A mouse, a mouse! Let's catch it. I want a new pet." Men started to chase after me. I scampered away as quickly as I could and slipped into a box of treasures. I stayed as still as a little statue, hoping that they would give up their search. All of a sudden, the box started wobbling. I was being carried away. In the distance, I heard the Prince welcome Zhang He into his palace.

I was relieved that they had given up the search for me, as I heard the men call out to the prince, "We lost it. We lost the mouse. Let us bring the gifts into the palace."

"Gifts? What gifts? Oh No! I am in one of the gift boxes..." I said.

"Did you hear something?" One of the men asked. I held on to my breath for dear life.

"No, I didn't. Stop daydreaming and hurry up. We need to get the gifts into the palace, the prince is waiting." One of the other men replied. I was again, relieved.

Then, the next thing I knew, I was in the palace. Suddenly, they opened the box. I dove deeper into the pearls, gold, and gems. Unfortunately, they gently tipped the box over and I toppled out along with all the colourful trading treasures. From the look on Zhang He's face, I knew he saw me. To my surprise, instead of capturing me, he stepped in front of me to block me from the Prince's view. That was my chance to escape. Bewildered, I scurried off to the next room. As the men were busy admiring and organizing the treasures, I gave myself a tour of the grand palace. CLANK! ... .. The sharp noise of crashing swords pierced my ears.

"What was th...?" I shivered. Before I could even finish my thought, the pictures in the gallery tumbled off the walls, missing me by a whisker. I dashed for the entrance of the palace, dodging a huge stone pillar that crumbled next to me. At the entrance I saw the most terrifying scene, the pirates, they

were there, fighting with the Prince, Zheng He and his men. It was total CHAOS! Left, right, through pirates feet I went as swords clashed and hit together above me. That is, until I tripped on a rock. I couldn't get up, I was stuck. They fought viciously.

'FIGHTING THE PIRATES IS NONE OF MY BUSINESS! THIS ADVENTURE IS FUN BUT ALL I WANT IS TO BE NORMAL AGAIN!' I thought in tears of rage. Then, a pirate's sword slipped out of his hand and came shooting towards me. "AHHHHHHHHH!"

"Kali, are you ready for school yet? The school bus is almost here! Plus you have a test today, are you ready for it?" came mum's voice from the kitchen.

"Uhhhh... Coming.... And... I guess?" I shouted back, totally confused. Everything was normal again. 'Maybe it was just a dream!' I thought as I laughed and ran down the stairs. 'What a weird night!'



# Pirate Problems

*St Stephens College Preparatory School, Chan, Otis Chihung James – 11*

It was a dark, gloomy day Zheng He thought as he settled into his usual seat at the bow of the ship. There were good and bad days in sailing, he thought. On the good days, there would be rays of sun reflecting off glittering waves with the pleasant addition of being able to catch fish. Then there would be bad days where it would rain continually, while the clouds hid the sun as if it was playing hide-and-seek.

Suddenly, a lookout yelled something indecipherable. Zheng He immediately snapped awake and sat up straight. His second-in-command relayed what the lookout had said back to the admiral.

"Looks like a whole fleet of pirates, Admiral," warned the sailor.

"No fear," he replied. "Alert the warships!"

"Yes, sir!"

As the sailor ran off, Zheng He stood up and took a glance at the pirate fleet. The pirates had a vast number of ships at their disposal, Zheng He thought. He then shook the grain of doubt out of his mind as he looked at his own warships. They were huge affairs made of wood and strips of iron. On them, he knew, were hundreds of prime fighting men, eager to strike a blow for the Emperor. He took one last glance at the pirates and swore in anger and surprise. The pirate ships were hoisting a flag he knew only so well. It was Chen Zuyi! The most feared pirate to ever infest the seas of Southeast Asia. He frowned. He would have to change his tactics, he knew. He called for his messenger.

"Yes, Admiral?"

"Tell all the ships to go to Palembang. We're going to destroy this damned once and for all. If the ship captains ask who it is, tell them it's Chen Zuyi. GO!"

As the messenger scurried away, Zhang He closed his eyes and tried to think of a tactic that could help him defeat Zuyi.

"Admiral, we're here!"

Zheng He's eyes immediately shot open. He looked around. They had docked at a gigantic wharf with his other 150 ships. The thought for a moment and said, "Unload the soldiers first. Then tell one-eighth of them to stay and guard the treasure ships."

The messenger nodded and charged off, looking like an enraged bull. Zheng He instinctively stood back and studied the situation. He decided to climb one of the mountains to get a better view of the place. He marshalled all of the soldiers into place and started to march.

After several hours of grueling, backbreaking work, they finally reached the top of the mountain. Zheng He groaned. Chen Zuyi's whole army was right at the base of the mountain waiting in ambush for them to return. Zheng He debated on sending a hail of arrows down onto them, but quickly discarded the idea as it would reveal their position and incur casualties from returning fire. He finally decided to ask Chen to surrender. If Chen refused, he could overwhelm them with his superior numbers. He roared to the enemy army:

"Chen Zuyi! Surrender now or we will attack!"

Chen's army turned around and around trying to find the spot where the voice had come from. When they finally identified Zheng He's position, Chen Zuyi roared back:

"All right! I'll come personally tomorrow to meet you at the wharf."

As soon as he had finished speaking, Zheng He knew he was lying. He considered attacking now, but realized that in doing so, they would lose the element of utter surprise. He grinned fiercely and told his army to march back down the mountain.

After a few days, Zheng He started to worry. Chen Zuyi still hadn't come to meet him, despite his advisor's constant assurances that he and his army would come. Zheng He's own army was already in place, ready to fight. Suddenly, he heard the constant drum of horse-hooves beating down on the ground. He looked around the barricade and was surprised to see Chen Zuyi riding towards his camp.

Chen yelled, "Zheng He! I've come to surrender. NOT!" The he screamed to the army behind him, "Attack!" and they charged forward, seemingly appear out of thin air.

Zheng quickly yelled orders to his own army, and they streamed out of their tents and formed a shield wall against the charging enemy. The air filled with screams and groans of agony. Zheng He directed his cavalry to attack the left flank. This forced the enemy flank to try to turn and run in a different direction, but they had blocked themselves. As they crashed with an audible clang into each other, Zheng He immediately knew that he had made a good move, and though thousands of soldiers were falling, he had gained the advantage.

Finally, he decided to end this bloody battle and ordered his reserve unit of one thousand men to charge the front. Overwhelmed, the enemy soldiers threw down their weapons and surrender. One fierce-looking soldier came forward and spoke:

“All right. You win,” Chen Zuyi said bitterly. For the first time in what seemed like years, Zheng He allowed his men to see his smile grow broad across his face. He had defeated the strongest pirate in all of Asia. He couldn't wait to get back to China!

# Adventure on the Sea

*St Stephen's College Prep School, Chen, Daniel – 12*

A long time ago, there were lots of vicious pirates, fighting and killing their way for treasures; not stopping until they got gleaming gold and precious jewels. They were ruthless villains, mean and filthy...

In China, the emperor, Huang Jiang Ming Tong, was a bit scared.

"Ooh, I'm scared! Pirates might kill me!" "He'd whimper every night to his nanny. Now, Huang Jiang Ming Tong was only eight years old, and of course was scared of everything.

"There, there, kid. Nothing to be afraid of," Nanny would answer, but she herself would be trembling. Whole of China was terrified of the pirates.

Time went by...

Huang Jiang Ming Tong grew up and he wanted to defeat the pirates. He thought and thought and finally came up with an idea! He would beat the pirates at their own game: overseas! He found a very capable admiral in his own navy, his name was Zheng, who quickly gathered support from the people in the country and in a month, the navy had approximately five hundred thousand men! They decided to fight back. They were trained with swords, bows and arrows and shields. Expert sailors manned the ships, and the fleet was ready.

"Take this with you!" shouted the emperor to the admiral. He was holding a heavy box, full of treasures.

"When you go to other countries, go to see the rulers and offer them some of these precious treasures so we can make treaties with them!"

"Your Majesty, your wish is my command," Replied the admiral, who was famous for his bushy moustache and his ingenious strategies which he gets while twisting the ends of his moustache. The whole fleet of navy departed from the royal port in Peking (now Beijing) and set out towards the pirates.

The ships were massive, made of fine wood. There were many gun ports, with cannons ready to fire. The sails flapped in the wind and carved on the bows were ugly mythical faces. The ships were so polished that they gleamed in the sunlight. It was a most astonishing sight.

The "Ming treasure fleet", as they were called, had many dangerous and exciting adventures. Here is one of them ...

One foggy day, the navy was looking for pirates to battle.

"We look smart in our uniforms!" gloated a navy soldier.

"Yes, absolutely, my dear fellow!" another agreed. "I reckon we might wipe out all the pirates from the face of the Earth!" All the soldiers chuckled and giggled. Suddenly it all became quiet. The Admiral was here.

"Attention!" he barked.

"Yes, Sir!" the soldiers replied.

"Now, whose turn is it to go up and look out for danger in the crow's nest?" he said, not so loud now.

"Me, but ...but I've got vertigo," stammered a scared soldier.

"Oh, who's after him?" Admiral Zheng asked.

"I'm next," bellowed a buff man called Ben.

"Okay, see you up there," said the Admiral. A few minutes later, there was a really loud shout!

**"PIRATES ON STARBOARD! PIRATES ON STARBOARD!"** The navy soldier jumped to their feet and swore at the pirates, fired cannons and shouted war cries: the fight was on! Cannonballs flew and zipped everywhere. Swords were drawn and the clang of metal was deafening. Suddenly, there was a big thumping noise! The pirates dropped their weapons and retreated, thinking it was a giant coming to hunt them. It was actually some navy soldiers beating some drums! The soldiers laughed and howled, and they gave chase. Little did they know, a whole armada of pirate ships were waiting for them. "We've got you now, fools!" said the leader of the pirates. All the pirates pointed their weapons at the naval soldiers and chanted, "Surrender or die! Surrender or die! Surrender or die!"

"Maybe you should surrender instead, pirates!" said the cunning Admiral Zheng while twiddling his moustache. Without the pirates knowing, he sent messenger doves to his backup fleet. Out of the mist, a whole fleet of naval warships appeared and surrounded the pirate ships. From the warships, the beating of drums were heard. They opened fire on the pirate ships, blasting holes everywhere, letting water rush into the hulls. Before the ship sank, some naval soldiers hopped onto the main pirate ship and got all the loot, killing the leading pirate (to prove that they killed him they chopped off his head) and all the pirates standing in their way with their sharp swords. The pirates either died of drowning or got captured by the navy.

After this battle, Admiral Zheng became so famous that his name was known as far as South Africa. Many countries wanted to sign treaties with China because no one wanted to be their enemies! The whole fleet returned to China and showed the head of the leader of the pirates to the emperor (which was already kind of rotting), and gave him all the pirates' treasure. In return, emperor Huang Jiang Ming Tong elevated Zheng's rank to second in command, only under himself.

Of course, there were more adventures, but those are stories for other days. China had relationships with many foreign countries, states and cities, for instance: India, Arabia, East Africa and more! (This was all written in Admiral Zheng's diary and this is only one chapter in it). Here is another story inside Zheng's diary...

"This is our last journey, guys," a navy soldier said. Admiral Zheng said this himself as he was getting old and tired. On their way back from South Africa, they were running out of food supplies and they needed food.

"Land ho!" someone shouted. Everybody looked. An island! But there were people on it! Admiral Zheng was gambling because he didn't know whether the islanders would be friends or foe. . And what a surprise for them! They were extremely friendly and danced for the navy as well as served them drinks and fish. This island would later be known as Hong Kong, but more on that later. The natives sang a song called "I Love Dong Dong" which sounded like "I Love Hong Kong" so maybe that's where the island got its name. Some of the navy stayed and the others went back home. Sadly, on the way, Admiral Zheng died and the whole of China wept and grieved for him. They built a statue and put a brass plaque that read "Zheng was a hero. He lived well."

# Zheng He's Fleet

*St Stephen's College Preparatory School, Cheung, Jesse – 9*

"Look, Zheng He's Fleet is here!" Chen whispered under his breath, awestruck by the sheer size and grandeur of the ships. Chen had always dreamed of joining Zheng He's valiant and undefeatable crew. Only nineteen years old, he lived in an impoverished and remote village in Nanjing. His childhood had been rough and was a constant fight for survival, in search for food and resources. Orphaned by seven years of age when his parents died in a plague, Chen felt determined to help Emperor Xuande to obtain riches, then spread this wealth with his poor neighbours. Chen practiced his fighting skills and educated himself about gunpowder and cannons to increase his chances of being chosen by Zheng He himself.

The year was 1431 and Zheng He was commencing his seventh expedition from China to Africa to explore and discover foreign territories. The first time Chen met Zheng He, he immediately felt threatened by Zheng He's tall, sturdy build and unique intellect. Chen passed the difficult entry test and gained the highest scores. Zheng He handpicked Chen to be his lieutenant, and outlined all the important rules on their fleet. As the ships were about to set off, Chen waved goodbye sadly to his homeland in Nanjing and returned to his dirty and smelly cabin. Zheng He's ships sailed across China, distributing wealth to poor Chinese people from Liujigang, Quanzhou and Changle.

One day they set off to Qui Nhon and were confronted by nasty Vietnamese pirates. These gruesome pirates wore eye-patches and had evil grins stretching across their faces. Their pirate ships attacked Zheng He's ships mercilessly by throwing hundreds of grenades. Zheng He ordered Chen and his soldiers to destroy his enemies using their latest invention "Flying-Cloud Thunderclap Cannon"!! This hollow cast iron shell was packed with deadly, explosive gunpowder. Suddenly, "Boom! Boom!" Some pirate ships exploded! Then, another gigantic, destructive explosion burned down all the Vietnamese pirate ships. There were no survivors on the opposing side and Zheng He's crew were the victors.

Next stop, Zheng He's ships arrived at Malacca where thousands of people were starving and had no access to clean water. With his heart of gold, Zheng He commanded his soldiers to give out juicy pork buns and water to the people. Then, they sailed their ships to the ports of Ayuttnaya, Sunargaon, Pandua, Beruwala and Galle. Chen had never heard of or seen so many exotic islands before. He was amazed by the splendid architecture of the Buddhist monasteries in Ayuttnaya. On the way, Zheng He's crew also dived in the deep seas to discover sunken ships, ancient galleons and rubies .

Halfway towards Quillion, they were suddenly ambushed by cutthroat Indian pirates with a fleet of two hundred ships. "Go and kill those Indians, who have been terrorizing the villagers. Chop their heads off and blow up their ships. We must win! It is a fight for our survival and we must maintain our reputation as the Master of the Seas." yelled Zheng He. He commanded Chen and his thousands of skillful sailors to assume an attack position. His loyal crew loaded their cannons and fired without remorse at the Indians. Sadly, the unbearable fight continued for five months. Zheng He's crew advanced heavily while the Indian pirates lost numerous men, but they were persistent and continued fighting until they had only five ships remaining. The Indians tried to sail away, but Zheng He's crews attacked the enemy ships with their latest weapon – "Multiple Bullets Magazine Erupter". This bronze cannon could fire up to 100 lead balls and Zheng He finally captured the enemy ships. He went so far to prove his point that he commended his soldiers to place the Indian pirates inside the cannon, and blasted them into infinity.

After sailing the rough sea for another month, Zheng He arrived at a place in Somalia called Mogadishu and witnessed hostile terrorists destroying the cities. Zheng He wanted to protect the citizens of Mogadishu from this terror, so he ordered Chen to take the lead and attack. Chen shot them down with his guns and took out his immense sword. He slayed the men swiftly without any injury but

was suddenly pushed aside by the leader of the terrorists. Chen used all his tremendous kicking and punching movements but it was not effective on the strong man. Finally, Chen was able to grab his sword firmly and stabbed him in the heart fiercely. After the leader was defeated, Zheng He directed his ships towards Aden, Lasa and Hormaz. However, the cities were filled with awful men scowling, so Zheng He ordered his sailors to sail back to Nanjing. When the ship arrived at Nanjing after five months, Chen noticed the Emperor and his court awaiting their arrival at the dock. People of Nanjing cheered with joy and threw flower petals in the air to celebrate their return. Chen was proud of their accomplishments and waved at his people excitedly, happy to finally be in the comfort of his hometown.

Emperor Xuande thanked Chen for leading such a fearless crew and exploring many untouched places. He was rewarded with tonnes of gold. Chen had accomplished what he originally intended to do. He had a strong sense of fulfillment and returned to his village to share these riches with his poor neighbours. Now, he also had a heart of gold.

# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

*St Stephens College Preparatory School, Chih, Vianna – 9*

I am sure you've heard of those greedy pirates who sail across seas to steal gold, most of them do. But a huge fleet of Chinese ships set sail in the early 1400s, which carried cargoes of gifts instead! More of what I think happened, read carefully and you'll see!

Back in Ming Dynasty, Emperor Yongle sent Zheng He to sail the oceans to meet emperors and rulers of different kingdoms. There were seven voyages, and people on board had amazing adventures in many places. The Emperor put gold, silk and other precious items onto the ships to give away as wonderful gifts. Zheng He and his crew often met friendly people who were the perfect people to have gifts. They also encountered mean people like the usual pirates or hostile armies who didn't like him. These travelers went to places such as Africa, Vietnam, Thailand, Arabia, Red Sea and more places. Zheng He set sail away from the shore with 62 ships and more than 20,000 men. He was very excited for his first voyage, a mission ordered by Emperor Yongle. After departing from Thailand, the fleet arrived in a place named Malacca. Zheng He came to the elegant palace and traded silk with the Thai king. When Zheng He and his small group of servants left, danger arrived. Some forces against the king attacked him, but Zheng He captured most of them and threw the forces out into the middle of the sea.

If I was on one of Zheng He's ships, I'd be enjoying the cool breeze by the sea. Then I would check the polished gifts before they were given away to someone else. When the ships sail, I would scan the ocean view for seagulls and sunset as a best scene of my life. Likewise, Zheng He would fight the bad pirates or armies who'd attack them. Just like how Zheng He got attacked by Ceylonese king named Alagakkonara, a king who did not think before acting.

During the third voyage, one of the places Zheng He went to was a kingdom named Ceylon. King Alagakkonara was silly, so he thought Zheng He might steal from him or attack Ceylon. He sent most of his soldiers to block Zheng He's way back, but he didn't think Zheng He would be so smart. Zheng He knew his way was blocked soon, and he already had a plan. He would crash through the city walls and would surprise the king with an attack from the ceiling. He would then capture the royal family and bring them back to Ming. Zheng He led some soldiers into the palace and attacked the king very quickly. He captured him and his family and brought them back to Ming Dynasty to see the emperor.

After the sixth voyage, can't there be a tenth voyage? Why does it have to be only seventh voyages, and why did it stop? Did Zheng He die just after the seventh voyage, and when did he die?

Zheng He didn't die afterwards but he died before returning to their country. Emperor Yongle died when Zheng He was on the journey. The ministers knew they wasted a lot of money for the voyages, so they stopped Zheng He from going further. Suddenly, Zheng He felt ill on the ship while going back to Calicut. He died soon on the ship. Everyone was sad. The fleet returned to Ming Dynasty with this bad news. No one ever travelled the seas on the fleet again.

I like the story of Ming Treasure Voyages very much because I am interested in Chinese history. I wish that brave Zheng He hadn't died so soon, so his part in the history would be greater. Sometime maybe, another better person will soon take place in history "ruling the seas"!

# The Journey to the Underworld

*St Stephen's College Preparatory School, Choy, Lut – 9*

If I had known about the trouble and the dangers I would encounter, I wouldn't have gone on to become a member of this ill-fated voyage. Alas, I was Zheng He's star pupil... so my fate was sealed.

The first voyage had gone smoothly but on our return we went to Sumatra to defeat a pirate uprising. A mysterious foreigner had joined our company and even though Zheng He had organized the journey he was not in our midst. Thus, I was made captain and was left in charge of the ship. As we sailed towards Sumatra a devastating whirlpool appeared and we were stopped dead in our tracks.

A giant, pale figure rose out of the centre of the whirlpool and said, " You have killed my son, the Pirate of Sumatra and now I shall kill you!" She vanished as quickly as she had appeared and only then did I realize the figure was none other than the goddess of the sea, Mazu!

The whirlpool sucked us into the watery depths of the sea and then I lost consciousness...

When I woke up, we were sailing straight towards these enormous, black rusty gates. The water was dark and it ate away at the sides of the ship. Flames were everywhere and the sunlight was long gone. The ship sailed on until we were in front of the black gates of the underworld. Then, the acidic currents swept us through them. I tried to turn the ship around but my body would not obey. I could only watch in horror as the ship continued to drift further on.

Our ship sailed all the way to the throne of the god of death, King Yan. Surrounding him were the Ten Kings of the Underworld. King Yan bellowed to us in a terrible voice, "Who goes there?"

I tried to answer him but then I remembered I couldn't speak, so I motioned to him that my lips were sealed. He snapped his fingers and I could suddenly speak and move again.

I said, "We are the crew of the Ming Treasure Ships. and the wrath of Mazu brought us here."

Then I told him about the whole voyage.

After listening to our strange tale, he took mercy on us and decided to send us back to the surface world. He also gave Mazu the soul of the Pirate of Sumatra to comfort her.

The rest of the voyage went smoothly but I was so shaken by the time I returned that I decided to retire. I went on living to a ripe old age in peace and peril-free on the periphery.



# Zheng He's Adventures

*St Stephen's College Preparatory School, Ho, Marcus – 10*

Inside a luxurious palace in China lived a very wealthy emperor. He had lots of riches and gold inside the palace that made him feel proud and satisfied.

One day, he was thinking of a plan. He said, "Let's go for an adventure around the world. No one has done it in the past and this could be very exciting and challenging!" The Emperor's assistants agreed but they were wondering who would be in charge of this mission? Where will we explore? Who will be going? Will we give presents to other countries? Suddenly, the Emperor came up with an idea and exclaimed, "I know! Why don't we call Zheng Ha to take the lead, and find some of our army's greatest generals?" Everyone agreed and cheered.

The Emperor's assistants soon got Zheng Ha and sent him to the Emperor's palace. Zheng Ha accepted the great command with honor, and started to prepare for the great voyage.

After a few months of preparations for food, equipment, weapons and training, Zheng Ha and his team were ready for the voyage. The Emperor also gave Zheng Ha some of his treasury including gold, silk and jewelry to give away as gifts in case he made friends with peaceful people.

The Emperor gave a hearty goodbye to Zheng Ha and his team when they set out to ride the raging sea on his humongous boat.

The first day in the sea was calm until suddenly, the sky turned as dark as black and a scary, ruthless band of pirates came to attack the ship. They wanted to rob Zheng Ha's treasury! Luckily, Zheng Ha's ship was equipped with cannons. James, who was in charge of the cannons, started to fire the gigantic cannons towards the pirates. The war was very violent, and few of Zheng Ha's people were injured. When the war ended, they continued their journey.

They spent a few days to arrive their first destination—India. They were very excited because India was a mysterious country to them.

When they arrived India, all the citizens there greeted Zheng Ha and his team. "This is quite a peaceful place." Zheng Ha said.

After they took a break for a few hours, they continued marching forward, helping people who they met in this new city. "It seems like that we are not only exploring the world," Zheng Ha continued, "it also seems like that we are also spreading our friendship to others!"

By dawn, the crew was exhausted. Suddenly, a woman found out about them. She asked, "Are you really tired?"

Zheng Ha replied, "Yes, we all are."

"Would you like to come to my house to take a rest and to refresh yourself?" the woman asked.

"Oh yes, it is very kind of you!" Zheng Ha replied in a warm and happy tone.

"Good!" said the woman, "Come inside, I will fix dinner for all of you." The team went into the woman's house and had dinner. Everyone was amazed as it was the first time they had Indian cuisine and it was exotic! After dinner, they got ready to sleep by putting up their tents. Very soon, everyone was snoring loudly like pigs.

The next day, Zheng Ha and his team woke up early. They cooked breakfast for themselves. The woman was pleased to see the team settle down nicely for themselves. When it was time to go, Zheng Ha thanked the woman.

“Thanks for your hospitality. I want to give you something very valuable as a gift.” Zheng Ha said. He opened a big bag full of precious gold and silk. “These are all for you.” He added.

“Oh! Thank you very much!” the woman exclaimed.

“You are most welcome.” Zheng Ha replied. It was time for them to continue their journey and they headed back to their ship. But when they arrived at the city docks, they found that their ship was gone! “Blimey!” James exclaimed. “Our ship has disappeared!” Everyone gasped in awe!

At this moment everybody panic and felt hopeless except Zheng Ha. “Everyone please calm down and listen to me!” he shouted. Now everyone was as silent as the dead sea. “I’ve got a great idea!” Zheng Ha said, “I know the palace of the Indian king is not that far from here. Maybe we could go there to ask for help!”

They arrived at the grand palace of India. There were guards armed with long guns guarding the enormous gate of the Palace. Zheng Ha told the guards the reason they were here and surprisingly they were allowed to enter the Palace! Zheng Ha bowed down to the King and said, “My mighty King, we come from China. To show our respect to you and your country, we are giving you all this gold and silk for you and for your country. Also, my Honor, our ship at the city dock has disappeared. What should we do?”

The King replied in a mysterious expression. “Well, I do believe your ship will appear very soon and I hereby decree that China and India are now friends forever!” everybody cheered. This was the best news ever!

They left the Palace and headed back to the docks, and found that their ship was back! “This is weird.” Zheng Ha said, “Why is our ship suddenly back?”

“Aw, it doesn’t matter now! The most important is that we have to spread the wonderful news to China now!”

“You’re right James,” Zheng Ha replied, “Let’s go!” Everybody cheered.

The whole voyage was a gigantic success. On this voyage, China not only went to explore India, but also spread their friendship too. This made the whole voyage even more meaningful. Everybody in China was very proud about their success on their very first trip. “Where are we going on the other 6 voyages, Zheng Ha?” James asked.

Zheng Ha replied, “I’m not sure James but I certainly hope that the next country we visit is also a great country.....”

# A Deadly Voyage

*St. Stephen's College Preparatory School, Kwok, Sum Yu – 9*

As the ship departed from the coast of the Southern Sea of China, Young Captain Zhuang knew that he was going to go give away some treasure. He sat down on his chair and thought for a while.

"Actually, should I keep it or should I give it?"

It took him a while to figure out what to do. He always made the right choice.

It was the time where pirates were cruel and evil and mean but he didn't care. As long no one killed him he would be fine. His best sailor, Chen Wen, was looking at him the whole without blinking. Captain Zhuang looked back and saw Chen looking at him. He was surprised that he was interested in him so he told Sailor Chen what was he thinking.

"Aye mate, we know that these times, evil pirates." Chen Wen replied in a miserable face.

"These times you'll know why. I ain't gotta tell you."

The ship stopped by a little island on their way to the northern sea. The three little pirates, Meagan, Annabel and Alicia, stood and looked at the island.

"Look! There's some pal over there!" they exclaimed.

And sure enough when they went on the island they saw two tough and strong men. "Ahoy Matey! I am Captain Zhuang from Beijing. Would ye like to join! We'll give you enough money and food." Of course, they joined the gang.

"Avast ye, we're going off to The Canadian Ocean where the treasure fleet is. We pirates will give out money, but we will pass the Northern China Sea," said Captain Zhuang.

"To our new pirates: We're the Ming Treasure team. We serve for pride and I hereby present ye my seadog, the old salt, Chen Wen the sailor. So, what're we waitin' for? Yo Ho Ho! We'll set sail to the northern seas! Somebody raise the Jolly Roger!"

Not far away from the southern sea, the northern sea was ruled by a very famous team of evil pirates: Captain Chua's Pirates. They are known as "The Killer Pirates" as they always kill and there is a theory that no one can ever beat them because their weapons are too strong and powerful. But Captain Zhuang knew that it wasn't real. One day he would beat them.

Many days passed as the sailors, pirates and Captain Zhuang prepared their strong weapons to defeat Captain Chua's Pirates. He was pretty satisfied that he had so many dangerous weapons and his pirates worked hard, except one, Pirate Rong Yang. He always pretended to be nice but he was cruel. He always messed things up and today was his punishment.

"Blow the man down! Let him walk the plank! E's bad, he's a maggot! E's going to feed the fish! E's a landlubber! Me fellow pirates, let this be lesson to you!" shouted Captain Zhuang.

All the other pirates had never seen Captain Zhuang shouting at someone. They were all surprised and fascinated. At last, Rong Yang went on the plank and drowned. That was the end of his journey.

"Chen, I'll talk to you later. The others, go and fetch the monkeys," said Captain Zhuang.

"Aye!" the pirates chanted.

"Chen, come with me. I want to take you to a secret place. It's at the rear of the ship." Captain Zhuang ordered. They went to the back of the ship and there was a secret tunnel leading to a tremendously beautiful room where there was a small table with two seats and some tea.

"Have some tea." Captain Zhuang said,

"Never tell any pirate about this matey. Now I will tell you how to be a better sailor."

Suddenly, Chen heard thunder and lightning. Thunder roared and he knew if lightning struck the boat would sink. He quickly ran through the secret tunnel and told the pirates about the chance the boat would sink and when they looked down there was a gigantic sperm whale! They were all frightened when this chaos happened. Even worse, they were almost in the Northern sea!

"Thar she blows!" said one of the pirates as they panicked and panicked.

As the storm disappeared, they calmed down, but there was more trouble ahead! Now they were at the Northern seas where Captain Chua's Pirates were waiting for them. The Captain sent the military force to protect them and defeat the pirates.

"Avast ye," said Zhuang, "Chen and ye buccaneer will go on the crow's nest to see what will happen. The rest of ye, get out ye cutlass and the bombs. Man—O—war!"

It was a horrible war that killed lots of people. But the team that had hope defeated the unstoppable pirates and had set sail for a new journey after they visited the Canadian Ocean.

# Zheng He and the Tiger

*St. Stephen's College Preparatory School, Lai, Cheuk Kei Brandon – 10*

In the preparing of a fleet of sixty ships, that would bring the great Chinese explorer Zheng He and his massive crew of thirty thousand men, mostly professional soldiers and about one hundred and eighty doctors on the first of seven amazing journeys, a lot of work had to be done. A gigantic harbor was needed to fit these sixty enormous ships, each four hundred feet long. The loud noise and strange smell from the dirty ships attracted a number of animals to wander around the ships, and some even got on the ships, causing all kinds of trouble.

A long time passed, and the long-awaited day of departure finally arrived. Emperor Yongle himself came to wish the sailors good luck and a safe journey, and of course, ask them to bring a large amount of treasure and gold from other countries home. With a final goodbye, the fleet left the harbor.

The huge ships had more than five hundred cabins for the crew. Zheng He also had his own “first class” cabins on one of the ships. There were also kitchens on all of the ships. The ships were kept in a very good order and the sailors were all in a good mood when they set off.

The fleet travelled peacefully for the first few days of their journey. The crew did as they were told, and they didn't grumble. The only problem was that on the ship that Zheng He was on, some of the food had gone missing, and there were cracks all around the ship and nobody knew why. At night on the third day, Zheng He and the crew said good night as usual and went to sleep.

The next morning at dawn, Zheng He and the crew were woken up by a loud roar, the roar of an animal. Zheng He opened his door and saw a crazy sight. Members of his crew were being chased by a tiger! Panic gripped everyone on board, as they tried to run to safety. The ship rocked left and right, looking as it might sink into the sea any moment.

Zheng He was in a panic. How could he save the ship when the crew was being chased around it by an angry-looking, large, hungry tiger?

Suddenly, Zheng He got an idea. He shouted to the men on another ship to come over and help. The men grabbed a large net, trapped the tiger, and locked it up.

The men were so relieved to be alive, they thanked the men from the other ship again and again.

After this horrible experience, everyone on board was more eager to get to their destination quickly to avoid anything unexpected again.

Fortunately, the crew spotted land a few weeks later. The ships parked into the bay, and Zheng He and the officials left the ship to meet the king of that land.

The trip to the palace was smooth and easy. The people there seemed nice and polite, and the guards let them into the palace without hesitation.

“Your majesty,” they said to the king of that land, which they found out was Arabia. “We come in peace from the empire of China. We have bought presents to exchange with you.”

“Presents?” the king brightened up, “Interesting. Let me see.” The king snatched the silks that Zheng He had brought. “Thank you.” He said delightfully, “Take these ostriches and join us for lunch.”

They had a very delicious lunch, with all kinds of tasty food from Arabia. Zheng He only refused to eat a kind of meat that he said “didn't look well”. Only one official ate that meat, and he didn't look well!

After lunch, Zheng He said farewell to the king and they continued on the journey. However, as they neared the bay where they left the ships, there was shout, and out jumped an army holding swords, ready for a fight. Right there, the official who ate the meat Zheng He refused to eat, fainted, and died. Zheng He heard the king laugh “hahahaha!”. They've been tricked! The king was trying to trick them into giving them more treasure!

Zheng He shouted to the ship for help. The crew arrived in an instance. Luckily, most of the crew were professional soldiers, and they started to fight. One of the soldiers had a terrific idea. He let the tiger from the ship and led it down to the battlefield. The hungry tiger, which hadn't eaten in days, let out a loud roar, and scared everyone away. The soldier who let it down fed it a lot of meat. He told their crew to calm down, then let them back to their ship.

The crew, horrified by what happened during their first journey at sea, sailed home as quick as they could. However, back at home, they were given a hero's welcome. The Emperor invited them all to the palace for a feast. When he heard about Arabia and the tiger, he gave Zheng He the tiger as a gift. And soon after, they started to plan for the next journey.

# Zheng He's Last Voyage

*St Stephen's College Preparatory School, Lau, Alessio – 11*

*Cling! Cling! Cling!* I hear the sound of a set of keys through the metal prison door. The keys are attached to the belt of a terrifying giant, a man who I wished I would never lay eyes on again. *Chick, shack!* The lock twists and the door grinds open, a beam of white sunlight stings my eyes. Fresh air rushes into the cell, after days of nothing but the foul pong of damp walls and rotten fish, it is truly divine. Two colossal guards march in, unshackle me, grab my shoulders firmly, and drag me out of my cell. Sliding along the main corridor of the dungeon, the sound of their heavy chests breathing helps me to forget about the searing pain coursing through my body.

They free me from my heavy chains. "Can I go?"

One of the two bear-like guards replies, "The emperor wishes to see you!"

I feel shocked, nervous, and gleeful all at the same time, if I can just explain what happened, he would set me free.

After being escorted through a maze of endless corridors, we finally arrive at the grand hall. Like upright mahjong pieces, the ministers and courtiers are standing to attention. At the very end the Emperor is seated on a golden throne.

Fear strikes me. The Emperor speaks directly to me, "Ahhh, Vice Admiral Cheuk Lang, so nice to finally see you. Where are my captains, sailors and soldiers... WHERE IS ZHEN?"

Stuttering, I reply "Your... Your Ma... Majesty, I... I am... real... really so... sorry... please allow me to explain..."

The Emperor shouts, "SPIT IT OUT MAN! Tell me the truth at once! I won't feel sorry for you when your head rolls across my courtyard floor!"

I find my voice and begin...

*Our fleet was in the center of the Indian Ocean. We had been at sea for five months, there were only about ten days left before we would approach the shores of the Mughal Empire.*

*Due to the success and near completion of our voyage, Admiral Zhen decided to hold a celebration. Every ship in the fleet was a hub of revelry and joy.*

*One of our captains onboard the lead ship turned to a lieutenant and said merrily, "You know what, the Indian Ocean is well known for its sea monsters, but where are they? Our boats are too mighty!!" The crew erupted into laughter.*

*Zhen shouted with an air of superiority, "There are no such things as Sea Monsters!"*

*During the party, a yeoman began to sing a beautiful ballad, the water was still and it seemed to amplify his voice across the fleet, just as he reached the last verse, it happened.*

*It started with loud splashing noises. Splash! Splash! Then a thousand gallons of water seemed to lift one hundred feet into the air, then came crashing down onto the enormous hulls of our ships. Then it all went still again, like nothing had happened. All of a sudden, the boat started to rock between starboard to port, this was confusing, as the sea was so still it reflected the stars in the sky. The rocking became more and more violent. Panic broke out across the ship. That's when we first saw it. Something enormous rose up slowly and silently from the water. Myself and Zhen raced to the port side to take a closer look, what we saw boggled our brains, a tentacle, like that of a squid, but the size of about forty fully grown elephants trunk to tail! Zhen was white as a sheet, he turned to me and said, "I met some Arabian sailors many years ago, they told me about a fleet being decimated by a colossal ocean monster, they called it..."*

*"It's the Kraken!" howled a scout. The war horns blew across the fleet and our defensive forces mustered as fast as they could. We loaded our muskets.*

*"3,2,1, Fire" shouted the captains. Boom! Boom! Boom! There is no sound on earth as awesome as four hundred ships firing full broadsides all at the same time. Nothing could have survived that. Every cannon launched their cannon balls at the same time; on top of that, the archers had shot thousands of fire arrows towards the kraken. We were one hundred percent sure that this beast was dead. The gunpowder smoke began to clear. A giant yellow eye appeared through the fog of war.*

*With the first swing of its tentacle, our best ships were smashed into chopsticks-sized pieces of timber. The remaining soldiers screamed for help. I can still hear them today. The evil beast followed us. It was as quick as lightning. Within twenty seconds, we were caught up in one of the kraken's long tentacles. It lifted the entire treasure ship into the air. The colossus held ships in each one of its eight long limbs, flipping them over and smashing them into each other. It was at that moment, I realized that the brute was not just destroying the fleet but it was looking for something.*

*The kraken was stuffing its beak with all of the gold and silk we had brought to trade with the Mughal Empire!*

*Crack! Crack! Crack! All the other ships were effortlessly smashed. Finally, the kraken focused its huge eye on us. I thought to myself, "This is the end, I could take my chances in the water but I'm vice admiral!" Before I could make a decision, a huge tentacle silently rose up through the clouds above. Then like a meteorite, it screamed down crashing directly through the hull. The powerful strike tossed Zhen and myself in opposite directions. This was the last time I would see the great admiral.*

The Emperor slowly stands up from his throne. He walks towards me with a sad look upon his face, "Argh! This is the most terrifying thing I have ever heard. Vice Admiral Cheuk Lang, forgive me, you are free to go."

# Quantum Quagmire

*St Stephen's College Preparatory School, Lau, Meagan – 9*

In the 22<sup>nd</sup> century, quantum computing and self-learning A.I. have reshaped mankind, the world seems like a very different place. The air is clean and the skies are crystal clear. Well, as long as you are rich enough to stay inside the walled cities, that is.

Milly and Marc aren't so lucky. They live in one of the super slums that thrive on the rubbish discarded by the wealthy. These places are filthy. Millions of people are crammed in together. Life is hard and short.

"I'm sick of rummaging through these piles of worthless junk, we haven't found anything valuable for days."

"Would you just shut up? You know how this works? One good find will keep us full for weeks."

Just as Milly was deciding which side of Marc's face she was going to slap, she saw a curious box hidden under some old computer parts, "Hey, Marc, take a look at this."

Marc paid no attention, he was busy trying to pull an old iPad 68 out of a broken desk drawer. Milly pulled out the box and read the official-looking writing on the top. "Property of the U.S.W. Government, Top Secret," she muttered. Without thinking, she smashed the two huge padlocks and opened the box. Inside it was a curious, small pyramid.

Milly removed it from its protective case and held it in her hands. It was sleek and shiny, smooth as glass. Examining it closely, she flipped it upside down to inspect its base. It was covered in small, round, grey buttons — twenty or so. She started pressing random buttons, but nothing happened. She flipped it upright and discovered that the tip of the pyramid was now pulsing electric blue. After a few more pulses, the light turned red and a blinding white flash consumed the whole area! Milly and Marc were both dazed by the sudden flash. Suddenly, they were stirred by the sounds of seagulls and people speaking Chinese. After a few minutes, their vision slowly returned. Milly and Marc saw a huge, red, wooden ship right in front of them. They knew they were now in China, but everyone was dressed in old-fashioned clothes. Then, Marc saw the black, shiny pyramid Milly was holding. He gasped, "That's an X15D, top-secret tech! Where did you get it?"

A man dressed in military uniform walked past and spoke, "Excuse me, I am Admiral Lee, who are you?"

Milly replied calmly, "Oh! My name is Milly."

"How about the man over there?" pressed Admiral Lee.

"Marc? Oh, he is my husband and we have come from the future using this pyramid, I believe."

"Can I borrow this pyramid for a second?" asked the admiral. Milly passed the X15D to Admiral Lee.

Suddenly, Marc rushed back to them, "Eh, excuse me, Admiral. May I ask, that ship, what is it for?"

"Ha! That ship is a treasure ship. We're on a mission to find treasure on different islands."

"Wow!" cried Milly and Marc.

"If you want to join us, come! We can all find treasure together," added Admiral Lee.

"Thanks Admiral Lee!" Milly and Marc bowed down to thank the kind admiral.

The treasure ship started to set sail on the enormous waves rolling on the vast sea. As Milly, Marc and Admiral Lee were chatting enthusiastically, they heard a screech coming from outside.

"Arghh! Help me!" cried a crewmember.

"Hey! What's up?" asked Admiral Lee.

The crewman stuttered, "A...a...a...a Admiral, there is a beast, it...it has caught one of our men and it is still there!"

Then, the poor crewman burst into tears. Milly could tell that he was frightened and in a state of shock.

The three of them ran with urgency to the side of the vessel. Out of the deep blue sea, the beast rose. It was a giant, with a horn protruding from its head, lifeless black eyes and rows of razor-sharp teeth. The beast was covered in thick red scales that oozed with poisonous slime; it was terrifying! The admiral took out his gun and shot the beast, it let out a deafening roar. The beast used its horn to defend itself, and then it rose out of the inky sea and bit the admiral's arm. Enraged, Milly grabbed a bow, locked in on the beast and fired a silver, pointed arrow directly into the creature's eye.

The beast was blinded, but it could still hear, feel and smell. With the huge sea creature left vulnerable, Marc found a stick of dynamite. He lit it and threw it up into the gaping mouth of the monster. An explosion engulfed the evil creature and destroyed it.



Marc, Milly and Admiral Lee lay on the ruined deck looking up at the sun. Relieved to have survived the encounter, they caught their breath. Milly spotted a small, shiny object out of the corner of her eye. She grabbed it, looking at it closely. It was a small piece of jade shaped into a cone. “Admiral Lee, can you pass me the X15D pyramid, please?” said Milly. Admiral Lee passed her the piece of top-secret tech. Milly observed the base and found that there was a missing piece shaped exactly like the piece of jade she had just found. Like a puzzle solver finding the final answer, she placed the jade cone into the pyramid with glee. With that, a vivid stream of white light shone out of the pyramid and ripped up the sky. There was silence.

Milly and Marc began to hear the sound of industry, crunching cogs and metal machinery. The smell of rubbish drifted across their nostrils. They were back in the walled city.

“What...was...that?” exclaimed Marc.

“That was incredible!” Milly replied. “We have the missing piece of the time machine and that means we can use it whenever we like. We can escape the walled city!”

Elated, both Marc and Milly strolled back to their slum hand in hand, ready to plot their escape.

# The First Voyage

*St. Stephen's College Preparatory School, Lee, Jazzelle – 11*

“Tianfei! Tianfei! bless us from the depths of the sea, for we, shall make China wealthy and strong, ensure us a safe journey, our fine sea goddess!” Zheng He prayed. He took a deep breath, it was July 11th already, and it was time for the royal banquet before the voyage to where treasure and fate awaited...

Sitting down to a table full of royal delicacies, all the uniformed officers nervously sat down on the gold and red leather chairs. They appeared to be composed, but in reality, they had butterflies in their stomachs. No officer or commander ate anything, for they were too anxious. After the quiet meal, the whole ship crew received numerous gifts, however, everyone's minds were on the voyage that was ahead. Finally, as the dinner ended, Zheng He and the fleet boarded the ship and waved their farewells to their family and friends. Finally, they set sail and started to row in the direction of their first destination, Liujiagang, where they would organize the fleet and pray to Tianfei again for good luck.

Once the ship's crew was on deck and ready to go, they sailed to Fujian and awaited the Northeast monsoon. Zheng He relaxed, this was his break and he wanted to utilize his time wisely. Shortly after what seemed to Zheng He and his crew less than a minute, the weather changed and the wind blew past his face, “Ahh— let's go crew, let's go!” Zheng He called, still enjoying the cool wind. They departed via Wuhumen. The crew went to Lambri, where they sliced through the Indian Ocean in a straight line, instead of following the time-consuming route they had been given. “Haste, men, HASTE! We shall not waste our time, time—is MONEY!” Zheng He hollered.

Finally after the tiring journey of eight days, the crew woke up to the sailor yelling, “LAAAAANNNNND HOOOOOO! CEYLON COMING UP!”

“About time, matie,” Zheng He said in a sarcastic voice. Zheng He wanted to sound enthusiastic, but an eight day journey of waiting patiently on the deck and bed really drained his batteries. However, when Zheng He set foot on land, he suddenly felt quite energized. But then, when he met the Alagakkonara family, he was rudely treated and stormed off onto his ship again. “What a disgrace to Asia!” Zheng He scolded, making sure that everyone in the Alagakkonara family heard it. After they quickly rushed to leave the land, they decided to sail back home, but when they reached Palembang, they were blocked by a ship, it had elegant gold statues on the wooden ship, and a painting of a skull with a scar on the flags.

“Hello! Fellow ‘maties’, I, am Chen Zuyi! I have come to rule the world!!!” the man in the front of the deck called, with an evil smile playing on his lips.

“Never!” Zheng He hollered, determined to take down Chen Zuyi. He grabbed a rope on his ship, and with all his might, ran and leapt from the handlebar on the deck on his ship. “Arghh!” he called, as he landed on Chen Zuyi's deck. He grunted as he drew his sword out, “Come, my crew, help me defeat these pirates, we shall not allow them to pass our territory!” All of the fleet swung on board and started to fight the pirate crew, swords sliced and shields collided, grunts arose from both the enemy and the Chinese people. Suddenly, horror dawned upon everyone as they heard the crackle of fire. Officers panicked and swung back to their ships. Some pirates jumped onto their backup ships sailing through just in the nick of time, some pirates were trapped and incinerated in the roasting fire. Thankfully, none of the Chinese got trapped. After what seemed like an eternity, the ‘war’ finally ended. Zheng He was exhausted, he had killed almost a thousand people at least! Altogether with his allies, they had slayed almost five thousand pirates! Zheng He thought, ‘What a shame they didn't become friendly and surrendered, I wouldn't have killed them if they did!’ In the meantime, Chen Zuyi was being locked up in a cage to be brought to China. The sailor hoisted up the ship's anchor and sailed away back to China.

“Oh, finally! Back to China!” Zheng He sighed, it was October 2nd, 1407, Zheng He and his crew hobbled off the ship and four strong men lifted Chen Zuyi and his cage back into the court.

“Greetings! Zheng He, what have you found?” the Yongle Emperor questioned as Zheng He entered.

“Your highness,” Zheng He grinned, “we—have SOMEONE in store for you!” Zheng He curtsied fancily and waved his hands in the direction of Chen Zuyi and his cage, still carried by four strong men. “This— is Chen Zuyi, a pirate who attempted to disrupt our territory—which I must say, is a far too ambitious goal— but obviously,” Zheng He emphasized, “Failed.”

The Yongle Emperor was speechless, he then snapped out of it and hollered, “Take this pirate, and execute him! A man such as him shall not be permitted in China—or this WORLD!”

After all of that, there was nothing left to do, all of the treasure fleet had already received their rewards for battling Chen Zuyi and his pirate crew. ‘I might be crazy, but I desperately want to go on an adventure again, but that will never happen again...’Zheng He thought. However, little did he know, he would be called in for 6 other missions on sea...

# The Saviours

*St Stephen's College Preparatory School, Lee, Kelly – 9*

## **Beginning:**

A long time ago, a pirate crew called “The Saviours ” accidentally saved a person from Coral Reef. As a thank you present, he gave 2 maps of the Coral Reef to the pirates. The second map pointed out some spots for hiding gold and treasure. However, the facilities were not advanced enough for them to find the position of Coral Reef, hence they couldn't get the gold and treasure. They passed these maps down from generation to generation, but nobody ever found the riches. One day, a pirate crew member was reminded of the story and decided to start a journey to Coral Reef. Different from the other pirate crews, “The Saviours” was a team of pirates that donated their valuable treasures to poor people who were in need of help, and they could make friends along their journeys.

## **During the journey:**

They kept doing what they usually did, going island by island, giving help to poor people. Along the way, they saw other pirate crews who wanted to steal all the valuable treasures for themselves. “The Saviours” had no choice but to defend. Fortunately, they won the war and the journey continued.

Eventually, bad weather arrived. Fortunately, the pirates were very experienced with tackling extreme weather and the passengers were well-protected.

The next day, they arrived at the Coral Reef. When they landed, they saw tall trees and lots of sand. First, “The Saviours” went to the closest cove and started searching for treasure. They found another clue. The clue said that if they passed all the challenges then they would find the most valuable treasure there is. Next, “The Saviours” went to a big cove. It was very dark and they couldn't see a thing, suddenly, they saw something coming down from the ceiling, it was another clue. It said that they had to go straight ahead to the next cove and “The Saviours” would have to find the golden key to unlock the secret door to get the most valuable treasure from the biggest cove called “The Enchanted Cove”. So off they went to “The Enchanted Cove”. Inside, there were thousands of shimmering jewels and other valuables. When they went inside they started searching for the golden key to unlock the secret door to the most valuable treasure. It took them an entire day just trying to find the golden key, but “The Saviours” couldn't find it. One of the crew members found something that was the most shiny treasure he had ever seen in his life. When he reached it, he noticed that it was golden and it was a key. “The Saviours” had finally found the golden key. The next day, “The Saviours” found a cove called “The Enchanted Island”. It was enormous! When they went inside, they found many types of treasure, such as gold, silver, jewels and other valuable treasure. “The Saviours” were overjoyed. They were so relieved they didn't get trapped in anything or have to have another war with other pirate crews. “The Saviours” were very glad that they could help the poor people. The poor people were also very happy to be helped. Everyone happily boarded the ship and set sail back home. They started to find the other poor people and loaded the valuable treasure aboard at every island that they passed by and gave every poor person ten big bags of gold, silver, shiny jewels and more, to celebrate they all drank wine and danced.

## **Farewell:**

Passengers were getting on the ship through the extended deck one by one.

Their family members were crying with smiling faces. They all felt honored and joyful for them and showed that by waving hands and hats to say goodbye.

The passengers also felt excited about the potential unknown adventure.

## **The decoration of the small boats:**

The small boats were 10 meters long and 5 meters tall. They were a brownish red, with one underground floor. On the deck, there was a control centre which had the steering wheel and instrument panels in the stern of the boats. Some anchors were attached at the stem of the boats. What's more, there was a guardian angel with a mermaid look with curly long hair at the front of each small boat. Her hands were attached to the boats and her chest is facing upwards.

The lower ground had 2 bunk-beds, and several survival supplies such as food, sails, bows, arrows, and signal detonators. Each small boat had 4 guards to ensure the safety of the big ship by keeping track around the ocean. When it was time to look out for the big ship, there would be 2 guards for each turn, one in charge of controlling the wheel, and the other responsible for the long-distance viewing binoculars to observe if there were any dangers near them.

**The decoration of the ship:**

The deck was for detecting dangers, and the control centre was also at the stern of the ship. As with the small boats, the guardian angel was also attached at the stem of the ship. Anchors were hanging on the guardrail around the ship.

The middle floor was where the passengers and the guards rested at night. There were 20 bunk-beds and some entertaining facilities on this floor. The interior decorations were not luxurious but was decent enough to sleep in for the whole journey.

The lowest ground was a storage room. It was filled with many goods such as flour, salts, and also some kinds of protective weapons. There were also some extra clothes and blankets in case of war.

**Closing statement:**

The pirate crew was very glad they could help poor people and again set sailed to start a new adventure.

# A Quest For The Treasure

*St Stephen's College Preparatory School, Li, James – 11*

I, Javk, Captain of the Eagle Queen of the Eagle Fleet, was sent on an important mission commanded by Emperor Zhu Yuan Zhang. The mission was a second voyage of the kind. However, the mission this time was to send a picture of Emperor Yongle along with several ass-loads full of jewels and gold to his ally Guang Jiang.

We packed our supplies and stashed the gifts in a strong and secure place for the long journey ahead of us and then stepped onto the lead boat. Our fleet had seven ships in a perfect arrow formation, with the lead vessel positioned at the front. This formation was strategic. In case we were ambushed by pirates, burglars or other enemy fleets, our fleet had the top-of-the-line arrangement to counter-attack. We had a dozen long ranged weapons on each deck, so I was pretty confident about this voyage.

I stood on the main deck breathing into the cool and refreshing sea air as the salty breeze was swept over my face. I watched thousands of fish darting through the water in a synchronous manner. I gazed at the ocean, wondering how immeasurable and boundless the ocean was, when a giant shark started bumping against our ship. And now, it was bumping curiously at the lead ship, shaking it, and disrupting our formation. “Kill it!” “Kill it!” The guards said, their swords and harpoons pointing at it. However, they did not advance further and were looking expectantly at me. I realized that they were waiting for my command. We fired our cannons at it and it fled. We were still six days away from our destination, so we had to keep our eyes open and energy up. I decided to sleep till tomorrow morning and after thirty minutes of staring at the ceiling, I finally dozed off.

CRACK! BOOM! A sudden sound startled me. I woke up, grabbed my sword, and rushed out of my cabin. Torrential rain fell around me, dark clouds enveloped the sky, lightning struck the water. Suddenly, something slammed into our ship. And the next thing I knew, it was boarding our ship. As they boarded I could not distinguish them as enemies or allies. They wore black clothes and had a *kopesh* hanging from their belt. I fought desperately, but the blackies (my nickname for them) soon overran us. Finally we were all tied up, with the rain still pouring onto my face, the leader of the blackies put his kopesh to one of my soldiers throats and demanded, “Who is your leader?” I stood up, “Me.” I replied curtly, not submissive nor aggressive. “I’m just going to take a stroll through your fleet and see what valuables I can take.”, he laughed to himself, and then he walked away.

Suddenly, I heard arrows being fired, and the blackies’ ship sank. It turned out to be my friend Jwak.

The next thing I knew, our whole legion was in Jwak’s fleet and had our ships towed behind us. “Why aren’t we on our own ship again?” I asked. “Your rudder was damaged.” He explained I also learned he was admiral. “Great! We’re at one of our closest camps.” I followed Jwak off the ship with my legion following me, I saw a temporary camp, and our damaged rudder was already being worked on.

At dinner, Jwak and I found out it was missing. “It had to be stolen by the people that attacked us” I said, worried. I described the blackies to Jwak and his face paled. “They are the Zérons, they love treasure, fortunately, I know where their stronghold is...”.

An hour later, Jwak, a few handful of soldiers and I were at the island of the Zérons. Jwak and I had worked on a plan on the way here. A few soldiers would sneak off and create a diversion, while Jwak, I and a handful of soldiers would go to the treasury. Jwak, I and the soldiers were waiting behind a sand dune when suddenly, something exploded. “That is the diversion!” I whispered. The soldiers grabbed their weapons. As we sneaked in, we only encountered a few guards, apparently, our diversion worked. Finally, we reached the treasury, not surprisingly, it was locked, we barged against it until we realized it would not work. Suddenly, a guard charged at us with a mace. Suddenly, I got an idea, I pushed him back into the corridor and provoked him, I backed up against the door as he charged at me. At the last second, I dodged, just in time for me to avoid being a whack-a-mole victim. The mace shattered the door, and the door crumbled on him. I ran into the room, spotted the gifts, grabbed them, and hauled him out of the stronghold just as the last of the diversion ended and the explosives detonated. Half hopping and half hauling, I carried the gifts and Jwak out of the stronghold just as flames engulfed the hold. I glanced back, hoping to see the soldiers climb out of the wreckage. Feeling guilty, I wanted to stay for a while to grieve but I knew the Zérons would overcome their shock soon and come for me. Luckily, Jwak woke up on the way back to the ship and we half dragged, half carried each other to the boat. We immediately got into a boat and sailed away.

We arrived at Guang Jiang's palace, we gave him the gifts, sent Zhu Yuan Zhang's greetings and entertained him. After a while, we were allowed to leave, we got off at Jwak's camp first and we parted. We boarded our lead ship (now fixed) and left the remaining five to Jwak as a gift. Zhu Yuan Zhang praised me for my actions and conviction and honored the ones that had died during the journey. As for this journey, The Second Voyage, had came to an end. Now, I am 700 years old.

# The Royal Dragon's Adventures

*St Stephen's College Preparatory School, Ng, Rachel – 9*

I, Ng Pak Yan, am the captain of the ship named the Royal Dragon and we are on an exploratory journey to undiscovered lands around the world. Loaded on the boat are, rifles, bows and arrows, cannons, and gun powder –these are to protect the ship's treasures from pirates who want to steal our goods. We have riches from the Chinese Emperor, things like silk, rice, jade, jewellery, gold earrings, necklaces, and china. The emperor wants us to seek out new countries, where we can meet different groups of people and share our wealth and knowledge. We hope to trade our goods and show off our power to the world.

But our journey up till now has been very difficult – two nights ago, a fight broke out when a pirate ship attacked us and tried to steal our gold. They were armed with long swords. They killed some of our comrades, my friends who I had chosen to join my quest had died. I felt extremely upset because they were the people who had helped me a lot since the start of the journey.

I will never forget the time we landed in Arabia. This journey was particularly difficult for us because we had to travel through desert land for weeks before we met the royal kings of Arabia. We had never experienced anything like it before. We almost used up all of our food and water making our way through the sand blazing desert. Many times, we wanted to give up and turn back. When we finally arrived at the palace of the Arabian kings, we saw a huge palace made out of white stone and decorated with golden statues. Gardens of lush trees were all over the palace grounds. Steps led up to the main entrance. As we entered the hallway exhausted and famished from the trek, we were greeted by their prince and welcomed into their palace to rest. We traded lots of our treasure for theirs. Our bags were filled with Arabian dresses and robes. We spent two months learning from their scholars and teachers, trading knowledge of math and science, while we taught them what we knew of sailing and the seas. We even spent some time learning the language. They treated us like guests and at one point, I didn't want to leave. But I knew we had to move on to the other places and seek more. The prince gave us wonderful things to take home. He gave us these sweet fruits that they had grown on bushes. They called them grapes and the meat of the fruit was delicious and like nothing else we had tasted before. The prince said goodbye and we went back past the dessert and back to our ship. But when we got there, we saw a group of pirates trying to steal our treasures. They were holding a bomb and threw it to the bottom of the ship, taking our treasure with them. My friends ran and carried the bomb to the top of the ship. We threw the bomb onto the other pirate's ship, then hastily began our travel back to China to show the Emperor our gifts from the kings and princes of Arabia. We found out that we were lucky one of our friends had set a trap for them and they took our fake treasure. We cried for joy when we saw that the bomb was exactly next to the captain of the pirate's ship. But we knew our mission wasn't complete yet. We quickly sailed away as we watched the bomb explode in the distance.

Now we are on another mission. We are heading towards a new place called Africa. It feels very wild and we are looking for a famous treasure. We had a treasure map, but unfortunately, while we were sailing in the middle of the sea, there was a sudden thunderstorm and lightening. The sea was very unstable and there was nothing that we could do. One of our friends fell into the sea because he slipped and the ship almost flipped. We called everyone to our protective area, where we would be safe there for a while. No one could sleep, and our map unluckily got lost. Fortunately, I had memorised the location of the riches and intend to finally discover them. It has already been a while now, about four months, since my friends died. I know I am the captain of this ship and I have to lead my team. One group of followers will stay on the ship, just in case any other pirates come and attack us. Another two groups will follow me, and we will be digging for the treasure. We want to get this treasure because it is really important to us and we have to give some treasure to the people that helped us, as a gift. Lastly, the two groups left will wait for us to return, then help us carry the precious cargo. I decided that we were going to take the treasure today. Our plan did not fail, and we went back to the ship. I guess we were the first to land on Africa.

When we return, the emperor will be delighted with our achievements. They will give us a place in history as some of the first great explorers on planet Earth, reaching Africa and Arabia. I think we have had lots of good adventures even though it has been very tough and we have to worry about lots of things. I love the time my friends and I spent when we didn't have much to do; we would sit down on the third floor's floor, looking at the beautiful sights through the large window, talking about our happy memories and adventures. I will never ever forget any part of this adventure. I promise I won't.



# Wong's Ming Treasure Adventures

*St Stephens College Preparatory School, Poon, Wilson – 9*

I, Wong Kit, was the watchman of several of the Ming Treasure voyages commissioned by Admiral Zheng He in 1400's. Having the honour to scout for the voyages through long telescopes, I had first-hand information on what our leading ship would expect and encounter. People called me the "Eye" of the fleet. Even though some of my reported intelligence might neither be pleasant nor recorded in details by historians, I still would like to share with you some of these memorable stories, whether you considered them to be fairy tales or not.

Having dreamed of fighting against wrongdoers since childhood, I prayed for the opportunities to punish them in our voyages. In the returning trip of our first voyage, our fleet of more than 60 large treasure ships and 28,000 men encountered a large gang of 5,000 pirates led by Chen Zuyi at Palembang. Through the telescope, these pirates were strong, weaponized and ready to claim the treasures from our fleet. Meanwhile, Chen surrendered but secretly planned for a surprise ambush. Fortunately, a local informant tipped Admiral Zheng off and our fleet was prepared to shed blood on foreign soil with no mercy. With adequate preparation, our state-of-the art cannons drew first blood and struck lethally at the pirates and their fleet. Although the band of pirates and their fleet had already been covered in smoke, we fired our cannons as accurately and frequently as possible to prevent them from having time to counter-attack. As barbaric and determined as the pirates were, they fought hard in the fierce battle. Bombs, swords, arrows, body parts and blood were flying all over the various parts of our and their fleets. Putting it simply, each of the fleets attacked its enemy for survival and until the opposition lost its last breath.

Our Ming armada won the battle after killing all of the 5,000 pirates and destroyed their fleet. When I returned home to Nanjing, I was relieved but my heart was empty at the same time. Gradually, I suffered traumatic symptoms and kept questioning why our inhuman massacre of the pirates was necessary. Nevertheless, I wished that casualties could be controlled to a minimum in future voyages.

On our fourth voyage to the Persian Gulf, I spotted a herd of big sea creatures dividing its feast of fish in the deep blue sea. The circle of blood grew larger as these creatures enjoyed their meal ravenously. Without delay, I reported that they had sharp teeth and swam with their black fins on the surface of the sea. With little hesitation, the generals of the fleet suggested that the fleet should either capture or kill such creatures since we had more manpower and firepower than those of the prior voyages. When the scientists were debating what creatures they were, Admiral Zheng yelled "Sharks"! As the leader of the troops, Zheng explained that sharks could be extremely dangerous when they sensed threats or smelled blood. Instead of igniting a new battle, Zheng tactfully commanded the fleet of ships to change its course and keep enough distance from these vicious animals. When we were sailing away from these sharks, I could not forget how terrifying they looked when staring furiously at our fleet underneath the water.

From this adventure, I learned and appreciated that Admiral Zheng was a wise and decisive leader. More importantly, he would not use military forces lightly to solve problems when there were better solutions.

In the seventh and final voyage, there were more than 100 ships and over 27,000 men. We managed to visit all the important ports in the South China Sea and Indian Ocean. At that time, I was no longer the young watchman with sharp eyes but served humbly as a butler of Admiral Zheng. During our leisure time, Zheng and I discussed the important diplomatic and commercial aspects of the past voyages. Zheng said "The voyages were all about demonstrating the Ming supremacy to other countries, broadening the horizons of the Chinese people and fostering trades among countries. They were not meant to be military exercises to conquer foreign land and expand the boundary of our country."

Shortly after becoming a close friend to Admiral Zheng, it was difficult for me to accept that he died in the return trip in 1433. I could barely hold back my tears during his burial even though the sea should be the most suited chamber for our god of exploration and navigation. "Farewell and rest in peace, our dear friend and great diplomat, Zheng He!"

# A Voyage of Discovery

*St. Stephen's College Preparatory School, Tam, Anabelle Sophia – 9*

One afternoon in Grade 4 Chinese history class, Layla was perplexed about China ruling the seas a long time ago. So Layla decided to go investigate with her robot dog, cute little Doggyboggy and use his gadgets to go back in time and see for herself what happened back then.

After school, Layla went home and asked Doggyboggy to come too, they went to the time machine and Magical Anywhere Door to ask Zheng He the captain what had happened. They suddenly arrived on the ship with one hundred and ninety-nine other pirates, the ship was as big as a giant. The people on the ship planted a huge amount of food, there were also black and white cows, fat and pink pigs, strange and tiny chickens .....

When Zheng He first saw Doggyboggy, he thought Doggyboggy was a dog, he wanted to eat him. He shouted "lai la, lai la", in Putonghua. Layla ran to Zheng He. She threw a tiny bit of translating Chewing Language Gum to Zheng He's mouth so that she could understand what he was saying. He shouted "not you big fish lips".

Layla's face was turning as red as a tomato, she was very angry. And thought maybe they want to eat Doggyboggy, she suddenly remembered once her Chinese history teacher told her Chinese people eat dogs but Doggyboggy wasn't a real dog. Sure, he looked like real dog, with fluffy fur and cute dog eyes but he was made of machinery inside. She shouted angrily "he isn't a dog, if you don't eat him, we will tell you about the future." Doggyboggy nodded in agreement. "Well, if you will tell us about the future of course I will not eat your friend, now talk about the future," replied Zheng He.

Layla cleared her throat and started to talk about the future, people will study you and you will be in history books. People will write stories about you guys. It is very cool to be famous, and almost all of the temples would change into buildings, ..." she still hadn't finish her sentence, when Zheng He interrupted her and asked "what are buildings?".

Layla took the Picture of Describing from Doggyboggy's 5D pocket and pressed the huge ENTER WORD button, she texted "buildings" into the code, suddenly, Burj Khalifa the world's tallest building appeared on the screen and a robot voice started talking, "THIS IS A BUILDING, PEOPLE LIVE AND WORK IN THEM."

"That wasn't very useful, now I'm going to continue," said Layla. "Stop we are passing by India, let's give out some gold to the king and poor families." When they arrived to India, the rich people who live there said "what are you doing here, odd person?"

"I, Zheng He am here to give out precious gold and soft silk, we are here to make friends!" "War! You're lying mean enemies!" said one of the Indians.

Doggyboggy and Layla ran to the ship as if a lion was chasing them. Then took their weapons to fight them, but the rich Indians were too strong, even one hundred soldiers couldn't defend one of them. Doggyboggy had only one idea, use the War Bomb.

Doggyboggy put the War Bomb on the floor and shouted out loud so even a person over a hundred miles could hear him shouting. Run away from the War Bomb, it's very dangerous, said Doggyboggy. Three, two, one, KAPOW.

After the big kapow, Doggyboggy led us to where the king lives, using the Magical Anywhere Door and the Historian Map to search the place. When the king was there, Zheng He told him that we were there to give out gold and not get into mischief. After giving the lovely silk to the king, the nice king said, "In return, I'm going to teach you how to make curry." After the king taught them how to make curry, Zheng He thought up a great idea. He wrote a letter to Zhu Di about curry.

They went back to the ship, and they saw pirates. Without a second thought, Zheng He shouted “Charge!” The soldiers charged and the pirates who were very bad at protection, lost and got kicked off their ship. The Chinese won and continued travelling to Africa.

On the ship they fished for fishes, they even made curry that the king of India had taught. Indeed it was cool for Layla to go back in time. Being on a ship doing nothing was very boring, but she was very excited to go to Africa where she had never been there and also listening to Zheng He’s funny stories about travelling in the seas.

In Africa they saw elephants, different animals and the wildlife they had never seen before, “Cool animals, they are so cute and special,” said Layla. The African king was the best king of the history in Africa. The king invited Zheng He, Layla, Doggyboggy and the sailors to join the king in celebrating other countries.

After a while, the king asked nervously “would you like to have a look at the “okapi” (forest giraffe), if you like them I can give one as a gift or whatever you want here.” Zheng He wanted to bring a new animal to China, so they all went with the king of Africa to look at the “okapi”.

The “okapi” was very tall and behaved nicely, with brown spots all over its body and it was bright yellow. “It’s cute and beautiful, also it eats leaves!” Layla exclaimed. Zheng He liked the “okapi” and decided to take the okapi back to China. Suddenly Doggyboggy told Zheng He and Layla that Layla needs to go home to have her dinner, they said bye and went home using the time machine.

When they were home, Layla told her mum about going back in time and the amazing adventures they had. “Isn’t it fun to go back in time and learn about China ruling the seas!”

# On the Sea

*St Stephen's College Prep School, Tam, Manson – 11*

“Silly, come here right now.” I rushed to the voice with the mop.

Captain Zheng, the most experienced captain in Ming emperor who was yelled to me. “Did you see beer on the ground? Clean it off right now!”

I am Li Sze, 14 years old, handsome and smart but everyone calls me Sze Li, Silly. I am sure that even might be calling me silly, I am the most hard working crew on the board. I am one of the three hundred crews on the Ming’s ship and I am also the youngest one. Therefore I have to do all the cleaning work including kitchen, cabin, bedroom and definitely toilet.

I stayed on the Ming’s ship around two years. I missed my mom, my family. However I want to live my dream as a helmsman for Captain Zheng who was the greatest captain of the world. We were heading to India for trading the treasure to their King.

Let me show you how important I was. We all know that crews are always drunk. Everytime they drink, everything went messy. Everyday it was repeated. I was not sure when my dream would come true..

Chan Chan my best friend was the cook and we shared a room. His snore was like earthquake. So I build up a habit that I would go to the deck to sleep secretly. I went to the deck as usual but there was something different that night. The water was extremely quiet. Suddenly a lot of fish jumped towards our ship. I looked up the sky and saw a huge water tornado like a dragon flew the sky. Behind the tornado there was the largest thunderstorm that I ever seen. I would remember this scene forever. Death god was coming.

“ Wake up Chan, wake up, Call Captain Zheng Hurry, Help! Help!”

All the crews woke up and light up the fire immediately. When they saw the weather, everyone was overwhelmed. All the ship started to shake like a toy on the water. Captain Zheng instructed helmsman to change the voyage to escape. However the luck was not on our side. Helmsman fell down and broke his arm badly. The rudder lost control and the ship hit the huge wave. I ran to grab the rudder without hesitation and kept turning to ride on the wave. Captain Zheng taught me how to control the ship and made it stable. He organized the other crews to control the sail, some holding the rope, some holding the paddles. Finally we got away from the Tornado under the great teamwork.

“ We are alive!” All of us burst out loud.

We celebrated whole night. Captain Zheng came towards me and tapped on my shoulder.

“ Come with me.” Captain said.

I followed him to the captain’s room.

“ What brought you on board?” He spoke to me drinking his wine.

“ I love ocean. I love the sea. It makes me feel comfortable” I replied nervously.

“ Even after what just we have been through? He asked curiously.

“ I think so because it shows the power of nature” I said.

“ Who do you learn from the control of the rudder?” Captain Zheng asked.

“ My father. He was a fisherman. He taught me how to see the wave, feel the wind. He always emphasized we should respect the mother nature. He died two years ago. That’s why I started my journey by following you, Captain.” I said

“ I need a new helmsman. Can I count on you?” He asked

“ Sure, sure, sure! It is my dream. Although I am not smart, I am hardworking.” I replied excitedly

“ Good, start it tomorrow. I will assign Helmsman Tim to teach you. Are you ready?”

“ Yes, thanks captain” I said gratefully.

Tim taught me patiently. Every time i made the mistake, Tim used his finger to knock my head and said, ‘ Hey dude, don’t be silly’. I practiced very hard every day and night. More I learnt about being a helmsman, more I missed my father. He was like always with me.

After a year, I became a qualified helmsman of ship. We were in Indian Ocean now and were suppose to arrive at the destination after one month.

“Captain, there are twenty boats surrounding us from different directions.” A sailor reported urgently.

“Dawn, they are pirates.” Captain said angrily.

Captain Zheng ordered the military of the fleet to prepare the weapons to protect our treasure on the main ship. The pirate wore the elephant mask and held knives and guns. Pirates boats were coming closer and closer. They flew the rope with hook and tried to get on our board. Our soliders pulled of the knives and cut the rope. Some pirates fell into the water. Our cannon took two shots at the pirate boats and they sank right away. However the leader of the pirate still climbed on our ship. He was six feet tall strong man. He put along with two long knives and went towards Captain Zheng fiercely. Although the solider tried the best to protect captain Zheng, the leader of pirate was too strong. Solider were all defeated. At that moment, Chan Chan came out with two pans of hot oil. He spilled the oil to the pirates and hurt him seriously. The pirate leader ordered the others to retreat instantly.

“Victory!” We all acclaimed.

In the end, we met the emperor of India. They welcomed us with a great party, Indian food, drink, dance and music. At the same time, our crew unloaded our treasure and goods including gold, ceramics and fabrics. In return the emperor of India gave us lot of herbs, ivory, silk and luxury accessories. We stayed India for ten days and restarted the next Journey again.

# New Tales For The Ming Treasure Voyages

*St Stephen's College Prep School, Tong, Loius – 11*

During the Ming Dynasty (1400–1600), The Ming ships sent to trade gifts with other countries like India, Australia, Philippines..... were always in chaos. Sea monsters, pirates and dangerous rocks were everywhere! It looked impossible to trade.

One day, a man named Zheng approached the Emperor, Zhu YuanZhang. He asked, “Your Majesty, I am Zheng He, an experienced sailor. I have been through many adventures, through monsters and even the Bermuda triangle. Can I have a fleet of ten galleons and a crew of five hundred to help me in my voyage to trade gifts with other countries? You have wanted to do so, but all your fleets were sank.” “Sure, wish you luck, experienced sailor! I will give you a mountain of treasure to trade, do not fail me!” replied the Emperor.

So Zheng went to his ten galleons whose names were Pearl, Revolver, Justice, Striker, Empress, Beijing, Tin, Dutchman, Jesus and King. Zheng took Pearl as his flagship and the crew which were later sent by the Emperor and some who volunteered to go readied the ships with supplies and treasure. They set sail immediately.

As Zheng’s fleet entered the South China Sea, they spotted a fleet of 5 pirate ships sailing by. The pirates started firing cannons at Zheng’s fleet, the first volley of cannonballs missed, Zheng immediately told his crew, “Come on, my brave lads, we give no quarter!”

As they readied the cannons, a cannonball fired from the pirates whizzed through the air and crashed onto the Dutchman, wounding two men and blew a huge hole in the ship, treasure started to spill out! Zheng immediately gave the order, “FIRE the broadside\*!” (\*cannons)

Cannons were all booming instantly and cannonballs rained down on the enemy, ripping huge gashes in the hulls of the pirate ships. Then, there came a huge explosion! The cannonballs must have hit the powder magazines\*\* (\*\*TNT store) of the pirate ships. This was the first victory!

As they then reached India, where the great mogul (who was basically King of India) traded Chinese silk for gems and diamonds. The King heard Zheng’s story and agreed for friendship, he also gave Zheng two more ships, filled with a thousand Indian people who wanted to visit China.

As they waved goodbye to India, yet, another danger came. This danger was a monster and was the last of its kind. It had tentacles which were big enough to crush a ship and suckers large enough to rip flesh of a man’s face. It was the Kraken, a giant squid! The monster first attacked the Striker, one of the Zheng’s galleons, and used its tentacles to crack the ship. The huge galleon began to sink at once with treasure and men pouring out! It then started attacking Tin, another one of Zheng’s galleons. Tin fired its cannons at the tentacles, but then, the Kraken grew angry and tentacles started smashing the cannons and decks started to splinter. Enraged Zheng then immediately gave the order, “Fire cannons into the water!” There was then a large boom and a bunch of tentacles sunk back into the water. A second victory! Zheng told the crew, “we now sail south to Australia.”

Couple weeks later, after setting a blaze pirate ships throughout the Indian ocean, they arrived at Australia, where the exchanged gold and silver for salt crystals and wooden figures. The Australians also heard Zheng’s story and agreed to be friends. They gave Zheng more materials including real kangaroos, an Australian animal to bring back to China for memory. Zheng then set sail again.

This time, they were attacked by a huge serpent, with length as long as five ships combined. It first snapped Tin into two and crushed Justice and Revolver with its tail. Zheng was so fed up that he ordered to fire at the creature with everything they got. Cannon and musket fire then came blazing from Zheng’s ships and knives and spears splashed into the water. The sea serpent was peppered with cannon fire and stabbed with knives and spears. It then was defeated by the blows and sank back to Davy Jones’ Locker, a place for the dead. The crew then celebrated and cheered as this horrible beast was defeated.

Zheng's fleet then reached Indonesia and Philippines, which exchanged magma rocks and exotic medicines for silk and paper. The Indonesians also took a shrink ray gun and zapped a temple for Zheng to bring back to China so that their Gods can also bless China.

As they thought there was no more danger and sailed back to Beijing, they were caught up in the Titan, Atlas' daughter, Calypso's maelstrom, the biggest whirlpool in the world! The whirlpool also sucked five pirate ships in, which Zheng gave the order, "Fire!" again. A titanic battle was started! The ships pounded each other with cannonballs as muskets were fired, cutlasses slashing and cannons firing, it looked like the battle would never end, until the "Pearl" fired a cannonball which hit a pirate ship's powder magazine and exploded. Turns out that it was the flagship and the pirate leaders were blown out of the water. As the pirates were leaderless, Zheng took all of the pirates as prisoners and took them back to China.

Upon return, Zheng immediately presented all the traded items and shared the adventure stories with the Emperor. The Emperor was very impressed and pleased by Zheng, so he made Zheng an admiral. The kangaroos, Indians and shrunk temple were all given a new home in China.

After many years, the Ming Dynasty was overthrown by peasants and Zheng was executed for trying to defend the empire with his missiles. His last word was, "Freedom!"

This is the story of Zheng He. Zheng is now known to us as "Odysseus of the East", since he is so feared among the South China Sea. Zheng has many more other stories, but that will be a tale for another day.

# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

*St. Stephen's College Preparatory School, Wong, Audrey – 11*

After the last adventure, the Ming Treasure Fleet was ready for an eighth adventure around Asia, this time led by Yong-yi Lui, a scholar who was at a tender age of 18, and who was also proficient in the famous five martial arts: Baguazhang, Kung Fu, Shuai Jiao, Tai Chi and Wushu.

The fleets set off from the dock early in the morning on the 15th March 1440. Yong-yi stood on the deck, admiring the vast sea in front of him. A sailor ran up to him and said, "Sir, it is nearly noon now. Would you like to eat your meal up here or at your private cabin?"

Yong-yi replied, "Just bring it up here, and tell the cook my thanks to him for cooking my meal." The sailor was so surprised that his mouth was wide open for a moment. He had never expected such words would come out of a young boy's mouth! The sailor quickly nodded his head and ran back to the kitchen to report everything he had heard to his fellow shipmates. Everyone was astounded by the event, but more surprises were to be revealed to these sailors.

By the tenth day, the crew had already landed in several countries and had paid respects and made alliances with the reigning monarchs. The monarchs were amazed by the Ming dynasty's enormous wealth and fortune! Yong-yi was very satisfied with the progress with the alliances and let the crew rest at a country—Arleguern—for two days before the fleets continued their journey around Asia, but what Yong-yi didn't know was that an evil force was slowly creeping its way into his life and would soon endanger the lives of the entire fleet.

After resting at Arleguern, the Ming Treasure Fleet raised the sails once again and recommenced their journey. Yong-yi was in his cabin reading a book when a sailor frantically knocked on the cabin door while gasping for breath, "Sir, sir! A ship has been seen sailing towards us! The watchman guesses that it is a pirate ship coming for our gold! Sir, what should we do, what should we do?"

"Prepare the cannons and the guns! I will be there in a minute. Spread the word that a pirate ship is coming and everyone should be ready with their weapons, whether it is swords, spears, bow and arrows..." Yong-yi calmly replied.

"Yes!" And with that, the sailor nodded and swiftly rushed out of the room to spread the word. Yong-yi's eyes instantly turned frosty and flashed a murderous glint, as though he had some grudge against pirates. He fixed his clothes and strolled out of his cabin. Yong-yi arrived at the deck only to see a ship with a skull painted on its mast and flag sailing speedily towards their fleets. His eyes somehow turned even icier. The pirate ship stopped parallel to Yong-yi's fleet and a pirate with a black beard and a patch over his left eye stepped out.

"Ah, brother, we meet again after so many years. It's been so long since I've seen you last, 4 years, am I correct? Anyway, I need to introduce myself once again for those of you who don't know me. I am Lui Lei-yong, the famed pirate and your commander's blood-brother." Lui Lei-yong took the initiative to speak up.

"I have never considered you as my brother since you killed our whole family, even your own parents, and left the household burning to the ground when I came home from class." An arctic voice came echoing back to Lei-yong's ears.

"Oh! You still bear a grudge against that? Well, let me let you in to a little secret: They were never our real parents, little brother. They picked us up from the streets and raised us up, making us believe they were our biological parents." Lui Lei-yong bitterly laughed.

"Well, then there's all the more reason to be grateful to them, isn't there?" Yong-yi's voice was seeping with bitterness and anger.

"Stop being so emotional, little brother! Anyhow, I am still here to steal all of your treasures and food or you can all die while defending, your choice." Lui Lei-yong roared hysterically.

"Sailors and fellow shipmates, we must not easily surrender all of our dynasty's precious treasures to filthy pirates, should we?" Every shipmate shook their head. "Well then, fellow shipmates, if we die today defending our dynasty's reputation and treasures, it'll still be worth it! Charge!"

This was the start of a bloody battle. The pirates jumped onto the Ming Treasure Fleet and every shipmate fought bravely and struck down countless followers of Lui Lei-yong. Lui Yong-yi used all his knowledge in the well-known five martial arts to defend against the hoard of pirates that seemed to be endless, but the tides were changing. Soon, the hoard of pirates was reduced from crowds, to hundreds,



to dozens, and at last, only few pirates remained fighting while the rest were either dead or heavily wounded and bleeding. Lui Lei-yong saw that even he would be struck down if he didn't retreat at once, so he ordered, "Fellow pirates, today we have been reduced to a small crowd, but someday we will rise again! Lui Yong-yi, today you have won, but you will never win forever! I will one day beat you! Retreat, fellow pirates!"

The few pirates left their dead and heavily wounded friends to the Ming fleet to handle and dejectedly hopped back onto their ship and sailed back to their base. The shipmates shouted and rejoiced in their victory. "Shipmates, today we have won, but my brother may rise again. But for now, let us head back to our homeland and rejoice!" Lui Yong-yi said.

The Ming Treasure Fleet sailed back to China and brought many adventures they had encountered to report to the king. The king was overjoyed to hear their stories and heavily rewarded each and every one of the shipmates who sailed with Lui Yong-yi.

# The Rulers of the Seas

*St Stephen's College Preparatory School, Wu, Timothy – 12*

In the early 1400s, these pirates were legends. A fleet of ships sail from China, the seven voyages by the Ming Treasure fleet, they carried cargoes of gold, silk and other precious items for the staff on the ship to give away. The people they meet were always unexpected, they have met peaceful people and have also fought with hostile armies, or deal with nasty pirates or more, they gave away some and kept some when they needed to use the military forces and weapons to fight the horrific ones. They have gained themselves a name in history and China truly "ruled the seas".

I was apart of that legendary ship once, I will never forget that time when we battled the army of France. I still remember it like it was yesterday, it was midnight, and the rain was pouring down as hard rock falling from the sky aiming for the ship the hardest it can. I was petrified as it was only my second adventure with the ship and I am still getting used to it. We quickly sailed at the closest land possible and an army of French solders met us there. I was young and I had loads of energy so the ship captain set me as the frontline and we charged against them easily defeating them and soon we were expecting to see more. I was filled with excitement after seeing what we were capable of. It was so dry cause it was September at the time, the leaves on the yellow trees were falling on us as we were trying to find a shelter to hide in. We hear the France army chattering and the leaves on the ground shivering super loudly. We were only one voyage of the Ming Treasure Fleet so we could call for backup but it was impossible because we were only in a small little shack and we could not locate to map to find where they are now. I wasn't capable of controlling my temper so did some of my shipmates. I was only scared cause I was one of the youngest ones of the voyage. The France army finally looked inside the shack and we started attacking, it was a massacre, blood was splattering everywhere and all I did was sitting there and firing, not worrying about anything, just firing. At that point I have realized what I have gotten myself into, my heart was beating as fast as it can go, but as this point we have finally defeated the French army. It was over, we left and never got back.

But there were times where we could've done things way easier, we were sailing to the dock of Japan, the weather was gloomy and so we quickly docked and the boarder control there was so much nicer, they welcomed us with warm hands as a translator steps up. "We are here to give you guys some gifts, we do no harm it is from the emperor of these voyages, we are only pirates, the most humble of the pirates," our leader quickly said. They told us to enter and we started to scatter the floor with gold and emerald and a lot others. Their king came out and thanked us personally by gifting us the finest Japanese silk jacket. We set back off in the sea after eating supper and that day was unforgettable as we could see the different cultures of the world.

I soon retired after 15 years with the ship, but this was the most remarkable experience for me and I will never forget it.

# Santa East

*St Stephen's College Preparatory School, Yaury, Megan – 9*

Once upon a time, there was a man called Santa East in a beautiful country called East Pole. He wanted to make friends in different countries. Therefore, he decided to form a huge crew and start a treasure voyage around the world. Santa East tried very hard to gather a lot of valuable gifts such as jades, jewels, silk, medicine, tea leaves, porcelain and technologies so that he could give them to the emperors of different nations as a friendly gesture. He also wanted to bring home some new products and technologies to help make East Pole a better country.

From his past experience, Santa East knew that there were many pirates on the sea wanting to rob him of the treasures on his ship. To prevent this from happening, he travelled to the hidden woods to invite Kung Fu Panda to come and join his crew. He wanted him to teach the crew various Kung Fu skills. Originally, the crew did not know anything about fighting or Kung Fu. Therefore, Kung Fu Panda had to start teaching them the basics. Since the crew was smart, they were able to master the necessary skills within two days. They kept practicing very hard until they had learnt all the techniques. After a month, they were finally ready to start the journey.

The voyage turned out to be a huge success. Santa East had made friends in different countries in South East Asia, India and Africa. Once, the crew travelled to Kenya in Africa. They were amazed by how different the life of the Africans was compared to theirs. They got to meet with the Kenyan King later on. The King welcomed them and treated them very nicely. Both sides got to exchange their cultural products and experiences. Santa East gave the people in Kenya a lot of precious products from East Pole, such as tealeaves and medicines. The King was very glad and decided to give Santa East a giraffe in return to show his gratitude. The crew had never seen any creatures like that and was amazed. They could not wait to show the giraffe to the people in East Pole.

After travelling to Africa, Santa East went to meet the Royal Family in India. At first, the Indians were not friendly to them and were even ready to fight them as they thought they were there to take over their country. But after some explanation, the Indians realized that was not true. Instead, Santa East and their crew were just there to make friends. After that, they were happy to offer them treasure and gifts such as Indian tealeaves, spices and curry. They even put a traditional red dot on their foreheads and drew henna art on their arms. Santa East and the Indians became very good friends in the end and everyone was happy.

More and more people came to know of them, including the pirates. There was a group of pirates called the Undeatable. They were very greedy and were jealous of the jewels on Santa East's ship. They were determined to rob their ship. Kung Fu Panda was very brave and fought the pirates. The fight was very scary. Unfortunately, the pirates' guns and weapons were too powerful and the panda got hurt. However, since the crew had already learnt a lot of Kung Fu techniques from Kung Fu Panda, they were able to stand up against the pirates and defeat them. They defeated the Undeatable! Starting from that win, Santa East got an even better nickname: "Kung Fu Santa".

The pirates were not the only difficulty they had to overcome. Sailing on sea was never easy. Not long after they had dealt with the pirates, the sea became very unsettling and unstable. The waves were big and angry, which made the ship move vigorously. Later on, there was even a furious storm and the strong wind had caused the ship to steer from its original track. Soon, Santa East discovered that they were lost. The crew was in a panic. Thanks to his years of knowledge of the sea, he immediately took out a compass to figure out which direction they should go. He successfully led the crew back on the right course. Finally, they were heading home after the long journey!

On this voyage, Santa East and his crew had made friends from all over the world, such as Kenya, India and Indonesia. They were very excited to share their experiences with the people back home. This voyage had been a successful one! They had left a very good impression on the other countries and they made East Pole famous among different continents. The Emperor of East Pole was very happy and impressed. He warmly welcomed Santa East back and eventually made him the Prime Minister of the country as a reward.

# The Sea and the Sky

*St. Stephen's College Preparatory School, Yuan, Grace – 10*

It was an extraordinary day in the 1400s. On a bright and warm winter morning, the sun was shimmering in the blue sky, the sea was peaceful and glistened like a huge blue crystal, and several seagulls were gliding around, enjoying the nice breeze. In the Bay of China South East Sea, forty-five humongous ships were anchored, which carried cargoes of gold, silks, Chinese tea. Their brand new white sails were raised ready to set out. The Emperor of China of the Ming dynasty had decided to send those treasures to India, Africa and Arabia to build up good relationships.

In my ship, Captain Butch, a motley crew of sailors, soldiers, fortune seekers and I were excited to set sail on this voyage. Captain Butch was a strong old man with white hair and black eyes. He was a brave and experienced sailor! My name was Grace, a 10 year old girl from a poor family. Captain Butch chose me as his servant for this voyage. He treated me so well, just like my father. I was so proud to be working in this great fleet. Right before sailing, I prayed to the Lord of the Sky for a safe and lucky adventure.

A few days had passed, nothing really happened and we enjoyed the warm sunshine and the relaxing sounds of the ocean in the ship. However, one night, a huge storm came!

That night, the sky turned dark and the moon and stars all disappeared. Big waves hit our ship and the ship deck was full of water. Suddenly a huge underwater monster appeared in front of us! It was about fifty feet tall and about twenty feet wide. It had an eagle's head and a lion's body. Beside the underwater monster was a ship with fearsome looking pirates, who had raised the monster and commanded it to kill all people in our ship and help them steal our treasures!

The underwater monster jumped onto our ship. Captain Butch ordered our military forces to fight against it. However, with its magic powers, the monster was too strong, and the soldiers began dying one by one. Captain Butch waved his long sword and fought back against the monster. His sword chopped off the monster's arm. However, he was struck by the monster close to his heart. I ran to the Captain and saw the blood running out of his mouth. Captain Butch looked at me, and with a weak voice, he said, "kid, be brave, fight and protect our people until you die!" He put his sword into my hand.

"Captain! Captain!" I cried.

"Now you are." Captain Butch smiled at me and closed his eyes for the last time.

I looked at the huge ship deck, on which near half of our military forces were lying down covered in blood. I raised the sword in the air and shouted to the sky, " Lord of the Sky, where are you? Can you protect us?" A strip of light split the dark sky and I heard a voice saying, "Pray with your heart and your blood, kid!"

I scratched my hand with the sword, and put my hands together over my heart and prayed, "Lord of the Sky, please protect our people and help us kill the monster."

After my prayer, I saw a big golden dragon jumped out from the clouds and fly towards me. I jumped onto his neck and rode the dragon towards the underwater monster. The monster looked scared and started to back away. The dragon breathed fire on the monster, struck its head and broke its neck with his sharp talons. The monster sank into the deep water. Our surviving military forces saw what was happening and were filled with hope. They managed to force the pirates back and killed many of them as they tried to return to their ship.

The next morning, the sun rose and the storm stopped. The ocean became peaceful again and a rainbow came out in the sky. Another bright and beautiful day had arrived! The dragon dropped me onto the ship and flew away into the clouds. The remaining military forces cheered loudly, and raised me into the air three times. I became the hero and the new captain. We had lost close friends and our ships were damaged, but we still felt a joy at being alive, so when we had repaired our ships, we set sail again to continue our journey!

# The Voyage of the Ming Treasure Fleet

*St Stephen's College Prep School, Yuan, Stephanie – 11*

In the early 1400s, a fleet of ships from China set sail to Agra, India to sell valuable silk and gold to the people.

The admiral, Zheng He, fifty-one sailors, the military forces and cooks went on the ship and set sail to India. During the journey, they had parties and celebrations from every 100 kilometers they had sailed safely. When they were having a gigantic party at night, Zheng He was looking at the extraordinary view at the edge of the ships. There was the glowing moon, lots of tall trees that grew in a plain area. Little bushes with berries and small rocks. Something was strange, there was a gigantic rock that sticks out in the middle of the small rocks. Then the rock was moving! It was moving towards the ships! Zheng He was worried and told the military forces to check it out. The sailors stopped the ships and some people of the military forces went to check it out in small wooden boats. They rowed the boats and surrounded the giant rock. The rock expanded and rose above the big blue's surface. It was spiky and big! It wasn't a rock, it was a sea monster! It had ten enormous tentacles, three scary eyes, eight nostrils and two large mouths. It uses its tentacles to slam the wooden boats into pieces and used its mouths to eat the people.

"Quick! Sail the ship away from it!" shouted Zheng He to the sailors as loud as he can.

Unfortunately, that sea monster swam like a flash of lightning and grabbed Zheng He tightly! It threw him miles and miles away. A light bulb suddenly appeared brightly in a cook's mind. He quickly grabbed a slice of strawberry and blueberry cake and threw it far away into the ocean. The sea monster followed the cake and swam under the ocean. A sailor sailed the ship away and continued the journey.

They sailed along until they arrived at Agra. They sold all the silk and gold and earned a fortune.

When they finished, they went on the ship and set sail back to China. Maybe, they will meet the sea monster again!

# Pirate Jack

*Taoist Ching Chung Primary School (Wu King Estate), Chan, Isaac – 9*

My new neighbour Jack is a strange man with a strange smell. My dad is a friend of his, I visit Jack's home when Dad goes to work. He tells me stories about people while I'm there. However, I wasn't interested in him until he revealed to me about his old days.

I first thought he spent his life as a farmer since he was tall, my mind was soon to change. He had eight people in his family and was the smallest, giving him a feeling that he would be unlucky in life. Since his parents treated gambling as a hobby, they could hardly educate their children. They were bankrupt by the time Jack was in primary four

The worst time of his childhood was still to come during secondary school. His parents decided to take Jack out of school and make him beg on the streets for money. He got enough to support his brothers and sisters. After five years, everybody was working. How about poor Jack? It was time for him to find work too, but most companies did not hire him. When he was fifteen a farming company wanted him, but a mighty crew of pirates kidnapped him on the streets when it was dark. They brought him to a boat and made him part of their crew.

He met his captain and was frightened when he saw him. He was a cruel man, he had fed a lot of humans to the sharks. He was greedy, there was no hope of getting a dollar after finding a big treasure chest, maybe just ten cents. Also, he was very strict, if you didn't do as you were told, expect your life to end in a shark's tummy. Therefore, it was the Lord's first command to follow him. Since he was so horrid, Jack decided to give him a nickname – "World's Most Horrid Champion".

The "Horrid Champion" asked Jack to be the Treasure Hunter. Not only did it just mean running on the Islands to search for treasure, this duty needed the hunter to attack other boats for their treasure also! The captain would ask Jack to bomb the boats, if he refused the captain would send him straight to the shark's tummy. If he did do what was asked, he may go to jail for bombing ships. Keeping the stolen goods was not an easy job too. If a battle was lost, they'd ask you to give them money. If you refused, they'd kill you immediately.

He was very tired those days. Although he only went to a few islands and there weren't any boats, he was still tired since there was a big food shortage too. The food was given to all others before they gave it to Jack. Therefore, Jack ate only a little, and found some food in the ocean to survive.

Arriving at a new island was always tiring, the size of the island was always different too. Jack would look for ages and if lucky would find a small treasure box. Repeat this process a thousand times. Jack became smellier day by day, and never had a bath. The captain always said, "We don't have enough water for your bath!" Jack's job needed luck, thanks to the lord Jack got some of that. The captain gave him some money. Jack was glad that he could finally get some save something for himself. He thanked the captain for it.

Those days Jack was happy. However, it ended when Jack was twenty-five and the captain wanted to upgrade him to cannon fire duty.

This was very scary, and a battle happened by surprise during a storm. After ten minutes Jack was running out of ammunition. However, the other pirates seemed to have plenty left. Jack's boat had a hole in it and water was gushing in. He was trapped, they shouted "Give us something worth or time and we'll let you pass!". Jack had no choice, so he had to give them a chest of treasure. The enemy was still not satisfied "More, more, more, this is not enough!". Jack accepted and gave into their demands.

Jack's captain was furious "You need to keep the treasure, otherwise we will be bankrupt, why didn't you listen to me? You disobeyed my rules so it is to the sharks you will go!" Jack didn't want to die so he asked his friends onboard to help him persuade the captain not to kill him.

In the following days Jack's friends would always be near the captain saying things like "Jack is good, don't kill him". The captain thought again and decided to downgrade Jack to a dishwasher instead of killing him. Jack celebrated and thanked his friends.

He celebrated too early. Jack's job was worse than death. He had to eat leftovers as punishment, he was hungry every day. Also, he couldn't have a bath, the tank was always full. Once, his shipmates caught a big, yummy fish, everybody except Jack could share it. They said to him, "Sorry, none for you! The fish is too small. Better luck next time, you filthy, smelly, dishwashing, cleaning machine!" Jack knew the reason wasn't that. He saw half of the fish was uneaten, sitting right on the table! The real reason was that they were biased against him. He was angry but didn't dare show it. The nightmare lasted for fifteen years and ended because the man who replaced Jack's old job had retired, by now Jack was forty. Jack was glad because he could go back to his old, respected job.

Five years later, his ship suddenly sank, and Jack was the sole survivor, he decided to return home. The company that wanted to hire him when he was younger did so after they knew Jack was back. He got more money and could finally buy a house for himself. Therefore, he decided to retire and enjoy the rest of his life alone.

# The Kidnapped Pirates

*Taoist Ching Chung Primary School (Wu King Estate), Xiao, Remy – 10*

I have had neighbour for ten years now. He used to be a dishwasher in a ship's crew. His name is Fred. Fred had told me stories about the seas, which I found rather interesting.

One day, I was waiting for the train and someone shouted my name, but nobody seemed to realise this. Then, a strong arm viciously pulled me all the way down the street, straight towards a horse carriage.

A figure emerged from behind a statue of a lion. It was the fit body of Fred, who tried to pull me from the man's grip. But it made things worse. The man had clubbed Fred with both hands, I fainted. When I became regained consciousness, I smelt the ocean's salty air. I was laying on a plank in a dark room. There was a food tray on the floor beside Fred who was still unconscious, lying beside a locked door. There's only a small piece of fish and a tiny amount of water in the tray. After what seemed like days, Fred awoke.

He seemed to be crazy when he saw the tray, he drank and ate until nothing was left. On what seemed like the second day, the lock on the door was almost removed from its hinges when it lunged open. It revealed an extremely fat man with a scar on his face. Fred shouted "Where are we? What's going on? Answer, you great lump of flesh!" I roared.

The man said in an incredibly low voice "I'm Captain Dodds of 'The Golden Coin' If you were to ask where we are, I would say we are somewhere in the middle of the Pacific Ocean!". "Dinn, or Donns, whatever, don't try to fool us, we're..." I was quickly interrupted with a frightening "It's Captain Dodds!". "Okay Dodds, so why did you kidnap us, walk pranks?" I grunted

Dodds replied "I am going to..." clearing his throat "Make you two the ship-fixers of The Golden Coin!" It was the loudest silence I had ever heard in my life, thunder was



shaking the ship violently. Fred broke the silence “So what, ship fixers?” We however, had to keep the promise.

For eight years; we ate raisins for every breakfast, dried meat for lunch and dinner. We slept in hammocks and fixed the damage as fast as we could. But Dodds never ever helped. His office was like an extra-big landfill, stinky and untidy. The thing however, that I feared most was the battles against other pirates. Once, there was a gigantic hole made by a cannon blast on the deck and it took me and Fred six months to repair it.

On my last battle, I was seriously injured in the leg, so I needed to be sent home with Fred, who is also seriously injured in the arm. Those ten years were more exciting than I expected. Now, Fred and I are waiting for our wounds to heal so we may join The Golden Coin again...

# The Chinese Boomerang: The Untold Story of Zheng He's 8th Voyage

*The Independent Schools Foundation Academy, Kuaila, Annabella – 8*

"All right!" I yelled. I was playing my new video game, 'The Seven Voyages of Zheng He', fighting pirates with Zheng He's fleet. Just as I reached level 5, WHOOSH! I got sucked into the game!

I found myself on an ancient wooden ship, and there stood Zheng He. I knew an adventure was lying before me. "How...where...what's the purpose for me being here?" I asked. "Hello! You came to help me with my mission," he replied. "If I am here to help with the mission," I said, "it might help if I know where the fleet is going, where it has been, and what your mission is." "Certainly," Zheng He answered, "My mission is to bring foreign goods to sell in China, and to bring foreign people back to buy Chinese goods so the world will see that China is a great and powerful country."

One morning, as I slept on the ship – BAM – I heard a loud noise and was thrown out of bed. "Ow!" I yelled, sitting up from the floor. Unhappy, I walked outside my cabin to see what was happening. "The Sea-Monster has returned!" screamed one of Zheng He's men. "Take cover indoors!" boomed Zheng He.

A giant sperm whale had rammed the ship. "Sea-monster!" called another of Zheng He's men. I realized what was happening. There was not much science in those days, I thought, so...Zheng He and his men figured this giant sperm whale was a sea-monster! I was so amused that I began grinning like a Cheshire cat. "Don't just stand there smiling", said Zheng He, "take cover!" "Chill, dude," I replied, "I know this is a sperm whale, not a sea-monster." In fact, I spilled all the information I knew about sperm whales. "So, you see," I finished, "he is probably just trying to swim with his pod to migrate," I said. "We're in his way, so the rest of his pod is in front of us. So, now, he is trying to ram past us. Also, he is a calf, you know, so, without his mom around him, without her milk, he could die. Calves are weak. Perhaps we had better move out of its way." I suggested. There were hundreds of mouths curling into perfect letter 'O's. "Reverse the sails!" called Zheng He, and we were off again!

Zheng He couldn't recognize a whale, but he was rather an excellent sailor. How could he be famous if he wasn't at all good at sailing, right!? History is proof of his greatness. He commanded seven expeditions that expanded trade to 37 countries and carried books to show China's intellectual accomplishments. It was the porcelain, brocade and silks that had foreign countries wanted most. He also captured evil pirate scoundrels that sailed Chinese waters. He even captured the most feared Chinese pirate ever – Chen Zuyi himself. Unfortunately, no one is perfect, and he had troubles too. Some of his ships leaked, many of his sailors got scurvy, and it was difficult to plan the movements of a large fleet like his. Still, there was no greater sea explorer than Zheng He.

During the seventh voyage Zheng He really suffered and became very sick. Just when he was about to die, he told me he had a 'secret' map to an unknown country. We call it Australia today. He said his mission would be completed if I would bring back a sample boomerang for the emperor to reproduce as weapons for China's army, and for goods to sell to tourists. I accepted the task.

The next morning, I set off ...and met a tsunami. Oh, come on! Having just died, Zheng He missed out on the action and I was alone! Typical, I thought, just when I needed an ace sailor it was up to me. I was a complete duffer at sailing, so I just dropped the anchor and waited for my doom. Just then, when it was curtains for me, I took a moment to think. What could I do? The idea literally took me three minutes, then...TA-DA! What if I took our sails down and wrapped them around the ship to make it float like a ball? With air trapped inside them, it might float! Balls float, don't they?! I wrapped all our sails around the ship, and it worked! I floated away.

When I was out of dangerous waters, I put the sails back where they belonged, and finally reached Australia in 30 hours' time in calm waters. I was an absolute mess when I arrived, so I made a bed onshore from hundreds of cut leaves. I slept there for a night and felt right as rain in the morning.

When I awoke, I went to find some Aboriginal Australian people, as I knew they used boomerangs to knock birds out of the sky for food. When I found some, I asked them if I might have a boomerang. "Alright", said the chief of the tribe, "we have more than enough, anyway." Mission accomplished!

I left Australia feeling very happy. I sailed back to Nanjing, and then...yet again – WHOOSH – I was back home. I wondered if I had dreamed it all. It seemed real, but it couldn't have been.

Static from the TV caught my eye. An image of Zheng He popped up on the video game screen. That wasn't part of the game! Yet, there he was. He said, "Your mission is complete, dude, and now that boomerangs are in the shops of Nanjing, mine is too. Thanks, man!" (Okay, yes, I taught him some modern words). I shook my head and said "Wow!". Zheng He smiled back at me and said, "Cool, right? Goodbye for now!" Then, POOF! Zheng He vanished. That had just proved that it wasn't a dream. I had finished my adventure, and it had been a most marvelous one!

Wait, did he just say, "for now"?!?

# Fairytale Land

*The Independent Schools Foundation Academy, Leung, Annabel – 8*

On a late Saturday afternoon, General Zheng He and his soldiers were sailing back to China to the Yongle Emperor when they saw a weird glass door floating in the midair. Zheng He was stunned.

He shouted to his two hundred soldiers, “Let’s go inside!”

“But General,” said his advisor, “It might be dangerous!”

“Who cares?” roared Zheng He, “Let’s be brave and find out.”

“Yes sir!” said his advisor, trembling.

The fleet of ships rushed forward in single file. Once they were in, they gazed around in wonder. A new land.

“Everybody, turn the ships into land transportation!” Zheng He ordered.

“Yes sir!” All the soldiers answered in unison.

Almost at once, all the ships turned into trucks, buses, and vans. Then, all the soldiers drove the transportation forward. When they passed a castle, a little girl opened a window and peeked out of it. She screamed.

“Who are you?” She asked nervously.

“Now, now. There’s no need to worry.” Zheng He said gently. “My name’s Zheng He, what’s yours?”

Now that the little girl knew that Zheng He was not going to hurt her, she relaxed.

“Hello! My name is Hope. It’s nice to meet you, Zheng He” she said.

“May I ask you a question?” Zheng He said.

“Sure!” Hope answered cheerfully. “What?”

Zheng He asked, “Where am I?”

“You’re in Charming Kingdom. My parents are Queen Cinderella and King Chance Charming.” Hope replied.

“Hope, what is The Charming Kingdom?” Zheng He questioned.

“The Charming Kingdom is one of the kingdoms on Fairytale Land. There are six kingdoms, one territory, and one empire. The six kingdoms are The Upper Kingdom, The Center Kingdom, The Charming Kingdom, The Western Kingdom, The Magic Kingdom, and The Sleeping Kingdom. The territory is Trolblin Territory, and the empire is Elf Empire.” Hope said, surprised he did not know.

Zheng He was starting to get worried. “Hope, what is this strange place?” Zheng He asked frantically, “Is it different from my home?” He was starting to realize this place was different from his home.

Hope was confused, “I suggest you go to meet Fairy Godmother. She makes all the Laws. She has the real control over Fairytale Land.” Hope said. “Take this map and it will guide you to The Magic Kingdom. It is where she lives. The rest of the information about Fairytale Land is on the other side of the page.”

“Thank you so much, Hope!” Zheng He cried.

“Good Luck” Hope said with a wink.

Zheng He set off at once. “Let’s Go!” Zheng He bellowed to his men.

Once they reached The Magic Kingdom, they marched into the castle.

“Where is Fairy Godmother?” He asked.

“Hello,” said a soft voice behind him, “What do you want?”

Zheng He turned to see a beautiful young woman looking at him. The minute Zheng He saw her, he fell in love with her, but first, he had to ask his question.

“My dear lady,” Zheng He said, “Where is the Fairy Godmother?”

The woman laughed, “*I* am the Fairy Godmother!” She said. “Would you like to stay in the palace since you don’t have a cottage or house?”

“Of course!” Zheng He answered, “Thank you.”

After a year in Fairy Kingdom. “Fairy Godmother, will you marry me?” Zheng He asked.

“Yes!” Fairy Godmother answered with a smile.

They had been secretly dating over the year, so they already knew each other well. And so, Fairy Godmother and Zheng He got married the next day. One year after their wedding, Fairy Godmother had a baby daughter, Zheng He was overjoyed, and they named her Holly.

One day, Fairy Godmother woke to hear the sound of war. “What is going on?” she wondered.

Zheng He, who had also woken up at that moment, was also as confused as Fairy Godmother. When they looked at the window, they discovered that an army of nine thousand men had attacked The Magic Kingdom earlier this morning and all the fairies were trying to fight them off.

In a flash, Zheng He gathered his men and Fairy Godmother summoned all the armies of Fairytale Land. Together, they all charged towards the army and fought them.

Fairy Godmother quietly went to check on Holly, but to her horror, she was not in her room! Suddenly, a horned witch appeared in front of her, and tossed Holly out of the window to the forest.

She cackled, “You will never see Holly again!” she cried evilly.

“GIVE HER BACK NOW, MORINA!” Fairy Godmother yelled as loud as she could, “NOW!!!”

But Morina just laughed and said, “Just go get her yourself then.” Then, she disappeared in a flash.

Thankfully, Fairy Godmother did not have to. A minute later, another witch appeared with baby Holly in her arms.

“Thank you so, so, so, much, Hagetta!” Fairy Godmother said gratefully to the witch, “What can I do for you?”

Hagetta smiled and replied, "All I want is Holly to be safe with you forever. Goodbye!"

Then, Zheng He came in with some great news, "My dear wife, the army was defeated! Even better, they agreed to become new soldiers of Fairytale Land!"

Fairy Godmother smiled. "That's great!", "how about we have a celebration party to celebrate defeating the army?"

"Okay," Zheng He said, "Sounds good!"

And they all celebrated until the next day.

# New Ming Treasure Voyage

*The Independent Schools Foundation Academy, Zhang, Emmanuel – 9*

The time machine was ready, and Keith and the time-travellers would go back in Ming dynasty to trade for ancient treasure that long disappeared and was lost. So, with one press of the button, they went back in time. When they arrived the time-machine landed right in front of the emperor. The emperor was shocked but kept calm and said, "Whom would that be?"

"We are the time travellers here to investigate the ancient world, and here to give you some good advice," they replied.

The emperor smiled and said, "Well we could give you some valuables for your investigate in return for giving China some good advice."

In the Forbidden City, everything was so different and unique, the city walls were made with brown clay bricks, so sombre and stately. Keith brought gifts of the future to the villagers when suddenly, not far from the castle walls, a big army of soldiers rode on horses kept firing arrows tipped with poison. The leader of the army kept waving swords and throwing fire sticks at the village and the emperor's palace.

"Oh! No! The bandits are back!" cried the emperor but the villagers were ready. They've been already taught to fight with guns (Of course by Keith) and knew the best way to finish off a big army of soldiers, that's what was exactly happening now. The villagers rushed out with cars with strong armour and kept firing machine guns. Things were really going well with them. On the other hand, the bandits were losing war. The arrows were no match with guns and stabbing cars with swords were no use.

After five minutes clearing off the bandits, the emperor turned to Keith and the others smiling and said, "You had saved my life and trained the villagers to be fine soldiers with incredible weapons. You deserve to have everything you need to study the ancient world!"

So the travellers, took what they needed and said: "Thanks for all these precious items and the help you gave us! War is never the eternal theme, the real power to develop is science and technique."

The time traveller bowed down and took out some money and showed him how they buy things in the future and how the whole world works in the future, Keith took out cars and showed the emperors how to drive them. The things explained were piled up and given to the emperor as a gift.

The emperor can't believe how many things that the warm-hearted travellers gave him, how many ways to make peace in the Forbidden City everything was so different and unique from the future, China in the emperor's heart felt as if it could be fixed forever with only these things." Bring me," the emperor pleaded "To your world, to the future!"

The travellers agreed taking him and also promised him that he could live there. So, with the finger on the button, they went into the future. The traveller selected the location to land which he chose Beijing. Whoosh! The machine landed on the ground softly and out came the emperor, everyone around the machine stopped dead in its tracks, looking at the emperor.

Then out of nowhere, someone shouted, "The time travellers had returned with the emperor! Hooray!" Everyone wanted to rush forwards but one of the travellers stepped up and in a warningly voice said "Stop!", everybody bowed down for a few seconds then stood up, letting a way for the emperor to walk.

The emperor went around the city and showed no sign of being more important than the other people." Do not treat me better than others, I am just a normal person, I am not an emperor in your world."

After saying that, the traveller's tummy rumbled so they stopped for lunch in a spicy noodle shop, they ate some noodles and left, then all of a sudden, the traveller cried "How about the rest of The Forbidden City?

There is no one there to lead them and they'll be in a mess!" Oh! No! I completely forgot! What a bad emperor am I!"

So, they hurried off to find the machine. One click of the button they were back again, but the traveller was greeted by the angry faces of the rest of the time traveller clan." Hey Dave! You forgot about us! We were having big trouble calming the people of the Forbidden city, and we don't blame you your majesty." said one of them called Bruce."

But the good thing is that we improved the buildings and the food they serve! We even gave them better medicine, medical equipment and built a parking lot! "Oh, thank you how could I thank you ever more?" You need to give us nothing! Because you already gave us joy!"

So, with that they returned to the time machine and went away.

# Sunset from Cochin

*The Independent Schools Foundation Academy, Zhang, Miya – 11*

Lian stared ahead at the golden sunset as the waves cracked against the helms of China's treasure ships. She looked to the distant horizon and made the promises she owed to her friend, and to the world. She made vows, and thought back, to that soul whose fire rivaled that of the sun's.

Lian thought back to the time she'd had with Anala in Cochin. The day she met her friend had been when the sunset was at its full, glorious climax. The sky was swathed with vibrant ribbons of light in purple, ruby and gold. The healer had leapt off the treasure ship, "neglecting" her duties as her father would later say. She raced through the streets of Cochin, gliding past silk-clad bodies speaking in a language like the gentle currents of a river, or like gusts of wind rolling off the tongue in soft, melodic trails. She inhaled the sweet aroma of steamed seafood as it drifted through the air and admired the sky's brilliance. Lian had skidded to a stop only when she'd heard cries of pain from inside a cottage. That was when she'd spotted the other girl lying on the floor, trying to shield the gaping wound on her forearm. Silently, the healer had lowered herself so she was face to face with the other girl. Anala, who couldn't have been much older than Lian herself, had sun-kissed skin the rich color of star anise. But her eyes – they were ablaze with a flame-like quality. She had a fierceness that seemed to rival even the flames of the sun. It was these flames in the girl's eyes that encouraged Lian to reach into her sleeves and produce the bundles of healing herbs.

Absent mindedly, Lian spoke in a soothing tone as she tended to Anala's wound, describing her first few days at sea with China's fleet. How she'd had the good fortune of being chosen to accompany the imperial eunuch Zheng He on his voyage for the Yongle Emperor. When Lian was finished, Anala had spoken in uneven Chinese to tell Lian her name. Anala had gone on to discuss Zheng He's voyages with Lian during their many conversations. Though the girls had both known how their friendship was to end, they still had felt crushed when Zheng He's fleet's time in Cochin was announced to have expired.

So, the girls had prepared themselves for their last night together. Lian had sat with her head on Anala's shoulder. "Do you suppose what Zheng He is doing is noble?"

Anala had contemplated her question, her soft smile flickering like a flame. "I do in fact. He came to give. To provide. So many people come to Cochin because they want to take back a part of its luxury. It's spices or whatever else they find valuable. I think it's noble that the Yongle Emperor sent him here to give to the Calicut Kingdom instead. Perhaps it's a fool's way of thinking, but I can admire that. Maybe what China is doing now, what you're contributing to, is helping the world. Maybe. I'm hoping that this act of selfless goodness will bring our worlds back to the light."

Then, Lian had laughed, for she did not understand. As laughter-like beams of sunlight hit the sails of China's fleet, she exclaimed, "Anala! This began as a voyage to obtain pepper!"

Anala smiled a little wider. "Hope, Lian. Hope that we will be brought back into the light."

Lian and Anala had talked that night away. In the few moments Lian had with Anala before boarding the treasure ships, Anala had leaned in and said to her words that were to be more cherished than even the precious pepper aboard the treasure ships. Words murmured beneath a sunset painting their faces, lacing their hair with color. "I wish to know you by the name Kanaka. A piece of Cochin, and of me, to take with you on your voyages." When Lian had given her a perplexed expression, Anala smiled back and spoke in hushed tones.

"Gold, Kanaka. That is the name I have chosen for you. Gold. Remember me when you see the sun, or embers rising up from flames. Remember me, and hope, for that is what you gave me when I was wounded and lost. Gold, Lian. Gold, for what you gave when I had nothing. Gold, for the glory that will befall China. For the hope, you will bring as Kanaka, or Lian, or whatever you wish to call yourself.

This memory of Anala was what kept Kanaka going. Somedays, Kanaka could still feel the warmth of Anala's breath beside her ear. This friendship helped her fulfill her silent promise on the deck of Zheng He's fleet.

*"I promise to spread that hope and to give until my very being is shriveled up and crumbling. If only to honor my homeland and the fire of the friend I shall never see again."*



# The Defeat of Chen Zuyi

*The Independent Schools Foundation Academy, Zhang, Steven – 11*

A brilliant flash of light appeared near the horizon, and the water instantly became sapphire. The calm waves rolled on and on, casually moving boats out of the way. The sun raised like a fiery ball of molten fire. Tiny islands can be seen near the horizon. On the main ship, a man named Zheng He woke up.

Zheng He walked up the stairs to the platform and took out a small, white object and a map. He muttered something and looked more closely at the object. It was, in fact, a fish compass.

“Chin Hong, are we in direction?” Zheng He questioned. Then a young man wearing a white robe and a sword at his belt walked up and answered his question.

“Yes, sir. We are heading west with pinpoint accuracy. At this rate, we will be back within 2 weeks, even with some ships damaged from the first attack of the pirates.”

A sudden flash of this horrible memory came into mind. Hundreds of men dying, the ocean soaked with blood, platforms littered with dead bodies, and ships filled with holes. Even though they won these battles, the casualties were high and the fleet was extremely damaged.

“Sir, are you okay?”

“What? Oh, yeah, I’m okay. Just wondering if I should put those islands on the map. Meanwhile, Chen Zuyi still didn’t come yet for his surrendering contract.”

“Sir... those are not islands. Those are the pirate ships, and they are coming back.”

One hour later, the whole crew among the ships woke up and armed for battle. But the ships in the distance was not a battle fleet. It was simply just a cruiser ship

“All troops, hold your fire! He is only here for negotiation!” commanded Zheng he as the ship made its way to the commanding ship.

The ship was a masterpiece. Holly wood lined the hull, with sanded poles and gold linings here and there. A broad grey sail could be seen on the junk with decorative carvings depicting victories and legendary battles. If there were no pirates on board then it will be impossible to recognize it as an enemy ship. A bridge lowered and Chen Zuyi stepped out.

Chen Zuyi was about 50 years old. He wore glistening bronze armor that shined brightly in the sun. He had a small beard and sharp, piercing eyes. He was only by himself and showed no means of threat.

“ So, it looks like you received my message. I am demanding surrender from you. Here is the contract. Surrender and leave the bay of Palembang and the East, or we will use force.”

Chen Zuyi’s grey eyes glinted under the sunlight. “I agree to... surrender. I will leave Palembang immediately. Without military force. Farewell, then.” He said and then left.

All the soldiers and crewmen sighed contently, feeling safe after the surrender. But Zheng He had the tiniest bit of suspicion left in him, so he soon hatched a plan.

That very night, Zheng He sent his fellow navigator Chin Hong on a mission. He fears that Chen Zuyi’s attack could be coming any moment, so Chin Hong will be spending the whole night tailing the pirate boats. He looked at Chin Hong leave on the small boat until he disappeared. Then, Zheng He went to bed.

BAM! BAM! Zheng He woke up to a strange noise. It was still night, the sky as dark as obsidian. Zheng He opened the door of his cabin and saw a wet, panting crewman. In fact, it was Chin Hong.

“Sir... Sir... the pirates... coming...so much.....” and then he collapsed on the floor, panting and unable to move. It was no doubt that the pirates were coming, so Zheng He gathered up all the troops and prepared them for an attack. But he had a trick up his sleeve...

KABOOM! That was the first sound of battle. Fire and lanterns were equipped on the pirate ships, making it look like a dragon. The sound of cannons pierced through the air, and smoke was steaming everywhere. Finally, Chen Zuyi came on board.

“Ha Ha! I fooled you, Zheng He! Now China will bow to the pirates! We will own the best ships in the world! No bow for mercy or be killed!” he teased as almost 20 huge pirate ships confronted Zheng He’s Commanding Junk and Treasure Ships.

But Zheng He showed no sign of surrender because this was his plan. A sudden blast shook everyone’s ears. Chen Zuyi looked around and saw hundreds of boats. Most of them were cruisers, but there was a handful of huge junks and battleships. The royal red mast was on every single ship, the commanding one with a golden phoenix emblem on it.

The pirates were outnumbered, but they kept on fighting, so Zheng He fought back. He was a blur of silver, he leaped like a leopard, it was like he was invincible. The pirates were brave, but they were no match for Zheng He.

Zheng He was getting braver and braver. He expanded his forces into a semicircle, surrounding the pirates. Now his ships and the reinforcements had cornered Chen Zuyi.

Suddenly something struck Zheng He’s forehead. Everything went black as he fell down to the ocean.

“Hello? Wake up, wake up!” a voice said. He saw a pirate in a cage. Some of the crewmen fixing the poles. A crewman tap-dancing with a pirate. Hmm... perhaps he had just imagined the last one.

Then, someone pulled on his hair and yanked him back to life.

“ Huzzah?” mumbled Zheng He. “ Wait... is Chen Zuyi captured? We had specific orders to!”

“ Yes, yes, he is captured, and all is well.” assured Chin Hong.

A wave of relief spread over Zheng He. We walked to the deck, feeling the cool, sea breeze. The aquamarine water glistened under the setting sun. Near the horizon, he saw a line and a dot, and he swore it was China.

# What an Adventure Means

*Victoria Shanghai Academy, Bolchover, Isadora – 9*

The Ming Fleet set off on their mission to India with one of their finest captains and one of their greatest fighters in the land: Zheng He and Ying Yen. But something was suspicious about the captain, Ying Yen, and Zheng He knew it, even though he couldn't put his finger on what it was. As they set off, the crowd on the docks cheered them on, shouting encouragement and comforting words. The ship finally sailed out into the dark blue ocean on its way to India with no idea what adventures were in store.

Ying Yen rushed into the only bathroom they had on the ship and pulled her helmet off. Thank goodness! She thought. Maybe Zheng He would have found out she was in disguise as a man! Hopefully he didn't suspect her! She had successfully cut her hair off and snuck onto the ship, but she was sure that her perfect features would be a bit too much, so that the men would become suspicious. Wait a minute. Was that shouting she heard? She quickly pulled her helmet back on and hurried up to the deck.

As she reached the deck, she looked into her telescope and saw the dreaded white flag with a dragon's dripping fangs staring back at her. She told her crew: "Weapons ready! We've got an evil pirate trying to kill us!!" Alas, her words were true. A pirate named Chen Zuyi was on their tail right now and he was one of the most feared pirates with one of the most gruesome crews in all history. Just to list a few of his most evil deeds, he had: killed loads of people, stolen a ships' goods and sold children to slavery. This was bad – VERY bad. Ying Yen caught Chen Zuyi looking at her with his one eye (he has an eye patch.). He sneered, and she rolled her eyes.

Ying Yen shouted: "Attack!" Both crews roared. Over the noise of killing, shouting and massacre, Ying Yen shouted: "I'm going for gold!", which meant, "I'm going to fight Chen Zuyi myself! No one try to help me!"

Ying Yen ran towards Chen Zuyi dodging every obstacle in her path. Finally, she made it to Chen Zuyi. As she ran and swung her sword, the blowing wind made her helmet slip off and her short, but beautiful black locks were revealed to the world! (well actually just the Ming dynasty and the bad guys not the whole world) As the Ming dynasty and the pirates gasped in amazement, frustrated whispers went around the crowd: "a woman?" "Who let HER in?"

Ying Yen shouted back "What is SO wrong with a woman being on the ship? Can we just get on with the battle already?" The men grumbled but they kept on slashing each other and yelling insults so Ying Yen figured everything was fine.

As Ying Yen swung her sword at Chen Zuyi, he blocked her easily and said: "Not so fast little girl! No one is going past me!"

"Okay," Ying Yen growled, "One, no one calls me little girl, and two: I am getting past you." Again, she ran and swung her sword, and Chen Zuyi closed his eye and expected the blow, but nothing came. He opened his eye and looked around him. As he looked behind him, he caught Ying Yen grinning at him. "I thought you said NOTHING was going to get past you." she said, and then everything went black for Chen Zuyi.

Chen Zuyi woke up. His head throbbed. He looked down and saw that he was tied to the mast along with many of his crew. Ying Yen said "I told you I was going to get past you! Women can do great things, Chen Zuyi. It's just that some people don't believe it. When Zheng He takes you and your wicked crew to my father's dungeon, I hope you'll understand that you're a horrid person and that you should try and do something good for a change." She walked away, her dagger swinging at her hip.

That night, Zheng He called a meeting with all the crew except Ying Yen. He banged the hammer on the table. "We are here to discuss the matter of a woman on the ship and what we should do with her. Any suggestions?"

"Toss her over board! It's a disgrace having her on this ship!" That was one idea. Here comes another one! "Keep her! We can use her as our captain and finest warrior!" "Use her as a slave!" Then came the cries of "KEEP HER!" or "TOSS HER". Over and over until Zheng He was sure he couldn't stand it anymore.

"Silence! I have decided that we should keep her! She has proved herself! And to this day, woman will be allowed to fight and with everyone else!" Everyone cheered.

The next day, Zheng He broke the news to Ying Yen. She jumped for joy. “We have also decided to let all woman join the Ming fleet!” Ying Yen grinned. “Great! Do I still get to go to India?” She asked. “You bet!” Zheng He said.

After weeks of sea scurvy and other horrible diseases, the watch girl finally yelled “Land ho!!!” They had arrived in India!

As they walked through the exotic architecture, Ying Yen gazed in wonder. They arrived at a palace of solid marble. As they walked in, they saw a giant throne carved with strange animals. A regal, tall, handsome man sat on the throne accompanied by a beautiful woman. As they approached and knelt, the Maharajah said: “Rise, my friends.”

“We have come for trading.” Ying Yen announced. “We have Chinese silks, jewels, ceramics and artwork.”

“Intriguing.” The Maharajah said. “This will be interesting.”

As the Ming fleet finally made their way back to the ship, Ying Yen realised what an adventure actually means: the journey, the experiences, and most of all, proving yourself. And that is what an adventure means.

# Ming Treasure Voyages: Always Be Laughing

*Victoria Shanghai Academy, Chan, Joshua – 9*

As we were about to set sail from this beautiful island of snakes and men wearing turbans riding elephants called India, I felt a pang of sadness leaving our newly-made friends, but also comforted by the fact that we were to embark on a new adventure with my companions that have accompanied me to many distant lands. We were given many soft fabrics to bring home, and brown beans which when crushed led to a distinct aroma. Some of the men added water to it which when drunk helped the men to stay awake whilst they were on watch at night.

My best friend, Ching, was the cook and he served the best Chinese dim sum on board. He was a plump little boy who was much more mature than he looked and he had a heart of gold. The many times he had saved me from pirates, I have only him to thank for saving my life. The other close friend of mine was Captain Fu, who I am also indebted to for taking me on board as an orphan after my parents both died when I was a toddler. I am thankful to him as he gave me food and taught me how to look after myself whilst guiding me along the many voyages. Captain Fu was kind and often made me laugh as we sailed on our adventures in seek of new things, new cultures, new lands around the world on The Golden Phoenix.

The Golden Phoenix could carry a crew of over 15 strong men and often we had to stop at new islands for supplies of food and water. We were due to stop soon as it had been over a month since our last stop, and the food was starting to smell. From a distance we could see a mass of land approaching. It looked like many strange animals we had never seen before with lots of tall grass and trees surrounding the waters. I could see some horse-like animals with black and white stripes and millions of brown ones too that looked like a larger dog. I had heard about a faraway land, where many animals roamed freely, and as we approached land there was an amazing sightseeing these new creatures interacting with each other. I was so excited that we had come across this new place. Some of the crew were muttering that they had heard of this place before, a place that people called Africa.

The Captain decided to dock in a cove to see if we could find any treasures but it was full of crocodile. No doubt, we had to explore this mysterious cave but first we had to fight off the crocodiles now moving towards the entrance. Out came the swords as the men fought at the front of the deck. I used this new invention called gunpowder which combined with fire would cause a loud noise. I hoped this would scare away the crocodiles and luckily this worked, as the snapping beasts soon retreated and disappeared into the depths of the waters.

The Captain ordered the men to dock the ship. The men were scared of what may be in the cave, so I plucked up the courage and volunteered to go first. I was trembling with sweat pouring down my face as I slowly climbed down from the boat to step into the swampy mud. I splashed my way into the cave with my sword and as I was about to enter the dark cave, an echo of a cavernous, roaring sound came from the back. Before I knew it, a ferocious group of hyenas ran out laughing. Surprisingly, these cat-like animals were gentle and kind, not at all what I had expected. I immediately waved to my crew to hold off as I attempted to make friends with them. They slowly crept up to me as I stroked their heads and let them do the same to me. They welcomed all of us, visitors to their home where they offered us food and water.

Inside the main part of the cave was dark and damp but what I saw was an Aladdin's cave filled with priceless treasures that one could never imagine. There were glowing turquoise emeralds, blood-red rubies, ocean blue sapphires, buckets of gold and glittering diamonds that filled the whole cave with colours. The men were whooping as they gaped at the mouth-watering find and they started to plan how to divert the hyenas to steal their treasures. As the crewmembers plotted, I realised that this was not the way to treat our new friends who had just been kind in offering us food and shelter. I was not suffering from the same amount of greed as my colleagues. I know times were tough back at home, where if we came back with lavish treasures we could live like kings, but deep down I could not do it and it did not seem right.

I had to think of a plan which would help my new friends. I used stale bread to lure the crocodiles out of the murky waters, and they soon surrounded my sailor-companions, scaring them out of their minds. Ching screamed so loudly that he caused more animals to appear – more animals I had not seen before – tall ones, fat ones, and large ones with big manes of hair. They all looked very scary which led the crew retreating back to the boat. There were mutterings that I was the traitor but I think this was the right thing to do: leaving the treasures in this magical land.

The hyenas thanked me with a large bag of jewels, which was more than enough to pay for a lifetime of voyages on The Golden Phoenix. These expeditions led us to even more interesting places, but the land of Africa will always be remembered by me where the friendliness and warm laughter of the hyenas can still be heard.

# The Cursed Chest

Victoria Shanghai Academy, Cheung, Vanessa – 9

“Land ho!” somebody on the deck yelled. Zheng He groggily opened his eyes. He got out of his luxurious sheepskin four-poster bed. He brushed his teeth with his horsehair toothbrush and put on his best robe. Zheng He turned to the rest of his gigantic fleet. He grabbed a large wooden megaphone, and said, “Okay, half of you down to the island! Other half, prepare breakfast.” With that, the general jumped onto the dangling rope ladder and headed down the ship. Half of his giant fleet followed him. They marched behind Zheng He in two perfect lines, walking towards the heart of the island.

At the center of the island, there was a stone pyramid that was larger than the others. Zheng He and his men entered the pyramid. They crossed a long wooden bridge. They found a bronze chest in the midst of the large stone pyramid.

The chest was rusted and old, but still glinted in the sunlight. Zheng He tried to force the chest open, assuming it was locked. But it swung open effortlessly. The half of Zheng He’s humongous fleet gasped. Inside was exactly 882 gold coins. Zheng He’s men divided the coins among themselves and carried them back to the fleet. Zheng He didn’t bother to touch a single coin. He was already wealthy, and that wealth satisfied him. Why did he need more money?

The next day, Zheng He was bored. But the fleet seemed much more empty. So he just wandered around the library, checking out different books. Suddenly, he gasped. He had spotted a bronze-coloured book. On the front cover of the book was a *very* familiar symbol. It was the same symbol on the chest in that stone pyramid.

That same withered skull with the pointed circles and wiggly lines. Out of curiosity, Zheng He pulled the book from one of the library’s wooden bookshelves. The title was, ‘The Curse of the Aztec Gold’. Then, Zheng He started reading from a random chapter, which amazingly was the exact chapter that he needed:

“The Curse of the Aztec Gold is a very dangerous but not well-known curse. It was put on the chest the Aztecs gave to a power-crazy Spanish conqueror named Cortes. Aided with his magic sword, Cortes and his army conquered anything in their path. The Aztecs had given it to him because they hoped that if they offered it to Cortes, he would stop his conquer of their country. But that only made him greedier.

That made the heathen gods so angry they cursed the chest: Whoever took gold out of the chest had to return all the coins they took and sprinkle some of the blood of the child of any person they had ever murdered in order to stop the curse. The curse was: Those who took coins from the chest shall turn into walking skeletons when in the beam of the moonlight.

“So now you get it,” Zheng He said through a wooden megaphone. His voice was hoarse from all that talking, and his mind was still swimming. He had been explaining to the fleet about the information he’d read. “Now, all generals of the fleet, listen to me.” Zheng He told the captains of the ships his plan. Three captains and the remaining half of their men would search the island at midnight until they found the undead skeletons. When they *did* find them, those captains would sound a conch horn.

While they were searching, six generals and *their* remaining crewmembers would build a large, strong cage made of the strongest material on the ship that could host more than a thousand skeletons. When they heard the conch horn, they would join those three captains and get ready for the fight. The rest of the fleet also needed to battle if they heard the conch horn’s cry. Suddenly, the fleet’s large bronze bell rang. All of the sailors knew what that meant. *Midnight.*

“Okay, everybody.” Zheng He tried not to sound too afraid. “Operation Skeleton starts *now!*”

All of the half of the fleet got to work. With so many sailors, the job was quickly done. *Honk!* HONK! HONK! “The conch horn,” Zheng He whispered to himself. “EVERYONE, GET TO THE ISLAND!” The admiral shouted much louder to the remaining part of the fleet. The skeletons were indeed a gruesome

sight. Their robes had turned into rags and their pants had been ripped. Most of their ribs were showing, and their bones were pearly white.

A lot of them were missing some teeth, and those that remained were the most disgusting yellowish colour. Some of their limbs were gone, and their eye sockets were showing. “*Yuck*,” somebody in Zheng He’s half of the crew muttered.

“*ATTACK!*” Zheng He shouted in his bravest, most formal voice. Zheng He’s part of the sailors had the upper hand since they had the ship’s resources and weapons.

“Great job, men,” Zheng He congratulated his part of the crew. They had won and stuffed the skeletons into the cage the six generals and their remaining crew—members had built. “So now, who would volunteer to send the dreaded cursed Aztec chest far away? And not to mention by himself.” A brave sailor named Xiang Gang volunteered for the daring mission. He had a good heart and a smart mind. And he was also very courageous.

While Xiang Gang was making his long journey with only the cursed chest, stacks of bronze cups of tea, and a leather bag stuffed with packs of dried fish meat, Zheng He’s half of the fleet hauled the cageful of skeletons into the Mediterranean Sea. “Come on, men!” Zheng He encouraged the brave sailors.

You might be wondering if Xiang Gang made it. Yes, he did. And where did he send that cursed chest? He placed it safely into a hidden island called the Isla de Muerta. Zheng He’s half of the fleet hoped that it might never be found again.



# All because of Pie

*Victoria Shanghai Academy, Chiang, Kyle – 9*

Everything crazy all started at the Ming Treasure ship.

The baseball bat was ready to swing the target. “Are you sure about this, captain?”

”It’s all worth it, Sailor Bob,” says the Captain. Then he swings the bat with all his power. Candy pours out the piñata. HAPPY BIRTHDAY, CAPTAIN!” The crew all shouted. The captain was super excited for his 100,000th birthday. Then the crew worked together to put 100,000 candles on the birthday pie, which they failed 10 seconds later.

Suddenly, the pie started rumbling. A giant snout as big as a pirate popped out. The terrified pirates screamed as if someone was spanking them. Then the whole body of the great PIE RAT came crashing out. The pie rat crew had all sorts of electronic devices and just texted each other instead of squeaking, which they thought was too old school.

The pirates knew very little about technology at that time, they were simple and just all sang in harmony, ”ya want some pieeeee?” The pie rats stared at them in confusion. They thought the pirates were offering a war, so they bit all the pirates into shreds, leaving the pirates at a critical state. The message soon floated to the nice emperor of China. When he found out the pirates were hurt, he was so worried that he healed the pirates with his very own magical machine. Now, the newly-recovered pirates were super nice and grateful. Instead of snatching, they gave out precious stuff like gold and silver to other people, so they were always welcomed in villages. But then something happened. The world will be changed after this.

One day, the Ming treasure ship suddenly started to rock back and forth, followed by a loud BANG. It was the black destroyer squad pirates, the meanest pirates on land. The black destroyer squad saw the Ming Treasure pirates playing happy slappy. Like any other pirates, they are greedy and violent. So they used their NUKES to nuke the ships.

Luckily, the happy slapping pirates saw the nuke, and they fired at the gigantic bomb. Of course, the bomb exploded, but in the air. Then the Ming Treasure pirates explained to the black destroyer squads that peace was all they need and gave them a chance to flee. After that, With peace in their hearts, the Ming treasure pirates continue their nice act. They went to every pirate ship in the universe and gave them each a chest full of gold and silk. So, they basically just ended pirate torture in about 5 seconds. Now, even the villages had tons of precious materials.

The Ming treasure pirates soon were floating across countries to play and give away stuff. They floated to Japan and had sushi. They sailed to the UK to meet the king. They even went to Florence and helped Leonardo da Vinci paint the Mona Lisa! They thought it would be nice to go back to China and report their nice acts to the emperor, so they did, but unfortunately, they ran into the black destroyer squad. AGAIN. The black destroyer tricked them by pretending to be nice Last time they met. But they are actually evil. They started a battle again, and the black destroyer squad actually won this time. They tied up the nice pirates and threatened to slice them up with blades and swords. The Ming treasure pirates were terrified, and they quickly tried to scoot away in the rope, but the black destroyer squad leader spotted them, so he sliced the head off one of the nice pirates just to show he wasn’t joking. The Ming treasure pirates were now determined to avenge their friend. They used all their might to slip through the ropes to shoot the black destroyer squad with their guns. But the emperor was mad. He did not like to kill. So the emperor demanded the pirates to leave China forever.

The pirate who got his head sliced off at the black destroyer squad was actually a fake, he was actually captured by the black destroyer squad. He was getting restructured with bionic parts and being reprogrammed with an evil mind. The evil squad was planning to use this half robot half pirate to get control of the Ming treasure pirates and get all, yes, ALL of their loot. The Ming treasure pirates were still playing around at England and didn’t notice a sword behind their filthy heads.

One by one, the robot pirate (let's just call him Bill for now) got all the pirate's head implanted with an evil chip, all except the leader. The leader was very mad, he tried very hard to deactivate the chips. Unfortunately, The Ming Treasure pirate leader never went to pirate's I.T. class, so he knew nothing on tech, and he failed. These new reprogrammed red-eyed pirates decided to rebel and make Bill their new leader.

Bill was a nice person at first, the nicest of all, you could say. But after he was painfully rebuilt, he was the most ruthless and merciless pirate on land. Also, he friended the black destroyer squad and often went on sleepovers on each of their ships. They soon retrieved all the loot from the villages that the nice Ming treasure pirates gave them before. All the treasures were then presented to the Ming emperor, who was very impressed. He shook Bill's hand and kept praising him. But what the emperor didn't know was that his life would be never the same soon.

One day like no other, the emperor was calling all the pirates for a promotion. One by one, the pirates got their prize, and when it was Bill's turn, he shook the emperor's hand, but this time, he got an implant chip, a specially programmed one which is more nasty than Bill gave to his team, in his palm. The emperor felt a second of dizziness and after that, his eyes turned red.

# The Sacrifice

*Victoria Shanghai Academy, Graff, Eric – 10*

Alex the great watched as his crew brought gold, porcelain and silver aboard the ship Scythe. The sea was peaceful and calm, the perfect day to sail. Alex had installed giant engines that would lift the boat into the sky so they would be safe from the dangers of the ocean. Alex's destination was East Africa, when they arrived there they would trade for goods, but that wasn't the whole story. He had also heard of a rumour saying that treasure was to be found in one of the caves located on a mountain called Mount Kilimanjaro. He noticed an old woman by the harbour whose clothes looked like that they were made out of dirt and clay. Her eyes were constantly shifting from brown to black. Alex didn't really think much about it because he thought he was hallucinating since he hadn't slept much the night before. When all of the trading currency had been transported safely, he turned on the engines and they lifted off into the sky. There was one thing Alex didn't notice as the ship sailed into the sky, the old woman by the harbour had turned into a dragon and was flying towards the ship. The dragon hid in the clouds so the ship couldn't see it. The skin turned into the exact colour as the sky making it invisible.

The ship kept sailing through the sky. The ship was now flying over the ocean when suddenly another ship passed below them. The ship saw them and started following them. The crew was puzzled why the other ship was following them. Little did the crew know that it was the ship of the white walkers, a group of dead pirates that sailed the Pacific Ocean, destroying any ship they came upon. The Scythe had never heard about them before, because no one had seen them and come back alive to tell the tale. The ship then realised that they must be pirates but laughed because the pirates couldn't reach them, but little did they know the pirates were always prepared. The white walkers summoned a group of 50 seagulls and the white walkers grabbed on the legs of the seagulls and commanded the seagulls to fly up to the ship. The Scythe crew was completely stupefied. The seagulls flew up to the boat and then they dropped on the deck and they started attacking the crew. The crew immediately started fighting the pirates with swords. One of the crew men ran up the mast of the ship and then jumped off it and squashed 3 of the pirates. One of the crew lured the pirates in to one line and then stabbed his sword through 5 of the pirates. The pirates were running around and stabbing everything. They decapitated most of the crew because you could see several heads rolling across the deck. One of the crew threw a pirate overboard and watched as it hit the ocean. A pirate came out of nowhere and flung his sword at Alex. He ducked just in time to see it miss his head by millimetres. After they destroyed all of the pirates the deck was covered with blood and lose body parts and dead carcasses from both pirates and crew men. Alex immediately commanded the ship to fly away and head towards their destination with the dragon still pursuing them.

The ship had taken a lot of damage so it was forced to land on the sea, so they could repair the engines. The dragon mumbled get ready for the plan under his breath as if it was talking to someone. The Scythe continued on. It began to turn dark, so the crew went to bed with some of the crew still awake keeping watch. Suddenly one of the watchers saw something green. He immediately spoke into his microphone and broadcast the message to the whole ship. They had reached India. When they arrived at shore they were treated well and they traded for spice and food and furniture. They bought beautiful pots that would definitely make the crew's wives swoon. They also fixed the ship and they lifted up into the sky to continue their journey to East Africa. The crew reached Africa the next day and were overjoyed. The crew landed at Somalia and they were treated as kings. They traded and became friends with the locals. One night when they were eating dinner Alex asked the locals about the treasure on Mount Kilimanjaro. The locals told the crew about what they knew about it. They said there was a terrible monster that guarded it but people said it had flown away. Alex decided they would search for the treasure in the morning. The next morning the crew got in the Scythe and they flew towards the mountain. They spotted several caves but none of them looked right. Then round about noon Alex spotted a cave that was humongous and had coins and jewels at the entrance. The ship landed and they climbed down a ladder to the cave entrance. Alex and 5 others stood at the entrance while the rest of the crew stayed on the ship. Then suddenly the mountain exploded and then something emerged out of the ground, it was the dragon that had followed the ship. It flew straight through the ship. The dragon hit the engine and then exploded. The ship blew up and bits of flaming debris landed all over the mountain. Alex and the rest of the crew ran straight for the monster. The monster torched one of the crew mates while the rest ran forward and stabbed the monster. The dragon swallowed two more crew men. Alex and the last crew man went to the boats debris and found a ballista that somehow

had not been damaged and fired straight at the monster the monster got hit and flew backwards. They charged straight for the monster, but the crew man got torched. Alex pulled out his two flintlocks punching holes in the hide of the dragon and causing it to bleed. The monster lunged at Alex and Alex jumped but the monster swallowed him whole. Alex was inside the monster's mouth. He was going to be digested but he couldn't let this monster harm any more people. He stabbed straight up and pulled out a stick of giant dynamite and lit it. After about 5 seconds the mountain exploded and obliterated everything in the mountain and everything on it. Alex had sacrificed himself for a greater cause. He had saved lives and put his duty first, even at the cost of his own life.

One day, I was playing football and my friend kicked it into a storage room. He asked me to get it. After that I found something glorious and mysterious, glowing in the dark. I didn't want to touch it but I touched it accidentally. All of a sudden, it sent me right back to 1405s.

I felt dizzy and seasick until I could stand properly. Then I realized I was stuck on a ship that is full of people. It was when I saw a man with a weird hat and a cape on him, in ancient Chinese clothing. He introduced himself to me as Zheng He. Then I realized I was on his voyage ship. To my surprise, he asked me if I want to go on an adventure with him and I agreed. All of a sudden, a storm was coming to us, bringing dark clouds and heavy rains over straight to us. Zheng He called his crew to get the ship covered and put down the anchor to stable the ship. After having a war with the storm for a few days, we were still alive! Unfortunately, some crew members got flushed away by the storm so we only got 20 members left on the ship...

We continued our adventure on hunting treasures all around the world. Not after long, we rested on a quiet island and discovered an abandoned cave in a mountain. There was an old and locked treasure chest inside! However, as it was locked, we have to find the key for it... While we are still figuring out how to find it, someone saw a carved map showing the location of the key on top of the treasure chest. "Hurray!" I cried. It was also inside the cave as well. Few hours later, Zheng He finally came across with the key, which was buried under some mud. We opened it and see... A huge glowing ship model with a crown on it! We also shared the gold found inside the chest.

Few years later, I said goodbye to him and his crew and started to seek my way back home. On my way, I once encountered the glowing and mysterious thing I touched at the beginning. Then I touched it... "Boom!" I was sent into a bright swirl and went back to the normal world. Everything seemed like a dream to me. My friends are happy to see me again!

# Zheng He

*Victoria Shanghai Academy, Kong, Matthew – 9*

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# Yao Ming's Adventures on The Ming Treasure Voyages

*Victoria Shanghai Academy, Lam, Darren – 11*

Ten-year old Yao Ming somersaulted across the deck, dodging a pistol's shot while waving his gleaming cutlass at the pirates. "You'll never take me alive!" he yelled, throwing ropes at the pirates. The pirates yelled, the ropes binding them, and Yao Ming was being lifted onto the cheering crew's shoulders. He felt legendary ... except that he was daydreaming on the loo once again. He quickly grabbed the plumbing stick and started cleaning the toilet, before he was spotted by the captain slacking again. Yao Ming was on a ship that was part of the Ming Treasure Voyages, and he was headed to India, which would have been an exciting trip ... if he hadn't been a servant.

Despite this, he still looked forward to India, where he might get a break on a beach. The miles melted by, and Yao Ming's life continued. Everything was great ... or at least until the night of the storm, where everything changed.

That night, waves battered the ship. Rain lashed the sails, and lightning flashed through the sky. The ship lurched and wobbled in the thunderstorm, with the deck crammed with sailors, lookouts, guards and servants. However, Yao Ming was in his tattered, flea-infested, half-rotten bunk which was littered with buckets in an effort to hold out the rain, where Yao Ming was daydreaming again. On the deck, there were grunts and cries, and a vague shout of "help!", but Yao Ming was oblivious to everything. He was dreaming of a kung-fu kick when the door swung open, and there stood a pirate! Yao Ming did not spot him, but kicked him in the face, and the pirate collapsed. Yao Ming awoke abruptly, saw the unconscious pirate and hurried out to help, closing the door behind him. In his haste, he didn't quite close the door.

Yao Ming raced up the deck. He dodged fighters, weaved through supplies and managed to get to the side of the ship. He peered down at the choppy sea and felt a lurch of seasickness overcome him. He headed back to his bunk, where he might feel better when he spotted several pirates were being battered by his swinging door. Yao Ming tried to provide assistance, but suddenly the rusty door fell off its hinges, and sent them all tumbling into the sea!

The cold water rushed up to meet Yao Ming, and the impact stung his entire body. He felt himself sinking to the bottom, when he collided into several pieces of coral, which floated into a strange pile that looked like a pillar and shifting an ancient lever, which seemed to adjust a bit of the seabed, but Yao Ming convinced himself it was nothing. He pushed himself desperately back up, and barely reached the ship when suddenly there was a roar ...

A monstrous creature loomed out of the water, clearly relishing the effect of it. It had great black spots with eyes embedded in them all around eight slimy, long, sinister tentacles that were absolutely hideous. Its body was larger than a giant squid, dwarfing the ship and it gave an ear-splitting roar that sent the soldiers and sailors scrambling around the deck. Pirates yelled, dropped their weapons, banged into each other which provoked screams, yells and bangs, which startled the creature. However, it was not an achievement as the creature got mad and threw its slimy tentacles onto the ship.

The pirates screamed, the sailors ran for cover and the captains of both forces yelled at their men to stop acting like babies. Yao Ming was one of the few reasonable men left, and he suggested the idea of working together to the two leaders. "Why don't we combine forces to fight this monster?" he requested, gesturing at the chaos ensuring behind him. The leaders glanced at each other, considering the offer. It was a tempting one if they were to survive.

"Yes!" they agreed. They retrieved their men, and the sailors readied the cannons, soldiers sharpened their weapons and pirates prepared the sails, when suddenly, the monster struck, sending two nearby soldiers flying, and a huge crack appeared on the hull of the ship. Immediately, Yao Ming was dispatched to mend the crack, while the fighting raged above. Quickly finishing his mission, Yao Ming returned to the deck where cannons were banging, and silver blurs were flying all over the place, trying to find their target. The serpent slapped the ship again, and it rocked dangerously. The pirates ran about, yelling, and Yao Ming

encouraged them to keep it up. However, many men were disarmed, and the ship's stock of gunpowder was slowly running out. Yao Ming, desperate to do something, grabbed a nearby fallen sword and charged the mighty monster himself. "NO!" yelled the captain. The monster's tentacles engulfed Yao Ming, and he fought them off and reached the monster's body. The monster roared as its defences were penetrated as its tentacles were severed, and whacked Yao Ming hard in the face. Yao Ming felt his nose crack, blood spread across his face and he fell into the water below...

Yao Ming's lifeless body sunk deeper and deeper into the dark, misty sea. He was close to unconsciousness, when suddenly, he hit something soft. The coral he had unwittingly turned into a pillar was saving him now! He swam for the surface and burst out full of confidence. The monster was caught off guard, and suffered a fatal blow, and its life ebbed away. Triumphant, Yao Ming lifted his sword as the crew celebrated, joyfully hugging him. Smiling, Yao Ming only requested one thing: for all the pirates to join the sailors, and sail together representing China. His request was happily met, and the men made him commander. The ship then sailed once again, and soon became famous for its heroic deeds. And so, to this day, it is known as the mighty king of the sea.

# A Race Against Time

*Victoria Shanghai Academy, Lam, Isabella – 10*

I sighed as I sat on the deck of my boat. Don't get me wrong, I love the sea! But charting whale activity and other boring stuff was not how I planned to spend my break. As the boat moved across the silent night sea, I stared out at the distance, wishing I was home. Suddenly, the boat lurched, and I was almost thrown overboard. The other crew members ran out in their pyjamas, confused. One of my men ran to the prow screaming, "What on earth is that!?" Following his gaze, I looked, and what I saw chilled my bones. We were being lured farther and farther into a swirling vortex of water. "Whirlpool!" someone shouted, but I could barely hear them over the ear-splitting sound of water. This was our end.

Praying to god, I quickly gathered everyone and told them all to go below decks. No one was going to be left outside to the ocean's wrath. We swayed from side to side and crashed into countless objects as well as each other. There was broken glass everywhere and just as I was thinking of what to do, I heard the sound of shattering of glass yet again. Many of our crew were hurt, I knew we couldn't hold much longer. Then suddenly, as quickly as it had started, it all stopped. The boat stopped swaying, the sound of crashing waves died. Suddenly, it was so quiet you could hear a pin drop. Carefully, I stood up and brushing past the broken glass, I walked up to the deck.

For a second, I stood dazed staring at the strange sight. A group of men were standing on the deck. No way, I told all my crew members to go downstairs and we didn't have nearly as many people. As my eyes got used to the darkness, I saw the figures of strongly built men, holding wicked sharp swords that glittered in the dark black night.

Instinctively, my hand moved towards the door handle behind my back. But suddenly, there was a flurry of movement and before I could speak, a sword pressed against my neck.

"Who are you?" I demanded. "What are you doing on our ship?"

"Actually," replied a voice from the pitch black, "Who are you and what are YOU doing on our ship?"

"What do you mean?" I said confused, "This is my ship, not yours."

"Stop joking around," he said. "We are the Ming treasure fleet and though we are famed for giving valuables away, we also keep military forces and we do NOT like thieves on our ship."

I was bewildered.

"Hold up." I said. We are not thieves, we got sucked into a whirlpool and landed here".

"The blue flurry!" They exclaimed

"The what?" I said.

"It is a special hurricane that appears once a century and sucks ships from their time to any time in the past." The captain explained.

"So what year is it?" I asked

"1423."

Time seemed to slow down. My heart stopped. If they were being honest, then that meant over 20 young men and I were currently stuck 596 years back from the current time.

"No, it can't be!" I exclaimed.

"It's happening," they replied.



“Isn’t there any way to go back?” I asked desperately.

“Well..... there is one way” they said slowly “but it’s so difficult that no one has ever made it back.”

“How?” I asked.

“You have to find the blue flurry again and go through it before the second sunset from when you arrived here.”

“I have to try,” I said.

“Okay. We’ll help you.”

“We must go to the mountain of truth and find the man of wisdom,” Someone said.

“Yes! He has the map of the flurry, meaning he can track the blue flurry no matter where it goes.”

“We have to hurry!” I exclaimed.

“Very well, we will change course towards the mountain of truth.” The pirates said.

“Ok,” I replied.

I gathered my crew and we went back above deck to await our arrival at the mountain of truth.

After hours of sailing, we finally reached the mountain of truth. We hiked up the rocky path and when we finally reached the cave of the man of wisdom, the sun had set. We were exhausted.

“Only one can enter,” said one pirate.

“I will go,” I said.

“Very well,” they said. “But be careful.”

I nodded and stepped into the dingy, moist cave.

I walked for about ten minutes and found myself in a circular clearing. There was a glowing orb and an old man sitting next to it on a cushion.

“Are you the man of wisdom?” I asked tentatively.

“Yes. I have been expecting you,” he says.

“Um..... OK?” I replied unsure of what else to say.

“Tell the pirates that the blue flurry is currently located near the port of old Chinatown.” He says.

“Thank you,” I say gratefully.

“You’re welcome, I wish you luck.”

And with that, he vanished.

I rushed out of the cave.

“He said the blue flurry is located near the port of old Chinatown!” I panted.

“Let’s go!” they said.

Once again we boarded the ship. I was so tired that I lay on the bunks and soon I was sound asleep.....

When I came to, we had arrived, and the pirates had found the blue flurry.

“Well, here we are.” The captain says.

“Thank you for all your help.” I said.

“You’re welcome. You better hurry though, the sun is about to set!”

“Bye!”

And with that, the hurricane sucked us up and all I saw was black.....

I landed with a thump on the deck of my ship. We were back! I screamed with joy and relief. I hugged my crew and we celebrated all night. This may not have been the most fun break, but it certainly was the most interesting. I’m sure, I’ll never forget this adventure.

# Admiral Zheng

*Victoria Shanghai Academy, Lam, Julian – 10*

Admiral Zheng He and his fleet of ships just left China, and are about to go to their first stop, Vietnam. There were 16 ships and he was going to hand out gifts in the form of gold, because the Yongle Emperor of China wanted to build good relations with other countries. Everyone was excited and happy for the journey. Everyone on board was eating their breakfast of mantou and drinking oolong tea, and they were extremely hungry. They were close to China but not close enough to see China, even though it was a bright, clear and sunny day.

Suddenly, there was fog everywhere. Zheng He was feeling uncomfortable because he couldn't see his ships. He didn't want anything bad to happen, like a pirate attack and stolen treasure. Zheng heard his men bumping into each other and shouting at each other.

Ho Wong, the captain of the ship, Phoenix, signalled to his crew to row to a place where pirates lived. "Where are we going? The other ships are going the other way!" a member of the crew questioned him. "Be quiet! I am the captain of this ship! How dare you question me!" The crew started moving the ship to a land of troubles.

Pirates suddenly jumped aboard The Phoenix and attacked the crew with swords. Some of the crew, scared, ran around the ship and accidentally fell in the sea. Some hid aboard the ship but some brave soldiers fought back with spears, swords and also bow and arrows. While they were fighting, some pirates accidentally knocked down some torches and lit up the ship with fire. There were sounds of weapons clanging with each other, shouting and screaming. The pirates and the soldiers had to avoid the flames on the bloody deck which had dead bodies laying on it. There were more dead bodies from the crew than the pirates. Some of the soldiers caught on fire as they were forced into the flames. People were fighting everywhere. While they were fighting, arrows were being shot from the pirates's ship, flying through the air and injuring the enemies.

"Go, get the treasure!" yelled Chen Zuyi, the leader of the pirates. Ho, who had since joined the pirates on their ship, directed a few of them back to his own ship, The Phoenix, on small wooden sailboats to steal the precious treasure on the lower deck. The pirates climbed into the lower deck and started to load the treasure onto the sailboats. "Go, quicker!" barked Ho.

Chang, a captain of a ship called Firefly, saw flames across the sea, He heard shouting and smelled the smoke. "Tell Admiral He!" he shouted. Chang waited for Zheng He's instructions, then lead his ship to the flames.

As he moved to the flames, he wondered what was going on. Suddenly, he saw the name of the ship through his telescope and realised it was one of their own fleet, He was shocked to see that Captain Ho was helping Chen Zuyi, the most feared pirate of the Asian seas, to kill his crew and steal the Emperor's treasure. "Fire archers! Aim at the pirate's ship then fire!" commanded Chang.

The pirates ran around the deck of their ship frantically trying to avoid the arrows. Chen Zuyi feared that he was going to lose his ship and his men. Pirates were shot on the body but some wanted to take cover so they wouldn't die, so they decided to hide behind barrels or even dead bodies.

Chen was forced to jump into the freezing sea because his ship was in flames. Chen swam up the water and was unexpectedly hit by a bunch of wood planks. Chen furiously screamed while swallowing salty water, "How dare you, Chang you filthy sailor!" Chen swam as he tried to get to the sailboat Ho was in with the treasure, while also avoiding dead bodies floating in the sea and arrows being shot at him.

The crew aboard The Firefly jumped onto sailboats and made their way to the strong pirates and the magnificent treasure. Along the way were sailors, bad and good, grabbing on to the boats, trying not to drown. But those on the sailboats shoved them off rudely because they had to quickly save the Emperor's treasure before it sank into the sea. They saw tattooed pirates with scars on their faces on the boat filled with treasure. The pirates were still loading up the treasure onto their boats. The crew crept quietly onto The Phoenix to defend the treasure while some of the soldiers attacked the bandits with all they had. The pirates surrendered since they were outnumbered by the aiding crew. Four soldiers rushed towards Ho, then put a smelly fishing net to capture him. Ho tried to get out of the net but got stuck with some silverfish slapping him with their tails! Suddenly, Chen dashed to Ho with a dagger to slash open the net to free him. Ho jumped out of the net and took a fallen broken sword from the dirty ground and slashed all four soldiers. Chang commanded his soldiers, "get them!" The soldiers surrounded Ho and Chen, leaving them with no escape route. Ho and Chen gave up feeling defeated and outraged. But they spared Ho and Chen Zuyi to be taken as prisoners

After the fight was over, the soldiers of Zheng He proudly took the prisoners to their master. Then they enjoyed their trip to foreign countries.

# New Adventures

*Victoria Shanghai Academy, Li, Xinyun – 9*

One sailor came running towards captain Daniel with something round and circle in his fist. Daniel asked, “You look very worried and scared. What happened, Bob?” Bob answered, “Read this scroll then you will understand what had happened. You have to help! We will have to go on another adventure soon...” Daniel took the scroll gently from Bob’s hand and opened the scroll to read “Dear Daniel, please can you help me with one problem? There is a SHIP of pirates who have stolen treasure from an island, and now that island’s people are very sad, so please can you help with your amazing pirate team? Please??? Your friend from the lookout Charlie. Ps: please write back if you can or cannot.” “Bob, go and get me some paper and pen and all the other sailors.” Bob came back with a large group of sailors and a piece of paper. Daniel read out the message aloud, so all the sailors could hear what the letter was about. All the sailors listened carefully and chanted together after Daniel finished reading, “Ok we are ready to go!” The sailors went home to pack and they met near the Ming Treasure Fleet. Daniel told one sailor to deliver the letter that said “ok!” on it. Then they set off to go on another mysterious adventure.

They sailed for a while until they heard some singing. Daniel thought that the singing came from an island nearby. But he couldn’t see any island. So they kept on sailing happily until they saw a big ship. On top of it there was a black flag with a skull and a crossbones and also some scary shadows. That ship was called “Black Shadow.” Daniel couldn’t believe the singing was coming from the Black Shadow ship. Their fleet was endangered. All the sailors stood there in horror, they didn’t know what to do. Just then as the Ming Treasure Fleet drifted on the bright blue sea, their fleet suddenly crashed into the Black Shadow. CRASH! Then it suddenly felt like the Ming Treasure Fleet’s sailors had suddenly woken up from a sleep. The Black Shadow ship’s captain hadn’t noticed the Ming Treasure Fleet but now he felt the crash, so he turned around and saw the Ming Treasure Fleet sailing towards them. He shouted “FIGHT!” There was no movement but the sound of making arms. He looked around and saw no sailors on the boat to listen to his slogans. When he turned to face the Ming Treasure Fleet, he saw huge amounts of arms facing him. He felt so scared that he nearly fell overboard. He turned and was ready to run away, just then all heard a “PONG” and he fell to the ground with a heavy “THUMP.” The Ming Treasure Fleet’s sailors were so happy, but soon they heard clinging and crashing, and they looked on their fleet speechlessly. IT WAS THE BLACK SHADOW SHIP’S SAILORS!!! Daniel and his sailors were ready to battle, and then they started the battle with a “CRASH.” Someone in the Black Shadow ship had fallen over their captain then all the other sailors fell on top of him. Daniel and his sailors took their chance, they shot at all the sailors on their fleet until they were dead and couldn’t move. Then they climbed on the Black Shadow ship and searched for a long time, finally they found something special. All the sailors’ eyes shone with sparkles.

They slowly opened the treasure chest, inside were shimmering gold coins, glimmering jewellery and shiny diamonds. They took all the treasure and gathered it onto the Ming Treasure Fleet. They had done their job! They were very happy to help the poor people who had lost their treasure.

They sailed for a while until they reached an island with lots of people crying. Daniel returned all the treasure to the island people. They were very happy to have their treasure back and thanked Daniel over and over again. Then Daniel said goodbye and left the island with his team and sailed back home. When they finally arrived home, huge amounts of people were onshore cheering. Just then Daniel spotted Charlie in the middle of the crowd. Charlie said “Congratulations! You managed to make it. For your hard work I am going to give you a prize. It is a pet parrot! Usually all pirates have a parrot. The parrot can look out for danger. But this parrot is special, it can also talk to you and understand you.” “Thank you!” Daniel said happily and took the parrot gently from Charlie’s hand.

Until another adventure started...

# The Adventure of a Lifetime

*Victoria Shanghai Academy, Lo, Maxine – 9*

Ashlyn banged her head. She had to do a project on the Qing dynasty, which she had to hand in tomorrow, and she just started thinking about it! Since she always does her work after she finishes playing, she always does homework in a rush! But the bigger problem was... the wi-fi was broken! “Aha!” she said to herself. Even though it was a crazy idea, she was always wondering if that object could be invented...

She worked on her idea for hours and hours, until she made a...TIME MACHINE! Ashlyn had a brave and curious personality, so she didn't mind if she got lost in any puzzle or maze. She was sweaty and exhausted, but it was worth it. She took a proud look at the smooth time machine, as she went in it. She was too proud that she forgot to set the time period to the Qing dynasty!

After the sound stopped, she stepped out and found herself on a ship, and as dizzy as a moth that flutters around the flame. She checked the controller... “No, No, No! This is not right! This is the Ming dynasty! Ok, what should I do?” She tried to put it back to Qing dynasty, but the time machine was broken down and rusty. Ashlyn grabbed the heavy time machine in her hands and threw it in the ocean as hard as she could.

The people around her looked dirty, as if they haven't taken a bath for months. She looked over all the heads, and saw someone dressed differently from all the other crew mates. He was somewhere about seven feet tall, and was perfectly clean. Ashlyn zoomed through her brain, trying to figure out who he was. After a while, she realized it was Zheng He, the captain in the Ming dynasty who led the Ming Treasure Voyages!

She was so ecstatic to meet the legendary Zheng He! Suddenly, she saw Zheng He approach closer...closer... and closer. Ashlyn was really nervous. “Now, please, do your job! Ok?” She had no idea what her job was. So Ashlyn just picked up a random mop and swept the floor.

After a hard day's work, while everyone was sleeping, a crew member shouted “PIRATE ATTACK! PIRATE ATTACK!” Zheng He quickly commanded the military to attack the pirates “Admiral Zheng here, a pirate attack is currently launched by the pirates!” Zheng He told the whole crew to hide in his room, because the security guards were guarding his room. They could hear heavy footsteps heading their way. The loud SWOOSH sounds of the sword fight could be heard through the door. Screams of agonizing pain followed. The sword sounds came closer... Suddenly, a sword poked through the door. It started sawing a circular opening. Ash widened her eyes and grabbed her bag, ready to hit one of the pirates if they came in.

Suddenly, the pirates rushed in and giggled “Our captain would be impressed if we take the silk and treasure... but for people, we're gonna get you guys! You people have been causing so much trouble for us pirates! You will be our slaves, cleaning our ships every day! MWAHAHAHA!” The pirates were about to put a hypnotizing poison on Zheng He, but Ashlyn started turning her head to the pirates, and hit the pirates with her heavy and torn— down bag. The last of the pirates fainted heavily on the floor, while Zheng He took out his sword, breathing heavily. “Thanks for the help. You seem to have good instincts. Why don't you help me navigate to Africa?”

The fleet continued along the route, and it had been many days since they last saw land. Finally, the fleet nearly reached a man on the plank. The man waved at them from a close distance. The man had much darker skin than anyone on the ship. it was obvious that they were in foreign lands. Zheng He exchanged gifts with the man. He offered trunks of astonishing silk and gold, reflecting the sunlight. In return, Zheng received all sorts of exotic animals like camels, zebras and ostriches.

Ash was still thinking about having a new adventure, but she remembered: SHE HAD TO RETURN TO THE PRESENT! To distract him, she asked Zheng He to go to sleep. Zheng He raised an eyebrow but agreed anyway. Ashlyn ran to the shore like a wildfire. Ashlyn walked around the shore to see if there were any scraps she could use. She saw a time machine. Wait, was it the one she built?

Ashlyn worked on fixing the time machine for hours... until she made it back to how it was supposed to be. She inserted new-looking metal parts in there. She turned the controller to the present and activated it. The sound was like a truck. VROOOOOM....

In a blink, she was back home, lying in her bed, breathing hard. Was this just a dream? Ashlyn's hair was as messy as a mop. The time machine glowed then disappeared, glowed then disappeared... Then it disappeared for real. The alarm clock rang and Ash banged on it. The alarm fell to the floor in a crash, and a small piece of glass fell off it. Her mom rushed in and asked "C'mon, wake up!! You're gonna be late for school!" Did the time machine have some magic, or was it just a dream? Ashlyn ate her breakfast and saw the time machine flashing around again. Mom shouted "What are you looking at! Eat your breakfast! The school bus is almost here!" Couldn't mom see the time machine? Ashlyn thought "If mom wasn't going to find out, I guess this means more adventures await!".

The best is yet to come, but Ashlyn would have to be patient!

# The Exploits of the Mighty Sea

*Victoria Shanghai Academy, Shaw, Micah – 10*

“Dad, can you tell me a story before I go to bed?”, asked Kent, a 6-year-old boy to his father. “Kent, it is getting late, you should go to bed now”, replied his father. “Please?”, begged Kent, eager to hear a story. “Well, there is one story that I can tell you before bed” answered his father. “Yay!”, screamed Kent, jumping with excitement.

More than 1000 years ago in the deep Pacific Ocean, the brave and mighty captain, Zheng He, set sail for the long journey around the coast of Java. “I see land about 3 kilometers away!”, screamed the lookout officer. “Everyone, all weapons ready!”, replied Zheng He loudly through the speakers. Then, Zheng He caught sight of the colossal country Java. He was ready to start trading treasures for the Yongle Emperor, defeat enemies of the Ming Dynasty, and most importantly, explore Java’s natural wonder.

A few more minutes later after arriving and now circling the coast of Java stealthy, Zheng He called out “All clear so far, I don’t see any enemies in our way...yet”. As the powerful fleet continued sailing, Zheng He started feeling his stomach rumbling. Zheng He glanced at his shining watch. “I think we should stop at Calcutta and eat at the Inn” suggested Zheng He. The others agreed with Zheng He for they were also starving. Very soon, the mighty fleet arrived at Calcutta.

Before the pirates arrived at the inn, Calcutta’s ruler stopped Zheng He and his pirates. “Hi, Mighty Zheng He”, he greeted. Zheng He replied, “Hi, may we eat at the inn?”. “Sure”, said Calcutta’s ruler. Then, Zheng He marched into the inn with his crew and they all stuffed their faces.

As they were walking out, the local ruler stopped him. “Hi, Zheng He. Would you like to trade us your silk for our matchlock guns?”, asked the local ruler. Zheng He replied, “Yes, quickly because I think it’s time to leave.”. After trading, Zheng He ran to the ship in fear of enemies coming.

At the ship Zheng He asked, “Hey Ma Huan, do you see any enemies coming our way?”. “Let me check sir, let me check”, replied the captain “Uh sir...”. “What?” asked Zheng He bothered. “Sir, I see a fleet of ships with green sails incoming less than a mile away, you should be able to see it now without a scope,” warned Ma Huan. “I see it...” Zheng He paused, mouth dropped open. “Everyone all weapons in position! We’ve got incoming forces!” screamed Zheng He as he readied himself.

Very soon, the silent, wide stretch of water became a loud boiling volcano full of explosions. Hand cannons were breaking through parts of ships, leading to massive explosions all around the ships. Pirates were diving into the ocean trying to escape, and the commanders were barking out commands all over the place. The unknown opposition fleet was soon screaming in fear from Zheng He’s leading fleet. Zheng He knew the victory would be his. The captain was the only one left standing. “Arrest him!” Zheng He commanded. Five of the best pirates took hold of the evil captain and locked him with unbreakable chains. Then they made the pirate walk the plank and sold their ships for spices and silks.

The pirates soon sailed off for their next stop— Ceylon (Sri Lanka) which was only 2.1 miles away. They could already feel the wide, weedy land ahead of them. “Land Ahoy!” shouted the chief. The large, green plains in Ceylon amazed Zheng He, but what caught most of his attention was the huts made of stone, grass, palm leaves, and branches. A man walked slowly out of a hut, noticing the army of pirates approaching. The man screamed, “A FLEET OF SHIPS ARE INCOMING!!!!”. The man hurried back in the hut and came out again with his matchlock gun. Other farmers also spotted the approaching fleet. Zheng He announced through the speakers “Stop! We mean no harm” he continued “We only wish to refill our bunker fuel”. “Hold fire,” the first man said, “Follow me”. Zheng He signaled the pirates to follow the man. The man showed him into the fuel dock. When they were finished, it was already night.

Zheng He got into his ship and made his way back to Mainland China. Zheng He heard a scream from behind. He spun around. A ship sank into the water with a huge splash. Then, two ships broke in half, spinning Zheng He’s ship in the center. He knew something wasn’t right. It wasn’t a storm and it wasn’t just misfortune. Zheng He felt goosebumps shivering inside him. His beating heart trembled with fear.



Then a disaster struck. A humongous green, scaly sea spirit towered above them. Zheng He jumped back. Shocked. “This is it”, thought Zheng He. “This is where it all ends”. He closed his eyes, waiting for certain death. Suddenly, his Nephew, Zheng Enlai leaped out of nowhere to the beast and with his sword and sliced it in half. Zheng He opened his eyes finding the monster killed. It was a miracle. It was just like a dream. He was saved.

“Was Zheng He’s nephew in the ship the whole time?” asked Kent, excitedly. “Did the sea spirit have muscles?”. Dad checked the clock, “It’s late enough, go to bed Kent”. “Fine,” said Kent excited to hear more next time. Just before Kent walked into his room, dad called, “Wait, I’ll tell you a little more. I have a secret you should know...”, dad said mysteriously, “We are the blood of Zheng He!”

# Adventures of China's Ming Treasure Fleet

*Victoria Shanghai Academy, Wong, Hang – 9*

More than six hundred years ago, there was an adventurous man called Zheng He. He wanted to explore some unknown lands by ship and take the riches and treasures to give them to the emperor of his country, China.

Zheng He asked shipmakers, carvers, painters to help build three huge ships. He also gathered a crew of more than eight hundred men to go with him on the journey. After careful planning, the fleet set sail from the port of Beijing, with lots of food, clothing, as well as maps, leaving all the villagers waving goodbye from the mainland.

At first, the crew sailed to a tiny island and saw an old man sitting on a rock. “I have lived on the island for 40 years already, and I sensed some little earthquakes on the island in the past few days.”, he said. “There must be something lurking below the waves. Be careful on your journey and good luck.” He said to Zheng He. After thanking the old man, the three ships sailed away from that tiny island.

Suddenly the wind started to get a bit strong. They thought of the old man’s advice: There was something lurking below the waves. The crew still bravely sailed on. They sailed to an island called Anuta Island. “Hi!” Zheng He smiled. The people there were really friendly. They decorated the ships with long leaves and paint them in all sorts of colours and welcomed them by dancing around the ships. The people told them that there were small earthquakes on the island in the past few days. “Some of the houses lost its roof or door, or that the whole house had crumbled down.” The leader of the people said. “We also had small tsunamis earlier this month. We believe the cause was a monster in the sea, like a giant underwater dragon or a enormous squid.” “Maybe you are right.” said Zheng He as many of the crew trembled with fear.

Then, one of the lookouts of a ship spotted something far away: A pirate ship! The good thing was the ship was far away. The bad thing was the ship was getting closer. Strangely enough, after a few seconds, one of the pirates on the pirate ship shouted some things. “It must be the captain,” Zheng He thought. But then, the ship turned away and headed another way, this time further away from their ship. It must be a sign that something was wrong.

On that night, all was calm. “That was weird.” Zheng He thought. The sea had very little waves, even though the ships were sailing, cutting through the waves. But then, the sea began to get choppy, giant waves came, the wind blew like a hurricane, and a giant squid rose up from the waves.

The island people were right. The giant squid was huge! It was about the size of two school buses, and its eyes big as basketballs. It attacked the ships with tremendous force, and many of the crew were thrown overboard because of each of the squid’s ten giant arms! Zheng He killed the squid with a sword, the ink squirting out of the squid and wetting the whole ship with black ink! After that, Zheng He asked the crew to cook the squid for their dinner. The squid was so large that it provided food for them for another month! Then they continued on to somewhere that they had never seen before.

After weeks of tiring sailing, they came to the place that they had wished they had come to: India! “We come from China.” Zheng He said as he bowed gently to the king of India. The Indians were very friendly and gave them lots of gifts from their king, like rubies and emeralds. They guided the sailors around their country, visiting sites like the Taj Mahal. “We have lots of cool animals here.” the king said. “The King cobra is one of the most iconic. One bite from its venomous fangs could kill an elephant.” “Cool!” Zheng He replied. The king offered them some delicious curry and roti, also sometimes called Indian pizza. “There is also another country that has many wonders you will like and has lots of treasures that they can give to you.” said the king. “That country is Africa.”

The sailors arrived at Africa. They heard drums beating and people singing. They were there! All of them were dressed in traditional African clothing. They were wearing hats made out of feathers, clothing made out of lion skin and fabrics, and some wore wristbands made from leaves. "Hello!" said the king of Africa in African. Like the Indians, they were very friendly and gave them gifts like drums and bells. When they guided the sailors around Africa, the sailors saw many animals they had never seen before, such as the African elephant, hyenas, and hippos! The animals were all quite noisy. The lion roared, the hyenas laughed, and the hippos, well, um, they continued fighting for a female hippo! The sailors gave the Africans silk, which was precious to China, and the Africans also exchanged them with a giraffe as tall as a house!

Finally, they returned to China. The people were all waiting for the sailors to unload the ships and see the treasures inside. All the people were awestruck with the treasures and the animals they brought back. Some of the squid meat was even still there on the ships! When they went into the palace and saw the emperor, Zheng He bowed to him. He had not only done his mission, but he had also experienced different cultures from other countries, and most importantly, made friendship with them. That changed China forever.

# The Assassination of the Ming

*Victoria Shanghai Academy, Wong, Matthew – 10*

The sky was as pink as a blushing beetroot, as chaotic as a ruined empire, and the sea as dark as the endless depth of an eternal abyss. The ships were coming, crammed with shimmering iron. In the ship were a thousand snores, and the joyous shore of India grows ever so closer.

The sky melts away. A peaceful blue drives the chaos away. Suddenly a shriek of fear pierced the air. The ships have come, casting a long, thick shadow on the earth. The mast was painted with a golden dragon, which looked as though it was frozen in melted gold.

The shore was suddenly overwhelmed with soldiers, and the general screamed out “Zheng He arrives! By the order of the heavenly emperor, we bring you these valuable treasures. Let our empires coexist in prosperity and happiness. We shall flourish in this trading route. Now, we shall depart after three days time. I this time you will pay respect for the heavenly emperor, and we shall be in peace.”.

The people covered as the ships sailed away, but nobody noticed the raft that followed the vast vessels...

“Ahh!!” a scream of terror slashed through the air as the shimmering blade shot through the kitchen. The intruder leapt on board, and silenced the cook.

The figure crept up the stairs silently, and she strained her eyes to find the man he had to kill. She needed a distraction to lure him in her trap; she had been unwise to silence the cook; he was a essential distraction. She had no choice but to venture deeper in the kitchen. Before long, a soldier arrived. She had acquired the distraction she had wanted.

“Freeze!” shouted the soldier, but was silenced as the assassin flicked a poison dart at him. “Stop!” cried another soldier, but he was beaten unconscious by a well aimed stab of a chopstick. She was yet again stopped by a soldier, who tried to pin her to the ground. Yet she kept calm, and shoved a spitting cobra at her opponent’s face, who viciously bit the soldier’s face. The soldier collapsed, and the snake slithered away, while the assassin waited to kill the man who had to die.

“Bang!” a loud noise rang through the kitchen. “It’s probably nothing,” mumbled Zheng He, the admiral of the fleet. Thud. A scream rang through the vessel. “Bang!” A loud noise rang through the air as though someone was firing a gun.

“Bang!” The sound torn the veil of silence once more. Zheng He decided to investigate. A sliver blade slashed through the corridor. “Finally, you shall die.” whispered Abdula, assassin of India.

Zheng He examined the sword that had been thrown at him. It was curved and carved. Ivory adorned the blade. This was definitely not a Chinese dagger. “This looks almost like the elaborate Indian dagger!” thought the admiral. “Prepare to die, fool.” Zheng He looked up. A short knife was pointing at him.

Zheng He drew his sword. The assassin leapt through the air, slashing at the admiral. However, her opponent dashed away, using a piece of severed wood as a shield. She pulled out a six foot long krait. He pulled out his second sword. The snake darted forward, striking at Zheng He. Zheng He sliced its head off. The assassin knew he was too strong. Suddenly, she jumped off the vessel.

Strange things were happening at the ship. A week after they visited Africa, a barbaric race bombarded the ships. A day later, half of the cooks went missing. Then, the giraffe they captured broke free and wreaked havoc, savaging ten sailors before it was killed. Later, a weird infestation of strange bugs poisoned twelve people. Afterwards, cobras were sighted roaming the ship. Rumours flew around the ship, cold as shadows. Were they cursed?

Nevertheless, they carried on. They fought off the barbarians even in the most dangerous of places. They captured the animals that dared to escape, and tried to exterminate the dangerous bugs. But the snakes were nowhere to be seen....

The men had journeyed from Africa to Arabia, India to the Philippines. The threat of the assassin was long forgotten. Oh, how foolish men can be when faced with merriment! However, Zheng He remained alert. He was shaken by the assassination attempt. As he brooded in his study, he noticed the engravings on the blade he had discovered. There was an abbreviation. A.O.I. He thought for a while, then a wave of realization crashed unto him. “Abdula of India” he muttered. He swept away, calling his troops immediately.

“Ahhhhhh!” A shriek broke of quiet. A big black snake reared onto the foolish nurse. With a single bite, she fainted on the ground. Abdula materialised on the ship. “Finally, I can strike safely again.” But she was very wrong indeed.

“Not if a squadron of elite soldiers and their generals are standing in your way, Abdula of India!” Zheng He whispered in disdain.

The peace of the night was broken. Smashed. For the battle had ensured, and will not stop until one of these people are dead: Abdula or Zheng He. The sound of iron rang through the ship. It was time for death.

Then, as quick as lightning, a sword thrust pierced through her waist.

“Ah!” The female of terror fell. Her waist snapped as her legs gave way. Her head crashed through a wall and landed on a steaming pot of soup. Then, a note fell out of her pocket:

*“We cannot bear any further pressure from the chinese any longer, it is ridiculous! We must take action now! Kill Zheng He, for this will make China withdraw from India in shock. Also, kill as many chinese scum as possible.*

*–Sultan”*

“So the Sultan was behind this, was he?” asked a soldier. “Yes.” answered Zheng He.

The sky was as pink as blushing beetroot, as chaotic as a ruined empire, and the slight tint of blue reminded the Chinese of better times ahead.

# A Voyage of Gifts

*Victoria Shanghai Academy, Yin, Adora – 10*

Zheng He looked up in the sky, it was very foggy but he had to signal the fleet of ships to go right, heading for Africa. He couldn't use the ship's flags so he commanded his servants to get the firecrackers.

Zheng He sees two firecrackers in the air and thinks "Oh! That must mean the direction right!"

The sound reverberated throughout the air, the other ships must have heard it. When the sound of the firecrackers died, the other sailors yelled "Thank goodness! Honestly, I thought that we were lost in the middle of nowhere."

The journey has been about seven thousand and eight hundred kilometres long, some nights on the ship were terrifying with big waves but some days were beautiful and calm at sea. Zheng He remembered that the emperor had sent him to lead the fleet for the fourth time, this time they were headed to Africa to give away gifts to the tribe leader there. Zheng He sailed into new waters, to the Somali coast and down to Kenya. When they reached Africa, many people were looking at them in fear and mesmerisation. "Oh my god, look at this!" "I have never seen this many big ships before, they are practically three hundred feet long each!" "Oh no, what if they are going to take us as slaves!" "This is going to be the end of our lives." The citizens of Africa would whisper to each other. They thought that China was going to invade them and started shouting out things like "Please spare us! Take whatever you want, we immediately surrender!" as they went on their knees to slowly bow down. "Please! We are just innocent people, spare us!" They would dramatically.

Zheng He stepped out of the ship holding the gifts and said loud and clear "I don't plan to do anything to your country and I don't mean any harm. I came to present your tribe leader with gifts from the one and only Yong Le, China's emperor, so please get off your knees. I'm just giving your leader a gift of friendliness."

As the residents slowly went back on their feet, they smiled at each other awkwardly. Africa's tribe leader also arrived in his grand carriage, having a look at why everyone was bowing down. When he stepped out of his carriage, he was astonished at the fleet but still confused why his citizens were acting so weird.

"Good afternoon," Zheng He said as he shook the hand of the emperor, "The emperor of China, the mighty ruler Yong Le, would like to give you some gifts. "

The tribe leader smiled kindly "Thank you very much, but why would you do that?"

"It's just a present from the emperor of China, I hope that you like it. We brought porcelain, tea bags, cosmetics, and silk." Zheng He answered, presenting the items they brought from China.

"Thank you again, but would like anything in return?"

"Well, the mighty ruler Yong Le loves animals dearly. He believes in a mythical animal called Qi Lin that brings luck to people near them, and Qi Lins really looked like giraffes. But of course, you don't have to give anything in return as this is just a kind gift." Zheng, He answered.

The tribe leader of Africa nodded and gave some commands to his assistant in another language that is probably African.

That night Africa's leader invited Zheng He to stay a little longer and have dinner with him. They talked all night, Zheng He mentioned about the fleet of ships and the how it's like in China, the king of Africa told Zheng He about the animals there and how life is like in Africa.

“You know Zheng He, I really want to give you an extra gift of friendliness. I hope you accept another giraffe. All of the animals would be really excited about a new place especially if it is a moving city like yours.”

“Now I thank you very much! My emperor, Yong Le, will be delighted!” Zheng He said cheerfully.

After the dinner, the king of Africa said farewell to Zheng He as he led the animals onboard. Four zebras, three ostriches, and six giraffes, Zheng He counted in his head. He directed the animals to the zoo section on one of the boats, no wonder everyone called it the moving city. His workers looked at the animals with eyes of admiration. They would slowly stroke them and say “Awww, you’re so cute!” “You’re going to love this big ship it’s almost like a cruise.”

He waved goodbye to Africa’s tribe leader and grabbed the steering wheel. As the sky was clearing up, Zheng He waved the sixth as a sign to start departing. Zheng He hoped that China’s emperor will settle another trade with Africa so he can visit them again for his fifth voyage.

“Till I see you again!” Zheng He shouted to the king of Africa as the animals walked around excitedly exploring the ship, their new home for a while.

# Pirates

*Western Academy Beijing, Fu, Peter – 10*

When someone mentions the word “Pirates”, usually you think of a foreign, water soaked, stinky breathed man on an old ship looking for gold with a hook for a hand. You would think they have a cool name for the ship, like the “Destroyer”, or “The Queens Revenge”. That’s the exact opposite of what my ship is and has set sail for.

My name is Wang, and I am on “The Emperors ship”. Literally, I am onboard the emperors ship. We have set sail to give gold out to other ships, and visit other countries while we’re at it. I joined because my mother is sick, and has no money to go to the local doctor. I hope to steal some gold without the captain noticing and go back home.

“Wang”! Shouted the Captain as he opened the barrels containing priceless treasures, the whole reason I signed up for this journey.

“Coming, Captain Ke”! I replied. Captain Ke calling me at four in the morning? This was not going to be a happy day.

“Captain Ke, what’s the problem now?” I asked with a tired yawn.

“There is another coin missing. I think I know who stole them all.”

I focused on my poker face as I tried to talk Ke into telling me who he suspected.

Sorry, but I am not quite sure yet who is on whose team. I cannot tell a single soul yet, not until they prove to me they are on my side. That was what I suspected he would say but all I got was:

“Go get some sleep”

What!? You called me up for that? I wanted to say, but I knew better than to provoke the ‘rhino’ (every one called him that behind his back) at four in the morning.

When I got into my hammock, my heart was pounding as I pondered over the idea of me being caught. I shuddered at the mere idea of it. I would not let myself get caught. No, my mother and family need me. I would bring shame and disgrace on the whole family, not to mention I would be executed.

As I slowly drifted towards sleep, my mind was still burning with questions and ideas on who the captain suspected. When I finally started snoozing, I dreamt that I was caught stealing gold and the emperor made me watch my whole family being slaughtered in front of me. I went crazy and started to connect my fists with anything that was in my way, scratching and clawing my way to the emperor. Suddenly, another army of soldiers in full anti-crazy man armor appeared at doorway and pulled me toward the executioner. He swung his gleaming sword at the sun and brought it down on my neck. After that, everything felt cold and wet. Then I woke up.

“Wake up!” shouted Li, as he dumped another bucket of fresh seawater on me.

“Why are you dumping water on me?! I did nothing to you!” I replied.

“Wake up call” said Li.

“Disgusting” I muttered while spitting out water and wringing it out of my now soaked clothes.

I was changing when I realized the dream meant something. I now understood the terrible price that came with stealing things that are not yours. Maybe I could wait one more day. Maybe two, or three...



Slowly, the confidence that was there and kept my company for the past weeks I was onboard left me until I was overwhelmed with self-doubt. That was what I was missing. A little self-doubt to fight my over-inflated head and my fatal flaw: overconfidence.

A sharp voice broke my deep thoughts.

“Attention on deck!” Barked captain Ke.

“A pirate ship is coming towards us! We have to prepare all weapons!” Shouted Ke.

Whispers, shouts and murmurs broke out through the crowd as the captain announced this news. Seconds later everyone scattered to find every weapon they could get their hands on.

When I got to my hammock, the only thing I did was write a letter to my mom. I did not want to die leaving my mom nothing to remember me with. Then again, she would be dead if I did not steal the money. I shoved those thoughts aside. I would live. So would my mom.

A deafening noise made me instinctively cover my now bleeding ears. An earthquake like tremble cracked open the floor and caught me off balance. As I tried to regain my foothold, I stumbled across a sword. Recalling that there was an attack, I grabbed it and ran into battle. But it was too late. Almost half the crew were dead. The only good news was that it looked like there was another ship helping us. Finally, we destroyed the pirate captain. Their crew retreated back and sailed away into the vast ocean.

A chorus of cheers erupted from what remained of our crew and the other ship. Too tired to move, I fell asleep.

It has been two days since we made allies with the English people (that is what they called themselves). We gave them lots of gold and treasure from our barrels. Today, we have found a new land with people that call themselves “Arabians”.

I was on the deck when captain Ke pulled me aside.

“Wang, I know you stole the gold. I found a few pieces of gold in your hammock. That is why I need to kill you.”

My insides twisted and turned while my body was paralyzed with fear. My heart was pounding on my chest so fast it could have been traveling at the speed of light for all I knew. Overconfidence. My fatal flaw killing me.

“Please, my mother, she is sick in bed and I don’t have the money for the doctor!” I pleaded.

“I am sorry, Wang but you know what happens to thieves.” He said with a hint of sympathy. Ke then pulled out a knife.

Strangely, the fear left me when he stabbed. I felt at peace, but sad knowing that my mistake cost the life of another person, maybe more.

Somewhere, a mother was calling, not knowing that her son would never come back.

# The Boy That Lived on the Farm

*Western Academy Beijing, Gormley, Saoirse – 10*

## A CHILD

“We have brought you some gifts. We have gold and silver.” said the strange

man in a strange uniform. He looks like a tomato.

Li Yang giggled at his own joke. “Gifts for your WHOLE town,” the other tomato man said as he stretched out his arms, refusing to notice the small boy giggling. “Yu Yang, I don't trust these men,” his

father mumbled into the woman's ear. His mother shrugged

at his father. Li Yang stepped forward, “Why don't we just take it? Our whole town is in a drought and we could do with some fat on us.” He pointed to his very small belly and skinny arms. “I agree with Li yang,”

said his older brother. “I'm never full or

even close, nobody is.” After that, an old grey haired man nodded for them to bring in everything.

From then on Li Yang and his family were healthy and they didn't need to

worry about anything to do with money. Until about three years later, when everything changed.

“Get on the ground, you filthy farmers.” The pirate was spitting everywhere

as he talked to Li Yang who was now thirteen. The sharp swords gleamed as they slashed through bags of wheat and corn, and through bag after bag of gold that the small town had saved.

## A PIRATE

As I saw the gold spill out of the brown bags I knew I wouldn't have to

worry about money for a long time. The life of a pirate doesn't really suit me, but these peasants don't need the gold, and my children do. So I kept on stealing from the rich farmers. Day after day we came to take more and more.

The last day we came to their house was when I decided it's time to leave.

We went in as usual ready to take our loot but they wouldn't give us the money so the first mate made the parents kneel down and about 30 seconds after that they were on the floor... dead.

A month later I quit my role as a ruthless pirate. Now I am a captain of my own ship, working for the Ming dynasty as a gold giver to the poor. It is a great job, I get to do what I love and feed my family.

“Ok li yang where are you from and who are your parents?” I asked a young boy as he tried to get a job working on my ship. “Umm well I lived on a farm and my parents are.” he stuttered “Dead. They were killed by a pirate when they refused to give up their money.” “Well, I'm sorry for your loss. But you're hired.” At that moment I remembered seeing the boys face before. We had killed his parents.

A MAN

It took a long time for him to get here. He had to go through deaths, hunger, drought to be the captain of his own ship. The Red Lotus. “It's a great honor to serve under you captain Yang,” said a young man. “Thank you, Mr. Yung.” The captain said as tied a knot on the boat.

“Time to go,” he yelled. “ To help the poor, to help the friends, TO HELP OUR PEOPLE!” captain Li shouted to his crew. “Aye Cap'n.” His first mate said to Li Yang.

It took about a month until they reached the farms. “Hello farmers, we have brought gold and silver from the capitol!” the older man, Li Yang, said in his tomato suit.

There was some murmuring coming from the farmers. A little boy giggled. They all talked, a brother stood up for the little boy, the parents agreed, and we left. I went back home, back to the family.

AND FROM THAT, THE CYCLE CONTINUED

# The Amazing Journey

*Western Academy Beijing, Guo, Hayley -9*

In 1405, I was 18 years old. I had experienced an amazing journey. I had joined the largest naval fleet in the world. We are not PIRATES! We aimed to build new alliances with other countries and extend the influence of China.

The emperor had appointed the remarkable commander to construct the treasure fleet. It was consisting of many treasure ships, warships and support ships. Treasure ships had carried gold, silk and other precious items, also the chief commander worked there; Grain ships carried rice and food for the crews and soldiers; Support ships were very important as well, all diplomats, trade officers, medical staff, interpreters, financial staff, administrators and other staffs were on these ships. Our expeditionary fleet had seven voyages over three decades, from the coast of the Indian Ocean to the eastern coast of Africa. I was extremely excited to go sailing with hundreds of ships and several thousands of people together in the floating city each time. I worked on the Diplomatic boat; I was an envoy who had made relationships with other places. It was one of the important positions in the fleet. I had attended the first voyage, the second voyage and the fourth voyage.

My first voyage was beginning. It was a real challenge. We visited Champa, Siam, Aru, Melaka, Ceylon, the island of Java and Calicut with 27,800 sailors, marines, interpreters and other crewmembers. We met many friendly people and brought them a lot of valuable gifts. However, when we arrived at Java, there was the Civil war and mistakenly killed more than 140 our soldiers. This situation was so sad and scary for me to see. Unfamiliar geographical location, the variable weather and communication problems made us more dangerous, we need to be more organized in the future. When we were returning homewards, the fleet encountered evil pirates. They tried to snatch the precious objects from us, but our warships led the charge in the battle and soldiers were super brave. They killed 5000 pirates and burned more than 10 pirate ships. After back to China, the foreign envoys from some of these countries visited China to present their tributes.

Soon after, we departed for our second voyage. We sailed to Champa, Siam, Java and Calicut in India. This time, we landed on Java again. We need to settle the enmity between our country and Java. Finally, the king sent an envoy to the China court to admit guilty for killing our soldiers last time. When we stopped at the coast of Siam, got out of our ship there were many very poor people and didn't have enough food to eat and some children had died with hunger. Then we went back to our grain ships and got them some rice and meat to feed their family. They felt so happy. After that my colleagues and me got the permission to meet their king to present with gifts to offer as a sign of friendship. Finally, the king had appointed their envoy to China for making trade relationship.

The last time I went with the fleet was in 1413. This time was an unforgettable time for me. When we docked our ships in India, I was extraordinary sick, my face was turning as green as a cucumber and my body couldn't hold itself as wobbly as a jellyfish. I felt weaker and weaker every day. I believe I was going to die. Even the doctor in our fleet couldn't make me well again. My friends were very worried about me and went to the local doctor please come and see me. The brilliant doctor had given me a traditional medical soup; I had to drink it twice a day for a week. After that, I was ready to go back sailing again, however I was so sad to leave my new friends I had made during my sick days. They will always stay in my heart forever; they gave me my second life.

After stopping at the principal ports of Asia, we went further west to Hormuz on the Persian Gulf. While we were sailing, I saw the most amazing beautiful sights ever, the sea was golden only when the sunshines on it, it was also glowing and charming delicate, besides there was a cave full of pixie dust that was like magic. Then, we arrived at Malindi. At the first, our fleet had frightened the local people, as the largest wooden ship had appeared, they thought we were pirates. They never saw the fleet as large as ours. I had to

follow my leader and present friendly. We were aware there was a great opportunity to make warm, as they showed really interested and loved our silk outfit. Then we gave some patterned silk to their families. Following, the chief of the tribe and guards came, our admiral made expressions there wasn't any nasty purpose, and we only intend to establish trade and relations with them. There was a happy ending we exchanged them with wonderful presents. We gave them luxury silk, precious China and gold. They back us a zebra for our emperor as a showing of good friendship.

After the voyages, we were so proud of our fleet; we were the first great explorers in the world. Not only did the naval expeditions, but also build up diplomatic and trade relations with the places we had been to, also expand Chinese influences in the world.

# 明奴 (Mong nu) Goes to an Adventure

*Western Academy Beijing, Kim, Haneul – 10*

In 广州 (Guangzhou), China, there was a small village called 别放弃 (bie fang qi). It means Never Give Up; so sometimes, foreigners say NGU. It is a short name for this village. In 广州 (Guangzhou), girls can't go outside and play with their friends or go to school like boys. Girls don't matter if they are kids or not. They just have to work in a house. Mong nu was part of it. She thought that this is so unfair, so she decided to go on a secret adventure.

The next day, she packed everything that she needs for her long and secret trip. Her mom helped her. Next, she said goodbye to her parents, and she went out of Guangzhou. The first thing that she saw was a ship. She thought that ship is not a normal ship, also it was hiding in the cave. She carefully went into the cave and saw the ship, and then she thought that she is going to use that ship to prove that girls can also do everything.

When she came back to Guangzhou after a very, very, short trip, she said to her parents that she is going to leave the house to prove that girls can do anything. And her parents let her to do it. Her parents believed that Mong nu is going to do a great job. But, her parents said that they are going to send 2 girls and 2 boys to go with her. She agreed.

The next day, is the day that she has to leave, someone knocked on her house. When she opened it, she saw 2 girls and the 2 boys standing in front of the door. The 2 girls were used to being her mom's best friends, and the 2 boys were her dad's friends. One of the girl's name was Savannah, and the other girl's name was Alina. Also, one of the boy's name was Max, and other boy's name was William. They were from America.

They walked out together to the cave. Max and William helped to pull the ship out. When they pulled ship out, they took it to the nearest beach. They got into the ship, and Mong nu started driving the ship. She drove the ship until she saw the island. Few minutes later, they saw a huge island. They thought that spot is good to relax. So they arrived onto that island. But as soon as they got there, they saw the pirates coming to steal their ship. They ran into the ship, and they started driving the ship.

They drove as fast as they could, but pirates came closer and closer and they got into a huge fight. Max and William were using these huge guns to kill the pirates, and the pirates were coming closer and closer to Mong nu. Then they quickly went into the hiding space. After a few hours later, when they got out, pirates were all gone. None of them were hiding in the ship.

Mong nu started to drive again towards the ocean where it has a lot of gold and find a good place to take a picture. So that she can prove easily girls can do anything. It was their first night to sleep on the ship. Savannah and Alina were already sleeping on the ship. In the morning, they decided that Savannah and Alina are going to drive the ship today. So Mong nu and the other 2 boys went to fall a sleep.

When they woke up, it was already night. The 2 girls were so tired that they lie down on the front of the ship. Mong nu started to drive. It was like after 1 hour? They found a small island. It seemed like this island has a lot of gold or something. They arrived in the Island and they looked at the island carefully. When the 2 girls were sleeping, Max and William were just wondering around, and Mong nu found the cross mark. She tried to dig a hole but she couldn't, because the sand was very hard to dig. So they had to use a knife to cut and then dig it.

When they finished digging it, they found a treasure chest inside. They took it out and they started to put that into the ship. They finally got into the ship and came back to 别放弃 (bie fang qi). Everyone thought the trip is over but Mong nu didn't. She still has to prove her point.

The next day, she went to the place where the president is. She told him all about her trip, and that the girls also have to go to school. After this, the president decided that the girls can also do anything. Mong nu was happy after all what she had done. She was thankful to her parents who gave her such a nice name, and they helped her go on a safe trip.

The week after this week, Mong nu started to go to International school. When she went, she learned a lot of things and she thought that she is going to go on a trip again, by herself. It was really good that Mong nu is a really good, brave girl. She packed the same thing as her last trip. She also drove the ship that she drove the last time. She hugged her parents. But unfortunately, that would be her last hug with her parents. She died while on her new trip. She fought with pirates and she died because she got shot by the leader of the pirates.

Her parents were crying a lot. But on the other hand, they thought that they had to teach Mong nu's little sister and little brother about their wonderful future. Mong nu has been on everyone's mind, and she did a great job. Everyone respected Mong nu. They taught their child about Mong nu, and how to be brave and kind like she was. Anyone can try any kind of adventure. You can also try just like Mong nu!

# Life on Board

*Western Academy Beijing, Lahteenmaki, Elsa – 11*

## Day 1

It was a normal day when all of a sudden I heard gagging coming from my mom's room. At first, I did not notice it but after twenty minutes of that same noise my brother, Samuel went to investigate. "Sonya, come quickly!" Samuel said in a shaky voice. I ran as fast as my little legs could take me. When I arrived Samuel had a look of shock on his face. "What is it?" I panted. I came closer and peered over my brother's shoulder. I gasped in disbelief "is Mom d..dead?" I managed to say. My mother was laying on her bed as pale as a ghost. "No...she is not dead. She is just sick, it's the virus going around town." Explained Samuel. "Go to sea, within you will find great treasure." Whispered Mom. "There is a boat leaving tomorrow morning to give treasures and trade. Maybe we could find the medicine mom needs?" Exclaims Samuel. "All we have to do is hide in one of the large shipping boxes and sneak on board!"

## Day 2

That is how I ended up stuffed in a box the size of a chair. The boat turned from side to side and would not stop moving. Suddenly after about three hours at sea, muffled voices come near our direction. "Okay dad!" One of the voices said "I'll get the food" I heard a creak. "Oh no!" I thought as they were opening our box! "AHH!" Screamed two people wearing striped uniforms. "Who are you guys?"

"This is my brother and I, we are here to try and find some medicine for our mother." I explained. The two people in uniforms showed us around the boat and believe it or not their dad was the captain of the ship! They asked their dad if it was okay that Samuel and I could work on board, he said yes. The two people in uniforms were called Cherry and Caleb, they were also twins just like me and Samuel. Cherry and Caleb helped us find our uniforms. So from now on we also worked on board. Most days we found people that were friendly so we gave them some of our treasure to make friends around the globe. We would give them gold, expensive silk or silverware. We also had a few enemies at hand, one or two people would get hurt from the enemies but not a big fight.

## Day 3

Today started like a normal day but ended in tragedy! We traded with three other countries before we met our biggest enemies.

It was evening, the sun was going down and we were down to our last island for the day. We spot the island and did our ritual call "friend or foe?" Samuel called out. "Friend..." a faint voice said. We came closer to the island preparing our gold and silk to give. We see a group of people lined up on shore. We arrive on shore and the people seem quite nice, so we give them one stack of gold. "More..." said the chief of the island, so we give them another stack and some silk. "More..." he said again. At this rate we would run out of gold and treasure to give. Suddenly they don't seem to friendly... Some take out harpoons and start shooting at us. Cherry pulls me to safety but I can't see Samuel anywhere! I had to split apart from Samuel and Caleb, I just hope they find shelter.

## Day 4

I woke up not knowing where I was or what time it was. I looked out of the hide out and immediately regretted it. The hot blazing sun was pouring on the boat's deck, I could make out bodies laying there on the floor. I prayed that Samuel was not one of the victims of this deadly sight. I wake up Cherry and showed her the awful sight. We went to investigate and found no sign of our brothers. In the distance we hear faint screams come from the jungle, me and Cherry went to see what was going on. The screams got closer and closer the deeper we went. I could see two heads poking out both with black hair, I turn to Cherry but before I could, she told me something "those meanies over there are pirates they want our treasure so that they can be rich." I could hardly believe what she said, pirates were supposed to be mythical creatures weren't they?

"Pirates are not real! People just say that to scare you!" I screamed. "Who is that?" Someone called from the



jungle. "Oh no!" I thought, I had ruined everything. "We said who is it!" That person said again. "Sonya someone is coming look!" Cherry whispered as she pointed to a dark silhouette. Cherry was right about 10 silhouettes were surrounding us! "Sonya, Run!" I screamed. "Not so fast!" A deep voice said, he captured us and took us back to their common area. He tied us up next to Samuel and Caleb. "Just so you little younglings understand we are pirates, therefore, we rule this island." The chief of the pirates explained. "Great now we're all going to die." I thought, "We're maybe the only survivors, now we are going to perish."

"Let us go you meanies!" Cherry said. "Yeah we want to go home!" Samuel shouted. Apparently on the boat one person was still alive and heard the cries of the twins. That person came rushing and found the twins tied up and some pirates standing near them. "Captain!" We all shouted "you came to rescue us!" The captain untied all of us then he took the pirates to the boat's jail cells. Before leaving the pirates' area, I spot something in one of the tents. "Samuel look!" I screamed. There laying on the floor was the medicine mom needed. Me and Samuel both shouted with glee "Mom is going to live!"

# The Crew's Adventure

*Western Academy Beijing, Lynn, Miriam – 9*

## The Crew's Adventure

ALL HANDS ON DECK! shouted captain Shang to call a meeting with the crew of the ship. "Whats wrong sir? Let me guess, hmmm.. did another chicken fall overboard again? "No Oliver, this time it is more important than a chicken falling overboard" corrected captain Shang. "Can I have you attention everyone!" Everyone stopped talking Immediately, which was actually very surprising because normally everyone would ignore the captain and continue talking. Shang felt like he was with a different crew! He announced that the emperor Ming has asked the crew to sail around the world exploring and bringing her gold to offer to all the kind people they meet! Every one gasped excitedly. The next morning the crew started to pack up straight away, focussed on what the Emperor had requested!

## A friend on board

Finally on April, 8 ,1400 we started to make our way across the sea to find kind people around the world. We decided first to head east, across the Pacific. During the voyage, every one was fighting for the Fruit Loops, because there was no other food that you can actually call breakfast, just lobsters and squid. Nobody really liked to eat them, especially because they had been prepared by the chef whose voice really makes him scary!! So no one ate his food.

Another challenge was with friends. Everyone on board had a pal to talk to, at least once in a while. That sort of made me feel sad. But there is someone named Lín on board who I hoped that one day I could be friends with. I know I can't be her friend if she's not asking me and I know I can't be like this for the rest of the Journey so there was only one thing to do. I walked straight up to her, my heart was beating as fast as lightning. I did not know what to say so I just simply opened my mouth "uawwnmm uuh" which did not come out right!! Now my heart was really beating as fast as lightning. I could not see it, but I just knew I was blushing. I ran to the quarter deck as fast as I could. I wanted this all to be a dream so I tried to sleep so I could forget about it. The next morning I still was not sure if what happened yesterday was a dream or not so I tried to pass Lín and she looked at me like she never saw me before. I felt like my opportunity of having a friend on board was reduced but I knew I could not give up so I walked straight up to her and tried again this time "uh... Hi my name is Mēi". Still not impressive, but at least it was not as bad as yesterday. A couple days after that conversation, we started to become the best of friends. We sat next to each other at lunch, we had sleepovers every two days... it all went well until...

## The Storm

All of a sudden the lights started flickering, I went out of the room, it was 11:00 at night. There was a wave, then a bigger wave, and it kept going until the boat started to capsize. You could see thunder ahead, everyone was screaming. I could see at least 4 people falling overboard every 12 seconds. "There's a wave ahead!" someone cried with all his might. I looked where the man was pointing, right in front of my eyes stood the most gigantic wave I had ever seen, which was rushing to the ship. It seemed like it was a monster, but I knew I had no time to think, I had to react quickly. The wave was approaching me. I tried to run to the toilet like a sensible person but I was too late the wave had overlapped the ship.

## The Island

"CREEK" I heard, I slowly opened my eyes and saw crows in the blue sky. I was lying on the sand covered in bird poop. More significantly, I realised I was on an island with a giant pile of bird poop next to me. I got up and walked closer, to get a better look, then accidentally fell in the pile of poop but also realised that the pile was not just poop, it was also captain Shang!! I saw other piles of poop which must be the other crew members who survived. Luckily the ship was also on the island as well. "There must be coconuts on this island" I told myself so I went to where the tree was and found some coconut trees. I could see the deliciousness from the fresh juicy colour of the coconut so I tried to climb it. I was half way up when "BOOM" a net had fallen on me from who knows where and dragged me to the ground. Suddenly, lots of tiny coconut people started surrounding me. I was

trapped! They dragged me using the net they had caught me in. When they were not looking, I slipped out of the net and ran to the piles of poop, and woke everyone up on the island. We got back to the ship and started to sail again.

### **The New Land**

We finally arrived to a new undiscovered land a few weeks later. The crew started to give out gold as a gift to the kind people they met there. However when I helped give out the gold, there was an issue because there were unkind people that tried to steal the gold. But after going to a judge and using some persuasive and emotional words, we managed to find a solution. Since we successfully gave out the gold in our first country, we became world wide famous. But to us being world wide famous was not our reward, our reward was to inspire others to never give up no matter what people say and how hard what you're going through is

# Seven Seas

*Western Academy Beijing, Montagnon, Ivy – 10*

1

7 June 1427

Jilie

We bowed down before the emperor, Hongxi. He was wearing a royal blue changshan, that reached his ankles. His jet black colored beard reached to his big vast chest.

We stood up tall. I remember in my early years of training the mean old master would make me stand straight for hours on end. I pulled my shoulders back, I clenched my hands tight. Sweat trickled down my face I didn't dare to wipe it away. My silver hangpao stuck to my skin like skin stuck to my body. He paraded down the chestnut carpet, and moved his head swiftly from side to side. His wife walked behind, her pear colored robe dancing as she followed her beloved husband. Looking swiftly from side to side, giving a little nod here and there, Hongxi gave a little sigh as he sat down on a rich, red throne, covered on every side with gold.

'Now my friends, we are gathered here today for some important business, to be precise you want 15 pieces of pure gold, to be shaped into ships?'

'Yes sir, very well sir,' replied Captain.

'Do not call me sir! I have a name! Hongxi, call me Hongxi!' he snapped

'Yes Hongxi.'

'Now the gold will arrive on the 22 of June,' the emperor said as clearly as glass. He began speaking suddenly.

'Jilie, Xu, I would like you to meet me just outside the south gate of the Forbidden City.'

I nearly jumped out of my skin.

'Am I being clear?'

I took one shaking step forward, 'Yes Master Hongxi.'

'Now I think my business here is done.'

He lifted himself from the throne and strolled through the big, vast doors. Once his footsteps echoed down the hallway. We headed in the direction of our ship.

2

8 June 1427

Mei

The ship arrived at the dock at five. People fled the dock, mostly beggars and some who could not even buy a home or food for themselves. People pushed, people yelled. We stayed giving out gold till our eyes were sore and our hands were bitten with the cold.

We pushed into the dining room. We sat till the dumplings and leek soup had come. We ate without a word. As I ate the food, warmth filled inside me.

We stood on the deck watching the stars float by. Ah, Chi, and others went swimming close to the ship. As I was about to jump in someone shrieked, 'Shark!'. They climbed onboard faster than a blink. I stood there gazing as the fin darted through the water. At that very second, the ship moved into life. Once the fin was out of sight people started to go back to their daily work, just like nothing had happened. Da went to catch some fish, Xing played with the girls who were the Captain's daughters. My mother had come upstairs because the noise was so frightening, but calmly went back downstairs to make the breakfast for the morning. Ping went to help the captain steer his boat. Sheng went to mend things for the ship. Liling and Nuo played some games with Shu. Lastly Jilie was reading a book by herself in the corner of the ship's deck. Zhen (my dog) was chasing my fingers, begging for a treat.

As the sun began to set making a bright, red and yellow texture in the sky, the others started to drift back to their rooms.

Once I was in my bed, I curled up into a small ball, wrapping my frozen fingers round my legs. I fell into a deep asleep.

3

10<sup>th</sup> June 1427

Hai

I woke up to find the ship tilting sharply to one side. My cat, Fei, jumped into the air and landed on my face. I trembled as the ship tilted back into place. I pulled on my clothes, hurrying to see the what the problem was. I grabbed my sword in case there was an enemy ship, searching for treasure. I ran up the steps towards the deck of the ship, sweat running down my arm making the sword slip out of my hands.

‘Hai!’ a distant call came from the edge of the deck. It was Ah who was being held by enemies.

‘Where is your gold?’ snarled the pirate.

I tiptoed up from behind, and pulled his sword towards the ground. I eased the sword out of his reach.

‘Now who is going to save you?’ I said. I swung the sword towards Ah and he started fighting him with the sword. In the corner of my eye, I could see one of the pirates talking roughly to the cook. I found a bucket rolling around on the floor, with dirty water used for our washing. I snuck up behind the girl and poured the bucket on to her head. ‘Ahhhhhh!’ she exclaimed. Once she had cleared her emerald eyes, I could see her anger building up.

I got my sword ready for the battle. She cut the sword through the air as easily as cutting paper. I moved from side to side as she moved her sword as fast as a lightning bolt.

After a while, I could see that her hands were getting tired, and her eyes were beginning to droop and in minutes she was battling sleep. It was finished as fast as it began. The captain had given up. They sloped off to their ship.

The cook had made us all warm mantou. As we filled our stomachs, a storm approached, the thunder crashed to the sky sending us flying across the room.

# The Fantastic Trip

*Western Academy Beijing, Wei, Leo – 9*

I am invited to participate Zheng he's forth sailing trip. I am a soldier, my job is to fight with hostile enemies such as pirates. When I'm on the ship, I was amazed to find that there were about 27000 people and 240 ships/boats. This is the first time that I saw more than 200 boats. There were 5 kinds of boats: Treasure boats, Horse boats, Grain ships, sitting boats, and Battleships. I was on Battleship No. 63.

The sea was blue and endless. Our plan was to go south and then head west to Africa. On passage, we stopped at 25 stations. They were all peaceful people and we gave them gold, silk away as gifts. We told them about our country and culture. There were different people with different identity. I saw a lot of plants that can't be found in China, for example: coconut trees. We used a compass during daytime and at night we observed the stars to make sure that we are on the right way, and this strategy is called "Navigation Astronomy Technology". Because of our boat was so big and strong, hardly any waves can come in.

The First war was against pirates, there were 6 ships of them. Lucky we had weapons, like canons. They first only saw the few boats so they thought it's easy to rob, but the boats behind came quickly and we easily defeated them. Next, we went to Sumen, we found out that Su Ganyu has killed the old king. So we battled with him and captured him alive.

Finally, we are at East Africa. It is the highest terrain in the continent. They had black skin and there were many kinds of animals that I had never seen before. The sun kept shining and it was hot. For me, the Great Rift Valley was the most beautiful place in East Africa. It's full length is about 6000 km and deepest place the Valley is 2000 km deep. I guess from a space view it looks like a big scar. There is water down there but it was so deep that I can only see a bit of blue just like some sapphire. Then we went to a ginormous grassland. The animals was amazing, zebras, antelopes, and all kinds of animals. I even saw a lion preying a wild deer! There were birds flying from here to there in the sky. Elephants was playing with water in a small lake and the giraffes even joined. This will be a place that is impossible to forget.

After 2 years 9 months, we came back to China and brought a giraffe from East Africa. We took leaves to feed it. We were the first one that told China that there was that animal.

I look forward to the next trip, and I believe that it would be more interesting.

# Fei Shun in the West

*Yaumati Catholic Primary School (Hoi Wang Road), Chan, Hok Man Nathan – 11*

Nanjing (1408)

Zheng He looked at his sixty-eight majestic ships proudly. The ships, beautifully lavished, had cabins with open balconies and royal furniture. Now that all was set, he looked at his cheering men one last time, waved at them and followed General Ma Hua on the road back to court.

The officer in charge, General Fei Shun, was an honourable seaman. Treating the sea as his brother, he had a good sense of direction. He was wise too.

The flagship's bell rang. Gongs sounded, and the massive armada pulled away from the harbour to start the journey to the Calicut Kingdom, near western India.

For the first weeks of the journey, the seas and the voyage were calm and uneventful. The crew joked that they should have brought games to play to liven up their boredom. Their days consisted only of them lounging around the decks, eating, plotting the convoy's course and keeping the ship in relative order and cleanliness. Their only companions were the seabirds that stopped to rest.

But then, on the thirtieth day...

Emergency bells startled Fei Shun, who was having breakfast in his cabin. The crew was in a state of panic, running to and fro shrieking: 'Sea monster! Sea monster!'

An enormous snake with a horse's head and a jet-black mane reared its great ugly face out of the water, and tried to bite Fei Shun's ship. The whole fleet was in calamitous chaos.

Then an even bigger blue shark with huge yellow eyes pounced on the snake. The ships shook violently as the two grappled with each other. Suddenly, with a flash of blinding light, the two creatures disappeared.

The dazed crew stared at each other in disbelief. But Fei Shun kept his cool as two rings of hidden light under his sword, in the shape of the two sea monsters, pulsed slowly.

The fleet finally reached Calicut after four months. The crew were duly welcomed there, as they brought technology like compasses and watermills. The Yongle Emperor wanted to turn Calicut into a land that had better technology and also a kingdom with a healthy relationship with the Ming Dynasty. The crew visited the city and some nearby towns, introducing Chinese culture and technology along the way. They were treated very well.

But one night, whilst they slept, a masked man wielding a sabre came into the crew's inn. The man pressed his sabre to a seaman's neck. He said in a low threatening voice: 'Your money or your life!'

Fei Shun, sleeping next to the seaman, got up and boldly said, 'If you want a life, take mine. I would make an ideal sacrifice.'

The masked man took off his mask and smiled. 'Well done. You have proven yourself worthy to visit my coronation.' He was the Prince of Calicut.

The Prince of Calicut was rich and just. He was about twenty-five years old and preferred testing people to prove their worthiness. He had planned this test for Fei Shun about two weeks earlier.

At the coronation, Fei Shun stood as the head guest. He was given a royal sword, jewels and a great feast. He also took some spices back to Nanjing.

A year later (1409), Fei Shun was in the Indian Ocean, with his mighty fleet, sailing back to Nanjing. Suddenly, a gigantic body came to the surface. It had a jet-black mane. It was the sea snake!

Fei Shun's royal sword turned from jade green to sapphire blue. A turquoise beam shot out from the sword and vaporised the sea snake, which vanished in the beam of light that was vibrating and shining. Fei Shun stared at the magical sword. Carved into the sword was an engraving of the sea snake on it.

Four months later, Fei Shun and his crew were at the port of Nanjing. Zheng He was there to give them a warm welcome. They were invited to a princely banquet at court, with the Yongle emperor and Zheng He, to talk about the journey to Calicut. Fei Shun was rewarded with gold and jewels, and the entire crew was given tablets that exempted them from the death penalty.

That night, Fei Shun stroked his sword and put it in a golden box, which he brought in his travelling sack. His sword acquired many other powers over time, and he kept it by his side, never leaving it again.



# The Greatest Foe

*Yaumati Catholic Primary School (Hoi Wang Road), Wu, King Lok – 11*

‘Sir, I don’t think you’ve knocked on my door yet,’ said Shi Jingping, ruler of the city of Palembang, nowadays called Sumatra.

Shi’s statement was directed at Chen Zuyi, the pirate. Shi’s palace was attacked by Chen and his pirates again. Chen was famous for his ruthlessness. He had control of the seas near Palembang, and whoever controlled the seas had real authority.

‘Ha! I want gold, Your “Majesty”!’ smirked Chen.

‘You won’t get away with this,’ said Shi, as he reluctantly handed over the booty.

‘Well, then let see who wins,’ whispered Chen to Shi’s ears.

Zheng He looked out into the distance. The sun rose above the ocean, his treasure fleets sparkled with prestige, glory and gifts. Zheng was the admiral. He was a kind and honest man. Born in Yunnan in 1371, castrated at the age of ten, he became a eunuch of the Prince of Yan, who later became the Yongle Emperor. He and the Yongle Emperor were firm friends.

Today, as he awoke, Zheng quickly went to the control deck of the main fleet. Deputy Admiral Wang Jinghong and some sailors were already waiting for him. ‘Deputy Admiral, what route are we sailing today?’ asked Zheng.

‘We were sailing to Palembang,’ Wang replied.

Zheng was immediately apprehensive. ‘We’re going into pirate-land!’

‘Not only that, the Emperor has decided that we should help the ruler of Palembang capture the pirates...’ Wang didn’t even finish his words.

Zheng sighed. Wang was unsatisfied with this mission too, they read the expressions on the sailors’ faces. ‘The Admiral’s a coward, he shouldn’t be leading us,’ thought Wang to himself.

That night, the ship stopped at Palembang. All sailors-in-command gathered in the main cabin to think of a solution to fight the pirates. At that time, a guard sailor came in. ‘Excuse me, sirs, there is a visitor.’

At the port, a mysterious visitor was waiting for Zheng.

‘Who are you?’ asked Wang, with dubious feelings inside him.

The visitor replied, ‘I am the ruler of Palembang, Shi Jingping. I have important information regarding the pirates.’

‘Let him in! Deputy! He’s a guest! Don’t disappoint him!’ said Zheng. But Wang was still suspicious of him. The visitor was escorted into the main cabin. They discussed for over an hour.

That was when a sailor frantically knocked. ‘Admiral, most fleets are captured by the pirates!’

Zheng, Wang and Shi quickly rushed to the control deck to see what was happening. They saw many pirates jumping onto the main fleet. The sailors grabbed their weapons, ready for a fight. Zheng and Wang turned around, to see Shi still rooted firmly on his ground. An odd smile spread across his face.

‘Huh! My brothers are all here, there’s no need to hide my identity now!’ said Shi.

‘You brute! I should’ve known you’re the pirate, Chen Zuyi! You wanted to distract us to let the pirates capture our fleets!’ cried Wang.

Wang wasn’t fazed. ‘Alright, listen up. It’s time to fight these brutes!’

As Wang finished his words, all sailors began to battle fearlessly and boldly. But as time wore on, the pirates were beginning to prevail. Some fleets were on fire, others were detonated, and many gifts from foreign countries were taken. Zheng was scared witless; he was about to flee.

‘Oh help! Can someone help me? Please!’ wailed Zheng.

‘Zheng He, you’re the admiral of the treasure fleets! You can’t escape all the time!’ shouted Wang to Zheng.

Zheng left Wang’s voice trailing a long way behind him, when he was suddenly attacked by a pirate.

Zheng found himself standing in the middle of nowhere. In front of him were the Yongle Emperor and his teacher, the Daoyan Monk. He heard the Emperor, in a low booming voice saying, ‘Zheng He, you can’t be scared, you are the leader.’

‘But – but –’ protested Zheng. He didn’t know what to do.

‘Zheng He! Fear is your worst enemy! You must overpower it!’ said the Monk.

‘What should I do?’ asked Zheng in desperation.

'Use your meditative consciousness,' said the monk, as the Monk and the Emperor slowly faded into the background.

'Admiral! You're awake!' Zheng regained consciousness to find one of his sailors violently shaking him. 'You fainted, and the Deputy Admiral asked me to take you to your bedroom.'

'Is the fight over? Have we lost?' asked Zheng, wearied and worried.

'Not yet! The deputy admiral is still fighting the pirates till now,' replied the sailor.

As Zheng ascended to the deck, the sailors cheered. 'Admiral!' cried Wang, as he went over to hug Zheng.

Just then, a man in resplendent armour ran up to Wang. 'I am the real Shi Jingping. Our citizens are willing to help your sailors, for their own freedom.'

'Good!' replied Zheng. He summoned up the courage, and boomed: 'Do not give up! Palembang is on our side! We can, and we shall, win! Capture those pirates! This is for us, for the merchants, for the sailors, for the trade route and for the people of Palembang!'

With renewed energy, the sailors fought to the edge. Their hearts became united for the cause. And with the help of the citizens, the sailors gained the upper hand now. At last, the mission was a success. All the pirates including Chen were captured by the sailors. They left Palembang the next day, with many citizens waving grateful hands to their heroes.

Two days after the battle, as usual, Zheng, Wang and the sailors were having a meeting in the morning.

After the meeting, Zheng and Wang exchanged pleasantries. 'You know, Admiral, after capturing Chen Zuyi, I've found your confidence to be higher than before! How?' asked Wang.

'Well,' began Zheng, 'let's just say that I've had a change of heart. As you said, I am the admiral of the treasure fleets, and voyages are always quests for courage. If I'm scared, how can I be your leader and overcome fear, my greatest foe?'

# The Pirates of China

*Yew Chung International School (Primary), Chen, Neo – 9*

The Pacific Ocean was always peaceful, but today, there is something peeking out of the horizon at the crack of dawn. “Argh! I’m so cold, can’t we just have a little bit of silk to make warmer clothing?” a voice moaned.

“No Long! Those are for the other people!” said Captain Zheng. He is a really strict, bossy and smart person, captain of The Friendly Whale. Which is a ship so large that it is almost as big as a whale, hence its name. “Fine! Just wait until we all freeze to death!”

They were friendly enough since they’re good pirates but that doesn’t mean they still behave well. “Stop, it’s not supposed to be done like that! And you, don’t just brush the deck like that! The captain said to clean, not brush!” A fairly fat and strong pirate called Xiao scolded. He is the assistant of Zheng and is almost as strict as the captain himself. All these pirates give out all kinds of stuff like gold and silk to countries.

The next few days on The Friendly Whale weren’t quite as different, but today, the peaceful water wasn’t... It all started one morning when all was usual. When suddenly, a short pirate named Guo let out a squeaky shout “Captain look, there is smoke coming out of the horizon!” In fact, there was, and they’re worst nightmare may come true. The Smoky Sharks are a fleet of evil pirate ships that are known throughout the globe. The captain of the ship is a villainous, scary and powerful pirate that was named Black Inferno, he is the number one enemy of Zheng.

As soon as Guo said that sentence, Zheng took out his binoculars, there, just peeking out of the horizon, was thick smoke. At first, Zheng didn’t realize, but as if God had told him, he thought, “The Smoky Sharks.” Then he quickly ordered his crew to prepare everything and move as far east as possible. The pirates immediately obeyed, meanwhile, the enemy is creeping towards The Friendly Whale. Will they survive the impossible?

Zheng was preparing the fight. The Smoky Sharks were sailing closer and closer because their ships speed is much faster than Zheng’s. “Why is this ship so slow, faster faster faster!” A while later, The Smoky Sharks fleet of ships came into view. Zheng probably has butterflies fluttering in his stomach right now, you can tell by his facial expressions.

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“Argh! This is going to be great! You guys go get rid of the other silly pirates, leave Zheng alone, he is mine!” Black Inferno barked. The Smoky Sharks was about to start their attack. Suddenly, a miracle happened. A blast of white light appeared. Suddenly a boy, a boy named Neo, a boy from the future stepped out the beam of light. “Oy, what on earth is going on ...” Black Inferno Shouted.

“A-a g-g-ghost war-l-lock be-behind...” Never Fear stammered, as he fainted. All the pirates were terrified of a person appearing out of nowhere. “HEEEEEELP!” Black Inferno screamed as he turned and saw Neo, he finally realized what fear was. Neo was just as shocked too. “Wait what, um... PIRATES! Rats, I must be in the past, whatever...”

“Wh-who ar-ar-are you?” Black Inferno finally received the courage to ask the young boy.

“Me?” Neo asked as his frown began to turn into a broadening smile, “I’m one of the most famous inventors of all time. My name is Neo Chen, I come from Hong Kong in 3035. I’m a good guy, I’m wondering where...” Suddenly, he caught a glance of The Smoky Sharks sail, history suddenly swarmed into his brain, he immediately recognised it. “Did you hear that boy? He said he’s a good guy. ATTACK!” Black Inferno saw that Neo was just a boy. But the pirates don’t even dare budge, they were too scared and shocked.

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Back on The Friendly Whale, all the pirates were wondering what on earth is going on, The Smoky Sharks definitely are not scared of them, and they don’t usually stop. “They must be tricking us or something, there must be something behind this.” Zheng thought.

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Remember Neo's from the future? Which means a lot incredible mind-blowing things. Take The Edible Weapon. It explodes after 5 seconds and will release bubble gum that will grow to extremely large balloon-gum balls. After the bubble gum is around the place it wants to take out, it will start making the land or thing float away to space. Really powerful stuff, and that is what Neo is going to use to defeat The Smoky Sharks.

Neo quickly ran to the bow of the ship and placed The Edible Weapon down and started the countdown ...KABOOM! A bang sounded and immediately, there started to appear bubble gum, it was growing bigger and bigger. All the pirates were terrified, Black Inferno just stood in shock, but Neo had a trick up his sleeve. He took out a blue teleporter and disappeared and reappeared on the deck of The Friendly Whale. After the gum had done its job, The Smoky Sharks fleet of ships started to rise up higher and higher and finally, the fleet of ships floated into space and vanished.

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Now Zheng's crew were really shocked, so shocked they froze. When they started to move, Captain Zheng asked "Who are you? You must be a good guy, you helped us defeat Black Inferno!" Zheng was fascinated after Neo had introduced himself. Zheng wondered how would he thank Neo for doing such a big favor. They decided to send their goods to their first stop.

Their first stop was Hong Kong. As they arrived at Victoria Harbour, Captain Zheng and the others went giving out barrels of silk and gold ingots. After the citizens and the government thanked Zheng's crew. They all boarded their ship again and waved goodbye. This time, the Pacific will always stay peaceful as Zheng's crew traveled to their next destination...

# Diary

*Yew Chung International School (Primary), Gao, Miracle – 10*

January 12th

Bang! The cannons blasted the enemy ship, leaving a gigantic hole in the hull of the ship. The cannons repeatedly fired, and the soldiers ran towards their posts. This wasn't a drill ; they were under attack. The invaders, were running for their cannons, too. But it was already on late. The Chinese soldiers ran towards the ship, attacking the crew. But just as the last soldier reached the deck of the enemy ship, a wall of fire came to life. The fire began burning the ship, turning it slowly but surely into ashes. The soldiers shouted and cursed, as the ship went completely up in flames, taking the soldiers with it.

Aaron woke up, in the sun. Their were bodies scattered and littered everywhere. Flames were dancing on the wooden dock. *Where am I?* Aaron thought. *What just happened?* Little did he remember, he had forgotten that he had charged up the enemy ship, and then there was a fire and an explosion. Now he was covered in ashes, his clothes were tattered, his face grim, but more or less alive. He had leapt from the boat, and he had swam to this wooden plank that had fallen from the burning ship. Now, he was holding it like it was his life, which is typically true, based on the fact that he would drown. *I know how to swim, I can swim to land!* He finally remembered that being a captain of a ship, he definitely knew how to swim. He swam back slowly, surveying the damage done. Most of the ships were on fire, a few were sunken. Then, an officer ran over to him.

He asked "Sir, the fleet is leaving tomorrow. Do you want to come?"

Aaron nodded. He knew that he was in for a adventure.

January 15th

Even before he knew it, he was on a ship, and he was watching the ship's sails flying in the breeze. Suddenly, there was a shout. "Land ho!" The clatter of chests sounded throughout the ships, before they realised that the people on the land weren't welcoming the; they were doing the complete opposite. Battle bells rang. There was a cannonball, speeding towards the ship. It hit the ship with a deafening sound. "Boom!" There was fire everywhere, and Aaron ran towards the cannons. He reloaded and fired. "Boom!" The same sound repeated. The cannonball hit the wall of the enemies, and threw about half a dozen soldiers off their posts. The sound of death and destruction surrounded them.

Crash! Aaron tried to jump overboard, but it was too late. The enemies swarmed up the massive ship in hordes, taking prisoners and killing anybody who stood in their way. Aaron considered getting imprisoned, and getting killed, and decided on imprisoning.

The chance came later that night. There was a storm, a great heavy rain cloud looming over the enemies castle and city. Aaron never figured out what happened next. There was an explosion, and the sounds of people screaming. The entire left wall burst open. Seawater flushed in. Aaron trekked over to the fallen part, and clumsily, he climbed over the fallen bricks. The waves were huge. They were at least ten feet high in the air. These came from what seemed like giant tentacles. Looking at it, Aaron remembered his childhood, with adults telling the children not to swim alone because of sea monsters. Until now, he had never believed it. He knew it was a Kraken. A giant one. Its bright yellow eyes glared piercingly with hatred. The enemies seemed frozen on the walls. Seeing his chance at escaping, Aaron dived into the freezing water. The Kraken thrashed around wildly, slightly missing Aaron. The enemies finally seemed to realize that Aaron was escaping, and they shot arrows at him, as he struggled to swim towards freedom. But then, a ship crashed into him, and everything went dark.

January the 16th.

Aaron woke up to the shouting of his name. He forced open his eyes and staggered up like a zombie. There he was, on a ship. One of the soldiers he remembered said: "Sir, we got you outta the ocean. We '*borrowed*' a ship from the enemy. And now we're heading to somewhere West."

"Follow the drill! Don't panic! Fight back!" The pirate invasion caused a stir of mayhem on the ship. The pirates used planks to invade, and jumped to the ship with ease. The sailors and soldiers tried to fight back, but there were too many invaders, and not enough defenders.

“There’s no more cannonballs! What should we do?”, a sailor cried. Aaron was trying hard to stay alive, and almost got sliced by a blade. As fast as a jaguar, a pirate caught up with him. Aaron saw that there was a crossbow lying on the floor, so he picked it up, and shot an arrow straight at the pirate’s face. The pirate howled in pain, and staggered away.

Even though the sailors had the high ground, and were more experienced, the pirates outnumbered them 10 to 3, and with a bit of luck, they took over the whole entire ship. There was no way to win. But... there was one way to survive: escape. Without even thinking, Aaron plunged into the cold, icy water 5 meters below...

Soon, Aaron was on a beach, the yellow sand sparkling under him. He stood up groaning. In the distance, he could make out the outline of a ship burning. His ship. He felt anger turning into rage, and then before he knew it, he was stumbling into the forest of the island he was on. There it sat, a little shack. Its windows were cracked, its appearance similar to a horror movies setting.

Aaron trekked over to the house, inspecting it. He then, saw, with lurch in his stomach, a figure trudging towards him. The figure was a pirate. He laughed. “Looks like you’re stranded here!” he stated. Then, he walked away.

# The Rulers of the Sea – The Journey to India

*Yew Chung International School (Primary), Hsu, Declan – 9*

## Prologue

A few hundred years ago, in the 1400s, there was a fleet of ships that went and gave away treasure. Emperor Zhu Di ordered this to make peace, harmony and to also show the other countries how great China was. But the weird thing was, he chose pirates. It would have been appalling for regular pirates! The emperors must have been pleased to be given that loot.

Log of: The Great White      Day 1      Date: 1/5/1405

Hello! The name's Admiral Zheng He. This log is for my crew mates to record the journey. I've warned my crew mates that this is no walk in the park, but they don't really care. They figured that if they wanted to die, it would have been on an adventure. The Great White is going to set sail in a few days. Good luck on this journey, crew mates. May the gods bless us.

Day 2      Date: 2/5/1405

My name is Bo, and I've been invited to go on the ship The Great White! The Admiral Zheng He said they needed a person who was strong and burly like me. He said it was risky and it would be dangerous. It would be my choice. I decided to take that risk. When I saw the magnificent ship, I couldn't believe my eyes! It was as large as a whale shark (although I don't know what that is, everyone just keeps saying it is a prodigious leviathan).

Day 3      Date : 3/5/1405

This is Zheng He here. We've just set sail and a pirate ship led a full-on assault on us. From what I've learned at naval school, the first shot from cannons always falls short, so they came closer, shot all cannons then fell back. Fortunately Bo and Jian threw planks of wood onto the hostile ship, bridging the gap, then used their daggers and attacked the pirates.

Hui ignited the flint-tipped arrows and kept shooting until his quiver was empty. Unfortunately, the crow's nest, the mast and the sails were wrecked. It was a good thing that the pirate ship was full to the brim with treasure. We've now stopped at a port in Hong Kong and the ship is being repaired. Now we can give many people in different countries treasure.

Day 4      Date : 4/5/1405

My name is Hui. I'm the genius on board the ship. We are travelling at 62 knots. The ship should reach India in a day. See? I'm a genius! A few hours ago, Chang was making fun of me when I was giving a "lesson" about India, which is our first stop. When I was speaking, he pretended to be sitting on a desk and said "Go on, go on, Professor Hui! I want to get an A+ on the test!" What an aggravating fool.

Day 5      Date : 5/5/1405

Hi! My name's Cheng! Although I'm still a kid, I am allowed to sail with them because I can learn more overseas than in school. That Hui thinks he knows everything, but I bet he can't compose a Japanese haiku poem like me. I doubt that he even knows what a haiku is! Here's how my haiku goes:

'Pirates in China

They are the Ming Treasure Fleet

They give lots of gold.'

"Everyone brace! The ship is going to crash into those rocks over there!" I yelled. I was so absorbed in writing my haiku that I didn't notice those rocks! And I'm the lookout! Luckily, the Admiral turned the ship before we hit the rocks.

Day 6

Date :6/5/1405

Vfbjtdnnfgh. Hi. Yes! Finally managed to write! I never learnt to write. Right now, the admiral is teaching me, and Hui is scolding Cheng for not seeing those rocks. Ccraakk! Oops. I accidentally broke a brush. Just got another brush. Darn! We're under attack. Again! I think it is a Indian warship. Hui is waving a flag of peace. Now Bo and Chang are throwing treasure onto that ship. I think they said we have to meet the king. By the way, my name is Jian.

Day 7

Date : 7/5/1405

Admiral's back! We're sailing towards India right now, but we've been shrouded by a blanket of fog and mist. What? We can't see anything but we can see an island that suddenly appeared there. We're going to crash! Phew! At least we haven't crashed and destroyed our boat. We've docked there. Huh? There's a hole in the middle of the island. How strange. Wait a moment. I can see water coming up the hole. We jumped into the boat, only to just be projectiled by the water. That was a humpback whale. We shot up into the air like a cannonball. Goodbye, cruel world! Hello, Heaven! Arrrrrggggghhhhh! Wait, what? What's down there? I think I see India! Whoa! It is India. We landed on India just as the warship arrived. Now we're going to the palace. We've given them treasure and they have given us different kinds of valuables. The king has spoken. Hui has translated it to "We are going to set a port up so we can trade stuff!" This is the end of our first voyage.



# The Ruler of the High Seas in an Adventure with Science

*Yew Chung International School (Primary), Xu, Malvin – 10*

As the pirates rested near the sea, Captain Zheng stood in his cabin, brainstorming a plan. They were about to go to a place in China known for its famous hidden treasures, and the crew was nothing but excited. Zheng was a kind-hearted and loving man. He was tall and fit, with a beard silky and in healthy condition.

Zheng returned to the cabin. He had always dreamed of it, of going to the land of treasures, and now the dream came true.

“Alright,” said Zheng, whilst making a gesture that made the crew gather together.

The Captain explained that in order to get to the treasure, they need enough supplies. Then he said that on the way they might encounter some nasty people, so they need to be alert.

“Now are we ready to go?” asked Zheng.

“Yes, we are!” chanted back the crew.

They lined up to board the Qi Xia. The ship was parked against the deck of the vacant seaside cabin in where the pirates rested. The tides were low and the weather seemed friendly, so it was perfect for them to start the journey.

The pirates were exceptional pirates, and they sailed the sea giving merciful people their treasure, whilst fighting off bad pirates. They travel around and have an adventure and find treasures. They also greatly appreciate helping people in need.

Finally, the anchors raised. The ship was filled with the air of excitement: the pirates danced around, sang shanties and got out the food. It was a festive time now in the year, and the pirate crew just couldn't help it.

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It was a warm morning when the captain announced that this was the first stop for refill and rest.

“First stop,” said Zheng. “We need to find a place to rest, and we need to get the ship checked up and supplies ready. You guys can rest in the cabin or guard the ship.

“Alright, guys. I'm going to find resources and load supplies onto the boat. See you guys later” said Zheng. As he walked off and the pirates set off to guard the ship.

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After a while, the captain came back. In his arms, he carried loads of cardboard boxes.

“Hey guys, I've –” the pirate captain got cut off as he saw the pirates chatting with a random guy who was sobbing on one of the pirate's bed.

“Hey guys, what are you doing?” questioned Zheng.

“We just found this guy sitting in his cabin crying. And he is a scientist, we just asked him,” said Li.

“We were just trying to comfort him,” exclaimed Bo.

“So what happened?” Zheng asked the scientist, with a bit of pity.

The scientist explained to them how his brother was heard to be captured in Zhangjiajie, and he heard it on the radio. The pirate captain suggested to help, and the scientist greatly accepted, brightening up a little. The scientist already felt a part of his mind feeling gratitude towards the pirate Captain.

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When the scientist went aboard their ship, he told them about the horrible scientist that was against him and his theories and inventions, and that he was afraid that the lost scientist would get all the attention, and lose his customers.<sup>6</sup>

“Such an old greedy hag, wants the treasure all to himself,” said Bo.

So they set off towards Zhangjiajie, checking the nautical charts every few minutes. The boat sailed through rain, blizzard, hurricane, and storm: nothing could stop them, now, as they have a mission ahead, and the crew will never rest if there was a mission to be completed.

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Saturday was ship cleaning day, and everyone was cleaning the ship. Suddenly, the pirate captain announced that they had, finally, arrived Zhangjiajie. They got off the ship and gathered around a beach.

Then the scientist briefly described the appearance of the malicious scientist.

“He sort of has some grey eyebrows, whooshy moustache, hair sticking straight up and grey hair poking out off his ears,” replied the scientist. “And has round glasses, a white lab coat, and he's sort of short.”

“That seems like a grey man.” retorted Li.

Zhen explained to the others that they could go and find the person at different places, and then he made the connection that the scientist's brother might be captured by the evil scientist and threatening the scientist with the death of his brother, so that the scientist won't carry out his theories and inventions to the public.

“That makes sense! All of it, and by the way, I might know a place where he might be hiding out: the Gentleman Science Lab. I might lead the way if you want me to. I’ve been here to give lectures with other scientists.” remarked the scientist, later known by the name of Darwin, and his brother as Euclides.

And thus, they set off.

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Bo was the first to notice.

“HEY, YOU! TELL US WHERE EUCLIDES IS, OTHERWISE WE WILL RUN YOU THROUGH WITH A CUTLASS!” Bo shouted.

“Oh,” gasped the scientists. A few blacked out.

“Tell us.” Bo directed to the horrible scientist.

“Y—you m—mean E—euclid—des?” stammered the scientist. “Yes.” confirmed the crew.

“H—he is hang—ging on a cl—cliff in Av—avatar H—hallelujah M—mountain.” stuttered the scientist. Then, he passed out.

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The crew set of to the famous Avatar Hallelujah Mountain.

After a while, they reached the peak. A few of them were afraid of the enormous height. They looked around but couldn’t find him. They were about to leave, considering the scientist being a liar, when Li shouted, “He’s here, everybody! Come and help me lift him up!”

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“Thanks, I, I just don’t know how to thank you!” Darwin sobbed of joy.

“Oh, this is normal, isn’t it?” Zheng replied, modestly.

“Yes.” replied the crew. They even found some treasure on the peak, and now the crew was interested in nothing but that.

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It was another calm day. An adventure was ready to come, at the right time, in the right place...

# China Rules the Seas

*Yew Chung International School (Primary), Zhao, Nancy – 10*

The Atlantic can be a very dangerous place. The Zi Tao was right in the middle of it, the Atlantic Ocean.

They were at the wrong place at the wrong time. At first, it just swayed softly, unaware of the dangers ahead of them. But slowly but surely, the swaying became stronger and stronger. It started to jerk around. The pirates aboard the Zi Tao were still in a deep sleep. It was an ear-piercing screech from the wind that finally woke someone – Fong. Fong was the captain of Zi Tao, a Chinese pirate ship, and he was the youngest, too.

Fong looked out of his window. Oh no, he thought, a storm.

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Fong ran onto the deck. His jet black hair flew behind him as he ran. The rain started pouring as he started to spread the news of the storm, yelling on the top of his voice. The next few hours were chaos. Crews yelled as they used up their strengths trying to steer the ship to a calmer place, but it was no use – the ocean had a will of its own. The wind forced them to sail more west, making them leave from their track.

Gradually the storm calmed. Everyone was exhausted, but they were lucky to be alive after all.

‘I think,’ said Fong, clearing his voice, ‘I think that we should go back to sleep. Take some rest and restore our energy. Leave all the work to me today.’ The crews all nodded solemnly, they couldn’t have agreed any better.

Liu stayed behind. He knew that Fong would be very lonely on his own, so he decided to accompany Fong for the rest of the day.

Liu was a young boy of twenty-one, just one year older than Fong. Liu was Fong’s best friend, but many mistook them as brothers, because they looked rather alike.

Both had jet black hair and dark eyes. Both were tall and strong, and both were rather handsome.

The ship was wet and damp from the storm, so the friends set to work in cleaning up, laughing and joking the entire time.

They spotted a ship ahead of them, so far away you can barely see them, and the mist that just appeared didn’t help the situation, either. The other ship sailed closer and closer, but they weren’t targeting them...

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‘Aha! I see a ship ahead!’ said Captain Jack. It was the Hoop. The Hoop was a pirate ship from America, but not just any pirates, evil pirates. They earned their living by stealing things from other ships.

‘Yes, captain. You are very right’ said scrawny Meg, Captain Jack’s sidekick. Meg was very short and skinny. One shall have mistaken him as a stick if he wore brown all over with leaves sticking out of his arms. Meg only came up to Captain Jack’s ankle and was ‘accidentally’ stamped on by his wicked captain whenever he made just the tiniest mistake.

The captain himself was very tall and had a black moustache above his lips that he had always been proud of. He always dressed rather unnecessarily, as he always wore huge boots for dancing day and night, whether he was dancing or not. And his hat always had feathers sticking out, a different colour and shape or each day of the week. Captain Jack wore unnecessary clothes, and was an unnecessary man – his team would have been better off without him.

‘Of course, I’m right!’ bellowed Jack. One mini thing would set him off in a real mood. Just as he said that he began his usual punishment ‘accidentally’ stepping on Meg.

‘Look! Captain!’ shouted someone, distracting Jack from Meg, ‘The other ship is within reach!’

Jack stood up straight. He always loved terrorising other ships and watch them sink into the very bottom of the ocean. According to him, there was nothing more satisfying to look at.

As the Hoop sailed closer and closer to the other ship, they were able to identify the other boat – the Helina. The Helina was an Australian ship who also took pleasure in stealing and killing, and was Hoop’s worst enemy. The two enemies sailed towards each other, preparing for a battle without a single sense of fear – this was a life or death situation.

The two ships finally faced each other properly. The Australian pirates glared at the Americans and the Americans back..

‘Perhaps they think they can beat us, the most powerful pirates existing!’ laughed Jack.

Without a single more moment to waste, the Hoop fired cannons at the Helina and immediately it started to sink. The Australians screamed as they lowered their safety boats, but unluckily, they weren’t quick enough.

Captain Jack cackled like a witch as their enemy screamed – a scream that shall never be answered.

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The Zi Tao watched everything from behind, burning with fury. They decided to teach the Hoop a lesson.

Fong stood there, shocked by what had just happened. He was furious at what they had just seen.

'Wake up everyone!' Fong shouted loud enough for his crew to hear but quiet enough to still be oblivious to Hoop. 'I know this is your day off, but this is an emergency!'

Fong and Liu quickly filled them in on what had just happened and they decided to teach the Hoop a lesson – a lesson they won't forget.

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'Hey!' Fong shouted to the Hoop, 'we saw what you did just now!'

Jack took one look at the Zi Tao and burst out laughing.

'Your ship looks rich,' he said, and then, facing his team, he said, 'let's fire!'

However, the Chinese ship was prepared. They aimed their cannons and shot. Just like the Helina, the Americans tried to lower their safety boats but were too late.

Fong closed his eyes. He hated killing, but if they didn't, who knows what would happen to the oceans?

Fong took a deep breath and shouted, 'China rules the sea!'

A loud applause followed.

# The Seventh Voyage

*Ying Wa Primary School, Chan, Roy – 11*

Our ship disembarked for the twelfth time, leaving behind a band of cheerful people clutching our crates of presents, while waving at us.

My name is Chan Se, and I am a crew member aboard our captain, Zheng He's ship on his seventh journey. This is my first journey and my heart already longs to return to my family.

There are strict rules that we must follow on board, and the number of crew members getting seasick has reached three-digits long ago, the same goes to the people I know who want to quit this journey and return home.

The sky starts to get dark – a storm is brewing. 'Full speed ahead!' shouts Captain Zheng. The mast flutters in the wind, and the hull creaks and groans. Several people on board get seasick at the same time as the ship lurches and all stagger to the railings to throw up into the raging sea.

Suddenly, our lookout runs, gasping, up to Captain Zheng, looking frightened. 'Pirates!' he exclaims. Indeed, a vast ship is emerging from the dark horizon, bearing a ragged flag with the familiar crossbones symbol on it. Standing on the ship's deck is a tall, heavily bearded man with a wild look in his eyes, and he is twirling a gun in his fingers easily, flanked by a dozen other pirates.

'Ready the cannons!' cries Captain Zheng. The crew obey quickly, and soon all our cannons are all trained onto the pirates' ship. Our enemies quickly train their cannons at us also, and a tense feeling falls between the two ships.

The pirate captain shouts, and a volley of cannonballs hit our ship, sending several people overboard. We return fire, and soon both sides are shooting cannonballs at each other as fast as possible, with the sea full of people trying to climb back aboard their own ships to help and fight.

We almost seem to be losing the fight when suddenly the pirates retreat, running away quickly. Feeling puzzled, we turn around and the answer unravels in front of us.

A humongous creature is rising from the depths of the sea. It has millions of tentacles all over its body, and an enormous, bloodshot eye in the middle of its lime green forehead. With a slap from its tentacles, the ship tilts dangerously to the right, then starts to sink.

'At that moment I saw the rows of razor-sharp jaws inside the creature's mouth. I thought I was a goner, but I somehow managed to grab hold of a drifting piece of wood and drifted to a nearby island. Weeks passed by, and I finally managed to catch the attention of...'

I looked over at my son sitting in the chair next to me, he was hiding a smile, clearly thinking that I was mad. I sighed to myself. No one had ever believed me after that incident, being a surviving witness on board. I slowly closed my eyes, letting go of my past, and entering heaven.

# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyage

*Ying Wa Primary School, Chow, Jayden – 10*

The storm was howling through the night. Waves as high as mountains whipped up from the sea. A ship sailed steadily on, not afraid of the wind. It was bustling with activity as the sailors hurried around the deck. This voyage was known as the Ming Treasure Fleet.

“Captain! Our deck has broken, and a ginormous hole is visible! Please give your commands, sir!” A commander reported obediently to the captain, Lawrence. “I see. On the safe side, bring the treasures away from the hole, and patch it up immediately,” he ordered. The commander rushed back and forth, giving orders. Lawrence gazed out of the window. He sighed, “Our ship might not hold for long. I must have a back-up plan.” Just after he spoke, another voice came. “Captain! Our sail has fallen! Luckily, nobody was injured. What do I do, sir?” Lawrence sighed once again, and quickened his pace to check the damage.

The next day, the storm had gone. Lawrence had gathered up all of the sailors on board to make an announcement. “Fellow sailors, commanders, cooks, and everyone on board. I have made a decision. This ship,” he said, “is worn-down, old and it won’t provide us much more protection. So, I have decided to build a new one.” Murmurs spread like fire.

“What? Another one? How can we manage?”

“Oh no! That means more work!”

Lawrence tried to calm the crowd. “If we all pitch in, I’m sure we can achieve that. Please help! Of course I will help too!”

It seemed to calm the murmurs among the crew, and that made Lawrence a bit more confident. “Set sail to the nearest island!”

After days of sailing, they reached an island named Tropic Island. It was beautiful with loads of gardens and rose bushes. A city could be clearly seen in the middle of the vegetation. Lawrence decided to go explore the city. He told the crew to start building the ship, while he walked cautiously towards the city.

Soon, he had arrived. As he walked further in, he found that the city was seemingly abandoned. “Hello? I come in peace. I do not carry any weapons. I just want to make friends.” A few heads popped out from corners and behind walls. In a few seconds, there were tons of heads looking at Lawrence. One tall and skinny man walked out of hiding, trembling. “Yes? May I ask...who are you?” Lawrence introduced himself and his reason why he was on this island. “I need help. Can you lend me a hand?”

After a few minutes, they had made a compromise. Apparently, the Tropians (the people on the Tropic Island) were weak against pirates’ attacks and needed more protection. That’s why the Tropians hid when Lawrence came. Lawrence promised the Tropians to defend them as well as they could, and so the Tropians let the crew on the Ming Treasure Fleet stay to build their brand new ship.

Meanwhile on the beach, things were going pretty well. They had gathered wood from the vegetation on the beach, and were cutting them to a size that fits the build. Lawrence returned, this time along with the Tropians. They were planning how much space the crew was going to take up. Lawrence was quite satisfied about the progress they had made. He grinned.

Months passed by. The ship was finally finished. The Tropians were quite disappointed when they heard the news. After all, the crew had protected them against all sorts of attacks. Lawrence could see their frowning faces, so he gave them weapons from their treasure storage. The Tropians promised to repay the crew for their protection. With that, the crew sailed off.

Another year passed by. Lawrence was extremely proud of himself, because he just made friends with the Indians. Just when he was celebrating, he heard a huge BANG. Pirates were invading his ship. His cannons had unfortunately broke down when he needed them. He had neither defense nor attack weapons. The only thing he could do was to run. He suddenly saw the now empty treasure vault and remembered the Tropians. He immediately ordered his crew to set sail to Tropic Island.

When he arrived, the Tropians were putting up the crew’s old ship in the center of the city as a statue to remember the crew for helping them defend them against the pirates. The Tropians once again stared at Lawrence. “Remember me? I’m Lawrence!” he yelled. “I need your help! There are pirates after me! My new ship has broken down! I need my old ship!” The Tropians beamed. They finally had a chance to repay the crew for their kindness. They got to work right away. The braver Tropians helped defend the pirates with the weapons the crew had given them. The rest moved the old ship to the other side of the island. The Tropians followed closely behind. “I want to go with you,” the tall, skinny Tropian said.

“So do I!” another Tropian raised his hand. More and more voices popped out, saying that they also wanted to go with Lawrence and his crew. Tears streamed down Lawrence’s face. He nodded, smiling.

Soon, the crew and the Tropians were both on the ship. “Set sail!” Lawrence yelled. The ship sailed away from shore. Lawrence patted the old ship. “It’s good to have you back,” he said.

Back in China, the Tropians were given a new home and weapons to defend themselves. Some of them were even accepted to be soldiers to defend the country!

Lawrence’s old ship was on display in China, and the new ship that the crew had built was later confirmed destroyed by the invading pirates.

As for Lawrence, he was raised to become the Emperor’s advisor. And although he seldom roamed the seas now, his dream had never changed – to sail bravely in the sea with the ship he once sailed with.

# The Facebook of Zheng He

*Ying Wa Primary School, Lo, Yik Ming – 11*

Do you know what is the most popular social media network? Of course, it is the Facebook! Even Zheng He had switched on his phone and registered a Facebook account, renewing his status everyday...

Mr. Zheng is happy with Mr. Yongle today                      July, 1405

Hi everyone, I am Zheng He. You can call me Mr. Zheng or He He. The first Ming treasure voyage is going to begin soon, so I am very excited now! The Mr. Yongle emperor treats me very well. He gave me 27,000 troops and at least 62 ships. And he gave me boxes and boxes of treasures and told me to give the other countries during my trip too. He also said that there will be another eunuch, and he will be a partner of me. He is Wang Jinghong, who talks loudly and grabs all things to do. He is so rude!

Mr. Yongle also taught me a magical expression by Whatsapp on the half of my way. It is 'Attack! Let's battle to victory!'. But he told me that I can only use this when I see some pirates on the sea. I don't know who leaked the confidential matter, and told the other people that we have a great amount of treasure! Alas, there will be countless pirates waiting for me through my trip and they will kill me so they can steal everything on the ships! Shh! I see the Mr. Yongle is actually not that good. I haven't taken a shower for at least a week. But that miser only gave me a tattered shirt and a pair of old and torn trousers. Such a sad life for me!

Mr. Zheng is surprised of his troops.                      January, 1406

We have met pirates today. Proof of fact, my magical expression is useful. When I cried that slogan loudly, our troops fired to the pirates. The battle is intense and fierce! Unfortunately, my phone's battery is dead, otherwise I must record a video and upload it in Facebook. Anyway, we won in the battle! We will still meet pirates, but we go on to victory every time. One time, I was caught by a pirate, and they gave me a comfortable and warm bath! It's quite boring along the way. The general always says, 'Oh! Admiral... Admiral Zheng is caught by the pirates!' Wang Jinghong always says, 'I am hungry!' He only pays attention on food and girls. And the troops will only say, 'There is a pirate!'

Mr. Zheng is feeling relaxed in Malacca.                      May, 1406

After a long journey, I found that Malacca was a good place for me to have a rest there after my retirement. But the network signal there is too bad!

Mr. Zheng is frustrated in the communication with the residents in Calicut.  
December, 1406

Finally, we made port at Calicut (now India), and communicate with the residents there. We taught them how to farm easily, and they want to teach us their religion and the passages of scripture. They asked, 'Have you brought your USB here?' Ah? Nobody said that we need to bring our USB here! I only brought my phone, and the phone memory is only 32GB, but they said the scripture is 250GB! Wow! We had to exchange our email address, and wait for them to send it back a few days later.

Ahhh! Why don't they say they can send it through email before our voyage start?



# Battles in America

*Ying Wa Primary School, Loi, Jasper – 10*

Pirates usually travel the sea looking for gold to steal, but have you heard crews that do the exact opposite?

“Welcome!” the king of the Ming Dynasty said, “I heard you brought along precious and marvellous gifts from China, can I take a look?”

“Sure!” Jasper, the captain of the ship replied. He brought the king onto the ship, leading him to the Treasure Room. A shining golden door with a keyhole was to be opened in order to go in the Treasure Room. Jasper and the king, accompanied by Marcus, Jasper’s right hand man walked into the Treasure Room, filled to the brim with piles and piles of valuable and precious items such as gold and silk. The walls were lined with ancient Chinese dragons, which the citizens believed would protect the ship from intruders, carved by pure gold.

The king stared at the treasures for a long while, unable to get his eyes off the magnificent and extremely valued gifts. “Thank you so much!” the king said.

“Oh, you must have mistaken, only one twelfth of the treasures are yours, there are other countries that we also have to gift,” Jasper corrected.

“No, you’re mistaken,” the king laughed maniacally, “go up deck and you’ll see.”

Jasper and Marcus rushed up and found everyone included in their voyage tied with sturdy strings and bundled up in a bag. The crew’s muffled screams could be heard even from the outside. Jasper and Marcus were wild with fear. They backed away from the millions of soldiers with their swords sharpened out. “Go away!” Marcus shouted. The soldiers walked closer towards Jasper and Marcus every second.

The duo finally swung their swords at the soldiers, their swords glinting in the sunlight, as if in glory. At last, the soldiers sprinted at Jasper and Marcus and slashed their swords together. Jasper side-stepped and dodged instinctively from an attack. He stabbed his sword in the soldier’s gut.

“Jasper! Marcus!” Luke, a fellow member exclaimed, “You’ve got to get us out of this dungeon!”

At that moment, they heard someone panting heavily right outside of the cage where they were imprisoned in.

“Jasper!” someone shouted from the dark, “Luke!”

Jasper stared out from inside the prison. He inched closer towards the bars and found himself staring straight at one of his crew members...

“Peter!” Jasper gasped, astonished, “How?”

“I... I was asleep in our secret headquarters when they came,” he talked, still breathless, “I followed the soldiers sneakily as soon I found them carrying you guys here.”

Peter took out a silver key with the word ‘dungeons’ carved on it. He put the key in the lock and the bars sprang open.

Suddenly, footsteps echoed from above, alerting them that the guards were near.  
“Come on!” he yelled, “We’ve got to run!”

The entire crew dashed along the hallway, running away as quickly as possible. Soldiers ran in front of them and the ultimate battle had begun...

The crew swung their swords at the soldiers, knocking them out of the way. They kept doing that in order to keep a clean path towards the exit. Soldiers attempted to damage the crew, but together they were undefeatable. They ran and ran and ran. Finally, they had exited the dungeon into the clear plains. The crew kept darting away from the soldiers, unwilling to take on any trouble.

They darted up the dock and leaped onto the ship.  
On the ship was their last and greatest threat, the king himself. He slashed his sword at Marcus, Marcus held up his own sword to deflect it, but the king was just too strong. The king pushed Marcus to the boards of the ship and smirked. He then started dealing with Jasper. Immediately, Jasper knew there was no way at all he himself could finish the king off, but together, they might stand a chance.

“We’ve got to fight him together!” Jasper screamed.  
The king dodged the first few blows, but was unable to dodge the last one. The king shrieked in agony and fell to the board as he said his last words.

“I... I will get my revenge.”

# The Adventures of Zheng He and His Army

*Ying Wa Primary School, Tong, Colin – 11*

An entourage of armada stood at the harbor, waiting for this extravagant journey to inaugurate. A drizzle fell cloaking the raven black sky and the smell of gunfire enticed the soldiers' nostrils followed by impending rain. Zheng He strode forward without any qualms. The adventure would commence. I stood on the ship, acutely feeling guilt in my heart. I would leave my hometown and my family, but it had happened and was now water under the bridge. Farewells were bidden and the ship left. I would fight for China's peace.

Other sailors reciprocated the same feeling. Homesick and seasick, we endured the onslaught of intrepid storm. Nautical miles from home, we sat in terse silence every night, trying not to throw up. Finally, one day, 'Land Ahoy!' there came the shrieks of the excited crew. Zheng was thrilled. Before I could say anything, a gale ruffled the ship and I suddenly felt myself being torn up by a magnetic force.

I was inordinately shocked awake. It seemed that several doors of my dark side had opened. I suddenly found that I was not in my own drab room, but in a commodious room full of maps! 'Mr. Zheng, the ship is almost ready for the sail!' a voice said. Immobile as stone, I digested the crew's words. I suddenly knew what had happened. I had exchanged identities with Zheng He! I ran to my room and found a man in a state of irreparable confusion, Zheng He. He was stark white with fear. Then he spoke. 'Mister, we faced terrible storm hours before. Now we have exchanged identities, I hope you can help me to be the leader. I will be you. You are a brave warrior, and I know you can face adversities like this.'

We had arrived at the first port at Champa. We exchanged goods to the leaders there and got animals (an ambitious sign) and silk, and we set sail again, every soldier filled with nourishment. This time, we went to Java, Malacca, Aru, Calicut, and other places. I was crossing the Indonesia waters when we spotted Chen Zuyi and his gang. Notorious and nefarious for their guns, tales said that their gunfire could practically masticate a person in seconds by lack of blood.

We were out of luck when we crossed their way. They launched an attack. The discordant sound of gunfire clashed. My forces fought back like a Tasmanian Devil unleashed, unbeknownst to Chen Zuyi who was evading into a rowboat, I swung a sword at him. We won in our first battle.

Awaken, I found myself on the deck of the ship. I was a regular sailor again. The ship had boarded at China.

I was on the fleets on the fourth voyage. Being an opportunist, I had a platoon of men following me. 63 ships and a myriad of 28000 men was commandeered to the Persian Gulf. I was on the deck of the ship when I felt a foreboding sense. The same sense I had felt on the first journey! I fell into a deep sleep.

I was a doctor on the ship. I was in a daze as I looked at the uniform I was wearing. A doctor! I was clearly on the lower deck of the fleet. Seasickness was the matter of debilitating illness. Every person lying there was emaciated. I helped those who had severe injuries and were hapless.

The next day, I was back in my room.

What had caused me to turn into different people?

Years later, I found myself on the Ming treasure fleets for the last time. Embroiled in a dire matter, we had to leave at once. The fifth time was most latterly due to exorbitant demands from the king. Fortuitously, we were going to Africa. First to Aden at the mouth of the red sea, then onto the east coast of Africa. Stopping at the city states of Mogadishu and Somalia and Kenya. There, I met my lover. She was the cream of the crop. Impeccably dressed in traditional African clothes, I loved her with my heart. She boarded our ship. Her smile that could rival the sun, her manicured fingers, her serenity, were all feigned. One stormy night, when the onyx black waves splattered against the ship, her men she brought aboard attacked the crew. A wolf in sheep's clothing. She had been sent by the African king, who had appeared congenial and friendly with our ambassadors, but when I saw my wife's true colors, I knew what had happened. The mendacious king must have wanted to usurp the rights of China and rule over China. Fortunately, we had exchanged some silk for gun-fire but we lost the battle. Alas I had lost my beloved, who was buried at sea during the sea. That night I prayed in bondage of the Africans, to let me win the battle one more time. Suddenly, a gale ruffled myself and I was whisked away. Stupefied, I sat up and noticed that it was sunset, just like hours ago. Time travel! Posse of man was alerted and men regurgitated the message to all people. Hence, we were prepared when my wife and her men attacked. Imprudently, she pulled out a knife. 'Die!' Alas she was too slow – I had killed her with sorrow. The others were consigned back to China and would be beheaded back to China.

I died on this voyage. I had a dream, lying on my deathbed, my dreams wandering the desolate moors of Africa. I saw myself on the second voyage, the third voyage, the fourth voyage...then I thought about the further fortifying of my dearest country, China. I thought about the magical times when I became Zheng He and a doctor. I thought about my lover, my dead wife. We had brought back goods and tributes and envoys and whatever you could name. Zheng revered me as a leader and I knew it was time to return home.



# Fiction

Group 2

# A Journey of Economy of China

*A.D. & F.D. of Pok Oi Hospital Mrs Cheng Yam On School, Man, Mandy – 13*

Owing to economy of China was on the decline. Xi Jinping gave an order to the celebrated navigator, Cheng Ho to lead his fleet and travel around Atlantic Ocean. Also, they needed to advocate of their culture to other countries so that Cheng Ho decided to set off Atlantic Ocean in Christmas. Also, they would bring some Chinese food such as mooncakes and rice dumplings to sell.

In Christmas's morning, they boarded Cheng Ho cruise ship and stepped on their trip excitedly. They waved their hands and started their trip. They used an hour and they neared the first destination. Their first destination was Korea. But when they tried to near it, they were locking by radar of Korea. They were scared so they left there immediately.

Their second destination was the USA, but before that, they must cross the Pacific. While they were crossing the Pacific, they saw some rare dolphins jumped out water happily and lively. They were amazed by it so that they took some photos for it. After they arrived the USA, they sold some high technology and had a meeting with some businessmen in the USA. But unluckily, the USA president Donald Trump locked Cheng Ho and his fleet in a secret forest because he thought that Cheng Ho might improve the economy of China. They tried to ask for help but there wasn't anybody. Luckily, Cheng Ho and his fleet carried on their GPS and phone so that they could ask China for help. Then, they escaped and they were saved by China. They left the USA eagerly because they were scared of it.

After they left the USA, they arrived France with breezed and spray. When they arrived, they shook hands with French president Macron. Also, they had a meeting and they advocated of their Chinese food to French businessmen. They were intoxicated by local snacks so they stayed there for a whole day. They left there reluctantly because time was of the essence so they arrived Africa quickly.

They taught local residents there how to be more cheerful to enjoy their life and improve their quality of life. When they saw that they helped them a lot, they were satisfied so they left. Then they asked Cheng Ho, 'Where will we go?' Cheng Ho replied, 'We will go to Australia and this will be our last station in this trip.' When they arrived Australia, they were excited and played with kangaroos and koalas. They held them in the arms and took photos with them. Also, they talked with local residents there and advocated of their culture to them. They let Cheng Ho and his fleet know more about their daily life and what they need. Cheng Ho and his fleet recorded some notes and they left.

At last, they were back to China and they explained that what they had done immediately. They had a happy and unforgettable memory from this trip. Also, this was a lesson for them.

# A Passion for Voyages

*A.D. & F.D. of Pok Oi Hospital Mrs Cheng Yam On School, Wong, Brianca – 12*

Long time ago, there was an administrator who called Cheng Ho. He was the greatest seafarer in China. His life had half the time to travel around the world. One day, the emperor told Cheng Ho to find the precious because the kingdom outward appearance was too monotonous. The emperor wanted the kingdom to be more colorful. Therefore, Cheng Ho started his journey. He called 27,000 people to come with him. They used 48–317 vessels to travel around 30 Asia's country.

They just recently started. They got a big crisis. They did not plan where they go. Therefore, they lost in the middle of ocean. The crew member started embarrassed and at a complete loss, but Cheng Ho slept on the prow of a ship. The crew member awoken Cheng Ho. Cheng Ho woke up impatiently. He took out the map and said, 'Well, well, well. Now we are in the middle of ocean. We just have to detour this gable and go throw this village. Then, we will arrive India.' After his explanation, he went back to the prow of a ship to sleep again. The crew member was astonished.

When they arrived India, they sent to the leader of India who called Mawee. Mawee said, 'Why do you come here?' 'It is because I wanted to get the precious which called beryl. I know it is a rare gem. Therefore, would you mind have a battle with me? To let all the people know who have the status to have the beryl!' 'Cheng Ho shouted. Mawee said, 'Ha! It is my first time to see a person who has a courageous to have a battle with me. Yeah! Let's have a battle behind the castle.' Mawee accepted the challenge. Their confrontation lasted for a long time. They still could not distinguish the winner from the loser. Finally, Cheng Ho won. Mawee gave the beryl to Cheng Ho. Cheng Ho said, 'I cannot take things away like this. Therefore, I want to give you a present because you are a good opponent. This book is about China. Hope you like it.' Mawee said, 'Now, we are friends.'

When Cheng Ho travelled around Asia, he gave some presents to the leader of that place. He made a good impression to the leader around the world. He also got a lot of things back to China. When he died, he was on the vessel. Although he was sick at that time, he still loved to travel. His ocean exploration successfully opened up a new sea route. Also, he was promoting East–West trade and cultural exchanges and promoting cultural exchanges between China and the West.

## The Eighth Voyages of Zheng He

*A.D. & F.D. of Pok Oi Hospital Mrs Cheng Yam On School, Zhu, Ryan – 9*

On the twenty first of December, Zheng He left China to Indonesia. On his way, there was a huge storm, so his ship fell into the dark sea. Then, a huge man came and saved him. Zheng He said, 'Thank you!' The huge man said, 'You are welcome. My name is Peter. How about you?' Zheng He said, 'My name is Zheng He. I need to go to China.' 'Okay, I'll help you.' The man said, 'Thank you, Peter!' Zheng He said.

Then Peter made a big ship for him. Zheng He said, 'Bye!' Peter said, 'Bye! Good luck' Zheng He said, 'Thank you for your ship!'

After that, Zheng He left the island, there was a huge storm again. He went to England. And a small man said, 'Why are you so big?' 'Because I am from China!' After that he lived there for two nights and he went away. On his way to England, there was sunshine! And then he went home. He had a good day.

When he was at home everyone came and asked, 'Where did you go?' 'I drove to Indonesia but there was a huge storm on my way! Then a huge man saved me. Then I drove to England. There was a huge storm on my way again! When there was sunshine I drove back home!' Zheng He said, 'Wow it's amazing!' Everyone said, 'Maybe we can try it tomorrow.' Zheng He said, 'Wow thank you, Zheng He!' Everyone said.

The next day it was sunny so they could go voyages with Zheng He. Everyone had a ship so they could have one person one ship. Again Zheng He said loudly, 'Follow me. We will go to Thailand.' 'Okay! We will follow you.' Everyone said.

Then a very huge storm came. 'Hey that is Peter!' Zheng He said 'Peter, Peter, Peter, help us!' Zheng He said, 'that is Zheng He! He needs my help! I am coming!' Peter said, 'Help! We all need your help! Fast!' Zheng He said.

After that, all people were safe. 'Thank you, Peter!' Zheng He said.

Finally, they drove Zheng He's ship home.

# Zheng He's Bold Adventures

*Alliance Primary School, Kowloon Ton, Law, Joy In – 11*

Spools of golden silk thread rolled back and forth in a wooden trunk as the ship rocked violently in the howling wind. In the stores, crewmen were busy tightening ropes to fasten the porcelain urns in place and covering other treasures with an extra layer of oilskin cloth. “Admiral Zheng, water is gushing into 285!” shouted General Wang as he scrambled onto the deck. “Do not fear. Abandon 285. Drop the sails and separate the ships,” replied Zheng He, the young leader appointed by Yongle Emperor. His steady command offered the only calmness at that turbulent moment. Wang, who was second in command, nodded trustfully and quickly got to work. By the time all the sails had been reefed, the crew was exhausted. While the men laid down to rest in their cabins, their nine-foot tall admiral stood alone under the mast, waiting for the first light of dawn.

The fleet of nearly 300 treasure ships drifted about in the dark for another hour. The storm finally subsided. The sky turned from black to grey, then grey to gold. A while later, coconut trees along a coastline were spotted from a distance. “Land ahoy!” yelled the excited Zheng.

The fleet sailed towards the shore. Anchors were dropped. Five ambassadors were sent to survey the island. Two came back, badly injured. “Admiral Zheng, Ma, Zhou and Hu were killed. The ruler and his men were fierce beasts. We were lucky to have escaped.” Zheng was shocked, saddened and angered by this report. He was still thinking over the next step when General Wang rushed in to report the fleet was by now confronted by a vast troop which hoisted a huge flag that read “Ceylon”. Zheng knew there was no choice but to rage a war. Bombs were fired from the Chinese ships. Twelve commanders then led eight thousand elite soldiers to fight the enemies on shore. The Ceylon soldiers had the fright of their lives. Vira Alakesvara, the ruler of the island, soon surrendered to the Ming army. Taken captive, the defeated ruler was sent to the Chinese Emperor along with some peacocks, Sambar deer, junglebowls and other exotic animals.

The name of the Great Ming Empire began to reach far and wide. A few years later, another expedition took Zheng He and his crew to India. The local king there was amazed by the size of the ships. A splendid banquet was served to the visitors. Looking at bowls of brown and yellowish mixtures, one general whispered to Zheng, “How are we supposed to eat that?” “Not with a pinch of salt,” the Admiral joked lightheartedly. He liked this country very much, finding it a lot better than Ceylon. Towards the end of the feast, upon the command of the Indian King, barrels of herbs, spices and dyes were presented to the guests as gifts. In exchange, Zheng also offered the Indians stacks of delicate silk fabrics, barrels of tea leaves and a chest of golden coins. Drinking to the newly established friendship with the Indian ruler, the young diplomat had never felt more proud of his country.

Zheng's ships were on their way back to China when they were met by a fleet of four vessels carrying armed pirates. “We can smell treasures from miles away,” shouted the tallest of the pirates. “Now, tell me, shall we take the gifts or your lives?” To this, the Admiral replied, “You won't take anything, but take care!” His generals promptly bombed all of the four pirate ships and captured the leader Pirate Chen. They tied him up and took him to Zheng. “I won't allow you to keep on robbing ships anymore. You will be taken back to China and executed,” announced the great leader triumphantly.

Back in the Captain's cabin, Zheng was drinking a cup of hot tea. A map had been laid out on his desk. He dipped his writing brush in the black ink and put a circle around East Africa.



# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

*Alliance Primary School, Kowloon Tong, Yung, Lok Yan – 12*

“Captain Cheng, I, the activity manager, am going to hold a ball for all the people on this ship, any problem?” “No,” Captain Cheng answered. After I got on board the ship and reported to the Captain, the ship started a new journey. In this round of Ming Treasure Voyage, we were sailing to India to give out precious items from our Emperor for business opportunity and cultural exchange.

As we had just completed the tour to Japan building up relationship with the Japanese during the last voyage, I decided to organize a ball to celebrate. While I was planning the programme activity, I heard somebody shouting “Quick! Get ready in thirty seconds! There’s an Indian ship within 200 metres heading towards us! It’s a pirate ship! Army, get ready A.S.A.P.!” “Yes Sir!” someone replied. I felt frightened because I learnt that Indians were going to eat human alive if we lost the battle with them.

Battle started very soon! First I heard the Captain yelling “Stop the attack! We want peace! We just want to give out embroidery and other gifts from China!” However, the war went on disregarding the Captain’s announcement. I was hiding in my cabin, peering through the window. Our ship kept on firing bombs and got nearer and nearer to our enemy’s ship. They were throwing bombs too but we were well prepared to defend ourselves. Our ship then sailed in parallel with theirs and some enemies got onto our ship immediately. Still “Boom! Kaboom Boom!” sounds were non-stop. After that, there were hundred of battles of sword fighting on our ship. Once, I saw an Indian young man was stabbed and his leg was bleeding. He felt like very painful. So I rushed out of my cabin, carried that man, and then rushed back into my cabin again swiftly. At once, I helped him to bandage the wound with Chinese medicine. The wound stopped bleeding instantly and the man was getting better. After that, he left my cabin quietly. Finally, my team won the battle and the Indians on the pirate ship were invited to join our party.

When I was dancing happily in the ballroom, a young man walked towards me and said, “thank you! I’m the prince of Indian. Thanks for saving me and I want to reward you.” Then he gave me a big diamond which I had never seen before. We shook hands and made friends with each other. When the ball was close to its end, there was a gift exchange ceremony. I changed into a white Cheongsam to see off. An Indian saw me and cried “Ghost! A ghost!” The Captain explained to him and gave him one piece of Cheongsam too! The Captain of Indian brought us some spice and jewelry. We gave them Chinese Calligraphy in return. We not just won the battle, but also their friendship.

What a memorable moment on the Ming Treasure Voyages!

# A Mysterious Voyage

*Alliance Primary School, Kowloon Tong, Liu, Tsz Wing – 12*

One fine summer morning, I woke up to the sway of the ship. I sat up and rubbed my eyes, not accustomed to the bright sunlight pouring in from the lower deck windows. I looked around at the crew and saw that Captain was not in his hammock. I quickly ran up the stairs to the upper deck. I saw Captain sitting there, staring out over the ocean from his chair. “Good morning,” Captain said. “Morning Captain,” I said respectfully and saluted. “Where are we heading now?” I asked curiously. “We are going back home! It’s almost time to go back to celebrate the King’s birthday and everyone in the kingdom needs to attend.” Captain said excitedly. “Great!” I said enthusiastically. I quickly ran down to the hammock room and started packing up for the trip to return home.

A few days later on a quiet evening, everyone was sleeping except for the sailor on his night shift steering the ship. Suddenly, we heard a thunderous yell of horror travelling down from the upper deck. Everyone immediately sprang awake and rushed up the staircase in their pajamas. “What? What happened?” A crew member asked in a deep state of confusion. “I...I went in the wrong direction. We are now heading towards... The Dead Sea.” Everyone instantly broke into a nervous murmur. Rumor has it that no ship that has went into the Dead Sea has ever returned.

“Silence!” Captain yelled suddenly. “Everybody go change, then load the cannons, gather your weapons, and report here after fifteen minutes. Go!” He ordered. Everyone immediately sprang into action, and fifteen minutes a group of well-dressed crew stood on the deck, ready for battle.

“Ok,” Captain said, pacing around in front of us, “Let’s say there is a crew of...evil people standing on a ship in front of us. If this happens, we will first fire the cannons at their ship. If they manage to board our ship, we will all pair up and have a sword fight. Ok, possibility number 2. Let’s say.....”

We continued discussing possibilities and strategies through out the night and when morning came, all of us were exhausted but didn’t dare to sleep. Suddenly we heard a thunderous noise and huddled together. A loud rumbling noise echoed around us for miles around. Out of nowhere, an enormous wave unexpectedly rose in front of us, and a gigantic sea monster appeared. It had eyes the size of a small table, body the size of twenty elephants, and teeth as sharp as razor knives. “Ok, the answer is strategy number two hundred and seventeen. Peter, you first!” Captain yelled out. Peter immediately ran around in circles on the deck, yelling, “Get me! Get me!” The monster immediately bent down to try to scoop Peter up, but failed as Peter was so tiny he could slip between its fingers. “Will and Jake, you’re up!” Captain yelled. Will and Jake immediately jumped up the monster’s arm and ran up to its eyes, took out a knife and stabbed it once in each eye, then slid back down to the ship. The monster yelled out in agony, clapping his eyes. “Everyone, last step!” Captain yelled frantically. All of us immediately aimed one of the cannons at the monster’s head and fired, once, twice, thrice! At the third time, it finally froze, then fell down towards the ocean floor, and it never resurfaced. All of us cheered in victory, and gathered around and yelled in celebration. But before we could react, an enormous whirlpool appeared right beneath us and swallowed our whole ship up.

We were swirling in blackness, and we clutched to each other in confusion. After a few minutes, we finally slowed down and the sun’s warm rays shined upon us. I opened my eyes slowly. We were bobbing up and down on a very blue ocean, and we can see land just a kilometer ahead of us! “Straight ahead!” Captain ordered. The sailor immediately steered the ship towards that direction. Once ashore we can see roads, large carriages without horses moving, and tall buildings looming above us. Everyone also stared at us peculiarly. Everything was just so...strange. An innocent little girl came up to us “Excuse me, can I help you? You look lost.” She was looking at us curiously. “Can you tell us where this is?” I asked bravely. “Why, sir, you’re in Hong Kong.” She answered me. “What year is this?” I asked again. “The year 2019!” She answered, looking at us in bewilderment. “We went in the future...” Captain said absentmindedly.

“Who are you?” She asked us. “We are a group of sailors from the Ming Dynasty. We were setting sail for home but went in the wrong direction and entered The Dead Sea. “Oh!” She said, excitement lighting up her eyes, “Do you have a map?”” What’s that?” We echoed, “It is a piece of paper with the whereabouts of different places in our world!” She said, “I am a student and we are now being taught geography, the study of different whereabouts in the world, at school now. We are required to buy an atlas at the start of the year.

How about I give it to you!” She rummaged in her backpack and took out a book. “Here, you need this more than me!” “Thank you!” We said. We went back to our ship and investigated this map. Suddenly an enormous whirlpool engulfed us again and brought us back to our time. Once we returned home and set sail upon a new voyage we followed the map, and successfully found out different places in the world. We traded a lot of different goods back to our country for example silk, and China emerged to become one of the prosperous countries in the world.

# Jong, 964 A.D.

*Bradbury School, Atepolikhin, Lea – 8*

964 A.D.

In china a little girl called Jong was born. Her father, King Yu, wanted to sell some stuff like bowls, plants, plats, chopsticks, cups, spoons and some watermelons.

When Jong was 8 she told her whole class how she wanted to become an explorer. When Jong was 14 she got through and she was welcome to join the Academy. In the Academy she met Jang, Weiwei, Li, Ding and Bing. At 10 they started the journey.

Frist Jong wanted to go to the poor parts of China. The first stop was Henan. When they got there it looked so gloomy that Jong could not see herself living there. The first stop was a family of four with grandparents. They wanted everything they had. After 10 houses the boat was starting to leave and thankfully they got on the boat.

“Next step Shenzi!” cried Jong.

When they got there it was a world of delight and they didn’t know where to start. They knew that they needed to go to the countryside. When they got there it looked so gloomy they did not know where to start.

“There were about 20 houses here but our budget 10 houses” Wei Wei said surprisingly.

“ There are 15 houses– we have knock on people’s doors and ask if they are poor or not”, said Jong boringly.

When they finish knocking on all of the doors the boat was about to leave but they didn't want to miss another one so they just left it and none of those people got to have gifts. They ran finally got on the ferry.

“Next Shandon!”, said Li excitedly.

“ I'm so excited to go to Africa, India and Arabia!”, said Jang excitedly.

When they Arrived in Shandong it looked just an ordinary city. They walked across this big mountain and found some poor people. The first stop was an old man and his name was Xingdong. He wanted everything but he wished he had some fresh water to drink instead of discussing water from the –river side. When they finished the tenth they all walked peacefully to the ferry.

“Next, Africa, which is going to take a week. Luckily we have rooms”, said Jong after the boat ride.

When they got there it looked like a zoo. They walked down the river Nile. When they got there they went further down the town and Jong thought that there would be poor people but there were no poor people, just a pack of lions. So they walked up the river and got on the boat.

“Why did the king of Africa, King Jack, let there be poor people?” said Jang. No response.

Next India.

When they got off the boat it was near the poor side so they did need to go anywhere. So the first house there was a grandma shouting at them. The grandma said, “ Don't go here, you know that you’re not supposed to.” So she slammed the door.

“So there only 9 house I guess”, said Li. When they finished all 10 house they walk on the boat.

Next Arabia.

When the boat was boarding the dock the king Mohammed could see that the boat was from China and he does not like china so Jong said. “ Guys,get ready for a war quietly!” .

When they got the ferry they were all ready and king Mohammed shouted and the war began. They were able to give some stuff. So Jung and Jong sneakily went up a mountain and when they were half way through they saw a poor man’s watermelons and plants and they asked if there were any poor people. A bow and arrow shot at Jang and Jong they both had to sit out and Shu helped them. After Shu helped them he went back to the war.

The Arabians won so king Mohammed said, “Give all the goods!”. He chuckled at the end.

So Jong said, “ We only have bowls, plates, plants chopsticks, watermelons, cups and spoons.”

King Mohammed said, “ Bring it all to me!”, so they passed it on.

When they got back all the parents told them to tell what happened. And Jong was the best at explaining it.

# Christopher's Big Dream

*Bradbury School, Cheung, Charlize – 9*

Christopher had a big dream.

It was to ride on a boat.

Every night he dreamed of it, and finally, unexpectedly, his chance came.

You might think, “ Why does he want to go on a boat so much?”

The reason was that his father was a fisherman. Every night, when he came home, he would tell Christopher about all the things he saw when he was fishing for sea animals on the King's boats in the sunset.

Christopher was always fascinated by the king's boats. That's why he wanted to be on a boat so much. One day his father came triumphantly home early from work and said, “ The king wants me to be his personal fisherman to catch fish for his meals. And, I got a private boat for us to use!”

“Can we go on it now? Please?” begged Christopher. His father, startled by his enthusiasm, hid it by saying firmly “Not now Christopher, it's late.”

The next morning, his parents were startled awake by the banging on the door. “Come on!” Christopher shouted, “ Let's go and see the boat!” So they hurriedly set off to have a quick glance of the boat before his father went to work.

After having a quick look, he convinced his parents to let him stay a little longer to have a proper look of the ship, his father wrote down the rules and left him with his mother. Christopher explored the four corners of the ship. It was amazing, everything they needed and wanted was in the ship, and each one reminded him of a happy memory. The fake jewels reminded him of the pirate stories his father used to read to him before bedtime and, the cannon reminded him of his old toy castle with toy soldiers and weapons, etc.

That night, Christopher had a weird dream. First it was of him and his parents on a ship, peacefully sailing out sea. Suddenly, out of nowhere, came a giant dark whirlpool, crushing the boat and sucking him in. He screamed and screamed till he could shout no more and woke up panting with sweat dripping down his back. Then, he rolled over, went back to sleep and totally forgot about the dream.

Early in the next morning, Christopher followed his father to work. He jumped up and down and ran around impatiently as they slowly made their way along the street. “Hurry up!” He shouted, as he ran towards the pier.

It was a beautiful day, the sun was shining, the birds were singing and the fish were jumping, their colourful scales reflecting on the water. It was all very peaceful until ....

## **BOOM!**

A rumble of thunder shook the boat off course into the dark, rolling waves on the cold, salty water. Christopher hung on for dear life but he was still flung around the cabin. Then, it was all still. Christopher crept out of the cabin and onto the deck. He had misunderstood the stillness, the waves had eased but the wind was as worst as EVER!!! He was thrown around the ship as he desperately tried to grab on to something solid. He slid down to the edge of the boat and grabbed onto the edge, then he got sucked into the whirlpool, he screamed and screamed like in his dream. Then, he knew no more. As he spiraled deeper and deeper into the abyss, a pod of dolphins carried him gently to a concealed magical island where they laid him on a bed of blossoms and feathers.

Meanwhile, his parents were frantically looking for him. They screamed and shouted but he never came. They even hunted for him around the ship but couldn't find him. In the end, his parents soberly gave up and kept on sailing forward.

When Christopher woke up, he found a strong, young Morgan mare with big, soulful eyes looking at him. Then it said in a musical voice "My name is Autumn and this is my story."

"Long ago, when I was a little foal, my family, friends and I lived on a happy, peaceful island named Calypso. One day, a huge storm struck our island and pulled us into the sea. We tried to swim but couldn't keep our heads above the water. A huge wave came down on us and everyone drowned except me. I was washed up on this island and have lived here ever since that day."

"That's strange" said Christopher, "I fell off the ship and lost my parents too! Maybe we should be friends!"

"I'd love to be friends with you; it's been so long since I spoke to anyone except animals on the island. Everything is very cozy here and I'm sure you'll settle in."

"I know I will. But I'm quite homesick and I miss my parents!", said Christopher sadly. "I know how you feel," said Autumn softly. "I miss my parents too, but you'll just have to cope until they find you."

So the days went by. Every day they played and explored the island together and every night he slept on a feather bed. Christopher had so much fun that he didn't realise that almost a month had passed.

One night, Christopher had a strange dream, he dreamed that his parents were on the shore of the island calling to him and embracing him. Tears of joy were streaming down their faces.

Then he saw them building a big farm and living there.

The next morning, he saw two figures on the beach. His parents ran towards him, happiness and tears of joy shone on their faces as they hugged him. Christopher asked them a question he had been thinking about ever since his dream, "Can we live on this island please?"

"I don't see why not," replied his father. So they sailed back home to buy supplies and built a large farm for the animals to take shelter on the island.

How come everything I dream about comes true? wondered Christopher. As they settled down safe and sound for years to come.

# The Magic Sword

*Bradbury School, Ho, Jocelyn – 8*

It was Zheng He's seventh voyage. He had spent most of his life at sea on special missions. He was a strong and courageous boy, ever since he was separated from his family, he had looked after himself. Zheng. He was an amazing Chinese explorer who had visited many countries and was fortunate enough to have seen fascinating places. He even saw animals he had never seen before, making new discoveries every day. He had traveled as far as the African coast and built relationships with over twenty countries and had even visited Arabia. Zheng He had many wonderful experiences, trying many foods, herbs and spices for the first time which he brought back to China to share with his people.

One of Zheng He's most favourite places that he had visited was India, the smells, colours and warm people really made him happy. India is where he saw an elephant for the very first time and he couldn't believe his eyes, he remembers it so well. He was on a tour with Sukayna, a local girl that was looking after Zheng. He and his crew became good friends with Suka, as he called her, and he plans to find her again if he is lucky enough to return to India one day.

"It's HUGE, what is it?" exclaimed Zheng when he saw the elephant.

"It's an elephant and this is his trunk." Said Sukayana, matter-of-factly, while stroking the giant beast's huge floppy ears.

"It is incredible", whispered Zheng He as he stared at the elephant in awe.

"Elephants are very peaceful animals and they have the largest brains in the animal kingdom.," informed Sukayna.

"Wow, they are smart and beautiful. I cannot wait to tell my country about this magnificent animal." Zheng He and Suka rode the elephants and it was one of Zheng's best days.

Zheng woke from his daydream and looked around the deck. He had better get to work. There were always a lot of jobs to be taken care of on the ship and the crew had a busy day ahead of them. Zheng knew how lucky he was to have seen such amazing things on his adventures and he always shared many stories in China. However, Zheng and his men had some dangerous experiences too, on his many voyages. They had fought against mighty typhoons, rough seas and even pirates!

It was a fine morning at sea when without warning, looming ahead in the distance Zheng He saw a pirate ship heading their way. Zheng warned the other members on the ship by sounding the horn but the ship was still approaching, they started to head away from the pirate ship, but the pirate ship was too fast and caught up to them. The crew were crazily running around like they were on fire, shouting in every direction, "PIRATES, PIRATE ATTACK!" The crew were securing the treasure and handing out weapons. However, the pirates got on to Zheng He's boat. Zheng and his crew hid along with the treasure. Suddenly, the pirates heard some mumbling at the bottom deck where the treasure was and headed towards it.

"Where are our other ships? We need help here, they are going to attack" Mumbled Zheng He. He thought he had seen this pirate ship before from his fourth voyage when they were attacked. The crew had defeated the pirates and ended up finding a very special sword covered in precious gems that had a special symbol on it that none of the Chinese could understand. However, they had kept the sword as no typhoon, tragedies or rough sea seemed to happen when the sword was on the ship with them. This could be a coincidence but Zheng He didn't think so, he knew the sea well and believed the sword was magic.

"We would like to talk to the captain, we mean no harm!" shouted a pirate.

Zheng He looked around in disbelief. Were they trying to trick them? Why would a pirate mean no harm!?

“We would like our sword back, we are sorry for attacking you and have had nothing but bad luck since”, the pirate stated. They want the sword because it protects them. They tell Zheng He and his crew that they have had the sword for many years and if the pirates do something bad the sword will do something bad to them. Zheng He talks to the pirates and discovers that the magic sword is very important to them and has been for many, many years and it also ensures they do good deeds. However, since the fourth voyage when the pirates fought with Zheng He and his crew, which is a bad thing to do, the pirates had lost many men and experienced very bad typhoons. They also said that they live on the sea and need the sword to protect them and others.

Zheng He gave back the sword but not before making the pirates promise to protect the men at sea rather than attack other boats. The pirates were very thankful. “If we bump into you again and the weather is bad then we will make it nice again and we will not harm you.” They all agreed. The pirates asked if they can be friends, and Zheng He said yes. The pirates also told him that the sword had saved thousands of shipwrecks over the years and losing the magic sword had proved how much it protected them, and taught them the lesson that we should always be kind and caring to others. The magic sword knows if you are bad, bad things will happen but when they show love or kindness, good things happen for them, they would never forget this again.

They celebrated with a bottle of beer, pak Choi and salty fish. They gave each other a cheer. “You have shown us great kindness Zheng He, thank you.” shouted the pirates as they sailed into the sunset.



# Diary of a Ming Dynasty Voyager

*Bradbury School, Kalidindi, Anwita – 10*

## July 11th, 1405

Today is the day. We set sail to brand new regions on Earth. There is a man on this ship named Zheng He and apparently, by the looks of things, is now in command. I surprisingly am not too stressed! But, in a few hours, we will be on a ship, with others around us, and we will finally have to say our goodbyes to the warm, fresh grass...

We have finally set sail, not only our ship but a fleet of ships. Our ship's Captain, Zheng He, is giving us orders left and right! Still, my heart is pounding with excitement! I am happy to be setting sail, but I am missing my homeland. I just hope that my family will be safe without me. There's always danger in the territory that we live in, and I do not know if wondering off of land will help with the situation. What if something happens to them? I will constantly be worried but I need to leave them behind. But, I have to focus on the journey ahead of me.

## July 23rd, 1405

It has been a few days since I have been off of the main island, and life on board has been exhilarating. My eyes are practically running in circles. Am I meant to feel this way so early on in sailing? As a voyager? The others do not look as pale as I am and I do not understand why that is, but I am clearly seeing it with my own eyes. For protective measures I might stand near the edge of the ship. I do not feel well.

I cannot stand being on this foolish, creaky moving invention anymore! All these people are mad here! They are not showing any expressions, emotions, nothing! Captain Zheng He is doing a horrible job of sailing in a straight line, Navigator is doing an alright job. I on the other hand, as Quartermaster, am doing an exceptional job of being in charge of carrying out the captain's orders, the Bosun is doing a cruddy job of keeping this ship in shape ready for longer and harder travels. The Cooper is doing a cheap job of keeping all the barrels with our ships valuables safe! I wish I was a carpenter; I wouldn't have to do anything right now! Our ships are supposedly "just fine" so we would not need to polish them up. Whoever is currently the carpenter is having the most effortless life! We have a few healers here in their sleeping quarters if needed. Our goal is not to get into any sorts of violence while we are out here, but, if someone has surely caught an illness, we will have people who know what to do.

## August 1st, 1405

I am missing my family. I miss talking to my brothers and I miss the flavourful aroma of fresh dumplings that my mother made. I believe I am homesick. I am sore from previous chores, and there seem to be more and more as the days pass. I tend to feel isolated at times. I attempt to converse with others but they steer clear of me. What shall I do? I might as well request Captain Zheng He for any new chores that need to be done. I can only hope that it will not be something that gives me more pain.

## August 13th, 1405

The skies have darkened in the past few days, and I feel a slight uneasiness. Is trouble arising? I do not have much knowledge about the weather but there has been news from others saying a storm could arrive. I hope it will not affect us harshly. The weather looks like it is going to change rapidly, and that surely isn't acceptable.

The weather is not getting better by the second. The storm is just getting stronger, and stronger, from every wind it blows. The crew and I do not know what to do. Do we just sit the storm out? By camping on nearby shore? Or do we keep going, risking our lives by sailing across the dangerous waters...

"Long, long ago, there were many, many ships that had set sail, trying to conquer the world." Was that the beginning of a story that was going to be told to the young and to the old, once our fleet of ships travel across the waters together, and discover new places? I think so!

August 15th, 1405

The weather has gotten better, so I am starting to relax a little bit! My heart has stopped pumping at literally the speed of lightning! Get it? I made a little joke! Storm, lightning, haha...

Again, the weather has cleared up! So, I will not make a big deal of it anymore! But, I still do not understand how it could just clear up so quickly! Not that I want it to come back again, but..

August 17th, 1405

The scenery around us has still not changed these past few days, which I expected before setting sail. Now, away from the talk about scenery, is there an evil in the waters? The ship is going, UP, AND DOWN, UP, AND DOWN. I do not wish to fall overboard!!

Rock, are hitting our ship. Sadly – a few people have fallen off the ship, and I feel I am to soon join them in meeting my end...

The ship has suddenly tilted to the right, and all the members on the ship have slid across the deck, all falling right into place next to me. I am right on the edge; there is so much weight on me from the others in the crew. The sea has prevailed.

I am giving you to the sea. I might never see you again..... but, I will miss you ver- ry much...

# An Adventure Never to Forget

*Bradbury School, Sekhri, Anika – 8*

Have you ever had a hard time in life?

Andrew's life was full of hard times. He was an only child and he only had a mother as his father died three years ago when Andrew was four years old. His mother was not very caring and that's what made Andrew's life hard. He had always wanted to get away and have an adventure.

One misty, chilly evening Andrew and his mom were walking home from the market when Andrew noticed a large, wooden ship that he had never seen before on the dock. He wanted to explore it and pleaded with his mother to let him go closer but she refused. She clutched onto Andrew's arm.

"Mother let me go!" He exclaimed.

"Walk, you foolish child!" His mother shrieked.

"No, let me go!" He grabbed her hand and yanked it off his arm, and then ran as fast as he could towards the mysterious ship. He reached it and clambered on board just as the plank rose off the glittering sand.

He could hear his mother's voice calling after him and pleading for him to come back. But it was too late; the ship was gliding away from the dock.

"Everyone here?" Andrew heard a man holler at the other end of the deck. He could see five men standing in front of a tall skinny guy with long brown hair and wearing a navy blue vest and white pants. This must be the captain and his crew, thought Andrew.

"I'd better not be found by them." So he ducked down some stairs going to the hull of the ship. Down he went. Luckily the men did not see him. He was a castaway on the ship!

"Hopefully no one will come down here!", Andrew thought, his heart was pounding very fast. He felt nervous yet excited about the adventure that awaited him.

"Where are we off to this time?" said one of the crew above on the deck.

"We're off to India," another voice shouted back.

Andrew could hear more voices.

"Time for a chore run through! William, you're on cleaning detail with Alexandre. Harold, you're on cooking with George. Big Harry you're with me on lookout!" That must be the captain.

Andrew could hear everything that was going on. He was very thrilled that he had gotten away with being on the ship without anyone noticing him. But his luck didn't last. Suddenly he felt something fall on his head and down his shoulder. Without thinking, he screamed. What could it be?

"Ahh! A rat! Yuck, help me please!" Andrew pleaded. The sailors heard him yelling for help.

"Who's that!?" called one of the crew.

"Yeah, who is that?" another one said.

"It came from the hull, let's check there." So they all went down to the hull and can you guess what they saw? Poor Andrew!

"Who is he?" They all asked each other in confusion.

"Please don't hurt me, I didn't take anything! Please spare me, I beg of you, please!"

"Look kid, we ain't gonna hurt you, ok? What are you doing here though?" The men asked suspiciously.

"Well...umm...I came here to...umm. Can you help me get rid of this rat first?" There was a brown, ragged, furry rat nibbling at the edge of Andrew's shoe. Boom! One of the sailors stomped his foot in front of the rat and it scurried away.

"Now tell us why you're here or we will do the same to you," they warned.

"Well, you see my life isn't very nice and I wanted to explore something new," the boy said.

# A New Feeling

*Chinese International School, Cheung, Cassandra – 8*

Meiling carried the cargo up to the massive ship that she called home. “Come here, Meiling! Can you help me clean the wheel? I’m too buff and muscular to squeeze between the gap.” The captain of the ship shouted.

Meiling hastily replied, “Dad, wait a minute, okay? I have to carry these silk scarves up to the storage room.” She heard her dad grunt in agreement.

“Whoa, my baby sis is standing up on her own two feet defending herself! How nice for her.” This line was said by Meiling’s older brother Muling, with just a hint of sarcasm on the last line.

Meiling’s family ancestors were famous pirates from the 1300s. This legacy was something her dad was very proud of. So now where do you think this brought Meiling’s family? Yes, back to the seas, the place where her ancestors fought countless battles and lost thousands of valuables.

The one difference between Meiling’s family now and her ancestors is that Meiling’s family *gave* valuables. Her ancestor stole valuables and fought with enemies from all over the globe, making rivals wherever they went. I think you can understand that growing up knowing that your family has enemies waiting to fight you is a pretty harsh living environment.

‘Meiling, hurry up! We need to depart at 11:00 PM sharp.’ Captain Li hurried her up. ‘Remind me again why we need to leave so late?’ Meiling asked. ‘Because we are pirates. We need to travel unseen.’ Captain Li answered.

Meiling slipped through the narrow gap which led to the steering wheel. ‘Quickly! We leave in 5 minutes.’ Li reminded her.

‘I’m doing it right now, okay? Stop being so impatient!’ Meiling hastily replied. She grabbed the steering wheel and started wiping it down forcefully. She was done in a few minutes and pushed the cargo stopping her father from crossing aside. ‘Dad, I’m ready!’

‘I’m ready, too!’ Muling shouted from across the ship.

‘Good, because I’m ready! Let’s go!’ Li bellowed.

They all ran to the ship’s bow and watched as Li grabbed onto the steering wheel and turned it to the starboard side. Meiling and Muling studied his movements carefully, as they would need to do the same when they grew up. As the ship moved, the wooden boards creaked under the weight of the cargo and the strain of actually sailing after a few weeks of being stranded and parked in the same spot near the port.

‘Dad, it’s getting late. We should probably go to sleep.’ Muling stated.

‘Yeah, okay.’ Dad replied.

Meiling turned around, about to walk into the cabin that she shared with Muling. ‘I call dibs on the bed tonight!’ She said.

‘Hey, no fair! You had it for two weeks already! It’s my turn now.’ Muling called, running after his sister.

‘Those two! I don’t know what I should do with them.....’ Their father muttered, smiling slightly. Then, he turned around and looked at the water ahead of the ship. Whistling, Captain Li grabbed the wheel and readied himself for a night on the sea and beneath the twinkling stars.

Next morning, Meiling woke up and rubbed her eyes sleepily. Then, she realised she was sleeping on the floor! ‘Muling! You sly dog, get back here now!’ She shrieked angrily. All she got in reply was a chuckle coming from above decks. Groaning, she got up and changed clothes. At last, she trudged upstairs to see the crew.

‘Hey, sleepyhead! Did you have a good night’s sleep?’ One crew member asked Meiling.

‘What do you think?’ Meiling replied grouchy, pointing at her eye bags and glaring at Muling.

‘Haha! You look like a panda.’ Muling said, bursting with laughter.

‘Pandas are cute and chubby. Kind of like you, just without the cute part.’

‘Well, at least I have a fully grown body, unlike you.’

‘Oh my gosh, please just let us eat breakfast in silence!’ This voice belonged to their father, looking at them, amused. my gosh, please just let us eat breakfast in silence!’ This voice belonged to their father, looking at them. Li looked amused because they were arguing about such a small matter.

After breakfast, someone started steering the ship in the direction of Africa. Of course, Meiling did not know the name of this exotic land. All she knew was that Africa was the home of unique animals and was filled with all sorts of woven goods. She was very excited because she needed new clothes.

‘Land Ho!’ The captain’s first mate shouted as soon as he caught a glimpse of the cliff side and a small village in front of them.

‘Yay! We’re finally going to meet more people and make more friends!’ Meiling shrieked.

‘Not to mention establish new friendships and trade more goods.’ Li added.

‘That’s the boring part.’ Muling said.

They tethered their ship to a palm tree they saw on the white sands. Then, they continued their journey to the little village, bringing along porcelain, riches, and silk.

As you can probably imagine, the Africans were delighted at the sight of the valuables and immediately rushed into their houses to grab whatever they thought was appropriate for trading — fabrics, necklaces, baskets.....

When Meiling caught sight of the necklaces, she took some silk cloths and ran to the owner. ‘Is this enough?’ She asked breathlessly.

‘No, no. You want this, you give me vase.’ The villager replied with broken Chinese.

‘Negotiating, huh?’ Meiling heard a voice behind her.

‘Yeah, dad. *Totally.*’ She said.

As a red ball of fire played hide-and-seek with the moon behind the mountain, the pirates walked back to their ship. ‘Good day, huh?’ Li said.

‘I guess so.’ Muling muttered.

As the trio walked towards their awaiting crew, Meiling felt something she never felt much of before — love.

It came in different shapes and sizes, but she loved her version the best.

# Zheng He's Command

*Chinese International School, Keswick, May – 8*

It was 1414. Captain Zheng He and his crew went to the emperor to ask about their next mission and were totally surprised by his command.

“Take my gold and give it to the pirates. Please don't harm anyone! No people should get hurt. And remember... you all have courage and kindness. Even if they fight, you can fight back – but in a kind way. Never give up!”

This was the first time the emperor had made such a request. The crew loaded as much gold as they could onto the boat. Zheng He was with the crew as they put the gold away inside a treasure chest. After careful planning of the route, the crew put up the sails and set off to sea.

Zheng He shouted, “Ahoy crew! First, we will be setting off to the Indian ocean and will be going across to the Bermuda Triangle.” The crew were a little worried by this as they knew it was a dangerous place.

As they entered the Bermuda Triangle, they saw so many unusual things. Enormous sharks, crashed boats and airplanes surrounded them. A huge tornado circled around them.. When suddenly, out of nowhere appeared a massive ship. It was owned by their old enemy Cheng Tang. Straight away, the crew ran to get their weapons but then remembered they could not fight.

Zheng He murmured, “Cheng Tang. We come in peace. Please can we just give you some gold and then we will go away?”

After a long time of giving away gold, they realized they had very little left. The crew started to panic. They had no gold and they weren't allowed to fight. They had to come up with a plan and make sure no one could hear them.

“What do we do?!” Zheng He asked, feeling very stressed. All the crew felt panicked.

“What do we do, what do we do?!” Zheng He suggested that they should trade ships.

“But we can't. Our ship cost so much more than their ship!.” the crew yelled,

Zheng He cried, “We just have to get on with it.”

The crew jumped off the ship. “We surrender..... but we will give you something. There is some gold on our ship but it is not much. So we decided to give you our ship but you have to give us your ship because we can never go back.”

All of the pirates on the other ship shouted, “We don't trust you trying to trick us.”

They raised their guns and shot two of the crew. The bodies sank to the bottom of the sea and the fight began. Zheng He and his crew could not fight back. Their emperor had given them the order and they had to obey. Instead, they swam to the pirates boat. They took them by surprise and tied all the pirates together.

“Now, do you trust us or not!” they asked the pirates. “Do you want our ship and gold or not? We are just trying to help you!”

The pirates captain replied “Okay we trust you!.”

Zheng He and his crew went to the pirates' ship. It was ugly with scratched off paint and cracks in the basement but it would get them to where they were going. They were sad with what had happened to the two crew members, but knew that they had a good life. No one would ever forget what they did to help other people.

All of a sudden, Zheng He saw a rainbow parrot. It was beautiful and even said HELLO. The parrot travelled with them to Cape Town.

Zheng He messaged the emperor and said "We have given 100 pirates gold but we had to give away our ship because we did not have enough gold left.. Sadly pirates shot two of the crew."

The emperor proudly replied "It is fine. At least you are safe and you learned how to be kind."

Zheng He and his crew went back to Nanjing. They had a funeral for the two crew men called Tao and Yan. Zheng He had to explain what happened to all their friends and family. He kept the parrot for company and taught it how to speak Chinese. Zheng He planned his next mission with his new friend, the parrot.

# The Generous Pirate

*Chinese International School, Lau, Isabelle – 8*

*Kapow!* came from the wooden ship, floating close to shore.

What was that? I wondered, almost dropping my fishing line in shock.

“Arrr, matey!” a man yelled across. It was a pirate! I felt a little scared – although he seemed friendly enough.

“This is the most exciting part of my life” the pirate screamed. “Today is my seventh journey!”

I wondered where they were going and what he meant by the seventh journey.

“We are going to India” the pirate told me. “The people there use all their gold to buy things they need. But they have so little and need more!”

While they were in India, when the pirates were walking.....

“Wahhhhh!!!!!! Mommy doesn’t have enough gold!” a baby suddenly cried out.

“Oh, you poor little baby! I will give you some gold. Well, maybe even some silk!” the kind captain said.

“Thankyou! Thankyou! We don’t have enough silk to make shirts!” the baby’s mommy said, suddenly feeling relieved.

The pirate gave the woman gold *and* silk and said “You’re welcome!”

She felt so happy when she heard those words and wanted to thank him again.

The pirate went to more houses to give gold and silk to the villagers. Now they could buy whatever they wanted.

“All right, everybody who is with me..... let’s go back on our ship and celebrate!”

There was cake and fruit for everyone to eat. Everyone felt so happy and free to *FINALLY* have a party on a pirate ship.

Suddenly, in the middle of the celebration, somebody accidentally pressed the “Explode” button and there were colorful things flying through the air. They were curly and wavy, with many different colors on them.

The captain stopped. He looked angry but curious. His face was red but his eyes were wide open.

“Why did you press that button?” the captain asked.

“Uhhh....., it was an accident sir! I accidentally pressed that button and now things are floating in the air” the crew member who had pressed the button answered.

“I *LOVE* IT!!!!!! It is *AMAZING*!” the captain yelled out to his crew. “THIS IS THE BEST DAY OF MY LIFE!”

The captain became known as “THE SEVENTH JOURNEY CAPTAIN.” When he passed away, his crew would put flowers next to his grave. They missed him very much.



# Saving My Father

*Chinese International School, Marsh, Megan – 8*

Isn't it ironic that I'm literally fighting against pirates and my own father? And yet the whole reason I joined this treasure fleet was to get away from the pirates and what they did to my family.....

Just to let you know, my father didn't want to be a pirate! He had no choice but to work for Chen Zuyi as he had to repay a debt. His bakery business had failed so suddenly he found himself feeding pirates. This brought shame on our family so the rest of us left Guangdong and went north looking for work.

After 12 days of walking, we arrived in Nanjing. We had been told that there were jobs there because Emperor Ha Gao was constructing The Ming Treasure Fleet. Over one hundred ships needed to be built for trading, making international voyages and expanding the community.

My father had taught me well when he owned the bakery. I was an excellent cook – especially with making sweet pastries. So I found work in the shipbuilders cafeteria while my brother worked in the shipyard. We worked hard and when the fleet was finished, my brother and I were lucky enough to gain jobs on the fleet. In fact, on the Admiral's very own ship!

Admiral Xui Mai had travelled a long way from the palace to the shipyard to inspect the ships. When he arrived, the chefs were summoned to cook the finest dish for him. I decided to make the admiral a slightly spicy slow-cook lamb rack with an extra dessert on the side. It was a citrus tutti frutti jelly. He absolutely loved my dish and he offered me a job on the voyage. My brother got a job too – working on deck. My brother and I decided not to tell anyone that our father was working for the notorious pirate, Chen Zuyi. It was too risky.

The Admiral always enjoyed my pastries and encouraged me to be creative. He really supported me and eventually promoted me to be Head Pastry Chef. I think he saw something of himself in me as he used to be a poor boy until war came and he had to fight. He fought so hard that the emperor promoted him and eventually he became an admiral.

We visited many cities on our voyage. These included Champa, Java, and Malacca. We gave gifts to the people in every city we visited. For example, we gave porcelain, calligraphy scrolls, and copper coins. We too got many gifts in return. We even got given exotic animals – including a giraffe.

Our route home took us through the Malaccan Strait which was a shortcut. Many pirates lurked around here because many merchants used this passage way to go to their destination.

On our way we met Chen Zuyi's fleet and we did not expect an ambush attack from Chen Zuyi. Admiral Xui Mai was quick to start planning the attack strategy. I told him I had heard that the pirate was paranoid about sticky sweet stuff. I suggested to make a dough bomb filled with sticky corn honey slime with food colouring.

Our fleet started attacking Chen's boats with the dough bomb. The minute it landed on them, the bombs splattered all over oozing out the most stickiest green slime.

One bomb crashed onto Chen Zuyi's face. He stumbled backwards as liquid burst all over his body. He screamed as he tasted the sweet corn honey and turned green with anger!! It was terribly sticky and awfully sweet but quickly hardened. He was stuck and could not move.

The other pirates hated these sticky sweet bombs too.... except for my dad. While the other pirates were powerless, he was surprised by the sweet bomb strategy. It felt familiar because he was reminded of his daughter who used to make sweet bombs during her childhood.

The pirates struggled, unable to move. After another round of attack and they finally surrendered. We locked the pirates in the dungeon. My father was one of them. He wondered if this could be the work of his sweet lovely well missed daughter. Would he ever see her again? And I needed to start thinking of a plan to save my father.

On the way back home everyone was raving and laughing about the pirates. My brother hugged me and gave me a wink!

When the ship arrived in China, the Admiral reported to the emperor about the victory. Emperor Yong le was very impressed with my clever plan. I was promoted to be the personal chef for the emperor, because my cooking was delicious.

Of course I remembered this was my chance to save my father. I explained the whole story to the emperor and begged him not kill my dad. The emperor discussed the situation with the court and finally they agreed to let him go because I had contributed to the victory.

Without my father, I wouldn't have been able to make the dough bomb. It was my childhood boredom that had turned into a fantasy of dough balls. I squealed with excitement. Finally, after all those years, my family was back together again.

# The Ming Treasure Fleet

*Chinese International School, Wells, Amelia – 8*

“WOOSH! CRASH!” Waves slapped against the Ming Treasure fleet as they voyaged across the coast of the Caribbean. I woke with a start. There was obviously a mighty storm going on.

“Close all the doors, exits and trapdoors!” the captain barked. “Roll up the sails!”

“Captain Bossypants” I murmured. I was still groggy from sleep as I pulled off my covers. I took my PJs off and blindly reached into the drawer. As I put on my dirty sailor clothes and climbed out of the bottom of the ship, I was splattered with rain.

“Another day stuck on the the same boring old tattered boat” I thought, as I pulled myself up the creaky old stairway. I stared at the ocean. Waves were crashing and bumping against our ship.

Suddenly, I heard the captain scream at me” WHAT ARE YOU DOING RYDER ?! THE WAVES WILL BE HERE ALL DAY, HURRY UP AND PATCH THE HULL WITH TAR!”

“But——” I began.

“Not buts except your’s in the hull working! Now get to work!” he screeched.

I stomped down to the hull and began to patch up the leaks with tar. By the time I got back up to the deck, the storm had passed and I was totally covered in sticky, hot black tar.

“Ryder! Go patch the sails. They have rips that won’t sew themselves!”

“But—— “ I began again, feeling like the captain didn’t care about me.

But before I argued back, I thought about losing my job on the ship and dealing with my brothers and sisters stealing my toy ships.

“Fine“ I moaned. I climbed up the chilling metal poles that lead to the tattered old sail with the Yin and Yang on it.

“Careful up there! If those sails break you’re paying for them!” the captain ordered.

“Yes Captain” I mumbled. I gazed at the horizon, I saw another ship. It looked like a ship from the fleet but this one had black sails and a mossy green body. I looked at the ship again just as a cannon flew towards us from the ship.

BAM! The whole ship shook as the cannon hit us. I felt unsure on the mast so I went down to main deck. As the ship drew nearer and nearer, I saw pirates swing across to our ship. As the pirates swung across and shot our newly patched hull, it caused our ship to sink. Before I had time to run to the getaway boats, I noticed half the crew were repatching the hull with the tar. More and more enemy pirates swung over to our ship and started stealing the precious treasures which were meant to be delivered to Malaysia.

Suddenly, their captain swung across and landed with a THUD. He was evil and wore a mossy green trench coat, black tunic and dirty leather boots. I screamed and screamed but my desperate screams for help were drowned out by a booming voice

“OH!! QUIT BEING A BABY, YOU REALLY NEED TO LEARN HOW FIGHT.’

I gulped. I had never ever fought a pirate before, so I ducked under some water barrels.

Suddenly, the evil captain swiped ferociously at me with his cutlass. I ducked just as the blade came and landed inches away from my hiding spot. I wearily pulled out my sword. The metal felt icy against my damp skin. I drew up my sword and lunged at the captain from behind my hiding place. But the captain was ready. He simply drew his sword and knocked me off my feet.

“HAHAHA” he cackled. “You fight like a baby!” As he was saying that, I got to my feet and tried again. But this time, luck was on my side. The captain had just put away his sword when I knocked him on the head super hard.

He got up, I could see rage and fury etching over his gaunt yellow face and down his ugly neck.

“Uh oh.” said a voice inside my head, I should have not done that at all.”

As the captain towered over me, I thought of what my mom had said just before I boarded the ship. “No matter what happens to you always believe in yourself.”

The evil captain began to pull his sword out as these words swam through my head. “Believe in yourself.. believe in yourself...”

BAM!! I lunged at the captain with all my might, causing him and me to topple over. Before I knew it, WHAM! The captain’s sword smashed against my cutlass. We started dueling.

He swiped.

I ducked.

And this went on for ages.

Until the racket of blades hitting blades was deafening.

“Oh, you’ve really done it now, Kid” warned the captain glowering at me.

“Oh yeah?” I said confidently for the first time in my whole entire life “Why don’t you look at your ship?”

The captain turned his head and saw his ship sinking into the depths of the ocean. And while the captain was distracted, I bonked him over the head one more time, successfully knocking him off our ship. We never saw him and his crew again.

As the captain came up from the deck he walked up to me and said “ Remember when I was so harsh to you?”

I nodded.

“It’s because I wanted to see if you would stand up to people some day, and you did, you stood up to the evil captain. And only a real pirate would do that.”

“Thanks” I said bashfully.

“It’s fine” replied the captain. “ I want you to have this.” He held up the gold medallion that he wore to tell everyone he was captain and he placed the medallion on me.

“And I just want you to know that wherever you are, always believe in yourself” were the captain’s final words after he delivered me back home to my beloved family and friends.

# Auntie Meng's Story

*Chinese International School, Wu, Andrea – 8*

"Auntie Meng! Auntie Meng! Tell us a story please!" The excited voices of her grandchildren brought a smile to her old, wrinkled face. The children clustered around her feet, their rosy-cheeked faces turned up to her. "Very well," she smiled. "I will tell you a story..."

"Long, long, long ago, I was sailor girl, a strong – willed one, in the Ming Treasure Fleet. We travelled the seven seas to give away treasures so as to make alliances with different continents. However, during our voyage, we would often encounter difficulties. This might including natural disasters or problems on board the ship..."

At this point, the boys jumped up and said, "We want a story about heroic sailors! A great battle!"

The girls grimaced, and replied, "Can it not be a heroic sailor battle, Auntie Meng? We've heard battle stories too many times!"

Auntie Meng nodded wisely, and searched within her mind for a story that would satisfy both the boys and girls. At once, a story popped into her brain. Straightening up, she started, "For all of you, I have a story about a battle and something else."

"According to the maps that our crew had drawn," she went on, "We had reached the biggest ocean around. That day, I woke up to screaming. I did not particularly enjoy it. The reason why everyone was screaming was because the volcanoes were exploding. Hundreds and hundreds of volcanoes were erupting around us.

With the molten lava and meteorites of lava stone flying around us, the crew panicked. The captain was the only one who didn't fear the calamities happening around him. He ran around the ship's deck; not yelling orders, but flinging fellow sailors off the ship into the water to save them. The sailors trod water frantically, choking on seawater with surprise at our brave captain's actions. The captain didn't have time to care that he was getting absolutely covered in burns from the lava's sparks. He just wanted all his crewmates into the water. When the volcanoes finished erupting, we all realized that it was only because of selfless captain's act of bravery that we all survived. Our poor ship, however, did not fare so well.....Story ended for today. Go back home, you rascals."

"Auntie Meng! No! Don't leave us at an end like this like last time! Please continue!" the girls begged.

"We want a—" the boys started. But the girls shot them a poisonous glare.

Auntie Meng looked at the clock and gave a firm nod of her head. Continuing, she said, "Our ship did not fare well in the volcanic incident. So the Captain decided that our first priority was to fix up the ship until it was as right as rain. He started us on mending the crater holes in the ship with new wooden planks. We hammered and nailed until the crater holes were to his satisfaction. Then, he got us to deal with burns that scarred the ship using oil. He made us scrub until the burn marks were completely gone. Some sailors who were handy with a needle were sent up to the main mast and foremast to mend the sails.

I was one of the unfortunate sailors ordered to go up the main mast. The foremast was so high, and I had to swing from rope to rope to reach my designated mast. Straddled on the bowsprit, I started my mending. When gusts of wind came, I was the only one not shaken, as I was on a solid item. One sailor fell overboard from his mast into the ocean. Luckily, the crew got him in time, but soon I was thrown off my post as well. A strong hand caught me from falling into the ocean's murky depths.

'Can you swing from my hand to another rope? I'm not strong enough to pull you back up.'

I looked at my crewmate and the rest of the sailors down below. They looked at me dubiously, worry showing plainly on their faces.

I suddenly realized why my crewmates' faces were laced with worry. There were a pair of sharks swimming right below my dangling feet! I judged the distance between the ship and the bowsprit. It wasn't very far, but if I was to jump far enough...

I grasped my crewmate's hand tightly and started to swing, generating motion with my legs. At the highest point, I let go and leaped for my life. As I jumped, my crewmates looked on with their mouths agape, marvelling at my marvellous jump. I stretched toward the ship's railing, and snatched it with both hands, relaxing as my hands hit solid wood. My crewmates pulled me up at ease, rescuing me. I lay on the deck floor, looking up at the familiar faces of my fellow sailors. I was happy to be alive, and to be able to embark on these wonderful journeys.

Leave me in peace now, ask your Grandfather for any further questions. He knows each and every bit of the story. Because the crewmate who saved me on the bowsprit... That was your Grandfather."

"Wasn't that a touching story of sailor friendship?" A voice came from the doorway. The children swung around to see Grandfather standing there, eyes twinkling mischievously, a smile lighting up his face.

# Zheng He's Secret Eighth Voyage

*Chinese International School, Young, Ethan – 8*

Swish! Swish! The sound of the waves colliding against the ship's hull woke Zheng He. He peered through the iron bars. It was dark and he was alone. Zheng He knew his crew would devote their entire lives to rescuing him. But he feared that would take too long – as he was already on the Tasman Sea and they were back in China.

That night, he managed to pick the lock. He quietly slid open the bars of the gate. Carefully creeping around the ship, he was amazed to find that half the crew was dead. He thought a battle must have been waged, but soon realized that the captain had got drunk. This was a great distraction. Zheng He wanted to take the ship for himself but realized he couldn't kill the remaining crew by himself. He needed a plan.

First, Zheng He stole some gold and silver bars from the captain's cabin. He stowed them aboard a sailboat and went to the gunpowder room. Using a piece of his shirt as a fuse, Zheng He carefully placed the fuse in a keg of gunpowder. He lit the fuse, ran for his life. He leaped overboard and swam to his sailboat. He quickly rowed away from the ship and watched it explode. It was like watching a fireworks performance. Splinters of wood were sprayed in the sky, while cannon balls randomly fired and a dead body shot up into the sky.

Out of nowhere, a hunk of metal got fired into the sky landing dangerously close to Zheng He's sailboat. He realized those were the iron bars that had held him captive in the brig. Looking at the scene, Zheng He chuckled with delight. All he wanted was to return to China.

Navigating by the stars he set sail for home. The days were long and nights were cold. He looked up at the starry sky and wondered if he would ever return home. He saw storm clouds gathering. As his sailboat moved towards the storm, it started rocking violently back and forth in the high winds and choppy seas. As Zheng He frantically secured the sails, he didn't notice an enormous wave looming over the boat. It came crashing down on the deck, sending Zheng He sprawling and knocking him out in the process.

When Zheng He opened his eyes, he found himself in a busy circular chamber. He saw people rushing by and could smell a fishy odour hanging in the air.

"Where am I? ....Where is my sailboat?" he asked?

One man with big curly hair, sunken black eyes and a lopsided grin walked towards him. Zheng He could smell a taint of whisky on the guy's breath.

"Namaste! This is India! You are in the presence of the greatest fisherman who has ever lived, by the way. My name is M'Baku. You have been sleeping for weeks here in the fish market. Your boat is tied to the pier just next to mine" the man said animatedly. Zheng He sat up in disbelief but was too weak. He doubled over coughing.

Weeks passed and with the help of his new friend, M'Baku, Zheng He regained his strength. It was now time for him to make a move. This time, he knew he needed a big boat and a crew. Zheng He said a grateful goodbye to M'Baku and sauntered off to the market. He sold his sailboat and all the silver and gold bars to buy supplies, weapons, and a bigger boat. He also hired John Cena and his crew of mercenary strong pro wrestling sailors to escort him back to China.

But returning home was hard, the journey was long and dangerous. Zheng He needed to cross the Triangle of Death where villainous pirates. As they did, a ship approached them from afar. Zheng He recognized the colors on the ship. The pirates were in the same league as those who had captured him. This pirate ship had been hunting Zheng He to get revenge for blowing up their comrades' ship. It was too late for escape. So they had to ready for a fight. They attacked Zheng He and his crew mercilessly.

Zheng He was fighting like a demon and John Cena was throwing pirates overboard and singing “The Time is Now,” his theme song. Zheng He found this quite funny.

With the enemy crew occupied, he confronted the pirate captain. Sword and spear in hand, Zheng He tried to pierce the enemy with the spear. But the captain parried and returned fire. Zheng He couldn't believe it, he had been wounded. The captain dived overboard and Zheng He followed. They fought fiercely in the water.

After what seemed like a never ending fight, Zheng He delivered a strong blow to the captain who sunk beneath the waves. Seeing their captain defeated, the pirates threw down their weapons and surrendered. The pirates' weapons, valuables and ship were now Zheng He's.

After a long hard journey, Zheng He was finally home. The Ming Emperor and Zheng He's crew greeted him with cheers and smiles. They were even more excited when they saw all the treasure and fine silk he had brought home. The emperor held a feast in his honor. Zheng He persuaded him to invite all the community, rich and poor, warming many hearts around the villages.

Thus is the tale of the Secret Eighth Voyage of Zheng He.

# A True Hero

Chinese International School, Zhou, Hanyi – 8

It was a bright Sunday morning. The air was crisp and clean. I lay on my bed and opened the book *The Ming Voyages* for the hundredth time: “China’s sea ban policy, which was first issued by the Hongwu Emperor to defend China from pirates, was counterproductive. Fortunately, Zheng He, with the support of the visionary Yongle Emperor, embarked on seven voyages across the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean, traveled as far as to East Africa and covered a total distance equal to three times around the world.”

“Wow!” I stared at the page and sighed in admiration.

Suddenly, a blinding flash of light whirled into a tornado, turned bigger and stronger, and lifted me off my feet. I tried to pull myself down, but the tornado spun around and whisked me into nothingness.

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I slowly opened my eyes, my whole body aching. I scanned my surroundings. Men with long hair and buns walked around on the streets, wearing beizi and strings of jingling coins on their silk belt. *Neigh!* A troop of soldiers paraded through the streets on horseback.

“Who are you? Where are you from?” a tall, old man with deep creases on his face leaned over and asked. His voice was kind but authoritative. I didn’t know what was happening. I didn’t know where I was. All I knew was that I was not where I was supposed to be.

I plucked up my courage and asked “Where am I?”

“Liu Jia Harbour” the old man replied with a brief puzzled frown.

“I—I’m Li-Ming. Uh—um, and who are you?” I asked hesitantly, still trying to figure out why the name of Liu Jia Harbour sounded so familiar. His reply pulled my eyebrows to the top of my head.

“I’m Zheng He.”

My jaw dropped. Zheng He? Liu Jia Harbour? How could it be??

“My men found you unconscious on the street. Looks like you are fine now. I gotta go.” Zheng He gave me a gentle but firm pat on the shoulder, smiled, and walked away.

Still in shock, I looked around. Red and yellow flags on the streets waved in the clear blue sky. People crowded the streets, cheering and grinning from ear to ear. In the distance was a fleet of huge wooden ships with staggered towering masts and bamboo-battened sails flapping in the early morning sea breeze. Sailors in white uniforms blew vibrant red conch shells in a ceremonial tune. A flag embroidered with the Chinese characters ‘Xuande’ rose higher than all the other ones.

Xuande. It rang a bell... *Xuande*.

Abruptly, I remembered Xuande was Yongle’s grandson. He was the one who...

I instantly knew what was happening. Zheng He was about to embark on his seventh voyage. Seventh voyage... *Zheng He got seriously ill and died on his seventh voyage.* The line from the book flashed before my eyes. I couldn’t let him go! I had to save him!

“Excuse me! Sorry! I need to get through!” I yelled as I shoved through the sea of citizens. I saw disapproving glances as I rushed through the crowd, but I kept on going. At long last, I caught a glimpse of Zheng He.

“Zheng He!” I called out in desperation. “Don’t go!”

Zheng He heard me. He stopped and strode towards me. “What is it, kid?”



I didn't know how to explain. How could Zheng He believe me? "You... can't go...! You... will die." I muttered.

Zheng He raised an eyebrow. "What are you talking about?"

I took a deep breath, gathered all my courage and said "I know it sounds bizarre, but I know what's going to happen. You will die on this voyage. You can't go!"

Zheng He seemed more amused than annoyed. "I know kids love making up stories, but this is not the time."

It was only then that a light bulb went off in my head. I remembered his name – *Ma He*, his real name before he served the emperor. "I have to persuade Zheng He not to go," I told myself. This may be my only chance of convincing him.

I screamed out the words: "Ma He. Don't go. Please, listen to me!"

Zheng He froze. He slowly turned back. "How did you know my real name? I... I've never told anyone. The emperor ordered me not to tell anyone when he gave me the new name."

I crossed my fingers, wishing Zheng He would believe me this time. "Ma He! I know this sounds absurd, but you will die on this voyage! You can't go!" I was half shouting, half pleading, hoping Zheng He would stay.

Zheng He peered at me with a curious look, chin propped on his hand, trying to make sense of everything I had just said.

After what it felt like an eternity, he slowly uttered the words "I have traveled enough to know strange things do exist. Maybe you know something I don't know. Maybe I will die on this voyage. But no matter what, I have to go. As long as I am still breathing, I have a purpose to serve — to spread the glory of China to the whole world." His chiseled face looked a bit tired and weather-worn, but his voice was firm and his eyes sparkled with hope. With that, he turned around and walked toward his ships, slowly but determinedly, each step putting another strain on his body.

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I opened my eyes and found myself lying in the comfort of my own bed again, still grabbing tight to the book. The sight of Zheng He walking away stuck in my mind: An old man with a slightly hunched back, in an arduous gait, along with all the hardship that comes with years at sea. My tears came rolling down. Then I remembered a saying: *A true hero isn't measured by the size of his strength, but by the strength of his heart.*

# Trespassing

*Clearwater Bay School, Chen, Daisy – 9*

My stomach flutters. But I have to appear strong; I have to be seen by the King of Skyland as someone that he wants to make friends with.

People bowed, lining up beside my two companions, Yu Dong, Chang Shuai, and I. Yu Dong clutches the gift of the finest China Sea pearls. As we walk to the palace I catch sight of the locals, the people are well fed and their clothing suggests that the Kingdom of Skyland is small but strong. As we approach the palace the king stared at us, his beard hiding his expression.

“Mighty King of Skyland, we come before you to extend the hand of friendship, please accept our gift as a token of friendship.” I said in a loud and clear voice, handing the gift to the King’s representative. “Who are you, and where did you come from?” boomed the king. “I am Zheng He, from China.” I answered with a confidence I don’t feel. “My emperor has tasked me to form trade relations with other countries, relationships that will...” the king’s hand rises, silencing me. “LIAR!” the king bellowed. “You dare trespass on my land and come to my palace pretending to offer friendship? Do you think I haven’t seen the number of ships and men outside my kingdom waiting to attack? You insult my intelligence by your very actions. But you are the one who has been tricked, if I have their leader then they won’t attack and destroy us.”

The king’s soldiers come closer, circling us as they try to catch us. Yu Dong uses his martial arts skills to escape the circle and grabs the king from his throne. The king yowled for help. “Stop, before you do anything silly.” I call as the soldiers move uncertainty, I thrust a hand in front of me. “We are not going to harm your king.” The soldiers stopped. Glaring at us with hostile eyes, they reluctantly let us go. As we leave, all the villagers glared at us, eyes red with fury. “I’ll get you.” The king rasped outside, “I’d get you if it is the last thing I do.” His voice was getting weaker, less sure of himself.

Like a diving peregrine falcon, I sped into my ships with Yu Dong and Chang Shuai on my tail and we leave Skyland. Inside the main ship, I pushed the king into a small room and set him on a small bed. Looking around, the only objects seen were a small table, a bed and a large bench. “We are not going to harm you king, but we have to take you back to our home, China. Our intention was always to make friends, but you left me with no choice.” I sighed and left Yu Dong to guard him.

I met my men to update them, when suddenly a cry came from outside.

“Admiral Zheng! Admiral Zheng, there is trouble outside!”

“Wait here.” I said to the other sailors. “I’ll be back.” Outside, there was a fast, but small boat.

We only took off when an arrow struck the deck out our boat. I looked up and saw another person shooting arrows from the same boat. Quickly I summoned Chang Shuai to get my bow and arrow—fighting crew “fire but do not hit the men” they were all confused but did as I asked as I pulled out the arrow from our deck to study later, the two people was gone, hiding under their deck and almost the whole deck was covered with arrows. Don’t come back out, don’t make us fight you I thought, but a person makes mistakes.

I commanded Wang Tie to pull off the arrows and this time to hit them if they fire again, I summoned the whole fighting crew and waited there, ready for any attack. Suddenly a group of boats appeared.

“Not soldiers.” I thought. Knowing there won’t be any trouble. The crew attacked, causing the people to flee with fear.

“That was easy,” I thought with a proud, triumphant smile on my face. Not knowing any other trouble would occur to us.

I looked out from the deck. Everything was fine, until I heard the noise of men pulling on oars. Gasping, I realized that the whole army had come to fight, to defend their beloved king.

“Good thing they are far away.” I thought. But as soon as I saw their cannon, I started to worry. “Ou Yang, Stay away from the cannons.” I called. “Navigate the ship well.” Finally it was time. The first cannon blasted. Luckily Ou Yang dodged just in time. The rest of the cannons blasted sending red sparks everywhere but we dodged all of them in time. This time we took advantage and got far away. I didn’t want to fire back as we would have destroyed them.

If we survived 10 bombs, we will certainly survive bullet guns, and that is what came next. This time I didn’t even bother to call any fighters. It would be useless and of course we survived all that.

I believe me and my crew is getting stronger, braver, and mightier. Whoever tries to fight us will lose. we didn’t run away because we were weak, but because if we fought it would have been unfair and we would never be able to be friends.

Further and further out to deep sea I thought, Finally it was time to prove the king, to prove Skyland, that we really only wanted friendship! I hope the king understands that we could have destroyed them but didn’t so we could one day really be friends.

# The Epic Journey

*Clearwater Bay School, Damodaran, Mohini – 10*

26 June, 1410, 8:30 AM.

Ah. I wake up and rise peacefully in my bed at home. I can't wait for today. Our fabulous journey on one of the 7 great treasure ships starts today! I am 21 years old and an English immigrant to the majestic country of China. This is my first journey as a cook overseas. I can hardly contain my excitement for our voyage on the magnificent treasure ship. Ow. "Stop it Fluffball!" I scold the ball of hair scratching at my clothes. Oh, I forgot to mention. My Chinese name is Cheng. In English, I am simply Tom. This is my diary. I will get dressed and prepare my favourite English breakfast, scrambled egg and toast.

26 June, 1410, 10:30 AM.

I am ready to go. Breakfast was delicious. I will miss it ... and Fluffball. I walk through the streets, heading towards the port. I will miss my house, but this will be an amazing new adventure. The weather is perfect, not a single cloud in sight the sun shines bright in the sky above. Ah. The port. This is where my amazing adventure will start. I look in front of me at the enormous treasure ship we will be travelling on. I see my friend and shipmate Mike, waving at me. I run over to him. "Ready?" He asks me, his eyes shining. I nod. We both take a big breath and step on to the gangway. We walk up and step onto the ship. I suddenly realise I left my bag on the street. Silly me! I run down laughing, grab my bag, and run back up. I am shown to the cabin. This is where I will spend the next 7 months.

26 June, 1410, 1:00 PM.

The ship has set sail. The sea is calm, so I do not feel as seasick as I usually do. I hope I do not get THAT seasick. I am lying in my bed, reading a book and writing my diary. This is what I will do till 6pm when I will make dinner. That is probably what tomorrow's afternoon will be like. And the day after. And the day after. And the day after...

26 June, 1410, 8:00 PM.

Dinner tonight was a seafood fried rice. Everyone said it was delicious which made me feel warm inside. I had a look through the food supply. They have eggs! Eggs, eggs, I like eggs.

27 June, 1410, 10:00 AM.

Breakfast today was porridge. Tomorrow I will make scrambled eggs. Yum. This is a surprise breakfast. Everyone is happy and we are sailing smoothly. The day after tomorrow we will land in Vietnam. Apparently, Vietnam is a wonderful place and it is there that we will make our first trade.

28 June, 1410, 8:00 AM.

My heart is pounding in my chest. I don't exactly know why. Today is when we will make the trade in Vietnam. When we get back I will tell you all about it! Oh, I forgot. Today for breakfast will be my specialty, scrambled eggs on toast! Mmm. I used to think it was different kinds of eggs all mixed (scrambled) up.

28 June, 1410, 8:00 PM.

That was awesome! We made lots of magnificent trades including jewellery and food. Perfect! They gave us lunch and dinner. It was absolutely delicious. I got hold of some recipes. Time to sleep!

29 June, 1410, 1:00 AM.

There is a storm outside. I need to go up and help on deck. We did not expect this. There are waves as tall as the mast. It is havoc. I will update later.

29 June, 1410, 5:00 AM.

No! We are sinking. I am packing my bag with some flasks of water, tins of food, and some belongings. Write later!

29 June, 1410, 10:00 AM.

I am currently sitting on a table, floating on the ocean, writing this. Ok, wow. I sound super calm. The reality: ahhhh. My plan worked. Ish. The storm is over and I am sitting here on this floating table, hoping for the best. I must ration my food and water. I DON'T WANNA DIE. I saved 38 tins of food (yuck) and 30 flasks full of water (not much.). I did not expect this. I am just going where the current takes me. Which is not very fast.

29 June, 1410, 5:00 PM.

A SHIP, A SHIP, I SEE A SHIP!!!!!!!!!!!! I am waving my hands and yelling because in front of me I see a ship. This ship is tiny compared to my treasure ship but this could save me (or not.). Luckily, someone notices. It heads in my direction. When it is close to me, I will shove everything in my bag and climb up the rope ladder they are holding down. Ok, time! Speak to you later.

29 June, 1410, 8:00 AM.

I woke up from a nap and found out some information. Turns out this is also a trading ship but from Vietnam. Their next stop just happens to be Nan Jing port, China which is where we left. Time to go home!

30 June, 1410, 8:00 AM.

My first day on this ship. I met the cook ( I think I am a bit better than him.) I have all day on this ship. OOOOOH. I see another ship! This one is getting closer, and closer, and closer. Now they are connecting to our boat. Oh. They look angry. OH. They are angry pirates. OH. I am surrounded. Think. What can I do. Think. What can I do. Think. What can I do. Think. What can I do? Oh, I know! I can just throw myself off board and swim to safety! Yes. 3, 2, 1 JUMP!

# The Wave Goodbye

*Clearwater Bay School, Mao, Hitomi – 10*

Grinning with delight, I smiled as I bowed to King Lozi. The last few days have been indescribably wonderful. King Lozi has personally shown me around his kingdom. The animals, the people, the culture, and even the ground we stand on. It is a color that no one could have ever imagined. Oh, the animal's, the giraffes, the elephants, the lions! All of these fabulous animals are beyond a child's wildest dreams!

Tonight is my last evening here, and if my mission wasn't so important, I would stay here forever! But I really look forward to the feast King Lozi is holding tonight as a celebration.

"Welcome, to the farewell party of Zheng He and his team. We are honored to have them here, and as a farewell gift, we will give 3 giraffes to him and his team to remember us by. We will also need 3 people to take care of the giraffes. Who will be the one I choose? Yes, Kahfijjazi, Staekkiiged and... Verjhcemeeild. Now Savana..."

I turn my head, and instantly, there's this woman from heaven. Her soft, brown skin, kind chestnut eyes, I know that I simply cannot leave without her. At that very moment, she locked eyes with me, and starts blushing furiously. She then turns her head around in embarrassment just as an entertainment begins. King Lozi stands up to find a better place to sit, as I rush to the angel.

"Dearest woman, what is your name?" I ask, unsure what her answer would be. She giggles and says

"Hello, Zheng He, I am Savana, the king's daughter,"

Breathtaking, I say, "Why don't we go somewhere to go for a walk?" She nods, uncertain. I pull her to her feet and kisses her hand. She leads me to a grassy field.

There, my heart quickens as I confess to her, "Beautiful Savana, the moment I set my eyes on you, I'm instantly in love. I don't know if I'll ever be able to leave you here and sail back to China," I could feel her steady breathing on my skin as she says in the most beautiful sound,

"I know, Zheng He, I'm in love with you too, but there's a problem,"

"What?" unable to believe what she just said.

"Yes, there is. My father says that I have to marry a man that is from my native country, which is here. Africa. Since you are Chinese, I cannot marry you," My heart stops. The woman that I fell in love with, I'm not allowed to marry!? A flame burst in my chest, extinguished by a single tear.

"Can't we persuade your father?" I asked her desperately, but she only shakes her head.

"He decided already, and there's nothing we can do about it,"

"No," I gasp, shutting my eyes and not believing it.

"Yes," She whimpers "I'm so sorry Zheng He," Then, I got the most brilliant idea, as a lightbulb lit up in my head.

"Savana, do you want to run away with me on the boat to China, there's loads of opportunities there you'll love it there!"

"Zheng he, that is an idea, but I'm worried about my father. He will be very unhappy if I run away without telling him, he'll think I don't like him or the country,"

"Oh, but Savana, this is our only chance to be together!" I try to convince her. "It's our only chance! I just can't imagine a future without you, Savana,"

"I really can't imagine a future without you too, Zheng," She pauses, unsure of what to do. We don't talk for a bit, and I'm afraid that I had just lost the woman I loved. Until...

"Yes Zheng, I'm going to run away with you, but I'm have to write a letter to my father. It just worries me what will happen if I suddenly disappear, and no one knows what happens,"

"Savana,... Savana..." What a brave woman, letting down her kingdom, her father, her people for me. I still feel a bit guilty, but it was worth it.

The next day, King Lozi and his people stood by the shore to wave us goodbye. I saw Savana's red scarf in the middle of the crowd. After King Lozi was sitting down on his chair, watching the farewell dance just like everyone else was, Savana pushed her way through and I let a rope down the side of the ship, as she climbed on the deck. There, I took her to the lower deck and then climbed back up. There, the show had just ended and everyone was waving us goodbye. After I let the praise soak into my body, I held up my hand for silence. "Dear people of Africa, you have been a wonderful host and a welcoming country, I would be honored to come back and visit you all again, farewell friends!" With that, we started our long journey back to China, with a hidden passenger under our decks...

Not long after sailing, a colossal wave roared ahead of us, ready to destroy everything in its path..... The people on the decks scream in horror as they face the upcoming danger, with nothing to prevent it..

# The One Desire

*Clearwater Bay School, Pratt, Maggie – 11*

The brightest star in the cosmos was extinguished, but like a phoenix from the ashes it rises to vanquish all hatred. A wave of havoc rose about the city of Nanjing as the fleet set sail with Zheng He leading aboard the 400-foot Baochuan. With its seven sails and a hull four times the size of Christopher Columbus' Santa Maria, the Baochuan is the mightiest ship afloat. Zheng and his 62 vessels are heading for the South China Sea en route to the Indian Ocean and all the riches of the ancient trading ports.

Light, dark, thin, thick – all are opposites, yet all have one thing in common: a difference. I open my eyes not fully but just enough to see what's happening across the room. A shadow falls across my face and I feel a pair of eyes fixed on me. I try to sit up, but the pain cuts through me like a dagger in my side. Shackles weigh me down, hundreds of questions fill my mind. I remember the last time I was truly happy: at home with my darling daughter, Ayodele.

A cacophony hums through my ears as the harsh siren of morning chatter fills the air. The whip hand enters and unshackles my limbs. I shoot out of bed and get changed instantly. My roommate's belongings are gone, which can only mean one thing. I rush from the room, surrounded by men heading for the dining room. Crushed by the endless queue of people lining up for a plate I hear the sound of a bullet ripple as it cuts through the air.

Following the crowd, I hurry to the deck taking in the huge ship with its sails aflutter like beautiful wings. It is the most wonderful site I have ever seen. Just then I hear my name being called, it sounds strange and unfamiliar. A tall man towers over me, his piercing blue eyes cut into my very soul. Was it he who called my name? I move towards him and suddenly I am overcome by a sickening realisation. This journey could be my last.

The harvest moon is high in the night sky. It is a wondrous sight and momentarily makes me forget my many troubles, but with adventure looming there is no time to ponder its beauty.

For the first time, I take the staircase to the top floor. I run my hand against the wall as I read the room numbers as I walk along. Finally, I find the room and knock apprehensively. Preparing for the worst, I begin to tremble ...

She opens the door and orders me in. I follow her to the dining table. She sits and gestures to a chair opposite her.

"Lieutenant?" she doesn't reply, but instead shoots me a frosty glare.

"I do not believe I need a servant, but as you are here I will take advantage. What is your name?"

"Akin, Ma'am."

"Alright, return here at 400 hours precisely. And I expect breakfast to be ready. Do not be late. Now get out of my sight."

I bow deeply as I close the door behind me, dart down the hallway and scale the stairwell.

A hunched figure enters the bowels of the ship, studiously avoiding eye contact as he reapplies the manacles to the wrists and ankles of every man.

When he reaches me, he barks: "I shall return at 3 bells to take you to the galley."

I try to sleep, but it's no use as I lay upon what feels like a bed of nails.

Just as I finally do drift off to sleep I am shaken awake by a heavy boot and a harsh whip across my shoulders. Unshackled, I am dragged to my feet and led towards the galley. The room is small but bustling with servants and maids. I choose a counter in the corner of the room and begin to prepare breakfast. In 20 minutes I had made a bowl of congee and chao siu. I finished and began my ascent to the top floor.

The tray is heavy but when I finally manage to knock it swings open and the Lieutenant grabs it off of me, places it on the table, hands me back the tray and orders me to leave. I make my way to the main deck.



Bang!  
The ship rocks violently back and forth.  
Pow!  
We all hit the deck.  
Crash!  
Shrill screams fill the air.  
It's complete chaos.  
Arrows rain down.

Captain Zheng stands in the middle of all the terror, out of instinct I dive, the tray before my face. I see the arrow pierce my plate and turn to Zheng He. It would have hit him in the neck.

Then just as quickly as it started, the battle is over. Our cannons score a direct hit on the Cheung Chau pirates' and their junk is sinking fast.

Captain turns to me.  
"You've done good las, I'm assigning you to my personal cabin. Thank you for your bravery."

# The Treasure Cave

*Clearwater Bay School, Shi, Angela – 10*

I press my ears against the cold stone floor, frantically hoping for any sign that indicates where Yi Long is. But I heard nothing, nothing except for the quick beating of my heart. Suddenly a little rat scuttled out from the darkness. Jumping out of my skin, I nearly fell over all the islanders who had come to wish me luck.

Cautiously, holding the fire torch in one hand, I inch a few centimetres forward before taking a deep breath and enter the cave. Slowly I watch the sunlight being swallowed by the darkness like a mouth snapping shut. My knees quivered and each step I take is heavier than the last. The darkness seems to be alive, swivelling around me, and jeering when I find myself in the same cavern. Several times I found myself in low rooms where it's not possible to stand straight. The shadows in the corners look like they want to jump out, I hear rustling sounds, but when I shine my light in that direction there is nothing.

A narrow tunnel appears. I paused, breathing heavily, thinking of Yi Long and the danger he might be in. At that moment, a bitter wind whipped through the tunnel blowing out the fire and plunging me into darkness and fear. I really didn't want to go on now. It was a dark snake-like tunnel, and who knows what danger there might be in it. I thought back to this morning where I had been chatting to Li Lin Fei, on Admiral Zheng's ship, putting up the double masts and the flag of China. It seemed like an aeon ago. I had only volunteered for this daring adventure in desperation to gain Admiral Zheng's praise. Oh why did a sentence of praise need to be so hard earned?

Gradually the tunnel eased into an open room and I breathed again. Since I no longer had a light I kept close to the walls, groping and forcing my legs to go on. Suddenly I tripped over something and scraped my legs onto the surface of a shard of rock. Blood gushed out and pain squeezed my heart into such a tight ball I didn't pay any attention to what I had tripped over until it shuffled and heaved itself up.

"Why is Admiral Zheng not waking us up," He murmured to himself  
"Yi Long," I gasped, raising up my head and looking at the faint outline of my friend groggily rubbing his eyes. "Yi Long. Can you hear me?"  
"Wei," he whispered, his voice barely audible "Where is Admiral Zheng."  
"Yi Long," I limped over to him and shook him "We're in the treasure caves, remember, he asked us to explore the caves."

Suddenly, Yi Long jerked awake and gave a scream of fury that echoed around the room "Traitor," he hissed tugging my arm away "Traitor, Thief, Enemy. I know you stole the treasure."

A horrible thought jolted into my mind. What if Yi Long had gone mad in the caves?  
"No Yi Long," I whispered "There is no traitor."

Yi Long looked at me with defiant eyes. "No traitor but treasure, treasure from the country. That is why we were asked to explore the caves. Admiral Zheng wanted us to find the sea pearls from Ning Duo Li palace."

I didn't want to believe Yi Long but it did make sense. Yi Long and Admiral Zheng had been talking privately for months now, not even letting Xiang Jing Yuen, the navigator into their private talks. Had they been they been talking about the hidden treasure? And then there had been the robbery of the sea pearls from Ning Duo Li palace, few days before the voyage had started. Had this voyage been to find these pearls?

"Stand up Wei." Yi Long stood and almost tripped over the same rock where I had hurt myself. "We will show Xiang Jing Yuen that he can steal all the treasure he wants. We will find them and rid the country of the traitor."

"Erm Yi, that's a very ambitious plan and if you might notice we're in a black cave with no light and no idea where the treasure is. And how did you know that the treasure is even in the caves?" I poured out my doubts in one breath.

Yi Long snorted. "I have been watching Xiang Jing Yuen 24/7. Have you yet realized that I am a very bad sailor? I never learned the art of sailing, I was meant for military and I have been educated in that." He puffed out his chest and boasted "I am the leader of the Emperor Yongle's army" before returning to the subject. "Xiang Jing Yuen has been sneaking around the island for days, carrying the box of ornate brass. Did that idiot think nobody would see him?"

Suddenly he stopped, besides the entrance to another cave. He ran his hand across the wall. Slowly his hand traced the Chinese word Bao: Treasure. "Yes," he whispered, his voice sounding like a little child, growing more and more excited. "This is the cave"

I entered, slowly aware that there was nothing in the the room. "Are you sure this is the right room," I asked cautiously stepping into the room. It wasn't a low room just a normal room. Like all the others it was so dark it was like looking through a blind man's eye.

Suddenly I tripped again. Yi long caught hold of me, preventing me from hurting myself again. When I regained my balance, Yi long bent down and slowly opened the box. The glistening pearls inside made me gasp in surprise. Xiang Jing Yuen really had stolen the treasure!

Yi Long slowly closed the lid and we stepped outside. But just then, we heard a faint growling sound. Something not human was angry ...

# The Epic Voyage

*Clearwater Bay School, Wan, Adrian – 9*

In the third lunar month of year 1405, in the palace of Nanjing, the third Ming Emperor Yongle, gave an order that Zheng He would be the leader of a chinese voyage to explore the outside world! To venture to the unknown areas, the Yongle emperor gave the order of 252 ships (62 treasure ships and 190 smaller junks) to be constructed. The treasure ships carried troops of soldiers and cannons just in case if they were attacked by armies or pirates. Yuval Noah Harari, author of *Sapiens* mentioned that Christopher Columbus's ships would been just lifeboats compared to Zheng He's Flagship.

Before Zheng He and his crew set off, they gave sacrifices and prayed to one their gods Tianfei, the guardian of sailors at sea, to grant them safety for the dangers at sea. The emperor gave them gifts to exchange with foreign countries. They first departed through the Wuhem passage. The treasure fleet first sailed to many different countries including Ceylon. When they landed into Ceylon, they were met by a hostile attitude with Alagakkonara, who was the ruler of Ceylon that time. On the way back home, the Chinese had to confront the Guangdong pirate Chen Zuyi. The pirates were confronted by a naval battle between each other. In the end, the winners were the chinese navy. When Zheng He returned to Nanjing he was greeted as a hero. The emperor met lots of ambassadors from different countries that Zheng He had brought from.

On the second voyage, Zheng He and his fleet traveled to Champa; Siam; Java; Malacca; Semudera, Aru, and Lambri on Sumatra; *Jiayile*, *Abobadan*, *Ganbali*, Quilon, Cochin, and Calicut in India.

The imperial order for the third voyage was issued on the first month of the seventh year of the Yongle reign. It was addressed to Zheng He, Wang Jinghong, and Hou Xian. The fleet made stops at Ceylon, Quilon. Wang Jinghong and Hou Xian made short stops at Siam, Malacca, Semudera, and Ceylon. Arriving in Ceylon in 1410, the treasure fleet landed at Galle. On arrival at Ceylon, King Alagakkonara cut off Zheng He and his troops from the treasure fleet. In response, Zheng He and his troops invaded Kotte, conquering its capital. They took captive Alagakkonara, his family, and principal officials. The Sinhalese army of 50,000 hastily returned and surrounded the capital, but they were repeatedly defeated in battle against the invading Chinese troops. Admiral Zheng He returned to Nanjing on 6 July 1411. There, he presented the Sinhalese captives to the Yongle Emperor. Eventually, the emperor decided to free and return them to their country. He also requested someone to serve as the new king. However, the previous dynasty had already re-established themselves in Kotte by the time the Chinese embassy arrived. From then on, the treasure fleet would experience no hostilities during visits to Ceylon on subsequent treasure voyages.

Before Zheng He set off, he recruited some new people for his fleet. One of them was a muslim scribe who was called Ma Huan. On the Fourth voyage, The fleet sailed to many different countries including Java and Hormuz. In 1415, the fleet made a stop at Sumatra during the journey home from Hormuz. While the Chinese were there, they realised that the ruler Sekandar had usurped the Semudera throne from Zain al-'Abidin, but the Chinese had formally recognized the latter as the King of Semudera. Admiral Zheng He had orders to launch a punitive attack against the usurper and restore Zain al-'Abidin as the rightful king. In retaliation, Sekandar led his forces to attack the Ming forces and was defeated. He reportedly attacked with "tens of thousands" of soldiers. The Ming forces pursued Sekandar's forces to Lambri where they caught Sekandar, his wife, and his child.

On the Fifth voyage, Zheng He and his fleet traveled to these places: Champa, Pahang, Java, Palembang, Malacca, Semudera, Lambri, Ceylon, Cochin, Calicut, *Shaliwanni*, *LiuShan* (Maladive and Laccadive Islands), Hormuz, *Lasa*, Aden, Mogadishu, Brava, *Zhubu*, and Malindi. The accompanied ambassadors arrived at the Ming court in the eighth lunar month of 1419. Their gifts included lions, leopards, dromedary camels, ostriches, zebras, rhinoceroses, antelopes, giraffes, and other exotic animals, causing a great sensation among those at the Ming court.

On the Sixth Voyage, Zheng He and his fleet was divided into separate squadrons at Ceylon, they separated for *Jiayile*, Cochin, *Ganbali*, or Calicut in southern India. The squadrons travelled from there to their respective destinations at *Liushan*, Hormuz at the Persian Gulf, the three Arabian states of Djofar, *Lasa*, and Aden, and the two African states of Mogadishu and Brava. On the return home, several squadrons regrouped at Calicut and all the squadrons regrouped further at Semudera. Siam was likely visited during the return journey. The fleet returned on 3 September 1422.

On the Seventh voyage, Zheng He split his fleet into different squadrons. One squadron went to Arabia and Mecca. Ma Huan turned out to be with the squadron that sailed to Mecca. In Mecca, Ma Huan got to do the Hajji. The squadron traded with the Sharif of Mecca and the Sharif also sent envoys to Ming China. Ma Huan wrote a chapter in a book that he was writing about the voyages about his experience in Mecca. The squadrons got together for the homeward bound. Sadly, Zheng He died on the journey back to China at the age of 62. When the treasure fleet came back to Ming China, the civil ministers of the Ming Court said that the voyages were a waste of the emperor's money, because Japanese pirates were raiding China and the money should be spent on land defences. And the ships should be left to rot and all the books and charts and maps of the ocean and places that Zheng He had crossed and carefully made by the scribe Ma Huan were decided to be burned. Thankfully, some stone tablets still contain the stories of Zheng He's voyages.

# The Passage

*Clearwater Bay School, Wen, Amy – 10*

Lian skipped through her thoughts while she shouldered her way through the extremely crowded market, why couldn't girls learn Kung Fu? Why can't she learn archery like her brothers Qing and Long? "Girls are too weak to do things like that!" Qing will say, "Kung Fu and archery is for boys!" Long would taunt her and mama will say "Girls shall NEVER do things like that!" Running away from the crowd, Lian continued running. All of a sudden, a crate tripped her. She looked up and the majestic ships lay sitting in the bay. This was Su-Zhou Bay. A thought dashed through her mind. She stepped forwards, slowly onto one of the ships. Suddenly, a woman yelled behind Lian, "Step back Lian! Don't you dare even step on that ship!" The woman lunged for Lian. Lian dodged and leapt onto the boat "Bye mama!" Lian shouted triumphantly.

"Captain Zheng, we checked, all the goods are packed." A voice of a young sailor came from the deck. "Great job! Wang. It was right to choose you to come." Lian inhaled, exhaled, and slowly walked towards the deck, Zheng He was surprised that a 15 year old girl appeared onto his ship, "What is your name?" He kindly asked the little girl "My name is Lian, the only daughter of the famous Luo family!" Her proud introduction made Zheng He giggled and looked at this girl with her hands on her hips, "She is special." A voice deep inside him spoke.

Lian stared at the sun, sinking into the sea painted by the sky in the colours of pink, orange and red. She imagined herself as a fish, melting into the beat of the glittering waves, she turned her head and asked the Captain "Where are we going?"

"We are trading our amazing goods to foreigners, of course!" Zheng exclaimed, it was his turn to be proud, "And this ship is the best in the world!" He added with his head up. Lian wondered again, what was mama, Qing and Long doing? Admiring her because she could go on the ships of Zheng He? Her heart whispered to her "You want to go home, you miss home." Right, maybe she actually does, her stomach growling after dinner, sleeping on the hard deck, but she could not go back, or else she could never go out in her life again. The chill wind blew and blew, one harder than the other, little by little darkness has taken over the sky.

Lian opened her eyes, where was she? In the middle of the ocean? Where was land? She lay on her back and closed her eyes.

"We are here!" Zheng's familiar voice echoed through the majestic ships. When Lian opened her eyes, some people wearing some cloaks waited at their harbour, captain Zheng calmly walked down and showed them a piece of silk, and offer them to stroke it, they looked so surprised, and they handed a glowing ball to Zheng and whispered in his ear secretly, Zheng winked back and went back on the ship for an announcement, "We are entering their trading market and we are staying here for a night, everybody pack your things and get down!" Every sailor jumped down the ship except for Lian, she did not bring anything, she just jumped on the boat! Zheng looked at her and gave a sac, he winked at her. Lian took the sac and carried it on her back and walked off the ship with the other sailors. The market was filled with goods like pearls, coral, weaved fabric and some special things from all over the world, Lian eyes feasted on the goods while Zheng is trading goods in one of the stands. She wondered what her brothers were doing, reading? Eating? Sleeping on their soft beds with their silk blankets? She snarled in the cold wind, because snarling is better than moaning. They settled in a little hut, she shared it with five other sailors, the floor was covered in brown hay, it was too hard to get to sleep, Lian closed her eyes and forced herself to sleep.

Lian felt a push on her back, when she opened her tired eyes and looked behind her, Zheng stood there and said to her, "Don't be the last one again!" Hearing that, Lian jumped up realizing that all the other sailors were gone, she packed everything and ran for the ship, after all the sailors were on the ship, the giant ships sailed through the ocean, battling the waves. When one sailor shouted "Other ships!" Lian had a feeling that they weren't friendly ships, they had black flags and there was a dozen of them, something shot through the air straight to the ships. "Bang!" A big explosion happened two meters away from the ship, another one was fired, it flew through the sky and tore up the quiet night sky, "Fire!" Captain Zheng ordered, "Everybody

dodge!” All the sailors obeyed, all but Lian, she held on tight to her bow and arrow, she lifted the bow, aimed and let go of the string, the arrow launched, a wail, another arrow, another wail, all the sailors stood up and fired a cannonball. Cannonballs and arrows flew across the dark blue sea. “Bang!” A cannonball fired through, a little distance away from the ship and shattered by Zheng’s cannons, some of the broken parts flew at Lian, in seconds, blood was leaking down her face, everything blurred up

When she woke up in her room, there sat Papa “You woke up, Lian!” He exclaimed, everything in Lian’s head messed up: “Was I dead?” “Were all the things just a dream?” A maid came in, “There’s a visitor Mr.Luo!” Before she finished, Zheng stepped into the room, smiling at Lian.

# The Great Adventure

*Clearwater Bay School, Williams, Florence – 10*

## Monday October 12th 1405

“Miyuki”

Ma Ma calls to me, trying to get me to go to her. We live in the gorgeous west province of China called Tibet. My father is a tradesman, he trades spices and silk to travelers from the west. Lately work has been poor for Ba Ba, we have been low on supplies for months now. Our only way we can survive and save ourselves is for me to work as a maid to Lady Chu on the ming voyage to Africa. I am to leave tomorrow morning to her house in Portola, I will miss my home and family but Ba Ba and Ma Ma have promised that I will be gone for no more than three years, I don't believe them of course. I know that the fleet is fast but not as quick as to get to East Africa and return in three years. I believe I will raise enough money for us to survive after my adventure but only time will tell.

## Tuesday October 13th 1405

I'm beginning to have second thoughts about this, how could I raise enough money to support three people and their needs? Boom! The sound of the front door being slammed echoes through the house followed by anxious footsteps.

“Miyuki” screams Ba Ba, he's arrived early from work.

“Yes Ba Ba what is it”

“Miyuki it's time for you to go to Lady Chu's house, before you go say goodbye to Ma Ma”

“Yes Ba Ba”

Ba Ba is silent as we descend the stairs, it worries me, fortunately Ma Ma is at the bottom of the staircase ready to wish me my goodbyes. She turns to me her eyes flowing with water, I kiss her to see her bottom lip trembling, so I tell her I will be okay. She kisses me again and tells me she loves me. Then I turn to Ba Ba to kiss him, I say my painful goodbyes leaving, unknowing what awaits my future.

The next thing I know the door is closed and I'm driving off towards an uncertain destiny, it is an extremely overwhelming feeling to have. As I arrived at Lady Chu's house I was overcome with excitement and began to feel nauseous. A maid walked out of the house.

“You are late!” The maid says.

“I am only late by five minutes!” I reply.

The maid gives me a stern look and I quickly rethink what I had just said.

When in the car, Lady Chu turns to me her face was warmer than I had thought, she smiled at me briefly.

“Miss Miyuki I am Zheng Chu but to you I am Sir Chu, you will be working for Lady Chu as her maid for the voyage to Africa understand?”

I nod to him.

We arrived on the boat to be greeted by a policeman and an elephantine crowd, I was not expecting this.

The ship is covered in a deep red and sails that fluttered like beautiful wings. I have no words.

“It's amazing isn't it? It's the fastest boat ever made in history.”

Lady Chu is talking to me and I turn her way, stumbling a little.

“Yes it is truly magical.” I say.

When we are in our room I go to my bed to unpack my things, however being so tired I close my eyes and fall into a deep slumber.

## Friday October 14th 1405

I wake up to another maid staring at me.

“Why aren't you awake, The ship won't clean itself you know!” She yells at me.

“I have never gotten up at 5 before”

“Well get used to it young lady!”

She thrust some clothes at me, then told me to be on deck in 5 minutes or I would be in a lot of trouble!

The sound of the sailors, and maids doing their business echoed through the thin walls of the boat.

Reminding me of my much beloved family. When I was finally on deck the maid from earlier was waiting



for me.

“Your late!”

She said arms crossed, staring at me.

“Sorry, It took awhile to find the way up here.”

“I will let you go this time but next time you won't be getting away so easily, go over there and scrub the deck with Ji Young.”

Out of the blue someone came up from the lower deck screaming about some of the gold being stolen! I back away, towards the staircase afraid to be suspected of taking the precious cargo,so scared I start running as fast as I can to the room. Oof!, I bump into Mr Chu!

“Hello Mr Chu honour to see you,sorry for banging into you.”

I stutter.

“It is nice to see you and it's quite alright.”

replies Mr Chu.

“Have you heard about the gold being stolen?”

I ask

“Yes it's outrageous some criminal would do such a thing”

He explained with enthusiasm

“Indeed”

I reply. The door of the room opens and out comes Mrs Chu.

“Hello Mrs Chu it's an honour to see you ”

I say curtsying.

“Yes good to see you”

She says, obviously worried about something.

“Miyuki there is something we need to tell you.”

There is a look of great worry and sadness on her face as she speaks.

“Anything”

I say with more worry on my face then there is stars in the sky.

“This is going to be hard for you to take in but we need to tell you, you may not make the ship back to China.”

My heart sinks, I could not be going back to my family, I may be stranded in an unknown, sinister place,with no one speaking my language.How can I persuade them to bring me back? How could I change their mind?Then a crazy idea comes into my head, I will find the missing gold, that should persuade them to let me return home to my beloved family.

# The Surprise Proposal

*Clearwater Bay School, Studholme – Wilson, Minnie – 10*

Mika's pale white hands trembled from the gust of icy wind that blew swiftly through her fingers. Icicles started to form under her cold, sensitive nose. Her tears slowly started to form into ice, then quickly falling and shattering into a million shards.

Suddenly a large wooden boat appeared in the distance and seemed to be floating towards her "This is my way out", Mika thought. Then she shouted "Excuse me I'm lost, can you help me navigate my way home?" A small boy around the age of 12 poked his head out, he glanced at her, then at her surroundings and then back at Mika. "Where's your companions?" he asked. She shrugged and took a step forward to take a proper look at the child. He turned and walked away, then a lady wearing a captain's hat emerged from below deck; the Captain rolled her eyes and announced "Tell me how to get China and we'll find you a way out of this horribly cold place". Mika thought for a moment then warily said "OK, but remember you have to keep your end of the deal". The Captain ferociously nodded, smiled and had a small laugh. She scrambled onto the deck, the pirates saluted her and said their names. Mika learnt their names were Ella, George, Hung, Meng, Hannah and Sophie and thought she would be a sailor now, so the new addition to the team would be Mika.

The Captain walked over to her and said "Greetings I'm Mary, Mary Shallow".

The boat sailed across the perilous Caribbean seas, making many stops along the way trading their finest silks for shining gems. Some tribes were aggressive, some welcoming and passive; we passed many countries and next was a capitalist country, my homeland America "Why are we trading lots of valuables?" Mika asked "To transport, trade and share different things also so we can get things that we don't have" Mary replied. They made their last stop before reaching China, but the traders were heavily armed, they had weapons more dangerous than lions, hyenas and all those dangerous animals combined in one, it was called a 'gun'. Mika walked in on the trade, she sensed it was going brutally wrong, you could hear gunshots from miles away, the weapons blocked out all the screams and cries of terror of the sweet, innocent citizens. Mary realized that she didn't tell America they were coming to trade not war, the guns just came out of the blue nobody was expecting it, America thought they were intruders. The crew escaped before anyone could get even more hurt, sighs of relief came from almost everyone on board. Next stop China.

It has been four months since they barely escaped America. The crew was starving and couldn't see anything resembling China, except the terracotta warrior sitting on the small round table. All hope was lost but Mary wouldn't give up no matter how much the crew complains that they have been on the sea for months she just blocked all the sound out of her mind. Days passed Mary kept on dreaming but was starting to lose hope, "Land!" Hung screamed, all of the crew woke, startled by all the screaming and ran to the edge of the boat. The captain jumped out of the boat and Mika steered the ship to the docks. The crew stayed aboard while Mika and Mary went to the powerful Emperor's beautiful palace; every step they took the more nervous they became. Emperor 'Khang Lee' would be tough sale, there were rumors that you would be lucky just to make a simple trade with him but Mary wanted to trade for sparkling pieces of gold for a life size terracotta warrior.

Approaching the emperor's place the guards stopped Mika and Mary at the entrance

"names and why are you here?" The guard asked

"Mary Shallow and she is Mika- ..."

"Mika Hardenna"

"We are here to make a trade with the emperor," Mary continued The guard moved out the way and they entered the emperor's palace. The sight was breathtaking, jewels and art covered the silver walls, Morning light shone through the glass roof, Mary and Mika couldn't take their eyes off the fragile furniture and the giant terracotta warriors. The emperor approached Mary "Ni Hao" The emperor said "sorry I meant hello long time no see Mary"

Mika giggled like a 8 year old girl even though she was 17 then she stopped because everyone in the room was looking at her. "Another trade? You know I Personally like the gold you brought last time" The Emperor laughed

"Yes, this time I need a life size terracotta warrior" Mary Replied "And I'm trading four of my shiniest pieces of gold"

“As you wish” He replied, Mika could see they were flirting with each other it was quite obvious she thought they had a ‘thing’.

“Mika I have something to tell you.. While you were thinking umm.... Khang he..... he..... Proposed to me” Mary told Mika, The shock made it so confusing it was just such a short time ago when they made a trade, now this it was all too much to take in. Mika had to be the new Captain she felt so ... responsible she needed to make trades learn new things and make mistakes along the way to be a Captain, She never thought this would happen but yet the day had come she knew Mary would have to lay back and relax one day and that day was today.

# Perseverance is not Betrayal

*Clearwater Bay School, Yan, Maya – 10*

The young boat was trapped. Colossal waves started to crash his sides. From the deck, Zheng He saw waves covering every single inch of land. This was his 4th voyage, which may be his last. Trudging towards his wooden cabin, the sounds of mutiny started to spread into his ears, while his heart beat faster and faster.

He needed a plan. A plan that could give this mission another chance. He pulled open the laced curtain, and watched the room as it lit up. Climbing up the desk, he noticed the sailors crowded demanding: "MONEY!" At that moment, he devised a plan. Not knowing if it would work, he pushed the door open, and announced: "The first member of my ship who sees land will be awarded with half of the gold I find!" With determination everyone left the crowd and took turns using the lookout. At least he has a chance to bring gold back to China.

"Land!" A young boy shouted as he made his way down the ladder. Finally there was land. Finally there was food. Finally he could keep his word. As the ship slowly reached the shore, Zheng He ordered his men to prepare the boats and lower the anchor. Once everything was set, they climbed down into the boats and sailed towards the land. This place was rather unusual. He watched as the trees swayed from side to side and the flowers dancing in the wind. The tall mountains covered the sunlight, making everything darker than before. The steep trails of the mountain were covered in rocks, which made it ever so hard to climb. The consequences of attempting could possibly lead to death. He had a feeling there was something up there, hidden deeply. He ordered his men to climb it. The more they climbed, the scarier it became. By the time they were nearly there, he no longer regretted his choice.

Trembling, his arm reached up as he pulled himself towards victory. With the last of his strength, he stood up, looking down at the everlasting hills of the new kingdom. Before he could celebrate his victory, a shaking voice hit him, knowing it was only him who made it. The sky started to darken even more as water poured down from the sky, wind wrapped around them trapping them together on the top of the mountain. Just then, from the top of the mountain, you could see a black arrow spinning crazily out of control. Just as they estimated, they saw a tornado. It spun as fast as it could. It started to approach the mountain they were standing on.

A few short minutes ago, he was full of excitement. Now he was frightened and extremely scared. Zheng he looked into the distance as the wind spun closer and closer. "Help!" a voice called towards him. Knowing it was one of his men, he let the voice go back with no answer. "Oh please help." whined a young girl as she forced her hand up, hoping someone would pull her. Zheng he signed. He grabbed her hand and anxiously pulled her up. Together, they collapsed on the mountain edge unable to stand.

Curiously, Zheng he asked: "what is your name?", as she looked towards the sky,

"I'm Ruby and I came here for a new life." Ruby addressed "Life was really hard from where I came, No one had a proper home and we all ate food and water from the wild," as she stood up pointing towards the sky.

"One summer, there was a drought, millions died," Ruby looked down at her feet "Including my mother. I set off in a boat to find a home." Zheng He glared into the girl's blue eyes, and started the story of his life. "When I was small, my dream was to become a sailor. But no matter how hard I worked, it seemed to fade away. At that moment, the King needed more soldiers so I stepped up to join. I remembered the time I left my home and betrayed everything I had, also keeping words of importance locked in my head."

"What are they?" Ruby mumbled, noticing that the sailors crowded around to hear.

"Have perseverance, that's all we have left." said Zheng he, as he turned around, noticing everyone crowding around.

“What about your parents?” Ruby said pushing the soldiers out of her way.

“They’re dead. I killed them.” Zheng he mumbled, “For my glory. My power. Forgetting them.” All he knew now was to Never give up.

At that moment, the sky was as dark as a photo taken from a pitch black cave. Looking up, it seemed as if he was wrapped by wind. “Come, I know a way out!” Ruby announced as she pushed over rock and jumped the hole eyeing everyone to follow her. Although their knees shook from side to side, they knew she had no choice. One by one they climbed into the hole awaiting for the next step. After they got out they wandered into a deep dark and misty forest. They all felt as if there were thousands of eyes watching them in the dark, which made them all feel nervous. There wasn’t another path. At that moment, all the mist cleared. And there it was, a beautiful small village in front of their eyes! The song of laughter spread, as the frowns on their faces slowly disappeared. The trees swayed from side to side, dancing along with the wind. Something made Zheng he freeze. It was gold. A lot of gold. The thing he needed to bring back. With all this perseverance stuck in his head, a plan formed. He didn’t care. He was going to kill Ruby.

He tiptoed into Ruby’s room, seeing a dead body lying there still. Picking up a letter wrote for him, and read: Perseverance is important. Glory too. But there is always a way around betrayal.

# Zheng He and His Amazing Voyages

*Creative Primary School, Cheng, Elizabeth – 10*

Zheng He was one of the most successful and brave explorers in China's Ming Dynasty. He led the largest fleet and crew in the ancient world history, traveled on the enormous seas for 28 years, and made seven amazing voyages.

When Zheng He was young, he lost his grandfather during a dangerous voyage. Unfortunately, his dream of being a brave explorer and a fighter came to a halt with nobody teaching and supporting him. But Zheng He didn't give up and he learned by himself all the skills. His determination was appreciated by the emperor and the captain of a large fleet that would have great voyages abroad. The emperor decided to appoint Zheng He to command the voyages to the west, as he wanted to build good relationships with other countries and get richer by trading expensive goods with them. The emperor also gave Zheng He a very special ring that could bring him good luck.

After years of preparation, the day of the voyage had finally come. Zheng He and more than ten thousand crewmen stepped aboard onto over sixty-three gigantic ships full of Chinese silk, porcelain, jewels and many more goods for giving as gifts or trading with locals.

Three, Two, One.....GO! The emperor shouted. The ropes tied to the ships were released and the ships drifted away towards the beautiful seas. The crowd cheered and danced in circles while singing.

As the crowd cheered and happiness filled the ships, the sailors didn't know that there was an uninvited guest abroad, taking their every move under its vicious, cold-blooded eyes.

A few hours later, Zheng He looked at the sky, and he told all crewmen to turn south. It wasn't very cloudy, so he was able to observe the stars and figure out which way he should go. When the crewmen were sleeping, the sky started raining cats and dogs. This woke all the crewmen and the uninvited guest and they became very angry. Then a huge storm came. The ships swayed violently and it knocked a box of jewels into the sea. Zheng He and two crewmen tried to use a fishing net to salvage some jewels, but they just managed to find a few. A crewman called Chen Yi jumped into the sea to salvage the jewels but he drowned because the sea was rough.

As time passed by, the uninvited guest grew hungrier and hungrier. It locked its eyes on the crewmen. It went out of its hiding place and jumped at them, followed by terrified screams. A tiger emerged on the deck, "Sir, It's a tiger!" reported a soldier frantically. "Oh, no! What are we going to do with a horrible storm and a tiger on board?" Zheng He heard the men shouting, so he rubbed the ring super hard. He rubbed it so hard that his skin from his fingers peeled off!

All of a sudden, the sky turned bright blue and a rainbow appeared. The tiger became smaller and smaller and finally turned into a little bunny. Chen Yi was alive and all of the fallen jewels magically flew back to the ships. It just took a minute to make everything back to normal! It was a miracle! Zheng He was so thankful that he kissed the ring and hugged his crewmen then he went back to his work. Turned out it wasn't too bad after all!

After the terrible situation, Zheng He put his ring into a beautiful and secured box, then locked it up in case anyone would steal it. All of the crewmen danced in circles and enjoyed some delicious food to celebrate their survival from the storm and the tiger.

After a few days of sailing, Zheng He finally found a country called Rance, and the crewmen moored their ships besides the shore. Rance was a wonderful country. It had lots of colorful and fancy houses, beautiful antiques and many more. Although Rance was a beautiful country, its people were very rude. They shouted every time they talked, said rude languages and even kicked someone on purpose! They also spoke in a weird language that none of the crewmen or Zheng He could understand.

Like what Zheng He did in the storm, he rubbed his ring as hard as he could. He also prayed so the people wouldn't be so rude. Suddenly, the people stopped shouting and screaming and they started speaking Chinese, and they even said hello to everyone walking past! So Zheng He and his crewmen were relieved and headed for the queen. The queen's castle was enormous.

When the men stepped into the magnificent castle, they were quickly captured by a bunch of soldiers to pay a respect to the queen. The crewmen and Zheng He were tied up very tightly so none of them could escape. They entered a room where the queen was enjoying some cookies. She saw the men tied in ropes and asked, "What is going on?" One of the soldiers stepped out and told the queen what had happened.

At first the queen didn't want to build a relationship or trade goods with China, but Zheng He told her that they made the citizens very polite. The queen smiled and said happily, "I will fulfill your requests since you've saved my people! They've been so critical because they have different opinions about choosing a king and have been arguing for years."

The queen ordered some of her servants to take the expensive goods out from storage and they traded some jewels, silk, diamonds, gold, pearls and animal skins. It almost took three hours there.

Of course, Zheng He and his men still had some amazing voyages after the visit to Rance. They had shown to the world that Chinese people are brave, intelligent and caring!

Although Zheng He and his crewmen had all passed away years later, the magical ring was still hidden in the box on one of the ships and the magic may last forever!

# Magic Hands

*Creative Primary School, De'eb, Isabella – 9*

I wake up to a soft thud, followed by what sounds like rats crawling up the side of the ship. I shake Xiaoling's shoulder and we frantically look around. Suddenly there are scuffles above us and muted screams. Xiaoling and I are paralysed with fear. I wish there was someone I could call for help. Why did we stow away on this ship anyway?

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It was only three months earlier that I found my best friend Xiaoling sobbing in the street. Her father had beaten her yet again. In the year 1400, China was no place for a deaf and mute girl like Xiaoling. She begged me to run away with her. This was the last straw. I grabbed her by the hand and made our way to the docks where we found a fleet of ships being prepared to set sail. It was easy to make our way on board as the cargo was being loaded, little did we know that we had just boarded the Ming Treasure Fleet.

We were both petrified as we made our way onto the ship. Once inside, we found a small, dark corner behind baskets of food. We collapsed in a tired heap and fell into a deep sleep. When we woke we were greeted with the creaking backbone of the ship as it rolled over the waves. While Xiaoling could not hear the sounds of the ship, she did have her 'magic hands'. Some may argue that magic is not of this world, but magic can also be something far more real. Xiaoling could do the most amazing things, simply by using her hands as an extension of her soul. Just then a dark, lumbering shape came towards us carrying a chopper. We cowered behind the baskets as the chopper rose and then plunged down. I screamed only to discover that it was just an old chef gathering food for that evenings' meal. Chef Lau did not report us to the captain, but instead became our friend and protector. He had daughters our age and he was grateful for our company.

As time passed the noises of the ocean blended with the noises of the ship like an orchestra. I tried my best to share these sounds with Xiaoling, while she in return let me into her world of magic. Somehow her soul could speak to me through her hands, and the longer we were together, the more I understood. On no special day the ship entered an angry storm. We tossed and turned for two days and two nights before we saw Lau again. He told us that the ship had been damaged and that we had become separated from the fleet. We were stranded in the bay of an uncharted island but safe.

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But now, hearing those screams, our optimism has vanished. While cowering in our hiding place, we hear Lau whisper, "Don't make a sound, the ship is being attacked. They have captured everyone and I fear I am next." Just then Lau screams as he is grabbed and suddenly everything is silent.

Xiaoling and I squint outside through the cracks in the ship. We see many canoes carrying the crew, bound and gagged to the island. With the ship deserted we climb onto the deck and bathe in the glorious sunshine. Our freedom soon changes to guilt as we realise that our protector Lau is in extreme danger. Xiaoling's pure heart works through her hands and tells me we must save Lau! Before I have time to think we climb down the side of the ship and row ashore.

We think we have not been seen but in a flash the beach is filled with fierce islanders carrying spears. I scream as they grab me and tie my hands together. I turn to Xiaoling expecting the worst, but she is using her hands to explain that we mean no harm. I think it is useless, but to my surprise they don't touch her but rather gesture for her to go with them into the forest. As we enter the village we see our captain tied to a stake and the entire crew in a wooden cage. We are led into the chief's hut and come face to face with a



huge, tattooed man standing silently in front of us. Unexpectedly he starts gesturing with his hands without a single word and as he does so, amazingly I can see that Xiaoling understands. They continue to communicate while an old lady comes out of the shadows and joins them and it is like the three of them are in their own world. Xiaoling turns to face me and explains that all the people who have ruled this island are from the same family and are deaf and mute. Xiaoling explains to the chief and his mother that the ship has come in peace from China bearing gifts. The chief believes her because of her magic hands through which he can see her pure heart. After the conversation, the chief takes us outside to tell the captain that he will release him and his crew if he will learn to treat everyone as equals, including poor people like me and deaf and mute people like Xiaoling. The chief adds, "We don't treasure riches but we treasure a good heart."

The captain agrees that Xiaoling and I will be treated equally from this moment onwards. With that, everyone is released and a big feast is held until the early hours of the morning. The following day, we leave laden with fresh fruits, vegetables and all sorts of natural things. However, as we get into the rowing boats, I notice that my friend is not next to me. I see Xiaoling holding the hands of the chief and smiling. I realise that she has found the perfect home.

Deep in my heart I know I will return on a future voyage and see her again.

# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

*Creative Primary School, Lam, Katrina – 11*

In the early 1400's, there lived a greedy king in China who wanted to rule China forever and not pass his throne on to his sons. To do that, he had to find the Potion of Youth so that he could live forever. So he appointed his minister Zheng He to find the potion.

Zheng He was a very loyal and humble person. Although he never liked the king, he followed all his commands no matter how ridiculous they were.

Zheng He worried about his voyage of getting the potion. He paced around his room, thinking about what would happen during the trip. What dangers might he face? How should he get the potion? At this moment, his servant came in and said, "Your Excellency, it is time to go." Zheng He stopped his pacing and put on a brave face before leaving his room.

When he went outside, he saw a fleet of ships waiting for him. He stared at the ship in awe. Although he went on the ship seven times already, he still couldn't help himself from getting so surprised about it.

After sailing for a couple of weeks, they arrived in Egypt. They sailed down the river Nile, and arrived to the palace where the pharaoh lived. When the soldiers saw them coming to the palace, they quickly blocked their way with weapons raised. Zheng He calmly said, "May I go and visit the great pharaoh? My name is Zheng He and I'm from China." The soldiers hesitated but then answered, "Very well, wait a moment please." The soldiers went into the palace and returned. They said in unison, "You may go inside the palace." Zheng He followed the soldiers and went into the grand palace.

"Welcome to my great palace! What brings you here today, minister of China?" said the pharaoh. Zheng He replied, "I am here to collect the Potion of Youth. And it happens to be in your famous pyramid of Giza, so can I get inside and take it?" The welcoming smile faded from the pharaoh's face. He said, "Of course you can but be careful." Zheng He saw the face the pharaoh was putting on and asked, "Is something wrong?" The pharaoh sighed and confessed, "I once had a son, who was very smart and caring. He tried to get the Potion of Youth for me. Unfortunately, he died trying. I have a weapon that might help. If you can get the potion successfully inside the pyramid, you will be the first and the last to do it!"

After days in the Sahara desert, they finally arrived at the Pyramid of Giza. Before letting the servants open the door, Zheng He checked on the things the pharaoh had given him. There was the Pendant of Life separated into two pieces. Zheng He put them back and..... BOOM!

Once the door opened, the soldiers backed out, hesitating to go inside and fearing something would pop out. Zheng He put on a brave face and told the soldiers to move. When they went inside, the servants slammed the door shut and waited outside. Zheng He grabbed a torch and went deep inside the pyramid. It was very cold and it shivered down the soldier's spine. Seeing the cobwebs and hieroglyphics, Zheng He knew no one had been in here for hundreds of years. They skipped through the booby traps, some of the soldiers disappeared. The other soldiers cautiously moved around the pyramid with weapons raised. After hours of wandering around the pyramid, they found a door made of pure gold. They pushed through the door and saw a large casket on the ground. Zheng He slid the lid off and found a mummified king holding a bottle of blue potion. Zheng He knew, it was the legendary Potion of Youth. He quickly took it, but suddenly, the door busted open and hundreds of mummified soldiers pointed their weapons at Zheng He and his soldiers. Zheng He took out the Pendant of Life and locked the two pieces together. The mummified soldiers fell on the ground and gave Zheng He and the soldiers plenty of time to escape. They ran away as fast as their tired legs could carry them. They bumped through the door just as the mummies caught up to them, they slammed the door shut and panted.

Once their hearts caught up to their brain, Zheng He and his soldiers were back to the steps of the palace. Once they were in the grand hall, the pharaoh stared at them in astonishment. He was speechless to what he was seeing. The pharaoh looked at the small blue vial like it was a ghost, he peeped, "Send the ... minister and his team ... to their ship, I am going to take a nap." The servants escorted them to the fleet of ships on the Nile, Zheng He and his team boarded the biggest ship and sailed back the China.

On the way back, Zheng He thought about the eternal life the greedy king would have with the potion. He quickly came up with a decision. He threw the vial into the sea and told the whole crew he had lost it. The whole crew was disappointed that all the hard work turned into thin air.

Back to the palace in China, the team reported to the king about their journey. Zheng He told the king how the vial had been stolen. The king didn't feel angry but disappointedly sighed. If the king was smarter, he would have asked the sailors too but he didn't. He sadly dumped away his dream.

Zheng He was proud of himself for saving the people in China from the harm the king would give. And his heroic action was known all over the world.

# Medicine of Immortality

*Creative Primary School, Lee, Jeston – 11*

It had been a long time since I last set foot in a ship. But I had not forgotten the feeling of having the wind on my face and the salt in my hair. Fifty years ago, I was a cabin boy in the legendary Ming Treasure Fleet. I was a young man then and here is my story...

"Wong, the Naval Captain is coming in a minute, so be ready for his arrival." My master shouted from outside.

"Yes, sir." I muttered under my breath.

A man stepped into the room. Even without my master telling me, I would know that he was the Naval Captain, Cheng He, as he had that kind of gaze that would make people around him back down.

I quickly made way for him and bowed to him. Cheng looked at me for a long time. Then, he said, "Your master told me that you were smart, and recommended me to hire you as my cabin boy. Come and meet me at the Qiang Long pier tomorrow."

The next day, I went to the pier. I could see a group of enormous warships in the port. They were huge, with cannons and detailed chiselled dragons.

I saw Cheng standing on the deck of a warship, supervising the loading of goods. The deck was crowded with people, with some sailors heaving large sacks and some scrubbing the deck. Tremendous sails towered high above me. It was an extraordinary sight, with a hundred ships navigating together.

I was the youngest sailor on board and responsible for serving Naval Captain Cheng. Despite his stern look, Cheng was kind to me. He also served the Emperor with unswaying loyalty. I respected him a lot.

We worked day in and day out and very soon we were out in the Arabian Seas. The sailors were superstitious and said there were demons in the Arabian Seas. The demons would play tricks on you and lured you into drinking their wine. Once you had drunk their wine, you would come down with an incurable disease. The only thing that could save you was the Medicine of Immortality, which could only be found on Penglai Island in the East of the Bohai Sea. But no one had been able to find the Medicine of Immortality, so the best way to protect oneself was to avoid drinking wine during the whole sail in the Arabian Seas.

Cheng dismissed all these as nonsense, and he continued to have wine in his meal. One night, a heavy mist came hovering over our ship when Cheng was having meal in his cabin. I was serving him with wine.

Suddenly, Cheng's face turned pale and he clutched his chest. He began panting, gasping for air. I shouted, "Help! Help!"

The doctor did not know what caused Cheng's illness, but we could see that Cheng was getting very sick and might soon die. The rumour spread that Cheng had drunk the demon's wine. I felt responsible for it as I was the one who served him the wine. I decided to go to find the mystical Medicine of Immortality.

The other sailors thought that I was a fool, and no one wanted to risk the wrath of demons. So I set out alone. For seven days and seven nights, the seas were rough. The waves were soaring and twice I had been thrown out into the waters and almost got drowned. But nothing could stop me from finding the Medicine of Immortality. I continued to battle the angry seas and the unforgiving waves. But my boat was small and finally a huge wave came washing over me and I went under and lost consciousness.

When I woke up, I found myself on an island. The island was covered with lush trees, green grass and beautiful spring flowers. A girl came towards me. She looked strange when her face was illuminated by the moonlight and she said, "You have found Penglai Island. My father found you worthy and decided to give you the Medicine of Immortality. Follow me please."

The girl led me to a huge cave decorated with beautiful jewels.

"So you want the medicine for your immortality?" An old man with a long white beard asked me kindly.

I was lost for words momentarily. I then managed a smile and asked, "Can I have the Medicine of Immortality please? My captain is in dire need for this medicine. He is now dying!" I felt my throat tightened and tears came to my eyes.

The old man smiled and said, "Well, here it is. You have proved yourself worthy of taking the medicine, and it will give you immortality. Of course, if you take it, you can't bring it back to save your captain, but you can live here forever. However, if you give the medicine to your captain, he might be saved but he can't live forever. What a waste!"

“I’ve come all this way for my beloved Captain, not for me. He is a good man and I will do anything to save him!” I pleaded and begged him to give me the medicine for my Captain. At last, the old man seemed satisfied and handed me the medicine. Then he asked the girl to take me to a boat and showed me how to sail back to the Ship.

After a day’s sail, I saw our Ship. When I saw Cheng, he was in an even worse condition. Cheng took the medicine and after a while, he returned to his normal state and could even stand up. He looked at the now empty bottle and said, “This is unbelievable! We must find one for our Emperor!”

Cheng redirected the whole Fleet to search this Penglai Island. But no matter how hard we tried to find it, it seemed to vanish without a trace. I guess this place was either really magical, or nobody deserved to be immortal.

# Discovery of Zheng He's Great Adventures

*Creative Primary School, Leung, Theodore – 11*

“I am so not happy.” Kelvin pouted as he stormed into his room after school. His mother could see something was wrong. “What happened at school?” she followed him to his room.

“We are studying exploration and Miss Michelle wants us to write a report on famous adventures. We all drew names from a box. Thomas got James Cook’s Easter Island exploration and David got the adventures of Columbus. And guess what I got? I got Zheng He’s voyages to the west. I don’t even know who this person is!”

“That’s why Miss Michelle wants you to do research for your report. You might learn something interesting.”

“Uh! I don’t think I will.” Kelvin rolled his eyes. “I don’t even know where to begin!”

“Start with this book. You will be impressed with his exploration.” His mom got a book from the bookshelf and left.

Kelvin took the book and scanned the back cover:

Go back in time with Fei Xin, when there were no walkie-talkies, no Google maps. Yet he traveled through the unknown seas with the famous Chinese explorer – Zheng He four times. Fei Xin documented the wonders of what he saw and heard throughout the voyages. He also recorded the hardships the crew experienced during the voyages. Discover the world with one of the greatest explorations of all time.

Kelvin had no idea how to start his project, so he took his mother’s advice and flipped through the book.

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We had a great time in Quy Nhơn. When we arrived, the king came to greet us on the back of an elephant. He gave us a full ship of pearls, precious stones, elephant trunks and rhinoceros horns. We even signed a few trade treaties with him. I guessed the king really loved our gold, silk and porcelain. He even gave us a big banquet before we set sail. None of us had had so much food and wine in the past 15 days.

Our fleet continued southward. The weather was excellent. However, I could sense Admiral Zheng’s worries. He stood on the deck looking at the sky with a frown. Then suddenly, he gathered two hundred soldiers and told them to prepare some chopped ginger and dry citrus skins. He then demanded all of us to rub ginger on our stomach and then drink citrus water quickly. We did not understand why. After a little while, the wind suddenly blew very hard. I heard the whoosh from the waves as they crashed toward our ships. I could not believe we had a storm coming. It was sunny just minutes ago. The storm was getting stronger. Our ships tossed wildly and seemed about to go down. I closed my eyes, as the thunder and lightning were too much for me to handle. Luckily, the ginger and citrus water kept me from throwing up. Some of the crewmates on the treasure ship were tossed back and forth while checking for leakages. They felt really sick and wanted to turn back. However, Admiral Zheng told them to lie in bed and stayed in the compartments. The storm lasted the whole night. Twenty vessels had minor damages but we all survived.

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Kelvin was impressed. He wondered how they got the fleet back on track. After all, the storm must have blown the ships away from their destination. He slowly found their trip quite interesting. He flipped to another page.

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Almost everyone in Nanjing came to see us off. The sky was clear. The port was packed with thousands of people again. We offered sacrifices and prayers to the sea goddess, hoping a safe and successful journey for us all. Emperor Zhu Di came and offered us expensive gifts. I gave my gifts to my servants and then said my goodbyes. Then the firecrackers were set off. I boarded on the treasure ship with Admiral Zheng and Deputy Admiral Wang in the midst of the smoke. My friend Ma Huan also boarded with me this time. Ma Huan and I had been friends for a long time. We both enjoyed studying Arabic. I was happy he finally agreed to come with us on this journey. The rope that tied to the dock was released and off to our journey.

Diseases had been one of Admiral’s main worries during our first voyage. Luckily, nothing serious happened to the 28,000 members of the fleet. Some just got minor food poisoning. Others got mild stomachaches and some threw up. Nevertheless, after they got some rest and took some medicines from our doctors, they all got better. I supposed they were just not used to eating the unfamiliar food from the foreign countries we visited. The most ridiculous sickness I have heard from our last trip was what the doctors called the “tired” disease. The doctors prescribed “sleep” to these sailors and they felt much better afterwards.

But not long after we left Siam this time, a terrible thing happened. General Wu caught malaria. At first, we thought he caught the “tired” disease, but the doctors said General Wu’s case was very serious. We all were very scared because we knew malaria could be spread very fast. A sailor suggested throwing General Wu into the sea. However, many of us opposed. General Wu was a nice man, and had done many good things for us. After hearing a few officers complained, Admiral Zheng decided to leave General Wu on a remote island with food and water. That was the best he could do. He told us that he hoped General Wu would feel better and could board on the ship when we returned.

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“Tired” disease! Kelvin thought that was funny. “I must have ‘tired’ disease all the time.”

Kelvin found Zheng He’s voyages fascinating. He decided to read Fei Xin’s book from the beginning.

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My name is Fei Xin, from Jiangsu. I was born in the year 1388. My family is poor. After my elder brother died, I became a soldier...

# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

*Creative Primary School, Lu, Lisa – 10*

Year 1418, King of Yong Le commanded the treasure fleet to set out the third voyage.

I joined the Ming Treasure Fleet taking the position of a translator, as I can speak and understand most of Asian and Arabian languages, which could be helpful for the voyage.

The whole journey was very exciting and successful. Our fleet went the longest distance ever. We fully loaded eighty cargo ships of goods. There were gold, silver, coral, various utensils, ivory items and other unusual things like five zebras and ten ostriches. For the most exciting part, we had a caged jaguar caught by our African friend. We planned to sail toward the port Malacca to have a two day rest before setting sail to our homeland.

As we settled, I helped the crew to refill fresh water for the voyage. When I was pumping water from the well, I overheard some local guys talking in Swahili language. “Hey, dude I just found out some other country weirdos came with lots of valuable treasures.” “And oh just look at their vessels. It must be the Ming fleets.” “Then let’s get the ships and cargoes. Tonight let’s gather our brothers and call Nathan.” Yes, let’s do it.” Uh oh, I panicked. I have to inform the captain. Now!

I ran back to our fleet and told Zheng He, “Sir, when I was pumping some water, I overheard a gang of local pirates’ talk. They said they are going to steal our treasure and vessels tonight!” Zheng He nodded and said, “That’s a very important message. Now we need to prepare a setup for these thieves. You’ll see.”

“Please bring Wang Yi to me!” Zheng He then said. A moment later, several people walked into the room. “At your serves, sir.” Wang Yi lowered his waist to Zheng He.

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Later this evening when it was starting to get dark, Zheng He gathered all the crew members and soldiers including me secretly. “Tonight, the pirates will try to rob our treasures and vessels. When it’s completely dark, put out all the fire torches and follow our plan.”

A moment later, the blue sky turned to completely dark. Carefully, we put out all the lights on top of the masts. Then we hid ourselves in the ships behind walls and masts. Then we silently watched at the sea water beneath us. No one made a sound. We scouted at the water as suddenly the water shook really hard.

Five small boats appeared in our sight. A moment later, the boats approached our ships and slowly stopped beside our ship. Around 20 shadows started to climb up the ship brim. I held a firestone tightly, getting ready to light a torch.

The shadows sneaked onto the flagship deck. Suddenly, as the leader, Wang Yi shouted out, “Light on!” We ran to the mast and climbed as fast as we could to light the oil lights on all the masts. The ships all got brightened.

After lighting the ship, I hid myself safely and watched from behind a wall. I have to admit, the pirates were astonished by our setup and they started to scatter around the deck. “We are busted!” shouted one of them.

The fully armored soldiers now rushed out with sharp sword on their hands, chasing the scattered thieves.



Out of our expectation, there was a tall man armed with a sailor scimitar standing still. My gut felt he must be Nathan. Nathan and the soldiers had a hand-to-hand combat. Following him, more pirates joined the fight. There was a “king king kong kong”, sword versus scimitar. But not long, we had three man fallen. Wang Yi jumped out from the carbine and had a combat with Nathan. It was so tense that my palms were wet. It seemed that no one could take any advantage in the fight. Suddenly, a knife flew to Wang Yi. While he was dodging the knife, Nathan took the chance and cut Wang Yi’s right arm.

Seeing Wang Yi got hurt, Zheng He shouted, “Flee! Abandon Ship!” All soldiers and crews stepped back and slowly retreated from the battle, covering the wounded. I felt very anxious. But before I retreated, I rushed into the deep chamber. In the darkness, I saw two green eyes. It was the jaguar in the cage. I pushed the cage near the door, released the jaguar and jumped out of the ship.

When I climbed up another ship, I over watched the flagship. The jaguar was jumping around the deck, created a big mess. One after the other, the pirates shouted and jumped into the sea. I guess none of them had ever seen such a beast. Soon, the deck was back quiet again. All freaked out pirates had left, leaving only the jaguar walking on the deck. All the soldiers and crews exclaimed and burst into tears of happiness. Zheng He praised me, “You saved our ship! Hero. Let’s put her in front of the crowd!” “Sir, the hero is the jaguar,” I said. Everyone burst into laughter.

The next morning, when the sun rose up, five crew members climbed up on to the flagship and cast a large fishing net to catch our hero jaguar. After sending it back into the cage, I walked to the cage and made a deep bow. Our fleet finally set sail to our final destiny: Quan Zhou port.

# Heroes in Time

*Creative Primary School, Ma, Lotta – 11*

“Come on!” shouted Yun. “We can still make it to class.” His friend Ling scurried behind, trying to catch up. Just when they turned around the corner, they found Professor Fa standing in front of them. “Where do you think you are going?” he questioned. Before the friends could answer, the professor pulled them into a science lab. There were maps of China on the walls. “You must be wondering why I brought you here,” Professor Fa said with a mysterious face. “Have you ever learned about the Ming Treasure Fleet?” The students nodded. “Well, there were some pirates jealous of the legend and decided to travel in time to steal command of the voyage,” he continued. “I don’t have much idea what they would do, so I need you to travel back in time to catch them!” The girls thought the professor had gone crazy but followed his order. With a snap of Fa’s fingers, out appeared a time machine, Yun, thrilled about the adventure, didn’t waste any time. Although Ling was terrified, he still accepted. They were ready for an adventure!

Meanwhile, the pirates, also known as the Crossbone Crew led by Tersilla with Asher and Karl, arrived in a majestic harbour. “We’re finally here!” exclaimed Asher. “But we’re not done yet, put on your disguises and get ready to meet Admiral Zheng,” whispered Tersilla. Later at the port, Admiral Zheng was assembling his crew. When it was Tersilla’s turn, he asked, “And what can you do?” “I’ve served three Admirals, sailed the Indian Ocean and is an expert sailor,” Tersilla replied with confidence. Admiral Zheng accepted the Crossbone Crew without a doubt, not knowing that he was inviting a pack of troublemakers.

On the other side of the harbour, Yun and Ling arrived. “Where are all the taxis?” asked Yun. “We’re in the Xuande reign, didn’t you listen in class?” explained Ling. They, as well as the pirates, had a disguise. “Hey, look!” said Ling. A pile of fish n’ chips laid beside a restaurant. Usually, Chinese people prefer fried rice than fish ‘n’ chips, it was obvious who ate these—the Crossbone Crew! There were also footprints leading to the port. “Oh no! The ship is about to set sail!” they shouted. Luckily, they made it just in time before the famous fleet set sail. Yun got to be the helmsman because of his super-strength. Ling was the scribe who was going to write the story of the voyage. She remembered the look on the Admiral’s face when she told him she could write, the lessons of Chinese finally paid off!

The next day was very special for China. Everyone came to see the Ming Treasure Fleet set sail. We watched the grand launch ceremony joyfully, all except for Tersilla, Asher, and Karl. Soon, everyone began working hard, not wanting to get scolded.

At night, the Crossbones Crew began their heist, by telling a tall tale, trying to scare the sailors. “My two cousins from Japan were sailing across the Pacific Ocean, but one of them never came back,” Tersilla began. “The rumors say that a horrible sea monster followed them for days. They had no clue, the only sign of it was a spooky whistling sound. Then one night, it sprang out from the water, gobbling my cousin alive!”

Somehow, the other morning, Ling heard a faint whistling sound, until it got louder and louder! “Eeeeeeeek!” she screamed. Being the brave one, Yun followed the sound. But instead of a man-eating sea monster, he found an old record player with a Halloween record. Even though Yun had no evidence whatsoever, he knew who was behind all of this.

The following days were worse! More incidents happened, such as a broken sail, someone swapping seawater with wine, and the deck was covered in bubbles! Little did anyone knew, that Tersilla’s plan was to steal Admiral Zheng’s thunder, by giving his crew a bad reputation. “I can’t take it anymore!” the Admiral scolded. “Whoever is behind these pranks should admit it.” “Well, I think it is Yun’s fault or how else is he not afraid of the sea monster,” I mumbled. Unfortunately, Admiral Zheng heard every word and punished Yun by scrubbing the deck. Ling realized that she had ruined their friendship and she was alone in stopping the nasty pirates.

That night, Ling couldn't stop thinking about what she had done, just when she thought all hope was lost, she heard Asher murmuring in his sleep. "Zzz...take command of the ship tomorrow...zzz...we'll be rich and famous...zzz..." Ling gasped, "How could you!" Asher continued, "We'll contact the other pirates and fight...zzz..." Admiral Zheng and the sailors would be in danger!

It was a quiet morning until there was a big "BANG!". Just as Asher had mentioned, the fleet had been surrounded by other pirates. Then, chaos erupted. Everyone was fighting for their lives. Suddenly, Tersilla charged at Yun while he was distracted. As he was a good fighter, he didn't seem to need any help, but he then got exhausted. Ling wanted help, so she charged behind, but Tersilla was quick on her feet. It was a fearsome fight, it wasn't clear who would win until Ling fell on the plank, Tersilla used her sword to stab her, Ling rolled away in the nick of time, but accidentally pulled off the wicked pirates mask which revealed Tersilla's identity. "Ahhhhhhh!" shouted Ling as she fell. Opportunely, Yun grabbed her hand. "You saved me, now it is my chance to return the favour," he said with a smile.

All was well after Ling and Yun caught the Crossbones Crew red-handed. When they went back to the present, they had never been so glad to be back at school. "Welcome back!" welcomed Professor Fa. "I have a little surprise for both of you." He opened an old History book, and found Ling and Yun's name in the Ming Treasure Fleet's crew list!

# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyage

*Creative Primary School, Shi, Grace – 12*

One day when I was looking at the tremendous exquisite mirror in my cozy chamber, I felt a little tired and dizzy. My naughty sister thought that it was a good opportunity in a hundred years to prank me.

She tiptoed quietly and anxiously towards me. I would definitely notice that immediately as usual. However, this time all I was thinking was good sleep so I didn't pay attention to her. She was standing behind me when I suddenly saw the reflection of my sister reaching out her hand in the mirror. I knew what she was going to do. I quickly dodged but it was too late— my sister had already pushed me to the mirror!

I closed my eyes and prepared for an agonizing crash. Wait...I didn't crash into the mirror! I opened my eyes. I saw people selling noodles, dumplings and buns on the streets. I looked into the distance. I saw the Ying Tianfu (where the Emperor lived). I walked towards one of the people and asked, "Which year is this?"

"The person looked at me as if I was an idiot. He replied, "Ming Yongle third year, and just to remind you, you forgot to tie your hair into a bun."

"Wow! I travelled to the Ming Dynasty! The time when Zheng He and a fleet of ship carried cargoes of gold and silk and other precious items for the crew to give away as gifts! I was so excited since this was my first time travel. While I was intoxicated with excitement, a voice appeared behind me.

"Why are you wearing a weird yellow dress?"

"Her feet are so big, just like the men's!"

All the people were talking about me. They formed a circle around me. I didn't know what to do.

"Silence!" a team of soldiers separated the people and tied me with some ropes.

"Why?" I asked, "Why do you tie me up?"

"Yellow clothes are for our supreme emperor ONLY!"

The soldiers led me to Ying Tianfu. It was glorious! While I was looking around curiously, the soldiers pushed me to the prison. They locked the doors as soon as I walked into the prison cell.

"Now, what shall I do?" I asked myself.

I felt something wet on my temple. I touched it with my fingers. There was gold paint on my fingers.

"Oh yes," I thought, "I can paint!"

I have a habit of placing a painting brush on my right ear and carrying some paint in my pocket.

I started to paint a lifelike dragon and a graceful phoenix. My hands were sore so I decided to take a rest. I fell asleep despite the floor being cold and hard.

I had a wonderful dream. I dreamt that I went to the voyages with Zheng He and gave away presents.

Then I was awake. I saw the Emperor with his soldiers. They were looking at my painting.

“Um...nihao?” I tried to communicate with them.

“You are so talented,” the Emperor praised me, “what is your name?”

“Thank you, my name is Grace.”

“Can you help me paint the sails of the fleet of ship?” Zheng He asked. He was standing next to the Emperor.

“I need to think about it,” I answered. I saw a chance getting myself out of here.

“We’re not asking for your opinion, this is a command!” the Emperor shouted.

“I’m not carrying out your command, unless...” I replied. Praying that my little trick would work. “I’m not going to paint in this place,” I said.

“Fine, you can come along with the fleet of ship,” Zheng He said.

I was led to a room with paints and some huge flags. I started to paint the sails with red. In Chinese culture, red represents joy, prosperity and longevity. I think luck is important in voyages. However, when I thought about the western culture, red represents danger. I painted the sails in yellow at last. I also drew a phoenix and a dragon with the gold paint on every flag.

“What do you think?” I asked myself. I always ask myself this question so I can make my artwork better.

“Gorgeous,” a voice said.

“Thank you,” I was contented.

A few weeks later, I went on a voyage with Zheng He and the crew. The sea was blue and clean. I felt so relaxed until...

“There is a pirate ship coming towards us!” a sailor shouted nervously. “What shall we do?” Everyone didn’t know what to do. I was so scared.

“Little girl, maybe you’re going to lose your life. Regret for not staying at home?” a crew member ridiculed me.

“I have a plan,” I said. “We can paint the other side of our sail into a pirate ship flag.” Everyone agreed. We started acting as quickly as possible.

The pirate ship didn't stop. It kept driving towards us. The closer it was to us, the more nervous we were. When the pirate ship was beside our fleet of ships, my face was almost as white as paper. The pirates shot arrows at us. I hid behind a pillar immediately.

I went back to the cabin and painted a really creepy monster.

I took the gold out of one of the boxes and placed the monster painting inside. I delivered the box to the pirate ship. The pirates opened it and they thought it was gold so everyone ran towards the box. One by one, the pirates fainted because the monster was the most creepy and disgusting creature they had ever seen. We drove our ships away.

We arrived a tropical island with the indigenous singing and dancing to welcome us. I was so happy. I looked at the clear water and my reflection. The waves stopped.

"The water looks like my huge mirror now," I thought.

Wait... why did I hear my sister laughing? I turned around and saw my sister laughing. I was back home! It was definitely the best journey ever!

# The Revenge

*Creative Primary School, Tang, Jayden – 10*

I was standing on the top deck of my Bloody Devil glancing over the horizon. The breeze swept over the top of the sail and made it sway. The sea looked calm and peaceful. I was interrupted by my spy, Hawk Eye, who rushed towards me and shouted, "Cap! Good news – Lots of treasures on Ming's ships!"

"Calm down." I frowned, "Our chests were already full of silver and ivories."

"Each ship in this fleet is heavily loaded with gold and jewels!" I could see dollar sign in his eyes.

"Really?" I raised my brow. "Then this might worth a battle."

Immediately, we took off and roved among the seven seas to look for the "treasure ship". We have sailed for years, but still could not smell anything. I started wondering if Hawk Eye's intel was just a joke, thus I ordered him to locate that fleet again.

Months later, Hawk Eye returned with news. "Cap, the fleet is mainly sailing in the South China Sea and Indian Ocean, giving away treasures to other countries."

"What? Giving away?" my jaw dropped. "This is the silliest thing I ever heard." I could not believe until he added, "The Chinese emperor wanted to make friends with others, so he did it for diplomatic purpose."

"Then what are you waiting for?!" I roared, as my crew untied the ropes and charged to the Indian Ocean, ready to raid the Ming's ships. "Not even a gold coin will be left on those ships, and we will be very rich!" I grinned. It might be a long fight, but the rewards would be definitely worth it. With my famous Bloody Devil, and I, Captain Golden Hook, we were unstoppable!

During the journey, I heard more about the fleet, such as the captain was Zheng He and they were very shallow to believe that giraffes were some kind of mythical animals for worship. Bah! They did not know what the world is like! Unlike me, Captain Golden Hook, who has captured many vessels and circumnavigated around the globe, it will be easy as pie to loot all the precious items from them!

All the time, I did not have any worries about plundering the treasures. Until one day while we were approaching to destination, Hawk Eye told a rumor about a giant sea serpent near the Indian Ocean that would crush everything into bits when it was annoyed. Since then, we had been cautious of any movement in the sea and tried to avoid that terrible monster.

Next day, the sea was unusually rough. Maybe it was just another storm, I thought. Suddenly, a ten foot tall black shadowed "Unidentified Object" thrust out of the water. "It's...the sea...serpent! Ready the ca...cannons...throw explosives!" The sailor hollered stammerly. But the sea serpent was pissed and its tail smashed violently on the ships that the crew couldn't even load the cannons.

"Link the ship, link the shipp!" monkey Jack squeaked.

"Great idea, Jack!" I praised. "Link all the ships together to stabilize." I yelled to the crew. Sailors instantly chained up all our ships in line and formed a horizontal fortress on water. The sea serpent was starting to lose strength because it no longer bashed as hard as before. Now we should attack. Bam! Pow! All cannons were firing, so soon the monster was defeated as it dived down and vanished. "Whew! Now we are safe." I muttered to myself. Just when I thought the coast was clear, Jack scanned around and squealed, "Ship! Ship!" Sure enough, there was navel fleet, and it was Zheng He's fleet!

"Surrender and we can be friends" Zheng He gave me a stare as he slowly approached. How dare him to underestimate me! I never lost any battles and I will not throw a towel under any circumstances. I remained silent and longed to attack when the sun went down. The first blow was half the battle.

Zheng He did not push further and we were all hushed except monsoons were blowing hard and making “whoooooooo” sound. I was starting to wonder if there was any conspiracy behind all this, or was he really that friendly? It was a windy night as Caesar, my chief warrior, had been discussing the strategy with me on the deck. “We must strike first! Let’s send all the warriors swimming to Zheng He's ships as it's dark now, the crow's nest won't spot us.” Caesar was confident since he has won so many battles with me. “Be cautious, Zheng He may not be asleep,” I warned.

While my crew was swimming silently towards the misty darkness, I was on the deck hoping that our plan would work. But things don't always go as we planned. All out of blue there were flashes of light moving rapidly like shooting stars, before I realized those were fire arrows, my ships were hit and lit up completely as we had chained up to fight the sea serpent before. Zheng He was on the stern of the ship and slowly appeared through the smoke and he gave me some "surrender or die” look. I would never abandon this ship! I decided to fight back even though it was hopeless. Zheng He's forces were much stronger, plus my ships were extremely damaged and slowly sinking. I knew the time had come. " An eye for an eye, Zheng He! You... will... pay the ...price...” I cried with my last breath as I went down to the sea with my ships. All my crew, my glory, my treasures and my ships were gone in one single battle. However, this was not the end, yet.

Years later, Zheng He died in his last voyage, his 7th journey. Everybody believed that he died from illness. However, among the seven seas, people knew that it was me, Captain Golden Hook who haunted him, near the India Ocean where he sank my Bloody Devil. Ever since, the Chinese emperor had forbidden any sea voyages.



# Beyond the Seventh Voyage

*Creative Primary School, Tong, Nicole – 11*

My name is Zheng Ping and I am the stepson of Zheng He, the great voyager of our Ming Dynasty. I am a young sailor and have followed my stepfather since his sixth voyage when I was ten. I called my step father Captain Zheng during voyage times. The sixth voyage lasted for about ten years and I gained valuable voyage experiences and became a senior sailor even I was only twenty.

In 1431, Captain Zheng started his seventh voyage from China to India and gave the poor the treasures we carried, as a usual mission of his voyages. However, after our trip to India, our ship was left with a batch of gold, silk and other precious items. On our way back to China, Captain Zheng had a quick thought that he wanted to give those left treasures to a poor place which he had visited during one of his past voyages – West Africa.

Captain Zheng knew that his change of voyage plan would be disobedient to our King. So, he asked me and the crew of our pilot ship to convey a message to the crews of other ships that Captain Zheng died from over-exhaustion during the voyage. The vice-captain of our pilot ship, Yong, instructed the crews of other ships to return to China while our pilot ship would find a peaceful place in the sea to give Captain Zheng an honourable sea burial. After our white lie, we actually continued our voyage to our destination, West Africa.

About three days later, we finally arrived West Africa. We started our plan to give out our treasures and other materials to the poor Africans. However, after a few days of donation work, we found that we did not have enough materials to continue our donation because there were too many poor people. When we gave our last piece of gold to a family, I made a new friend called Djembu who was a teenager. He felt that we were very kind and caring to the poor, so he decided to tell us a secret. He told us that he was a descendant of an old emperor of the Mali Empire which is a weak nation now as caused by internal wars, but it was a strong and very rich empire which ruled over West Africa about a hundred years ago. Djembu wanted us to continue our charity work, so he decided to bring us to a secret island which hid a lot of gold and other treasures left from their ancestors. However, we needed to take a sea journey by a small boat which could only carry four people. Therefore, Captain Zheng decided to bring me and Yong with him.

We boarded on the small boat during nighttime and told our crew to wait for us on the pilot ship. We were led by Djembu who told us that we would encounter some dangers during the sea journey. Although we were experienced of voyages by ship, we did not use to travel in the sea by a small boat. Luckily, Djembu said he was experienced of sea travelling by small boat and would led us all the way to the secret island.

We sailed in the dark until the next morning. When we woke up in a cloudy and foggy atmosphere and travelled for a while, we realized that there was a gigantic sea dinosaur emerging its head out of the water. Captain Zheng and Yong immediately pulled their swords out in unison and were about to fight with the enormous creature. Djembu was shocked by their prompt action and told them to calm down because the sea dinosaur was his friend and the guardian of the secret island. Djembu told us that whenever there were intruders, the sea dinosaur would gobble them up. Afterwards, Djembu murmured some magic words that the sea dinosaur understood, then its head slowly lowered back into the water.

We sailed for a few more hours and then saw some shining light in front of us. The light became brighter when we got closer and we found that it was a huge pile of gold which caused the island to glow! We had to pass through a dark cave before we can reach the mountain of gold. Djembu warned us, “You’ll have to be very careful or else –” “Bang!” A trapdoor suddenly opened up and Yong was falling down. In a flash, I grabbed his hand and Captain Zheng and Djembu together helped me to pull Yong out of the trap where there were full of spikes underneath. “Thanks for your prompt warning!” said Yong, breathing heavily. For the rest of the trap doors along the way out of the dark cave, we followed Djembu’s instructions and moved with great caution to avoid other traps which included snakes, cannibal flowers, and etc., as mentioned by Djembu.

After we passed through all the trapdoors, Djembu led us to the site piled up with many gold pieces and some other treasures. Some people were working there to melt the gold pieces and shape them into gold coins of different sizes. Djembu introduced us to the workers and explained our purpose to them who then agreed to help us to deliver the gold coins out of the island and donate to the poor. However, the delivery could only be done boat-by-boat, and be accompanied by Djembu so as to pass the guardian of the sea dinosaur.

After five years of charity work, Captain Zheng nominated me to be the new captain as he had to retire. I took up the role and partnered with Djembu to continue our secret charity mission of giving gold coins to the poor, with the cooperation between our crew and the African workers on the secret island.

# The Dragon in the Mist

*Creative Primary School, Tse, Zhena – 11*

Everyone knows that Zheng He went on seven marvelous voyages to different countries, and went down in history, but then he also went on his eighth journey. Unfortunately, the details of his last trip were lost in the storm. This is the story of his last adventure.

“I command you to go on another epic journey, and return with the most powerful ally,” said the Emperor. “Yes, Your Majesty,” replied Zheng He. “I will do my best.”

The next day, Zheng He gathered his crew and sailed away in hopes of fulfilling His Majesty’s wishes. They sailed for days without finding land, and at last they found a tall tower in the mist in the distance. “Land Ho!” shouted the crew with joy, “We’ve found land!” “Wait, you guys, this island is weird, it isn’t even marked on the map,” said Zheng He, but his crew was already docking the boat and lowering the anchor. “Hey! I’m Captain around here, listen to me!” No one heard him.....so with a sigh, Zheng He went to join his crew.

The tall tower was indeed horrific. Made from volcanic stone, it loomed above, casting fear over them. Suddenly, a roar came from the other side of the island. The sailors walked around the island, finally reaching the source of the sound. What they saw was astounding, a milky blue dragon laid there, bound in chains. It rumbled melancholy, tears falling from its turquoise eyes. Zheng He approached cautiously, “Honorable Dragon, where are we?” he asked. “You are at the entrance of the tower of the evil Mist Lord, but he has gone on vacation,” replied the dragon. “Who are you? How can we free you?” asked a sailor. “I am Cloud, from the tribe of the legendary Dragons of Dreams. As for freeing me, you must climb to the tenth floor of the tower and find the Mystic Sword, which can cut my chains,” said it. “Just climbing towers? That’s too easy!” whispered another sailor. “Ah, that’s not all. The first nine floors are full of strange traps, in which only the tenth is safe. They launch when you’re near them, but the problem is that you can’t avoid them, because they’re automatic. Everything is automatic here,” sighed the Dragon. “You guys gotta endure it if you go inside,” murmured the Dragon, and went to sleep, or, at least he tried to. “Let’s do this!” cheered the adventurers. “Shhhh! I’m taking a nap!” said the Dragon.

As they reached the tower, the giant metal doors swung open, creaking at the hinges. They shuddered at the thought of being skewered into sailor-kebabs. An overhead parrot squawked, “Up the stairs, up the stairs.” So they slowly went up the stairs, not even sure what dangers they were looking for. A bell rung, and the stairways fell apart, piece by piece, showing electric eels underneath. “Run for your lives!” A bunch of crazed-looking sailors shouted, “Run, run, run!” They really could have broken every speed record in the world if someone was actually counting. More horrors awaited them in the following floors. Ten huge rattlesnakes slithered on the second floor, rattles in the air, threatening to swallow them. The fourth floor’s ground was covered in every corner slimy, stinky sardines, it was dangerous just to let a bit of the air into your lungs, its stench will kill you. Onto the sixth floor. You just might think that there’s some kind of horror waiting for poor Zheng He and his sailors. It’ll repeat for the following floors. But strangely, nothing special happened on the sixth, seventh and eighth floor..... until the ninth. As the troop of adventurers ascended the stairs to the ninth floor, a wooden door bared their way. Clanging sounds seemed to be coming from the other side. Zheng He bravely opened a finger’s width of the door, only allowing himself to peek inside. A moment later, something sleek and sharp in there poked him under his armpits, the place just above his hips. He yelped and shut the door, accidentally slamming it into his face, and he yelped again. So he calmed down, regained his composure and flung the door wide open. A flurry of frenzy was what they saw. But a moment later, hundreds of automated flying swords with glistening blades were pointed at their hearts. One flew forward and dumped a piece of paper in Zheng He’s hands. ‘A Moment Later Swords, by Sword Company. A hundred yuan each. Please come buy!’ “What in the world?!” exclaimed Zheng He. “This isn’t the time for advertising, man! I already have my own sword!” As soon as he said it he regretted it. A piece of paper appeared next to the swords, and they swarmed around it, after they scattered, it was still intact. A moment later, it burst into smithereens, demonstrating their power. A sword came and pointed its blade at the pouch of coins at Zheng he’s side. Finally, Zheng He unwillingly gave up his money just to buy another weapon, but just as he wanted to walk away, the swords gestured to the crew. So they lost another hundred dollars to those stubborn swords.

At last, when they reached the tenth floor, they saw nothing. They heard a bell ring, then, whoosh! They fell down the tower like how Alice falls down the rabbit hole. They landed in front of Cloud. He woke up and said, "You're alive! What a miracle! And got a bunch of those swords. Seriously, you only need one to free me." Then, as most stories go, they freed the dragon, had a safe trip home, and got rewarded by the Emperor. The Queen of the Dream Dragons was so grateful to Zheng He and his crew for saving Cloud that she promised that the Dragons would be China's ally from that day on. To honor the Dragons, the Emperor announced that the symbol of China should be a dragon, symbolizing strength, power, and good luck.

# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

*Creative Primary School, Wong, Danica – 11*

“Do you want to go to the exhibit Ms. J mentioned?” asked Holly. “She said it’s going to open tomorrow,” Collin said, “I’ve always wanted to see it! It must have lots of information about Chinese history.” Francis mouthed “nerd” behind Collin.

The next day, they went to the museum together.

“Wow! There are so many people!” exclaimed Holly. Collin said, “For your information, there are an average of 5,000 people coming here every day.”

“Please just shut up for once. I don’t want you spouting nonsense that no one wants to hear,” Francis remarked. “How about you keep quiet first?” Collin replied back.

“Guys!” called Holly. “Calm down! Let us all just have a nice day at the museum.” “Fine.” they both answered in unison.

They entered the museum and saw a huge sign saying, “Chinese History Exhibit – THIS WAY” followed by an arrow. They went towards the direction the arrow was pointing at and found themselves in a hall full of exhibition boards.

“The Chinese certainly have a long history,” said Francis. “The Chinese ...” blabbered Collin. While Collin was rambling about the Chinese history, Francis and Holly were looking at the exhibition boards.

“Silk was invented 6,000 years ago... That’s a long time ago!” Just then, out of the corner of her eye, she spotted an Exhibition board. It was about Ming Treasure Voyages.

After a while, they decided that they would buy books from the museum shop. Since Holly was interested in the Ming Voyages, they bought some books on this topic. After that, they went home.

When they were at Holly’s home, they sat down and started reading the books. “The Ming Treasure Voyages carried treasure for the captain and sailors to give away as gifts,” explained Collin. “And I thought all pirates were scary and mean,” said Francis.

Suddenly, a book started shuddering and glowing. “What in the world?” shouted Francis. “THE MING VOYAGES” was a thick book with golden lines tracing the title. They gathered around the book and opened it. Suddenly, a flash of light came out of the book. They felt their bodies shivering.

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“Where in the world is this place?” said Francis with his body still shaking. They were all dressed in weird clothing. Then, a person came and said to them in a weird language, “Stop slacking! Start working!” Surprisingly, they understood what it meant.

“What language is he speaking?” whispered Holly. “It’s Chinese,” answered Collin. “Strangely, it appears we can speak the language.” They got up and started working. Their job was to prepare meals. They had to clean as well. They cooked as they spoke. “Where is this place anyways?” questioned Francis. “We might be on a Ming Treasure Voyage.” replied Holly. “The book we opened was about the Ming Treasure Voyages too.” Collin said. “This ship is similar to a picture of the voyages I saw in the book. We must have been travelled through time back into the early 1400’s, where the Ming Treasure Voyages set sail from China to other countries.” “So I guess that explains the weird and ridiculous clothing,” joked Francis. “Very funny,” said Collin. “We still need to find a way to get back home.”

While they were cleaning, they overheard the sailors speaking, and found out a few things. The Ming treasure voyages were the maritime expeditions by Ming China's treasure fleet. The Yongle Emperor initiated the construction of the treasure fleet in 1403 and Admiral Zheng He was commissioned to command the treasure fleet for the expeditions. They also found out it was already the third voyage.

When the kids were giving Admiral Zheng He his food, Zheng He said, "We are going to arrive in Ceylon after a while. Prepare to land and ready the treasure." After a while, they landed in Ceylon and Zheng He offered treasure to Sri Lanka. "The Yongle Emperor wishes to establish a good relationship with this country." The king of Ceylon, also named King Alekshvara, received the treasure. But the King did not accept the peace offering. "Oh dear, this is where it gets nasty," Collin whispered to the other two.

They found that the King posed a threat to the neighboring countries. Admiral Zheng He stood up and said, "We are men of honor! We will fight for our country!" "Not all of us are men." Holly jokingly whispered, the three of them chuckled. A few days later, the admiral and his troops invaded Kotte and conquered their capital. They captured Alekshvara, his family and principal officials. Francis said, "I might be a trouble maker back at home but I never thought that I would go this far..." The three of them felt really guilty. When one of the crew saw their faces, he said, "You guys might be new here, don't worry, there's an army outside waiting to strike, but the Chinese army is going to take care of it." Their faces instantly went green and terrified. The guy saw their faces and then asked, "D—did I say something wrong?" They tried to reply but nothing came out, they were speechless.

Collin mumbled beneath his breath, "W—we're in the m—middle of a w—w—war...!" They could barely believe it. Francis hissed, "We have to get out of here!" While trying his best not to speak too loud. They scurried through the streets trying to blend in and went to an alley way to hide from the enemies, but instead they found the book that caused them to fall into this place. They opened it to see a beam of light, they stepped into the beam and found themselves back in Holly's room. "Man! That was an amazing journey! We also learned a lot about The Ming Treasure Voyages," said Collin. They all decided to put the book in the attic, so that they could tell the story to their grandchildren and let them find the book for an adventure.

# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

*Creative Primary School, Wong, Oliver – 11*

In a cold and windy night in the middle of the Ming Dynasty, huddled in a dirty backstreet corner, a thin and small boy with only one eye plotting to change his miserable life. This young boy, nicknamed 'one-eye' had been roaming the streets of Nanjing, begging and stealing since his family and the village that he lived in was burnt down by a group of thieves. He lost one of his eyes in that raid and was probably the only survivor of that village. He was always hungry and people chased him away and called him 'dirty beggar'. One day, he heard the town people talking about the great sea captain Zheng He, who was planning his second sea voyage after the success of the first one. One-eye decided this was his chance to change his life and wanted to join this adventure at all costs.

One-eye found out the location where the ship was to set sail and the night before Zheng He began his journey, One-eye emptied one of the fresh water barrels and hid himself inside it. This barrel and the rest of the supplies were bought to the ship.

After the ship sailed for a few days, One-eye quietly came out of the barrel to explore the ship. He tried not to get noticed but the minute he was on the deck he got pulled up by one of the sailors. The sailor shouted, "Who on earth is this boy and how did he get here?" Another sailor said, "We must bring him to the captain!" One-eye was dragged to the captain's office.

Zheng He asked, "Who are you and why are you on my ship?" One-eye replied, "Sir, I heard so much about you and I really wanted to become your servant!" One of the sailors said, "There is no place for a small boy with just one eye to stay on this ship! You are no use to us!" Another sailor said, "Let's throw this boy into the waters and feed the sharks!" A fat man said, "Master Zheng, it will be too cruel to throw him into the waters! Let me keep him and he can work in the kitchen!" Zheng He took pity and agreed.

The fat man said to One-eye, "I am the cook of this ship and now that I have saved your life, you'd better start earning your living by working in the kitchen!" One-eye worked day and night in the kitchen but at least he had food to eat and a place to sleep.

One day, the cook shouted, "What happened to this fresh water barrel? Why is it empty? I must inform Master Zheng immediately!" The cook went to Zheng He's office and told him that the ship would run out of fresh water in a few days! One of the sailors said, "Sir, I saw a plot of land in front of us! Maybe we can go there and see if we can find fresh water!" Zheng He said, "I know this area is occupied by a group of very hostile natives but I guess we have no choice but to dock in one of these islands."

After a few days of sailing they found an island. Zheng He ordered the ship to dock and his sailors to get on the island. One-eye was ordered to stay in the ship but he felt so bad because he had emptied the water barrel. He really wanted to help so he quietly followed the sailors and got on the island as well. Shortly after they landed, a group of hostile natives rushed out with bows and arrows and deadly-looking weapons and started attacking Zheng He and his sailors. One-eye hid behind a rock while the fierce fight raged on.

Zheng He and his sailors (who were also trained as soldiers) had much better weapons and captured most of the natives.

Zheng He said to the natives, "My name is Zheng He and I come at the order of the Emperor of the great Ming dynasty. We come with good will and would like to barter fresh water with gold and silk." One of the natives stood up and said, "I am the leader of this island. Show me your gold and silk and I might believe you come with good will." Zheng He ordered the sailors to bring the gold and silk to show the leader. The leader was so pleased he invited Zheng He and his crew to a feast held in the evening.

One-eye overheard the entire conversation and did not trust the leader. He decided to quietly follow the natives and saw the natives put some white powder in the wine they prepared for the feast.

At night, Zheng He and his crew joined the natives for the feast and the leader raised his mug and said to Zheng He, "Let's drink to our newly founded friendship!" Zheng He was about to drink his wine and One-eye rushed out and shouted, "Don't drink!! There is poison in the wine!" One of Zheng He's sailors drank and fell to the ground. Zheng He was so angry that he ordered his sailors to kill the leader. The rest of the natives were so scared that they kneeled and begged Zheng He to spare them. Zheng He promoted one of the natives to become the leader and asked him to supply fresh water to them. He asked One-eye to supervise the natives' preparation of the water and as a good will gesture he gave the natives the gold and silk he had promised them.

Zheng He was so grateful for One-eye's assistance. He decided to take on One-eye as his apprentice and trained him to become a sailor. One-eye followed Zheng He on all of his future voyages and became a great sailor.

# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages: Alex's Travelogue

*Creative Primary School, Yu, Diago – 10*

My name is Alex. I worked as a chef on Zheng He's Fleet of ships which set sail from South China Sea to India, Africa and Arabia in the 1400s. We have done seven voyages in total.

First, let me introduce my skills and interest. I am good at cooking all kinds of Chinese dishes especially fish. My signature dish being Golden Deep-Fried Fish, a food plentiful during our voyages at sea. Besides that, I am also very intrigued in the four great inventions of China: gun powder, compass, paper making and printing techniques. These four creations have not only sparked my interest but also turned out to be the hero of our voyages.

One time, when we were travelling to India, passing across Java Sea, we saw a giant ship coming towards us. At first, we thought they were explorers, so we sailed towards them for a closer glimpse. Captain Cheng was about to order everyone to take presents out. Suddenly, they took out guns and started to fire at us. Everyone was shocked but I was calm. I told Captain Cheng that I kept some gun powder in the cupboard. Then, we fired back with the gun powder which we made into bombs. Captain Cheng and everyone on board cheered for me.

During our third voyage, the weather was fine in the beginning. But one day, the sky blurred with clouds above us. Shortly, it became stormy with horrific thunder. We could not see anything clearly because of the heavy rain. At some point, we thought we probably lost our direction of sail and got lost. Everybody on board started to panic. Then, I took out my handy compass from under the kitchen knife and taught everyone how to find North by moving the compass. They were so surprised and cheered, "That is amazing!" Finally, with the help of the compass, we arrived on the island of our destination.

When we got to land, there seemed to be nobody on the island, so we got off the ship and searched. Then we heard some kind of musical instruments behind the bush. Suddenly, someone with dark skin jumped out with an old drum, and led us to a village. We saw people fishing in the river, and children playing with seashells. We tried to talk to the village head in Chinese, but they spoke another language which we could not recognize. I suggested everyone to communicate by drawing pictures on the paper I had scrunched up in my back pocket. We learned that they are from India, and they liked spicy food. We stayed there happily for two days.

After a few years, we finished seven voyages and I made many friends from different countries. I helped Captain Cheng a lot throughout the whole journey. He rewarded me with mounds of gold and jewellery. I enjoyed the rest of my life in peace, knowing that one day, the four great inventions will come in handy once again.



# The Tale of a Hero

*Diocesan Girls' Junior School, Chan, Ki Yi Charlotte – 10*

The stinging pain shot up my leg in seconds like a raging fire, my brain was shutting down, my body went numb. “Am I going to die?” I cried, fighting for every breath. Strangely, I felt very tired. I collapsed and closed my eyes, letting darkness claim me...

“Hello!” an ear-splitting noise woke me. “Who are you?” I asked, half-closing my eyes, slowly adjusting to the rays of sunlight that blinded my eyes. When I could finally see clearly, I found myself in a totally different environment. I was in a big room made mostly of dark wood, it was almost like a stable. The smell of fresh hay filled my large, soft nose. Standing in front of me, was another giraffe. He was tall and slender, his fur was of a rich and striking coppery yellowish colour, his body was covered in splotches of tawny spots. “What’s your name?” I asked. “Jeff,” the giraffe replied. Just then, a human walked into the room. He was dressed in a colourful purple robe with intricate details on it. “He’s Zheng He, the captain of this fleet.” Jeff whispered in my ear. He then escorted Zheng He out of the room and to my surprise, I overheard them talking. “So, when are you going to include me into your great list of heroes? Well, I think you better do so as it was because of me that you have been able to travel to Africa and captured that other giraffe.” Jeff said, in an arrogant tone. “I’ll think about that later...” replied Zheng He rather shortly. ‘That other giraffe’ – were they referring to me? I was very confused. How could Jeff betray his own species and help a human to capture me from my homeland? Anger raged through my body and I furiously lifted my leg to kick open the door to the stable and ran to a quiet corner in front of the ship, hiding, waiting for a chance to escape.

Then, that very night, someone accidentally dropped a smoking pipe. Sparks and the strong odor of smoke immediately filled the front of the main ship. I was petrified, I couldn’t move a muscle, I glanced up at the sky, the once clear blue sky was shielded by a thick wall of darkness. Then, as if the condition wasn’t bad enough, the wind blew and encouraged the fire to kill everything unlucky enough to be caught by it. The air was hot. The deadly flames started growing at an alarming rate and in no time, it became a wall of flames with a fierce serpent that seemed to be gaining on me. I started to run, running so fast that I thought my legs were going to explode any second. My lungs ached, cold air bit my lungs and my breath came in short gasps, the ground beneath me blurred. Though I was exhausted, I kept on forcing my legs to push harder on the ground. Images of Jeff flashed into my brain, I knew I had to save him too. Even though Jeff wasn’t really much of a friend, he did not deserve to die. I screamed like crazy to attract other people’s attention as the ship was so big that some of the crew members hadn’t even noticed that the ship was on fire. In the corner of my eye, I saw Zheng He bolt out of his room, pulling Jeff behind him. He was staring straight ahead, mouth half-open and face deadly white. It was the fact that Jeff’s face showed no hint of shock that surprised me. As soon as Zheng He recovered from his shock, he began giving orders to the crew. “I want everyone to gather buckets of water and aim it at the fire NOW!”

Sadly though, it was no use, the flames devoured the main ship in minutes. The crew had to abandon the ship. As all of the crew members wanted to be the first to board the smaller ships sailing alongside, they kicked, pushed and screamed and made the ship deck much more crowded than it had been before. Just then, somewhere in the crowd came a blood-curdling scream, it was Jeff, he had fallen into the water. Without giving much thought, I immediately jumped into the icy cold water to save Jeff, not remembering that I could not swim either like any other giraffe. I caught Jeff in the leg, and he managed to splutter out “I-I’m sorry! I-I shouldn’t have f-f-frightened the sailor to cause this accident. I thought I could then s-s-save the ship like a h-h-hero so people would r-r-remember me. Yet, y-y-your s-s-selflessness to save me t-taught m-me what a t-t-true hero i-i-is...” Jeff said, swallowing more and more seawater. Jeff was drowning, he had used the last of his energy to tell me the truth. I was shocked, so shocked that I forgot that I was drowning too. Then, a few strong arms lifted me to the small ship with Zheng He and his crew. I had lost Jeff... I glanced back at the burning ship, I watched as the fire greedily devoured everything that proved Jeff’s existence.

I was still overwhelmed with sadness and depression when I saw a scroll drifting in the sea. I bent down and picked it up with my mouth. When I looked closer, my body trembled as I realized with a shock that the giraffe in the painting was Jeff! The slender body and the golden fur were unmistakable, it had to be Jeff. A strange thought came to my mind. Maybe there was something I could do to help Jeff to fulfill his last wish --to be remembered by everyone. I secretly hid the scroll among the other treasures in the ship... The year 2018...

“Mom, did you see that painting of a giraffe from the Ming treasure voyages?” a girl pointing to the wall of an exhibition in the museum...

# Journal of a Sailor

*Diocesan Girls' Junior School, Choi, Pui Yan Valerie – 11*

3<sup>rd</sup> year of Emperor *YongLe*

Waving, we gazed out across the sapphire-blue velvet of the sea, watching the triangular land of India gradually fade into the horizon. It became nothing more than a distant coastline, delicately outlined by the touch of the glowing sun, separating us from the many exciting adventures we have had. The adventures may be gone, but the thrilling memories will always remain. Now, the fleet headed home.

The visit to India— which was led by Admiral Zheng— had been a successful one. Aside from making a trade deal between the countries, we had seen countless items that were new to us, varying in shapes and sizes. Among all, there was one that was the most intriguing— the Tigrises. Regally, they roam amongst forests of dew-kissed grass with utmost grace, their bold, majestic stripes adorned on the flamboyant coating of their fur. Their blazing feline eyes resemble the lustrous eyes of a dragon, one that can only be found in legends, and one that can see into the deepest parts of your soul. They are like liquid orbs of amber, threateningly placid. These creatures watch with silent ferocity, their cat-like face perfectly symmetrical, evoking a sense of fear, respect, and awe in me at the same time. Yet most intimidating of all, are their formidable, bloodthirsty fangs, sharper than bronze swords. Just picturing a Tigris tearing flesh apart sends chills down my spine. Since it was such a monstrous creature, we had no choice but to leave it where it belonged. It was a pity, I thought, as it was such a beautiful beast, full of hunger and elegance.

“All crew members, prepare to switch sails,” the voice of our captain sounded through the ship. Lithely but carefully, I clambered up to the top of the mast and watched intently for instructions. As soon as Captain waved his hands in the air, I untied the sail, watching it slowly descend. Then, my fellow cabinmates hoisted the spectacular flame-red sails that, as said, symbolized the pride of the country. Captain nodded, and I slid back down, only to see the morning haze lifting off, revealing patches of fire burning in the crystalline water. Taking a deep breath, I stood a little straighter, embracing the pride that I had.

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We continued to steer across the ocean for a few weeks, following maps and a compass, and as we nearly reached home, we encountered the most dangerous thing a sailor can encounter at sea.

That day, the weather was perfect. The ocean filled itself with shimmering diamonds as it melted into the silky sky. Perfectly pillowed clouds sailed lazily across the creamy blanket of blue, leaving streaks of white behind and painting a dynamic, ever-changing picture. Golden beams of sunlight spilled out from behind them, never failing to show its face. But out of the corner of my eye, at the far corner of the flawless sky, I glimpse a sullen, menacing, even ominous cloud that started leaking. My heart stopped— a storm.

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Soon, everyone felt the cyclone. The air was sharp, and the azure sky was now replaced by a heavy sheet of lead. We frantically fixed the mast, the sails, and the wheel, adrenaline rushing in our body. Blood roared in my ears, the sense of dread pounding in every heartbeat. Whispering a prayer, I clutched the nearest rope and pole tightly, knuckles white, as everyone did. We had nothing to do at this stage, everything was to be left in the hands of Fate.

Suddenly, a jagged bolt of lightning split the ominous sky in half. Layers of thick clouds built into a thunderous deluge and torrential rain poured down like an avalanche. The gale was a tyrant. Roaring and screaming, she conjured rain and waves, splintering the boat like daggers. At the very front, trying in vain to steer the wheel was Captain, shouting orders over and over again. Beads of sweat rolled down my face as I strained to keep the sail in place, balancing the seemingly frail boat. Claws of tempestuous waves lashed our ships, tilting it from side to side mockingly. We were toys in the eyes of the brutal ocean, trapped at the very heart of the raging sea.

“Captain...two members...of our crew co...collapsed and a few were sw...swept in the o...ocean,” I heard my friend telling our captain, voice quivering. The fear in his eyes was uncovered, like glass that could be shattered at any moment. I couldn’t hear what Captain said after that.

The waves continued to surge, threatening to engulf our ship, and drag us into its bottomless depths. All we could see were the angry walls of water— dark as coal. Panic spread across my body. My lungs felt as if it carried the burden of a million rocks as I gasped wildly for breath. The only thing I could think about was not to lose my grip.

Our boat lurched back and forth as my stomach tightened. Then, it tipped. The rope broke. The pole cracked. Everything was a blur, and all I could remember was that I was plunging into the jaws of the sea...

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My body ached, and my brain was fuzzy, but I struggled, only to find myself in water. I couldn't move forwards, seawater crashing on my face, and causing me to cough and splutter. Then, I recalled what had happened. I kicked and I kicked, with hope that I could find land, but all I saw was an endless stretch of nothing. My arms flailed on the surface, desperately groping for something to hold, head pounding with an electric pain. I felt my body go weak and sank. It was all too much, and I just wanted to give up...

*No, you can't.* A voice in my head told me. *You have to survive.*

*Survive?* I thought.

*Yes.*

And so with a painful effort, I broke through the surface and started thrashing again.

# Welcome, Zheng He

*Diocesan Girls' Junior School, Pak, Hoi Wan Charis – 10*

I woke up to the deafening noise. Rubbing my eyes dreamily, I got out of bed and walked to the window. A blurry image appeared in my vision. It was huge, gigantic. As soon as I saw the clearer view of the object, I was shocked. The horn of a colossal ship honked loudly as it was sailing towards the shore. People cheered and there was a commotion.

Fleeing down the stairs, I dashed out of the house with excitement. I pushed my way through the crowd and settled right in front of the ship. A cool breeze brushed past my face softly as the ship stopped on the shore. Meanwhile, a crew of sailors stepped out of the ship in an orderly manner, several of them armed with weapons. Villagers glanced at each other uncomfortably, scared that they would take over our land.

Just at that moment, a tall man, dressed in odd, long robes embroidered with intricate patterns announced proudly, “I am Zheng He, the leader of our crew, and we have come a long way from China. We are very much pleased to have the opportunity to stay here in Dai Viet. Don't be afraid, for we are not here to invade your land!” One of our old villagers who could speak Chinese explained to us Zheng's message, we heaved a sigh of relief. And that marked the beginning of our short encounter with Zheng.

After Zheng and some of his crew settled in a small inn, some villagers and I took him on a stroll around the village. The old villager who could speak Chinese also came with us to act as our interpreter and help communicate with Zheng. Looking at the wall paintings on the houses, Zheng marvelled that China did not have such beautiful things and started to share his journeys sailing around Asia. We were entranced by his funny but exciting stories experienced in different countries, as if we had joined his journeys and were personally on the scene.

After an enjoyable half day walk, we stopped by a famous restaurant called “Queen of Noodles”. We ordered a bowl of “Phở” (Vietnamese noodle soup) for Zheng to try. He took a bite of the noodles, and squinted his eyes on the noodles, looking puzzled. We were afraid that he didn't like the noodles. Just as I was about to speak up, he exclaimed, “It smells really good! What ingredient gives such a special and refreshing taste?” “This is a special ingredient called lemongrass. It gives a lemon–lime taste with a tinge of mint and ginger.” I replied promptly. Zheng smiled, “Well, I must bring such a good thing back China for our people to taste.” We then ordered some more dishes and chatted with Zheng about the eating habit in Vietnam and China. Surprisingly, we found out that both countries had some common food cultures, like using chopsticks to eat, and rice as staple food. We even gave Zheng lot of lemongrass and other spices commonly used by us. Zheng, in return, treated us on his colossal ship a Chinese dinner. This was the first time we had chance to try the Chinese food which was so delicious, for example, wonton soup, stir fry beef with vegetable, braised pork belly, etc; we also learnt about different Chinese cooking styles.

Zheng stayed with us for a few months, we found that Zheng was not just a traveller, he was in fact very knowledgeable in many aspects; he taught our soldiers how to make different kinds of weapons; he taught farmers efficient ways to plant crops; and he even taught us how to speak Mandarin! By listening to the stories told by Zheng, we were fascinated by the prosperity and the profound cultural background of China.

The happy times always goes too soon. One clear night, when we were glazing stars on his ship, enjoying the cool breeze from the calm sea, Zheng said “My crew and I are leaving tomorrow to continue our journey to other countries. Thank you for being our escort during these days and telling me so many things about your country. I will tell our people how nice the people here are. I hope I will have chance to return to this lovely place someday in the future...” “Me too, it's a great pleasure to meet you. I...I...I...” knowing that I might not have the chance to see Zheng again, I suddenly ran out of words. The next day, all villagers and I went to the shore. Though we could not bear to part, we all waved goodbye to Zheng He and his crew.

The huge colossal ship eventually became blurry in my vision and finally, disappeared into the boundless sea.

# Qilin of Friendship

*Diocesan Girls' Junior School, Wong, Po Ying Emily – 11*

## **The fisherman**

I waded into the bay as the morning haze cleared. Before my eyes unfolded an armada of majestic warships – some as big as small islands – sailed closer one after another. They looked like mighty towering elephants, skimming through the waves of the sea. The ships' silhouettes, against the morning sun, glowed with an aura of power and might. Alarmed, I splashed back to shore, into the town centre, warning the villagers to be cautious.

A cry rose from shore. I ran to the chattering crowd of villagers, and they made way for the soldiers that were descending from the ship. They wore gold, sparkling armor that was a hundred times better than our rusty shields and swords. One of the soldiers seemed to loom above all the others, apparently the leader of the fleet.

"Dear people!" he bellowed, "we are from China, and we are here to profit and trade! I demand to see your king!"

Excited, some villagers ran inland, eager to ask the king to meet this commanding general.

The general barked an order to his crew, and our villagers stared in awe as they carried down all sorts of goods – huge porcelain vases, tapestries woven from soft velvet thread, and gold piled up as high mountains. As mere Swahili villagers, we had grown up with giraffes, elephants, and zebras. We had never paid a thought about the world beyond our village – we only ever thought about our own wonders in Swahili. And now, having all kinds of new and fascinating treasures in front of our eyes, it simply was amazing. Cheers broke into my thoughts. The king had commanded his soldiers to take out the best of our island's wares to trade, and soon everyone was bartering and trading, laughing and smiling, each wanting to get a piece of the strange yet beautiful goods from China.

The week seemed to slip past silently, and soon it was finally time for the departure of the Chinese fleet. The fleet left just as majestically as it came. In the shadow of the twilight sun, a roar was heard, and the splash of a thousand oars hitting the water broke the silent night.

## **The soldier**

"Land! Land!" the watchkeeper cried.

I could just make out a hazy, thin line creeping closer and closer – the Swahili Coast, the long and awaited destination! After ten days at sea, we had reached our last stop, the place that held all the wonders and promises before we returned to China. A ripple of excitement resonated through the ship.

As we neared the coast, I could see puny fishing boats lining the shore. Strange looking rocks protruded from the ground, and the rising sun cast a long, crimson glow on the shoreline.

Admiral Zheng called, "Dear people! We are here to profit and trade! I demand to see your king!"

Soon their king walked out in a tattered velvet robe and conversed with our leader.

For the next few days, I saw things that I had never seen before, things that amazed me. There were two animals that I admired most. One was very tall, with a neck that stretched to the sky and a docile, pointy face with two stubby horns that the Swahili called Twigia. When the Admiral saw the Twigia, he exclaimed, "A fine Qilin for the Emperor!" The other one was rather like a large donkey with black and white stripes, and a rounded snout. The Admiral called it the 'Yin Yang Steed'.

Admiral Zheng made more profit than ever in this tiny place. For days and weeks we bought Swahili's goods – elephant tusks, rhino horns and gemstones of every color. Finally, it was time for us to head back to China after almost two arduous years at sea. We headed out with the tall-neck standing proudly on board.

## **Admiral Zheng He**

As I was sleeping in my cabin, the holler of the watchkeeper broke its way into my dreams. "Land! China! Home!"

At last, we had arrived home, with our hulls filled with treasures from foreign lands. I smiled, recalling all the special places we had visited and established relationships with.

As I walked onto deck, Captain Zhu Zhen greeted me with the slightest hint of a smile.

"Good morning, Admiral. Our voyage has been most successful. The Emperor will be pleased. And we have, most importantly, developed profitable trading relationships that will last for years to come. I am sure

the Emperor will reward you greatly, Admiral.”

“Thank you Captain. We have also brought great gifts for the foreign countries, haven’t we?”

“Of course! The highest goods from China! The softest silk, the finest potteries...”

I smiled slyly. “And what do you think is the greatest gift we brought along?”

The Captain hesitated, “I would think...”

“It is you, Captain – you and your army of young men. We journeyed to them in peace. And we have shown these foreigners not only the things we made, but the people that we are. We have shown them our strengths, but more importantly, we have shown them we are a fair and peaceful people. We have shown them we are friends.”

“Ah...yes...” enlightened, the Captain was deep in thought.

I asked him, “And what do you think is the greatest thing we brought back here to China from the foreign lands?”

“The tall-necked Qilin, of course,” he answered confidently, but I shook my head. He was dumbfounded to say the least.

“Then it must be the Yin Yang Steed.”

“No, Captain. It is you, again—you and your 30 thousand men. We have been to places others couldn’t even dream of, met people that are so different from us. Each man will have his stories to tell, of different cultures, different languages and different people. Yet they aren’t people to be feared, and they aren’t people to be conquered. They are to be friends.”

# A Voyage to the Land of Camelopards

*Diocesan Girls' Junior School, Yuen, Yee Ting Hayley – 9*

“I DECLARE: Zheng He and his fleet of people set sail now off to the West!” announced the majestic and proud emperor to his people on the balcony of his palace of grandeur. The people cheered, and the atmosphere was one of happiness and joy. The emperor grasped Master Zheng He’s right hand confidently, thrusting it in the air: “The sea is so deep, and the sky is so wide. Explore the fruits of the earth, and find marvelous friendship!” Then, Master Zheng He, and his captive army, set off in a fleet of sixty boats. I was privileged to sail in the boat alongside Master Zheng He, and was given the tiresome but fulfilling job of cooking food for Zheng He’s men.

The first month went by quite peacefully, but about six weeks after setting sail, Master Zheng He warned one day, “If my forecast is correct, there will be an ominous storm coming tonight. Take my advice, be cautious and don’t go outside of your cabins as often as usual. Also, I have prepared some ginger and garlic for you all. Eat a handful of garlic cloves and rub some ginger on your belly. That way, you will prevent sea-sickness.” As you can see, Master Zheng He was a very thoughtful man. I was in charge of looking after the animals in their cabins when dinner time ended.

Later that evening, I was tucked up in my bed with a delightfully warm cup of tea and some reading scrolls. As my mind was drifting away and becoming one with the waves, I heard some pigs conspiring about their journey. “...I think we are going to a certain place to throw a superbly extravagant party. If we get to go there, we’re in for a hoot of a time!

“Objection! I think we’re going to explore the world and enlighten the whole of China!” said another pig, passionately.

“I think we’re going to eat and eat and eat new and yummy food we have never tried!” dreamed a third pig. “Our tummies will be full by midnight!”

It was certainly a funny discussion... and then I awoke from the bizarre dream!

After a few more months, we finally reached land. The place was stifling and dry! We walked around the island, looking around to see if there were any people living on the land.

Later that day, a messenger rushed back to Master Zheng He with news, “Master, Master, Master! I have discovered humans living on the island! However, they look very weird – they have very dark skin.”

Upon the news, the Master turned to his army, exclaiming and demanding, “Men, bring some gifts. Be prepared, we are going to meet people who don’t really look like us.” The men obeyed Master Zheng He’s words of wisdom, and followed his instructions obediently.

Once the men had prepared their gifts, Master Zheng He’s messenger guided the army to the location of the human discovery. During Zheng He’s reading of the introductory scroll, the who-didn’t-really-like-Zheng-He’s-people whispered and wittered to one another, “...wat sê hy...Hulle lyk so vreemd!” Then, out of the blue, Master Zheng He said proudly, “Wo men shi Zhong Guo ren!” The indigenous people seemed bewildered, but Master Zheng He miraculously managed to communicate to them with hand gestures, so they could understand. For example, he made a big circle with his arms to signify “world”. He held a person’s hand and raised it up high to imply “make friends”. But still, the people with different skin did not understand what he was saying, so we laid down our gifts on the ground as an offering.

After giving and giving and giving out our gifts of straw mats, silk and porcelain, the indigenous people finally understood we were here to make friends with each other. We had a big party, but the food was not what I expected! Indeed, it was actually bad! We tried a bun that looked totally normal on the outside, but inside, it was a disaster! It was stuffed with who-knows-what kind of meat, dipped in a sauce that was sickly sweet! So, this was when I came in handy and I informed Master Zheng He of the unfortunate buns. He asked me to teach the darker-skinned humans how to do all sorts of frying. They were overjoyed to hear about the new cooking methods, and rushed back to their homes to tell their family members all about

it. Once everyone returned, we also taught them how to grow crops on the farm, providing them with some seeds to harvest corn, wheat and vegetables. Suddenly, the people huddled together and wittered about something. After that, two men went deep into the woods and disappeared. Some time passed, and the two men came back holding a leash to a very tall and big creature, whose neck was intimidatingly long. They gave the creature to us as a present.

While on the boat, some crew members investigated the creature. Was it the mythical qilin? No, it didn't have a horn. Was it a horse? No, the neck was far too long. Oh! It seemed to be interesting and playful. I climbed up and slid down. Ouch, it hurt my butt. The neck was very dangerous for kids to climb and slide, since it was vertical and fidgeted a lot. Then what was it?

Upon our return to China, we asked an animal specialist to identify the mysterious creature. "It's a camelopard! The only place you can see it in the whole wide world is Africa! Let's put it in the vast collections of the great emperor."

Through this adventurous voyage with Master Zheng He, I learnt that spoken language is only one means to express our mind. It could be by drawings, actions, or even music! Exploring the sea not only allows us to discover new shores, but also establish precious friendships with people in different parts of the world.



# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

*Diocesan Preparatory School, Mak, Hei Tsit – 9*

Yesterday, when I was riding my scooter down the road, I hit an oak tree and passed out.

When I woke up, I found that myself lying in a hammock in a cabin. I got up, went up some stairs and found out that I was on a deck of a ship. There were people walking around, preparing food, repairing the sails, scrubbing the decks and crushing up some herbs to make medicine. And all of them were wearing ancient Chinese clothing. Then a man walked up to me. He looked like he was the captain.

“Who are you?” he asked. “What are you doing here?”

“My name is Lok Yan, and I seem to be lost,” I replied. “May I ask who you are?”

“My name is Zheng He,” said the man. “I am the admiral of the fleet. I suppose I can have you on this voyage.” He then gave me some delicious food and showed me the room I was going to sleep in.

The next day, I thought it would be a normal day. But when night came, I suddenly heard the sound of battle, I took a quick look of what was happening on the deck and saw that there was a fierce battle around me. I went onto the deck. There were people shooting arrows with fire or gunpowder on the ends. I saw that the ships that we were battling with belonged to pirates. I also heard sounds like ‘Boom!’ or ‘Crash!’ The ship rocked and swayed. It was terrifying. At that point, I saw the flag they put on the ship. The word ‘Ming’ was written on it. I thought, “Wow! That means this is a very long time ago.” I stayed awake until dawn. I could still see it clearly now. The pirates lost and we won! Now there were five boats following us, they were carrying some imprisoned pirates.

After a few weeks of giving gifts, trading with kings of different countries, we finally reached East Africa and met a giraffe there. Zheng He and his crew did not know what it was. They felt so surprised to see a creature with a long neck. They called it ‘Kirin’. They thought it had magical powers which came from the gods.

There we also met other animals, such as lions and parrots. We also gave them silk, tea leaves and taught them skills. They gave us their specialties like pepper, paints and dyes in return. On the way back to our countries on the deck of the ship, I accidentally slipped and fell, and fell, and fell.....

When I woke up, I found myself lying on a hospital bed. I looked around and saw my family next to me. I was so glad and relieved to see them. I hugged them immediately. I felt something in my pocket. They were some peppercorns that looked exactly like the ones that we got when we traded with the East African people back in my dream! That reminded me to tell the whole dream to my family when we got back home. It was an unforgettable experience.

Still, I had a big question in my mind. Was it a dream or not?

# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

*Diocesan Preparatory School, Wong, Cheuk Ying Charmaine – 10*

There was once a man called Zheng He. He loved travelling around the world and longed to go on sea voyages around the world.

It wasn't then when he became a trusted advisor to the prince, but unfortunately, the young prince died. A war broke out, and he was one of the commanders during this campaign. After the war, as the young man had helped a lot to win the war, he was rewarded to be the grand director. Soon, he became the Chief Envoy, and this was when his dream, the sea journeys he longed for began.

He gathered some crews, and a fleet of ships, with his flagship, called The Treasure Hind. He and his crew wanted to find spices to bring back to China, so people could try out something new, but at the same time, they also wanted to give away some items to the people who were in need. They also hoped to learn more about the world.

After loading the ships with cargo, such as silk, a large military force and weapons, the crew boarded the ships and set off. Soon, the sun set on the horizon, and China was nowhere to be seen. Zheng He decided to stop, and after a meal of vegetable soup, the exhausted crew soon fell asleep.

It was an eerie midnight, and some pirates had their eye on the fleet of ships. They decided to attack them and take all the cargo for themselves. While the pirates were sneaking off to grab their weapons, fortunately, one of the members of the crew heard the pirate's plan as he couldn't sleep. He also noticed there was a tiny hole at the bottom of the pirates' ship. The young man quickly alerted the crew, and told his plan to everybody, and they also approved his feasible plan.

Zheng He sent some sailors to make the holes in the pirates' ship bigger so that the boat would sink, and some of them put some flour inside the opponents' cannons so they wouldn't work. On the other side, the rest of the crew added some rotten eggs to the mixture of the cannon roundshot so that not only the body of the ship would be damaged, it would have an unbearable stench.

When the pirates finally came back to the dock armed with weapons, they found themselves surrounded in a disgusting stench. But the worst was yet to come ——— their ship was sinking fast! Before they could send anybody to mend the ship, the ship sank and disappeared into the ocean. The crew toasted the person who had come up with the evil plan, and everybody on board enjoyed themselves thoroughly till dawn.

After another day at sea, they arrived at a little village. The chief gave a welcoming feast to the crew, and in return, Zheng He gave him some silk and gold and a little more treasure from the cargo. At night, the crew slept in a big hut which was very comfortable. Two days passed by quickly, and the chief gave him some spices as a parting gift. Soon, it was time to leave.

The crew continued travelling until they reached India.

When Zheng He and his crew arrived at India, the king welcomed them warmly with a huge banquet. The next day, Zheng He discussed if they could trade some spices for valuable items, such as silver and rolls of silk. The king was happy to do so. In exchange, Zheng He received a huge amount of spice and loaded onto his ships. They soon set off again.

The crew wanted to reach Africa and Arabia, so they continued sailing southwest. They wanted to find more about the cocoa beans that are grown in Africa. But although Zheng He and his crew were skilled sailors who knew a lot about pirates, they didn't know that the most dangerous, and also the best-known pirate Ethan, also nicknamed Evil Ethan, was lurking somewhere in Arabia, and the worst was yet to come.

A few days later, when the crew docked their ship near Arabia, Evil Ethan noticed their fleet of ships and immediately formed a plan with his well-trained pirates.

But there was something the pirates didn't know. When the pirates were discussing about their plan, Zheng He saw their ship and quickly opened one of the windows to eavesdrop. He thought, "Part of my crew are excellent rope swingers. What if the rope swingers pour flour into the cannons, and send one of them to kill their cook, and poison their food and liquids? This might work out." Zheng He quickly announced his plan to his crew, and every one agreed to carry out the plan.

The crew quickly prepared the weapons, but this time, they added some poisonous gas bullets to the mixture of the cannons. The rope swingers wore masks to prevent the poisonous gas, and before twilight, they started carrying out their plan.

Their plan worked smoothly, but the pirate captain and few of the pirates refused to eat. With a sudden, Zheng He's ship aimed some cannons at their opponents' ship. Within a minute, nearly all the pirates were dead, except for those who wore masks in time.

When Zheng He was pretending to find one of his crew on the pirates' ship, Ethan aimed his gun at him, but suddenly some rope swingers knocked all of the pirates out and they disappeared into the ocean. Zheng He returned with his crew in triumph as they had won the battle and started to prepare for a journey back to China.

When Zheng He was back to China, he presented the spices to the emperor, who was delighted. He received a huge reward, but donated half to the needy, and divided the rest for his crew. Zheng He didn't care about money, but bore in mind to start a new journey soon.

# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

*Diocesan Preparatory School, Yip, Chi Ching Andrea – 11*

Work, work, and work. That's what we all do these days. The timbers of our ship creaked underneath his feet as our captain paced on the deck. "You! You, you and you, get it MOVING!" Mianhao yelled. We hastily scuttled to do our tasks. As I scrubbed the dirt-caked seat of the toilet, I couldn't help but think... How much more exciting it would be if something *would* actually happen...

All of a sudden, the whole ship tilted to one side as if struck by a giant wave. The clattering of feet pounded the deck as everyone rushed up to see what was happening. As I crawled up from the head, something heavy flew towards me and struck me in the skull. The next thing I could recall was darkness.

I woke up to find Mianhao leaning over me, as well as the worried faces of my crew members.

"Are you okay? For a second I thought that you had lost the number of your mess." This came from Zheng, the son of Mianhao and his ever-loyal second in command.

"Zheng!" Mianhao snapped. "It isn't proper to talk about such things aboard ship!" He straightened and pulled his robe closer around him, shivering. "Ghosts may hear you!" Zheng stood, red-faced.

"I'm sorry... It won't happen again."

"It better not."

Their little exchange was interrupted by Yui, our ship's lookout, shouting, "Land in front of us, and incoming!" Mianhao quickly scurried forward and peered out.

"It appears that you are right. Crew, prepare for landing."

The ship docked at a mysterious port, which had faded into view from the distance. Everybody slowly disembarked, me feeling a bit queasy. We walked onto the earth, hair waving and clothes flapping in the wind. Looking around, I could see a plain stretching out beyond my field of vision, and the faint silhouette of houses and towers not a kilometre away.

Mianhao seemed to have noticed the same thing. He commanded us to go towards the town. When we were fairly close to the buildings, I noticed something odd. There was no friendly chatter drifting around the buildings. No gleaming candlelight in the windows, welcoming travellers to their shelters. No animals – not even a single chicken feather. Unlike my village back home, this town seemed utterly deserted.

Our footsteps echoed on the stone cobbles of the streets. The heels of our shoes made clicking noises. This normal sound seemed weirdly eerie in such a place like this... Maybe Mianhao was right? Did ghosts really exist?

Suddenly, an old woman stepped out behind the remnants of a crumbling farmhouse. In her left hand, she carried a meat cleaver dripping with fresh blood, and in her right, held a glistening butcher's knife. Her eyes were gleaming with joy.

The faces of my crew paled immediately. We were about to turn tail and flee, when the old woman exclaimed in a delighted voice, "It's very, very nice to meet you!" She noticed the horrified and startled looks on our faces, whose eyes were not straying from her hands.

"Oh my goodness! I'm really sorry!" She quickly dropped the weapons, which let out a resounding smash as they connected with the floor. "My name is Maria... It's an absolute pleasure to meet you, travellers!"

Zheng quickly stepped in front of her. "You have heard of me, of course. My name is Zheng He, and I'm the best sailor that the seven seas have ever seen!" I rolled my eyes. Surely Zheng would never miss the opportunity to show off even with surroundings like this.

The rest of our crew exchanged looks. They seemed to be on the same wavelength as I was on.

*Hssssssss!* Everyone swung around to look at the old lady, who had to be the one making that strange noise.

But this time...she was not alone.

Snakes had twined up her arms and legs, wrapping around her torso and head. They had completely covered her body and facial features, leaving only her eyes exposed. Mianhao asked in a shaky voice, "Are you alright?"

"Don't worry, dearies... This is a very normal occurrence for me..."

Her eyes had started to glow green.

The crew screamed and scattered off in all directions. Snakes uncoiled from the lady and sped off towards them, chasing them off to the back streets and alleyways. Only I stood my ground.

She turned her face towards me. "Aren't you scared?"

In fact, I was very much so. I furiously racked my brain, trying to think of a viable solution. I suddenly remembered: During our trips to the more outward cities of the seas, I had received a present. The man who gave it to me promised that I would help me in any situation.

I pulled out the canister from my bag. It had strange writing on it that I could not decipher, plus a liquid that seemed contained in it.

The writing looked like this:

PEPPER SOLUTION

I frantically splashed the liquid all over the old woman. At once, her flesh seemed to burn and wither, curling in on itself. The snakes which were terrorising my crew had the same reaction, shriveling up and dying in the middle of the street.

With the same panic gripping everyone, we sprinted back to the ship, talking about our miraculous rescue.

From then on, I gained a lot more respect among the crew, and was no longer reduced to the more laborious tasks of menial cleaning.

The West really has a lot to offer.

# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

*Discovery Bay International School, Kothari, Aashi – 9*

Many years ago the empire of China and Zheng He decided to set a team to build over 300 boats. What they had in mind was that there would be a large group that would sail around the world and back. Months had passed by and the big day had come. There were people pushing and shoving their way through the crowd to take a closer look at the ships and the team. After about an hour, the team had assembled on the ship and they were on their way.

As they were making their way through the sea, the waves were suddenly beginning to get rocky and their ship was shaking furiously. A thunderstorm and lightning struck their ship. A few moments later, they had washed up on an island that was not far away from China. It was India. Someone shouted, “I see some other pirates!” everyone turned to look in the direction he was pointing. “They look friendly, maybe they could help,” said Zheng He. The members of the crew exited the ship and walked to the pirates.

As they approached the pirates, one of the team members tripped and the other pirates just sat there laughing. Finally they spoke up, “Sorry you fell, it was our trap to keep away intruders.” Zheng He and his team told the story to the pirates and they agreed to help but they were up to no good. After a good night's sleep, they woke up to find a surprise. Zheng He struggled to get out of bed and bombs were flying everywhere. Zheng He told them to fight. His last words had echoed through the room and in 5 minutes everyone had set off to fight.

The battle had begun. The Chinese and the Indian pirates were fighting furiously. Bombs were flying everywhere, destroying every single thing. The bombs were toys flying around a kids room. It was like a never ending battle. The Indians and the Chinese were tired of fighting and so when the Chinese pirates got the chance they snuck out of India and were on the ship home.

As they got down the ship, many journalists were gathering around the sailors, eager to know what had happened. The team were very proud of themselves. They might not have sailed across the world and back but they had succeeded in returning home safe and sound. Today they are made heroes around the world.

# Alive

*Dulwich College Beijing, Carmichael, Lili – 10*

As soon as Arrow woke, his friend came rushing into his room and shouted, “Arrow, Arrow, it’s Saturday! It’s *hong dou bao*, your favourite!”

“Oh, yeah! You know me, Lotus, always forgetting about things. Even, about my favourite— red bean buns,” said Arrow, lying back down “But just give me a few more minutes...”

“C’mon, out of bed, sleepy head. Otherwise there’ll be no more left!” she said, before swiftly leaving the room. He groaned but got up. Once dressed, he slid the carved, cherry-wood door open and walked to the food counter. Arrow poured some herbal tea and shoved mounds of red bean filled buns on to his plate. Wolfing down his breakfast, Lotus sat down next to him as captain Zheng He came into the room. “The head of the boat is falling off. We need... You!” he announced, pointing at Arrow, “Go please our guide with our precious melted gold, let him continue with us on our journey to Burma.”

“Yes, Captain,” replied Arrow as he put his plate away. He scurried off to the gold room and was out of sight in a second.

As he approached the head of the boat, gold-filled bucket in hand, he thought about it. The head of the boat truly *was* a head. A tourmaline green, ruby-eyed dragon head. Hand carved and carefully painted, it was genuinely a master piece, and nobody wanted it to fall into the ocean as it was their guide of their journey to Burma. It, of course, had a name, *Fei Teng*. It meant *ebullience— bubbling enthusiasm*. Of course, it *gave them* ebullience; there was a rumor that said it was blessed to protect.

Finally, he got to the dragon head and slowly started pouring the shimmering gold into the crack between the head and the boat. Even though the gold was already turning solid, Arrow heard a cracking sound that seemed to be coming from the head. *That’s weird*, thought Arrow, *the gold is hardening right before my eyes—*. Without warning, the head gave one last crack and fell into the never-ending sea. An emerald green blur shot up from the ocean and into the silver clouds. Dumbstruck and speechless, Arrow gaped and stared at the sky. Panicking frantically, he tried to calm himself down and thought, this is only a dream. Go to bed and everything will be just fine. With shallow breathing, he headed towards his room and slid into bed.

When Arrow awoke, he almost had a heart attack. The head of an emerald green dragon with ruby red eyes poked into Arrow’s room, staring at him with eager eyes. He jerked up and slowly, got out of bed, breathed heavily and never took his eyes off the magical creature. Eventually, he approached the dragon. Breathing deeply, he carefully lifted his hand and placed it on the dragon’s head and softly stroked its scaly head. It was surprisingly calm and seemed to be relaxed...until Arrow heard footsteps. Thinking of an excuse, he spun around to see Lotus gaping at Arrow and the dragon. She pointed her finger at them and stuttered,

“You...i-it...d-d-dragon...” Arrow put a finger on his lips and whispered, “I—its head was just poking in,”

“O-Okay. W-what are w-w-we going to d-do about it?” stammered Lotus.

“Let’s tell the story teller, o-or the captai—”

“No! L-lets j-just take it t-to the story teller,”

Silently, the children slipped past the dragon and dashed to the Story Room, where infants sat around an elderly man with a long, silver beard. “Sir, come quick!” Lotus and Arrow said in unison.

Back in Arrow’s cabin, the man rubbed his chin as he stared at the now sleeping dragon. “Mm... yes...you, are a special young man,” he said

Arrow gazed at him, “Me?! How?”

“You were chosen by the gods; very lucky you are. They chose you to be the Controller.”

“Me!?” he repeated as Lotus gazed at him, “But I’m just a messenger and cleaner. I’m just *me!*”

“Yes, exactly. You will know how to control *Fei Teng*, it will come naturally to you. I will inform Zheng He,” the old man said and very slowly left them. About ten years later, the man was finally out of earshot.

“This dragon,” Arrow said, pointing at the dragon, who was still sound asleep, “Is *Fei Teng*? The head of the boat?” He recalled the green blur, the same colour of the *alive* dragon.

“I s-suppose so, knowing the story teller is very wise,” replied Lotus.

They glanced at the dragon and decided Arrow should try to be the Controller. In the first attempt, Arrow fell off the creature’s back when he tried to get on. In the second attempt, he managed to sit without falling. The next thing to do was to get out of the hallway, but it miraculously came with ease. At first he felt an energy coming from the beast, silver and gold line swishing around them until, suddenly, they were out on the deck. *Okay, now for the dreaded part—flying*, thought Arrow. There were antennae like things with

lightbulb-shaped tips that came out of the dragon's head which he guessed he would hold onto like reins. Pulling randomly, he made it lurch forward and leap off the ship. He kept pulling, but this time up, and a wave of relief came over him as the dragon flew upwards. Grinning from ear to ear, he leaned forward, and the dragon went faster. The wind was refreshing as it blew in his face, and the view of the glistening deep blue from high above was breathtaking.

Instantly, Arrow knew he loved being the chosen one and couldn't wait for the exciting adventures ahead. Adrenaline shot through his veins like fireworks on Chinese New Year. His heartbeat pounded like a drum in his mouth. Exhilarated by his new purpose, he hollered into the infinite sky, "I AM *ALIVE!*"



# Ming Li's Great Adventure!

*Dulwich College Beijing, Herbert, Oliver – 9*

Wokou: Japanese pirates who raided the east coast of China.

Zheng He: a famous Chinese explorer.

Junk: a Chinese ship.

*The smell of tangy, tasty meat and earthy charcoal filled his nostrils, as Ming Li dreamily gazed at a cotton wool cloud drifting toward him. His ancient dwelling was made from oak wood. Inside, lying in the middle of their one room was a handmade table. Next to that were two strips of silk, on which they slumbered. His younger sisters leapt joyfully over the long piece of rope that they were playing with. His mother and father were hanging the laundry.*

*Daydreaming, Ming Li looked back at the beautiful cloud drifting by, something was not right... The cloud somersaulted in the breeze and revealed a dark grey sinister side. The idyllic scene was abruptly interrupted by the crazy barking of their neighbour's dog, Ping-Ping. Suddenly, the breeze hardened. In a flash, something sliced through the washing line like a knife through butter. A pirate emerged and with a grin on his face cut off his father's finger! Screaming at the top of his lungs, Ming Li sprinted as fast as he could away from the violent scene. Behind him he left all his childhood memories, his mother and father, his sisters, his best and only friend called Wang Li, everything!*

*Ming Li ran all day and night without food and water. Eventually, he reached a reasonably sized fishing port. He could see the fishermen coming in and out of the harbour. Docked at the end of the port, could it be?! Zheng He's colossal galleon! As fast as a hunting lion, he raced up to the giant junk. Scouting about on the ship, he found an empty cabin and hid inside a giant box. Luckily, inside the box were food and drink supplies. Ming Li got comfortable and immediately started snoring louder than his father.*

*The following day, Zheng He came bursting into the completely empty cabin except for the giant box. Surprised to find an intruder on the ship, he tied Ming Li to the giant mast. Zheng He bellowed questions to the terrified Ming Li. After spluttering out words, to his surprise they finally released him and made him cabin boy. This is how Ming Li's adventure began...*

*A few years later...*

*Sailing day and night, the person in the bird's nest spotted something on the horizon. A prized jolly roger flapped in the cold breeze, their cutlasses and daggers, PIRATES! Trembling and fearful, alarmed and afraid, he grabbed a massive sword and hopped onto the Japanese pirates' deck.*

*Ming Li remembered his first fight. It was horrible! But now he knew how to handle a sword, throw a spear and how to stab with a knife. Dodging and diving the spears that were being thrown at him, he stabbed one of the pirates, cut another and repeated that sequence. Zheng He's crew was so strong and mighty that they hadn't lost anyone in fifty fights! Ming Li reached another pirate and saw that he had only four fingers! Ming Li vaguely remembered someone who only had four fingers... HIS FATHER!!! His father's finger had been chopped off when Ming Li escaped from his town when the pirates attacked. He must have been persuaded to join the Wokou!*

*Ming Li fought his father by pushing him and then tripping him up. To threaten him he put the point of his dagger at his dad's neck. As his dad complained, Ming Li tied him up and threw him into the empty cabin and double locked the door, then ran back onto the pirate ship and started battling again.*

*Later, Ming Li showed Zheng He to the room he had left his dad in. His dad explained to Ming Li and Zheng He why he had joined the Wokou. Thanks to Zheng He's persuasion, his dad, who was called Zhang Li, agreed to join their crew.*

*Aboard Zheng He's mighty ship, they were trying to track down the vile pirates on their ghastly ship because Zhang Li told them that the pirate on that ship was no ordinary pirate, it was Wang Zhi!!! Wang Zhi is a Chinese traitor that caused all the chaos in the sea. All Chinese ships have been attempting to find him.*

*Thankfully they reached an island in the middle of nowhere so they could fill up their water supplies. But docked on the north side of the island was Wang Zhi's pirate ship! Sneaking up behind the ship they realised that no one was aboard. Peering to the south of the island he could see someone stood on the edge of a cliff. Telling the captain, he immediately knew that it was Wang Zhi. The captain ordered him to "capture Wang Zhi and if you have the chance, kill him".*

*Like a fox, Ming Li edged closer and closer to the cliff. Little did Ming Li know, Wang Zhi already knew he was there. Wang Zhi unsheathed his sword and the battle began! Clashing their swords together and attempting to stab or cut each other. Wang Zhi lifted up his sword and just before it reached Ming Li's neck, Ming Li dived away. Unfortunately, Ming Li misplaced his footing and nearly toppled down into the murky waters below. Hearing something unusual, he glanced down the hill and saw that his crew were waving at him and screaming, "THE MEGALODON!". Ming Li looked down the cliff and saw a huge fin circling. Ming Li focused back to the battle. Wielding his sword, he realised that Wang Zhi wasn't concentrating. So, he crept up behind him, put his sword next to his neck and pulled back, beheading him and then pushing his remains off the edge of the cliff and down to the megalodon's huge teeth.*

*Peace returned and Wang Zhi was no more...*

*The End*

*结束*

# The Ming Treasure Voyages

*Dulwich College Beijing, Jacob, Manav – 11*

Darkness crept onboard and the crew grew silent.

It was our 64th day at sea and it was one of our worst so far. Thunder rumbled near us as lightning struck the water, causing it to shriek in pain. We would have been petrified, of it, if it wasn't for the man who led us—Captain Zheng He, Commander of the Ming treasure fleet and amongst one of the boldest people I've ever encountered.

Cambodia, you'd better be worth it.

The weather didn't budge; and neither did the captain. "Keep going," he'd grumble each time we requested a change in route. The nights were cold and pretty soon day was too. It wasn't exactly the most joyful thing to do.

At last the words were said, "We're here!" Zhang Wei, the second-in-command yelled. Cheers erupted around me as brooms were thrown to the air. "Calm down, calm down," the captain ushered, though even he couldn't hide his smile.

We were denied entry. If there's one thing about the captain, it's that he doesn't take no for an answer. Ever. Things got nasty very quickly. The PLA (People's Liberation Army) were taking over the Junk and we were forced to go below deck. 360 soldiers covered our ship. War was dawning.

The sounds of gunshot, rage, and death echoed around us. Each time we thought we were safe; another explosion would erupt overhead.

At last, it was over. Not a sound was heard from the upper-deck. We were safe. Suddenly, the top of the staircase creaked. We froze. Not a soul dared breathe. Footsteps. We exchanged glances, the footsteps were descending towards us. We huddled together. It slowed, then changed. Something or someone had begun rolling down the stairs with a "humph" on each step. Finally, it was in our room.

His hand was sliced off; his face was covered with cuts. Broken armor rested on his chest revealing a wounded stomach. Broken armor, yet Chinese armor. It was Zhang Wei, the second-in-command. A scream reverberated through the lower deck from one of the other crew members but was quickly silenced with the trembling hand of another one of us, as we watched the lips of Zhang Wei move.

"Sangkram nih min chh te yeung nung theuka dakamm vinh." We gasped in astonishment, he was speaking Khmer, the language of the Cambodians. We looked towards Hang Ruo, the junks translator, for help. "The war is not over; we shall strike soon." He translated with a cold stare upon the ground. We followed his gaze to a small portrait of Zheng He lying next to a peeling wall. "The captain!" Hang Roa exclaimed, "You four, go look for the captain. We three will stay back and ensure Zhang Wei's wellbeing." Hang Roa then got up, and walked towards the painting. He picked it up, peered down whilst running his finger along the soft creases of the picture. He began to place it back down when he noticed a small, spherical shaped ball with light which flashed at each sound. Hang Roa bent down, then started reaching out to it. "Hang Roa, No!" Meifan exclaimed, but it was too late.

It started with his hand. Small specks of dust falling off. Then the arm. Then the body. Then he was gone. One second he was here standing next to us, and the next he was removed. After everything he had done for us, for China. The commitment, the effort; All to be taken from the face of our world without hesitation. To the universe's disposal. To a place no living man has been before. Alone. Afraid. Yet still gone.

"Give him water. That should wake him." Hang Ruo directed. I woke up to find both Mei fan, Li Wei and surprisingly, Hang Roa, all looking down to me. "Where am I? What happened? How on Earth did I get here and Hang Roa! You are...you're...dead."

"Dead!" Hang Roa laughed, "What do you mean dead? According to what I know I'm very well alive!" and with that he started pinching himself which made all of us roll on the floor laughing. "Why are you laughing?" I asked quizzically as he looked around, then realized where we were. "How are we, outside?" I exclaimed, getting up. "Uh, because you were sleeping for so long that the captain himself said he wanted his best patrolling officer on field and not busy sleeping."

"You are one tough sleeper man!" Li Wei chuckled,

"Ya, we tried waking you up but no matter what we did you didn't wake up!" Hang Roa said,

"So we took you outside and splashed that water on your face." Mei fan finished. It was at that moment that I realized that I was soaking wet from head to toe. "Well okay then," I said, "So then where are we going next?"

“Well according to what the captain said and the direction we are facing and all the coordinates on this map,” Li Wei paused, “We’re going to a place called...”

“ Home” interrupted a tall man with a wooden leg and eye patch on one side of his face—a pirate, “To call your mommies because there are some new bullies in town!”

“But we don’t need no mommies!” We fired back.

“Because they have me ...

Captain Zheng He!”

# Ming Voyages

*Dulwich College Beijing, Lam, Yoko – 10*

Blazing sunshine beat down on the ocean, illuminating the turquoise waves. The ship full of bounty thrust onwards, navigating the blustery winds, in search of the unknown, desperate to share her wealth of treasure with deserving souls.

On the deck was a boy, the youngest of the crew, scouring vigorously and watching others hustle about the captain's commands. Captain Zheng He, a well-respected man, was currently a trustworthy servant of the Yongle Emperor, who had specially plotted the voyage and was his benefactor.

Stunning everyone into silence, Zheng He bellowed in rage. Everybody scurried downstairs to observe the crisis. Intrigued, the boy followed the crowd. The nimble boy managed to squeeze to the front. A stowaway! Glancing at the slim boy that was no older than himself, he noted the streaks of black hair peeping through his tall camouflaging hat and the drooping white sleeves of a Chinese.

"Sorry sir," the stowaway stammered in fluent Chinese, "Please, sir, forgive me. I can fight on this ship for you." Dumfounded that the boy could speak in their own mother tongue, everyone curiously awaited the captain's verdict.

Zheng He paused, "There's no need of you in this cupboard, better to have more crew. Feng, our cabin boy, will guide you to his cabin, which you will share, and show you to the weaponry to let you pick out a sword that suits you. The rest of you, back to work!"

Murmurs arose as everyone filed out, eyeing the stowaway. Holding the boy's wrist, Feng led him to his cabin. Again, he couldn't help staring at the stowaway. As he looked closer, this peculiar person reminded him of his close friend, Wang Xiu Ying. But he couldn't be.

"What's your name?" Inquired Feng.

"Wen Hou."

Feng, wary of Hou, steered him to the weaponry, departing Hou to single out his preferred fighting tool. A fortnight later, when the moon was beaming down onto the ship, like lights for a stage, Hou settled on the edge of his bed. When he was certain only Feng was looking, Hou took off his black hat for the first time and revealed long black hair, with a bun at the top. The tips glistened in the moonlight as his ink-coloured hair swayed in a light merry tune. The only person he knew who looked like this was...

"Xiu Ying?"

"Yes, Feng, yes." With that, Xiu Ying slid her hat back on and shut her eyes, ready for bed, quiet as a mouse. Feng shut his eyes, trying to soothe his astonishment. However, he tossed and turned in bed the whole night. Could the fatal secret be kept?

The sun was long above their heads when Feng emerged from his dreams. Hang on, thought Feng, there's no sunlight! Out of the filthy window, he realised that the sun's duty had been misplaced by the menacing clouds, cackling their evil laughs as their sons struck lightning at the ocean; that the ship was being tilted from side to side, struggling against the strong currents with her might and that the waves were roaring for all they were worth.

Getting ready for the day, he saw that beds were all vacant except his own. Feng scrambled onto the deck and vomited violently off the side of the ship. Scanning his familiar surroundings, he glanced at Xiu Ying, who was slaying tentacles with a shining sword, fresh from the weaponry.

Purple tentacles were all over the place, attempting to drown the ship. Sighting Feng's green face, Xiu Ying, who had been fighting until the interruption, hurried to Feng's side, dropping her sword without meaning to. The fighter retrieved her sword, examining it for dents. In her distracted moment, the monster squeezed her so tightly that she could barely fill air into her lungs! Xiu Ying wriggled, resulting in failure of escaping. Her sword was tossed onto the ship and her disguise tumbled off, unraveling her photogenic hair. The cover was blown! His new friend, Chong, tossed the fallen weapon at Feng. Too far to be of any help, Feng clasped the weapon anyways, hoping for a miracle.

"What now?" Feng questioned the captain. Silence greeted him. Chong pulled him aside. "I think the captain's mad at you. It might be because of you and the girl...". How did *he* know?

Before Feng could speak, he was abruptly interrupted by Chong.

"She spoke like a girl, her hat appeared to be fit to burst so hair was probably stuffed with hair underneath, it was never taken off in public and she cared for you a great deal..." He glared his blazing ebony eyes. Oh. Chong's bed was on the other side of his so, Feng deduced, Chong must've secretly spied on them that deadly night.

"Right. Give the captain my apologies." Feng turned away before his friend could peek at the lonely tear rolling down his cheek, leaving a trail of sparkling water.

Cloudy white tears streaming down his pale face, the cabin boy strode into his room, collapsed onto his bed and opened his confider. Feng jotted down in his journal:

It's my fault Xiu Ying is taken as the Kraken's prisoner. My fault I blew her cover. My fault that the captain and Chong is burning with rage. My fault I distracted Xiu Ying. I should've been there to help her, like she's always done for me. That's why she was here in the first place, to protect me, to be here for me, to save me as she always does.

Finally, I understand it. But even if I do, what use will it be now?

Everything's my fault. I owe it to Xiu Ying to make things right. Like it was before I got tangled up in this mess, before Xiu Ying came on board, before she showed me her true identity. I'll save her, I will. I'll make amends with the captain and Chong. I'll make the wrongs into perfect rights.

I must. For Xiu Ying.

# The Parrot Who Saved the Day

*Dulwich College Beijing, Liang, Ryan – 10*

A wash of crimson illuminated the atmosphere, spreading a spectrum of red through the sky, crescendoing the diamond-tipped waves into blood-shot brilliance. A variety of birds soared gracefully across the horizon. One parrot, distinguished from the others, swooped down from the sky and landed on Captain Zheng He's shoulder.

What was this? *Who* was this? This ... was *me*.

It all began on a normal school day. When I entered the building, I realized that the first lesson was library, my favourite. So, I strolled into the cavern of books with the class and immediately, we scattered across the library. The shelves were abundant with stories, nearly overflowing onto the marble floor. I scanned the shelves for an intriguing book. Eventually, I found it – *The Ming Treasure Voyages*.

I lifted the dusty cover, anticipating a story. But when I opened it, a bright, blazing light blinded me, the world beginning to spin out of control; *what was happening?* Shelves collapsed, novels and reports scattered the floor and the library began to whirl uncontrollably until...

Everything was silent.

I looked around; I was on a ship. I was on a person's shoulder, who was looking into a mirror. However, realization hit me when I glanced into the mirror. I was a ... parrot.

So, there I was. A parrot. Captain Zheng He's parrot on an ancient, Chinese ship.

"Stop daydreaming!" Captain demanded to a startled, filthy young boy, interrupting my thoughts, "Scrub the deck!"

"Sorry, captain..." the boy anxiously mumbled, careful not to exasperate the captain.

As he dragged his feet while mopping the floor, he noticed me staring at him; I was still wondering where I was. Perched on Captain Zheng He's shoulder, I glanced at the ship I was on – the crew paced around on the deck, life rings hung from the side of *Ming 88* and the mast swayed gently in the warm breeze.

"Wang Jie Luo," Zheng He said, with me perched on his shoulder, "Come over here!"

"Coming, Captain!" Wang Jie Luo replied. He was Captain Zheng He's most trusted general.

"Make sure everyone is on duty. No messing about!"

"Aye aye, Captain!"

All was calm.

But that was when the shot rang out.

"All hands on deck!"

The command from Captain Zheng He caused sudden mayhem, as pirates onboard their menacing ships were suddenly within sight.

Havoc broke out. Panic flooded the *Ming 88*, screams of terror ringing in my ears. The loud clanging sounds of swords filled the ship, as the pirates began walking the plank over to the *Ming 88*. I opened my beak, to shout, "Stop! Calm down!" But instead, what came out was *Squaawk! Squawk Squaaaaawk!*

Zheng He gave a violent jerk and his hands covered his ears from the deafening sound, his sudden movements sending me plummeting towards the floor. I flew up and witnessed a ship full of fighting and destruction. I knew this was going to be a long battle.

"We are the pirates!" A voice boomed over the cacophonous clanging of swords, "The pirates of Alagonakkara from Ceylon! And we will NOT be defeated!"

It was the king that refused to stop, that refused to respect the authority, that ignored Emperor Yong Le's orders; King Alagonakkara.

"Justice will be served, King Alagonakkara." the captain replied, amidst the battle, "Just you wait."

At this moment, I decided that King Alagonakkara had gone too far – to attack the Ming 88 Fleet and attempt to loot us. So, I tried to stop him. Instantly, I flew into the air. Staring straight at King Alagonakkara standing triumphantly on the lead ship of his fleet, I soared up into the sky and plunged at him, talons at the ready...

I struck King Alagonakkara, my razor-sharped wing piercing his eye. "Owww!" King Alagonakkara winced, instantly putting his hand to his face. Pleased, I flew back to Zheng He and landed on his shoulder.

"Good job," the Captain whispered into my ear.

Meanwhile, onboard, chaos raged on. That is, until the opposing enemy stopped the fight.

"Stop!" King Alagonakkara commanded, still grimacing from the pain, "We surrender!"

The noises stopped. All the screams, all the swords clanging against each other, all the guns firing; it all stopped.

King Alagonakkara repeated, "We surrender!"

Slowly, Captain Zheng He nodded and demanded, "Your master has retreated. All pirates, get off the *Ming 88*!"

One by one, the opposing army trudged back onto their own fleet of ships. As I triumphantly watched the pirates retreat, I noticed he had a sneaky grin on his face, acting suspicious. I could see his eye were still in pain. Surreptitiously, he muttered something under his breath and pulled out his gun and directed it at Zheng He. Then, he pulled the trigger. Immediately, I flapped my wings desperately and, in a split second, Zheng He moved his head.

The bullet whizzed past me, grazing my outstretched wing. I span around to see where the bullet had flown ... straight at General Wang Jie Luo's head.

"Noooooooo!" Admiral He cried. But it was too late to do anything to stop it. Wang Jie Luo was dead. It had all happened too quickly. First, *Ming 88* won the battle, then Zheng He's most trusted general was dead. It was all a blur.

"Thank you for your help," Captain He whispered to me, "Without you, we would have lost." I was lost for words; so, I just said: *Squawk!*

Then, a bright, blazing light blinded me, the world beginning to spin out of control. I didn't want my adventure to end. But before I knew it...

I was back. Back in the library.

As I lifted the dusty cover for a second time, I read that Ceylon was the ancient Sri Lanka. After reading for quite some while, I closed the book, satisfied.

"Oh my gosh," For on the front cover of the library book, was the author; Captain Zheng He. And inside, it said, *dedicated to my parrot, who saved the day.*



# Ming Treasure Fleet

*Dulwich College Beijing, Soldati, Sophie – 11*

*The feeling of cold steel upon my neck sent a shiver up my spine. “Answer or else!” a voice bellowed into my ear...*

I was crouched in that stuffy cabinet for what felt like weeks. Time slowed down to a nearly stagnant trickle of minutes and hours. Actually, it was only two days since I hid on the ship of Zheng He, the admiral of Ming China's treasure fleet. If my hideout was discovered, my life wouldn't last long...

Suddenly the cabinet was yanked open and I rolled out into the daylight.

The next few minutes past in a blur.

Then, a terrifying voice bellowed, “Who are you? Answer or else!” I blinked my eyes open fearing whatever was coming for me. Knowing that something had to be done, my voice blurted out, “No please don't kill me! I can be useful!”

Zheng He raised his eyebrows, loosening his grip on me and motioned me to continue. Still aching with pain, I scrambled to my feet. Suddenly, someone shouted with urgency, “Captain, come quickly, 2 of our men are dead and 15 more are sick!” I saw my chance, “My Granny taught me some witchcraft. I can help!”

Zheng He turned back to me and hissed, “Later I shall deal with you.”

I had survived...for now...

The following morning, I woke up to the distant sound of yelping noises coming from the deck. It took me a few seconds to realize where I was: in the hold of Zheng He's ship. My dry mouth and cracked lips reminded me that I didn't have a drop of mouth since the port. As I was making my way to the door, an unsettling feeling began welling inside me. There was something wrong about the sounds up on the deck. Hurriedly, I made my way up the dusty staircase.

As the deck came to view, my heart sank. The air, heavy and stuffed, was filled with blood-curdling screams of people in agonizing pain. The boat was full of sailors kneeling on the wooden floor, holding their stomachs and screeching, vomiting on the floor; a horrendous sight to see. I stood frozen to the spot and stared at the scene in front of me. Feeling my bones tremble in fear, I did the only thing that came to my mind – find the captain!

As quickly as my legs would carry me, I wound my way through the disaster zone and ran for Zheng He's cabin...

Certain that the captain wouldn't be pleased to see me, I knew I had to go in. Taking a deep breath, I knocked on the heavy door. The captain was lying on a bench clutching his stomach in pain. “It's you again, what do you want?” he growled at me. “Captain, what has happened?” My voice rose to a squeak. Hesitating he replied, “All potable water on this ship was poisoned.”

“What can we do?” my voice trembled and my palms got wet, as panic flooded me. “Nothing, we all are doomed to die...”

The room span and I squatted on the floor, trying to make everything slow. Only one question knocked my mind: how could I save the sailors? Suddenly, a muffled yet familiar voice sounded in my head. Granny! “88, 88,” she repeated twice. “Key to knowledge.”

It took me a while to comprehend her wisdom: books are the key to knowledge!

As my eyes scanned the bookshelves in the captain's cabin, in the furthest dark corner an ancient book shining caught my attention. Engraved on the front was the number 88. Wondering how Granny had known, I hurried over to the mysterious volume, cautiously risking a glance at the captain who was still clutching his stomach and letting out ear-splitting cries.

A trickle of magic seeped through my fingers as they grasped the stiff, leather book. Carrying the tome, I walked over to a small round table a few feet away from the door. Opening the book to the first page, I was surprised to discover that all that was written on it was 1. Next few pages also had only the numbers marked. Suddenly, a thought struck me: I leafed through the book until 88.

There, in front of me was a sheet filled with characters. “*Wu dialect!*” I recognized with relief. Luckily, Granny managed to put some knowledge of it into my head during our few lessons. Sweat was beading on my forehead, while I was struggling through the text: the summoning spell... rain... healing... There it is, my only chance! Grabbing the book, I raced up the stairs as fast as my legs could carry me.

My heart pounded like a blacksmith’s hammer in my chest. I took a deep breath, before commencing the chant.

With the last of my words, a streak of silver split the sky and a torrent of water drained down on the sailors, cascading like a waterfall from the heavens and mercifully washing away pain and terror from the faces of the suffering crew. Sheltered from the rain by a main sail, I watched how life retuned into their exhausted bodies.

The feeling of relief was so overwhelming that my legs wouldn’t hold me any longer and I sank to the floor.

When I looked up, a tall bulky figure stumbled across the deck towards me— the Captain! I clambered to my feet and watched as tears of happiness ran down his wrinkled, weather— beaten face.

“You saved not only our lives but the whole expedition and honour of the Chinese Empire. Thank you.” These words of Zheng He filled my heart with pride.

At that very instant a sharp pain cut my stomach in two, and a wave of nausea washed over me. “Those few drops of water in a cup I found on the stairs of the hold...” was my last coherent thought...

# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

*Dulwich College Beijing, Wang, Ariel – 10*

The story you're about to hear was passed down through my ancestors. It all started in the early 14<sup>th</sup> century, when she heard the ocean rumbling beneath her...

On a winter morning, white gulls swooped and squawked in the spray of the waves, a bright red parrot dipped and swerved just ahead of the ship. On deck, a filthy teenage boy watched the birds, as if hoping he could soar with them. As he paused for a moment's rest, he licked his cracked lips with his parched tongue. Just at that moment, the bellowing voice of Captain Zheng He exploded behind him, calling his crew into formation on deck. Silently, the teenager tried to allow the shadowy corners loom over himself, but he felt the eyes of the captain pierce through him which led him to turn abruptly on the spot and face the enraged Zheng He.

"Yun, evading your assignments? Night patrol the entire night!" roared the captain. He stormed away, grumbling at the crew. As for poor Yun, he joined in with the struggle whilst weeping soundlessly.

The streets of India were filled with various stores, as the parade appeared around the crowded area.

Amongst was the little boy, Yun, transporting numerous gold. Despite the weight he was given to carry, curiosity got the best of him, and even the tears stopped dropping. It was around 6pm when they finally reached their destination, a large truck awaits as they layered the gold on top one and another. No one can hide their disappointment, for the members with high expectations they expected the majestic palace awaits them, but even with low expectations, at least a storage room!

The ship stood on the North-west coast of India, staring out to the diamond-tipped waves. As the crew boarded the ship, eyes drooping, the moon, long above their heads. Everyone else seems to be getting ready to sleep, when unfortunate Yun is getting ready for night patrol. Unexpectedly, the tears started to flow according to its own will, whilst the wind blew, swirling around the troubled boy, making him cuddle in a shadowy corner, rubbing his hands from time to time. "Hello." A mysterious voice echoed in the dark, effecting the numb boy in the corner. A shiver ran down his spine as Yun shivered uncontrollably. He didn't know what, but something was urging him on, to run, to hide from whoever is calling. However, his legs wouldn't move, only the thumping of his heart accompanied him as the night passed on hour by hour, little by little...

The next day was foggy and unwelcoming, it wasn't until 10pm when the sun was to be seen through the mist. Never were the members of AS Conqueror so silent, so unwelcoming. Deep below in Yun's heart he knew there was something exotic about the voice and it will do them no favor. The sooner the owner is found, the better.

Slouching to the hall, everyone seemed to be occupied so no one noticed him when he dragged his foot as quietly as possible into the private chambers of the Captain. Something lured him to go on, to step into the unknown. He didn't know what or who made him venture inside, only that an invisible rope seems to be tugging him on. Once again, Captain Zheng He detected his presence and was indeed irritated, which lead him to another night of patrolling the grounds. The tears were blocked by the waves of determination, Yun is going to uncover the mystery within and discover the possessor of the cold, hallow voice.

There wasn't a single light up in the sky, wasn't a single bird in sight whilst Yun faced another night of darkness alone. All that followed him is the swirling of the winds and thumping of his heart. Somehow, the voice is all Yun could think about, not the hallow within, but the mystery that lies beneath. Tonight, it showed itself again: the voice.

"Hello." It whispered softly. Yun stirred from the shadowy corner as his eyes grew into focus. There it was, the owner standing in front, ebony black hood covered her body, the only feature that is visible is her lips. Another rub of his eyes, she was gone. Yun stayed unmoved for a moment and stared blankly at the spot the figure once stood on. It wasn't until 5 minutes later when he finally came to his senses and smoothed out his eyes to make sure he wasn't dreaming. Still nothing. Nothing at all. Even the winds stopped moaning as if it was aware of another's presence. Little by little the night went on, leaving the boy standing there.

Unmoved. Untouched. Unwanted.

The sun rose and perched itself on the horizon, sending strips of sunlight through the member's window, leaving the crew awake. As for Yun, the main goal was to keep on the bright side of the Captain and don't get into any unwanted inconvenience. Arms full of gold, Yun marched down the streets of India yet again, his arm seems to be falling off as curiosity didn't accompany him. Finally, the moon uncovered itself, as they trekked down to the safety of their chambers and Yun stumbled to get an old piece of cloth to clean the deck. There was the helpless youngster, cleaning the deck whilst tiredness drizzled through him, making him slump on the deck, falling asleep.

The voice didn't bother him that night, only the sound of the waves whispering and the wind whooshing. On the vast ocean, was the AS Conqueror, as a boy slept motionlessly into the night. Glorious sunshine glinted off the crystal-clear waves, as the ship drove on with its AS Conqueror fluttering in the blustery winds. As for the boy, he went away too and was never seen again... The voice in the story was amongst us, the youngest siren, daughter of the Queen. She's now the eldest of the sirens, soon to deacease.

# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

*Dulwich College Beijing, Wang, Catherine – 11*

*Three weeks ago... As Captain Zheng He told his diligent crew to gather around immediately, his talking, magic and helpful hook began to remind him impatiently again, "2 days left! 2 short days left! Get moving or else it shall be death for all!" No one else knew about the danger except the anxious captain.*

*He was on a mission. A mission to save mankind. "Okay. Listen up everyone. Here is our plan..."*

It was the third day when I finally regained consciousness. There I was, body all scrunched up in a dusty, crammed shoe box as weak as prey being hunted. The smell of ash got to me, I coughed a million times. Although it was only the third day, it felt like years. The only thing I could hear was the sound of my heart beating as loud as a drum. As I thought of my sickly grandmother, tears rolled down my rough, dry cheeks. Yes, I was fleeing away from my life. I was in desperate need for a break. Before this summer, my grandfather left my grandma due to her sickness. She had brain cancer, but we had no money to do anything about it. We also had no proper home and had to live in a ragged train. No home.

No food.

No parents.

My mother and father died because they saved my life since there was a volcano eruption happening. "Leave this place sweetheart, do a good deed for the world." My mummy and daddy whispered to me. Guiltiness filled my heart. Everything was all my fault.

My stomach growled at me when I realized I had not eaten for almost two days. Hunger. A cloud of unanswered questions rained into head due to the noises I could now hear. Would they find me now? Was I going to get in trouble? What was going on? I had no idea until...

The voice screeched, "We need to get there now! The pirates are going to take the bounty! We would all die!" It was probably the captain shouting the bad news making everyone frightened by the sound of his demandingness. I peeked out from my little world and saw terror in everyone's eyes. Some cried, some panicked and some fainted. A floor of what looked like completely dead people horrified me. "Water, water!" some shouted. I'd never seen anything like that before. But I mean, I would see why he would do that, he needed the precious gold to save us.

"Ay mate! Stop right there!" another voice screamed. What I saw shocked me. A lot. Even more than before. Then, I really didn't know what this adventure held.

"It was the pirate!" I had thought I shrieked that inside my brain, but I was wrong. Completely wrong.

"Wait a minute, who are you and why are you on my boat?" The captain bellowed. Uh-oh. I was busted.

Standing right behind him, I was completely busted. Panic was starting to flood inside my mind. What could I do? What should I do? I had no idea...

"You do not need to worry nor think about that. What you do need to worry about is the gold. The treasure belongs to you! Everything here belongs to you!" I screeched. It was the truth, and the truth helped me survive, well, maybe a little bit longer only. I wasn't sure. And I didn't want to find out. I needed to show them that I was here for two particular reasons; to get away from home, and to be a part of the crew. When I was three years old, mum would always tell me that I ran as fast as lightning. It was time to use that as a talent. I sprinted as fast as I could to take the bounty away from the (adjective) pirate. "Hey! Who do you think you are and what are you doing?" the pirate roared. I knew I had no time answering him. After about five hours of arguing but pointless results, I finally made it come to an end. And it only took seven words.

*(inspired by the grinch who stole Christmas)*

*Nearly 2000 years ago, there was something called Christmas. I never experienced it, but it was passed down to say that it was full of love, joy and peace. But then, a pirate took the fun away from everyone. He didn't like people having fun, all the pirate wanted was... Misery on everyone's faces. That's all. So, he erased the Christmas memory; no-one knows how, and was never heard of again. The myths of the pirate carried on due to the fact that he was no longer to be seen.*

"Hey! You're the pirate who stole Christmas!" I hollered. The now looking guilty pirate had make-up start to sweat of his pale face. He took off his dark brown wig and the pirate fled away. It was assumed that he didn't want to be found and had a disguise. After that, the madness was gone. I had succeeded.

"Even though you weren't supposed to be here, you did a good job. But still, you weren't supposed to be here," The captain told me. "I can't believe me saying this but, would you like to be our new captain?" I was in shock. It didn't take it long for me to answer. So, I started nodding like a dog wanting to snack on bones. looked like an idiot. "Well then, crew, we have a new captain! Start listening to his instructions, or else, well you know what happens." The captain mentioned. It was official. Until, something horrible happened.

# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages – Mystery!

*Dulwich College Beijing, Xiong, Tiger – 11*

The waves scraped the sky, devouring the moon. Thunder collided with the ocean as our ship, Tao Tie shook with anxiety. She could not hold it anymore. The sky as black as the sickness of death lightened up every second. The compass was not working. The map was wet. Life boats dropped one by one. The ship was panicking.

Suddenly, an unstoppable force blew on the sail, making it flutter and rip into pieces. Now where we are going to amble is a mystery. Immediately, right after this mayhem, a gargantuan wave demolished the ship whole. The next thing I knew was darkness...

I found myself lying on sand shimmering in the sun like melted gold. I got up wearily and sat on the sand looking for human. What I saw nearly made me gasp my lungs out of my chest. It was a skeleton that looked centuries old. Its clothes were all ragged and torn. Its rib cage was smashed apart and one of its legs were missing. In its lifeless hand lying on the sand was an artifact. However, the most dreadful thing about it is that there were teeth, about 10 cm long stuck in the skull. I walked cautiously to him, gradually stepping on the sand, leaving deep footprints behind me. What kind of beasts could have done this to a human?

Then something hit me. I was stuck on this isolated island in the middle of nowhere with a skeleton. I do not have any maps, compasses or any other equipment in this remote place.

My thoughts were suddenly interrupted by a deafening roar. It made the palm trees shatter. It made the sand flee. Whatever just roared is colossal.

All of a sudden, an enormous beast leapt out of the blue. I watched, eyes open in horror as its shadow loomed over me. Terror rushed upon me, tearing my inquisitive brain apart. The beast looks like a tiger, except it was as black as the ashes of devils, and as large as a roaring thunder cloud. Right when its claws are about to rip my skull, I heard an ear-splitting sound of a bullet flying out of a pistol. The bullet soared through the air, thrashing at the beast, pelting a hole through the beast's body. It looked like that the darkest night was suddenly lightened up by millions of crimson stars. I looked in the direction of where the bullet came from, but all I saw was a shadowy figure. The figure was wearing a shredded hood, but I was certain that under it was a Chinese man. Out of the obscurity of his hood, he stared at me and walked away. His legs were oozing with cardinal, while shaking a few drops off with every step. "Wait!" I hollered suddenly. The man stopped for a second and carried on walking away, deep and deeper into the breathing forest. Who was he?

Suddenly, I realized all of our treasure from the emperor are sunk at the bottomless abyss of the ocean.

Gems, silk, gold, silver, clothes, pearls, bronze, swords, armor, scrolls and artworks are all lost forever. How is our emperor going to torture us if we ever see him again?

It hit me another time.

Forgetting all my troubles, I asked myself— what is wrong with this island? Bizarre beasts, skeletons and a shadowy figure. I need answers. Running as fast as my legs could carry me, I ran into the forest chasing after the shadowy man. Cardinal blazed around the forest, covering my legs whole because of the scraping thorn bushes. After some arduous agonizing running, I dashed to a sudden stop, huffing and puffing for air. My chest sped up and down like complex machinery, filling the place with sounds of breathing. Then every thing was silent again.

A twig snapped.

My head twisted slowly to direction of where the sound came from. Gradually and slowly, I walked backwards into a hole to hide from what made the sound. I crouched down into the hole as a gigantic paw smacked me. The next thing was sapphire blue in front of my eyes and then black.

I did not know how long I have been blacked-out, but when I woke, it was a morning. Everything seemed fresh, the trees which seemed holding their breath seemed to shake freely. I climbed out the hole, preparing to walk back to the glistening beach. My legs were still bleeding from the thorns.

A few minutes later, I was walking on the iridescent sand again. I walked to the demolished skeleton that had been there but something changed about it— it was wearing a torn black hood! How strange... I pulled the hood off and out of it dropped a substantial thing that clinked while dropping on the sand. With my heart pumping as loud as a culverin, I picked it up and it was a pistol! I checked the ammo and what I saw made my jaw drop— all the bullets were fully loaded!

I heard breathing. A man, about the same age as me, lay on the sand breathing heavily. I put my hood on, covering my face in the shadows of coal. I waited in the shade of the forest until he woke. Out of the blue, the same beast that attacked me leapt upon him. Without thinking twice, I aimed and shot. The deafening sound echoed through my eardrums. The beast fell on the ground as million of crimson stars filled the air. I started to walk away.

“Wait!” He hollered.

My eyes opened wide. His voice is my voice, his looks are my looks, he is me. I walked away. I just time traveled— Then another glimpse of sapphire blue and then black again.

I found myself lying on my comfortable bed in the captain’s room. It was just a dream I thought, relieved. Suddenly a crew member bumped in and shouted, ”STORM INCOMING!”

“Uh— oh...”

# The Mission

*Dulwich College Beijing, You, Lauren – 11*

“Sir, the emperor would like to see you.” Emperor Yong Le’s advisor called.

“I will be right there, thank you for informing me.” Zheng He responded politely.

Sliding the sturdy, red door open, he stepped inside the gigantic office. Bowing, he said: “Your advisor sent me, Emperor Yong Le.”

The emperor turned around saying: “Yes, I’ve been observing your team, the ‘Red Dragons’, in training. They are determined, trustworthy and resilient. Therefore, I have a mission which will be perfect for you,” explained the emperor, “I want the ‘Red Dragons’ to sail to Kolkata, India, to trade, give gifts *and* test your skills...”

“What do you mean?” Asked Zheng He curiously.

“You will see for yourself...” the emperor said slyly, “Be prepared...”

Joyfully, the seagulls sang whilst the Red Dragons loaded their reliable junk, ‘*Explorer*’, and prepared for the long and arduous journey ahead of them.

Finally, it was time to leave. Time to leave their family behind. Time to leave their friends behind. Time, perhaps, to leave their *lives* behind... forever... “The emperor is counting on us to accomplish this treacherous voyage, and we mustn’t let him down!” Zheng He bellowed, breaking the silence. The crew frantically scattered off, getting everything ready for their departure. Fluttering in the wind, the sails opened, slightly shifting the junk; the anchor was heaved up and the Red Dragons were ready to embark on their journey.

For the first few days, it was rough for the crew. The gale made a small hole in the once pristine sail, the seas roared, sending several obstacles their way but despite this, they had faith in themselves and kept going. They now knew almost After what seemed like decades, the voyage to India was officially over and they safely reached their destination and started their trading activities. After a few months, they had achieved all they needed on the trip, the crew joyously celebrated their great success with a party, honoring their captain, Zheng He for his leadership on this successful mission.

“I’m sorry to ruin the enjoyable party but does anyone else feel that something seems amiss?” asked a member of the crew. Half of the Red Dragons shrugged, whilst the others looked confused.

“Well, I guess...” But, before he could finish, something suspicious caught his eye... “THIEF!” The crew member called out.

“GET HER!” Zheng He ordered.

Sprinting down the narrow aisles, they followed the mysterious, masked, young girl into a dark alley. She ran to the entrance of a gloomy dilapidated building and crept inside. “Master, I have stolen the jewelry upon your request, please can you let me go now?”

“Fine! But you better be back tomorrow at 8:00am SHARP.” an unknown voice hollered sternly.

“Come on, let’s go inside and investigate.” whispered Zheng He to his crew. Tiptoeing, Zheng He and two of his crew members caught a glimpse of someone that they knew from a long time ago and whom they thought was dead... It was the one and only CAPTAIN HOOK!

“Well hello there Zheng He, glad you could make it, please do come out of the shadows” Captain Hook called out.

“Captain Hook?! I thought my father had destroyed you!” exclaimed Zheng He in surprise.

“You see, when your father pushed me off that cliff, he assumed I was dead, but I successfully climbed back up the cliff and survived!” Hook hollered with laughter.

Looking confused, the two members of Zheng He’s crew immediately drew out their swords, ready for a battle. Their enemy and his fellow pirates did the same. “Let’s settle this the right way then!” shouted Captain Hook.

The ear-piercing sound of metal swords clashing against each other triggered the rest of the Red Dragons crew to follow inside.

The violent battle went on for what seemed like eternity for the Pirate and Zheng He. Both challengers were equally talented and very experienced in combat, which caused uncertainty of the winner. However, with the Red Dragon army on Zheng He’s side, they were unstoppable...

As time passed, Hook and his pirates grew weaker, were tired and eventually noticed it was no use trying to fight back. The Red Dragon army was far too formidable for mere pirates like Hook. A few moments later, Zheng He hollered to his opponent “SURRENDER or prepare to be killed!” Astonishingly, the answer no one expected stammered out of his arch enemy’s mouth. “I-I-I-I Surrender!” And that was it, the words Zheng He had been waiting for. The battle had eventually concluded. “LET GO OF ME!!” Captain Hook shouted as he was forced by the Red Dragons to board the junk against his wishes. It was time for Zheng He and his crew to bid farewell to India and sail back home to China. This time however, they were heading back home with a little *more* than what they had expected. On top of items that were traded and gifts that they had received, the Red Dragons brought back with them a PIRATE. And not just *any* pirate, it was the very same pirate that Zheng He’s father spent years tracking down and whom he thought he had successfully eliminated.

This mission had indeed tested their skills as the Emperor had stated earlier on. Zheng He was proud of his army for accomplishing the mission that Emperor Yong Le set out for them, and he was especially grateful to his team for their efforts in helping him capture their arch enemy and fulfill his father’s legacy.

“Finally, let’s go home.” Zheng He said with a contented smile.



# The Stolen Treasure

*German Swiss International School, Chen, Josephine – 10*

I sweated nervously as the customs official went through my suitcase. I hoped he didn't open up the false bottom of the suitcase where I had stashed various valuable necklaces from The Ming Voyage Commemorative Museum in India. My ingenious plan was to smuggle them back to Malacca where I could sell them to my black market dealer. When that happened, things would seriously get interesting. I tried not to show how relieved I was when he closed the suitcase and asked for my passport. He studied my passport carefully and asked me: "Is your name Ming Shee Kuk?"

I replied cheerfully: "Yup, that's me,". He slapped my passport in my hand and let me through.

As you know now, I am Ming Shee Kuk. On my passport, it says my job is an 'art dealer', but how I really collect my money is by smuggling treasures from country to country, which then goes to the hands of my black market dealer. *RRRIINNNGGG!!* Now that's probably my evil dealer, Ted Lees calling me. I picked up the phone. "Hey Mr. Evil, I got your treasures alright. Ones from India that got shipped from China. You'd better be happy,"

"Right'o pipsqueak, you better be here in a flash, I'm a busy man,".

"Sure. I am in a rush too," I said, "and we better be careful because I think a detective is after us."

When I arrived in Malacca, I handed the stolen artifacts to Ted. I could see by the greedy glow in his eye that he knew how valuable these stolen goods were. He spent a long time studying one golden necklace especially. I was relieved that he didn't make me go back to India again to get a replacement. Now, let me explain some of the history of the necklace. A long time ago, a pirate called Chen Zuyi was planning an attack on the Ming General known as Zheng He. Chen Zuyi had told one of his other pirates about this plan – to wait until Zheng thought he was surrendering and then to attack. However, one of the other pirates was a greedy lad called Shi Jingqing. Shi was very clever and told Zheng He to look out and be ready for the fake 'surrender'. So on the day Chen Zuyi tried to attack Zheng He, Chen was caught and the smart Shi Jingqing abandoned his crew for a job in Malacca. As soon as Zheng He won the battle (thanks to Shi Jingqing), he took all of the valuable pirate treasure and used it as gifts on the voyages. He took all of the treasure, that is, except one necklace – this was the necklace Ted was so interested in. This necklace was given as a reward to Shi Jingqing to thank him for betraying Chen. Anyway, all of this precious treasure had eventually ended up in The Ming Voyage Commemorative Museum in India. And yes, they are now in the hands of Ted.

Ted had finished examining the valuables. He told me that he could probably get me two or three million dollars for the loot, more if I did not mind to wait. I shook my head. Ted is a bit weak and not too brave, so I knew I could push him to pay me more. "You can get me at least 2.5, Ted, and in a hurry. The jewels in there, on their own, should be worth at least 3."

Ted eyed me slyly. "Maybe," he said, "I *do* know someone who is very interested in Shi Jingqing's necklace. I think he even claims to be a descendent of the tricky ex-pirate! However, he wants to meet you first. I could probably get you a few hundred thousand more if you are willing to meet up with him."

"Great!" I exclaimed, "Just get me the cash."

Ted arranged the time and the place for me to meet the buyer. We had to meet in Malacca Bird Park, near the parrot aviary.

I was waiting patiently at the Malacca Bird Park. There were a row of parrots on the trees above my head. They were screeching like they were on fire. I was impatient and muttered to myself "Hurry up," when a high-pitched voice echoed back what I had just said: "Hurry up. Hurry up." Soon dozens of parrots were all shouting the same instructions back at me.

Finally, I spotted Ted. He came towards me a bit hesitantly, like there was something wrong. He had a suitcase, which I assumed contained the stolen jewellery. He told me that the buyer would be there at any moment. Ted had just received a text from him.

I looked over at Ted, but he was staring straight ahead. I noticed he was sweating a bit. He twitched his forehead to indicate there was someone coming from the front. I looked. It was a short guy with short, flat hair. He looked like he might be a soldier or something.

The man approached with a big duffle bag. He threw the bag to me. "Count it!" he said. "All the money is in there!" The bag felt heavy, so I figured there must be a lot of money in it.

I carefully unzipped the bag and took a look inside. Inside there was a lot of paper. It was looked like money but it wasn't. It was just shredded newspapers. "Hey... what the h..." Suddenly I realised the guy was pointing a gun at me.

"You are under arrest for stealing all this valuable treasure that belongs to China" the man roared. Then he mumbled something into his radio when Cheng Heet walked in. He smiled smugly. "You thought you could escape us didn't you, huh? Well. Thanks to your friend Ted here, we knew all your plans!"

I turned to Ted and accused him: "Why did you betray me?"

Then I saw Cheng passing Ted the necklace. "Here is your reward as arranged." he said.

# New Beginnings

*German Swiss International School, Chen, Veronica – 10*

My name is Harold and I am a Reticulated Giraffe. I used to live on the East side of Africa, in Somalia with my other animal friends. We used to talk together, play together, and eat together. One day, my friends and I were eating just like on any other day, when my giraffe friend heard some strange noises. When we turned around, I saw a group of short animals with silver sticks and nets. Men. We started moving away from the men because they were walking right towards us. As they came closer we saw they were a group of twenty poachers, all looking scary and strong. We tried to run, but they brought sticks and forced us to move. Soon we were being led by ropes around our neck. We were pulled for many miles until we reached the ocean.

I saw several giant looking ships with funny writing on the side and very large flags of gold and black. Soon, and much to my confusion, we were being led up a steep wooden path and onto the boat. The ground on the boat was strange because it was made of wood and moved. I immediately felt sick. Before, we knew it, we had left our homeland. I watched it from out of the window in my stall. My long neck could fit out of the window and I could feel the breeze in my mane. It made my eyes water as I saw us sail away and saw the grasslands getting smaller and smaller,

As nightfall came, we were all nervous about where we were going. I saw a cage with lions in it, who I do not usually like, but they looked so sick I felt sorry for them. Eventually everyone calmed down and the swaying of the boat made us all sleepy. As soon as I woke up, I heard hundreds of people shouting and running around. The only person that didn't seem frantic was the poacher, standing tall and trying to look brave and bold.

To avoid feeling dizzy, I poked my head out of the window. Covering the whole ocean in front of me, it seemed, were boats. The huge fleet, with over 200 boats looked fierce. The boats had five tall and proud sails and there were so many it looked like the ocean was a marketplace. The boats were powerful and swift compared even to sharks or whales.

Soon we pulled into a harbour in a strange land. There was a strong smell of spice in the air and many people were gathered on the beach as the boats approached. The ships docked and then, as I watched, the leader on the biggest boat of the fleet walked onto the shore. Two other men came with him. As you know, we giraffes understand all languages, as we are intelligent and can figure things out easily, so it was fun to know what the foreigners were saying before the short man understood. The massive man, who the others called Zheng He, was over two metres tall. He spoke in chinese to the first translator, who translated it to the second translator in arabic, and finally to the local man. After many rounds of speaking and translating, the brave and arrogant man summoned all the frightened faces out to trade with the new people. Not long after, the streets were buzzing with bargaining street vendors, loudly shouting, and every type of noise you could have imagined. It was soon apparent that the people in Quillon, where we were, were giving a gift to the people from the boats. They called the gifts tributes. There were many spices and cloths that looked bright and colourful and, in return, the Chinese sailors gave them food and gold and beautiful silk. After a few days resting in the sun and on the firm ground, finally we set off again. This time I heard we would be going to China!

After many days at sea I was starting to feel sick. My fur was blotchy and starting to fall out. The food they gave us was no longer green and smelled like sewage. Some of the animals had died and even the sun-burned sailors were moving more slowly and looked tired. Then, just as I was waking up one morning, I heard a shout.

“China! China! We are home!”

I poked my head out of the window and saw a beautiful coastline and forests of trees and bamboo. The air was hot, like at home, but sticky — as if there had been a great storm. As we sailed along this great land I saw many people, who seemed to be standing in fields of water, stop and look at us. I also saw pink dolphins dancing and playing in the water. The air smelled of green and of sweet fragrance. This, I knew, would be our new home. We were finally in China and going to visit the Emperor.

# Haven

*German Swiss International School, Wong, Madeleine – 11*

Father slipped. If only it hadn't been raining....

We were moored in the sea off the Indies. During the journey, every day I looked at the flags flying on the majestic *bao chuan* -- all 63 of them speckling the sea -- and they were glorious in the morning sun.

"Mei Li, when you deliver water barrels over to the *ma chuan*, make sure no one notices that you are a girl," said Father. "Remember, girls are not allowed on these ships."

Father couldn't work for at least a day or two so he wanted me to cover for him. This was my chance; I couldn't miss the opportunity to finally observe them close up. I was ecstatic and couldn't focus on my congee.

I had always wanted to see horses. Before I came away on this small ship, I'd lived in an old fishing town near Nanjing and was very exposed to going to the sea. One day some important looking men galloped into our village on their horses. That was the first and the last time that I had seen any horses and I became instantly fascinated. The men circled the village once and went into Mr. Wang's noodle shop. Our only noodle shop that can fit a large crowd. Then I saw Mr. Jing, our village head, run hastily inside after them.

After a whole *shi*, he came back out -- rather pompously to my eyes -- and made an announcement. He said that they were looking for people who could contribute a boat to carry water -- *shui chuan* -- for the Treasure Voyage led by the great Admiral Zheng He.

"I would but can not!"

"My heavenly goodness! I could never in the world afford a *boat*!"

"Of course I would. But how would I make such a boat?"

The villagers each exclaimed. Just then someone raised a voice.

"I will contribute a boat to carry water along with the *bao chuan*!"

It was father. Father volunteered to make a boat. Everyone wanted to. But no one had the timber nor the money. Father didn't either but what was his plan?

"I will use the timber from our house -- the house that we live in!"

People gasped. Our neighbors told him it was preposterous to give up a house to build a boat. I felt disappointed and sad by Father's decision but decided not to dwell on that feeling. Anyway, we had been away at sea most of the time in those days, trying to earn a living on the boats that came from big towns. At the same time, I was proud of my father for contributing to such an important project by the Emperor. Maybe he will build a reputation; maybe he will go and work for the Emperor one day!

Everybody seemed excited about the spices and goods that were given to us to take back home. My back was sticking to my shirt with sweat. It was so hot that I had to try hard not to succumb to the temptation of glugging down all the water that we are carrying on this boat. I knew that it was one of the most important supplies for the thousands of people on the fleet. Our boat supplied water just for the four *ma chuan* that carry the horses. Some of these were used in battle; some were given as gifts to the countries that we visited. It was horrible to even think that the horses could die of thirst because of my thoughtless action! Then father and I would have to leave our boat and go back home somehow, where we actually didn't have a house anymore.

Our boat slowly approached the *ma chuan*, which was at least five times bigger than ours and my heart beat fast. I quickly lowered the anchor and soon the plank came down. As I rolled the water barrel up over to the higher platform of the *ma chuan*, I sniffed the air; it smelled just like the time the officials came with their horses. Where were they kept? A man motioned for me to bring the barrel downstairs. He means below the deck; that must be it!

As I entered the lower deck, the smell of the horses grew more evident. I paused, took a deep breath and walked in, ready to meet the horses, at last. Wow. My eyes followed each stall of horses; rows and rows of them! I parked the water barrel and stroked the silky black hair that seemed just like my own.

Suddenly I was startled by a growl. It came from a beast with black dots and burnished orange eyes. “Cameleopard” it said on the cage. Then I noticed. There were many more different creatures in the stable — colourful birds that made talking sounds! Fantastic feathered fowls with green and blue tails and grey wrinkly cows labeled “Rhinoceros”. Weren’t these animals supposed to be on the *bao chuan*, as they were “treasures” given to our Emperor, too? My solitary awe was interrupted by a sense of being stared at. I swung around and searched for the eyes. There it was, in the far corner of the room, an animal that resembled a cross between a deer and a lion — or more like a horse and a dragon? I tread over to it, and the closer I got the animal seemed to grow taller. In fact, my height came up to just around its lanky legs. My eyes followed up its spotted body all the way up the towering neck to its enormous bulging eyes. They were delightful, dazzling and divine and looking down to me. I got a feeling that we may become great friends when we got back home.

I couldn’t think of leaving this haven of exotic creatures until I heard someone calling for me. Reluctantly, I tiptoed out of the room. At least I would get to come back once more tomorrow.

# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

*Good Hope Primary School cum Kindergarten, Chung, Nga Yu – 11*

I am one of Mr. Zheng He's maidservants. I met my master who took me back home when I got abandoned by my parents when I was five.

My master went to the Yongle Emperor's throne room a week ago. When he came back, he was as happy as if he was flying in the air. He cried, 'Ling, the Emperor gave me a mission : The expedition down the Western Ocean! We are going to set off in 3 months to find the jade seal!'

I signed. Although I didn't suggest him to do so, it was the preliminary order from the emperor.

11<sup>th</sup> July 1405

We set off to the Nan Jing coast. I was amazed by the ships which were as tall as a mountain. We set off with ambition. A while later, the ship became bumpy. I rushed out of the deck. The sky and the sea was howling. In a blink of an eye, I had an idea. In a moment, my master ordered the soldiers to push fake people made of straws and papers. Inside was filled with the intestines and organs of the pigs. The sea became silent. My master praised me for my intelligence. We continued our journey.

25<sup>TH</sup> July 1405

After 14 days of sailing, we arrived at a kingdom named Champa. I went out for fresh air at night. Abruptly, one of the soldiers covered my eyes. When I woke up, I found myself in a place liked jail. I was stunned why am I in such place? Day after day, I sat by the window, waiting for my master. A surveillant told me they were having a war. I started to worry my master. Finally, I was released from prison 3 days later. When my master saw that I came back with the King safely, he nearly wept. Later, after the King gave us the gifts and the documents, we continued our journey.

12<sup>th</sup> August 1405

We sailed for 10 days and nights, and reached Siam, which had a large population. The sovereign sent an envoy to deliver a message. However, Wang the deputy marshal insisted on strengthening the prevention. So all soldiers went to stand-by in their own post. The sovereign came with his large army. When he boarded the ship, he got caught and tied. Thousands of feeling flocked to his face, which was liked twisted. I nearly burst out of laughing! Similarly, he gave us some gifts and then documents. We apologized for our foolish.

23<sup>rd</sup> August 1405

Java was our destination. Yet, we were all frightened by the nations who were waiting near the coast, ready to fight with us. We parked to the harbor. The soldiers were shouting in different languages. I took a peek out of the window. After general Tong's order, the soldiers rushed into the little town. Here went the 'Ping Pongs' and there went the 'Cling Clangs'. A week later, the emperor was caught and my master ordered the servants to put him in jail.

30<sup>th</sup> August 1405

We reached Palembang. The King there was honest and kind. But one of his courtier was a villain. So my master and the king set a trap together. Days later, he was caught. The King was glad and he gave us money precious native product as a souvenir.

13<sup>th</sup> September 1405

The King in Malocca was thoughtful. He offered us to leave our luggage and gifts in their kingdom and to take it back when we returned to China. My master thanked him for his kindness.

18<sup>th</sup> September 1405

A traitor in Semudera killed the emperor to become the leader of the nation. In order to help the prince, general Liu and general Cheung encircled their composite and blocked all their escaping routes. He felt forlornness so he committed suicide. The King was satisfied, and he called Ghazni, Malabar, and Baghdad three kingdoms. They all invited us for dinner. My master was glad to see peace among them.

1<sup>st</sup> October 1405

Wong sergeant got lost in Semudera! He climbed up a hill and found some grass that could make him invisible and a phoenix egg. He borrowed a small boat from the fishermen and caught up the ship. Then he gave some of the 'invisible grass' to me!

21<sup>th</sup> October 405

100 000 miles away China in Kozhikode! I felt a bit touched when my master ordered the servants to build a gazebo to commemorate this remarkable time.

5<sup>th</sup> November 1405

We reached East Africa 2 days ago, and we had a war. So one of the sergeant gave the marshal a magical coin. When they battled, he threw the coin and their opponent blocked out.

12<sup>th</sup> December 1405



7 days before, an envoy from Mecca led us the way to their kingdom, which was the headstream of Buddhist. My master was a Buddhism, so he longed to go to the temple there. Two days later, the King held a farewell dinner for us and welcomed us to visit their country at any time.

13<sup>th</sup> April 1407

We travelled back to China. Although we didn't find the jade seal, my master was happy to find a night pearl which was the most precious treasure in the world. Yongle Emperor was glad to see us back. Although it was interesting and adventurous, I don't hope that we need to go to a same expedition years later ...

# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

*Good Hope Primary School cum Kindergarten, Yim, Charlotte – 11*

I think I definitely made a mistake of going through the beautiful portal that the scientist made. “Take me to ancient China — Ming Dynasty, year 1400,” I said, as I stepped through the portal.

Look, I know what you are thinking. The whole thing was just supposed to be an elaborate trick. Surely, it wasn’t supposed to actually work...or so I thought. Boy, was I wrong! How did I know if this thing really had the strength to take me back to ancient China? Stepping inside the time portal literally meant travelling back time to 1400 in ancient China, and that required strength and indomitable spirit. I soon realized that the decision to step through was not clearly thought out, as I had forgotten almost everything, I learnt from my history classes – especially the stuff about the boring wars. However, I did remember something to do with a pirate voyage sent by the Emperor from that period which I wanted to find out more about.

I got up and peeked through one of the coloured windows, and I saw the emperor giving orders to a group of people. Unfortunately, some of the emperor’s warriors saw me peeking through the window. They pointed at me and yelled thunderously, “Stranger! Assassin!” “Oh no!” I thought, “The emperor might catch me and I may never return back to the real world ever again! What if —” My thoughts were interrupted by the Emperor, who was in front of me before I noticed. He spoke, “Ah, I guess you are also interested in joining the voyage! These pirates are going to travel to the seven countries to give each of them a present: either silk, gold or other valuables that I have packed and loaded for them. I believe you are interested in such an odyssey, aren’t you?” He winked and smiled at me.

“Your Majesty, I am very honoured! Yes, I’ll go!” I said, thinking of all the great voyages I might have. “Very well. Go on now, we haven’t got all day!” said the emperor.

I have a happy scream in my mind because I couldn’t believe what just happened. I couldn’t believe I was going to join the mighty China warriors around to seven lucky countries and hand them their gifts. Moreover, I was delighted because this seemed a much better way for me to complete my history homework.

With great excitement, we sailed across the vast oceans. There were a few countries which were very nice, yet wished to refuse our gifts. However, we insisted as we were given a challenge to travel around the world. Sometimes, there were some countries which were kind of rude. They accepted our gifts and just ignored us. Some tried to attack us as well. It was a good thing we brought some warriors to fight the soldiers sent after us.

The most remarkable and memorable voyage had to be the one when we went to U.K. The Queen of England was very kind and offered us a ride for us back to China on her maiden ship. We of course thanked her for her generous offer and instead gave her some precious items and some silk. She was very surprised and said “May God bless you! You are very nice! I’m sorry to hear I cannot give you a ride back to China, but I will certainly remember you and will never forget you!”

That is when I realized the deep meaning of “One will feel more blessed to give than to receive. “This experience was surely my greatest treasure. At our school, our School Theme this Year is “Seek Your Treasure”, so it would seem that this was to be my treasure and serendipity during this voyage with these pirates. Soon after this part of the surprising voyage, a portal opened up behind me. The Emperor appeared again and I told him that I was grateful for this opportunity, and I hoped to join them again on another History Class voyage. With that, I turned around, and stepped through the portal before it closed.

# A Tale from the Emperor's Ships

*Good Hope Primary School cum Kindergarten, Yim, Hoi Lam – 11*

I woke up to the sound of the lieutenant of our ship's loud yelling. As my roommates scrambled out to the deck for orders, I found myself hardly being able to follow them. I was one of the latest to reach the deck. I glanced over my shoulder when no one noticed. All 317 ships of his Majesty, Emperor Yongle, lead by one of the Emperor's most trusted companions, Zhenghe.

"Focus!" Lieutenant Chen yelled after noticing that I was not paying attention, along with a few others, all mesmerized by impressive sight just like I was. We snapped our heads back to the enraged generals, looking a bit sheepish. They cannot blame us. Many of us had only been recently recruited and this was our first journey out of our great kingdom. It had only been 6 months, but it felt like forever. I was far far away from our family and missed them dearly. It was estimated the journey itself would take 2 to 3 years, which means my little sister would be 5 or 6 by the time I returned, and I myself would be 26 by the time I returned home, not to mention I possibly have to serve in the army for a few more years.

It was a tough life, but nothing compared to how much our king has served us. He gave us peace and tranquillity.

"Soldiers! We are nearing the land that we have named Champa! This specific land is known for creating the lemongrass you may know, but possibly not, since most of you are stupid and uneducated." There were quite a few murmurs at such a harsh and crude comment from Lieutenant Chen, but they were all silenced by the other soldiers. We continued to listen to what we were supposed to do.

"Half of you on this ship will stay and guard the ship. The other half, the most elite, will be chosen to go with General Zhenghe. Understood?" The tall and imposing man barked. He was rewarded with a loud and clear "yes" from us and he nodded gladly.

"Those who wish to stay here, get back to the sleeping compartments downstairs. The rest, we'll choose the best." Few soldiers budged, since most wanted to take the most out of the journey and see the scenery, others just wanting to possibly wanting to experience a real fight. I was among the many who stayed.

Lieutenant Chen grunted and told us he'd be tapping the head of the ones that were going with the General. I crossed my fingers and prayed to the Jade Emperor that I would be chosen. And I was. My eyes glimmered excitedly. I was going to set foot in another kingdom! Most people never even had the chance!

We set off a few hours later, and were immediately stopped by Champa's guards. None of us were able to communicate with them, and we had to rely on hand gestures to show that we weren't a threat. It was extremely hard, but we finally managed. We were welcomed, but all of us were extremely careful, knowing they could turn on us and kill us any second. We were not fighting in our territory. We were fighting in theirs. I was among those who waited outside a large building's door as guards while the General entered to converse.

It was hours until the General came out again, with bad news. The Champas were not happy about us, and he heard plans of killing us. Two of our fastest runners were sent to warn the ships while about a hundred others and I remained in the city, half of us hidden, the others, including me, escorting General Zhenghe to safety. I was one of the very last at the small parade we had back to the ship, and therefore the first to notice the oncoming Champa army.

"Enemies at 6 o'clock!" I yelled loudly, nudging the nearby soldiers and urging those in front to run faster. The General was on a horse, and he sped with two others towards the ship, while the others were left to deal with the enemy alone.

It was a lost cause, so little of us against so many of them, but we had sworn we would fight until our last breath, and that was exactly what we did. I was among the first to join the battle, my sword gleaming under the harsh sunlight. People all around us were screaming and hurrying away, unwilling to be in the bloodbath. I did the most stupid thing. I jumped straight into the fight.

I managed to stab a soldier, piercing through his armour. Blood splashed onto my helmet, and I bit back a disgusted yelp. I was almost decapitated by another soldier who took advantage of my momentary stun, but I counterattacked and managed to trip him before a fellow warrior finished him. I nodded at him, thankful that I was not the one to spill blood.

All around us, the battle raged on. I fought enemy after enemy like a monster, and when they started retreating, we wasted no time running to the ships, and when the last of us got on, the anchor was released and we sped away into the oceans, watching as Champa became nothing but a small dot behind us.

I write this on the ship that is carrying us back home, to China, my beautiful country. We have achieved many things on this journey, which I know will be rejoiced over and over years after years. But for now, I'll keep this piece of paper under my cabin pillow, and I'll see who I'll reveal this to.

Lee Ming

# Diary of a stowaway

*Harrow International School Beijing, Zhang, Queen – 10*

Dear Diary,

Today is the first day writing in this. My friend Sophia and I all want to sail with the great Zheng He. But we all know the rule that girls aren't allowed on the boat – so unfair! And girls are treated in a very bad way and we can't do anything about it anyway 'cause we are kids. But this time we won't let them push us down any more. We have a plan to sneak on to Zheng's boat.

## Day 1

Today we will try our best to be like men. We help each other cut our hair, even though it looks like our hair has been bitten by dogs but at least we look like a man. Oh great! Now I look like a beggar. We have to wear men's clothes. I hate those stinky man clothes that my father gave me. They are so heavy! When we tried walking in them, OMG! So disgusting. But after an hour or two we started to actually feel like a man and swagger like they do. We practice speaking because if we only look like a man and we sound like a girl that would be pretty weird to others, right? We are very nervous with this because if we do not success we will not get a chance to sail with Zheng. Or if we get caught we might even be killed. And we do not want to die. Now I have just got to make my voice very low and make my voice louder and stronger.! Sophia doesn't need to try 'cause she already sounds like a boy (though I would never say that to her).

## Day 3

Today Zheng's crew will be arriving and today our job is to pretend to be selling our mother's dumplings to people so we can sneak into his crew without being seen. It is quite easy cause there is a whole bunch of them and they are all taller than us so nobody will see two girls in aprons crawling on the floor and we could just squeeze in. Then we will change outfits. Luckily, I have a sister and Sophia has a brother who will be helping us. We could just tell them we were going to the bathroom and that they have to get on with the work. Our mother's recipe is selling very well so it is super crowded. But good for us as we can just easily slip away and leave our poor little brothers and sisters alone in the crowd handling those crazy customers.

Now we are in between the crew. Ewwww! Gross! They all smell like animals! I thought that they are supposed to be great but ughhh, they stink! Really bad.

Suddenly, Sophie fell. In this situation, if you fall, you will probably die. They are men and if they step on you ... Game over! But thank goodness that I quickly pulled her up. "That was close!" I whispered loudly. Nobody could hear us because the music was way too noisy.

The boat is much bigger than I thought.

Zheng is coming ... We rush and hide behind a wooden barrow to change into our uniforms. Now we look like men.

Zheng's voice boomed out "Our mission is to ..." He said a lot of things about the boat like where we are sleeping or where the deck was ... Luckily, me and Sophia are hiding in a relief boat on deck so we have a "room" to ourselves. Lucky us! Ha ha. We have been learning a lot of sailing skills so sailing won't be a problem. It is just that we don't want to be recognized.

## Day 4

The first thing I did in the morning when I woke up was to check the time. I did not want to be late on the first day of sailing! But Sophia did not seem to care. It was already 6:30 in the morning. Sophia is literally still sleeping while I am already dressed and ready to get down. I finally wake her.

We zoom upstairs. We are not late.

Zheng is teaching the trainees how to do their jobs. Our job is to control the position of the sail. Zheng seems to notice that we are not as strong as the other boys so he tells us to hoist the sail together. That is quite a tiring job because you know you have to climb the rigging to set the sail. Normally this job is exchanged through the day but we have to work together. No-one sees this as strange, except for Zheng.

It is such a busy day that we don't even realise that it is lunch time already. Just when the day was going perfectly... Suddenly... "Boom!"

Our boat bumped into an island and it began to sink. Uh-oh, there was no time to launch the safety boats! Luckily, we had not travel far yet. And we learned how to swim before so we won't drown. We saw Zheng Paddling around the water almost drowning but other sailors were too busy saving their own lives that they didn't see him. Zheng doesn't know how to swim! What about him? We can't just leave our hero behind to let him just die. We only had one thought in our mind, "We have to save him!" I said as we pulled Zheng onto a piece of driftwood that was moving in our direction and we took turns to push him.

Finally, we reached land. And when we got up, we were shocked! It was Shanghai! And people were cheering for us. Why? Because we saved Zheng! I wish I can see my family now. They would be so proud of me.

# The Voyage of a Lifetime

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Chan, Mavis – 11

## Day 1

### **Captain's Log**

There is a new crew on the ship. His name is Leng. He looks really young and skinny, so I am not sure if he can handle the heavy packages. Well, if he doesn't perform well, I'll feed him to the sharks.

### **Lian's Log**

*I arrived today at this colossal ship. I just met the captain and I don't know what he thinks of me. I'm very anxious since I don't want them to find out that I am a woman. As long as I keep my voice deep and work hard, hopefully, I should be fine.*

## Day 10

All is well. The ship's crew are settling in, learning to obey orders quickly. The winds have been favourable and we are setting a good pace. That guy, Leng is stronger than I originally thought. Let's hope we keep this up.

*Wow, this is difficult. It's much harder than I thought. Every single day we need to wake up before the sun, we go to bed after dark. I am responsible for keeping the deck spick and span. If it's not to the shipmate's liking, I get 10 lashes. So far I have avoided any punishment. I have seen it happen on others and it looks nasty.*

## Day 29

We lost a crewmate to the storm. He was thrown overboard from the deck while looking for dangerous waves. We replaced him with the new guy Leng. We will see how he copes as the new porter. We will need to keep an eye on our water supply. I'm impressed with Leng! He is a better porter and can lift more than old Yongle. He is more intelligent than I thought. I shall ask him for some mapping help.

*I'm exhausted. I have double the work! They have given me the porter duty as well as my cleaning duty. My muscles ache really badly. I keep telling myself that it's worth it. I'm not so sure anymore but I think the captain is starting to take a liking to me. He was amazed that I could understand maps. I can't wait to get off this flea-infested ship.*

## Day 38

We are beginning to run out of food. We have put the men on rations. I'm hoping we get there sooner than later as hungry men can start a mutiny. Leng however, has a real skill for reading maps, possibly even better than me. I really feel happy and relaxed around him.

*This work is getting easier and I feel like I'm doing a good job. This is becoming worth it as each day means I'm getting closer to the destination. Captain and I are able to talk about anything... well, there is one thing I can't tell him. If he were to find out, I couldn't cope with it.*

## Day 51

Yesterday, we saw Arabia and we all got excited. Unfortunately, the sailor Ma He, who was manning the wheel, was not paying attention and crashed us into a giant rock. Today, I woke early before the crew, I went to check in on them. When I entered Leng's room, something shocked me. How could he have long hair and lied to me the whole time? He covered up the fact that she was a woman? What should I do?

*We had crashed into a giant rock!!! I fell into the water while sweeping the deck. Then, my wig fell off and my hair came loose! I don't know what I'm going to do...*

*This morning, the captain invited me over to his quarters to have lunch. The food was so much better than our normal lunch. Surprisingly the captain had found out I was a woman. I had imagined it happening a million times but I never thought it would be real. I didn't want to lie to him and I felt bad when I told him the truth. He has decided to think about whether he should tell the others or keep it a secret.*

#### Day 72

I made the decision to keep it a secret since she was the best crew I had ever had. Yesterday, was the last day I could see her, considering that she escaped from us. I wonder how we will get back to our hometown since my ship has been destroyed.

*I was so relieved the captain kept my secret but I still had to leave since I didn't want anyone to know who I actually was except for the Captain. Now for my next adventure, I will head to India to discover their culture. This was a very important experience that I will never forget which means that I will learn from it and not make this mistake ever again.*

#### Day 93

I can't believe that Lian's gone, but the good news is that we found a guy called Ming and he was happy to sell us his ship. We just arrived near India. Now, we just need food. Well, the others probably can fish for food. I'm amazed that there was a woman on the deck right under my nose and I had no idea. Oh well, life goes on and I have got work to do and I wonder if I will ever meet her ever again.

*I found her! I can't believe that I found my mum! I missed her so much. We just spent a day crying and laughing and trying to piece our lives for each other. It was all worth it. I hope I will meet him again*

# Revenge

*Harrow International School Hong Kong, Chelpanova, Alisa -10*

Zheng He trades treasure with countries to show peace...

The wind howled through the night and everybody was staring in shock at their sinking ship. The crew was shivering from the cold and the thought of them drowning out at sea. Not seeing their family after they died. Not being there anymore to see their children grow up.

“Where’s Captain Zheng?”

Everybody cried out, “Somebody go get him!” A tired looking man ran off into the shelter to find the captain. His feet drummed on the wooden floor as he raced his thoughts to the captain’s hammock. Why hadn’t Captain Zheng run out at the first sign of trouble? What was he doing right now? Was he alright? Little did he know that the captain was nowhere near alright...

While the crew member was getting the captain, small, smart and brave Qui Xi at the age of eight was hiding out in the storage closet next to her dad’s (the captain’s) room. She had quickly realised that they were sinking but had decided not to climb out of the closet in case somebody saw her. She had peeked through the crack in the middle of the closet and heard two people come by, one had been very slow and cautious, or so it seemed, and Qui Xi had spotted something shiny and sharp looking which glinted in the moonlight with her sharp eyes. Perhaps a knife? She had wondered for quite a while why the man had been carrying a knife.

It hadn’t been a chopping knife, thought Qui Xi, remembering the knife her mother always used to cut tomatoes or steak, it hadn’t seemed like the knife to peel too, those usually had two sharp metal bits connected with plastic. No, it looked like the type of knife to kill something.

Her thoughts were disturbed suddenly by heavy boots clomping frantically down the corridor. Who could it be? Qui Xi nearly missed the sight of a thin, skinny man racing across the corridor looking confused. What could be wrong? At Qui Xi’s age, children liked to ask questions which, much to their annoyance, almost never got answered! Now’s a good time to come out, thought Qui Xi and very cautiously, climbed out. Almost the second she climbed out of the closet, she heard an agonised scream followed by the sound of a door being slammed shut and fast footsteps getting quieter and quieter until there was nothing to be heard. Qui Xi hated silence so she was glad when she heard the creak of a door being opened and closed, but was not so glad when she heard another scream, less agonised though, more sorrowful and sad. She reached the door which she recognised to be her dad’s and peeked inside. What she saw Qui Xi will remember for the rest of her life. She saw a man on his knees, back faced to her, holding a blood-soaked body in his hands. Her father.

She wanted to run. She wanted to run for the rest of her life, but she didn’t. Instead, Qui Xi watched in shocked silence at the man holding her precious father in his hands. One that would never see life again, enjoy life again, feel life again. Somebody who would never again witness the feeling of being proud or alive, because he was dead. Murdered. Murdered by someone Qui Xi would get back at one day. From now on, there would be no happiness in her life until she got *revenge*...

The sailors had started to wonder what had happened to their crew mate but decided to take action themselves, without the captain. The stronger people were left behind to scoop water out of the ship and the weaker people would go down the ladder where they wouldn’t weigh so much in the water but still hold onto the ship, ready to climb back on. Everyone had the same thought in mind; *save the treasure*. Everyone worked like bull in a fit, scooping water in, scooping water out, scooping water in, scooping water out. They were all soon very tired and wished for their hammock. When the last of the water had been scooped out, the people onboard sat down heavily on the benches and the people in the water gratefully climbed out and wrapped themselves in warm towels and changed into dry clothes.

Once everyone was settled, two things happened. One, the crew felt more of a team now, and two, they wondered what had happened to their captain and crew mate. So, with newfound team spirit, the group of curious monkeys went downstairs to find out what had happened. Much to the crew’s surprise, the first thing they saw was a little girl, about the age of eight or nine, weeping.



The brave team peeped into the room, the same way Qui Xi had done, and they too, will remember what they saw very vividly at the bottom of their heart. Captain Zheng was laid down on the hammock and the wound had been covered. The crew and the little girl formed a circle around the captain. To the whole crew's surprise, the little girl spoke in her quiet, small voice, "My dad told me once that one day, I will leave him and go out into the world as a young person and I should take with me my eager heart, mind and a will to help. That I should take with me a good understanding of many things, and a willingness to accept responsibility and show myself as somebody to trust and lean on. He said that he counts a successful person not as somebody who has done well in school, those these things are good too, that he counts a success as somebody who learns to be good hearted, and kind, sensible and trustable, good, sound people."

"I will."

# Seeweed's Wretched Life

*Harrow International School Hong Kong, Cheng, Jessica – 10*

“Seeweed, go get me a cup of hot green tea. NOW! You wretched girl.”

And that’s how my wretched life started.

You see, my father was a very important Chinese emperor. You’re probably wondering how I ended up being a slave when I was a Chinese princess. Well, it all started like this...

My father, the important Chinese emperor didn’t want a useless baby girl in his grand, royal life. So, guess what he did? Well, this is pretty harsh but... he put me on a DESERTED ISLAND to let me starve to death. He clearly hated me.

While my *grand, and spoilt* father is enjoying his life at his *glorious* palace, I was being a dirty slave in a ship. The only person that actually treated me *nice*ly was the captain: Captain Ming. The other crew hated me ever since Captain Ming found me at the deserted island. They didn’t care about me. When Captain Ming was around, they pretended to be super nice and loving (they were *really* bad actors and too bad Captain Ming didn’t notice).

After living here for twelve years, I got used to this kind of bullying behaviour. I loved the ship; it was so nice. We travelled night and day. We went to different places such as: India, Southern China, Africa, Arabia. The most dangerous voyage was in Africa. The people there seriously did not have any common sense.

It was my first journey: to Africa. I was really excited since this was my first time traveling. By now, I already been to six places in the world to give away our precious treasure. After ten years of traveling, we finally reached our destination. Also, after twelve years, I finally got my name: Seeweed(I know it’s spelt wrong. The pirates didn’t know how to spell)

Anyway, we went to Africa. Captain Ming was really weird. He didn’t steal treasure like normal pirates. He *gave* people them. I once asked him, “Why are you giving people money?”

He replied, “It’s kindness dear, kindness”

I was really confused then. Why would you give someone when you could keep it all for yourself? Apparently, he was really kind and shared everything he had; for better or for worse.

Back to reality. As we landed in the coast of Africa, we met a huge army of Africans staring at our humongous ship. I didn’t realize it then but the Africans were too scared to do anything. They thought that we were going to attack them or something. Captain Ming suddenly shouted “We are here in peace. We are here to help. We are here to offer money to this glorious country. Have no fear!”

The people of Africa looked around in horror thinking “Our country, glorious?”

Boldly, the crew marched of the ship and towards the emperor’s palace.

Suddenly, the door banged open. Lots of smelly, well-armed men marched into the palace. When the emperor was about to yell “ATTACK”, Captain Ming said in a clear, loud voice “We will give you the treasures of China. Please accept our gift!”.

Shocked, the emperor muttered “Okay”.

“If there’s no problem, we must journey on our way.” Said Captain Ming calmly.

Then, I understood. China was on the verge of war with lots of places. The only way to stop that was natural kindness. The Chinese Emperor never understood the meaning of kindness. He always thought violence was the best way to solve problems. But Captain Ming, he traded kindness with peace, and that was the only way he could succeed.

# The Ming Treasure Voyages – I am Li

*Harrow International School Hong Kong, Fung, Charlotte – 10*

Boom! The crashing waves hit against the docks, as the crew busily run around, getting ready to depart.

Cautiously, I watch closely; hiding behind some cargo nearby. I am Li and I am hungering to become a part of the infamous Ming Treasure cargo crew! And I will do whatever it takes to get there.

Although I am a girl, I know I am destined to join Yong-le Emperor's treasure fleets to sail the oceans under Admiral Zheng He and to show the Western World the true power and magnificence of the Chinese empire.

Suddenly, an idea comes to me! The crew is so busy, and the night is becoming so dark that I can disguise myself as part of the male crew and no one would be any wiser! Quickly, I run back into the village, roughly slash my long black hair with some scissors, change into some dirty trousers, and rush back out of the door.

It is not long before I return to the docks; just in time before the powerful ship sets sail. Quietly, I sneak onto the ship, as the rest of the crew continues to be oblivious to me as they busy with their chores.

"Let's go!" yells the Admiral proudly as he boards the ship.

We are off! The ship slowly and confidently drifts off into the deepest darkest seas that I have ever seen. The thrill of my new adventure is overwhelming but at the same time the excitement and the lull of the ship's sway makes me a little sleepy.

A few of the crew pass me by as I find my place in the hold trying to look busy shifting cargo. I am relieved as by now my heart is pounding out of my skin. I'm struggling to hold it together. I lean on the cargo boxes and slowly, my eyes get heavier and heavier and finally, unable to resist any longer, I give into temptation and close them firmly shut as the other crewmen begin to leave. I dream wildly of all sorts of wonderful things: faraway lands, meeting beautiful Kings and Queens, languages I could not understand, but am excited to learn....

Then, abruptly, I am awoken by thunder that roars from the skies like a hungry lion pouncing on its prey. The next thing I know, the ship is being engulfed by the storms. The hull is cracked and the bow is completely wrecked! The crew are not ready for this as many of them are standing on the deck and are thrown into the waters. As luck would have it, I manage to remain safely in the hold with the cargo although by this time water is starting to seep through the cracks appearing in the hull.

I run as fast and steadily as I can onto the swaying deck and notice something glistening close by within the waters through the corner of my eye. The ship must have hit some land in the storms and what I see are the crystalline rocks from the land being reflected in the moonlight. Grabbing all the rope I can lay my hands on, I run towards the direction of the glistening rocks and jump off the gradually sinking ship. I swim hurriedly and manage to climb safely onto one large piece of rock. As soon as I make sure I am securely on, I tie one end of rope to myself and throw the other end with all my might towards one of the sailors in the waters pulling him safely onshore. I do this again and again until I am exhausted and can no longer see any more bodies in the dim moonlight as the storms begin to calm.

The dawn sunlight begins to appear bringing with it a new day and new beginnings. The horizon is illuminated in warm colours. The crew I have managed to save, start to stir. Some have sore limbs, others have minor injuries; but nevertheless all of us feel fortunate to be alive.

"Li, you saved us! We want to make sure the Admiral rewards you for your bravery and does not punish you for boarding his ship without permission! We will all make a solemn oath to keep your identity a secret!" The survivors swore amongst themselves once I tell them my story.

I am Li, I am a girl, and I have become a part of the Ming Treasure cargo crew!

# The Doomed Voyage

*Harrow International School Hong Kong, Hill-Wood, Wilfred – 10*

A solemn evening washed over the deck. We had embarked on a perilous journey to India. The road would be very long and arduous, full of deadly perils. The weather picked up on the crew's mood. Stormy clouds cackled as the rain attacked us. I looked into the dreary horizon. Would we succeed? I clung to the old, dilapidated rail. We would have a perilous journey ahead of us and we would make it to, **India**. Lightning crackled, the wind howled, thunder roared and the boat set off into the dead of night...

The sun beamed, feeding on our cheerful mood. The waves subsided, it was as if grim was unknown. One figure stood out from the rest. Compared to the others he was a god. He stood imposing, towering over us. He was admiral Zheng and he would lead us to India.

Boom! Fear shook the deck, "Pirates!" the lookout cried in alarm. An arrow whizzed over my head. I drew my sword and strode into a legion of pirates, slashing at them, showing them no mercy. They were hurting my home and I was not going to let anyone hurt my home. I was invincible. My confidence allowed the my cabin mates to come back and fight, it was like a battle horn. A ghastly pirate rose the last one of the pack. His expression was an amusing one, as if he didn't care if most of his fellow pirates were silenced. His sinister grin angered me, forcing me to lunge out at him, only then did I realise the truth. He was holding up the admiral's head, coated in blood. I thrust my dagger out, allowing his corpse fall off the deck. Tears glistened down my cheek. I stared in horror at the carnage of the battlefield. I mourned for my lost friends and fed the pirate's bodies to the sharks. I felt a twinge of guilt, then shoved it away. They were hurting my home, and I wasn't going to let them. "Set course for India," I yelled!

Dark clouds hovered, casting their anger towards us, only then did I know the truth. The ambush had turned into a massacre. An army of dark figures leapt onto the deck, polluting with pirates. "Stand strong!" I bellowed, the crew's confidence was gone. It crumbled like sand. I attempted to reach the lifeboats, our only saviour. Only then did I realise our doomed defeat. I tumbled into the lifeboat. My eyes were welled with tears. My ears blocked the anguished screams of the sailors, the cackling of the pirates. I was a sitting duck out there in the ocean. An arrow ran towards me, embedding itself in my forehead. My eyes rolled out, everything went black and it was the cursed voyage, the doomed voyage...

"Ugh!" I crawled out of the wreckage. Was I the only survivor? A dense, deep forest lay before me. The vines gnarled around my feet, the fog clouded my vision. The only bright aspect was the bird's chorus echoing around me, like a microphone in a tunnel. The sun penetrated my skin. The wind rustled my hair. I was deserted and alone would I survive? ...

I settled down, nourishing on the last of the goat I had captured. I caught the aroma of fire burning, it reminded me of the taste of a sweet, succulent meal in a warm place not on a island scavenging for food. I was a beggar on the streets of this city. Thunder rumbled! I drew my dagger and charged of into the night. I froze, fell in agony, it was a hundred bullets invading around my body. Rivers of blood, sweat and tears fell from my eyes. I was going to make it, I urged.

I woke up with a shudder to find myself in a thick net. I struggled to turn around. My feet bound together, handcuffs had engulfed me. I was hurt physically but mentally as well. My proud navy, I had set off with men, ships, gifts. All was left was me. My throat was choked with emotion. I glanced down to see a horde of barbarians crowding around me.

I was desperate. The chief replied by banging his chest swinging his two axes which spun around in his hand. I was outnumbered, I was unarmed. I have no hope left. I was the mouse and he was the cat. He lunged at me cutting my prison in half. I leapt out dodging his powerful strikes. They formed a ring around me, moved in for the kill. My heart pounded. I closed my eyes and prepared for the worst. He raised his axe up...

The horn sounded. I looked up, incredulous. I had never been happier to see a ship before. "Climb aboard," I dived to port escaping the battle raging behind me. I had dodged the battle but I couldn't evade destiny. The leader charged towards me, a bull was charging towards me. My pulse sped up, my reactions quickened. I felt if I had been pumped with energy. He charged to me in slow-motion, I easily ducked. He fell, he fell of the waterfall. His eyes were blazing with fire, anger towards me as his head submerged. I took charge of the wheel and lead my army out of the battle..

I was lust on dreams of glory, a massacre towards these creatures, who had broken me so much. I charged out, my men behind me following my bloodthirsty brain. I left no survivors. I traveled on, to India.

We were starving, too hungry. A banquet lay before us, only when we reached out it disappeared. Miraculously we found a flock of cattle. Fear was etched on their faces as we killed their brethren. We were ready to go again, to continue the arduous journey to India. We were almost at Delphi, India.. We trekked across snowy mounts the cold freezing our persistent will. Should we give up? The icy terrain was full of crevasses and as long as galaxies. It was a universe of snow and rocks. It was a mirage. What is the point of struggling? I pondered. I pushed the thought down. I wasn't going to give up now, amount of hardships I had endured. I kept going. I glanced up. "Delphi," !

I was greeted with a warm welcome... We gifted them with rivers of jewelry and paper. We served feasts of steak and beef and pork. This was our grave mistake... "Run!" I cried, as they charged, insulted. They formed ranks, advanced like robots. Each move in sync. It was a dead end. I had nowhere to go, nowhere to run hide. I was a battleground of fear and anger.. Ungovernable terror gripped me. I closed my eyes, and fell off the palace roof destroying myself...

# The Ming Treasure Voyages

*Harrow International School Hong Kong, Jones, Kaelan – 10*

My name is Harry and I am 11 years old. I work on a ship but it's not any ordinary ship. This ship is a colossal boat that has been ordered by Admiral Zheng He to deliver some precious goods around Asia. "Harry! Hurry up Harry!". That was my mum calling me to hurry up getting ready for my big journey. I was actually quite early but I knew better than to argue with my mum. The reason she wanted me so early is because she wanted to spend more time saying goodbye to me.

I was excited and nervous at the same time because of the long journey ahead. It was dangerous because I could encounter pirates and we might get swept away at sea. Yet, it was also exciting because I would get to deliver goods that people could only dream of and I could go to different countries.

I am at the boat pier right now and I can hardly hear myself think, let alone hear my Mum. My heart was pounding through my skin as I was saying goodbye. "Goodbye, mum!" I yelled over the commotion. "I will miss you so much Harry!" my Mum replied. I knew my Mum was afraid because I think we both knew I might not be making it back to China. My heart was racing as I stepped up the wooden plank saying what might be my final words to my Mum...

Once I got onto the vessel I was dumbstruck. It was literally the most amazing sight I've ever seen. There were at least three times the number of people on the boat than there was at the pier. There were thousands of people loading and unloading goods that literally sparkled in the sunshine. I met a few people including a girl my age named Hazel and a boy a bit younger than me called Frederick. Hazel is quite tall and strong and Frederick is very short and skinny. Soon, I got settled down in my cabin, coincidently with Hazel and Frederick. Soon I started doing some work. First, I moved some barrels away so there was more space for the adults to put down the goods (I was too young to handle the goods). After that I cleaned the lookout so the people up there could sit or stand comfortably. My last job was to wash the dirty dishes that the older crew used for their supper.

Soon it was my supper and we hadn't even set off, yet I was already loving my new job. I was just about to brush my teeth after a long day of hard work when I felt a sudden lurch and I rushed outside. When I got outside I looked around for the pier which we were at only a couple of minutes ago but I was surrounded by pure darkness. No stars shone and there wasn't even the faintest of outlines of where the moon might have been.

This is my tenth day on the boat and we still hadn't seen any land until late morning when a voice from lookout informed the whole crew. "Land ahoy!". Suddenly everybody dropped and stopped what they were doing and started leaning along the railings to try get a good look at the land. At first it only looked like an isolated island but when we got closer the land looked surprisingly like Singapore just like on the map we had on the main deck.

Singapore was one of our destinations to deliver to so we were going to stop there. At first, I was just stood there not knowing what to do but then I felt a clammy, sweaty palm slap my shoulder. I quickly turned around not knowing who to expect but when I saw it was the Captain I rapidly relaxed. "Go look around son. You've earned this break after all your hard work these past few days," the Captain ordered. So, I obediently followed his orders and had a look around this minute country.

Soon it was all over and we all had to get back on the boat after a long day of seeing iconic structures, like the Merlion. That night I could hardly sleep because my leg muscles were aching so much from all the walking I had to do so I went up onto the main deck to look out at sea. I decided that I would tell Hazel and Frederick because I could hear them uncomfortably twitching in their beds. They willingly got up and we walked together chatting about what we did that day. I think we were so encased in our own conversation that we didn't even hear the mutterings from behind us. Soon I felt something touch my back so I quickly spun around to find what were obviously pirates.

“PIRATES!!” I yelled “PIRATES!! PIRATES ON BOARD!!” but I had a piece of tape around my mouth so it sounded like “prtftw! Prtftw oo bood!!” so no one came running to rescue us. The pirates made the quick decision of dumping us into the shark-infested sea. Soon we were shivering in the icy cold water praying that the sharks don’t get us yet we still managed to scream at the top of our lungs. Nobody on the ship heard us so we soon gave up trying and just let our bodies float helplessly waiting for our doom.

Suddenly, out of nowhere, this fire-breathing, almost transparent dragon swoops in from the skies. “I am called George. I have been summoned by Capogo whom, I’m sure you know, is the most feared sea monster in the world. Anyway, he summoned me to come save you because he thinks that you three are the ones in the sacred prophecy,” said George whilst hovering over the surface of the crashing sea. “D-dragon?!” I exclaimed but before I knew it we were scooped up onto the back of the dragon and taken away into the night sky...

# The Adventure on Sea

*Harrow International School Hong Kong, Lee, Abbey – 10*

Dear Diary,

“Alright, are we all ready to set sail?” Emperor Zhong Lee asked.

“Yes, we are ready if you are Sir,” Maiden Ying responded.

My name is Fei and I’m 13 years old. I have a sister named Yuan and my dad is Emperor Zhong Lee. Today we are sailing to the Macadain forest to find this stupid pile of gold that my father wants.

“We are ready captain, let’s go!” Father exclaimed eager to leave.

Once we set sail, I went down to my room on the ship to wait for Yuan to finish her violin lesson in the violin suite. While I was waiting, I looked out my window and saw trees as light as a marshmallow and fishes dancing in the water. Not long after we started to sail, captain Zhang Wei shouted “Waterfall! Waterfall!”

I looked out of my window and saw what seems to be a cascading waterfall under an opalescent light.

“Hey, let’s go play!” Yuan cried. Then I got out of my bed and we both walked over to the game center.

In the game center, there lots of arcade games like down the clown, claw machine madness and lots more.

We dashed straight to the game that we wanted to play and started playing. Suddenly the captain shouted “Five Minutes left, Five Minutes left.”

“Oh No, there are only five minutes left, that means that we can only play one game.” Yuan said.

Then I said “Don’t worry we can still play when we come back.” Then we started to play the game that we choose. “ We are here! We are here!” Captain Zhang Wei bellowed. We all walked over to the front of the ship and waited for father to say we could get off.

“ Get Off ! Get Off !” Father told us. One at a time we got of the ship and went to the Macadain forest. We walked inside the Macadain forest and searched for the stupid pile of gold.

We searched for ages and finally found the gold. Father reached out for the gold and grabbed the gold. The crew quickly ran back to the boat to avoid any traps. Once we got on the boat, the captain told us that we are going to stay overnight. The sun started to set and the moon started to say hello, I looked outside my window and saw the sunset sky with clouds as soft as a marshmallow. The mountains were standing tall on the green grass. I got tired so I went to bed.

Bright and early on the next morning we started to set sail back home. I was still very tired so I went back to sleep. A few hours later, Yuan woke me up to go to the arcade. We walked over and played lots more games. We played ten games and father said that there was only ten minutes left. So we played as fast as we could and five minutes later we played fifteen games. “ Get off the ship,” father yelled.

Finally, I said I can go back home.

Written by Fei Lee

19/6/1775



# The Secret Pirate

*Harrow International School Hong Kong, Lee, Franco – 11*

As quickly as his legs could go, Admiral Zheng ran and ran like his life depended on it, going as far as he could from the menacing shouts of evil laughter. Gun shots pierced the atmosphere. He scrambled towards the lower deck, desperate to guard the treasure with his crew.

As the gun shots stopped, silence invaded the room. Hong Bao, who was a chubby young man, followed his admiral to the upper deck to investigate what had made the pirates disappear.

Many pirates and crew members were lying on the wooden floor with a pool of blood surrounding them. The scent of war still lingered.

“H–Help!” cried a croaky voice. “Help me...”

Hong Bao heard the cry and as quickly as a cheetah dashed towards the sound, finding himself face to face with a weak and feeble man, lying on the ground.

Admiral Zheng had also heard the voice and was standing next to the man, questioning him.

Admiral Zheng, the kind–hearted man he was, took pity on this stranger and gave him food, water and a place to sleep. Little did the admiral know that this man was only the first step to a huge, nasty plot planned by the Black Pearl Pirates.....

Soon, darkness covered the sky. Charcoal clouds rolled in, swallowing any last bits of light. Then began the gentle pitter patter of rain quickly becoming a vicious onslaught.

Once the rest of the crew found out about what happened earlier in the day, they had a feast to welcome their newest crew member, Yang Zhen. Out on the table was any cuisine you could ever desire. Fried sweet and sour pork, fried prawn, rice noodles, fried rice, etc.

They gorged themselves in food as though they had never eaten before. Their manners were atrocious!

When the clock struck twelve, Yang Zhen decided this would be the perfect moment to strike. He got out of bed and darted to the treasure vault, swiftly and quietly. The vault with all the treasure inside had many complicated locks. *Wow*, Yang Zhen thought, *How could I be so dumb not to think that a vault will definitely have locks.*

He remembered what his *real* captain had said to him.

“Yang Zhen, I am giving you the one chance to prove yourself. Steal the Ming Treasure and I might promote you. Do not fail or else you will be banished from the Black Pearl Pirates. Arrrgh!”

Reluctantly, he went back to bed and tried all night to put together a cunning plan.

The next morning, a bucket of icy cold water was splashed onto Yang Zhen’s face.

“Hey! What was that for?”

“To wake you up.” replied Zhu Liang, another crew member. “Follow me, I’ll give you a tour of the ship.”

After Yang Zhen dried his face, Zhu Liang showed him around. On the upper deck, a huge sail towered over them and a steering wheel to guide the ship. A staircase was connecting the upper and lower deck. On the lower deck, there was a mini kitchen, the captain’s quarters and tons of sleeping bags for the crew to sleep in.

“Out of interest,” Yang Zhen nervously muttered, “How do you... how do you open the vault?”

“It’s a secret. Only the captain knows. Why do you ask?”

“No reason.” replied Yang Zhen. He tried to change the subject. “So... what is for lunch?”

*Only the captain knows*, Yang Zhen thought to himself. *Hmmmm...*

He ran as fast as his legs could go to the captain’s quarters, eager to complete his mission. Inside the captain’s quarters, there were paintings on the walls and priceless artefacts on top of the shelves. In the centre of the room was a desk with files all over it.

*This is my chance! I have to do this.*

Yang Zhen fumbled hastily through the captain’s possessions. Abruptly, he heard a sound and thought the captain was here.

“Look, sir. I—I can explain...”

Instead of the captain who he was speaking to, it was actually a parrot who he was talking to. He breathed a sigh of relief and determined, continued on his mission.

Eventually, he found the captain’s secret files under the desk. *Very sneaky, admiral. Very sneaky...*

Written on the files were the captain’s personal details, the crew’s information, pictures of the ship when it wasn’t finished and...the password to the vault! Yang Zhen quickly scribbled down the numbers:  
*2 3 7 1 9 7.*

Footsteps sounded from behind him, Admiral Zheng roared!

One word came to Yang Zhen’s mind.

*Run.*

“AAAAAAH!”

He dashed to the treasure vault, dodging the crew members who failed to catch him. Eventually, he saw the vault and quickly inputted the password. **2 3 7 1 9 7!**

He grabbed an old sack that was lying on the floor. He filled it with as much treasure as he could. Grunting from the weight of the sack, he struggled to pull the sack towards a life boat. The angry crew were just behind him by only a couple of steps away!

He got all the treasure to the life boat, panting heavily. Admiral Zheng ordered the crew to paddle after Yang Zhen but it was already too late. Yang Zhen was already very far from the ship.

He now could barely hear the shouts of the crew. He paddled as quickly as he could on his lifeboat, smiling because he had successfully stolen the Ming Treasure! He had completed his mission.

*Sometimes*, Yang Zhen thought to himself.

*Pirates win.*

# Journey as a Ming Voyager

*Harrow International School Hong Kong, Lui, Michelle – 10*

Hello, I am Cerise. I am a member of the Ming Voyage. This is my diary entry about my trip on Captain Ming's ship. As the crew boarded the ship, I had a swarm of butterflies in my stomach. I remember Captain Ming saying that we had some other evil ships sailing as well, and if we see them they could attack us. Ming came over and clapped my back.

"Don't you worry, Cerise. I will avenge you, even if it costs my life."

I grinned, but a little sadly as I didn't want Ming to perish. She walked off, and the ship lurched forward. Some crates crashed on top of me as I followed her. The shards of wood smashed onto my head, and my vision blurred. Blindly, I climbed up a series of stairs and collapsed onto the ground. I had a faint vision of Ming spinning the wheel, and then I blacked out.

When I woke up, I smelled the fresh scent of the salty sea. I scrambled up, and began to work. I kept the sails going and pressed my eye up against the telescope every once in a while. Then a colossal wave towered over us, and we all got soaked. Ming immediately stopped and looked down. A gigantic shark burst out of the water, and another huge wave splashed us.

"Oi you!" The shark growled. "I am a Megalodon, don't you see? No shark is bigger than me! And, I am hungry, so... I suppose you'd make a good meal!"

He leaped out of the water and tried to latch onto Ming and eat her, but she drew her bronze dagger and swiped at his snout. A fresh red scar appeared.

"GRRR!" he snarled. "I can't stand you anymore! Besides, I've got some other sharks to eat. So, I guess you can mind your own business now!"

He dived back into the deep sea. Ming stumbled back to the wheel and began to spin it again. The ship tipped over, and I almost fell into the ocean.

The day went quite fast and it was evening. Everything was going fine until a waterspout whirled out of the ocean. He laughed, then took a gulp of air. I felt the ship drag towards it. I acted quickly and climbed up to the crow's nest. Then I jumped, drawing my dangerous steel sword as I flew across the air. I then brought it down. I felt the sword severing the waterspout.

"YOU'LL PAY FOR THIS!" were his last parting words.

I grabbed onto the railing and heaved myself up. Ming grinned.

"Very well, Cerise. Now let us get going, we have a long week ahead of us."

The night passed quickly and I pushed myself up from my comfy bed. The sunshine seeped through the window; I winced as I gazed at it. I dressed up, and then climbed up the stairs. Ming had ordered Eddie to help her with the wheel as she slept. This morning, she was back and looking energetic.

"The breakfast will be later! It's only five in the morning, we can have it soon."

I placed my trusty telescope up to my eye. That was when I saw a bit of land. I told Ming, and she commanded John to do the sails. The ship swiftly sped up, and before we knew, we washed up on the beach. We hopped off. The land was deserted, just lots of mud and twisted trees. Then I heard an evil moo. Three devilish cows swirled out of the ground.

"YOU!" they mooed. "YOU HAVE DEFEATED THE WATERSPOUT. LET US SEE IF YOU CAN BEAT THIS!"

They pointed their ruby sceptres at the ground next to us. Hades appeared.

"What is it now?" he moaned.

Then he saw us and stomped his feet.

"INTRUDERS!" he boomed. "THIS IS OUR LAND! I CALL IT INDIA! Now, I shall BATTLE YOU to DEATH!"

Before he could swing his burly hands at us, I swung my steel sword and chopped off his arms. Then Ming punched his face, and a tooth was knocked out. John picked it up, puzzled.

"It's a BABY tooth!" he said. "Hades is a grown up! He still has BABY teeth!?"

"Calm down, John. We've got other things to worry about."

We turned around, leaving the cows and sailing off.

It wasn't long before we saw another land. It was night time, and the stars twinkled above us. The ship parked near the shore, and all climbed off. A loud growl was heard, and it lingered in the air for a while.

"Shush," Ming hissed. "I see something."

We tiptoed behind a tree and saw it. A liger the size of a garbage truck was busily grooming itself, grunting as it smelled our salty, sweaty scent. It turned its head, its amber eyes glaring at us.

"RAAAARRRR!" it roared, padding over.

It licked the tree, and it ripped straight off the ground and landed next to the liger. It bared its teeth at us; then it prepared to pounce and squash all of us with its gigantic belly. Luckily, we acted quick and sprinted like we never sprinted before. We climbed aboard, and Ming ran to the wheel. The liger swiped. The hull had a giant hole as the ship zoomed off. David, the professional mender, rushed over and patched up the hull in a flash. We continued sailing.

"Hey," I said, walking over to Ming.

She turned around and smiled wryly.

"Well, Cerise. You did great. Let's go."

The ship docked by the pier of China, our home. I was satisfied about that, as the boat ride was so bumpy I could've passed out the whole trip. Now, shall I tell you the name of that land we last discovered? We called it Africa.

# The Wreckage of the Sea

*Harrow International School Hong Kong, Stranger, Emilia – 11*

Tick tock tick tock. Time was running out. Blinding lights flashed in my chestnut brown eyes as my charcoal hair flew behind me. The colossal buildings towered over my small child figure as I raced down the unlit, dark alley. My head was faced straight down to the stone floor, making sure nobody could recognize me. I could smell the scrumptious food from the local dim sum shop down the crowded street. Everybody was lined up outside like bees in a beehive as I sprinted past it, trying to resist the delicious food. In the corner of my small eye, a gigantic ship entered my view. Bullseye! I was a cheetah, sprinting towards my target. A crate met my shimmering eyes. I headed towards it and leapt into it like a kangaroo. Bang! Everything hurt. I shut my eyes in raging pain as I tried to keep my screaming inside. Slowly, the pain seeped out of my body in small amounts. I eventually opened my eyes. Pitch black.

I reached inside my bag and pulled out the notebook that I had gotten for my thirteenth birthday. When I opened the book, I felt like all of my notes were flowing out in a waterfall of secrets. Then, my embarrassing secrets were leaked out of the crate and into everyone's minds. They were laughing and chuckling inside my messed up head but I pushed them out and carried on. I put down my pen and try to move it around but all I knew was that it was just going to be scribbles everywhere. I needed light. There was a tiny hole in the bottom of the cramped crate. I was going to get out somehow so I propelled my leg forwards with a lot of force towards the small hole. Boom! Thin lightning shaped cracks appeared across the splintered wood. I did it again. Another bang! Splinters of wood flew across the ground as the rough wood collapsed into pieces. I was out!

As soon as I got out, I flicked through my journal and a piece of writing caught my eye.

January 26th, 1421

Dear Diary,

My friends keep asking why my name is Fēngbào. Well, the not so long story behind my name is that my name means storm in English. My mother called me that because she had a passion for the sea and everything about it. She loved sailing and writing about the storms she encountered until she met my dad. My dad hated my mum going even a tiny bit closer to the water, so she never did because of him. Now that my mother has passed away the only person left is my dad. He is the only man in charge of me and the entire empire. So, I am going to follow my mum and sneak away, but honestly, I don't know how.

–Fēngbào

As I shut my journal, I found myself being rocked back and forwards continuously until, Crash! The boat tilted on its side and groaned at the enormous impact. Deafening thunder whined and moaned outside. I grabbed my notebook rapidly and opened it to a new page. This was an experience I could write about.

October 15<sup>th</sup>, 1422

Dear Diary,

Dark grey clouds were sprawled across the gloomy sky. In a flash, a thin slit of bright white struck down and split the sky into two uneven parts. It was as if a painter painted a canvas only grey then accidentally spilled a streak of silver all the way down it. Then, he kept doing it repeatedly and not cleaning his mess up. I thought that the lightning was bad, but the wind was much worse. It was howling like the opening of every single horror movie. It was roaring violently while the rain spat down forcefully against the rocky sea. I was getting thrown around and hung up on the wall like a painting. The waves grew larger and larger until they crashed against the weak wood. The boat was screaming in pain as I would if I was getting crushed by a wall of force. Monstrous waves were towering over the crew as they screamed and panicked. They were ants compared to the gigantic walls of water. I was extremely excited that something interesting had finally happened in my life. All I ever do is practice my manners and greet people with a phony, fake smile. I want to be on a boat and in storms at all times but unfortunately, I can't.

–Fēngbào

I slammed my book closed with enthusiasm as I peered through the holes in the window. I could feel the cold air punching my face, but I enjoyed it. I was trying to get a better view but then,

“Oi! Whot you doin ere!”

“Oh no!” I whispered under my breath.

# The Adventure on the Sea

*Harrow International School Hong Kong, Suen, Gaia – 9*

“Go!” Emperor Zhang shouted. “Go!”

“Father, no! Please, I’m your daughter!” Ming begged. She looked up at her angry father. “You are nothing to me. What did I do to deserve a useless daughter like this?” Ming helplessly looked at the guards standing next to the golden doors. She knew the guards would be ordered to take her away. Emperor Zhang looked at her and smirked. “Guards, you have my permission to take her away. If she tries to get free, threaten her.” Ming cried in despair.”

“Father, why?”

“You heard me guards. Take her away!” Emperor Zhang’s voice echoed through the hallway. As soon as the Emperor spoke, the guards scurried forward pushing each other just to get hold of Ming. Her long ebony hair was soaked in her tears. They all wanted Emperor Zhang to reward them. Soon enough, Ming was in chains and was carried away on a gigantic boat. Emperor Zhang laughed wickedly. “Finally I got rid of my daughter. Now for my little prank. “Qing!” Suddenly a young woman dressed in expensive, silky clothes ran into the room. “Get The Sagana Boat here! Tell the crew to set sail for the island.”

“Yes my dearest,” answered Qing, Emperor Zhang’s wife. Then, as quick as ever she sprinted out of the room tripping a few times on her delicate dress. Slowly, Emperor Zhang rose from his throne and strode out of the room in a very posh way. As soon as he stepped outside, the crew of men outside made space for him and bowed. “Hello my workers. Are you ready to trade gold?”

“Yes sir,” the captain of the crew replied. “Where are we going?”

“Oh! You are so going to love this. You are going to Alasonamakosaris!”

“Um... But sir, that’s not even a real place!”

“Oh it is. It’s just not on the map. You will find Mascotara on the way. She will guide you there. One of the residents.”

“But but...” said the captain in a panicky voice.

“Yes?”

“Nothing sir.”

“Then I guess you can go now. Bye.” The Emperor headed back to his palace proudly, thinking of how his crew would react when they realise it was all a prank. With that thought he laughed. The captain of the crew did not laugh though. He just stood there looking like he was paralyzed. One member of the crew had to shake him a few times before he would move. Finally, the captain said shakily, “Okay crew. Everyone on board The Sagana Boat.” Soon enough, all the crew was on board sailing out to the stormy sea, ready to begin a new adventure.

# The Start of an Amazing Tale

*Harrow International School Hong Kong, Tse, Leticia – 10*

As people brushed pass the busy market in Beijing with fruits and a jug of water in their hands. It was always a busy place, but today was especially busy. For today was when me and my family set sale to give treasures to the poor it was tough as I knew from the days I would sit up in my comfy violet bed reading the diaries of my great grandpa. As I knew me and my sister would be the only girls aboard.....

## The new journey to atlantis

HIIIIIIII! My name is Sydney and I'm 10 years old I have a sister whose name is July she is really dirty and clumsy and my papa's name is Raymond and my mamma's name is Miriam we set of yesterday early in the morning to go and give presents to the needy .Since I arrived it has been a very hard job keeping the place tidy I tried to clean my room it had mold sticking everywhere just thinking about it makes me want to BARF! Any way the bed seemed to be in good shape so I just slept on it.... I woke up to the sounds of thundering storms and roaring creatures I peeked out of a tiny hole leading outside it was a crazy storm. I saw large tentacles smashing the sea ground. I broke into a cold sweat and rushed into every room I could find and yell "ALERT ALERT THERE'S MONSTERS ON DECK ALERT" and of course they would wake up and jump around screaming except for my 4 year old sister she would jump out of bed and read her book and she would yell "YAY MONSTERS COME TO PLY YAYAYAYYY SQUEEEEE" I seriously can't believe that girl we would have to fight bare handed because all our weapons were stored safely in the storage room the person that had the keys had been swallowed by the monster I used to slap his tentacles of the deck with wheelbarrows uhm you wouldn't believe how long it took to wash that slimy muck of my hands, but those tiring days were all over we finally arrived to are destination Atlantis. As the beautiful land scape came into view the tall trees and the colorful flowers, but the best part was there was a humongous palace standing proudly above us our mouth dropped as I asked papa and mama if me and July could take a closer look as we pushed are way through the bushes and trees covering most of the land we finally passed the bushes and trees into a clearing a tall majestic shimmery palace looking over the forest the doors swung open, as July tugged on my arm she squeaked "can we go in there" without answering she led herself in.AAAAAHHH a blinding flash of light brightened the area as I called out for my sister ..no answer without looking I quickly rushed past the door .All the way down it felt like a illusion falling down a deep dark hole THUD!!As I got up on my feet I desperately tried to find my sister as I heard footsteps approach it got closer and closer I could make up the figure it was my sister! "JULY" I ran across the room hugging her like I was back at home. I smiled as she told me her adventure through candy land I thought she was lying before she showed me a crystal candy phone she told me the time here was much slower so we had time to figure things out. She also said that she got to have a cup of tea with the mad hatter YES, the mad hatter can you believe it. she explained that we needed to find a pendant to go back to papa and mama she told me that it would be just around the corner of the land of monsters I shuddered at the thought as we waked and walked as we arrived we were unpleasantly greeted by know what I think as a nature monster moss was growing rapidly but this will surprise you it was a sign as I heard footsteps I knew we were going to have a messy fight as my sister huddled under a rock as I quickly made a shield out of leaves and twigs I scratched myself so I could get some blood and paint with it on my shield I learned that it will scare the monsters in monster adventures . Apparently, it worked as I heard it running and whining yes, I saved the day and it happened alot of times finally we got the pendant by playing a winning chess game against a villager.

As we rushed through pirates and monsters and fought through twice as fast as we reached the destination we came from we could see the pedant was gleaming we quickly rubbed it and POOF we landed head first into the pond surrounding a small village it was noisy but colorful as we almost forgot what we came for as we quickly gave things to them including July's crystal phone as they thanked us and gave presents of their own including carved paintings on rocks and new weapons witch I'm shore papa will love ,as we waved good bye we set of to find papa and mama it wasn't that hard since they were coming to look for use since they were wondering where we were now I'm back in my cabin writing this all in to my diary hoping that my grandkids will read this and spread it through their own family roof BYE! poof that was a really long diary entry I wish grandma would have wrote a shorter diary entry. As mama loaded the luggage's onto the ship mama said "come on Hope the ship is leaving soon and don't say anything like that to my dear mama."

# My Voyage

*Harrow International School Hong Kong, Wakelin, Laura – 11*

I am just like any other girl from China, whatever you say, except for the fact that I had always wanted to explore the oceans. Mother had told me many times about the sea, as my late father was once the captain of a vessel, but one day he had heroically died in battle. That was all I knew about him. I didn't even know his name. Once, I had tried asking Mother about my father, but I would never get a proper answer. From then on, I learned to stray far away from the topic. We had always been happy, even without my mysterious father. We sometimes quarrel, but only with reason. However, we are both as stubborn as mules, (I inherited it from my mother!) so these 'disagreements' could go on for days on end. We were never the richest people in the world. Even though we had just enough to survive, sometimes, Mother would have to work a few extra hours sewing and mending clothes, with me helping, to feed us through winter.

One day, I was awoken by a loud trumpet. It was a proclamation! I scrambled down the stairs from my tiny room. Mother was already standing at the door, watching the elaborately dressed messenger in polite interest. "Hear this, people of China! The great adventurer, Zheng He, will be welcoming brave young men to join him and his crew on a lengthy voyage across the seas to find and destroy the wicked dragon, Tsunami!! Those who dare to join the crew will be richly rewarded, and will become renown throughout China!! But beware! This is a near-suicidal mission, so join, *if you dare*."

I didn't notice, but mother turned whiter than snow.

My mother faced me and sighed, "I know that I won't be able to stop you, but at least take this. She handed me an ornate silver dagger that gleamed in the feeble sun. The handle was delicately carved in the likeness of a flame, burning bright. It seemed to emit a soft glow that wrapped my heart in comfort.

The day before the voyage, I dressed in male clothing and cut my flowing, ebony black hair short with my father's dagger. I sprang aboard the ship and we set sail! The sea was a thick foamy blue, like the sky. The captain, Zheng He had a kind smile on his face as he greeted the crew. After five long days of sailing, we arrived at the monster's lair. It reeked of death and destruction. Suddenly, a thrashing dragon leapt smoothly out of the water, sending a tidal wave of fear through the crew. Now I could see where it got its name from. It let out a fearsome roar. It was like a python, but immense, and it was lined with spikes that expelled corrosive venom. It was as graceful as a panther, having a long twisting body but as deadly as a cobra. It had teeth as white as pearls but extremely lethal. Its horns were like freshly forged swords, glowing red and sharp in the darkness. Its eyes glowed amber in the blackness of night as if inviting us to our deaths.

We shot our arrows nonstop at it, but they did no good. They bounced off the polished scales as if they were only pebbles. 'Maybe we can use fire!!' I struggled over to Captain Zheng He, and quickly told him my plan. "Excellent idea! Of course, a water monster would loath fire! We announced to the crew that we would set our arrows on fire, which would sear away at the flesh and kill the monster! The great beast spat its corrosive venom that missed the ship by the length of a mouse's whisker. Encouraged to work faster, the crew lit the arrows and took aim. Blood stained the ocean as the beast got shot over and over again. It was hanging on to life by a single thread. Then I remembered my dagger and pulled it out of my pocket. Its flames seemed to flicker and dance. I threw the blade with all my might at the creature's chest. The dagger drove itself into the beast's heart. With a last eerie caterwauling, the beast slowly crumpled into a heap, with death hanging over its body. It started to disintegrate in front of my very eyes. I watched in awe as dagger-sharp tooth drifted towards me and landed in my hands.

As we all gazed at the slowly disintegrating dragon, the captain motioned to me to speak with him. The dagger that you slew the beast with used to be mine. There was no other dagger like it in this world. My jaw dropped. "Father?" I gasped. He murmured softly. "I am proud to be your father. You have proven that you are a warrior at heart.



# Treasure Hunt

*Harrow International School Hong Kong, Yip, Tiffany – 10*

Once in an island there were 3 pirates who lived in China. There was Mia, Jake and Annie. There was also a captain called Percy. The pirates did not get along with each other and always argued day and night. This is why they are on this island without their parents. Mia, Jake, Annie was horrible, greedy and had no manners. Percy was a bit more sensible than them. They wish to have all the gold on the world.

One day, they decided to go search for gold. They went on the ship. Percy was driving the ship while the others started to fight. In the middle of the journey, Mia pushed Annie out of the ship. “Hahaha!” laughed Mia.

“This has to stop right now and stop fighting!” shouted Percy in anger. Annie was very far ahead of the ship. They didn’t care about saving Annie so they kept going. BANG! CRASH! A flash of thunder was rushing out of the sky. It started to rain. The waves swished. The water slashed. The ship crashed in to hard big rocks. The waves made the ship flung side to side. They got very wet. The pirates were wondering around shouting. “STOP RIGHT NOW! CALM DOWN!” shouted Percy.

The pirates were silent. A few hours later, it got very dark. They all got tired and started to sleep.

The next morning, the pirates landed on a big island. They ran out of the ship as fast as lightning. “Yeah! We had arrived!” said Jack.

“Whatever, well when we find the treasure, it’s going to be mine!” shouted Mia angrily.

“Learn to share guys because sharing is caring!” said Percy.

They started to walk in to the island. The trees were green, the birds singing. There was a shiny castle. They went inside. It was silent. They all went into a dark room. Behind the chair they saw a treasure box. They tried opening it but didn’t work. So, they decided to search for their key. Percy searched for the key in the book shelf. Mia searched under the table. At the same time Jack searched in the flower pot.

“Found it! It’s in the flower pot.”

Slowly they tried again to open the treasure chest and it opened. BANG!

“What are you doing in my castle? Said a lady.

“We are so sorry, we just wanted to find some gold and please forgive us.” cried Percy.

“Well you should if asked me but now I must call the cops because stealing is not the right thing to do.

The lady started to call the cops. Percy burst in tears saying “We are never doing this again. This was a really bad idea.”

“I know we should be good to each other and not steal again.” Said Jack.

They never steal things again and lived happily later after.

# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

*Harrow International School Shanghai, Hui, Sabrina – 10*

“Grandpa! Grandpa! Please tell me another story!” pleaded 5 year– old Chang. “Alright, I will tell you a story.” Said Grandpa. “ This story takes place in the Ming dynasty, where people ride on horses and wheelbarrows for transport. People also travel by boat. Your ancestors were sailors, Chang. Only we know this.” “Grandpa, can we please get on with the story?” said Chang impatiently. “Okay, okay. Be patient.”

## THE MING TREASURE FLEET

Your Great–great–great–great Grandfather was a regular sailor. He went on many voyages. But this voyage was like no other. During the autumn of 1405, he was selected to go on this maiden voyage led by Zheng He. This voyage was to give gifts to other countries to make peace. Unfortunately in their time, there were vicious pirates roaming the seas. But the most feared of all was Chen Zuyi and his ferocious crew. So Zhu Di (the current emperor) demanded Zheng He to bring soldiers with him. On this voyage, they brought a total of 4 ships. Your Great–great–great–great grandfather got a job to scrub the deck on the leader’s ship.

They undocked the ships and set off on their journey. Their first destination was Champa, Vietnam. They met the Vietnamese king, and handed them chests of gold and barrels of fine silk. Their second destination was Java, Indonesia. They presented porcelain vases and priceless jewels. They saw beaches with sand glimmering under the sun. They went to places around Southeast Asia like Malacca, Aru, Semudera and Lambri. After leaving Lambri, one ship headed to the Nicobar Islands but the remaining three ships continued to head to their seventh destination, Sri Lanka. The view was breathtaking. The ocean blue skies were endless. The green plains were joined together, as if it were a carpet, smothering the land with its bright colour. They soon embarked and set sail to their final and ultimate destination, Calicut. There, people wore silk sarongs and turbans of different colours. Though they considered most foreigners to be barbarians, they respected residents of Calicut for their honesty in trading. The fleet traded in the last of their vases, gold and silk and finally headed back to China.

On the journey home, your Great–great–great–great grandfather saw a disturbing shadow come towards them. The shadow came closer and gradually started to resemble a ship. He warned Zheng He himself. After hearing this, Zheng He summoned a line of defence. As the fog cleared, the ship became clearer. On the ship, a man with a cloak held a telescope scowling fiercely. “Shoot the arrows!” he barked. This man was no other than the unmistakable Chen Zuyi and his pirates. The pirate ship started to sail closer. The arrows injured some of the sailors. The soldiers climbed on Chen Zuyi’s ship. The soldiers battled with swords. The pirates lost miserably. And Chen Zuyi was ordered to walk the plank.

“After arriving back in china, the sailors went back to their families and friends. Your Great–great–great–great Grandfather shared his tale with your Great–great–great Grandfather and he passed it on to your Great–great Grandfather and he passed it on to your Great grandfather and he passed it on to me and I passed it on to you.” Grandpa smiled. Chang stared in awe. “Chang, someday when you grow up and become an old grandpa like me, hopefully you could share this story with your grandchildren and think of me. Goodnight, Chang.” “Goodnight Grandpa.”

# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

*Heep Yunn Primary School, Chan, Antonia – 11*

As Zheng Le walked up the gangplank onto the ship, the *Jadeflower*, he felt a rush of excitement to be on this voyage. Though he was just twelve, everyone on the ship respected him as his father was Zheng Wu, brother of Admiral Zheng He, chief of the voyage to East Africa. Named after Emperor Yong Le, Zheng Le knew he was a privileged boy of his time.

For the first few weeks, the merest suggestion of breeze carried the ship along. Zheng Le enjoyed the sunshine. He also had different jobs on the ship such as helping the navigator to locate stars and looking after the ship's sails. He saw, did, and learnt much.

Suddenly, strong gales rocked the ship, tossing everyone and everything on board this way and that. The wind morphed the sea into mountains of ferocious waves. When Zheng Le and the others heard and saw how frightened the sailors were, they panicked.

"I miss home and Mum. I will never make it back home..." Zheng Le whimpered.

Zheng Le and other passengers stared forlornly at the horizon. No land was in sight. After sixty days, a brown strip of hope appeared on the horizon. That day, there was great jubilation on board.

"Good job, men! We have finally reached land!" the captain, Zheng Wu boomed with excitement, "Let's go and explore! My brother will be proud and the Emperor will be pleased."

Zheng Le followed his father to explore the land, exhilaration coursing through his veins. Suddenly, a towering creature with a long neck, long legs and dark patches on its body stumbled past Le. He spurted back to his father as fast as he could and blabbered, "This is a monster land. I've just seen one..."

Before Le could say another word, a native man with skin as dark as midnight appeared before them. Le and the man looked at each other in curiosity. Then with hand signals, the young man motioned for Le and his father to follow him back to the village. They found themselves surrounded by a crowd of inquisitive natives. After establishing that they were people of peace, Le's father took out ten dark green pieces of jade flower pendants from a silk pouch and gave them to the natives. The villagers seemed ecstatic with the gifts and brought out an assortment of local delicacies.

At last, the villagers indicated that Zheng Le and his dad could take back any animal they wanted from their land. Le's dad bowed low in gratitude.

They then scooted quickly back to the *Jadeflower* to gather soldiers to catch an animal. "Let's round up the long-necked creature that I'd seen!" Zheng Le blurted as he showed the ship's soldiers where he saw the creature.

"ATTACK!" Zheng Wu clamoured as the soldiers blitzed in on the creatures. The wild animals all galloped away like waves of thunder, except for a young, feeble one. The soldiers rapidly threw a rope over the smallest creature's neck and started to haul it back towards the ship.

"We got a long-necked deer for the Emperor!" the soldiers cheered.

However, as they boarded the ship, a larger long-necked deer dashed out from the trees to thrust the soldiers away. The soldiers fought back by shooting arrows. Blood flowed down its legs as it was clear this was a mother desperate to have her child back.

Suddenly, a wave of sadness washed through Zheng Le as he remembered his own mother waiting anxiously for him to return home.

"Dad, set him free, please! Let it roam in the wild again!" Zheng Le begged Dad.

"No! I need to take it back to the Emperor!" refused Dad. "Your Uncle, Zheng He, demands it."

They pulled the pitiable creature up onto the ship where it gazed despondently at Le.

Late that night, while the rest of the crew were sleeping soundly, Le stealthily took a key from his father's pouch. Sneaking and slinking, he slithered to the cage below the deck and unlocked it. Wordlessly, he led the creature down the gangplank.

Le was surprised to see its mother sitting wistfully near the dock, her wound already slowly healing. As he cut the rope with a knife, the creature bent down, and nuzzled him tenderly.

"Go back to your mum. I'll never forget you, my long-necked friend!" Le wept as he bade good-bye. The long-necked deer's mother limped away with her baby joyfully by her side in the moonlight.

The next day, when he was eating his tasteless breakfast after the ship had set sail, a sailor rushed in and screeched anxiously, “The creature has disappeared!”

“What—t!!” exploded Dad.

Zheng Le was terrified. He then steadied his breath and admitted to Dad, “I was the one who let it escape and I’m sorry...” Le then explained every single thing.

Dad murmured with new understanding, “We’ll have to ask the ship’s artist to present of the drawing of the deer to the Emperor. It will not be easy.”

Back in China, Zheng Le’s father presented the dazzling drawing of the long-neck deer to the Emperor.

“Your Majesty, here is a present from our travels... the long-necked deer! Forgive us as the creature unfortunately got away from the ship,” Le’s father apologized.

“How dare you,” the Emperor admonished, “You exchanged ten jade flowers only for a useless picture. Bring the creature in the picture to me tomorrow or I will execute you!”

The colour of Zheng Le’s face drained quickly as fear sucked out his very breath.

“I’m the one who should be execute! I helped that deer escape. My father’s innocent!” Le stepped out and confessed, as he sobbed out his story, “I’m sorry...” Le ended as he wholeheartedly apologized for his actions.

After listening, the Emperor was moved with compassion and announced, “ I pardon you. You did the right thing.”

And that was how a picture of the long-necked deer ended up in the palace during the reign of Emperor Yong Le.

# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

*Heep Yunn Primary School, Chan, Zennie – 11*

I am a spirit; a free spirit of a young medic on the fleet of ships that once sailed imposingly with fame and attitude as we marked our place in history. I was one of the main medics serving on ZhengHe's commanding ship. I still remember that fateful day which changed my life forever.

It was almost at the end of our voyage, our ships were filled with our acquisitions as we exchanged gifts with our new found friends and allies. We came into possession of a very smooth fabric called "silk" and spices, including the rare and exotic spice they call "saffron", from various countries, such as India and Arabia. Apart from that, we also came across a very interesting animal in Somalia, which had a long neck with brown spots all over its body. The crew joked, 'This zebra must be ill. It has swallowed a broom!' We all had a hearty laugh as we led the "long-necked animal" to an enclosed area on the ship. We dangled some herbs in front of it to draw its attention as we slowly pushed it onto the ship. The crew was praying that the animal would not suffer from seasickness, as it would not be much fun for them on deck should the animal start throwing up... Nonetheless, we were looking forward to showing it to our emperor.

As we sailed back to our homeland, celebrating a successful journey, our captain, ZhengHe, was very ill in bed. He was vomiting and had a terrible cough. His forehead was very warm to the touch. I was frantically trying to figure out what ailment he was suffering from. I had to use the limited supply of herbs and medicinal potions to soothe his discomfort and alleviate his symptoms. I just prayed that we would have a speedy and smooth return trip.

'Hurrah!' cheered the crew on the deck. Bowls of rice wine clinked as the planks soaked up the spilled wine. There were dancing and music. 'Poor captain, such a pity that he couldn't join the celebration!' sighed one of the crew members. 'Yeah, I am sure he can fight through this nasty sickness,' I responded, shouting out to the deck. 'Don't...don't worry, I will be fine...' replied ZhengHe in low spirits.

All of a sudden, the 'hurrahs' on the deck became blood-curdling shrieks. I rushed out to see what on earth was going on. As I looked up into the sky, I froze, my mouth agape in disbelief. A monstrous storm was brewing right above us. It was launching against our fleet of ships. The sky was pitch black, as black as ink, with thunder roaring and rain pelting steadily on the wooden floorboards. The sky threw thunder bolts at us, making the deck crack, and leaving charred, burnt spots on the wood panel. Our fleet of ships gave way one by one, sinking like stones thrown into a pond. Our ship was in chaos. Sailors, cooks, cleaners and pursers, were all running around, screaming in intense fear and panic, jumping into the water, grabbing onto any piece of barrels or planks to stay afloat. I, however, decided not to jump just yet, but to first tend to my captain, who was still resting in the medic room.

Rain continued to fall incessantly with the raging wind and roaring thunder. As the ship was crumbling into pieces, it was certain that it couldn't stand anymore of nature's fury. I swiftly dragged the feverish captain back on the deck before the wreckage sank to the bottom of the sea. I wasn't strong, so I struggled valiantly against the horrific storm to do so. 'Hey, guys! Catch our captain!' I shouted to the sailors who were already in the sea, hoping against hope that he would not drown. Then, I burst out my remaining strength and swung the captain into the sea, praying that his men would catch him. I had no more strength left; I couldn't even stand upright. I remember seeing a blinding flash, hearing a deafening sharp crack of thunder and then feeling disintegrated into a million pieces. At the same time, the sea gobbled all the bits of me up with the ships' remains.

The smithereens of me somehow regrouped together into a phantom of my former self. I sighed in relief, seeing that Captain Zheng and the surviving crew managed to make their way to an island where they built a boat to sail back to China. When they successfully arrived home, the doctors cured my captain's sickness eventually. People have since then dug up my captain's ships and the goods we tried to bring home from the journey. And have sifted through the wealth of information and relics of his many voyages, the historical museums can finally tell of my captain's amazing stories. It is true that I have never been mentioned in any of his adventures, I am still tremendously proud of myself as one of the many unsung heroes who made the voyages a success.

A true hero never fades!

# A Heart of Gold

Heep Yunn Primary School, Cho, Min Min – 11

It was a rather cloudy day. Ling sighed sadly.

‘Dad! Where are we heading to?’

‘Be quiet! I’m trying to concentrate!’ Ling’s dad, Shen, who was captain of their ship Raven, was leaning his big shaggy head over a complicated map. They were looking for an island where a lot of poor people lived. Although he had a kind heart and loved to help others, he was always having trouble *finding* his target.

‘Er, Dad? Do you have any idea where we are?’ Ling asked hesitantly because her dad was likely to explode when he was disturbed while reading his map.

‘Of course. We’re in the Indian Ocean,’ he replied grumpily.

‘That’s helpful,’ Ling thought moodily.

Rain was starting to pour from the gray clouds above them, with loads of fog clogging their vision ahead. Ling was starting to feel extremely worried. ‘Let’s just turn back, Dad. We don’t want to end up on the Evil Pirate’s island again, do we?’ The Evil Pirates were their greatest enemy, and they had once sailed to their island by mistake. Ling kept turning cold at the thought of them.

‘Nonsense. I know where we are heading,’ Shen growled.

‘But Dad, it’s raining cats and dogs, and a thunderstorm is on its way. We can’t see where we’re going,’ Ling cautioned in a slightly desperate tone.

‘We can’t be discouraged by just a tiny bit of rain! We have to sail across the sea bravely and help the needy!’ Shen yelled.

‘Yes, yes, but sometimes we need to care for our own safety. And this thunderstorm is more than “a bit of rain”. The waves are getting bigger and stronger and it’s *dangerous*. Let’s just come back another day,’ Ling pleaded, but Shen ignored her.

‘With a bit of luck,’ she mumbled to herself, ‘Dad’s miscalculation might hopefully land us back on our own island.’

After a few more hours of aimless sailing, the fog was starting to clear. Shen was getting excited as he believed that they had finally arrived at their destination. Ling, however, was not relieved. There was a massive dark shape ahead of them which looked sinisterly familiar. Ling squinted at it as the ship sailed nearer and nearer...

All of a sudden, the fog cleared completely, and in front of them was an impressive scene. It was a huge island with towering mountains on it. Wooden houses were built on the rocky land, which formed a circle. In the middle of the circle was a great wooden palace on top of which was a big flag displaying a scary looking white skull. With a sudden feeling of horror, Ling recognized they had sailed right to the island of the Evil Pirates!

Suddenly, the door of the wooden palace opened with a loud bang. Out came a gigantic figure with a big filthy beard on his chin. ‘It’s Ebit!’ Ling gulped. The leader of the Evil Pirates, Ebit was known for his cruelty, such that even his followers were scared of him. He smiled unpleasantly when he saw the Raven approaching, and raised his arms in a welcoming gesture.

‘Shen! How wonderful to see you again!’ he shouted out.

‘Oh, Ebit, we did not intend to come here. Shen had misread his map again. In fact, we’ll be leaving *now*,’ Ling called back hurriedly, putting emphasis on the last word.

‘Oh, don’t you leave now. My men have been desperate for some exciting little fights these days. So they’re going to have some fun now when someone wanders into our midst. Won’t they? *FIGHT!*’ As Ebit shouted the last word at the wooden houses. Right on cue countless men carrying guns and swords rushed out, yelling at the top of their lungs. They began to attack the men on the Raven, and the latter fought back. Within a few seconds, the air was full of yells and bangs of the guns.

‘Dad! We have to stop them! This is horrible, we’ll get killed!’ Ling shouted to her father over the sounds of the battle. ‘Stop this!’

But Shen took no notice of his daughter’s words. He grabbed his sword and charged towards Ebit like a madman. Shen was very gifted at sword-fighting, but Ebit was good at it too. The two leaders began to fight furiously. Ling couldn’t watch them for more than a few seconds – she was too terrified.

‘I have to do something,’ she thought desperately, trying to hatch a plan. Suddenly the wooden houses caught her eyes and a plan began to form in Ling’s mind. She quickly grabbed a bow and some arrows, lit a fire on the latter and shot them at the wooden palace. Luckily, all of them landed right on the balcony of the palace. It took a while for Ebit to realize that his palace was on fire, and when he finally did, he was very mad.

‘My treasure is going to be burnt! Put the fire out!’ he yelled at his men. They rushed for buckets of sea water immediately, completely forgetting about Shen and his men. By the time Ebit remembered with a jolt of his previous fight with Shen, the Raven had already sailed away.

‘I’ll have you next time, Shen! I’ll get you!’ he roared at the sea.

Although some of the men were injured in the battle, luckily nobody was killed. Shen was hugely relieved after hearing this news.

‘I’m sorry I didn’t listen to you, Ling. I guess you should read the map for me in the future, I really am hopeless,’ Shen said, sighing slightly.

They reached their destination at last. While Ling was happily assisting the poor people on the island, she couldn’t help reflecting that it would be a lot easier to do so if they had lived a little nearer to Ling’s home. She promised to follow her father every time he went to help others, so that she could also be brave and have a heart of gold.

# The Missing

*Heep Yunn Primary School, Chong, Colette – 11*

Chang Ze and Zheng He had always been best friends. They used to play together when they were young boys growing up in a tiny, Chinese village in the Yunnan Province of China. They would often go on their own little adventures around the outskirts of the rural village, causing mischief but making the locals smile. They were inseparable, like brothers. As they grew older, the boys remained very close. Therefore, when Zheng was to lead a voyage of ships like no other, packed with gold, silk, fine art and other wonderful treasure, Chang thought he would never see his friend again but when Chang heard the news that he would be among the 30,000 crew, he and Zheng were delighted and talked of all the adventures they would have.

During the first year of the voyage, the young men had seen more than they could ever have imagined. They visited Vietnam and Africa, which they were in awe of! They saw animals that they had never seen before, giraffes, Hippopotamuses' and zebras. They even saw an ostrich, the biggest bird they had ever seen, they actually thought it was a baby cow and laughed once they discovered it was a bird. The first voyage was going smoothly until the sixteenth month, when disaster struck and things would never be the same for Zheng and Chang again...

## **Chang Ze:**

*It was an extremely rough day at sea and we had many jobs to do today in the engine room. I was just talking to Wang about the plan to fix the boiler in the engine room when pirates rushed onto the ship and began attacking crew members. I ran as fast as lightning to the weapon room but all of a sudden, I felt a thick, rope around my chest and was being pulled backwards. There was shouting, gunfire and mayhem all around and I could see pirates carrying rolls of silk and bags of gold off our ship. I was struggling against the rope and my feet kept slipping beneath me, "Where is Zheng?," I shouted desperately as I felt myself being pulled backwards.*

*"Pirate attack!"*

*It was no use, there was so much chaos going on around me and more crew were appearing from the depths of the ship and being attacked. It didn't look like many of my friends would survive, as they couldn't reach their weapons in time. I was pulled across the deck, a bag that was secured over my head was wet and I started to feel drowsy and dizzy, I was falling asleep, my eyes feel heavy...*

## **Zheng He:**

*After hearing loud bangs, deafening gunshots and men yelling, I rushed up to the deck from the engine room and couldn't believe my eyes. Pirates were taking treasure but most devastating to see was the amount of bodies, how did they not see the pirates approaching? I looked around and saw so many of the men I had spent the last sixteen months with lying there dead. "Sir, the pirates have taken some of our men!" I heard as I ran to the back of the ship and I could see a black ship in the far distance. In the next moment, the thought of Chang hit me like an unexpected tsunami. "Where's Chang? Chang!" I bellowed. I felt crushed, a crew member missing his forearm ran over and informed me that Chang had been taken. I couldn't believe what I was hearing, I kept thinking over and over, why?!*

*Over the years and voyages that followed, Chang was never far from his best friend's thoughts, Zheng missed his friend dearly and felt guilty for not being on deck when the ship was brutally attacked. Zheng has never given up his search for Chang but has never come across a black ship since that dreadful day. He had no idea whether Chang was dead or alive.*

## **10 years after 'The Black Ship Attack'**

Zheng was on the twelfth voyage! He was now a grown man and had successfully completed many voyages. During all his missions, Zheng was always on the lookout for the black ship. It wasn't until one dreary day that among the huge waves and dark clouds in the distance, that Zheng spotted the black ship. It had to be the same ship that kidnapped Chang a decade ago. Zheng ran to alert the crew as the ship was edging closer but didn't have time, it seem to just appear. Once close enough, a few pirates jumped onto the ship and demanded, "We must speak to Zheng He."



"I am the Zheng He." Zheng declared.

"We believe we have something that you want." Snarled one pirate, as a man was thrust forward. He had very long hair, a long beard and looked much darker but there was no mistaking who it was...

"Chang Ze?" Uttered Zheng in disbelief. "Is it really you?"

Zheng staggered forward and the men hugged, many questions were exchanged.

However, when Zheng looked up again there were no pirates or ship in sight. "Where have they all gone?" Zheng asked.

"Don't worry about that." Said Chang.

Chang and Zheng spent the whole afternoon talking about the last ten years, it felt so good to have his best friend back, he couldn't believe it. He went to go and get Chang some rice as he seemed very thin. On his way to the kitchen, Zheng bumped into Wang and told him the brilliant news of the black ship and his friend being returned. Wang couldn't believe it and ran to the top deck to greet Chang but he was nowhere to be seen. "That's strange." Thought Wang, as he ran up to the captain's booth to ask if they had seen anything as they can see everything from up there.

"No sir, no ships or any pirates. Fortunately, we have barely seen another ship at all today and Sir, Zheng He has been sitting there alone all afternoon..."

"Alone?"

"Yes sir, alone."

# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

*Heep Yunn Primary School, Fan, Wanika – 12*

‘Good bye!’ ‘Have a nice journey!’ ‘We’ll miss you!’ I am Chu, a young boy of twelve, my friend Chi and I have joined the Ming treasure voyage, the biggest sea journey of our time. It was organised by our king, who wanted China to have more allies from overseas. Words of farewell ranged from the harbor, wishing us good luck on our voyage. As we finally set sail, I glanced back towards the harbor, which suddenly looked so far away. Will all of us come back? A random thought rose out of my mind. I shook it off. Of course we will, we are the best crew of the country!

Life on the sea was harsh, we faced a lot of difficulties. Sharks, storms, losing our way... Enough to drive anyone crazy. But life on the ship was even harder to stand. Smelly deck, bad food, annoying captain... Enough to drive anyone even crazier! But each time the sun rose, hope filled our hearts once more.

Our first stop was India. The locals there were full of passion as they welcomed us with open arms. When our captain went to see their king, me and Chi decided to take a stroll around the city. There were so much to see! Special food, crafts and even... ‘MONSTER !!!’ I yelled as I pointed at a weird beast with a long neck and a spotted pelt. ‘RUN!!!’ The local stared at me as if I was the monster. A few seconds later, they bursted out laughing! ‘This is no monster,’ said one of the locals as he wiped a tear from his eye. ‘It is a giraffe! Have you never seen one before? It’s usually used in the circus and their natural habitat is Africa.’ My eyes widen. ‘Africa? How do we get there?’ ‘You go east,’ The man replied. ‘After a month or so, you will see Africa.’ We thanked the man and went to tell this piece of information to our captain. But before we go, Chi took a quick sketch of the giraffe so he could brag about it when he got home.

The Captain was so delighted when he heard our news, he ordered the sailors to set sail immediately. Everyone was so happy, we all forgot one important detail: the African seas were full of pirates. After a few peaceful days on the African seas, one of the sailors saw something. ‘There is a British ship ahead, and I think they’re in trouble!’ He shouted. Sure enough, the ship ahead had a British flag on their ores, and the people on the ship were shouting as they waved their hands like crazy. ‘We need to help them,’ Said our captain. But as we sail closer, the flag of the other ship was pulled down. When it rose up once again, it was no longer a British flag. Instead, it has became the flag that we dread the most ----the flag with a skull and a cross bone. ‘It is the pirates!’ Someone yelled. ‘They are going to ambush us!’ As we cried in fear the pirates jumped on our ship and the fight began. I aimed at a young pirate and fired a shot. He yowl in pain as the bullet hit his legs. He turned around and charged at me, but I was faster. I ducked and thrust my dagger into his stomach, his cry of pain was cut short and he fell on the floor with a loud *thund*. I whirled around to face another opponent but was soon corner by a battle-scarred pirate. He held out his gun and fired a pullet. I closed my eyes to brace myself when a dark figure leap in front of me and got hit. I opened my eyes. There, laying in a puddle of blood, was Chi. Suddenly, a yell of retreat got the pirates darting back to their own ship. ‘We won!’ The whole crew cheered. I shook my head. The price was too high. The captain walked to my side and put his hand on my shoulder. ‘Chi died heroicly, he will be remembered for a long time,’ He began. ‘Now, you should continue this quest happily and finish it for Chi. Then he will be happy in heaven, knowing that his wish has been fulfilled.’ I smiled weakly. As I glance at the setting sun, I know that Chi will always walk beside me, and tomorrow will be a new day.

# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

*Heep Yunn Primary School, Ho, Viann – 12*

After a quick taste of his eyelids the fly hopped over to his cheek, crawled drunkenly up onto his nose, did a little dance, and buzzed away. He opened his eyes and shut them again away from the glaring sun. His head felt like it was going to explode from the inside, and he had no idea where he is. Wait...who is he?! His eyes popped open and found himself in a small but warm room. He tried to sit up straight but failed. He opened his mouth to ask for help but scared himself because his voice was so soar. "He...hello. Anyone here?" He yelled as loud as he could.

After a few minutes, the door swung open. A tall man walked into the room, making his heart miss a beat. The man had lots of scars on his face, showing the pain he had had before.

The man then bent down and looked at him kindly. "Hello, sir. Do you feel better now?" "Much better...may I ask who are you?" He replied. "I am Zheng He, the captain of this ship. Who are you?"

A ship? How did he even get on there? He tried to think of his name but failed. "Yeah, who is he?" "I...I don't know," "Never mind, sooner or later you will recognize that. We found you on a beach, unconscious. Would you like to join our crew to deliver gifts to different countries?"

That would be a hard choice. He could just ask for a little amount of money and work for his life. He heard himself said "yes" and suddenly, he became a member of this ship.

A week later, knowing that his wounds had recovered, Zheng He gave him a job to be a mate of the ship. All he have to do every day is to take care of the fitting out of the vessel. He had a friend named Huang Ming which is also a mate and they often talk about the voyages of their captain, Zheng He. The crew had already went to Calicut for the first three voyages, and now the ship was sailing to Hormuz in the Persian Gulf.

The crew enjoyed a few weeks of peace and joy although something happened that ruined it. They met a pirate ship. He was still checking a rope hanging from the ship when Huang Ming rushed in with fear on his face. "Go to the deck immediately! We are under attack!" He quickly ran to the deck, surprised to see Zheng He facing a gigantic ship with a flag of a skeleton on it.

Choiseless, Zheng He ordered the ship was turning back as fast as they could, hoping that the pirate ship isn't able to catch up. But the crew seemed to have bad luck. The pirate ship reached them so fast as if there were wings on the sides of the ship. The crew are even able to see the pirates with a sword and ropes on their hands, ready to get on the ship.

Soon the pirates got near enough to the ship to hop aboard. The crew began to fight with the pirates. The crew has less people then the pirates, so everyone were planning to escape from the smaller ship for emergency. He was fighting a pirate while Huang Ming called him to pack something and get on the emergency used ship. He knocked him down and ran away to get some food and water. He was the last one to get on the tiny boat. Zheng He quickly row the boat to an island and settled the injured people. He was shocked at the death or lost numbers but what made him mad is that his best friend Huang Ming didn't make it to the island. He hates pirates now and is blood-thirsty. Zheng He had figured out that they are now next to Hormuz, so the crew decided to ask for some camels or horses for them to travel to the palace.

The crew had rented a group of horses to the place of Hormuz, with the emperor receiving the presents (saved by a random member of the crew), they were given a new ship although it is not as big as the one before. They would have to return back to China first for some new presents, than start their new voyage. On the way back to China, he spotted something so touching he would never see twice in his life. It was a baby shark out of breath, body floating on the sea. Its mother was still paddling round the baby's body, not believing that it's children has died. After flipping the baby's body, really seeing that it has went to heaven, the mother looked at its baby for the one last time with teary eyes(if sharks could cry) before diving back into the deepest part of the sea, hopeless, leaving the lonely body still floating on the sea. He was kept staring at the baby shark until it went out of his vision.

Afterwards, he still haven't found his memories but that is useless. He now got a group of friends and everyday they get on an adventure on the ship, delivering gifts to other places. He had no regrets on choosing to enter the crew.

# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

*Heep Yunn Primary School, Hung, Sophie – 11*

A girl, who looked young was sitting on a rock which was a perfect spot for gazing at the mysterious and beautiful sea. On her palm, a coin was shining through the sun. She clutched the coin to her chest and then ran faithfully to the sea. Her journey was about to begin.

Eleven years past. 'What an easy job through these years!' said one of the crew. 'Not yet...' sighed one of the pirates. The pirate wore a hat with colorful feathers on it. A purple jacket surrounded her like a queen. She was the captain and her name was Siu. Looking hopelessly on the map, she said, 'We need to go to the island where our enemies live and go to a secret place that nobody has ever discovered, which is underground and has a lot of gold. However, we can't let our enemies know because the underground is where our enemies lie.' The crew looked horrid and scared to face the mission they were going to encounter. A man stood up and encouraged, 'Listen up! We came through bad things together, why don't we take this challenge?' That man was called Kai, he was Siu's younger brother. All the crew finally agreed to accept the mission. Siu and the crew hopped on their ship and got ready to set off. The time had come.

The crew loved to feel the wind while sailing on the seas. The sea lived in their hearts. However, the sea brought them storms. 'Hold on crew! We're going turbo!' cried Siu. She held the steering wheel and turned it around and around. The crew held the ropes tightly for not letting their ship drown. 'Yikes! There is a waterspout ahead!' The crew looked horrified and closed their eyes and prayed, only Kai strived to help. Kai jumped onto a deck and tried to change the sail direction in order to skip the waterspout. Siu used all her might to steer the wheel, but it just got worse. One of the crew found that the situation was not getting better, so he called the other crew to help push a side of the ship. Whoosh! Kai threw himself off the air like a bird and hoped to have a perfect landing on the ship but the direction of the ship had already changed. Instead of landing on the deck, he fell into the deep dark sea...

'No!' Siu cried with tears blinking. She felt very fear and unsteady. She looked at the clear, yet quiet sea. She never knew that the pretty sea had turned out to be her brother-slaughter. 'Captain?' asked a girl with a beautiful voice. That was Siu's best friend, Ting. 'We better keep going,' Siu answered. Splash, they sailed away. 'You are really fine?' asked Ting. Ting continued, 'You have never predicted the future. It has already happened. I know you have a lot of pain in your heart and that pain may last forever. You have to be positive and look at the sun, not the shadow. Remember Kai encouraged us to complete this mission, so we should finish it,' whispered Ting. 'Thanks Ting', smiled Siu.

They were approaching to the island and got closer to it. Siu and the crew got on the island and tiptoed beside a bush. 'Now here's the plan...' Siu whispered to her crew. 'Be careful,' Siu and Ting left after saying it. The crew left with a worrying face. Pump, pump, pump... Siu and Ting's footstep echoed down the cave. 'There it is the treasure!' Ting screamed in a whispering voice. 'This is a piece of cake!' thought Siu. As they were leaving, a creepy voice glued their feet on the ground. 'Won't get out so easy, ma'am,' they turned around. It was their enemy, a guy called Marcus. 'I thought our crew was taking care of them!' whispered Ting with anger and fear. 'Never mind that now, we have to get this treasure out so as to help those people in need,' after a single moment, they pulled their swords out and dancing, yet fighting with their elegant and cruel moves. Marcus started dancing with his big muscles and strong feet that weighed hundred pounds. Marcus pulled Siu with his mighty hands and hit her with his hundred pounds feet. Poor Siu got flung out from the cave. 'Ah!' An ooze of red liquid spread out from Ting's body...

'Little Chiang, where are you?' one of the crew cried. Chiang was the youngest crew among them all. Poor little Chiang got home lost and got chopped off his hand by the bad guys so he got a shiny hook to replace it. But now he was lost. 'Hey, let's go and save Siu and...' A mighty person stepped out from the shadow. 'Your treasure meant us for a little Chiang and two nasty girls. Will you accept it?' Marcus put a sneaky smile on his face. 'What have you done to them?!' One of the crew screamed with tears blinking. 'Here's a message they left to you all,' Marcus threw them the treasure and a letter with it. 'Be brave and bring the treasure to the ones in need, Siu and Ting,' The crew left the island with a broken heart but they had to finish their last mission that Siu and Ting wanted them to do.

Water splashed towards the shore. The crew put a smile on their face and finished their very last mission. A rainbow appeared from the dark clouds. A familiar coin washed out from the sea. An old crew picked it up and smiled at the rainbow, 'Your heart was filled with love and faith, even rainbow can grow on clouds. Today we pirates finished your last mission, no regret we were in your crew.' The crew knew, no matter what, you need a kind heart. And they believed that little Chiang would come back one day...

# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

*Heep Yunn Primary School, Lee, Mika – 11*

It was 2018 and I, Zheng Wo, had to travel as a captain on the ship called Brave Explorers I. I had four gigantic ships beside me and there were all together one thousand people with me.

The journey was initially smooth until the sky suddenly turned dark. There was a thunderstorm! The waves were like angry bears fighting and the ships kept on shaking. Wind was blowing like a fierce lion and forced us to a wrong direction. We tried to use the global position system to seek for the correct direction but the signal was weak. We were frustrated and tired to find a solution. We had no way but sailed in the current unknown direction.

After a few days, the sea was calm down and we reached a strange island. There were strange little green elves and gnomes walking around. We tried to communicate with them but their language was queer. We used Google Translate and told them we were thirsty and needed some bottles or cans for water. In a flash, their faces turned red and started shouting at us (using Google Translate), 'How dare you are! Do you know that the rule here is to be environmental friendly or you will be in jail! But you are just visitors....'

I quickly apologized and asked for some advices. They disclosed that there was a legend about an eco-book with magical power that could gave us some guidance to know more about the environment. They had a mysterious map for the book. However, the elves and gnomes did not understand the map. In the past, some fearless villagers came out to find the book but they never came back. We felt curious of the book and decided to help them to find it out. They gave us the map so we set off and sailed to our next destination.

After some time, we landed on a bigger island. There was a castle and we went to see the King. We greeted him politely but instead of a welcoming reply, he shouted, "Get off of my palace at once. Don't make rug filthy, you dirty pigs!"

My general Ng Bak Sheng was extremely furious. I soothed his nerves awhile. But he didn't listen to me and pointed his gun to him. To our surprise, the king wasn't angry with us but looked at the gun in curiosity.

Though I told him it was a weapon to attack people, he asked for some guns to protect his citizens. We gave him 10 guns with 5 bullets each and he exchanged them with some gold and jewelry. We formed the ally nations and we sailed away to continue our journey.

On the ship, I scolded the general as he misbehaved and disobeyed my orders. I said, "It is fortunate that he doesn't know about guns or we'll have to start a fight! We will lose a lot of men!"

We sailed and sailed. We fought with nasty and terrible pirates and became friends with people on strange islands and got wonderful presents.

We sailed and sailed and went to our last destination, an island with lots of talking animals. They were cute so we decided to pet them. One of them said, "I'm the leader of the robots and we are very tired. We are almost out of batteries...." Then, it fainted.

I immediately know what to do. I took out one of the precious batteries from the electricity king, whom we met on one island, and tried it on the leader. It fit! The leader got up and sang happily. He gave us an exquisite box in exchange. It was the eco-book inside the box! We were delighted and realized how the neutral sea animal and the earth were harmful by the human. The eco-book also gave us a direction to go back to China. We sailed for months and went back to our home country, China.

We shared our adventures with the president of our country. From the eco-book we learned how to be environmental friendly. Otherwise, the world will be destroyed one day in future. We also persuaded the president the importance of environmental protection. We dispersed the seeds of Chinese culture and the president's prestige to different places on Earth.

# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

*Heep Yunn Primary School, Mitu, Cheryl – 11*

In the early 1400s, a group of pirates from China determined to change the history of their ancestors – stopped looking for gold to steal. Instead of stealing gold, they started doing the exact opposite!

Feeling such an amazement, they set sail on a fleet of ships and carried cargoes of gold and other precious items for the captain and the sailors to give away as gifts. There were seven voyages by the Ming Treasure Fleet – and the people on board had many adventures.

Once, China's Emperor had a little argument with the Emperor of Russia and began an infinity war between the two countries. As it was too strong for China to beat Russia, China had to make new relationships with a variety of countries to realigned a coalition and dealt with Russia. Therefore, the group of travellers need to be dispatched!

The travellers sailed to the United States. They supposed to give away the wonderful presents they had brought from the Emperor, making new relationship with the U.S.A. However, none of the travellers wished to be the representative to give away the present. After consideration, a young man whose Dad was the Emperor took heart of grace and risked his lives to be the representative. Eventually, their plan was going very well. They convinced U.S.A. and realigned a coalition successfully. Relying on the military strength of the U.S.A., China defeated Russia.

Since then, the group of travellers started working hard. They used the tools to make silk and chinaware on board. In order to earn more money for China to buy more weapons, they sold all of them. All their hard work had paid off in the end. The ships finally carried military forces and weapons.

One day, when the group of travellers were travelling over the world and trying to meet some other peaceful people on board, suddenly a violent wave crashed against the ship, throwing the fragile ship into a full sway, causing it to tilt in a dangerous manner a while later. Soon, the ship started sinking. Most of the travellers fell into the sea. Struggling to survive, they swam everywhere they could. Everyone was in panic. Abruptly, the prince's voice rang out from the sea, "Stop being panic, we have to unite as one!" After hearing the prince's prompt, they understood that it was no used to be panic. They all calmed down and tried to grab some pieces of wood from the sinking boat as possibly as they can. Floating on the sea, they were all in a marvelous and wonderful mood.

Sooner later, they got to a desolate island. They had to wait somebody to pick them up. They sought for the several pieces of wood they had brought from the boat in order to make some fire to attract the boat that came to save them.

After a while, there was a glister of hope. There was an enormous ship sailing towards them! All of them were in excitement. They jumped onto the boat and went back to China.

As they experienced the incident above, they won for themselves a place in history and made a contribution to China. What an extraordinary travellers!

# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

*Heep Yunn Primary School, Shek, Chloe – 11*

‘Grandma, I’m studying about the Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyage, and you revise with me?’

‘Of course, actually I can tell you the details about it.’

‘What?How! It happened over six hundred years ago, you couldn’t possibly be that old!’

‘Hush, my child. Don’t ask, you will find out soon...’

‘I was a young girl back then, a few lucky ones were chosen to embark on the voyage, and I was among those few. Although I was just a mere scrubbing girl at start, I would never ever forget the beautiful sights I saw.’

‘Cool! Hey, Grandma,did you meet any buckling pirates?’

‘Yes,I did, my darling. Ah, I remember the first time I met pirates, we had just started sailing, just after a week, mangy pirates attempted to steal our loot. When I saw them, I screamed and screamed at the top of my lungs. Well, that was a huge mistake, the pirate king found me and took me hostage. But suddenly, a burst of energy burst through me and, boom! I was a half–demon and I took down the pirates single handed. That was when the crew found out I was not a mere mortal, even I at that time, I didn’t know what happened,I got promoted to a general immediately, and every time, I faced danger, I transformed into a powerful creature, like a half wolf, a demon wolf hybrid, just to name a few, I just couldn’t understand why. But all I knew was I couldn’t die and I was practically immortal.’

‘That is soooo awesome! What countries did you go to?’

‘Oh, we went a lot of countries. When we went to India to give them gifts from the Emperor, I still remember the gleaming white temples, the beautiful sunset, making all the temples red and orange, alas so beautiful. But one day, a precious artifact went missing, the Narcissus Star, and a very suspicious man blamed us for it, we got threatened and we were chased out with super sharp spears. And we went to Africa, I was starting to control my transformation, and I could communicate with different animals by transforming into that species of animal. The Africans were very welcoming hosts, we spent a great deal of time there, therefore by communicating with different animals, I was able to find out more information about different animals. But again, another precious artifact went missing again, then I saw the same sneaky man blaming us for stealing the Oriana Star. I couldn’t hold it back any more, I transformed into a demon and grabbed him by his collar, I asked him, “What do you have against us, why do you keep blaming us for stealing the artifacts?” he said, “I, I was sent by an anonymous person to mess up your trip.” “ But why?” I asked, “ Why did you just steal these Stars, not any other artifacts?” “ I don’t know, Master just told me to steal these Stars...” In the end, these two artifacts were found in the house he was staying in. We explained to the Africans and Indians, our friendship was mended and the man was put into African jail which is very very strict.’

‘That is so cool, Grandma!’

‘Yes. And then, one day I received a letter with a lightning bolt on it, and it said that I was the goddess of transformation and I was invited to go to Mount Olympus Academy. I considered it for awhile, but I decided to go after I finish the voyages, and then the people on my crew found out that I was a goddess. They all congratulated me except for one girl, Zoey,who was my neighbour in my hometown. When she crept into my room secretly, I felt that something was wrong...’

‘What happened, Grandma?’

‘Ah, I will tell you. I followed her into the room, and hid next to the closet, watching her closely. Zoey headed towards my table beside my bed. And then, she took out a packet of powder and sprinkled it into my medicine. When she turned around to leave, I blocked her way, and I asked her, “ What is in that packet?” She stuttered, “Uh, it’s none of your business!” I said, “Actually, it is my business because you just put it in my medicine, so yeah, it is totally my business.” She finally confessed, “I was putting poison into your medicine.” I was aghast, I asked her, “Why, why did you want me to die?” She said, “I thought it was unfair, you got everything ,you became a general and a goddess and everyone likes you. All I am is a sweeping girl.” I told her, “ All you had to do was ask me, I would have gladly shared my power with you and now I will of course forgive you.” And then I forgave her and this incident was forgiven and forgotten. After all, there is a saying, “ Forgive forget “ isn’t there.’

‘Grandma, I think we’re getting off course. Although I want to know, am I a god?’

‘Well, technically, you are a demi–god, I remember that you were proclaimed the god of technology.’

‘That is awesome!’

‘Now, kiddo. Let’s just stick to your textbook or else you’ll be studying till midnight. I’ll tell you more after you finish your studying. Now let me see... Hey, your textbooks are wrong! It should be...’

# The First Voyage

*Holy Cross Lutheran School, Chiu, Ho Tsun Anson – 10*

The evening before the first voyage, the emperor held a banquet. It was to celebrate Zheng He leaving China. There was lots of food on the table. It was a high class banquet. Everyone had to eat politely and wasn't allowed to spill any food, not even a tiny drop. There were some people singing and dancing. Zheng He ate very greedily because he knew he had to leave for a very long time. His friends and crew were nervous because they thought the pirates would attack and destroy their ships. Zheng He said, "Don't be nervous everyone, we won't let the pirates catch us." Everyone then calmed down.

Today was the day of the voyage. Everyone waved goodbye. The emperor gave Zheng He a lot of money in case he wanted to trade something. They then set sail; on the way to Sumatra they passed the Philippines. They waved to the people on shore. Then they saw some bananas on some trees. They traded some rice dumplings for the bananas and then continued their journey. Just as they were about to arrive at Sumatra, do you know what happened next? A lot of ships showed up! It was Chen Zuyi, the leader of the pirates and his crew. Then a war started. Five thousand pirates were killed. Ten ships got burned by the cannons and seven ships were stolen. Chen Zuyi and Zheng He were fighting. Zheng He was about to die, but thankfully a crew member saved his life by pushing Chen Zuyi off the boat. Zheng He and his crew arrived in Sumatra and found the treasure of the Ming treasure voyages.

On the way back to China, more pirates showed up. Somehow Chen Zuyi had survived. He wanted to steal the treasure. Zheng He fired cannons at Chen Zuyi's ship. Chen Zuyi's ship sunk to the bottom of the ocean! Zheng He and his crew returned to China. They gave the treasure to the emperor. The emperor said, "Thank you, but there are still more voyages." Zheng He and his crew took a twenty-four hour rest and then set sail again.



# The Magical Journey

*Holy Cross Lutheran School, Han, So Hyeon Ariel – 11*

Have you ever thought about the history of China? Have you ever heard about the Ming Treasure Voyages? Well, our story takes place between 1405 and 1433, the time when Zheng He goes on the Ming Treasure Voyages.

In 1421, Zheng He started his 6<sup>th</sup> journey. This time, Zheng He wanted to explore more countries and let the world know how powerful China was. After the emperor had given the order, Zheng He started his journey as soon as possible because he was very excited to start this new journey.

After several weeks of sailing, Zheng He and his crew arrived at Oman. This place was very famous for its commercial port, for some businessmen and businesswomen came from all over the world to do business there. Because it was every businessman and businesswoman's 'dreamland', the king of Oman warmly welcomed Zheng He and his team and invited them to trade. After Zheng He read the Ming Dynasty's edict, the king of Oman traded things with Zheng He. They traded silk, porcelain and other things from China, for mastic, aloe and myrrh.

After staying for a few more days in Oman, they said goodbye and sailed to their next destination, Adan. Adan had abundant resources, there were many agricultural products and rare birds and animals; commerce and handicraft were very developed at that time. In Adan, Zheng He and his team bought cat eye stone, pearls, a coral tree that was 2 feet high and many rare and valuable animals and bird species. They also chatted and sang songs with the people there, making good friendships.

The last destination on the 6<sup>th</sup> journey was Bengal but while they were sailing to Bengal, a strong storm came. The storm made the waves bigger and the ship twist and turn. Luckily, one of Zheng He's crew members said, "Land! Look, there is a small island there! Let's stop by and wait until the storm ends." Zheng He agreed with his decision and quickly ordered the crew to prepare for landing.

Zheng He's team was surprised to find out they had landed on Atlantis, the mysterious lost city. They explored the incredible city, they saw they were underwater but they could breathe normally and there was an invisible shield covering the magical city. They could see beautiful fish and all kinds of sea creatures through the invisible shield. They were in awe! In the middle of the city, there was a beautiful castle made from coral reefs. While they were exploring, they saw some citizens of Atlantis. Zheng He asked them the way to the palace gates, but unfortunately, they spoke a different language. While Zheng He and his crew were worrying about how to communicate with the people of Atlantis, a little boy stood up and said, "I know how to speak Atlantis. I can translate for you!" Zheng He was once again filled with joy. Because of that little boy, Zheng He successfully entered the castle door and chatted with the king of Atlantis; he also discovered many things he did not know before. To celebrate Zheng He's arrival, the king of Atlantis threw a big welcome party. Zheng He and his crew tasted many new and delicious types of food there. The crew chef asked the royal chef for the recipes to make the yummy food. They felt as lucky as a person who had won a million dollars because they could have the chance to come on this special journey and visit this magnificent underwater world.

After a few days of happiness, it was time to go back to China, their homeland. Every crew member was very sad to end this incredible voyage full of surprises and magic. Zheng He, leading his crew, sailed away. In this adventure, Zheng He was overfilled with joy that he could visit Atlantis. He couldn't wait to tell the king his new discovery. While Zheng He and his crew were heading back to China, he looked at the big blue sea and thought once more about the wonderful memories the 6<sup>th</sup> voyage had brought to him. He wished he could visit Atlantis one more time in the future.

# The Ming Treasure Voyages

*Holy Cross Lutheran School, Lee, Pak Nok Max – 11*

A long time ago, Zheng He is a Yunnan Kunyang people. A famous General attacked his village, and then he was distributed to one of the Kings to be the warrior. He fought well and won many battles; he ended up gaining the trust from the King who gave him a nickname of “Zheng”. Zheng He doubted that Hui Wang was dead in another country. So his King ordered him to make a big ship and go to find Hui Wang’s dead body. Zheng He knew that his king wanted to let every country realize China is more powerful than other countries but could not find Hui Wang’s dead body.

Zheng He’s ship had many weapons, food, porcelain and a lot of money. There were more than twenty thousand people working on the ships. They went from Zuzhou to Vietnam... Every place they went, Zheng He told the people that he has the greatest king and the greatest country. Zheng He had visited many places and gave money to all those places. But in the case of someone’s disobedience, his soldier killed them all. In the year 1408, they went to many places such as Java, Ke Zhi...etc. to build friendships. When Zheng He arrived in Ceylon, the King invited him to go to his palace to have a look. But the real objective of the King is to get all of Zheng He’s gold and all of his things. Zheng He was smart and realized his objective because he noticed that the city had no people. So he brought two thousand soldiers to attack the city in Ceylon and kidnap the king’s daughter and wife. Finally, he resolved this incident. Subsequently, he still had many journey around the world!

Unfortunately, Zheng He’s died on his ship because of overloaded. He was a great man who was the first one to visit many places in the world!!

# An Unexpected Journey

*Holy Cross Lutheran School, Man, Chun Hin Charles – 11*

Six hundred and thirteen years ago, the emperor of China was Zhu Di. He was very curious about the places that he didn't know about. Therefore, one day, he asked Zheng He to help him discover the world, trade goods with other kingdoms and show them how powerful China was.

Zheng He then asked the emperor, Zhu Di, to give him a fleet of ships, food and armies. Then, he was ready for the trip. Zhu Di said, 'Good luck!'

Zheng He started the trip on 11<sup>th</sup> July. He wanted to find some treasure to the east. A month later, a typhoon blew strongly and blew away Zheng He's army ships and food ships. These ships were lost.

There was a Japanese pirate team called 'Skeletons'. They wanted to steal all the things in Zheng He's fleet because they knew that there were many expensive things. They quickly prepared their ships and weapons.

The Skeletons suddenly and quickly attacked Zheng He's ship. They easily boarded Zheng He's ship and tied him up with a rope while he was sleeping. They told him to give all the things on the ship to them. Zheng He said slowly, 'Okay.' Suddenly, he used his martial art skills to free himself and hurt the Skeletons. He was able to do so because he was a martial artist.

The pirates were scared by Zheng He's martial art because they hadn't seen that before. They surrendered and asked Zheng He to free them. Zheng He told them to follow him in his journey and lead him to Japan. Some days later, they met the lost army ships and food ships again. Zheng He was thrilled.

There was a big problem just after that. The food ships sunk suddenly and they couldn't stop them from sinking. They starved because they couldn't get any food. Zheng He was suddenly inspired. He said, 'Does anyone have some wood and pins?' People were confused about the usage of the wood and pins, except the leader of the Skeletons, named Yamato. He said, 'I've got some here.' Then he quickly brought out a box. Inside were many things including wood and pins.

Zheng He said, 'You guys are smart enough. You've just given me the proper tools.' After this sentence, he threw out his new tool and caught two fish. He repeated this action again and again for half an hour. He then stored the thousand fish he had just caught in the storing cabins. Yamato and his partners thought, 'It begs belief that this mysterious man can be so fast!'

Some more days later, they arrived at Japan at night. The pirates settled Zheng He down. Then, the Skeletons secretly went to the palace. They went inside the emperor's bedroom and talked about how powerful and mysterious Zheng He is. The emperor whispered to himself, 'You are arrogant, Zheng He. You hurt my 'Royal Skeletons'. I need to kill you!' Although he was extremely angry about that, he needed to act like he was appreciating Zheng He. He said, 'Bring me Zheng He tomorrow. I want to see how powerful he really is.' Yamato, his partners, all the ministers and generals around the emperor hated him very much. They thought that Zheng He will be killed by the emperor miserably. They were thinking of methods to save Zheng He because they didn't want to see any sorrow caused by the emperor they hated.

The next day, Zheng He was brought into the meeting room of the palace. The emperor said, 'You are Zheng He? Fantastic! Come drink some deluxe wine. We need to drink happily. It's your pleasure to come in and see my ministers!' A eunuch then quickly came in. When he walked past Zheng He's back, he tried to use a knife to chop Zheng He into two halves. Just at that moment, Zheng He grabbed his knife, sprinted to the emperor, killed him, went back to his seat and put the knife back into the eunuch's hand in the blink of an eye. Everyone was frightened. No one screamed, 'Assassins! Protect!' They just scratched their heads and thought about why the violent emperor they hated had been killed. After an hour, all the ministers shouted, 'Thank you, Zheng He!' However, they didn't notice that Zheng He had just gone for a minute.

Zheng He went back to the meeting room when he learned about how grateful the ministers were. The ministers then pushed Zheng He to the seat of the emperor. Zheng He was frightened because he had sat on the chair the old emperor sat on. When Zheng He tried to ask what happened, the ministers said, 'You are the emperor of Japan!' Zheng He said, 'I need to look around the community.'

When Zheng He walked past an old village, he found that the people there didn't know how to grow things to eat. Therefore, he taught the citizens in Japan how to grow crops and feed animals. Some months later, the whole kingdom became very prosperous.

The ministers wanted Zheng He to stay in Japan because he brought much prosperity. However, Zheng He needed to finish his journey so he packed up. One night, he secretly went out of the palace, met his armies and took his fleet back to China. The pirates wanted to come to China too. Zheng He said, 'It's alright. I think my king will really appreciate you. Let me recommend you guys to my king so that he accepts you.'

The emperor, Zhu Di, was thrilled when he knew that Zheng He was back and heard about the work he had done. He said, 'Great job! I think I need to build a temple to show appreciation of your effort!' Zheng He said, 'Maybe you can let the name be Jing Hai Temple because this means 'the sea was peaceful'!' Then they all laughed and went to sleep.

# The Adventure to India

*International College Hong Kong, Bentote, Imogen – 10*

“Oh my gosh, thank you!” Exclaimed first mate Xing-Xing, now Captain Xing-Xing. She is 19 and has been at sea for 8 years of her life. She started out as the cooks helper and went up from there. This morning she met with the previous captain, and he said, “ Good Morning, Xing-Xing! I need to tell you something very important. You are going to be the captain of this ship, The Green Emerald! The Emperor has requested your presence, so we must go to see him right away.” So, Mr. Meng, the previous captain and Captain Xing-Xing set off to the emperor's palace.

In all her years serving the emperor, Xing-Xing had never seen his palace before and was absolutely amazed by the jade decorations and marble floors. Her family were very poor, so she had been sent on a boat that was going to find new lands when she was 11. Before she left, the only places she had seen were wooden boats and her small town of poor, damaged houses. “Oh, my! This is quite a dream!” Exclaimed Captain Xing-Xing, “It’s the most marvellous place I have ever been to!”

“Come along now,” Said Mr. Meng, “We mustn't keep the emperor waiting!” They stepped into the huge dining hall, where the emperor was waiting for them.

“ Sorry to keep you waiting, Emperor”, Apologised Captain Xing-Xing.

“ Ahh, no worries,” He chuckled, “ But now we need to get down to business. I am sending you on this trip because you are the bravest person in your crew. Remember this. You will be setting off a week from today. You are going to give gifts to the ruler of India so we can make peace. Okay?”

“Yes, of course.” So, Captain Xing-Xing and Mr. Meng left and went home.

A week soon rolled round and they were setting off. The crew helped to bring food, weapons and water supplies to last the journey, and of course, the gifts they were to give. That included luxurious gold plates and silk scarves, which were kept safe in the captain's cabin. Soon enough Captain Xing-Xing was hollering, “CUT THE ROPES, AND SAILS AWAY! LET’S DO THIS AND MAKE OUR EMPEROR PROUD!” This was greeted with a round of applause and cheering. They sailed for days. One of their 16 crewmen died of malaria, while they were still a few thousand miles away.

Suddenly, the lookout shouted, “Land Ahoy!” and everyone gathered on the deck to see. “Hmm,” mused the Captain, “ I think we are here!. Let’s dock and go to see if we can find their leader.” So, they did, and the captain and first mate went to find someone to ask for help. After wandering around and looking at nothing but trees and animals, they came across a small village. First Mate Li had been to India before, though was chased away by bandits, and knew a little of the native language. “Excuse me,” He said, “We come from China and we are here to talk to your leader. Do you know where we could find him?” “Of course, if you continue north from here, you will get closer.”, Said a Villager, “You will see a big palace made of white stone. You can ask for him there, and you will probably be allowed to talk to him. Just beware of bandits during the journey! It will take a long time, maybe over a month even. Goodbye.” The captain and the first mate began their long trip, of hard and tiring days.

One night, they had set up their camp, and was sleeping near a fire keeping warm, when First Mate Li awoke and heard a rustling sound. *It must just be an animal*, thought Li. Suddenly, there was a loud *twang* of arrows being shot and the captain woke up. “Li, get the gifts and hide them from the bandits. I’ll get the arrows then we need to get up and run!” So they did. They ran, and ran and ran! Before long, they reached a village that had horses. They offered the farmer a sword and bought the horses.

They sped fast down over the land and reached the palace. “Wow,” Said First Mate Li. “It truly is a magnificent sight. Let’s go in.” They approached the guards and stated their business. They were allowed in, and showed the ruler their gifts. “We come from China and hope to make peace. We have come with gifts of gold and silk.” The ruler agreed and took the gifts with thanks. Then the First Mate and Captain went off on their long journey once again, this time, with no bandits. They reached their ship safely and told their crew it was time to go home.

Their crew greeted them with joy and they started to sail back. All the food supplies had been used up, but thankfully, the First Mate and Captain had bought some fruits on the way back to the ship. The coconuts and durian fruits lasted all the way home, where they were treated like heroes. The Emperor thanked them all for going to India to make peace. Unfortunately, they couldn’t be wrapped up in their success for too long, as the Emperor had more jobs for them to do!

# Stowaway on a Ming Treasure Voyage

*International College Hong Kong, Lee, Nicholas – 8*

The year was 1430, on a typical hot and long summer day. Keng Hung was walking back from school with some of his classmates. For some unknown reason, Keng Hung was not in his usual talking and playing moods. He felt something was wrong but did not know what.

As Keng Hung arrived home, he found his mother sobbing in the kitchen and the dinner was not prepared. His father was busy packing as if he was about to leave. Keng Hung asked his mother, “what is wrong and where is father going?”. His mother continued to sob and did not answer. Eventually, his mother got out some Man Tau that were baked over a week ago and soon all three of them were sitting around the dinner table, tearing up the hardened Man Tau and began chewing the hardened bread.

The father began explaining whilst they were eating, “Keng Hung, you are almost nine now, so listen to your mother and help her with the house work after school, feed the chicken and help to harvest the crops. I will be back after two to three years”. “Two to three years!”, Keng Hung shouted, “that’s a very long time! Where are you going father?”, Keng Hung asked impatiently. “Well, Admiral Zheng He is going on a long voyage for the Emperor and all able-bodied men of this village have to go to help to work and cook on the Fleet. We don’t have a choice, and if we refused to go, they will chop off our heads.”

Keng Hung could not bear the idea of not seeing his father for several years. So, he decided to pack some of his clothes, some hardened Man Tau, several books, and his favourite toy which was a small wooden horse that his father carved for him. He sneaked out of the house and walked slowly towards the harbour. At the harbour he saw many wooden ships. He counted the ships, there were sixteen ships in total, most were small, and one was gigantic. So, Keng Hung hid and waited behind some wooden boxes, trying hard to find a way to get on board. Then he noticed a large crack in one of the wooden boxes. He then ripped open the crack wider and hid inside the box. Keng Hung noticed that the box he was hiding in was half filled with bags of yam and white carrots. He moved the bags around to make himself more comfortable and then he eventually fell asleep.

When Keng Hung woke up, he was already inside the ship’s food storage cabin. It was really noisy and the smell of the food storage cabin was like rotten fish. Then he started searching for his father and wondered around the ship. He asked the captain if he had seen his father, and the captain said that his father was one of the cooks and was very busy cooking for hundreds of hungry soldiers. So Keng Hung waited and waited for a long while and at last his father came to him. His father wasn’t in a good mood. When his father saw him, he shouted, “What are you doing here?!”. Keng Hung replied, “I just want to stay with you.”

Somewhere in the Indian Ocean, the Navy Fleet came across some pirates. The pirates wanted to steal their treasure but once they saw that the Chinese Navy Fleet had such a big ship and a lot of weapons, they let the Chinese Navy Fleet go. But the pirates didn’t give up, they had a plan...

The Chinese Navy Fleet sailed to a little island named Sri Lanka, for a break and to get more food supplies. They were really tired and thought they escaped from the pirates but the pirates secretly followed the Chinese Navy Fleet.

The pirates boarded the gigantic ship after the soldiers went to the island. The pirates saw a water tank where the guards would drink from so they mixed the drinking water with a sleeping drug. The guards guarding the gigantic ship with the treasure drank the water, and shortly fell asleep. Then the pirates stole their treasure and left on their own ship.

Admiral Zheng He was unhappy and angry but he still had a schedule to visit India to see the Indian Queen. He quickly sent a small crew to recover the treasure. So, they sailed to India without the treasure. In India, the Queen was keen to see the treasure that was a gift from the Chinese Emperor so the Admiral told a little white lie about where the treasure was. The Admiral said they will do some Chinese cultural dancing for three days, as it was their custom before presenting the gift.

After two days, the Chinese crew found the pirates' hideaway cave and recover the treasure from the pirates by pretending and dressing up as pirates, and then poisoned the pirates' food. The Chinese crew quickly captured the pirates and took them and the treasure to the Admiral in India. Keng Hung felt sorry for those pirates so he asked the Admiral, "can you not kill the pirates because they have families too?" The Admiral agreed not to kill the pirates. After that, the pirates thanked the Chinese Navy Fleet for their kindness for giving them some foods, coins and let them go. They also thanked Keng Hung too.

On the voyage home, Keng Hung thought of his mother, he really missed his mother. After two months' time, they finally arrived back home. His mother had tears of joys and cooked fresh Man Tau for them. "Yummy," they all said. What an adventure thought Keng Hung. He had learned lot of things and had a real stowaway adventure. Keng Hung's biggest wish was to travel with his father and Admiral Zheng He all the time when he grows up.



# Adventures In Time

*International College Hong Kong, Yoong, Joshua – 8*

Sixth Voyage, Yongle Year 19 (1421) Sailing along the seven seas, our crew were steering our ship to Africa, and so far we had a peaceful journey. We watched the horizon of China slowly fade, then started doing our chores. When we finished, we ate dinner and went to bed. When I was sleeping soundly in my bed, I suddenly heard a ear-piercing scream coming from another cabin. I thought I was dreaming, so I closed my eyes, but heard it again. I immediately threw my robe on, and stumbled onto the deck. When I saw the giant, terrifying monster that was towering over me, my mouth was open with bewilderment. The monster was around 40 CHI tall, and had spikes everywhere! He shot steaming acid at us from his mouth, and nearly destroyed our ship! We quickly retreated, and thought that it would be best to swim to a desert island, and shoot flaming arrows at it. But most of our crew couldn't swim, so we had to come up with a different plan. We quickly steered our ship, which was going up in flames, away from the monster. We then borrowed some materials from one of our team's ships and hastily fixed our ship. But disaster struck. A thunderstorm was coming, and as fate would have it, our ship took a powerful shot to the mast by a bolt of lightning. We sailed away onto a nearby desert island and tried to use bait to get that nasty, evil monster on land. The monster took the bait, and we stabbed him in the heart. But we still had problems. Another shot of lightning struck our boat, and it capsized. We realised that our captain Zheng He took a powerful blow to his waist. But at least we killed the monster. Two of us helped captain Zheng He to wrap his wound, and the other crew members built a fire and sent smoke signals and thankfully got rescued by a passing ship. We thanked them, and gave some goods to them in exchange for the rescue. They spotted a ship, and asked if wanted to get on that ship. We found out that it was one of our team's ships! We appreciated them, and got on that ship. We peacefully continued to sail across the ocean for some days, and eventually met a big fishing boat. They were friendly to us, so we traded fishes for steel so they could make more harpoons and hooks. We asked to see their ship, and they showed us. I noticed that they had brown skin, and black hair. They told us that their country is very hot and had lots of trees, has lots of rainfall, and has lots of fruit and vegetables. We told them we have snow in the winter, is hot in the summer and they were shocked when we told them we have snow. And we also told them we have a weird animal that is cute, black and white, called a panda, which only lives in our Ming Empire. After talking, we became friends. I wish I would see them again. After a couple of weeks, we arrived to Africa and docked our ship. We encountered lots of animals out in the jungle, even an elephant wrapped its trunk around me. After approximately 2 hours, we arrived at a village. The village was really big, and we walked around it and offered goods to the villagers. After a long period of time, we tried to go back to our ship, but was lost in the jungle. We first had to fight of a pack of lions, then needed to outrun a cheetah, and finally hid from a vulture. Whew! We continued to walk in the jungle, until someone asked, "Where are we going?" I thought we would be in big trouble since we couldn't remember where we docked our ship, until I heard that one of our crew members had left a trail. "Good." said our captain, Zheng He. He was happy at that particular sailor who said he had left a trail. Then another sailor piped up. "Um, captain Zheng, if we head east we will eventually find the boat." The captain's spirit rose when he heard that. So we went east until we walked into another village. We scrambled out of the village, and headed in the correct direction, back to our ship. We found a ship, but to our surprise we found it tattered and left in pieces. This seemed like the end, until we found out that it wasn't our ship. I sighed with relief. We continued walking down the east coast of Africa, hoping to find our ship, and there it was! After thirty minutes of walking, we finally reached our ship. We were so happy! Overall, I liked this trip because it was very adventurous and exciting, met people from other countries, but the most important part was that we were safe. Soon, We organised our ship and set sail for home.

# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

*Island Christian Academy, Cheng, Keziah – 9*

Everyone knows that pirates set sail to only steal treasure. Pirates usually have only one hand in children fantasy stories, but that isn't true for real pirates. They have two hands with sharp nails making it harder to fight them. Story tellers always say that cabin boys walk the plank.

I believed all of that until I was finding a job after going to college. Mama kept on fussing about finding jobs easier to do and harder to do. I searched all day and night long. I still couldn't find a job. I was walking all alone on the street, sad and lonely.

I remembered how hard my father taught me to follow my heart before he died. I remembered him working as a military soldier battling Japan. I was so proud of him. Suddenly I heard a mysterious hiss, calling my name coming from around that dirty house. "Lin, Lin" I turned around and stared sharply at the houses nearby. I felt a hard tug at my ragged shirt and somebody pulled me to the nearest house. "I know you're looking for a job." said a man with an expensive looking robe. "How did you know?" I asked.

"I overheard your mother muttering about it, I was your dad's friend in the war, Uncle Lun." The man said.

"Do you still work in the army?" I asked.

"I retired a long time ago." Lun replied.

"But now I need to find a job." I said.

"Follow me, let's go to the emperor's palace." Uncle Lun said, flashing me a mysterious smile.

After a daylong walking, they finally arrived at the emperor's palace.

"ah... just the last person I need." said the emperor, grinning

"W-w-what do y-y-you mean." I stammered, shocked.

"I need you to go on a mission with my great explorers," The emperor explained, "I need you to travel around the world on a ship and —"

"Steal treasure...!? I am no pirate."

"No... but to do the opposite, that will be your job."

"But I don't know what the "opposite" means"

"It means you get jewelry to give away to peaceful people, not steal it. And you need to fight away our biggest and toughest enemies: The pirates." said the emperor.

I finally decided to do it. I and the explorers got trained, swimming to diving, sword fighting to wrestling and aiming to targeting. When the day came, I was covered in scratches and bruises. But I looked strong. We packed our clothes and food to survive. Then we set sail.

We got trained again on the ship, bowing, sword fighting, climbing, shooting and diving. We finally arrived in India, set up our camp and fell asleep.

"Wake up, lazy lads." called captain.

"Where are we going now?" yawned an explorer, half asleep

"We are going to the Navi Mumbai." Captain said. We undid our tents and packed it up.

"Everyone, grab your gear and line up!" Captain shouted, hurting my ears.

I grabbed my armour and tent and lined up in front of a big muscular explorer. We marched through the city looking proud. I felt nervous, and a little brave.

We gave some of our money to the poor. Now the most terrifying part was when the snake charmer whistled into his pungi and the cobra hissed at me! We soon arrived in Mumbai tired.

We gave peaceful people treasures from the emperor, silver, gold, pearl, diamond and spices.

We bought delicious smelling fruits from the fruit stall, gifts for Uncle Lun and Masor Tenga . I ate them for dinner, and they tasted good. We went back to camp and during one week, we had already given most of our treasures! On the last day, I bought a jade snake necklace for me. We packed up our stuff and climbed aboard.

"All aboard!" Captain shouted .

Yes , Captain " we said.

"To arrrrabbia!"

After a few hours to Arabia, Captain looked worried. "I see a skeletal flag nearby, there're pirates!" Captain cried, looking around.

"Get ready for battle!" Someone cried, hysterically waving his arms around.

I grabbed my armour and shoved it on. Clutched my sword so tight it sunk into my hand. We fired a fireball at the other ship, some of our men hid in the bottom compartment for a secret weapon. I shivered. We shot more fireballs in the air, but we only aimed one fireball at them, and missed for the others. The ship rocked as we fired. We threw our spears while they fired. Men below were firing rocks at them. Suddenly a whole flock of spears came flying through! We ducked as the flags tied up on our ship tore into pieces. The boat began swaying as the sky turned red. Men in the bottom compartment climbed up as we faced the terrifying looking head pirate, Ali Abbas. He had brown teeth, daggers and revolvers, in his belt, with a skeleton face hat. "Dare to face me, huh? Everybody wants to win against me, until they just give up!" The ugly pirate growled, "I am giving you a chance, you can go away or see the results when I win the war! Haw haw haw!" We tumbled on to their deck, and aiming and shooting our bullets at them. They chased each other, when almost ten people of our army began attacking Ali tougher than usual. Ali shot one of his bullets, he missed. When Ali had enough, he finally collapsed onto the deck, the pirates were terrified! They sailed away into the darkness. Although we won, we had blood all over our faces. We traveled to Arabia, eating peninsula and riding camels. We stayed there for two days. We gave our treasures to peaceful people. They thanked us in Arabica. We finally set sail back to China peacefully.

# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

*Island Christian Academy, Francillion, Piyali – 10*

I woke up shivering with aching bones. It was early November. The sun was rising and the streets were quiet. I looked at myself on a piece of shattered glass. My face was black with yesterday's soot. I rushed to get ready for a busy day.

I went to see Mr. Cheung, a local Nanjing priest. His temple, across our hut, was massive and popular but Mr. Cheung remained humble. When I reached the temple he was on the dark end, lighting up candles. "Mr. Cheung!" I shouted. "It's me, Chen."

He turned around and smiled.

"Ah Chen!" He said. "I have been waiting for you. Come, son."

Since my father had died, Mr. Cheung was the one my family had to look up to and he was always willing to help us out.

We walked down the corridor which led to the priest's chamber. Mr. Cheung sat on one of the cushions and rummaged through his drawer while I poured some Cha<sup>1</sup> into two bowls. Finally, he sat down in front of me.

"Have you heard of Zheng, the famous Nanjing adventurer?" he started. "He is going on an expedition tomorrow but his designated helper got injured and he is urgently looking for somebody reliable. Zheng's willing to pay about 100 gold coins, lodging and food. I can recommend your name if you are interested." I thought for a moment and then nodded.

"Great! I'll tell your mother. For now, can you go dust the sculptures?"

The next day, after mom had finished packing my sack, I ran to the docks. There stood Zheng He. He looked very different than in the paintings!

Beside him was the ship doctor, Pang. He pushed me aggressively as he followed Zheng. Someone told me that Pang was Zheng's favorite in the crew. He was totally fascinated by the boss and disliked anyone else getting close to Zheng.

It was not long before we boarded the ship, excited for the adventure awaiting us.

Our first stop, a few days later, was the coast of Champa<sup>2</sup>. Zheng's only intention was to refill our water tanks there and shortly after we sailed off to continue our route south.

After another week of travel, we reached a beautiful beach in Siam<sup>3</sup>. Zheng ordered the crew members to prepare our camp and to get some food for dinner. In the meantime, Zheng asked a few crew members to go swimming with him. I was among the chosen ones. Zheng was starting to have confidence in me and the complicity between us was growing. It did not take long before I got dirty looks of pure hatred from Pang.

At night, all of us gathered around the fire. We were quickly joined by locals attracted by our ship. Their leaders shared some fresh coconuts with us. In return, we gave them some of the treasures we had in our stock. We all enjoyed this moment of calm when we exchanged stories about our customs and traditions. And, after a hearty dinner of dried fish and rice, a quick round of checkers and a game of cards, we went to sleep.

When I woke up, everything was dull. I felt dizzy. I saw Zhao, my best friend on the ship, run up to me.

"Zhao. I feel... I feel..."

I had blacked out.

I woke up on a cotton bed, surrounded by people. Zheng and Zhao were there too.

Pang, the doctor of the ship stood in front of me.

"Chen, you have high fever!" He said.

I fainted again after hearing him mumble "He will die."

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<sup>1</sup> Milk tea

<sup>2</sup> Central Vietnam

<sup>3</sup> Modern day Thailand

At night, the waves churned and the storm shrieked. I woke up cold and hot at the same time. I saw a shadow. I heard footsteps. Someone was coming!  
I gathered all my remaining forces to grab the holy sword from the drawer and held it tightly. It was the doctor! He held a knife in his hand as he crept through my room. He suddenly charged to me pointing the knife. I did the same except sitting up straight on the bed.  
As soon as it had begun it had finished. I looked down to see him lying on the floor, dead.

The next day, after I had explained everything to the crew we set off again, happily.

About a month later, we reached Cochin in India. By that time, thanks to our newly appointed doctor, I had recovered.

What a relief to again be able to walk on dry land! With some friends, we visited the port. We met with snake sellers and charmers displaying their tricks. For the first time, we ate daal<sup>4</sup> and chawal<sup>5</sup>, Hindu's<sup>6</sup> favorite dishes which would become our daily treat during our stay in India.  
In the meantime, Zheng had met with the head of the local army, Ranveer. Ranveer was a very welcoming person. He showed us around the jungle where we came across tigers, elephants and many other amazing animals.

After six months, it was time for us to return to to Nanjing and share our adventures with everyone. But our journey back home was threatened by our encounter with Chinese pirates near Sumatra's coast.  
Zheng once again revealed his courage. Heading our men, he fought like a tiger and maneuvered so well that it was not long before we took into custody the chief of pirates.

When we finally reached back to Nanjing, the crew was like family but I couldn't wait to see my original one. I rushed off to Mr. Cheung. He was waiting for me along with my mother.

"Welcome back Chen! I missed you so much!"

I smiled.

"Me too!"

At night we talked and joked. Happy, relieved and proud, I could not stop relating my adventures.  
As the fire dimmed, I shut my eyes and entered the world of dreams.

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<sup>4</sup> Lentils

<sup>5</sup> Rice

<sup>6</sup> A religion popular in India

# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

*Kau Yan School, Hau, Yuet Ching Jovia – 9*

“Quick! Sailor Lee’s temperature is too high. Fill the tub with cool water and we need to soak him in!” yelled Doctor Mak from the sick room.

Before I joined the Ming Treasure fleet, I had no idea what it would be like to sail for years. I was a twelve years old boy who worked as an assistant to Doctor. Doctor Mak was a kind doctor, but he was strict to me because he said, “Being a good doctor is about saving lives, you cannot afford to make mistake.” I learned a lot from him and I wanted to be a doctor like him. Doctor Mak was called by the Emperor to work on the ship, so I left my family and followed him.

The Ming Emperor sent a fleet of about 200 ships to visit different countries, to show his friendliness to them. We brought along many precious treasures and helpful skills, to share with them. We have different kinds of ships and people working here. We got ships for food, horses, weapons and most importantly treasures. Different people like sailors, chefs, soldiers, doctors and any kind of people you could name. It was like a moving city on the sea.

Days on the sea was very boring and tough. I was homesick and always sobbed at night in the beginning. Things got better when I met some friends about my age. I would gather with friends after work. We played card games and chatted about our adventures in different ships or horrible stories about pirates. Bob, who was also an assistant to Doctor Mak, had been very kind to me. He shared the same bedroom with me and would encourage me. “All your suffering now helps to build you into a better doctor in future.” Bob was right, with his words in mind, I felt stronger to handle the difficulties better.

“Are you listening? Move faster to get cool water!” growled Doctor Mak.

“I really don’t get it, why do our Emperor send us to the howling sea? Before we send out our kindness, we might all die. Who are going to show kindness to us?” I grumbled while pouring the heavy bucket of water into the huge tub. “I heard gossip from the main ship that we lost our way. I really don’t want to die here” murmured Bob.

It had been two months after we departed from last piece of land. The weather was getting hotter and more people got sick. Bob and I were busy helping Doctor Mak to take care of them. Things were getting worse when one of our ships sank, all the food and water on that ship were gone. We were running out of food and water, everyone was very frustrated and hungry. We were looking forward to see the land again.

Suddenly, I heard the special pattern of drumroll from the main ship. I clapped my hand to my mouth and Bob shouted to me, “Can you believe it? We are going to land soon!” Tears of happiness rolled down my cheeks. I was very excited about landing a new place because I was fed up with the sea.

After we landed on a beach, we were surrounded by local people, who spoke in a way that I could not understand and looked very unfriendly. They threw stones to us and shouted at us. When I thought they were about to attack us, they all ran away back into the forest and disappeared. I was very confused and terrified as I did not know what would happen.

While we were looking for herbs and food, I could feel the suspicious gazes from the local people but I cannot see them. I felt upset as we were not doing anything harmful to them. Doctor Mak reminded us that we were coming to share our friendliness and love to others. He told us to calm down, stay close to each other and be friendly to local people.

One day, Bob and I saw a fainted kid when we were collecting herbs on the hillside. The boy’s body was covered in bruises and scratches, he looked very weak and could not even open his eyes. We took him back to our camp and asked Doctor Mak to treat him. When the boy woke up in our camp, he was trembling in fear and sobbed miserably. After two days, the boy was getting better and stronger, he felt safe and showed smiles.

“Attack! Run!” Emergency horns were blown and we hurried down with the boy to an open area. We saw soldiers fighting with local people, and some of them were covered in blood. My teeth clattered and hugged the boy tightly. I was thinking how to run away with the boy. However, the little boy pushed me away and darted towards the local fighters. The local people were delighted to see the boy back again. The local people listened to the boy and their mouth hung wide open. They turned to us now with great big smiles and bowed to us. It turned out the little boy was their young prince, who was captured by their enemy! I could not believe I could be a friend with a prince!

Our captain gave them treasures to show our friendliness. The local people were very amazed by our skill to build a well, that could bring underground water to drink. We taught them how to build wells and they were jovial about this new skill they learned.

Showing kindness to others was not easy when we were in trouble ourselves. I was grateful to my teacher who teach me to stay kind and continue to share our love no matter what. It is the kindness that truly rules the sea, and I could feel the friendship that I shared with the all people I met.

# New Tales of Ming Treasure Voyages

*Kau Yan School, Leung, Ching Sum Maegan – 9*

“Maegan, it’s getting late! Practice your ocarina and go to sleep!” Mum shouted loudly as I walked into my room. “Yes, I will!” I answered back. I played my ocarina as usual. Then, I smelled a scent of the sweet dream essential oil next to my bed and then fell asleep soundly.

When I opened my eyes, I heard splashing sounds of waves. I looked around, trying to figure out where I was. I then heard someone mumbling, “ Captain Zheng He still hasn’t been able to sleep well for almost a week. What can we do?” Soon, a man dressed in ancient Chinese clothing walked slowly towards me. I realized that I had returned to the past! He leaned forward and asked, “ Who are you? Why are you here?”

I stared at him nervously trying to find myself an excuse of my appearance, then I suddenly recalled the conversation that I just overheard and muttered, “I’m Leung Ching Sum. I am here to help Captain Zheng.”

“Oh! Thank you! Welcome to the our treasure ship! I am one of the doctors on this ship. We have a problem. Our captain, Zheng He, can’t sleep well at night. We have had used all our methods and even different kinds of medicines. None of them work. Do you think you can help him?” The man asked hopefully.

“Yes, I think I can help him,” I replied earnestly.

After that, he took me downstairs to see his captain, Zheng He. I saw him lying on his bed, but he was still opening his eyes wide.

The doctor bowed to him and explained, “Captain, this child told me that she can help you sleep.”

Zheng He stood up straight. He looked at me doubtfully and asked, “Really? How are you going to help me?”

I answered with slight confidence, “I will use the sweet dream essential oil and play a peaceful melody with my ocarina to help you!”

Zheng He suggested, “You can try them tonight! I want to know if they are effective.”

I nodded and promised, “Okay!”

That night, I was in the doctor’s cabin. I saw a sight that I will never forget. It was raining cats and dogs. I saw lightning flashing and thundering roaring loudly outside. Waves got higher and higher, feeling that our ships were going to turn upside down! I was frightened and my body was shaking.

Suddenly, a soldier knocked the cabin’s door and came in. He ordered me to go to Zheng He’s room immediately. So I took the sweet dream essential oil and the ocarina with me. Quickly, I followed him to Zheng He’s room.

When I entered his room, I bowed at Zheng He, handing the sweet dream essential oil and the ocarina to him.

Zheng He commanded, “Now, you can start your ‘magic’.” I carefully dripped two drops of sweet dream essential oil on his pillow. I moved my fingers on the ocarina to play a peaceful melody named “Amazing Grace” for him.

While I was playing the ocarina, Zheng He told me about his past, “I was born in a Muslim family. I loved listening to grandpa’s stories. But in 1381, Ming army’s soldiers came to Yunnan, a place where I lived. Unluckily, I was captured by them. I became a eunuch and began to serve prince Zhudi. In 1390, I began to serve a prince in a ...” He had not finished his story and fell deeply asleep.

The soldiers beside him were all amazed and whispered to each other. Then, they sent me back to my room. I peeked out from the window, staring at the still raining sky. I started to feel homesick.

The next morning, Zheng He came into my room and sat on my bed. “Your sweet dream essential oil and the peaceful melody really worked! You are one of the best doctors I’ve ever seen!” thanked Zheng He.

I smiled, “Captain, it is my pleasure!”

Zheng He took me to the deck and showed me different masts. There were totally nine masts on the treasure ship. Then, he showed me his other ships, “We have more than 200 ships, including treasure ships, equine ships, supply ships, troop transports, fuchuan warships and water tankers!” He looked at the sky and said, “Look at the ocean! The huge mountains waves are rising sky-high. In front of your eyes are far-off foreign lands covered in a faint mist. Our ships are in full sail. On and on we sail; day and night we sail. Our ships can ride on giant waves just as if we were walking on a smooth road.”

I opened my mouth wide. I said, “Wow! Which voyage are we on now?”

Zheng He replied. “We are on our first voyage. We are going back to China now.”

I nodded and asked, “Where did you go on this voyage?”



Zheng He answered with a warm smile on his face, “We went to Champa, Java Island, Malacca, Aru, Samudera, Quilon, Kollam, Ceylon and Calicut. We travelled to nine places in the first voyage!”

“You went to many places! I wonder if the journey was fun?” I asked curiously.

Zheng He laughed, “The journey was not fun at all. Sometimes, we needed to fight with the horrible pirates! Sometimes, there were storms and gusts of wind. But there was a time, I gave gold, silver, porcelain and silk for Swahili. In return, they gave us some novelties such as ostriches, zebras, camels and ivory.”

“So that means you had many presents in the first voyage!” I exclaimed.

Zheng He whispered to my ear, “Yes! But don’t tell the others because they may want to have the presents themselves. Take this as your reward for giving me a good night sleep!” He placed a gold coin in my hand.

“Thank you!” I bowed lowly and replied.

Just then, I heard mum’s voice, “Maegan, wake up! Or you will be late for school!” I opened my eyes and felt that there was something in my hand. I opened my hand and saw the gold coin. I beamed, “Wow! The gold coin travelled back with me in time!”

# The Trip to the Western Seas

*Kau Yan School, Sin, Yan Yu Adeline – 10*

“Where are we?” whispered Yan Yan. “Shush, we’re in Emperor Yongle’s forbidden city. Emperor Yongle is about to talk,” said General Woo.

“You’ll set sail to the Western Seas tomorrow to discover new things and places. Good luck everyone,” said Emperor Yongle.

The next day, Zheng He, General Woo, Yan Yan and their tough warriors boarded a fleet of ships to the Western Seas. Zheng He was very clever and hard-working. General Woo was very good in wars, and he was able to guide his men and friends to safety. Yan Yan was General Woo’s daughter. She was a trustworthy and brave girl.

The weather was unpredictable. Yan Yan felt so cold and windy. People got seasick on the ships. “General Zheng, the men puke all over the ships,” said Yan Yan worriedly.

After a few months, there was a huge storm coming and the water was flooding everywhere! The waves came rushing forward to the ships. It was raining cats and dogs. People tossed and turned because of that horrible weather.

“I can’t sleep,” said the people unhappily. “We’re very tired too.” After a few days, the storm eventually stopped. “There’s a colourful and vivid rainbow,” said General Woo. People held a party to celebrate. “Hurray! The storm is over,” cheered the people on the ships.

Dolphins leaped and jumped out from water to show off their tricks. General Woo and Yan Yan laid down, gazing at the moon and stars at night. It was really a happy moment for them.

## Arrived at a New Country

Yan Yan then found something missing. “Hey, where had the map gone?”. “I think the storm blew it off the ship,” said Zheng He. “I have no idea where we are going.”

The ships sailed across oceans. Then after a month, Yan Yan saw land. Zheng He ordered his men to sheltered the ships on the land.

“I suppose we’re in India, because there are elephants here,” said Yan Yan. Suddenly, an Indian girl tapped on Yan Yan’s shoulder and called them all to follow her. The little girl took them to a beautiful place.

A king was standing in front of them. He wore a Sherwani, with a golden ring in his index finger. He smiled and looked them up and down curiously. He tried to speak with them, but none of Zheng He’s men knew what he said. But he treated them nicely.

Yan Yan whispered to Zheng He, “the king is a nice person, and he is smart too. Why don’t we give him our gold and silk as presents to make good friends with each other?”

“Good idea,” said Zheng He. He ordered his men to get some gold to the king. The king was very pleased. After a while, Zheng He decided to leave and to continue the trip.

## OH NO! Pirates!

The ships dangled on the peaceful waves. The sun shone down at the sea and the water sparkled. After that, disaster struck. Yan Yan heard booming sounds coming from the west.

About seven ginormous pirate ships were coming closer towards Zheng He’s ships. There was an enormous skull flag on each pirate ship. The pirates carried swords and ropes with them.

“Look! The world-famous pirate, Captain Hook, is on that pirate ship,” said General Woo. “Oh no,” said Yan Yan. “Calm down Yan Yan, I’m sure we will get rid of them in no time,” said Zheng He confidently. “Everyone, prepare for the pirates.”

Captain Hook was skinny and very tall indeed. He had an eye patch on his left eye. He had a pirate hat and his teeth were as yellow as the chandelier lights. He wore a white shirt, and he had a brown belt on his waist. He had a hook on his right arm, instead of a hand. He also wore baggy trousers.

“You won’t win,” said Captain Hook brusquely. The pirates grabbed the gold from Zheng He’s ships greedily. There was a big fight with the pirates. They finally took Zheng He, tied him up and placed him on Captain Hook’s big pirate ship.

When Captain Hook and his men were about to leave, there was something pulling the pirate ship and it wouldn’t let the ship go. What happened to the ship?

### **The turtles and their friends**

There were a bunch of turtles surrounded Captain Hook’s ship. People were flabbergasted. “What will the turtles do next?”

“Ahhhhhhhhhh!” screeched Captain Hook. When Captain Hook was about to jump onto another ship and escape, the turtle leader blew a whistle and two sharks, Mrs. and Mr. Shark swam towards Captain Hook, so he couldn’t escape. Zheng He and Yan Yan roared with laughter. A turtle crawled on the pirate ship slowly. It bit off the rope and freed Zheng He. When everyone wasn’t looking, General Woo jumped to the pirate ship and took the gold. He placed them back on Zheng He’s ship.

“I have no time for those silly games and I’ll get you all next time,” said Captain Hook through gritted teeth. His face went purple and red. Then the crowd of pirate ships disappeared in the darkness...

“Thank you, thank you, this was a really good job,” said General Woo holding a big thumb up for the turtles. “How can we repay your kindness?” asked Zheng He and Yan Yan. “We don’t want the Emperor to eat shark fin soup again because two of our friends had become Emperor Yongle’s lunch,” said Mr. Shark sadly. “I’ll promise you,” said General Woo. Then Zheng He, General Woo, Yan Yan and their men continue their trip to the Western Seas.

So, from now on, Chinese people love sea creatures and they won’t eat shark fin soup again, ever and ever.

# An Unforgettable Adventure

*Kau Yan School, Wong, Hou Man Cheryl – 9*

Long time ago, in 1403, the Emperor ordered the construction of a huge fleet of ships capable of travel around the Indian Ocean. He put his trusted retainer, the Muslim eunuch Zheng, in charge of construction. After an offering of prayers to the protective goddess of sailors, George, the fleet set out for India with the newly-named admiral Zheng He in command.

From there, they went to the island of Java (Indonesia) carefully avoiding the fleet of pirate Tom. The fleet made further stops at Islands.

When Zheng arrived, the people were very kind to him. The people gave him some food to take it back to his country. Zheng was very grateful and offered them a bag of gold and silver.

On the way back to China, the Treasure Fleet confronted the pirate Tom at Indonesia. Tom pretended to surrender to Zheng, but turned upon the Treasure Fleet and tried to plunder it. Zheng He's forces attacked, killing more than 5,000 pirates, sinking ten of their ships. Tom and two of his top associates were captured and taken back to China and were beheaded.

On their return to Ming China, Zheng He and his entire force of officers and sailors received monetary rewards from the England Emperor. The England emperor was very pleased with the tribute brought by the foreign emissaries, and with China's increased prestige in the eastern Indian Ocean basin.

After presenting their tribute and receiving gifts from the China emperor, the people needed to go back to their homes. They were very hungry so they wanted to catch some fish.

Suddenly there was a scream from the deck "HELP ME "shouted the people, it was a big squid, they ate it up, but they did not know it is the friend of the sea king.

The sea king was very angry and attacked the ship, making the waves rough. The people on the ship were frightened and scared, they ran to the places where the sea king can't see them. The waves are so rough that it even broke the foresail, the people felt hopeless because the boat will sink soon. "What shall we do?" complained the people. Suddenly, the sky was no longer dark, a piece of wood killed the sea king, the people fixed the foresail and soon, the great fleet set sail once again.

Some pirates from the first voyage had not die, and they wanted to kill Zheng. They crept onto the ship when the people are asleep. They put a small bomb inside Zheng's room. In the morning, the pirates cheered, but when they find out nobody got hurt, they were very angry.

Zheng wanted to find out who did this, so he squeezed some sticky ink on the ground and on the door.

At midnight, the pirates came again, they silently push the door, then they quickly run inside but find out their feet could not move, they cried " Help! It's a trap!" Then, Zheng he woke up, when he saw them, he called the guards. and the pirates were beheaded soon.

On the way to Muscat, one night, all of the people were having fun, when a ship went out of control, it drove with breakneck speed and crashed into another ship, the ship overturned. Some people swim up to the top and called other ships to save them, they rescue Zheng he from the water.

They went to a lot of amazing places to travel and everything went fine after. Zheng he exchanged money with exotic goods and creatures, famously including giraffes, which were interpreted as the mythical Chinese creature the *qilin*.

On the fifth and sixth voyages, the Treasure Fleet followed much the same track to Arabia and East Africa, asserting Chinese prestige and collecting tribute from as many as thirty different states and principalities. The fifth voyage spanned 1416 to 1419, while the sixth took place in 1421 and 1422.

In 1424, Zheng He's friend and sponsor, the Chinese Emperor, died while on a military campaign against the Mongols. His successor, the happy Emperor, ordered an end to the expensive ocean-going voyages. However, the new emperor lived for just nine months after his coronation and was succeeded by his more adventurous son, the happy Emperor. Under his leadership, the Treasure Fleet would make one last great voyage.

The Happy Emperor ordered preparations for a final voyage of the Treasure Fleet. He appointed Zheng He to command the fleet, even though the great eunuch admiral was 59 years old and in poor health.

This last great voyage took three years and visited at least 17 different ports between China and Kenya. On the way back to China, in Indonesian waters, Admiral Zheng He died. He was buried at sea, and his men brought a braid of his hair and a pair of his shoes back to be buried in Nanjing.

# The Treasure Voyages

*Kennedy School, Chow, Hana – 10*

Chapter 1: what this is even about

The salty air and the cool breeze blew against my face. The whole crew was busy doing bits of work and chattering away. I decided to enjoy every memorable moment. We all clearly knew he was eager to trade goods from the emperor such as silk and tea for something we desired all his life: gold. That's what he wanted. I was on the ship named 'The Greatest' full of riches. I mean there were far more riches and goods from the honorable emperor than the crew on board. I'm probably the youngest one here. I'm weak and I'm thirteen. But father always believes in me.

"I believe in you more than I believe in myself kid," reminded my dad over and over again.

Our destination was Africa which was very far and we were hoping we might be the first people to reach Africa. Of course I knew it was going to be very tiring. But I had to complete this journey and I still remember the very day I made up my mind. Father handed me a piece of paper, old and crumpled. It was a map.

"Chen, use this even though it may look useless, I've kept it for many years and I believe you will find this handy sometime" he said

By looking at the map, it seemed like a long way to Africa. Whatever it was.

Chapter 2 :enemies?

Few days past already, quickly and so far we'd reached India and Arabia, getting a chance to be one of the most historic historians. I met amazing people and tried the delicious mangos. I thought I would have a nice time, peaceful and calm lying down on my hammock because so far I'd experienced all the marvellous things. I was silently and carefully studying the map father gave me, thinking deep thoughts.

For dinner, all of us quietly gathered out on the deck watching the beautiful horizon. All of a sudden, something not quite right was blocking the entire charming view. Another ship. The captain scowled without stopping and suddenly he looked angry. The whole crew went crazy and a second later it was just shouting.

"The bombs! Load your guns!," ordered the captain busily walking around. We heard deafening noises of bombs shooting our direction. Many strong men of the crew started fighting back.

A load of fierce looking people got on our ship, and things got insane. They were searching for the treasures throughout the depths of the ship. Soon after, the vile enemies carried our silk and our belongings. One big bulky woman was holding something familiar. My map. I could never in a billion years let someone take it.

"THAT'S MY MAP," I screamed to the top of my voice. The pirate noticed me.

The pirate smiled smugly showing all of her menacing disgusting teeth.

"You're not afraid of me young lad?," she asked. She punched me hard on the stomach and I drew my sword as I stabbed her hard. She jerked away, the map slipping of her hands. I snatched it. Afraid, she ran away. At least I had the map. I noticed a large piece of glorious silk, that I could not ignore. It seemed to be the only wonderful thing in the middle of this chaos. I snatched that too hugging the belongings tightly, letting no one take it away. I shed a tear in pain because the pirate had left a colossal scar on my back. My head was throbbing with pain and I was unable to do anything but lie down.

Chapter 3: Hunger, shock and grievance

First of all, people were cursing. Next moaning of terror. I'd sort of saved the crew by holding on tight to the goods. What was the whole use of this voyage? A few moments later, still screaming in agony the boat started sinking. I did not want to pass away in a voyage we were supposed to be famous for! Soon most of the pirates were swimming and clutching tightly on their precious belongings. I shoved half of the map in my mouth, hoping it would not dissolve. The green tea was hanging on my shoulder about to fall. I tightened my grip.

"Swim! Swim!," shouted my father from the top his voice.

Immediately, grasping onto the small log I swam for my life. If the other pirates couldn't reach Africa, I would. No doubt.

Chapter 4: Cave

When at last I awoke, it felt surprisingly homely again.

"We're safe," assured father giving me a cup of hot green tea.

This was clearly not home. I was in a dim, damp cave. With a single comforting candle. I was too distressed, not knowing what to do. Wrapped tightly in a warm blanket, father comforted me.

"We're okay," he whispered.

I looked around the cave it was not okay. About sixteen from 28 were left. Some were crying and weeping for losing their loved ones. Co- captain, yi wei, was in a dreadful mourning. I just kept asking myself over and over. 'How are we to return to china with the traded goods?'

Chapter 5: The zulala tribe.

My back was painful from the rocks and all we were doing for an endless tiring one hour was wait for hope. People threw up of homesickness, people were weeping and some fast asleep. I still remember it. Painful. Utter misery.

All of a sudden, we heard music, drums laughter. It seemed like the people who were doing this were having fun. For us, fun was unimaginable in this kind of horrific situation. The noise kept going our way and eventually we were face to face with a group of colourful people. They hooted and cheered. The only thing we understood was them chanting out loud,

"Zulala tribe! Zulala tribe!",

They stared at us for a long moment and gently felt our precious chinese silk. I thought they were going to trade us something, and that's exactly what they did. Offering something even better than fruit. Soon, our silk, tea and gold was gone but us pirates had parrots, gold from the africans and jewellery. Even better, a boat. We were crying for joy. What the Zulala tribe did was unthinkable kindness. I mean who would've done that for us if the zulala tribe didn't?

Later that day, we happily communicated by actions, while having a fire by our side. I vowed that I would always remember the zulala tribe forever. It brought all of us happiness and taught us how to be grateful. I sat thinking about it the whole time.

Chapter 7: home sweet home.

"China!", they exclaimed. Father hugged me tightly without saying a word.

I finally had the chance to meet mother.

"We did it son. we did," he said proudly.

We were soon appreciated by the emperor and all got a bag of gold.

I still remember everything I took from this experience. hope, fear and joy.

We hoped,

We tried,

And we did.

# Ming Treasure Voyages

*Kennedy School, Chua, Emma – 9*

One winter morning, when the Ming emperor still ruled, a young Chinese boy named Xiaoming was on a journey to India. “Maybe, in India, I can get herbs to cure my mother.” His mother had been ill for many years and he had heard from the doctor that the cure was a herb only found in India. Xiaoming was only 16 years old and was traveling with his father, one of the chefs of Admiral Zheng He’s ship. Xiaoming’s job was to wash the dishes.

Days, weeks and months went by before they finally reached their destination. Calicut. The sky was starting to get dark grey. “Prepare for a rough day, I think there is a storm coming in” one sailor warned.

Despite the warning, Admiral Zheng He ordered “Anchor the ship. We’re getting off.” Xiaoming had just started doing the dishes when he suddenly heard the clash of swords. He looked out onto the deck. Without hesitation, Xiaoming got up and grabbed a ladle, so he could help. He was immediately caught up in the fight.

A sharp sword flashed over his head. In the corner of his eye he saw the Admiral fighting. Xiaoming ducked and hit a pirates leg. Xiaoming raised his ladle and jammed it on another pirates head, with such strength that the pirate was knocked out, unconscious. Then, Xiaoming felt the ship rocking heavily under his feet. The sky had become an eerie grey. Thunder started. Lightning appeared. Suddenly, a petrifying cry rang out. Xiaoming looked, and saw gigantic waves rising from the sea. The waves crashed heavily on the sides of the ship. Xiaoming saw silhouettes of pirates with pointy hats fall off board.

When the storm was over the Admiral continued his journey in Calicut. Luckily, for the sailors, though not all of them had survived, the pirates had been knocked off board by the powerful waves. Xiaoming tread on something hard and round as he walked to the ships edge. He looked, and down beneath his feet was a glass bottle covered in dirt and a whiffy stench. Could it have been left behind by a pirate? Or could it have been carried on board by the waves? This would be a secret no one would ever know the answer to. Xiaoming took it to his cabin and wiped the mysterious bottle. That’s when he realised there were small, green herbs inside. The herb he saw was identical to the drawing the doctor showed him back in China. Xiaoming was so excited. “*Fantastic! This is just what I need to cure mother.*”

They had returned to their homeland, China. It had already been 1 ½ years, but it only felt like a few days. Xiaoming and his father rushed home. His mother cried “Xiaoming! I’m so glad you’re back.” from under the sheets. “Look what I found! It can cure you, mom!” Xiaoming said.

With permission from the doctor, Xiaoming let his mother consume the antidote. His mother was gradually getting better. Xiaoming and his family lived happily and well for a long time and maybe you will visit the very ship they were on the next time you go to China..



# Treasure Surprise

Kennedy School, Ho, Hilary – 9

It was another one of those boring Friday nights at old Aunt Martha's house. We just can't stand the scrabble game she made us play over and over again nor the moldy smell in the living room. Also, her old toothbrush she always carries around because she thinks it's too special to leave at her house incase someone steals it. Every week mom and dad party and hang out with their friends ,so they send my sister, my little twin brothers and I to aunt Martha's farmhouse. After dropping us off, mom spoke to my sister.

"Sorry, Angela, Sweetheart. Daddy and I will be off in Hawaii for just a week. You are the eldest one, and I am trusting you to take care of the smaller kids. OK? Love you, bye..."next to mother, dad gave a weak smile to Angela and waved goodbye. My sister walked inside miserable and told me that whenever they say 'love you' so carelessly, a little of her heart breaks away until it is nearly no more. We all sat down and stared at the boring and plain cabbage soup Aunt Martha gives us for every meal. The twins groaned and then there was absolute silence. It was so quiet, you could even hear a mouse's footstep. A big, loud and smelly *buuuuurrrip* from Aunt Martha broke the silence.

"Sorry, my dears...but I have something special to show you all. All that soup reminded me of it." said Aunt Martha's wobbly voice. Our faces lightened up. The twins-Jacob and Jack were particularly interested. Aunt Martha carried on: "You see, children, I've found this magnificent map in my special book of wisdom." She unfolded the piece of paper in her hand and spread out the ancient map on the table.

"And also that every time I want to find a random page, my book keeps on opening to this frame." aunt Martha added. Since Angela was 13 and very smart, she was able to find a clue. On the back side of the map, there was a mysterious rhyme that appeared with a flash of light. Angela read the rhyme aloud:

Collect two things, silk and gold. Give it to a man that's bald.

Save his terrible life aboard, at the ending of a cord.

Teach them pirates the lesson, don't watch them slowly have progression.

Leave at night, take a bite

Of what's in front of you. Do what's right!

Slowly, it disappeared. Angela just stared at the map for a really long time.

"Maybe we need to somehow jump *in* the frame to get wherever this will take us," suggested Angela. The twins volunteered to jump in first. A few surprising moments later, we heard their echoed voices saying that they are on a beach. I was next.

"Auntie, are you coming with us?" I asked.

"Dearest Olivia, of course I am. Don't you little dumplings worry." comforted Martha. I took a deep breath and jumped in. Tossed and tumbled until I hit boiling hot sand. A gruff voice made me jump.

"Ta men shi ni de di di ma?" asked a chinese pirate-looking guy pointing to my brothers. I surprisingly understood what he meant. I tried to answer back that they *were* my younger brothers but what came out of my mouth was fluent chinese.

"Who are you all? Why are you here?" asked the pirate suspiciously. He gestured to the men behind him as they roughly grabbed us by the ears. They tied all our hands together and marched us into the rowboat to go to the main, grand sailing ship. The suspicious man brought us to what seemed like the leader who was now glaringly eyeing us. He didn't seem to be happy that we showed up in the middle of eating his cabbage roll lunch. He stood up and wiped his mouth.

"Who are you? Are you a friend or enemy of China?" the leader demanded. Aunt Martha stepped up.

"Hi, Mr.Suspicious Weird Beard. We have come in peace and would like to join your fellow crew," said Aunt Martha trying to sound not scared. The rest of us gasped. The captain narrowed his eyes at us. He looked as if he could read Aunt Martha's mind-if she is trying to trick the captain or actually meaning it. Finally, he said:

"Ms.Old And Stinky, I have some questions for you,"

While the captain and Aunt Martha were having the conversation, the twins, without being noticed, were excited began exploring the ship. They found some colourful cloth and shiny coins to play with. When the captain was asking questions, Aunt Martha noticed the cabbage stuck in his teeth and the captain looked terrible. The captain's face went red with anger when everyone he could see was laughing. She thought of her toothbrush she had with her. "Sorry to interrupt, but I have something that can clean your teeth," said Aunt Martha.

"I can lend you my bristle toothbrush if you like," she continued.

"Lend me your what?" asked the confused captain.

The captain snatched it from her and used it to clean his teeth. The cabbage got out and the pirates stopped laughing. At that moment, the twins spotted a pirate that was bald and looked tired and bullied. They asked the bald pirate to play with the. When the twins were handing that pirate cloth and coins, someone spotted

them. The bald man noticed and grabbed some rope and jumped into the sea. Me, Angela, aunt Martha and I heard and saw his splash.

“Thank you, Ms.Smart! You are accepted to join our cr—”

The pirate that saw the twins and shouted, cutting short the captain’s sentence.

“THIEVES! THE BOYS ARE STEALING OUR SILK AND GOLD!”

The captain demanded at once:

“Tie them up!” then he turned to Aunt Martha.

“You, Ms.SmartyPants! Trying to steal my treasure! You can’t outsmart a villain like me.Fellow pirates, let’s PARTY!” The pirates cheered. They painted their faces with the powder of crushed seashell then danced and drank. At night, when everyone was asleep, we were staring at the leftover spilled seashell powder all over the deck. The twins liked the colour of the seashell powder. They were determined to taste the powder. As soon as the powder touched their tongue, they disappeared before our eyes. A few minutes later, we were all back at Aunt Martha’s farmhouse. After that week, every Friday we couldn’t wait to go to Aunt Martha’s.

... and to this very day, the Ming Dynasty is known for inventing the bristle toothbrush.

# The Dragon King

*Kennedy School, Liao, Sofia – 8*

Once upon a time in a magnificent palace there lived a dragon family. They had a son who was named Drake. He had shiny blue scales, golden horns, black eyes and a long lashing tail. His mother had purple scales, green horns, blue eyes and a yellow tail. His father had green scales, blue horns, orange eyes and a short tail. Darke inherited the beauty from his parents as Darke was an obviously handsome dragon.

The young prince did not realize that his parents were both treasure hunters. One day Drake's father told him "Me and your mother have to go out for business and we promise to be back in two weeks. Little did young Drake know that his parents were going to jump in a volcano under the dangerous sea.

Soon they were rumors everywhere that the dragon king and queen were dead. The young prince was left to rule the seas alone. After many years Drake who was now known as the dragon king has been trying to look for his long lost parents. But he has no clue how to begin the searching in the vast open sea.

One day, in his father's study room Drake found a staircase leading down to a secret chamber. Once he was inside a chamber, Drake found a heavy book and inside there was a map which said where his parents had gone looking for treasure.

Drake followed the map and he eventually came to a halt in front of a treacherous volcano under the sea near Mariana Islands. He dived into the volcano where his parents had jumped in long ago. The dragon king found a path which led deeper in the volcano. At the foot of the path he found a lake. He slowly swam through the lake and climbed up onto the bank.

After he had got the water off his scales he started to shout "Mommy daddy where are you?" Then he saw a shadow and started to fly towards it. It was his mom and dad!

Drake saw his parents wounded and lying on the ground. "Mom dad are you okay?" he called out to them. "Drake" his mother called out to him "get out of here, there's a black dragon king lurking in the corner and he's very evil and powerful. Run or he is going to kill you!" Young smart Drake thought "I might not be able to fight the black dragon king but if I lure the black dragon king out of the volcano when it erupts the black dragon king will fly into the hot lava and he will be de

So the young dragon king decided to give it a try. He shouted to all four sides of the volcano and the black dragon king came out. "What do you want?" he rumbled. "I want to challenge you", Drake replied casually.

Soon Drake had led the black dragon king out of the volcano just as it started to erupt. Ducking it just in time the black dragon was dead by the eruption. Then Drake found out the treasure his parents had been looking for was actually a crystal ball that could foresee the future. He rubbed the ball gently and it showed him his parents safely back at home with him. So slowly he carried his parents back up to the palace.

With the help of the crystal ball, Drake can foresee when the volcano will erupt or when tsunamis happen so his people can run away or be prepared earlier. All his people are now safe from earthquakes and tsunamis. Drake become the King of Seven Seas!

# The Ming Voyages – An Insider Story

*Kennedy School, Pandey, Avani – 9*

My name is Avani Chung and I have heard many stories but one real-life story has been the most fascinating to me. It is that of my ancestor when she was a young woman in the 1400 AD and her name was Lin Chung. She had dared to disguise herself as a man to work on a ship and explore the world considering that women had no freedom whatsoever in that period. Our story begins when the Yongle Emperor of the Ming Dynasty was ruling China. He had just ascended the throne having overtaken his brother and hence did not want people to think he was cruel. So, he asked his top minister, Admiral Zheng to lead seven voyages in the Indian Ocean to distribute gold, silver, porcelain and more to spread goodwill and the mightiness of the Chinese Empire. When the King's messengers spread the message to enlist crew members for this massive voyage, Lin heard it as well and longing for adventure, she cut her dark black hair, posed as a man and got herself a doctor's job since she had learnt the art of traditional Chinese medicine from her father. The waves gently rose and fell as the heartbroken families said goodbye to their sons or husbands who were now boarding the treasure ships. With a last look at her home, Lin boarded the ship as well. It was too late to change her mind now, the anchor had been lifted. It seemed that her fate was sealed, Lin was going to sail after all. The people on the shore watched in amazement as the 317 ships, all heavily armed with weapons sailed away with 28,000 men including doctors, scholars, soldiers, etc in it. The ship sailed for weeks without a single sign of storms when the crew finally saw a welcoming sight, land! The map indicated that they were approaching Champa in Vietnam. A sailor dropped the anchor as they neared the port. A large crowd of fishermen had gathered to see the arrival of the large fleet of treasure ships. Admiral Zheng formed a group of important people including Lin to see the King. News spread fast in the little village about the Chinese's arrival. The Chief Minister heard the news as well and came to welcome the newcomers. The village was surrounded by small huts that lay on lemon green grass. Villagers chatted with their friends or worked at home. The group carried on walking until they heard the busy chatter of the marketplace. Pushing through the crowds, they found themselves admiring the bright vegetables and juicy fruits in the stalls. At the same time the Minister had entered the marketplace as well. Spotting the Chinese, he rushed to join their side and lead them to the palace. Once inside, the minister asked, "Pleased as we are to have the mighty Chinese visit us, may I ask what brings you to our humble kingdom?" "We have come from the Yongle Emperor of the Ming Dynasty to give your King, Huang Kieu these gifts", replied Admiral Zheng. "We also hope that both our kingdoms can continue to trade in peace", he said. The minister sighed deeply and looked at the floor. A little puzzled, Admiral Zheng asked what had happened. The minister sighed again and explained that their King was ill. "Yesterday morning, the maids served breakfast to the King. They had made scrambled eggs for the first time. After breakfast, the King grew extremely ill. The court doctor seems to be getting nowhere in diagnosing the reason. We would be grateful to you if you could cure our King" he added. With a nod, Admiral Zheng ordered Doctor Lin Chung to treat the King as soon as possible. Lin checked the health and symptoms of King Huang and spent some time understanding the routine of the King before he fell ill. Predicting that it might be an allergy due to eggs which the King ate for breakfast, Lin also verified the symptoms and cure in the palace library. She told that the King must eat 'Hoa Sen' or lotus seeds mixed with rose petal juice to cure the allergy. The minister thanked Lin for finding the cure. Once eating the concoction, the king's eyes opened with energy. The entire palace rejoiced at the turn of events and hailed Admiral Zheng and the Chinese Empire. Both the kingdoms traded their gifts and King Huang promised that Vietnam would always stand by the Yongle Emperor. Admiral Zheng and his group of noble men returned to their ship with a proud feeling. As they boarded the ship, Admiral Zheng praised Lin for her skills and rewarded her with gold. Happy to have been rewarded, she was also however relieved that her disguise remained a secret. Once again, they were sailing into the deep ocean. This might have been her first adventure, but Lin knew there were many more to come in this long voyage. She breathed in the cold night breeze and went inside the cabin.

If you have read the Ming Treasure Voyage History, you might know that the ships went to many places like Siam, India and Sri Lanka. Like my ancestor Lin predicted, they had many more adventures during that voyage that lasted for a year. But I guess the rest of the adventures is for another time for me to tell!!

# Ming Treasure Voyages

*Kennedy School, Roberts, Poppy – 10*

## April 3rd, 1421

It was a dark and stormy night, the wind was blowing in my face and through my hair frantically. I had no choice, I had to keep going. If I stopped, I would be letting my whole family, team and village down, not only to mention we would be letting our enemies, the Dead End Pirates, win this battle. I needed to get it, I needed to find the treasure.

## May 26th, 1441

My grandmother died when I was a baby, she was the leader of our pack. She had kept our legend up, she inspired many people to go out into the world and find hidden treasure and to stand up to any enemies you may have. On April 3rd, 1421, our treasure was stolen by the pirates. It was all calm that night, peaceful and relaxing, that's what we thought it was anyway. Round about midnight, the pirates struck, they climbed in through my grandmothers bedroom and looked in all of her 3 drawers. They couldn't find anything, until they opened the last drawer because in that drawer was a big colourful box, painted in the most magnificent colours and beautiful stars stuck all around it. When the pirates finally managed to open the box (with much difficulty and struggle) they took a super quick glance at the treasure and ran out, taking the treasure with them and setting the alarm off as they ran. My grandmother woke up at the sound of the alarm immediately. Then, as quick as a flash, everyone woke up, the village guards were up and all ready searching for the treasure because that is the only thing anybody would ever want. When they found out that the treasure had been stolen, my grandmother was in serious pain, struggling with anxiety and the anxiousness of finding it. The next day, she made up her mind to go to the ocean, alone, in search of the pirates and her stolen treasure. She wasn't prepared at all, my mother begged her not to go but, she didn't listen. She went off alone. A couple of weeks later, when she didn't return, the police and a group of people went in search for her, but they didn't find her, all they found was her dead body lying on the floor near a big, green oak tree at the edge of the water. Her body had been pulled apart and teeth marks were visible. Not only had the pirates stolen the treasure, they had also stolen her heart.

## Present Day

"It's not fair, it's not fair, it's not fair" I moaned out loud in my bedroom. "It wasn't her fault the treasure was stolen, it was completely and utterly the pirates fault." I had just read about my family's history and found out about a famous female explorer who was my ancestor. I was so upset about the whole situation, finding out that she had run off to fight the pirates and had to gain the treasure back by herself. I was frightened when I thought about it, just imagining how scared she must have been and what a difficult decision it was for her. To stay here where it is safe, or go off into the ocean in a wrecked old sailboat in search for the treasure, knowing that if she left, she may never return. My dream is that someday I will be famous and to accomplish my dream I have go off into the ocean and defeat the pirates as well as gaining that treasure back. Somehow, I don't know how, but somehow, I intend to.

The next morning I awoke at 2:30 because of ancestor. In my dream I saw her, lying in her bed, knowing that she is already dead and speaking to me. She said that I should go off onto the ocean, alone, and find the hidden treasure and kill or capture pirates. If this was somebody else in my dream I would immediately would have gone back to sleep, but this was the ancestor that I had just read about so without any hesitation, I packed my duffel bag at the speed of lightning, ran out of my room and encouraged my pet dog, Lucy, to come with me. As I dashed out of the Bel Air gates, with my bag on my back and Lucy trotting at my heels, I began to wonder if this was such a great idea, but, like I said, it was my ancestor visiting me in my dream, so I walked down the little Bel Air hill with wonderful grace and with an extra big smile on my face.

As I opened the dark and crooked old gate that lead to the boatyard, I heard the whistling of the trees swish behind me. I thought it was just the wind but a couple of minutes later it happened again, and again, and again. The trees were swaying side to side faster than ever now, it was like somebody was hiding in those trees. Then, as I turned to look at big bushes, a hand went out the bushes and then back in. All of a sudden a thought exploded into my brain, I knew what it was, I needed to run. I ran past the the trees and bushes as fast as my little legs would take me. It was them, it was the pirates. Behind me, I could hear the footsteps and my heart thumping. How was I supposed to get the treasure? I needed to. I was about to start a new chapter on the Ming Tales Voyages. Everbody now depended on me.

# The Magical Eye of Island Mocha

*Kennedy School, Subramanian, Thiya – 9*

As we crept silently towards the boat, I wished dad had finished what he had started. Once we reached the boat everyone pushed it into the water and then we sailed away.

The night wind was cold and the boat was rocking like crazy in the waves. After two long days of sailing on the blue ocean, I saw the green Island of Mocha sitting on the horizon. I nearly shouted with joy.

We reached the shore of the island in the afternoon and unpacked all our tools, gadgets, food and clothes from the ship onto the sand. Then we wandered around the island looking for a cave or a large space where we could pitch up our tents. Jacob and Richard stayed on the sand keeping an eye on the supplies.

After maybe 30 minutes Lennie found a large cave. It smelt like fish guts but we decided it was best we stay here. Soon we settled in.

The sound of swishing waves coming now and then was so relaxing. We set up a fire and began discussing how we would find the treasure while roasting the crabs that Richard caught on the beach. When the sun was setting we sat on the beach quietly thinking about treasure.

We woke up early in the morning so we could have a full day to look for the treasure. After having cookies and juice for breakfast we split into groups to search the island. I went with Jacob and Richard, Lennie with Maya and Lizzy. We put on our hats and took our torches and emergency backpacks and left the cave.

My group decided to hike to the top of a mountain where we could look for clues on where to find the treasure and to have a bird's eye view of the whole island. Maybe we would see a place the treasure could be hidden.

"Where do you think the treasure could be hidden?", I asked Jacob as we hiked along the trail. "I think it would be in some kind of cave or may be hidden under the sand!", replied Jacob. "I wonder how the others are doing.", enquired Richard.

The other group had decided to follow paths in the jungle to look for clues. "The scent of the flowers is heavenly but we have been walking forever! Hey look there, it seems like some sort of a clue...!", said Maya. The girls saw a small rock with something written on it.

"This is perfect! I think we are onto something. Someone read the clue.", said Lennie excitedly. Lizzy read expectantly, "Where the sound of water is heard, press a button and you will see...". "I can't read the rest, it's faded." she complained.

Meanwhile the boys had found another small rock with the same thing written on it. After a while, the groups returned back to the cave and ate lunch while discussing their clues. Suddenly Lennie shouted, "The clues are the same. This is very weird." "Let's use our invisible seeing glasses to see if there are any words written in invisible ink!", suggested Lizzy.

Lennie removed her invisible seeing goggles. She put them on and said, "Hey, I see some words! It says, The heart of the island is a cave. So we must find the heart of the island cave." "But there may be more to the clue. I think we should keep exploring." exclaimed Richard.

The Next day we all left but this time together to the other side of the island. It was a long walk. We reached there at noon. We climbed trees and dug in sand but couldn't find anything.

While climbing a tree, I accidentally stepped on a something sticking out and everyone underneath got stuck under a net. I pulled the net as hard as I could but it was stuck.

After thinking for a long time I got an idea. I found a sharp piece of wood and used it to cut the net. Good thing my plan worked and we got back to searching.

While we were talking and walking, we fell into a deep hole. Since we had no equipment, we couldn't get out. It seemed like we were stuck in there for hours together. Then Lennie devised a plan, "You all make a wall and I will try to climb up and out of this hole. Once I'm out I can throw our rope down and pull you up one by one." said Lennie. We decided to try Lennie's plan and we all came crashing down.

Then Lizzie got an idea. She said, "We can try to climb up and possibly reach the top. Then we may be able to pull ourselves up and out." The plan worked and as we climbed up, I noticed a cave.

I told everyone that the cave looked suspicious but we all wanted to go in and explore. As we got deeper, the cave looked more and more familiar and we realised we were in the same cave which we were using as our home away from home.

"Do you think we can find the button here?" suggested Jacob. We all searched and somewhere deep amidst the many rocks, I found a red button. I couldn't wait to press it! I gathered everyone near the button.

As soon as all of us were together, I pressed the button and the magical eye of mocha came tumbling out into my hand! We couldn't believe our luck and were running out of ideas as to how we were going to use the magical eye!

We should get a good rest before heading out home. How we could use the magical eye would have to wait until we got home.

We slept in the cave for the last time. The next day we ate our last breakfast on the island and set off after collecting as many fruits as we could for our journey back. The journey home was really tiring but we were all exhilarated after our big find.

# A New Tale of the Ming Treasure Voyages

Kennedy School, Tse, Chloe – 10

The ocean waves were soothingly crushing up, then falling down. The noise was nice, but irritating, as it kept repeating, sometimes louder, sometimes softer. A tall girl walked on the sand, her toes getting scratched by the shells scattered around. She had long, jet-black hair, which flew loose in her face along with the gentle breeze. Her skin was pale, but suited her. Her thin lips were in a light shade of crimson. But it was the eyes, that looked. . .frightening. They were dark, and empty – hollow. There was always a glint in them, which always made her look rather eerie. If it weren't for them, she would have looked beautiful. She was covered in a black hooded cloak, and a thin short navy-blue dress. Her arms and feet were bare.

Her name was Evly.

She walked to the shore, letting bits of shell and dried-up sand prick her feet. She sat down, letting the salty water touch the tips of her toes every now and then. But then she heard footsteps.

Her mother and father were coming down, along with her two elder sisters, Alethia and Clarina. They both had her eyes, her skin, her hair and mouth, but their eyes were gentle; Evly envied them for that. But her father was carrying along a suitcase, which had no wheels – it was probably very heavy. He had a pair of loose, baggy pants on, and a t-shirt. He also had a cloak, which was black. Evly's mother gave her father one last hug, before he picked up his suitcase and walked to the shore, to meet Alethia, Clarina and Evly. He hugged Alethia and Clarina silently, trying not to ruin the moment. But Evly was clueless – *why* was he carrying a suitcase? But before she could say anything, she too, was crushed into a huge hug. "Where are you going to go, papa?" she whispered. He smiled. "Somewhere nice, I hope. But don't worry. I'll call you every other night, okay? I'll be back in just a month." Evly smiled a fake smile. A month. A whole month. At sea. With one suitcase. Without Evly. Or Alethia. Or Clarina. The *one* month part wasn't *that* bad, compared to how long her mother's many journeys took. But when he climbed into the huge ship, tears began to well in her eyes. They slowly poured down her face, each one bigger than the next. Her father was at sea! Absolutely *anything* could happen to him. *But he's going to be safe* thought Evly. *But he's going to be safe. He. Is. Going. To. Be. Safe.* But she couldn't take it anymore. She ran into the house, and up to her room, slamming the door behind her, ignoring the voices of Alethia and Clarina. She cried into her bed for hours, letting her tears run down her face.

★

"So, *this* is where all the portraits are kept," I said, hustling the thirty-students fifth grade class in front of a brand new painting and photo of my late father – and his instant family. It was my pride and joy. My mother and father were standing up, with their hands on Alethia and Clarina's shoulders. I was on a chair, with my hair combed and gelled (It was strange to have tidy hair for once). "Why are you so obsessed with Zheng He?" one of the kids asked. I smiled. "Believe it or not, my father *knew* Zheng He," I said proudly. "That painting is of me and my family, after he returned from his voyage!" The teacher looked at me, with a kind look on her face. "*Sorry*," she mouthed.

*Why* am I so obsessed with Zheng He, you ask? Well, that's an easy question to answer.

Because he's amazing. He was brilliant. He was brave.

He. . . was just like my father.



# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

Kennedy School, Wang, Sophia – 9

A long time ago, the trees were swaying, the sun rose from the east end of the ocean and the Ming Treasure Voyages were ready to experience a hazard adventure beyond them. There were 7 voyages on the ship and they were all exceptionally brave. Soon, the voyages set off, on the way to their target.

The voyages had planned to go to a manacius forest because on one journey, they found a map. The map showed that there was a rare treasure in Diamonio Forest, this forest was seriously dangerous, it had curses, monsters, poison and dangerous plants.

After a long journey on the ship, the captain turned the wheel slightly to the right, towards the dark, spooky forest.

After some time, the ming treasure voyages had finally arrived at Diamonio forest. One voyage tossed the anchor onto the forest's ground and another voyage set a ladder down so they could alight the ship. Once all the Ming treasure voyages had disembarked the ship, they started heading towards their destination.

Through the forest of execution, there were lots of black plants which looked dead, the trees were as tall as buildings and didn't let much sunlight flow into the forest, the flowers looked dreadfully monstrous and the insects were gigantically enormous.

The ming treasure voyages were nearly there, just a few more steps until they could celebrate their wonderful achievement. But things started turning up worse than the voyages had expected...

The trees had armies of massive bugs on them and it became immensely dark and a humangest monster showed up right in front of where the treasure was, the treasure was right behind this colossal monster.

“Captain, I think this is the guardian of treasure. There’s no way we can get passed this monster.”protested Yi Hang. “We can do this. We are the ming treasure voyages!”bellowed the captain. This monster was very unusual, it had a dragon’s head, a tarantula's face, T Rex’s teeth and a gigantic, bloody devil’s body.

“Voyages, I believe we **must** fight to get past this unbelievable monster.” admitted the captain. The voyages looked terrified, but they were willing to do whatever they could do get that treasure!

Soon, the dragon-headed-tarantula-faced-T-Rex-teethed-bloody-devil-bodied monster let out the loudest roar in the world

"RRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRROOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO  
OOOOOOOOOAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAARRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRR!" and

trillions of enormous bugs came crawling to the ming treasure voyages and clung to them. The voyages struggled to get the bugs off their bodies. Some voyages even fell to the rough ground. When all the voyages fell to the ground (even the captain), the hideous and humongous monster roared a more controlled roar, and the bugs scurried off, then the creature took all 7 voyages (by hand) and threw all of them in a massive box with a lock and locked all of them in there. “I bet that thing was just trying to weaken us and later, it’s going to gobble us up!” complained Gu Ling. “Stop complaining and think! We must find a way to first, get out of this box, second, to find the treasure and hurry to our ship!” ordered the captain. Yi Hang, who was thinking the whole time on this journey had already thought of a plan “Can’t we just get our weapons and slice through this box?!” He wondered. The captain managed a small smile at him “That’s a wonderful idea!” Then, 4 voyages got out their swords and sliced through the locked-box. The voyages were free to get out of the locked-box! But... they still had to find the treasure. “Be as quiet as possible!” hissed the captain. The voyages started searching around the place. Yi Hang saw a small, locked box and without hesitation, he sliced through the small box (with his weapon) and found... something beautiful. It was gold and looked like a mini wizard’s staff! “Captain! This is one of the most rarest treasures on earth! I know once you have your hands on it, it will cause good luck for you everywhere!” explained Yi Hang. The captain smiled. “OK. Now, voyages, we have to get out of here and onto our ship before the monster attacks us!” mentioned the captain. So, all the voyages tiptoed to a door, opened the door handle and carefully hurried out the door. They saw... right in front of them, standing was the dragon-headed-tarantula-faced-T-Rex-teethed-bloody-devil-bodied monster, luckily, the monster wasn’t facing their way. Yi Hang (holding the treasure) went in front of everyone and he simply walked passed the huge monster, the monster was staring at Yi Hang, now. But Yi Hang showed no fear and went ahead, towards where their ship was. Amazingly, the monster didn’t attack him. The others followed close to the youngest voyage, they were just a few feet away from their ship! After half a minute, the ming treasure voyages were

lying down in the ship, feeling relieved. Yi Hang handed the Captain the treasure and the captain held it up in the air, like they've won a trophy. Suddenly, the sky had different colors in it, now! The ming treasure voyages couldn't believe it. It was an aurora borealis. They've never seen such a beautiful sight before. This, was the magnificent moment the ming treasure voyages could never, ever forget. The ming treasure voyages soon set off, heading back home. Once they returned back to their village, the ming treasure voyages showed everyone and the Emperor what they had found. The Emperor and everybody else were impressed and very pleased with these courageous men, they have gone through so much and never gave up. Until then, the Ming treasure voyages have another journey to accomplish, their destiny awaited them near the bright, blue sea...

# Diary of an Explorer

Kingston International School, Chan, Venus – 8

One day, I was in my grandma's attic, finding things to do. Then, I found a small book. On the cover, it said, <<鄭和的日記>>. Translated, it says “Zheng He’s Diary”. This book was Zheng He’s, the captain of the “Ming Treasure Voyages”? I decided to read it. I translated it from Chinese to English.

.....

## 1405 June 19

*The Emperor of China made **me** the leader of the “Ming Treasure Voyages”! It happened this morning. I was asleep, and there was a knock at my door. I opened it, and there was a messenger at my front door. The messenger told me: “You, ‘Zheng He’, has been selected to be a captain of the ‘Ming Treasure Voyages’, by the emperor, ”. I was like, “Sure!” (The “Ming Treasure Voyages” is about exploring the world.)*

## 1405 June 20th

*So, I guess I’m in charge of having a trade between countries. I’ve decided to go next week. I brought a boat called “Bao Chuan”. But first, I need to pack stuff to go on our trip. Cannons? Maybe I’ll decide tomorrow..... We also brought presents from the Emperor, like silk. We need to prepare items to go on this trip. These are called the “Ming Treasure Voyages”. We have military forces and weapons, in case of attacks.*

## 1405 June 29th

*Today, we visited this place called “Frosty Island”. What did they had? Ice, silk, and food. (The food was mainly frozen eggs.) They also wanted to make peace, so we traded items. We gave them gold, and they gave us silk. We decided to stay at “Frosty Island” and then go somewhere else tomorrow.*

## 1405 September 30th

### 3 Months Later

*We’ve been drifting in the sea for 3 months. We are in this place called “Kinda Amazing Island”. When we arrived, they started shooting arrows at us! We told them why we were here, but they ignored us and kept on shooting arrows. So we had to shoot bombs from our cannons, too. We called a truce, and traded items.*

*1406 February 27th*

*5 Months Later*

*We've just had a shipwreck. I was just walking around the ship. But then, we hit something. It was something cold! One of my crew members called "Cheung Sha" yelled, "Iceberg!" The ship flipped, and went into the depths of the sea. I saved this diary just in time! We all hopped into different lifeboats. We then made it to a island. I took roll call. Thankfully, no one was missing. But there were 4 broken arms. I helped push them back into place. We sent 4 crew members to get help. They went in our only lifeboat. Meanwhile, we sent 5 crew members to look for food, and the rest of us got the fire ready.*

*1406 March 01st*

*I found some animals on this island. They look like birds, but can't fly. They are grey, and have yellow beaks. I'm calling them "**Penguin**". We had to eat fish on this island to survive. And it's very cold here when it's supposed to be spring. But somehow, we're surviving! I think I should call this place "**Antarctica**". We found people living here. We traded our leftover silk for food. They were very nice. They wore wool coats, and spoke English. We had a crew member who was a translator, and he translated the words for us. We talked about why we were here, what it was like in "**China**" and "**Antarctica**". This place was originally called "**Icy**", but they liked our idea and changed it to "**Antarctica**" instead. They also decided to call themselves the "**Antarcticans**".*

*1406 March 02nd*

*Meanwhile, we decided to explore "**Antarctica**", so the Antarcticans gave us a tour. Later, they brought us to see their leader. He was called "Nick". We told him our story, and he told us theirs. The Antarcticans were originally explorers from "**Frosty Island**", but then on a trip to "**Kinda Amazing Island**", their ship somehow hit a iceberg, and the Antarcticans managed to survive with the help with some penguins (The penguins made a little drawbridge with ice). Their lifeboat went missing, so they were stranded. They had been living in "**Antarctica**" ever since. They were homesick. I said, : "When our helpers came back with a ship, we could take you guys with us!" " Sure!"*

*1406 September 03rd*

*6 Months Later*

*At last! Our 4 crew members who we sent to find help has came back! They brought back:*

- 1 new ship named Bing;*
- 80 pieces of silk;*
- Food;*

*They said they discovered a place called "**Tasmania**". We said "Bye", to the penguins, and climbed aboard the ship with the Antarcticans.*

*1407 April 06th*

*7 Months Later*

*We found this place called “**Funny Island**”. It was far from “Antarctica”. That is where all the comedians are from. We just got off the boat, and the people there started telling us jokes. Like this one: What books do skunks like to read? Best smellers! We traded items: a joke book from the people, and silk from us.*

*1407 July 30th*

*3 Months Later*

*We left “**Funny Island**”, and we are in this place called “**Music Island**”. We traded this instrument called the “Cello” for silk and gold. What they did on “**Music Island**” was playing instruments all day long. We learnt to play instruments here.*

*1407 September 20th*

*1 and 1/2 Month Later*

*What happened today: We got back to “China” and told the Emperor about the places we visited. P.S On the way, from “Antarctica to “Funny Island”, we dropped off the Antarcticans at “Frosty Island”.*

.....

*After reading this, I showed my Grandma, and she said: “Oh, yes. Zheng He’s grandchildren used to live here! “What about Kinda Awesome Island and Frosty Island”? I asked. “They floated away.”*

*The End.*

*Or, as put in Chinese,*

*完.*

# Zheng He's Fleet to Dragon Island

*Kingston International School, Doo, Damian – 9*

Once upon a time, in Ming Dynasty, Emperor Ming told Zheng He to form a relationship with Dragon Island because the Dragons have a lot of rare potions and medicine. Zheng He told General Doo to order his army to build strong ships. Two months later, they put food, gold, money and weapons in the ships. Zheng He was so delighted. They set sail to the Dragon Island.

The fleet sailed for three weeks and the weather was getting warmer and warmer. But one night, it became minus 4 degrees Celsius. It was freezing cold. Zheng He was asleep and he heard a loud “booooo!” He quickly woke up and saw two gigantic pirate ships coming toward his fleet.

“Aye, aye! Give me your gold. If you don’t, I will kill y’all.” The pirates said greedily.

“General Doo, wake up! The pirate ships are attacking us! They are using arrows to shoot us. They have powerful shields for defense!” Zheng He said anxiously.

When General Doo woke up, he yelled at the soldiers to bomb the pirate ships. “Hurry up yo slow poke!” “Can’t you be stronger, dummy?” He ordered the soldiers furiously. The bomb didn’t work because of the pirate ships’ shields.

“Nah, nah–nah nah–naah, you cannot beat us,” the pirates giggled.

General Doo was extremely annoyed. His whole face turned red like an apple. “You guys are very impolite and dumb. We will find a way to defeat you, weirdos!” General Doo replied grumpily.

With his special binoculars, Zheng He saw that the pirates loved wine. He took out a bottle of wine and put a tiny bomb inside, and then he threw the bottle in the sea.

“Wine, wiiiiiiiiinnne!!” the pirates said crazily. They swam to it. Then, one pirate touched the bottle and.... BOOM!! All other pirates were dead too because the mighty waves pushed them to the dangerous bottom of the sea.

The sailors cheered for Zheng He. Suddenly, a monster rose up in the air from the sea. They all were shocked. It was the legendary monster Sharkpedo.

“Catch the Sharkpedo, General Doo! Hurry up!” Zheng He cried out.

“Why?” General Doo asked.

“This monster is very rare. It can find the rare potion under the sea with its epic nose. We can trade it with Dragon King.” Zheng He told General Doo.

General Doo shot a tremendous bullet to the monster. Then, the bullet transformed into a net and trapped the monster. They caught the monster.

That night, Zheng He dreamed about Dragon Island: he arrived on Dragon Island and asked: can we form a relationship with you? “Yes of c–“ ZAAAP!! Zheng He opened his eyes and saw enormous lightning zigzagging in the sky and rain pouring fiercely. It was a violent storm. Some ships almost flipped, like someone doing a cartwheel in the sea! General Doo was scared as a mouse. He ran dizzily around the ship eleven times because he got seasick. The engine was about to break. Zheng He was still calm and told General Doo to turn off the engine and simply follow the waves. General Doo told the other ships to do the same. They tried and hoped it would work. Luckily it did! They finally left the storm. It was almost dawn. Everyone gathered around the deck to see the charming and beautiful sunset. It was peace, quiet and nothing in the sea except Zheng He’s fleet. At night, Zheng He saw thousands of stars in the sky. It reminded him of when he was five years old. The stars formed a shape, it was meant for good luck! Nobody knew, except Zheng He.

“Follow the stars!” Zheng He pointed to the stars and ordered General Doo.

One week later, they arrived at Dragon Island. The island looked like a Dragon’s head. There were hundreds of hard-working dragons. They did not use metal or anything that was man-made. They used wood, leaves, soil and bamboo trees to build. Very fascinating!

There was a temple guarded by some Dragon soldiers. Zheng He and General Doo stepped in the temple.

“Who are you?” the soldiers asked.

“It would be my pleasure to meet the Dragon King.” Zheng He answered sincerely.

The soldiers took them to the Dragon King. The Dragon King was old and kind. There were many dragons printed on his clothes.

“Why do you need to talk to me? Give me a good reason.” Dragon King asked slowly.

General Doo could not think of any good reason so he shouted, “Never, I will not give you a reason!” Dragon King frowned.

“Your Majesty, My name is Zheng He. We are from China, and we have a gift for you. Sharkpedo! Sorry, General Doo always gets mad. We heard about your kingdom, your rare medicine and potions. In China, people always get sick so we wanted to trade.” Zheng He said politely. The king smiled.

“Perfect reason! We will make a portal from here through to China, OK?” Dragon King asked.

“OK!” Zheng He answered gratefully.

When they went out of the temple, the dragon workers started to build a portal using some rare wood, potions and water. After one day, the portal was finished! Zheng He’s team stepped into the portal.

The portal went VEEEEEE and everything went black. Zheng He was back in China!

“Wow!” Zheng He’s team shouted surprisingly. Zheng He saw Emperor Ming.

“Mission accomplished! We have a portal to Dragon Island.” Zheng He said.

“Really?” Emperor said curiously.

“I will prove it! Dragons, COME!” Zheng He shouted.

At first, there was dead silence... Seconds later, “thump THUMP!” The dragons started running rapidly from the portal.

“Marvelous!” Emperor Ming said excitedly.

After this, China received the medicine and potions. Because of Zheng He’s an amazing adventurer, they were able to help many sick people in China. Zheng He taught the dragons how to make a compasses to help determine the correct direction. When the kingdoms needed help, they used the portal to help each other.

# The Fleet of Ming Dynasty

*Kingston International School, Ho, Shu Lin – 10*

Saturday 4:45 pm, 19th January 2019

I'm now getting ready for my grandma's 91st birthday. Oh! I have a history project due on Monday! I still haven't thought of which Chinese dynasty I'm going to work on.

Saturday 9:00 pm, 19th January 2019

I will do my research tomorrow, I bet I have enough time! I'm going to sleep.

"Hi, I'm here to help you. I'm your spirit. What projects have you worked on before?" The spirit asks.

"Oh..... The Qin dynasty. The first emperor Qin Shi Huang had made a huge project to connect the different parts of the barriers on the North, which became The Great Wall. I also made research about the Tang dynasty. The Chinese Buddhist monk Xuanzang wanted to know more about the deep meaning of Buddhism. He walked a long way to India to learn from other Buddhists. Many merchants and officials then followed Xuanzang's steps to the west, to exchange culture and goods, and building good relationships with other countries," I explain.

"Both of these happened on land, is there any adventure on the sea?" I ask.

"I see your curiosity about sea adventures, so let me tell you about the Treasure Voyages of the Ming Dynasty."

"Zheng He (1371–1433) was a Chinese explorer in the Ming dynasty. He was famous for traveling on the seas for 28 years and made 7 voyages in total," explains the spirit.

"His real name is Ma Wen He, and he lived in a village in the Yunnan Province. One day, his grandfather and father went to an adventure and brought back a blue and white porcelain to give to Wen He. The blue color in the porcelain is really attractive. Wen He's grandfather told him that he didn't know where the special blue color could be found. Wen He admired the color, and really wanted to find the color and material. Finding the color and material was his dream. He decided to explore countries for the special material and color by sailing. So he started his training, and the emperor saw his bravery and assigned him as captain in the voyages."

"The Ming emperor wanted to build good relationships with the neighboring countries. Then they could trade their goods with other countries' goods! The Emperor noticed the bravery in Wen He and how he served the country, so he gave Wen He a new name: Zheng He, and also assigned him as the captain in the few voyages. There were 5 different kinds of ships used in the voyages of Zheng He. He went on: the Command Ship, Horse Ship, Troop Transport, Supply Ship and Patrol Boat."



“Zheng He was clever, he invited different people on the ships, those included: Crewmen, recorders, diplomatic officials, weathermen, interpreters, doctors, and pharmacists. Altogether, there were about 27,800 people on the ships! The people on the ships could send and deliver messages by lanterns and gongs during terrible weather, for example, typhoons and hurricanes. Those were some common natural disasters that appeared during their journeys.”

“When the ships arrived in the countries, they presented gifts to the country’s emperor and told the country about Chinese stories and explained the Chinese culture. Zheng He won trust from all the countries leaders, so they were allowed to exchange goods and materials with the local people. Soon the team had lots of goods, so they headed back to China. But none of them were the special color.”

“Later on, he went to several other voyages, and traveled to over 30 countries and regions. But there was no special blue color. After a while, Zheng He heard some news about a blue color. So he went to the place and finally found the special blue material! It was called Cobalt. Many loads of Cobalt were shipped back to China.”

“Zheng He died later on during his seventh voyage in Calicut, India, at the age of 62. He was remembered for building a good relationship with other countries, and starting a trading system, as well as introducing many countries to China. He was also always compared to Italian explorer Christopher Columbus.”

“What do you think will happen if there were no voyages in the Ming dynasty?” asks the spirit.

“Then there will be countries we will miss out on. And the shipbuilding industry may not be developed as well in the Old Shanghai.

“Yes, you’re right. And also, the voyages Zheng He went on is to benefit other countries, (eg. Vietnam),” the spirit continues, “Vietnam is one of the places Zheng He went to, the team traded with the local people, and also told about their countries, cities, and Chinese culture. During Tang dynasty, Silk Road was used to travel around to trade unique goods with other countries. When the voyages happened, it developed another efficient way to travel, through the sea. So, when China and neighboring countries built a good relationship, people in both countries can trade with each other by the route the ships went on. It will be much easier to trade with them because people could either walk Silk Road or sail in the route Zheng He’s ships went. Besides trading, and sharing culture, some of the crewmen stayed behind in the countries that Zheng He visited, to start a new life. So the voyages weren’t only to achieve Zheng He’s dream to find the special blue material, but was also to help the country with the trading system, transportation means, and also cultural exchange.”

Sunday, 8:30 am, 20th January 2019

“Okay, you may need to stop, I need to go write all this information down on paper.....” I ask, “Wait, was that all a dream?”

No one answers.

I open my eyes on the fabulous Sunday morning, as the sun shines on me brightly through the gaps of the window. I write down everything I have heard and design my project.

Resources:

The Ming Voyages– [http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/special/china\\_1000ce\\_mingvoyages.htm](http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/special/china_1000ce_mingvoyages.htm)  
He–<https://exploration.marinersmuseum.org/subject/zheng-he>  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zheng\\_He#Cultural\\_influence](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zheng_He#Cultural_influence)  
dynasty– <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Ming-dynasty-Chinese-history>  
dynasty– <https://www.history.com/topics/ancient-china/ming-dynasty>  
dynasty and Qing (Manchu) Dynasty– <https://www.scoop.it/t/ming-dynasty-and-qing>

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# The Ming Treasure Miracle

*Kingston International School, Lau, Levia – 9*

The warm salty breeze brushed against my face like the hands of the sea spirits as the fleet of ships gently glided across the sparkling sea. Even though, I, Chenyu served as an ordinary sailor, the land of seas amazed me just the same.

I knew little about the oceans and the wonders with bright sails that cut across the oceans. I've longed to traverse the seven seas as it brought me closer to freedom, away from captivity. This is why I am now on the fourth ship of the fleet and also and the entrance to adventure.

You are probably wondering: "Hey, why's this person's English is better than mine? Isn't he supposed to focus on Chinese?" Well, let me tell you – there aren't no language studies on board. Anyway, my first days were poisoned by awfully tremendous thunderstorms, savagely sickening sea-sickness and revolting slime. Luckily, I *have* pulled through the toughest storms (surprise, surprise), fought across the raging seas.

We saw people with skins so dark that they could have been easily mistaken for leafless trees. They celebrated our arrival with delighted faces and tasty treats that were really tempting. Also sly faced men with tangled beards that ignited a gigantic mutiny. Luckily, our fearless generals drew their swords, and reduced them to nothing but a bit of ash (like your bad tempered teacher, the generals, not the ash). But there was the biggest threat of all...

## Facing the Emperor

When I mention the word "emperor", you might think of fearless, rich, mighty, and powerful, right? You never dared to think or look on the dark side of emperors and go: "Hey, he's pretty nasty and cruel!" because: a) emperors were meant to be looking after their citizens and b) you might go to jail. But one emperor decided that enough was enough, so he started toying around with his boats.

Emperor Hongxi was not the kind of person you would like to meet on the streets, as he ruled and conquered with fear. "China isn't in any need for the valuables of other countries, so why should we sail around distributing them when I seriously need a new palace?", thought Hongxi. It's a really cool fact that emperors can do almost everything, so his plan went into action.

My mind exploded, when the emperor's matey' scampered around spreading the news like pesky little cockroaches spreading germs. The mighty urge against the idea of leaving the Chinese navy forced a strong 'NO!!!' into my throat, but as I thought about my consequences, it was muffled into a silent scowl. But what could I do, a measly little weakling against a vicious conqueror who's word becomes reality. So that's why my cunning little brain picked up its oars and rowed away, into the plans of the cunning and the brave.

## Voyage to Success

The next day, I woke up, to a new day where the action begins. I announced it to all the sailors, and we all agreed, as it honestly was the only plan we had. The plan was risky, and if a tiny detail went wrong, the plan was good as dead fish.

When the emperor's matey' came back, he flicked a few coins at us and told us to go back to our homes. After he turned the corner, we scampered to our secret hidey-hole to wait till' the plan unraveled.

Each day, one of us patrolled the town, updating us with news. On the first few days, the news was as plain as watery fish soup. But after a few weeks, rage began to boil around China. First, it was those hairy-faced men, seeking the gold that they were receiving per year. Then it was those dark men, demanding the silk we promised to repay them with.

The Chinese army were armed with fearless men, and protected their city like an unbreakable shield. But as many men were attacking from either side, our Chinese soldiers were taken aback, and were destroyed as the soldiers fell, like rain from the rolling seas above.

“All they wanted, was for us to repay them with acts of kindness.” I advised the troubled emperor. So as the battle raged on on the battlefield, we steered our way through the crowd, fulfilling their needs. Cries of happiness erupted as the smiling faces of the soldiers merged into one. As I was the one who sailed the seas, I knew their deepest needs, it wasn’t greed, it was a matter between hunger and death. We didn’t sail off giving them gifts, we gave them to the needy, so they could survive to see another day.

The following day, a huge ocean of people gathered around The Royal Stage. The air was still, silence was all around. My heart thumped heavily against my chest, to every word the emperor said. Finally, as the emperor agreed to continue the mission of the Ming Treasure Fleet, the silence was shattered by a joyful atmosphere.

My chest swelled with pride like the billowing masts as the ship glided on the smooth steady waves into the adventure waiting ahead.

# New Tale of the Ming Voyages

*Kingston International School, Wong, Joy – 9*

“Pickles, quick! We have to get on the ship now!” Oh, right, I forgot about you. Well, my name is Joy, I am 8, I live in a farm house. My job at home is to take care of animals like horses, cows, pigs and dogs. So I don’t have a chance to go to school because I am so busy at home. I live with my mum and my dad. I am the girl, that has a super power to talk to animals. The animal I am bringing is platypus called Pickles is especially close to me and she is my buddy. By the way, do you know why did the Emperor let me get on the ship? It’s because I am unique, only I have a savvy to talk to animals. On the ship, I have loads of animals to take care of my best friends who are Pickles the platypus and Picker the penguin.

This time is our seventh voyage and we will bring precious animals like Pickles, Picker, seal, little hippo, snow fox, otter and a few others. We brought these creatures to tell other countries that China is rich and strong. My job on the ship is to take care of all the animals, so none of them get stolen. On the ship there are members of the navy, a captain, a ship driver, animals and GOLD. My room is always going to be connected to the animals room or else people or pirates will steal them since they are very precious. Everyone in the ship was busy even though the ship was shaking hard. Hardly anyone is sea sick or talks to me. Well of course except animals. My job isn’t as hard as the others, because I am just a kid. I am also the only kid and only girl in the crew ship.

When we started sailing, we spotted a ship coming directly towards us. Suddenly, we heard a cheeky shout: “Oh your boat looks precious I think there will be precious stuff inside.” We did not know what was going on. Captain looked with his telescope and he said “Is that... girl pirates?” Everyone freaked out. I wondered if there was such thing as girl pirates. Then the ship driver said, “Man it’s just girls, I don’t think girls are as strong as boys so don’t worry.” Everyone agreed even though I am a girl. Since they are just girls the ship driver decided to ignore them, so we turned the other way. But they kept following towards us but it is still quite a far distance. Thirty minutes later, they caught up their ship were next to ours one of their pirates named Mary which was the captain she tried to crossover to our ship to steal the gold, but we drove away so she fell in the water. Even though their captain fell in the water, they have a vice captain which was quite bossy. Their vice boss doesn’t want to cross over to steal some gold since the captain has an experience. Then one of their girl pirate successfully climbed over to our ship, when she was trying to steal the gold, while we blocked her the ship when shaking and tumbling I nearly fell in the sea.

In a sudden we heard a big noise coming towards us well the waves starting to get unusual the waves got bigger than usual, captain look with his telescope but this time was not just weird girl pirates. It’s a... tsunami!! We were slow to move the tsunami was driving our ship crazy, everyone on our ship fell in the sea. Luckily we were wearing swimsuits, because we planned to dive but then we didn’t. All our gold fell in the sea so we decided to get all of them before the girl pirates steal them, but then when I picked up one gold we saw diamonds in a line like a track that leads some where. So we followed the diamonds, it had lead us in to a water cave. We went in and a string pulled everyone including the girls. Then we saw a huge sea monster which has stolen rest of our gold, but he put in in a room like we are in jail. The girl pirates need help so they kindly ask us if we can work as a team, well of course we would but the problem is that we can’t because we have no way. Five minutes later, bubbles floated in the water and I thought it was something scary but it wasn’t. It was... PICKLE!! He was trying to unlock the jail doors, but then the sea monster saw it and Pickles nearly got stabbed which freaked me out. Pickle doge, punched and stole the gold, before he got hurt he got out the cave with some gold. I was fifty percent happy, because I thought he is going to save us but he didn’t. After Pickle stole the gold, the sea monster was so angry, the sea monster tried to chase Pickles but Pickles was faster. We tried to convince the sea monster to get out like say that we will give him one piece of gold only if he let us out and it did work. We were happy that we worked together so the girls pirates joined our army, we swam out the cave as fast as possible. So the sea monster won’t find out that the reason of getting out was a lie.

When we were on a island Pickles and Picker were so proud of us getting out of the cave but the biggest problem is that we have no ship to go back to the beach and back to town. Picker didn't care because he saw a ship coming towards us . Well it was otter, otter swim back to town to get another ship and he drove back to save us. Wow ! This journey was so adventurous the animals save the day! Well I am really proud of the animals. I can't believe a otter can drive, we better drive quick this time or else the sea monster will pop up any time.

“Finally we are back to town , we took quite a lot of days in the sea cave . Luckily we came back safe. This is one of my favorite adventure thanks for coming with us did you have fun , Because I did! See you in the next journey .”

# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

*Korean International School, Hui, Kim Yee – 9*

**I am Zheng He, I am a fleet admiral, a Chinese diplomat and a Chinese Mariner.**

**Here is extract of my Journal in year 1405 ...**

5<sup>th</sup> June, 1405

I discovered something on my friend's ship, a map, of the World with different countries – I am amazed!

6<sup>th</sup> June, 1405

Today was my day off! And I tried to study the map having look at the map. I discovered some of new countries. One was called Australia, one was called India, rest: unknown. This is exciting!

P.S I will try see what the other lands are called.

10<sup>th</sup> June, 1405

An eagle sent me a letter from Emperor Yongle regarding 7 voyages, sending me on a trip 7 voyages—around the World. How exciting!!!!!!

11<sup>th</sup> June, 1405 – 1<sup>st</sup> Voyage

So, I am on my ship with 17,800 men and one of them are captain Di (my closest friend).

We arrived at Iiujiagang. We gave them chests of money and gold in return of Iiujiagang's finest clothes; me and my crew took a break. I walked around Iiujiagang and saw different shops and ate some simple and yet tasty foods.

Then I chose another five people to come to a hotel called Bahedi Yaju (a Villa). The hotel was stunning, I was on my own while Captain Di and other four men shared two rooms. I stayed for another two nights in Bahedi Yaju.

13<sup>th</sup> June, 1405 – 2<sup>nd</sup> Voyage

Today we are going to depart Iiujiagang and go to a place called Calicut in India.

I met the King, Vasco da Gama, he spoke to me about Cotton—weaving, I was so fascinated I went into a Cotton—weaving factory. I watched as people wove different colour cotton, bringing home shipment of cotton cloth, handloom, fabrics and books of Zamorin (a Hindu Monarch).

16<sup>th</sup> June, 1405

For the past few days, I walked around local shops and bought some souvenirs. We had to leave tonight so I didn't go far and become tired.

In the evening, we left Calicut and went to Malacca for a short break. On the way to a place called Similan Islands, pirate fleet Chen Zuyi attacked me, and asking for golds and shipments from Iiujiagang and Calicut. I was so angry, I attempted to kill Chen Zuyi but failed. I swung my sword towards Chen but missed. Chen and I were fighting. I then kicked his sword away and threw mine. We both fought but my military was too strong for Chen's crew, left Chen no choice but surrender. He left our ship and never came back. We waited until the morning and continue our journey. Danger encountered with pirates but we were safe.

21<sup>st</sup> June, 1405 – 3<sup>rd</sup> Voyage

We finally arrived to Similan Island, it was a glorious place. I went to the beach and even went inside a bungalow! I went into different shops too! I am amazed we are already in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Voyage.

In the evening, we went to Seaside Inn to stay (me and my Captain Di) for the next 2 days to rest.

23<sup>rd</sup> June, 1405

We are ready to depart Similan and go to Hormuz. We probably won't arrive until ... maybe ... three days later.

26<sup>th</sup> June, 1405 – 4<sup>th</sup> Voyage

We arrived at Hormuz and first I shall give my greeting to the Hormuz peoples. I gave them our gold and they gave us two large boxes. I wonder what is it inside the boxes? I didn't do too much this time, but I visited rainbow island. It has red, yellow, blue, silver ... colour of rocks. I then ate steak tartare (raw beef on toasted bread), something I haven't never tried, but it tastes wonderfully good.

In the afternoon, we departed Hormuz and went to Aden, in Yemen. Me and Captain Di went to dine in Pizza 24.

27<sup>th</sup> Jun, 1405 – 5<sup>th</sup> Voyage

We departed Aden and went to East Africa, I went to Victoria Falls and Amboseli National Park. The weather was very hot, the hotter I never experienced. The Victoria Falls was my favorite, it was fascinating. In the evening, I stayed in English Point Marina for two nights.

29<sup>th</sup> June, 1405 – 6<sup>th</sup> Voyage

This time I visited an East Africa city called Nairobi. I visited a colourful market with necklaces, fine cloths, souvenirs and jewelry. I then ate in Mr. Chicken, I got a letter and it read ...

*Dear Fleet Admiral, Zheng He*

*Emperor Yongle died of a stroke, and Emperor Yongle's grandson Xuande shall is now the new Emperor.*

*Huang Fu, Emperor's Office General*

I sighed and knowing Yongle was a great man and very sad day. I know how important the Voyage is for the former King and I shall continue my journey.

30<sup>th</sup> June, 1405

Today we are in Krabi, Thailand I went to the beach and on a tiny boat! I went to stay in Thai Orchids for 5 days.

5<sup>th</sup> July, 1405

Today we are going back home, Nanjing.

In the evening, we very lucky to stay alive ... we got attacked some sort of Serpent Sea Monster!

It first splashed water on my ship, I leaped up on his head and cut his neck, but the Serpent swayed his tail at the boat nearly broke it. I dived underneath the boat and cut his tail, this cause monster huge pain, the pain must be too much for the monster and it swum away.

The moral of the story?...well...be a risk-taker (but safely) and be adventurous.

–but being a risk-taker means you also DON'T hurt yourself and say “mommy I hurt myself..... really badly”



# The Voyages of Benevolence

*Korean International School, Shum, Colin – 11*

One day, Ming Dynasty's Emperor Zhudi, together with his advisor and general Chenghe struck up a conversation about his worries about the Empress' dire illness, the Emperor looked at the empty throne and said he would give anything away just to be able to see her next to him again.

"Your Majesty, I will do anything to make you smile again, I will search everywhere to look for a cure," and with that promise, Zhenghe set sail, braving waves to uncharted lands all over the world.

First, the fleet arrived at Sumatra. Zhenghe presented an exquisite vase as a gift to the King and asked if he has any cures. The King did not have any but presented some Batik cloth as a favour. Zhenghe did not give up and set sail again.

"We will sail further South and present more gifts. I have no doubt that one of these unknown lands will spare us a cure in return," Zhenghe cheered on whilst marching back to his ship.

Suddenly a small group of little children sprang up.

"We are orphans and have nowhere to live, can we join your ships? We promise we will work hard!" the children begged.

"Of course! And I have gifts for each of you too!" Zhenghe had always had a soft spot on children as he has none of his own. To him, children were all special and nothing made him happier than seeing them smile.

However, unbeknownst to the men, they were being watched. Two mischievous twins were watching them. Their names were Ru and Pran, and they wanted to steal all the gifts on the ship.

"So what's the plan?" asked Pran, turning to Ru.

"Listen up. The only way to get those gifts is by causing a distraction. Any ideas?" asked Ru.

"Explosions?"

Pran gave him a quizzical look.

"We will pretend to be one of them, get on board and grab the gifts!" pointing his fingers.

"Brilliant!" Pran said, his eyes glinting with greed.

Zhenghe kept on sailing in search for the cure. He saved many orphaned children along the way who worked very hard on the ships. Zhenghe was very happy seeing the children feeling proud of their achievements. Each year, he would give each kid a special present, and all the children looked forward to that special day.

Eventually, the ships reached Europe. As the sailors were getting ready, a loud boom came from the harbour. Some ships were on fire and strange ships surrounded the fleet were firing cannonballs at the boats.

"Pirates!" Zhenghe shouted, "Defend the boats! Don't let them take the gifts!"

With a mighty roar Zhenghe and his crew drew their swords and charged into battle. As the battle raged all around them, Ru and Pran crawled around Zhenghe's ship, searching for the gifts. At last they found them but as they fled the ship to escape, Pran tripped over a sword lying across the deck and fell headfirst into the ocean.

"Pran!" Ru shouted, dropping their loot and running to the side. "Pran!"

Suddenly, a cannonball struck the ship, toppling Zhenghe into Ru.

"Give me my sword, kid," Zhenghe requested. Just then, Pran climbed back from the portside of the boat and threw a rope to Ru.

"On the count of three!" shouted Ru whilst throwing the sword back to Zhenghe with his right hand, and catching the end of the rope with his left. At the exact moment when the duo shouted three, they swung the rope with all their might, which swept the pirates' swords out of their hands. Suddenly all the pirates were disarmed and in a panic, they all jumped overboard into the ocean.

Seeing as the danger had passed, Ru and Pran rose to the surface.

"The plan failed," gurgled Pran.

"It's okay" said Ru,

"Okay? We just lost our chance of getting those gifts!"

"Don't fret. Remember plan B? I poisoned his food..."

"Who are you two?" Zhenghe with his men appeared out of nowhere. Zhenghe looked a lot bigger close up. The duo trembled with fear.

"You are noble children who saved my life!" Zhenghe said fondly.

"We are actually thieves." Pran finally felt guilty and decided to come clean.

Zhenghe suddenly collapsed. By the evening his face had turned green. The doctor tried everything he could to help him but nothing seemed to be working.

"Should we head back home?" asked the navigator

"No! Keep on going! I must find the cure for the Empress, we must not let the Emperor down!" Zhenghe wheezed.

Days later, they arrived in an unfamiliar land of freezing cold. There seemed to be nothing and no one there except an orange light from afar. Zhenghu felt too sick to witness the beauty. The children surrounded his bed and looked at him sadly. He had been a great father to them.

"Ru come over here" Zhenghe managed

"I can feel that you are a bit different from everyone else, but you can be a leader where all the children will look up to you. Can you look after all the children and make sure they are good and happy?"

"But I was a thief and I poi....."

"All is forgiven, son," he interrupted, "just promise me to be a good leader from now on" "Certainly, sir"

"We will always be good and hard working!" the children said

"We will never forget you. We will make sure you go down forever in history" said Pran

"And we will give presents to the well behaved children on a special day", said a little boy with bright white hair.

"What is your name?" Zhenghe asked with a twinkle in his eyes.

"Nicholas" and with his last breath, Zhenghe replied to Nicholas "好好好."

"Look!" shouted Pran.

A herd of reindeer suddenly landed on the boat. The leader had a ball tied to its neck. Nicholas opened the ball, and in it, he found a pill. The cure had been found.

# New Journeys to the West

*Li sing Tai Hang School, Leung, Tsz Hei Ryan – 9*

One day, there was an old voyager named Jung Youn. He used to tell old stories of the Ming voyages, from defeating black beard and giving away the jade jewel. This story begins when Jung first boarded the ship.

He always dreamed of being a member of the crew. Then he saw a person named Jack go into the ship. It was not ordinary, as only the crew members could go in. He did not care but stared at the door way, waiting if he would come back out. Two minutes later, the guy ran out with a sack. He saw a bright diamond and screamed “thief...”. The crew of the ship ran at him and was gone. Then a crew member said to him. “Hey, I am Rick and thank you.” That diamond cost millions of chen. He asked what Jang most desired and Jung said “I wish to be a member of the crew.” Rick thought for a moment and said “Fine kid, welcome to the crew.” That night, Jung became a member. The other crew member all greeted him. Soon he knew everything about the ship and he was a captain after two months.

Jung sailed everywhere and gave riches to people as gifts. One day, he saw a cave of crystals, rich and shiny. He told the crew to lower the anchor and then they went in. They found diamonds, gold and rubies. Also, they found another pirate and he looked tired and sick. Then they mined until they saw a bag of glittering jewels. When they boarded the ship, they sold all the things they found and brought the poor man back to his home. Suddenly, the man jumped to his feet and got out a sharp cutlass and grabbed the jewels. “Take the gold, take the money, just be careful, you will be victim” said the man.

That night, he spent three hours with his crew to think of one. It took three days to build the tools they needed but finally they did it. Then they had to set it all up, thinking slowly about the thief. The plan was to first do the same coincidence, meet an old man. When he got the bag, called the crew and we built a fence, he could not jump off and they surround him and then tied him on a chair and tortured him until he told the truth. This time, the old man stared at the ship and smiled. But he got a small knife and cut it free and climbed the fence.

Then he tried to think of another plan. He finally thought of one. “I’ll use a tracker in a bag and located him where he was.” said Jung. He found the man and let him take the money after the sword fight and the rope and everything else. They waited for him and then tracked him. After few days, they saw a big cave with a door. They went in and saw the most shocking thing. The old man was not the old man anymore. It was Jack with a capital J. He wore a mask and he escaped. “You know Hung, if you had let me grab one little diamond, this would not have happened. But you just had too.” He grinned. “But now, it’s time for you to die...” in a flash, Jack pressed a button. “Goodbye, Jung.” with a boom. The cave exploded. Luckily, Jung and his friends were safe. They were not hurt but the others died. Jack had disappeared and Jung said, “Thank you to serve the crews, you will never be forgotten.” He gave everyone some food and water, just in case they could be alive. Then he left them and escaped successfully. Finally they sailed back to mainland China.

# Zhang He's Adventure

*Lingnan University Alumni Association (HK) Primary School, Chu, Jeslyn – 11*

"Why me again?" shouted Zheng He, the great admiral of the Ming Dynasty. The walls of the Ming Emperor Place echoed his shout. "Shu... shu.... " whispered the Yongle Emperor, the third Emperor of Ming Dynasty. He ordered Zheng He, a man he has known since he was young, to get the ever-aging pill somewhere around the world. "Does the pill really exist?" asked Zheng He with question marks on his face. Without the answer from the Yongle Emperor, he walked out the door with doubt quietly. It was never a smooth voyage. It was an adventurous voyage which Zheng He ever had. But with Zheng He's knowledge, faith, trust, courage and bravery, he overcame all the difficulties and obstacles during the journey.

As it is a secret mission for Zheng He, the Yongle Emperor did all the preparation for him. Yongle Emperor prepared a giant ship equipped with magnetic compasses, cannons and different kind of weapons. It was loaded with a lot of jewelry, gem stones and gold bars, in case the crew on the ship met the pirates. All Zheng He needed to do is to get onto the ship and sailed away from China.

It was a dark and stormy night at Persian Gulf. Zhang knew it would be a tough journey. The ship began to rock back and forth and rolled side to side. Zhang He's two hands gripped the handles and refused to let go. A mountainous wave rose up before him. The thunder rumbled and boomed overhead like psychos screaming loudly.

Looking at the compass and navigation map, Zhang found out he and his crew were around the Persian Gulf. The crew cheered happily. After an hour or two, the rain stopped. The sky became clear and clear and the moon was shining! Suddenly, an octopus-like creature which they had never seen before appeared in front of the ship. The creature lifted its head so high and started talking to the crew on the ship. "What are you doing here?" roared the sea monster. "We are commanded to find the ever-aging pill by our Emperor in China." Everyone was shocked that the octopus could speak in human language and they opened their mouth widely without speaking a word. Only Zhang stepped out on the deck and answered, "Please get out of our way. We don't want to hurt you or anyone." The sea monster dived back into deep sea. Everyone took a deep breath and continued the journey.

The sea monster popped up from the sea and carried a chest with its arms. "Take it!" Zhang puzzled. He just grabbed the chest and the sea monster disappeared quickly. Inside the chest, there was a poison. But he did not know what it was for. He kept it in a safe place and continued the sailing. He still could not believe what had happened just now.

Spending hundred days and nights over the sea, Zheng He and his crew finally saw the land. According to the map, it might be somewhere in East Africa. The Island was not filled with trees and vegetation but grey coloured woods covered a large part of the surface. As he walked through the island, his courage faded out gradually by the darkness and the piles of human bones and skulls along the way. He made his way through the bushes by cutting down the vines and leaves and tried to find an end to this endless bushes. Just as he was about to give up, he heard some noise ahead of him. A man suddenly showed up in front of him and then he collapsed on the grass and fell into a deep sleep. When he woke up next morning, he tried to sit up and move, but he couldn't. His arms and legs were tied up by a rope on the tree with a pot and fire underneath him. He was trapped. He wondered what to do next. Zheng He looked down and was surprised to see cannibal tribe. Zheng He begged the cannibal leader, "I came here for the ever-aging pill, don't kill me, please. I can ask my man to bring all the food and jewels for your tribe." The cannibal leader believed Zheng He. He let Zheng He go and gave him a small bottle with lots of bugs inside. Zheng He felt blessed that he could escape from the cannibal.

Zheng He boarded the ship and continued his journey as he still hadn't found the ever-aging pill. After sailing for many days, one of the crew spotted a large piece of land. Zheng He decided to get off the ship. It was an old city called Mecca. Zheng He led the crew walked through streets and alleys. Then, he reached open-air working market. There were lots of stalls selling herbs, dried fruit, carpets, camel milk and wood. They were attracted by the woman, dressing like a witch and a snake danced on the sound of a flute from the snake charmer.

"Maybe we can ask her about the two things that we got in the last two adventures. She seems that she knows a lot about magic!" said a crew. "Good idea!" shouted Zheng He excitedly. "Hello! I want to ask that do you know anything about these two things?" said Zheng He and handed over these two things to the woman. The woman's eyes suddenly glowed, she said "My name is Maria, please follow me, I have some important information to tell you. But the only condition is don't tell anyone about this. "OK, I will." promised Zheng He.

He followed her to a mysterious room, there were many glass bottles with colourful liquid inside. Then, they sat down in front of the long table. "I have visited different countries to find this potion and bugs because these two things are the most importation ingredients to make the ever-aging pill." Maria sighed. Zheng He yelled with surprise. "The ever-aging pill!" "I came here just for this. Now, I find it!" "To make this ever-aging pill, except the potion and bugs you gave me, some of my colourful liquids and spells are needed. If I can make the ever-aging pill successfully, I want my share of it." Maria said. Zheng He nodded his head and said, "Deal!"

Two hours later, Maria came out from a dark room, holding with a glowing green potion. She handed it to Zheng He and said "It is yours! Hope you have a great journey back to your country."

Zheng He returned to China with great triumph. He would be famous and be remembered in the history of China voyage.

# The Ship that Saved People

*Lingnan University Alumni Association (HK) Primary School, Liu, Ken – 10*

In the early 1400, China's Emperor sent a crew to go around the world, there were three little boats following the main ship who was packed with different kind of wonderful China treasures. There were thirty sailors in the main ship and twenty men on each little boat, the name of the main ship was called The Angel. The Angel's captain was me, Ken. There were six cannons on each side on the main ship, and three each side on the little ships. We were supposed to give treasure to poor people and exchange gifts from other countries.

In 1403, the crew left the harbour and started to sail towards the sea. On the first day, the sailors delightfully changed the direction and sailed to East, and started to explore!

After two days of hard sailing, I walked to the upper deck and watched the sailors running and shouting orders. Suddenly, I saw a little black dot moving towards us! I thought that a sailor saw this too, because he shouted, "Red alert! All people back to position! Pirate attack!"

"Alert! Alert! Alert!" The sailor kept on shouting.

I dashed to the bridge and took out my sword and placed it on my table as I watched the sailors hurried to put the fire powder in the cannons. "Boom!" A cannonball flew right past our ships and landed into the sea! When I saw this terrible sight, my heart sank.

"Boom! Boom! Boom!" The cannonballs flew in all directions.

"KE-BOOM!" One of our ships sunk deep into the sea! Slowly, I watched it until it disappeared. Fortunately, two of the sailors survived, at the same time, one of our ships was smashed into pieces and nobody was alive.

After the first battle with the pirates, I decided that we needed more security so I put some fire powder in each and every of the cannon, so that when the pirates arrived, we would give them some surprise!

After two more days, we saw land! Yes! Real land! The sailors and I roared in excitement. When we were heading to the palace where the king lived, we saw poor people sitting or begging for money. We gave them some jewellery and money, they thanked us and prayed for us. We found that this place was very interesting because there were many things that China did not have. We attempted to taste some yellowish liquid. We each took a sip of it and spat it out quickly, because it had a terrible taste of chilli. I hated it! The aftertaste lingered in our mouths no matter how many times we rinsed our mouths! Moving forward, we saw a local bully attacking a poor woman, she was about to faint! That was outrageous and I felt indignant! I quickly yelled at the bully and shot an arrow at him. He ran screaming at the top of his voice. I rushed to help the old lady to stand up. I gave her some bread and some water. She thanked me with tears in her eyes. I was touched and I wiped a tear from my eye.

We finally got to the palace where the king lived, we came into the palace and it was filled with gold and jewellery. Some people were dancing, some people were telling jokes to the king. When the king saw us, he greeted us cheerfully and gave us something special, the yellowish liquid. The terrible food we tried earlier! It turned out that this place was called Indonesia and the liquid was called curry. A special food in this place. It actually tasted delicious if you cooked it with the right recipe! We thanked the king and started sailing again!

After four days sailing on the sea, we spotted a dot in the water, a big one! We fired at it, but we missed. When we got closer, I saw that it was a man! We pulled him on board.

When the man woke up, I asked, "What is your name?"

He replied miserably, "My name is Rex..."

And I ventured, "Do you want to be a sailor?"

"Of course! My dream is to become a sailor!!" exclaimed Rex.

I saw that he had dark hair and dark skin, he was an African.

Two days later, I found that Rex was very helpful. So I promoted him to be my executive officer. The next afternoon, a pirate ship really came! I heard loud fighting sound outside my door! I was unprepared. In no time, the door was flung open and there stood Rex holding a bloody knife in one hand and a head in the other. I recognised the head. It was not a pirate, it was one of my sailors!

Rex said coldly, "I tricked you, didn't I?" He came dashing towards me and I took out my sword to fight and my sword collided with his sword! But he was so strong and he poked me in the shoulder and blood splat all over me. Meanwhile, my people arrived in time and stabbed Rex on his back. Rex was dead.

In the end, we defeated the pirates. My shoulder was fine. However, one more boat sank and three man down. I was really sad because I lost three friends.

Days after days, we saw another land finally!

We went on land and we gave some money to the poor people and we found some very good food there. So we exchanged them with the imperial blue and white vase. We arrived a place full of poor people. We distributed food and money to them! They were all very thankful. We asked them where we were and the people said that this was Canada!

Our next destination, we reached to a country where many people liked to play football! We were interested of the balls they played with, so we bought one! We heard that it was Brazil. We brought some Brazilian nuts too! In return, we gave the poor people some money and the poor boys footballs too!

Finally, it was time to head back to China, we sailed cheerfully back to China. The journey back home was tough and uneasy.

“Boom!” A lightning hit a boat faster than you could think.

“AH!! Sinking boat! Pull down the sails! Put all the sails back! Change directions!” yelled everyone.

I said, “Calm down! I will take control.” and everything went back to place.

Now, it was just the main ship left. One more ship sank and three sailors down.

Finally, we spotted China! Good old China! We went to see the Emperor Ju Ding, he was pleased to see us and he was very surprised that there were so many presents from different countries!

After two days, my sailors all became the emperor’s guard, but I would still be a captain, the captain of my ship.

# The Storm of Bravery

*Marymount Primary School, Ng, Cherie – 10*

“Wake up, YuLong! It’s time for breakfast!”

I groggily opened my eyes. TianMing, my bossy older brother, was standing next to me, his expression sour. I got to my feet and put on my hand-me-down boots. I then followed TianMing out onto the deck of the pirate ship.

My name is YuLong, and I am part of the Ming Treasure Fleet. Instead of stealing treasure, like your average pirate fleet, we deliver invaluable treasure from the finest silk to the purest gold to foreign countries as gifts from the Emperor. You can guess by my name, YuLong, that I’m a girl, and the only one on the ship. The captain decided to let me stay because my father was a well-respected member of the crew. He died of typhoid fever shortly after I was born, leaving me and TianMing in the hands of the fleet.

I shivered as I stepped out into the open air. The sky was covered with stormy gray clouds and there was a cold draft.

A crowd of pirates were chattering and munching on their breakfast. TianMing joined them while I sat in the corner with the boys about my age, waiting for the pirates to finish their meals so that we could scavenge the scraps. We were the slaves of the crew—those who did all the dirty work and got fed the least.

LungLi, our Sailing Master frowned as he eyed the dark sky. “There’s a storm coming,” he croaked. “I can feel it. Everyone back to your cabins after this meal.” He glanced at us. “Except for you skinny brats. Stay in the kitchen and wash the dishes.”

“The only reason why we’re skinny is because you don’t feed us well.” I mumbled under my breath. LungLi glared at me.

“What did you say?” the aggressive pirate growled, clenching his fists.

“Nothing.” I gulped, quickly scooting away from LungLi.

The next hour was exhausting. It was bad enough without the boys teasing me about being a girl. I was overwhelmed with relief when the Cook dismissed us to our cabin. I curled up in a corner and quickly drifted off.

I was awoken by a gigantic lurch. The ship was swaying from side to side. Everyone else must have felt it too, because nobody was asleep anymore.

A moment later, TianMing rushed in. “Everyone wake up! The ship just hit a rock, and water’s leaking into the storage rooms now. It can be fixed, but it’s not safe for you all to stay down here. Everyone out onto the deck!”

Everyone was in a scurry of panic. There was a lot of pushing to get to the deck first. It wasn’t until I had stepped out that I realized how violent the storm was. Rain was pouring down from the sky.

“Are you sure this is safe, TianMing?” I shouted sarcastically, but nobody could hear me over the roaring wind. The ship was tilting dangerously to one side.

Suddenly, the ship jerked to the other side, sending us stumbling. HoMing, one of the boys who had made fun of me earlier on, tumbled overboard, screaming. He splashed about in the water, tears rolling down his cheeks. I immediately ran to help him, but a hand grabbed my shoulder.

“Forget it,” KwokChi, TianMing’s best friend, said. “If you dive in, you’ll drown as well. Leave him be.”

“What?” I yelled, incredulous. “You’re just going to let him die?” Before anyone could stop me, I plunged into the waters.

Instantly, nail-biting cold overcame me as I struggled to resurface. I was frantically searching for HoMing when I felt a hand grab my wrist. HoMing. I then used all the strength I had left in my body to swim me and HoMing to the ship. We were almost there when my body numbed and couldn’t move. I screamed as I tried to fight back the cold, but it was impossible. I was wondering how painful death would be when a rough hand grabbed me and hauled me out of the freezing waters, along with HoMing.

The next hour was a blur. For the first time, the whole crew had their attention on me. TianMing, who had been the one hauling me up, dried me and brought me to his private cabin. He laid all the cloth and rags he could find on the floor, creating a makeshift mattress.

“You...saved my life,” I stuttered after I had recovered from the trauma. “Why would you do that?”



TianMing let out a sound between a laugh and a sob. “Because you’re my baby sister, of course. I know I might boss you around sometimes, and never seem to care about how the others treat you. And when you dived in to save that boy...I was terrified of losing you. You’re the only family I have. You know what, YuLong? You’re the bravest person I’ve ever known. And believe me, I know plenty about bravery. Now go to sleep...you must be exhausted.”

Tears formed in my eyes---happy tears. It was comforting to know that someone loved me. “TianMing, sing me the lullaby Papa used to sing us.” I asked. I didn’t have much memories of my childhood, but I still remembered how our father used to sing us to sleep each night.

TianMing frowned, but started singing softly. I closed my eyes and let the music consume me. I began to fall asleep as TianMing sang the last line:

*You’re safe as long as I’m here.*

# Treasure Voyage

*Norwegian International School, Chow, Jasmine – 10*

While I was playing in the palace garden, I overheard a ceremony in the royal banquet hall. Oh, by the way, I'm Princess Changning, the youngest daughter of Zhu Di, the Chinese Emperor of Ming Dynasty. So, back to the ceremony. I saw servants walking around with plates of delicious food. Hiding behind a stone wall, I was curious and listened. "We will send a fleet of treasure ships to the South and make friends with the regional kings. We want them to recognise our might and power." I heard a familiar voice. It was my father, the Emperor!

Even though I knew that girls weren't allowed aboard, I desperately wanted to venture out. So I asked my father if I could go. Of course, it was a no. I didn't give up. "If I'm not allowed aboard, I'll secretly sneak aboard..." I thought. And that's how it all started.

I looked at the sundial and hurried to the study in the palace for my class. The teacher taught us about our country. As he took out an outfit that ordinary people would wear, an idea popped up in my head. "When the teacher isn't looking, I will take that outfit and wear it to pretend to be a boy for the treasure voyage!" I thought. That was what I did at lunch time.

The day after, the Admiral Zheng He told the crew to line up and we boarded the ships. The ships were like twenty times the size of my bedroom! I was assigned to be the cook on the third ship. I was good at cooking, so I was relieved.

I strolled over to the flight of stairs leading to the kitchen where I bumped into another cook! "Ouch!" the cook yelled. It was a girl's voice! She quickly clapped her hands over her mouth. I looked straight into her eyes and asked. "Are you a ....girl?" She shook her head. "I promise I won't tell." I whispered. She thought for a moment then nodded. I beamed and said, "So am I, but don't tell anyone. What's your name?"

"I'm Ling, daughter of Zheng He's assistant. I heard about this exciting trip so I decided to sneak aboard." She replied. I introduced myself and we soon became friends. Later on the trip, I found Ling pretty shy, but she was still fun.

When the ship sailed to the coast of Malacca, we found it to be a beautiful town with houses along the shore. As the others took out bags of gold and silver, Ling and I explored the place. We walked further and further away from the seaside and deeper and deeper into the woods.

"I think we're lost!" Ling said with a worried look. We looked around and something bright caught my eye. I slowly walked towards it for a closer look. Ling followed. Suddenly, the trail was brightened up by tons of glowing blue creatures. One of them greeted me, "Hello. I'm a little dragon of Malacca. I predict the future. Call me Scales." "Hi, Scales, we've traveled here to send treasure to the king. We are lost. Can you help us?" I asked Scales. "Just follow our trail." Scales pointed to the blue lights.

We followed the trail and joined the others. Scales slid into my pocket without a sound. Then we all set off to send treasure to the ruler of Malacca. He told us about the fierce pirates, led by Chen Zuyi. They were notorious for robbery and all sort of crimes.

In the bedroom that night, I whispered anxiously, "Scales, will the pirates attack us?" Scales looked a bit upset and said, "I'm sorry, I'm just a baby dragon, and can't predict that far. But, I know what you two will be doing tomorrow! You will learn to cook some local cuisine."

The next day, that was exactly what we did. First, a man showed us how to make coconut rice. We then learnt at least ten more recipes. They all tasted great. Rising over the mountain, the moon shone brightly as we served coconut rice for dinner. As expected, the entire crew loved it.

Later that night, Zheng He shouted from the first boat, “Grab your weapon and get ready to fight! The pirates are about to attack!” We ran down the corridor and took the bows and arrows hanging off the kitchen wall. We bolted up to the main deck. Scales cheered us on as we took our positions.

I took a deep breath and shot as far as I could, and it hit one of the scary looking men in the arm. Then just as I was about to shoot another, an arrow flew right next to my ear! “That was close.” I mumbled to myself.

After shooting a few men, I found that I was good at archery! We had to dodge under so many arrows that the arrows could fill up the entire kitchen underneath the main deck where war was happening. We fought and fought, then I started to get worried. Just then, an arrow flew between my legs and hit a pole behind me instead. “Phew.”

Suddenly, an arrow came in my direction. Just as I thought it would be my end, Scales created a magical shield in front of me. Scales had saved my life! We eventually managed to sink the pirates’ ships. We won.

By the time we were to say goodbye to Scales upon leaving Malacca, Ling and I took some of Scales’s glowing blue light which would allow the three of us to communicate with each other at all times.

At the next stop, Aru, we always talked to Scales when nobody was looking. Even now, in the palace, I talk to Ling and Scales a lot. Time passed. It has been two years since we met; our friendship kept growing. I wouldn’t have ever met such marvelous friends if I didn’t sneak aboard the ship.

# Adventures of Yen Wu

*Norwegian International School, So, Ocean – 10*

Hello, my name is Yen Wu. I used to be a fisherman in a small village. On the day I was supposed to go fishing, the people from the Baochuan told me that some of the workers overslept and one fisherman couldn't make it on time. I told them I could replace him, and they dragged me on board. I told them I am a fisherman and I can cook. So I was allocated to the Liangchuan. On the Liangchuan, there were all the cooks and fishermen. They were responsible for cooking and preparing food for everyone, including Zheng He.

A few months later, we landed on our first destination. It was the international port, Port Vijaya, in the capital city of Vietnam, Champa. We gave them some of our finest China, the best spices, and our original oolong tea. They gave us some wonderful wool, colourful cotton and a lot of gold in return.

We traveled near Java, Indonesia, but we didn't stop because we had to carefully avoid one of the most feared pirates of all, Chen Zuyi. Then we went to stop at "Chen Zuyi-free" places such as Malacca, Semudera, and the Anderman and Nicobar islands to trade. They gave us silver and gold, but we didn't get any ivory which our emperor Yongle wants. Finally, we stopped at Calcutta, India. Calcutta was one of the world's major trade ports, so we traded a lot of gifts with the ruler. As India has Indian elephants, finally we got the most wanted ivory for our emperor and it was time to return home.

On our way back to China, we met Chen Zuyi near Palembang, Indonesia. I was just going to present food to Zheng He and I saw grapple hooks came up in an instance.

"Grapple hooks alert!" I screamed and the soldiers all lined up.

Everyone was freaking out! Even I was freaking out. I dropped my serving plate on the ground and ran in circles with my hands up. The other people went to the poop deck of the boat and chattered their teeth. Some of Chen Zuyi's men lost grip while climbing up and fell into the water full of man-eating sharks. The intruders that didn't fall into the water jumped on board. I joined my pals at the poop deck and watched the soldiers fight. The intruders had very little people so we won very easily. We came out and celebrated. We threw them to their own boat and we sailed away.

On the next day, Chen Zuyi suddenly came back to the fleet with a larger fleet of pirate ships. They used grapple hooks again but there were more this time. Many pirates were climbing up to our ship at the same time. Our soldiers were cutting off some of the ropes. Some pirates fell into the water and got stung by the box jellyfish and died, while others were successful and got up onto the deck. I was delivering food to Zheng He when I saw Chen Zuyi came up again. My pals and I panicked and climbed up the mast to hide in the crow's nest instead of the poop deck.

After a few moments of fighting, it seems like that Chen Zuyi was losing.

"I surrender!" Chen Zuyi said.

A few of our soldiers dragged him and as we walked to the stern going to the Captain's quarter, he wrestled his way out and he ran to the helm to steer our boat to his boat.

"Oh my gosh! He is just pretending!" I screamed.

Just when our soldiers were about to react, the men on Chen Zuyi's boat jumped from mast to mast until they got to our main mast. Then they jumped down with their swords pointing down. We called the soldiers to go help us and they dodged their swords that were falling down. My fisherman buddy and I wanted to help, so we went to the weapons room but everything was gone. All we can do was to use our fishing equipment! We used our best fishing technique to fight the pirates off. First we made a trap by putting our fishing net on the ceiling. Just when they came into the room, we dropped the net on them and

captured them. We then threw them into the sea to feed the sharks. My fellow friends found that this method works and they followed.

With most of Chen Zuyi's people on the Baochuan was thrown into the sea, he was bound to surrender. During the battle, our Zhanchuan sunk 10 of his ships that were full of their pirates and we took the other 7. Finally we captured him and threw him and his 2 associates into the ship's prison. and we went back to China. We ported at Nanjing and Emperor Yongle beheaded Chen Zuyi.

Emperor Yongle was so happy about Zheng He, his officers, and sailors that he gave the entire force monetary rewards. I got fully paid and have enough money to have a new fishing boat of my own. Because the fishermen and I did so well, we could go on the second voyage again.

# Great Admiral Zheng He of the Western Seas

*Peak School (ESF), Akin, Esra – 8*

1

I was born a Muslim. My parents are Muslims, so that made me one; I guess it was meant to be that way. My father was an explorer, and my grandfather was an explorer too. The only thing that I didn't get was why there were so many explorers in my family.

Now I'm guessing you would like to be filled in so you understand the story... Back then, China was divided into many different chiefdoms, and each one had its own king or ruler. Together, it was called the Middle Kingdom. All of these rulers fought with each other regularly, and one sad day when I was eleven or so, our village was attacked.

The soldiers set fire to our homes! Suddenly, when the soldiers came, there were thousands of them coming through our city walls, and nobody had noticed that I ran to find my father. He had to know! Lost in my thoughts, I didn't notice the guards creeping up on me. "Zheng He, look out behind you!" said one of the people being attacked. I quickly gathered my consciousness and saw a large hand reaching over my shoulder to grab me. I slapped the hand away and ran for my life. As I ran, I found my father, he was in a terrible state...

2

Lying at my feet was my father. He had been screaming, but was now mysteriously quiet. I figured something was terribly wrong, and checked all his bones to make sure that they weren't broken.

Slowly I turned my father around and saw a large dagger lodged into his back. "No! No! No! Father, you can't be dead!" My eyes welled with tears, my head clouded... Time stood still. Anger surged through my veins.

In my sadness, the soldiers dragged me away to the great capital city called Beijing. When I looked around, there were many young boys who were captured. But they were all so small and weedy, and smelled really yucky! On the journey to Beijing, I dreamed of a life of adventure and boats. Since I had been raised as a Muslim, I could speak Arabic and Chinese, which made me pretty clever compared to the Chinese boys.

The emperor at the time was a curious young man, and wanted to find out about different places around the world. He wanted to know about strange animals that people in China have never seen! He wanted to build ships so he could leave land and go explore, make friends from far away lands! His naval architects were asked to make 300 ships, which he called 'Swimming Dragons'!

Now the emperor wanted servants to work on his ships. He came to look at the captured boys. "I want that giant one who is almost 2 metres tall", said the emperor.

3

Many years later, on one very average day, the emperor called me to his royal palace. "My loyal and very trustworthy Zheng He, I want you to be the admiral of these large ships I have ordered to be made. Go explore new lands, sail across the unknown waters and tell the people you meet about the Middle Kingdom". So since that very day, I was known as the Great Admiral Zheng He.

After a month or so, I went off for our first adventure with my crew of almost 30,000 men in 300 ships, each one with 9 sails, an underwater fish tank to keep fish fresh and healthy, rooms with fresh plants growing, live animals, medicine men, chefs, warriors, fishermen for each crew, and most importantly the most glamorous gifts the emperor could think of. You see, the emperor wanted to make friends with the most interesting people we met, and we did.

My first mission lasted from 1405 to 1407; we travelled to a strange country called India. Additionally, we sailed across the monsoon winds, passed India and went to Africa. we had passed some other villages and traded some more gifts. My favorite mission was discovering a unicorn, a magical horse with a long neck. The emperor would be amazed by the strange gifts I brought back from each trip, and his favourite was the unicorn.

4

We had to fight pirates stole ships. Each time, I thought I glimpsed the most feared pirate in the world, but then, there was another who was more vicious. On the front of the ship, called the bow, there were five younger pirates that were battling two of my men. I kicked one and waited for my men to follow me, soon the young men were rolling around on the floor in pain.

In the beginning, I went to the islands of Java in Indonesia, and Malaysia, then further and further to Oman and Arabia. I even attended Mecca, which is a place for a Muslim pilgrimage. My fleet and I were so adventurous that we went even further to Mombasa and Zanzibar, in East Africa! On my sixth voyage, I was nearly reaching 50,000 km.

5

On my seventh voyage, I fell ill. As I lied in my bed, with death approaching, I thought of my adventures and all the people I met along the way. My dream was that I had inspired these people to be curious about life beyond the horizon of their seas, and go forth to explore like I did.

My emperor was a big supporter of my voyages, but the Middle Kingdom was full of people who did not understand my journeys into the seas. So I made sure that all the friends I met along the way remembered me. They built mosques and shrines with my name, and also wrote about me in their books.

I am now ready to leave this world... my eyes close, I, Great Admiral Zheng He of the Western Seas, feel very happy to have seen so much!

# My Adventure with Zheng He

*Peak School (ESF), Barton, Jack – 10*

Long ago, in the year 1417, far away in Eastern China, there was a boy who lived by the sea, his name was Sheng Si. He was 16 years old, and admired the great sailor Zheng He, who had traveled many miles to extraordinary places in Asia. Sheng didn't know yet, but he would soon be sailing alongside his favourite pioneer.

It was in the middle of the year when Sheng got the surprise of his life, a huge banner in the middle of his local village in big fat letters read: WANTED CREW MEMBERS. He read a little more and found that if he went, he'd be going to Africa, he also found the message was made by Zheng He. Sheng was so excited that straight away, he signed up, he would be leaving in three days. He packed and bought a sword and gun for protection as he knew it was going to be a bit rough. He said goodbye to the villagers, and was soon traveling to the harbour. Once he got there he was welcomed by about half a dozen of enormous ships, five times the average boats that you would see today, with about 900 cabins for the crew including a kitchen and a dining hall. Besides that, there was these strange gardens that grew vegetables. Sheng was one of the last people to board the ship, so not long after, they were off. Sheng soon found that his jobs would be one of the cooks. He also had to scrub the deck every morning. So the next day at sunrise, he got to work.

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It had been nine months since Sheng had boarded Zheng He's ship that was going to Africa. So far the ship hadn't had any disturbances, but Sheng was about to get a surprise that he would never forget. It was about midday when a person from the crow's nest shouted "SHIP AHEAD!!!" Everybody turned their heads to see an enormous Indian ship speeding towards them. Then all of a sudden, the captain of the Indian ship, when close enough to Sheng's boat, yelled out loud: "YOU HAVE CROSSED THE BORDER BETWEEN DHAKA AND INDIA, SURRENDER OR DIE!!!" Which we replied back with: "NEVER!!!" The next thing Sheng heard was nonstop cannons shooting at the opposite ship. Sheng knew exactly what to do as he had prepared for this: he sprinted to his cabin, grabbed his sword and gun, and rejoined the fight, BOOM!!! Everybody tumbled over onto the ground. The ships had hit each other with great impact, though our ship was a lot bigger. It did get a lot of damage, but the Indian ship was extremely damaged, which gave us a big advantage. We were soon fighting again but with less people because of the boat's damage, the battle between the two ships got fiercer, and fiercer. Then, when all hope seemed lost, Sheng's crew started to drive the Indians back, they were soon jumping of Sheng's ship and swimming to their own, it was victory.

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After two months they had finally reached the Coast of Eastern Africa, Somalia. When Sheng arrived he found it was hot, dry, and miserable. Besides that, it was amazing. The food was good, the culture was interesting, and the traditions spellbinding. The captain said that the crew would be staying in Somalia for three days. In the first day they would be showing the gold to the African King, the second day they would be in the local market buying something to remember the voyage, the third day they would be packing up and sailing away to Kenya. So the next day Sheng went with his other crew members to the African Overlord. He was a small man with a big beard in shining robes, he was also very pleased to see Zheng He, as they made a deal: as long as Zheng He's master gave him gold, he would keep peace between China and Somalia. For the rest of the day the crew just looked around the city. The next day the whole crew went to the local market. There were tons of products, animals, food, ivory and slaves. Sheng only had a little money, but lots of things in the market were cheap. There was a lot of things that Sheng could choose to get but in the end he was only going to choose a little bit of ivory that had been carved into a mini hippo that he found in a little shop. But by then it was getting dark, so Sheng looked for his fellow crew members to be surprised because Sheng's captain, Zheng He, had brought back for his emperor a strange animal that the Africans called a "Giraffe". Nobody in the crew cared about saying its real name, they just called it a unicorn. So the next day we set off on our journey to our final stop, Kenya.

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Three days later they arrived at their final destination, Kenya. But this time only in parts of Kenya it was hot, in other places it was tropical. Sheng heard that the only reason why they were at Kenya was because all the other countries in Africa were friendly to China, but not Kenya, they were still hostile to China. Once they got off the ship, they headed straight to the African Palace where the king sat in his huge throne, wearing shiny purple robes. After 15 minutes the king shouted: "LEAVE ME ALONE AND DON'T COME BACK!!!" Zheng He told us that the African King refused for peace between China and Kenya. So the next day we set off back to China.

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11.5 months have passed and Sheng had reached China. Once he was off the ship, he said: "Goodbye Zheng He, hope to see you soon." To which Zheng replied: "Yes, and goodbye, Sheng Si." They shook hands and went their own ways.

# Ming Dynasty

*Peak School (ESF), Chan, Jason – 8*

Hi I am Zheng He, here is my story. I am a Chinese explorer but not any type of Chinese explorer: I don't take over land, instead I give gifts to others that need them. I am the captain of my ship. My ship is called the ship of the golden voyages.

Today I set off on my first journey, I was sailing to India to give gifts. I was there to donate gifts to the poor. Suddenly, I ran out of oil I had to get oil quickly. I was waiting for someone to come. All of a sudden my friend came. He brought me some coal and I burnt the coal he had given me, he had brought me the coal because I had given him gold in the past. So after that we became friends, that's why he came to help me when I had no oil and coal to burn. After I got my coal I continued my journey to India. I was currently in Thailand, I was almost in India. I had another problem for my friend to help me solve: I had no more gifts! Luckily, he came back and gave me some of his gold so that I could buy gifts for the people that live in India. My friend had loads of gold to spare he also had too many gifts to hand out. He needed my help to give out the gifts that's why he gave me some of his gold. I was giving out the gifts I had in India, my first destination. I had already given out 50 gifts and I still had some more. I had finally finished giving out the gifts that I needed to in India.

My next destination was Thailand that I had passed earlier on on my way to India. I was sailing in the Indian ocean to Thailand from India. I was ready to give out more presents because I had left some of the gold my friend gave me in the ship, so I could use that gold that I had stored in the ship of the golden voyage which is my ship. I was on my way to Thailand and almost there. I had finally arrived in Thailand to give some more gifts out in Thailand, everyone was excited that I was coming to donate gifts to them because they knew I was a good explorer and I didn't take over land. Instead I gave out gifts that were stored in my ship, the ship of the golden voyages. I just started to give out gifts to the citizens of Thailand, they were very excited indeed. I had given about 10 of my gifts so far, I was going to give many more. I thought that would be enough for the citizens of Thailand. They all thanked me as I boarded my ship, the ship of the golden voyages.

I decided that I was going to Taiwan, I only wanted to go to countries in Asia because I was a Chinese explorer. I was on my way to Taiwan, I was almost there. I was just a few meters away. I had finally arrived in Taiwan, everyone was excited and they were all greeted me. It was similar to when I was in India. I was giving out gifts because they were all so nice to me, I had given each of them 2 gifts. I had given out about 20 gifts now I gave gifts to 10 people so far but I was going to give more out. I had finally finished giving out my gifts in Taiwan, in total I given out 50 in Taiwan. The total of all my journeys I had given out 130 gifts if I remembered correctly because I had loads of stuff floating around my mind about where my next journey would be and other random stuff that I just randomly think of in my mind. I was done with Taiwan and I was ready for another adventure. I was once again thinking and thinking about where I was going to go. I made up my mind and I decided to go to Hong Kong.

My journey to Hong Kong was probably going to be my last journey in this story. I might have one more journey in this story, but you will just have to find out. Now my trip to Hong Kong was the best one out of all my trips I had been on. I was about to arrive in Hong Kong when I was finally there everyone greeted me just like in Taiwan and Thailand. I was about to start giving out my gifts in Hong Kong when all of a sudden I thought to myself about how to make Hong Kong the best and most interesting journey in this book. I had finally given out 10 gifts but I decided in Hong Kong I was going to give a total of 250 gifts I was going to give each person 5 gifts which meant that I gave out gifts to 50 people because  $250 \div 5 = 50$  that is why I gave 50 people 5 gifts.

# The Missing Piece

*Peak School (ESF), Donovan, Iris – 10*

1405, China Ming Dynasty

The wind blew against my face as the smell of the salty sea filled the air around me. I could feel the sweat run down my forehead. My arms were aching from all the rowing and rowing.

I've been trying to find land for about 2 days now. Everybody was looking for me in my hometown, where I ran away from. I ran away because everyday was plain, and everyday was the same. I had to work on a farm because my dad, the money maker of the family, was sent on a journey by the Yongle Emperor. My dad was honoured to be a part of the treasure fleet and he excitedly went off and never came back. So I have gone to Calicut, India to try find him.

But then I saw it! I saw it, "Land!" I shouted. The fog started to clear up and I looked closer and it was, it was a boat. But it wasn't just any old boat, it was a huge boat, and there was gold and treasure in it.

I was startled as I saw the miniature people strolling across the boat. I didn't want them to see me. Dad had told me all about the pirates of the Bay of Bengal. I thought they were pirates until I heard one of them say "We're never going to get to land without pirates finding us!". As I listened to the concerned voice I calmed down. I wanted to ask for help to see if they could bring me to land, but I couldn't. I was way too scared. I tried to ignore the big boat as I rowed my way past them.

As I was minding my own business, one of the patrollers shouted "LOOK, IT'S A GIRL!" I jumped up to my feet in alarm. For a second I felt relaxed, but then all of a sudden a wave pushed my boat to one side. I jumped and waved my arms all around and landed headfirst straight down into the ocean. All the noise became muffled, as I sank deeper and deeper. I felt trapped and not able to move.

The very next thing I saw was the boat's nurse, who set me down on a bed. All I could hear was the shouting and screaming that was coming from the deck. I sprang up, in confusion. The Nurse calmly held my hand and soothingly whispered, "It's alright, everything will be fine." As soon as I heard that, I felt like someone finally loved me, someone finally cared. I felt a warm feeling in my heart. I sat back down. I asked, "what's happening?" "Just another fight, the pirates have returned", the nurse said. I gulped.

Then all of a sudden I heard something. It sounded like a familiar voice. It stuck out from the rest. It was a voice that had that a strong, brave sound to it. My heart took over, I knew this voice was important. And I knew this voice mattered. This voice gave me the same warm feeling that the nurse's words gave me.

I burst the door open. I felt like everything went slow, it was as if the world wanted me to pay attention. I glanced back and forth from all the pirates and sailors. Nobody noticed, and nobody cared. But then I heard the voice once again. I walked through the fight. All my fears flew away all because of the one familiar voice that seemed to be the reason I came here. As I finally shoved past the last soldier, I saw him. I looked up at his messy long hair, his bright brown eyes, and his beautiful smile. Papa! I fell to my knees in surprise as tears raced down my cheeks. I sprung straight up and gave him a big smile. It was like we had a whole conversation without saying a single word. "Li Li!" My father said "I love you so much". "I'm so sorry" he whispered. "I Love you too!" I replied.

It was like magic because I looked up and the pirates were in tears and so were the soldiers. My dad popped me down and said a few words in a language that made no sense to me. I was so happy that I found my dad! and I have a feeling that we're going to have wonderful, exciting adventures together.

My whole life I new there was something missing, I knew there was an empty space. Now I know that my dad is the missing piece.

# Zheng He – The evil man

*Peak School (ESF), Keller, Lia – 8*

One day as I was walking home I passed Zheng He's fleet and one of his guards looked me in the eye. I felt a little scared. I couldn't chose if I should run or go closer and figure out what they are doing. So I thought for a minute and chose to know what they were up to. So at home I packed my bag and when 12 pm struck, I snuck up on the deck to find somewhere safe to stay. I found space in the chamber to sleep.

Today, I find myself tied up in the cell and I realize they found me. But luckily I brought an acid stick and my hands where safe, so I grabbed it and then I was free. There were guards outside so I put one of my sound switchers outside my cell so a alarm went off and every guard went to look what the problem was. So sneaking off I went but not knowing when they would come back. I got caught and was taken to the plank and was thrown into the water. I started to paddle to the closest island. When I was at the island I realised that my clothes were torn and wet, so I found some vine and took out some clips from my bag. Next I had to look for a good spot to dry my clothes. While they were drying I tried to make a raft and it was so hard. When I was done I found some banana leaves, so I climbed on top of a cave. But to my surprise there lay sushi and some mangos, I felt happy to had food. After I was done I found a place and went to sleep, wondering why had Zheng He had pushed me off the plank and did bad things. Just then I knew what had happened: they were great enemies with my parents.

Today I would set sail to find my family. As I got on the boat I realised my bag was lost so I ran to the cave and it was there. So I snatched it and ran back to the boat and started to go fast and I had a map. After four days I reached Asia. Then in two days I was home. I ran my top speed home and told everyone in my street what happened.

# The Tale of a Soldier

*Peak School (ESF), Yee, Ethan – 10*

It was a weird day when I saw Zhang He become a eunuch and it was cruel type of punishment and they still did it in public! It was so brutal since you could hear him literally wail as he get his private part cut off. After the horrible sight I went back home and afterwards Yongle emperor, the leader of China at that time was saying that everyone who was between 21 and 30 had to join Zhang He for treasure voyages around the world and since I was 26 I joined and the first voyage was kind of weird. As I entered the huge boat on Thursday 31st of May I felt shivers coming around because I wondered what am I doing as my part for Zhang He? Then Zhang He came. He said. "Hello army soldier." What soldier now I'm really scared. "How could you say I'm an army soldier?" Zhang He replied. "Because of the badge your wearing." I looked at my badge I thought it was just a present from the Yongle emperor for joining but it was a badge to address why and who I am and what I am doing. Then Zhang He gave me a longbow and I had literally no fighting skills and I didn't even know how to use a longbow. As the ship left I was just relaxing in the underground bunker where soldiers were meant to be at. After a long few days of traveling Zhang He shouted one thing I didn't want to hear. "ATTACK! Everyone get into position!" I ran out not knowing what I was doing and rushed out and saw people that were shooting are group with crazy longbows and started hitting are ship with swords and axes. I hid behind a tree just because I didn't know what was really happening and the fact that I could hear hitting and shooting noises a mile away! Then I heard footsteps the sound of that was making me afraid of what was going to happen then I took a look behind the tree and there was someone probably trying to escape the war that was happening but he was coming straight at my location so I shot one hit straight to the head and left him there and that was then I saw for the first time a dead body and so I ran away in fear. As I ran away I saw a few warriors heading to me! I must run I thought but then I saw one of my soldier buddies and he slice them and then the battle ended we won and they gave us a pony? Well it has a long neck and it's yellow with black spots. I then thought maybe it wasn't but Zhang He said. "This thing we have a unicorn!" A unicorn? Your out of your mind that's a... uh what is it? I didn't really know what it is so I just said it was a unicorn. When we got back we also came back with \$1,000 that the warriors gave us and so we gave it to are people and rested until the next time we would voyage. The next morning I woke up from a loud horn and I knew what that meant it was a gathering! For what? I went into the courtyard and saw Zhang He standing beside the Yongle emperor who said. "I need the people that was in the last voyage!" I came rushing towards them and said. "Why do you need us?" The Yongle emperor replied. "Well because your going on another mission!" I asked. "Why though?" He said. "Because if you brought \$1,000 everytime I could get rich! RICH!" "Aren't you rich enough?" I asked. "No, I have the minimum that I can get but now I can get to the maximum!" I thought wow he's greedy alright and crazy too but I wasn't going to say it or I would get punished so I just kept it in my head. After the ship was ready we set off and I was ready but I was assigned with a SWORD! I don't know how to use that! I ran desperately to someone with a longbow and asked. "Say, can I swap with you?" He replied. "No, or Zhang He would be very mad." I gasped and realised it's hard to use a sword and it's more easier to die since you have to go near them! I hid in fear instead of going out and in 10 days we arrived at are destination. I looked out and Zhang He said. "Everyone are boat has ran out of fuel and we made it here and now we're stranded!" Then someone asked. "Where are we anyway? Check your map." Zhang He looked down at his map and he said. "We are in Europe." Everyone gasped and ran in circles in panic but I just hid in the same spot I was in until Zhang He said. "I see something!" Then a boat arrived. Then the leader of the boat said. "We have came to the rescue." Zhang He then said. "We can't have everyone on board with you." Then the rescuers said. "Fine, we'll take some maybe we'll leave the soldiers." When I heard that I realised I should pose as a worker or crew member. I took my sword and hit an unexpected crew member and so I took his suit and went on the boat and went back to China. When we got back I knew I didn't want to do it anymore so I said to Yongle emperor. "I quit."

# Chinese Meets Thai Cuisine on a Ming Treasure Voyage

*PLK Leung Chow Shun Kam PS, Ho, Abby – 11*

In the year 1405

'Ready, Go!' shouted Zheng He. 'Hurray!' everyone shouted. We are setting off for Thailand in our huge ships. We have fruit and vegetables growing on board, livestock, many helpers and many ingredients. You see, I am one of the cooks on this voyage and I am the main cook on this ship.

Two Weeks Later

We have arrived in Thailand. Only a few minutes after arriving, we saw the king and queen. When they saw us, they excitedly waved their hands to say 'Hello'. They offered us these things called coconuts. They are very nice. They also prepared a meal for Zheng He and his commanders. I heard Zheng He say it was delicious.

12:00 (Afternoon)

I have been ordered to prepare a meal for the King and queen of Thailand.

'Zhen He. I have prepared the lunch. 'I said nervously. I hope they like our dishes.

'Here is the menu printed on our finest paper.' said my assistant as he passed it to the King and Queen.

## MENU OF CHINA

– PORK DUMPLINGS

- TURNIP SPROUT SALAD
- ROAST SNACKLING PIG
- DEEP-FRIED WILDGOORE
- TURNIP SPROUT SALAD
- SWEET OSMANTHUS JELLY

30 Minutes Later

After the meal Zhen He asked the King and Queen, 'What do you think of our dishes?'

The Queen replied 'They are very nice – Excellent!'

Then the King said 'Thank you for sharing your food with us. We would like to give you some of our favourite green curry to take back to your Emperor.' We will be heading back to China soon. I want to see the Emperor's face when he tastes the Thai green curry!

# The lost diary entries of Captain Zheng He—1405

*PLK Leung Chow Shun Kam PS, Pun, Hugo – 11*

5<sup>th</sup> February

I am the leader of the biggest voyage ever made. My Emperor has made me the commander. I will make him proud. We have treasure to give to the new people we meet. We are on our way!

18th February

We have entered our first storm. My men have run to their cabins for cover. I've ordered the gongs to be banged and lanterns to be flashed to communicate with the other ships. We can't see anything. One of our treasure ships has taken in too much water and sunk.

25th February

Our navigator has spotted land in the distance. I gave orders to load the cannons so if the people attack we could suppress them with our firepower but a messenger told me the Emperor has objected to any attack. He said we cannot show any sign of hostility. We have anchored the treasure ships away from the harbor for safety.

26<sup>th</sup> February

We will stop here for a week to buy and sell stuff. The people are friendly so I will give them some of our treasure too. I will also trade silk with a merchant for some sails to replace the damaged sail on my ship. This place they say is called India.

28th February

It's been a very interesting few days. I have stopped the ships at another place — called Sri Lanka. The king of Sri Lanka told me there is a problem and he cannot let us stay. I asked what the problem was and found out there are Kraken in the waters near the port. Krakens are the scariest monsters of the sea. This Kraken has been scaring all the people and sinking merchant ships. The king said if we can kill the kraken he will be an ally with us forever. So, I have set sail with my crew to find the Kraken!

31<sup>st</sup> February

This morning a Spanish galleon could be seen in the distance so I commanded we bang our gongs to signal it. Then all of a sudden tentacles as tall as my ship came out of the water and onto the galleon. The crew of the galleon was so shocked they jumped off the ship. My battle ships quickly fired cannons at it. But another tentacle hit the troop transport next to me. The gunpowder in the cabin exploded and burst into flames. We chased the Kraken and fired over a hundred cannonballs at it. By the afternoon we had only one cannonball left. I commanded it to be fired. The last cannonball hit the kraken. It hit it right in its eyeball and it sank to the bottom of the sea. The ships have gathered around and the crew is cheering 'Zheng He forever!'



1<sup>st</sup> January

I am now back in Sri Lanka and have reported back to the king. He is so pleased the kraken is dead and has again promised to be allied with China forever. He also gave me a man-o-war he captured from the Spanish. I have a feeling this is going to be a successful voyage.

But sometimes I still think that something bad might happen.... but maybe I am thinking too much!

4th February

It has only been a few days since destroying the Kraken and a pirate has appeared. But, luckily his ship is no match for our enormous bronze cannons. The pirate leader has surrendered. I spared the crew of the pirate ship and gave them an island to rule. But I wasn't so nice to the pirate leader. I used a cat-o-nine-tails to spank him and I am taking him back to the Emperor. Another crisis is over. This voyage is now over too, until next time.

# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages: The Treasure Voyage

Po Leung Kuk Choi Kai Yau School, Li, Cheuk Lam Bryan – 10

It was late, and every single sailor was asleep. Except Ben. The large galleon was like a knife slicing through the calm sea. The silver moon was grand and round, it was so impossibly perfect. Stars shone in the sky. Ben and the other fifty crew members were carrying extremely important cargo. Gold, silk, jade, and china. Despite it being a wonderful night, Ben knew this would not be a problem-free voyage...

It was morning time. Ben had just woken up. 'Good morning, Ben,' piped a cheerful voice. It was the unmistakable voice of Joe. Even though he looked like a big, burly man, he was very nice and kind-hearted. 'Good morning,' replied Ben. 'Let's have breakfast,' said Joe.

Joe wore a striped cap, and he had a gold tooth. His beard was bristly, it stuck out like the bristles of a nailbrush. He wore a simple sailor's tunic and baggy pants. But Ben still liked him. He always gave Ben some sweets and biscuits when he said he was homesick.

They went to the Dining Hall. Some sailors were playing chess, while others were sipping up oolong tea.

Suddenly, a voice called out, 'Pirates! Pirates!' Everyone stopped. Then they panicked and ran, alarmed. 'To your stations, Bob!' the captain called out. Bob and Joe scrambled to the deck. Three dreaded pirate ships were moving to intercept.

Cannons fired. But the pirate ship's hull was way too strong, the cannons only did little damage. Then a pirate hauled a long ladder across their ship. Moving like gymnasts with incredible speed, the pirates attempted to board the vessel. The captain and several crew members rushed to the deck. 'Hold them off! Others, to the lifeboats!' Two lifeboats were lowered first. But they were like sitting ducks to the pirate ships. The pirates fired a cannon. And one by one the lifeboats were destroyed. There was no escape...

The rest of the crew battled valiantly. Sparks could be seen when two swords clashed. The captain was fighting the pirate's leader, Chestbeard. Tattoos covered his body. He opened his mouth and shouted, 'AARRGGHH!'

Ben saw that his teeth were completely black.

They were blacker than oil. They were blacker than a midnight sky. They were blacker than black... For short, they were black.

Then, a peculiar sight filled Ben's eyes. 'What up?' asked Joe. 'Look, Joe, look! Reinforcements!' Two magnificent ships appeared. Everyone stopped. Then the pirates ran. 'I want my mum!' shouted one.

The pirates retreated rapidly back to their boats. All was safe.

The ship slowly sailed back on course, while the reinforcements pulled away.

Then, another sailor cried, 'Look! Look!' Ben's mind raced in thought. *Was it a sea monster?* But this time it was good news. It was civilization!

A few people arrived to greet them. The remaining sailors gave them all their treasures. The gold, silk and china. 'Thank you. Unimaginable kindness,' said the native people thankfully. Then Ben and Joe watched the beautiful sunset.

The next morning, the repaired ship set off. Waves crashed along the side of the ship, as if the ship was a puny toy. 'Don't worry, Ben. These storms pass really quickly,' the captain reassured.

Unfortunately, the captain was wrong. The raging storm lasted for hours. Lightning bolts and thunder could be seen and heard from miles away. Ben took shelter in his cabin, soaking wet. The moment that Ben thought he was safe, disaster struck. A strong wave hit the bow of the ship, and water started to leak in. 'Oh no,' said Joe, looking distressed.

Just when everything seemed that it was the end, a stroke of genius hit Ben's mind. 'Joe, I know! Remember the crates at my cabin?' said Ben, hoping that Joe would agree with his idea. 'No, but how do we get near that opening? The water is coming in at tremendous speed. We'd get knocked over the second we approach it! And how do we stick it?'

'Just come with me,' replied Ben calmly. Joe had no other choice but to follow his faithful friend.

They carried two big chunks of wood and marched to the damaged spot. Water was flooding and splashing in violently, like a swarm of people trying to escape a fire exit. 'Nails?' Asked Joe, confused. 'Yes,' replied Ben. 'We need to work now.' Ben and Joe took some nails and a hammer, and they got to work.

They tried to go near the flooding point, with Ben in front and Joe behind. After many attempts, they fixed the nails in place. Then Joe grabbed the hammer, charged and banged vigorously. Mission accomplished!

They returned to China. The emperor requested to see Ben and Joe in private.

'As a reward for your bravery, you two will serve me and be known as my personal generals. You two have made history.' For a moment there was complete silence.

Then Ben and Joe bursted into tears of happiness.

# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages: Life on the Ming Treasure Fleet

*Po Leung Kuk Choi Kai Yau School, Muk, Tuen Callie – 10*

I stared up at the great ship, which belonged to the Ming Treasure Fleet. How I longed to be up on its deck, breathing the fresh sea air and staring down at the rolling blue waves. But I was too young to be allowed in the fleet. I watched enviously as men piled into the ships, wishing I was one of them. I was watching so intently that I hadn't heard the sound of footsteps coming up behind me. "Hello, child," boomed a deep voice behind me. I whipped around to see the great General Zheng He standing behind me. Shock pulsed through me, for General Zheng was the one who commanded the fleet. I bowed in deepest respect, still startled by his appearance. "It's a pleasure to meet you, sir." I stammered nervously. Zheng turned to the ships. "You want to go too, don't you?" He said suddenly. "Y-yes." I replied. Narrowing his eyes, Zheng walked around me slowly, studying me and making himself seem even more imposing than before. "You have broad shoulders and strong hands." he commented after walking a full circle around me. "Perfect for a sailor." I gaped at him as he concluded, "You shall join me on the ship. Now come!" I quickly hurried after Zheng as he turned and walked onto the ship, not believing my luck. "Wow. I'm on the Ming Treasure Fleet!" I murmured to myself as I climbed onboard.

*A few days later...*

I hurried across the deck. It had been a few days after I'd joined the fleet. The ship was amazing. It had so much treasure and precious goods that it could last me two lifetimes! As soon as I came on-board, Zheng had me working hard to prove my worth. It's so great up here feeling the wind and looking up at the sky. I feel relaxed and happy on this ship. I'm glad Zheng let me join.

"LAND AHEAD!" yelled a voice. I looked over the rail and saw a large patch of green land. I looked on nervously as the ship slowed and stopped near the coast of the little island. Zheng appeared near the head of the ship and told us, "We're not sure if the people who live here are friendly or not, so we'll approach warily and be ready for anything." Then he stepped off the boat, right after telling some sailors to get the treasure ready. I followed him, along with some of my fellow sailors. Zheng came walking alongside me. "Be ready for anything, child. Be ready to fight if needed." he whispered in my ear before moving on.

As we went deeper into the island, two men came running out. They wore friendly, peaceful expressions on their faces as they greeted us warmly. "Hello," The first one said in a strange accent, "Welcome to Java! You are from China?" Zheng dipped his head politely. "Yes, and we come in peace. We come to give magnificent treasures to you!" He said respectfully. The second one beckoned us to follow them. "We show you Serang, our home. You come in peace, we shall give you peace!" They went off swiftly into the trees, leaving us to follow them hurriedly.

After a bit of walking, we finally arrived in Serang. "We are in Serang now!" The men exclaimed grandly. It was beautiful and amazing. Tall buildings and trees were everywhere, decorated beautifully with lights and sparkling rivers. "Wow," I heard Zheng whisper beside me as the men led us into Serang. Zheng stepped forward to talk to the men. "We like your home and your island, and you are peaceful and friendly men. To thank you for being so kind, we shall give you gifts!" he said. The first man looked surprised. "Of course. But it's nothing really. We didn't do anything special." Zheng smiled, and waved a hand. Two sailors came up, hands loaded with precious treasures. Another sailor followed, dragging a treasure chest behind him. The island men gaped at them in shock.

"W-we can't accept this!" one of them cried. "I-it's--" Zheng cut him off. "Please take it." he said quietly. The men looked at each other, then nodded. "Thank you, so much!" They cheered as the sailors dropped their load at their feet. Zheng stepped back and gestured for the sailors to go back to the ship, leaving the men to marvel over their treasure. They went back onto the ship, and to their surprise the men followed. As Zheng and his crew climbed onboard, the men below yelled after them, "Thank you for your visit! Thank you for your gifts! You will always be welcome here!" Then the ship started, and off they went. I watched the island get smaller and smaller in the distance, my heart warmed by the men's gratitude.

*A few days later...*

I woke from my slumber. Unsure of what had awoken me, I scrambled out of bed and went up to the deck. A storm was raging. Hard. Rain lashed at my face as thunder rumbled and lightning flashed. The ship rocked violently. Suddenly, I saw a dark shape emerging from the darkness ahead, heading straight for the ship. It took me a moment to realize it was another ship, and so I yelled, "SHIP AHEAD!" Soon many sailors arrived on deck, and Zheng stood beside me. "Good sighting," he murmured quietly. "Go get ready for battle. Those are pirates. Hostile pirates coming to steal our gold." Then he raised his voice and shouted to the other sailors, "PREPARE FOR BATTLE!"

And so we did. By the time the pirates came near our ship, we were ready. Our cannons blasted the pirate ship, blowing up bits of it. The pirates aimed their cannons back at us, rocking our ship. Then the pirates swung a rope across to our ship and climbed along it. We ran forward to meet them, and as the first of the pirates emerged, we swung our swords and shot our guns at them. I carried a long, silver sword, cutting and stabbing at the pirates in front of me, feeling more exhilarated than ever before. The pirates fell back as we fought, but more kept coming. The cries and yells of battle filled my ears. I slashed my sword swiftly at a pirate, watching in triumph as he collapsed at my feet. Slowly, more pirates fell back. We were winning! The crowd thinned until only a few pirates remained, who soon fled back to their ship. But we weren't letting them go that easily. We ran to the cannons and fired at them relentlessly. "Nobody dares to steal our treasure!" Zheng yelled. "We must show them that they cannot steal our treasure so easily!"

The pirates' ship was ruined. Fire burned on their decks, and huge holes covered their ship from the cannonballs we shot. A few more cannonballs and they would sink. But Zheng told us to stop. "We shall show them mercy today, but if they come back, we will destroy them," he said. We watched as the ship sailed away, until the ship came close to a small island. The ship rocked violently and sank, but we spotted many pirates appearing in the water and swimming onto the shore of the island. *They'll survive.* I thought. Zheng came up behind me. "You did a good job fighting, child. But it's about time you got off." I stared at him in surprise, but I understood. I was only a young person, and spending time with Ming Treasure Fleet, on the same ship as General Zheng, was already a great opportunity. I did not belong here now, but perhaps I could become a sailor when I grew older.

*A few days later...*

We arrived back in China. It was my time to leave this magnificent ship. Deep sadness lingered in me as I got off, Zheng at my side. As I stepped back on land, Zheng said, "You have been a great sailor. It has been an honour to sail with you, but now you must go. Perhaps one day we can sail together again." I nodded, filled with emotion as he turned and went back onto the ship. I watched as the ship sailed away into the distance, and I knew I would never forget the wonderful experience I had on the Ming Treasure Fleet.

# The Adventures of the Ming Treasure Fleet

*Po Leung Kuk Choi Kai Yau School, Tsang, Bernice – 10*

Sakura felt seasick – *again*. She had told her family many times that she couldn't be a proper pirate because she *knew* she would get seasick. She hugged her sides. Sakura was pretty sure the pirates on board were thoroughly annoyed with constant her seasickness, but the captain insisted she stay. She was also pretty sure that if her father hadn't told the captain and "convinced" him to let Sakura come on board, she wouldn't even be here. For her father was the great pirate Coblato. She sighed, wondering how she had wound up with such a *stubborn* parent. Sakura went above the deck and leaned on one of the rails on the side. Salt water splashed onto her arms. The wind whipped a few stray strands of hair from her messy bun onto her face. The ship was in a frenzy, and new recruits were coming on board every minute or so. Sakura watched the other scared sailors who were going to leave with her, but then she spotted a familiar face – Alara, her childhood friend. "My god, it's so *noisy* in here!" Alara shouted, with her hands pressed over her ears. Sakura couldn't help but agree. Alara's pretty green eyes darted from man to man, glaring at them. She rolled her eyes, and turned to Sakura. "They should be readying the ship now." Sakura nodded. "Yeah, sadly. I don't even wanna be here..." Soon after, the ship pulled up its anchor and gently departed from the dock.

Alara was sleeping when the whole ship lurched forward. Her eyes snapped open and she tucked herself under the covers. At first, she didn't hear the knocking coming from the door, but it quickly got louder and faster, as if the knocker was getting annoyed. "Coming!" Alara jumped out of bed and thrust open the door. A boy greeted her with a nod. "Max..." "Hello Alara, may I come in?" Max quickly made himself comfortable in Alara's extra bed. "Max! You're making the bed dirty!" Alara chided her brother. Max shrugged. "So what? Nobody uses this anyway." Alara clenched her teeth. "Just get off!" "Fine!" Max stood up. Alara thought, "*Why is he even here? What does he want from me? Is he just here to be an annoyance?*" "Hello?" Max waved his hand over her face. "Alara? You okay?" Alara shook herself from her thoughts. "I'm...okay." Max frowned, like he knew something *wasn't* okay, but then the door opened. It was Sakura, with a smile on her face. "Hey, come up to the deck. We've arrived."

Glittering lakes glistened in the sunlight. Tall trees covered the country. There were crowds of waving people at the side of the ocean, taking a look at the giant ship. The ship stopped at the dock and the people gathered around it. Pirates taking all sorts of treasures from the ship grinned, showing the people their crooked and missing teeth. "Where are we?" Alara asked, waving to one of the dark natives. "India," Sakura whispered back, smiling at the people, "We're giving the treasure to the people here. The Emperor thinks they will make a good ally." Alara understood why the Emperor wanted this country as an ally. The people were nice, strong, and seemed easy to control. Sakura nudged her arm. "Come on, Alara. We gotta go."

It would have been nice to walk around the new place with Sakura and her brother – except for the fact that they had to carry hundreds of pounds of gold. Alara muttered, "Do we *have* to carry these?" She lifted her sack, which packed full of gold coins. "I dunno, but it's heavy." Max was sweating a lot too. The

three grunted in agreement. Alara glanced around. “How far is this place? We’ve been trudging through this *terribly hot* country for *hours*. Where’s the—” Suddenly a yellow dart buried itself into her neck. Alara’s eyes rolled up into her head and she collapsed on the floor. Another dart flew straight at Max. Max fainted and fell down next to Alara. “ALARA! MAX!” Sakura screamed, as a third dart stung her in the neck. She collapsed on the cobblestone floor.

“Wake up!” Sakura heard a voice next to her, whispering harshly. “Sakura!” Sakura slowly opened her eyes, her mind foggy. “Wha—what?” She saw Max on the floor next to her. Sakura took in her surroundings. They seemed like they were in a dark cave. A dark cave with no exit. Pain seared into her neck, where the dart had landed. “Wh—where’s Alara?” Sakura looked around. Max’s voice was shaky. “They t—took her. I don’t know where t—they went, b—but...” He looked at Sakura. “Wh—what are they going to do with her?” She didn’t know how to answer. Her friend had been taken away and she didn’t know where or why. All Sakura could think of was that she would die in this ugly cave in the middle of who—knew—where, far, far away from home.

Elsewhere, Alara also woke up. She didn’t know where she was, who her kidnappers were, and what she was doing here. She only knew that she still had the gold beside her, and Max and Sakura were not here. She wanted to cry, but she couldn’t make a sound. Her kidnappers had put a gag in her mouth. Suddenly a muffled sound came from somewhere in the cave. “I’m telling you, the girl is one of the pirates from the Ming Treasure Fleet! She can tell us where all the gold is and then we can get as much as we want!” Another voice grunted in the darkness. “How can we be sure, Jerry?”. The one called Jerry sighed in disappointment. “You *have* to believe me, Nick!” *Nick?... Which meant the other guy was Cousin Jerry?* Alara thought. “Hey, Nick? You better check this out.” Jerry and Nick stepped into view. Jerry opened the bag full of treasures, which they were *planning* to give to the Indians. He poured it out, and gold bars and jewellery clattered on to the floor. Alara tried to shout at them, managing a muffled noise through her gag, which got their attention. “The girl wakes. Tell us where the rest of the gold is and I’ll let you go.” Nick whipped out a knife and walked towards Alara, pressing his knife under her chin when he reached her. “Jerry, help me remove the gag!” Jerry stumbled over and took off the gag. Finally, Alara could speak. “I’m Alara, your cousin! What are you doing?!”

“Alara? So that other boy is Max? I suppose the girl is his girlfriend?” Alara shouted, “Let me go!” Nick pouted. “What’s wrong, Alara? Why won’t you tell us where the gold is? I suppose we’ll just have to kill you if you don’t tell us where the rest of the gold is.” He raised his knife to Alara’s face, and lightly dragged his knife on her face, leaving a line of blood on her face. She cringed in pain, but there was nothing she could do. “Why would you kill your *own family* in *cold blood*? What *happened*?”

Nick snarled. “Poverty happened! I need money to pay for food for me and Jerry, and I don’t have it! Because *your family didn’t give me money to live my life*.”

“Do you *want to know what happened to my mother? She died. Because she didn’t have enough money to buy enough food for herself. She gave us all the food. She died because she didn’t eat enough. And you! You could’ve helped! You were rich. Yet you wouldn’t even donate a dollar. Do you wish to die?*” He dug the knife deeper into her throat. “You can die now. You wanted to be free. Here I am, giving

you a chance to be free *forever*.” He could have killed her if he wished, if Sakura and Max hadn’t chosen that time to suddenly burst into the room. But in the moment of panic, Nick thrust his knife into Alara’s gut.

Sakura screamed. Nothing seemed important now because her friend, Alara, was already half-dead. She screamed at the bandits, “YOU IDIOTS!” She found a rock and threw it at the shorter bandit’s head. He passed out cold. “YOU TOO!” She charged at the remaining bandit. “NO!” he yelled, before ducking out the way. “I won’t let you take her until one of you tells me the location of the ship!” He pointed at them with his knife. “I can kill Alara, you know. I can kill you all!” He looked like a maniac. “NOW!” He snarled. “Never!” yelled Max. “Well, say goodbye then.” He threw his knife at Alara. Alara screamed. “GET OUT OF HERE! GO! LEAVE ME HERE! PROMISE!” Alara was sobbing; tears streaked down her face. The knife had impaled her gut, and blood was gushing out. Alara smiled one more time. “Goodbye.” Sakura sobbed, but then she yelled, “DO YOU HAVE A DEATH WISH?!” She charged at Nick with a sharp rock. She stabbed him in the stomach, and said in his ear, “You’ll be going to the place where criminals die and receive eternal punishment. It’s complimentary.” The bandit bit the dust. Max looked at her with wide eyes. “You...you killed two people!” Sakura glanced over her shoulder, looking at the knocked out bandit. “Nah. Not exactly. But for Alara.” Max’s eyes were red. “Yeah. For Alara.” And together they walked out of the cave.

*Weeks later, the expedition of the Ming Treasure Voyages were over. Max and Sakura came home with many stories to tell. But they both never forgot the cave, where Alara died, and their promise. On the last day of the voyage, Max and Sakura took Alara’s things and tossed them into the ocean. They remembered their promise, told stories about Alara, and laughed during the sunset. They looked at the sinking possessions of Alara. “Promise.”*

# The Adventure with Pirates

*Po Leung Kuk Choi Kai Yau School, Tsui, Eunice – 10*

A long, long time ago in the Ming dynasty, I was once a young voyager on a fleet of ships that belonged to the emperor. We sailed the seven seas, carrying cargo filled with gold, silk and other precious treasures to give away as gifts to the people of the new lands we discovered during our journey. It was all good until one day an unforeseeable thunderstorm sank all our ships in the middle of the ocean. I was the sole survivor, adrift on the wreckage of the ship for few days, until one hopeless and foggy day, through the thick fog came a humongous ship. It was not just any other ship. It was the ship of the almighty and most feared pirates of the seas, the Sharks. They were a band of pirates sailing the seven seas with the sole purpose of finding land and loot. Some said they had even been to the end of the world in the mission to find treasures. Everyone feared them for they had attacked every village or city they ever visited. The military forces tried everything to eradicate the pirates, but it was useless because the pirates were too strong. Each of them was highly armed with cutlasses and swords and all new types of gizmos that were highly dangerous.

The pirates were notorious for their cold-blooded killing wherever they went. That was why they were called the Sharks. I didn't expect they would save me at all. To my surprise, they threw me a lifeline and lowered a rope ladder on the side of their ship. But I was unsure whether I should get on board the pirate ship. I was not sure what would happen to me on that ship. If I were to be enslaved to the pirates, I would rather drown and die in the big ocean. I could not make up my mind and I was losing my strength, but just as I was about to sink into the depths of the ocean, a strong pair of arms pulled me up onto a boat. The man who saved me took me back to their ship. I was petrified, and my legs were shaking with fear. I tried to run but my legs were glued to the deck. Who wouldn't be scared if he was surrounded by a band of pirates? Not to mention they were the Sharks! Suddenly, I was pushed towards a pole. As my back hit the hard wood, I felt a knife pressed against my throat. I screamed, "What do you want? Leave me alone!" Just then the captain of the ship spoke up, "Oui madame vous allez voyager avec nous maintenant, s'il vous plait soyez tranquille." I was so confused. It seemed, they were from somewhere far away from China and did not speak our language.

From that day onwards, all my days were spent on the pirate ship with them. I didn't know why but the pirates did not treat me badly. Rather they were very kind to me. They taught me their language, which I later found out was French. As time went by, I adapted to their lifestyle and treated them like family. I soon became fluent in French so that we could communicate. I started training to be like them. I learnt to be brave and ruthless, strong and ferocious. Before I knew it, I was fighting alongside with them to claim loot and land. They taught me the tricks of the trade. I also learnt how to sail and keep the ship in mint condition. They always said, "You only live once, so cherish it and live your life to the fullest!" and so I did. Those were the best moments of my life. Gradually, I forgot about my family and warm cosy home.

Some years later, however, when we were attacking a village, I saw a family huddled close together whimpering. Suddenly, the sweet memories of my family and loved ones came flooding back to me. Oh, how I missed them so much. I desperately wanted to go home but I knew that they wouldn't let me. The pirates had grown quite fond of me. If I left, they would definitely think that I was a traitor! I was stuck. But one day I gathered up my courage and asked for my freedom. They were shocked at first, but in the end they agreed to let me go. I was ashamed because I owed them my life, yet I was relieved that I could finally get back home. I said a loving farewell to the pirates, and that was the end of my fabulous adventure with them. Though I never saw them again, they will always be in my heart and I will never forget the adventures that we had together. Adieu mes amis pirates!



# Horns of Dilemma on The Majestic

*Pui Ching Primary School, Au, Nga Wun Adelaide – 11*

The weather was much better than I had expected. I whistled a joyful tune while carrying Chinese herbal medicines in my rucksack. Tangerine peels and pumpkin seeds rocked back and forth on my wooden cabinet as we sailed on our ship, The Majestic.

The Captain was Zheng He. I couldn't exaggerate how respectable he was. I grew up in Beijing with him. All I had ever seen him do was donate money to the poor while offering words of wisdom to those in need. He was also the one who encouraged me to become a medic. He was a captain, a mentor and a confidant. The emperor ordered master Zheng He to take the crew and me to Vietnam, in order to trade goods with them. The emperor wanted us to disguise ourselves as pirates, so no one would come steal our goods. I guess you could say we tried to do 'good' for the world, while pretending to be pirates.

My job on the ship was to heal the sick and injured. Be it beggars, common people, officials or kings, I treated them all just the same. It's not for the money or reputation, but to feed my dream since I was a child. It all started like this: A deadly plague, killed thousands in my village, including my whole family. I was lucky to survive but I was so depressed that I felt dead inside. As my broken heart healed, I realized that the problem was that there weren't enough doctors. That's when I made a vow – "I will work hard to become a doctor. No one in my presence should ever die the way my family did."

We arrived in Vietnam. The king welcomed us into his palace. We had a hot bath, some new clothes, a scrumptious meal and received luxurious goods in return from him. We hopped on our ship once again and started sailing back to Beijing.

Not long after, another pirate fleet named "Toxic Dragon" came out to attack us. An epic battle, unlike anything I had seen before, began. Men fought, pouncing onto one another, stabbing and killing. The smell of blood, sweat and gunpowder overwhelmed my senses. While the battle surged on, I stood there motionless, in the corner with fearful eyes. Slowly and slowly, I saw my friends fall to their death. We were going to lose. Zheng He was fighting the leader of "Toxic Dragon", a muscular smug-faced man. His name was Gilch.

I wanted to help him, but the thought of hurting anyone with my hands made my limbs freeze. I felt like I had no control over my limbs. I stood there like a brick. Emotionless. That's when I caught a glimpse of a seriously injured man, crouching on the ground in pain. At once, I rushed to him, carrying him on my arms back to my cabin. His nose was broken, and it seemed that his ribs had cracked. I thought, "No matter what, I have to heal him.."

I put him on the bed, and realized that he was still conscious. The minute I washed the blood on his face, I quivered. It was Gilch. Right then, one of our crew dragged Zheng He with a swollen eye and broken fingers into my cabin. Even though he wasn't seriously injured, my heart sank. Seeing your captain, who has been so helpful and caring to you, a person you see as your idol hurt, how would you feel?

There are ups and downs in life and this one was one of my hardest times. I had to choose: help my enemy who was seriously hurt and nearly dying or help my mentor who was less injured. I wanted to save both but I didn't have enough time.

I looked up at the clouds and made a wish, "Please, don't let the sun go down, I need time!" Time did not stop for me so I used my gut feeling to make the choice: to help Toxic Dragon's captain, Gilch. And for Zheng, he was suddenly losing a lot of blood but I knew deeply inside me, that Zheng He would have agreed with my choice.

Word got out that Gilch was badly hurt, and that the healer of The Majestic was healing him. The minute they heard this, the crew members of the Toxic Dragon put down their swords. When they came to my cabin, our crew were dumbstruck about Zheng's body but the Toxic Dragons confronted them in peace and thanked me for saving their captain.

The emperor understood why I chose our enemy over Zheng and was thrilled about the successful trading. However, the emperor also learnt that he shouldn't let us disguise as pirates next time in case the same thing happens! The Toxic Dragons were not punished at all since they were incredibly good sailors. The emperor gave them new names to honor them and they were the main sailors of our fleet in our second voyage. However, the happiest thing that happened in this journey was that I chose the right choice and I learnt that you cannot save everyone, no matter how hard you try.

# The Sea Serpent and the Red and the Diary

*Pui Ching Primary School, Chan, Man Hei Hayley – 12*

## Day One

Hi! This is the first time to write this journal so it might be a bit weird. I am the pirate in Zheng's crew, The Red. I am not sure I can tell you my real name now. And you must remember that my favourite tea is pu'er tea! Today was fantastic! Our captain, Zheng usually gives away gold but today we finally received something worth going out to the sea for! I was sitting on the chair and daydreaming about my imaginary boyfriend, Kan.

Then I suddenly heard Zheng yell, "All aboard! We have arrived at another island. This one looks fabulous! Red, follow me!"

I packed up my things fast and followed him to the island.

We passed through trees and bushes then we saw a small village filled with people and joy. The villagers were really kind. They even have a party for us! And the greatest part, we received a silver egg from them!

## Day Two

Today was the worst day ever! You remember that I received a silver egg yesterday? It was all fine and the sun was shining on our flag. I was having a dream about my Kan last night when I suddenly heard someone yell, "Oh no! The egg has disappeared! Call Captain Zheng immediately!"

I was really shocked when I heard this. I went out of my cabin and a few minutes later, Captain Zheng arrived. The crew yelled at him, including me.

"Stop!" yelled Captain Zheng. We all stopped yelling and looked at him.

"Well," He continued, "Don't forget what the king said. The king told us to go to different islands and make friends! That's why we are here. Don't think about the egg. Get back to work!"

We walked back to our positions and started to work. I walked back to my cabin and thought, "Oh yeah, I will follow what our 'great' captain's idea." Then I sat down and thought about what happened to the egg and what the villagers said on the island.

## Day Three

It's a bit weird. I just found out that some sailors disappeared! I looked for them everywhere over the ship but still couldn't find them. I didn't tell Captain Zheng about this but I told my friend Gon. He was the type of the boy that always has a book on his hand. He didn't want to join the crew but the captain thought he was really clever and he had persuaded him for three days until he joined the crew. I had told him we will discuss the sailors disappearing thing in my cabin tonight.

"Hmm.....Red, do you think this happened because of that egg disappearance?" Gon asked me.

"I don't know. Why?" I asked him.

"I had read a book before about magical creatures and the sea serpent is one of them. You remember? It was really sunny that day. Almost every magical creature is born on sunny days."

I closed my eyes and started to think about what Gon said. Suddenly, the ship shook. I got out of the cabin and looked what happened outside. Gon followed me.

I couldn't believe my eyes! I saw a gigantic blue sea serpent attacking pirates everywhere! Lightning was everywhere. The sky was crying. Raindrops fell on our cheeks. It was really messy. Captain Zheng waved his sword to attack the sea serpent. I asked Captain Zheng What happened.

"We don't know. I think it is a sea serpent." Captain Zheng replied.

Then he started to attack the sea serpent with his mighty sword again. It seems like that the sea serpent knew that Captain Zheng was attacking him. He lifted his tail and tried to sweep Zheng away. Luckily, Zheng jumped over his tail then he lifted his sword and stabbed the sea serpent. But the sea serpent wasn't hurt. Sailors started to throw rocks. Pirates started to stabbed the sea serpent. And some of them threw their favourite grape wine. Everyone was really sad that he ate our sailors. But everything was hopeless

When I threw my favourite pu'er tea at it, I spotted a red spot on its blue, shiny head... Without a thought, I threw the box of tea to the red scale. The next second I saw that the sea serpent uttered a dismal howl. The sea serpent's weakness was that red spot. Then I jumped as high as I could. I took Zheng's sword and run all over his long body. I went closer to that scale and at last I reached it. But it was really hard to kill. I stopped running and jumping. Then I realized a huge tail was in front of my face. And whoopee! I landed on my head. I felt really bad. Then I saw Zheng's hand.

He said, "We are going to kill that monster together!" His words gave me a lot of courage. Then I grabbed my own sword from the cabin. First we walked in zigzag to distract the sea serpents. We held our sword tightly and climbed on to his neck in two different sides. Other sailors on the ground took their own weapons and attacked the sea serpent immediately. Captain and I held the sea serpent's ear and jumped on his huge head. We signalled each other and lifted our swords and bam! The sea serpent died. Captain Zheng gave me its red scale as a gift. You can know my name now. My name is Cetus. It means a sea serpent.

# Adventure on Dead Island

*Pui Ching Primary School, Cheng, Hiu Ming Veron – 11*

“Alright, fellas! Let’s pack the booty and set sail!” Ying, captain of the Ming Voyagers, exclaimed. Ying wore creepy and dirty pirate clothes, he had red hair and devilish eyes. Boy, was he terrifying! His scars on his face frightens the most of people, rumor has it that his scars were made by his deepest enemies. They carried gold, silk anything what nice millionaires would give! Moreover, they’re giving it to sailors as gifts! They made new relationships with a variety of countries. But for this journey was definitely the most terrifying, heartbreaking journey of them all.

They had to set sail to a two villages they have never been before. It was Kalami Island and Dead Island. The sky was as grey as an elephant.

“I think a storm is coming...” Ying said.

“But Cap,” Jin said, “we’ve checked the weather today, the sun shone very brightly just now. Then that means—”

Before he finished his sentence. A giant octopus-headed sea monster glared at them with rage. It had human-looking arms and legs and a pair of devilish wings on its back and tentacles surrounding its supposed mouth. It was called a Cthulhu.

“Duck!” Ying commanded everyone to take out their golden pistols, “Fire!”

Some of the crew loaded up the cannons and some shot the Cthulhu.

“It’s not working!” Ying then climbed up to the Crow’s Nest. Bang! The Cthulhu eyes went red to white. It slowly sank down the ocean and never returned. The crew cheered joyfully as they have defeated the creature. Then they quickly gave the treasures to Kalami Islanders and set sail to their next stop.

“Our Yardarm is quite crooked and some parts in the ship are damaged...hold on... Dead Island is in front of us!” They showed the crew around the village and showed them a place to stay. Since the ship needed time to be repaired. Ying got to meet the emperor there.

The ship was repaired and new. When they were about to set sail, they heard a loud horn blowing. Ying couldn’t believe his eyes, it was the Dead Island’s emperor! His face wasn’t full of joy anymore; it was just full of anger and hatred. Ying was shockingly speechless to see the princess standing next to the emperor. If you don’t know who the princess is, let me tell you a tale about this bitter-sweet love story.

It all started when Ying was just 16, training for voyages and mastering naval combat. While he was training with his father, he accidentally hurt himself. Father rushed him to the hospital as soon as possible. When he was still healing from his wounds, he met this kind nurse called Delliah. She would usually talk to him in her free time. Ying started to enjoy her presence. One starry night, Ying finally had enough courage to confess to Delliah. Then, they became the sweetest couple in town. Unfortunately, after a few months, Ying had to continue following his father’s footsteps.

“Don’t worry,” he said, “I’ll come back”

Then he left, leaving Delliah alone.

“Delliah?” Ying said, seeing the love of his life.

“I loved you!” Delliah shouted, “You said you would come back for me!”

“When you left my father got terribly ill. I stole medicine from the hospital and ended up in jail I arrived to Dead Island three nights before you. Last night, I told the emperor you are a traitor.”

“Now... you’ll know what’s like to be heartbroken.”

Everything snapped back to reality when Delliah fired an arrow straight at Ying’s face. Luckily, Ying’s heart wasn’t shattered enough, just in time to dodge the arrow. The scene was terrific! Sounds of gun shots, innocent screams, shattering buildings spread across the island. The Dead Island soldier’s faces were so full of hate; they didn’t hesitate to fight for their emperor. The Ming Voyagers didn’t give up as they used all their might to leave the island as soon as possible. They didn’t stop until the sound of horns faded away. They reached in the middle of the ocean, not knowing where they were; around them were just fog and silence. Ying couldn’t concentrate. He was still analyzing her words. Then, he stayed in his bed.

The next morning, Ying got up early. The weather was still like a dust bunny. He slowly crept to the front deck, thinking again. Suddenly, he heard a sound. It sounded like the Dead Islander’s horn! Ying swiftly called everyone to prepare for battle. The loud raging thunder began the battle. The battle between good and evil commenced! Cannons were fired, sounds of swords clanging and slashing. Nobody stopped nor surrendered. The sea was raging; it rocked both boats with ease. Delliah shot almost a quarter of the Ming Voyagers. She took every chance to kill Ying. Delliah aimed at him but shot Jin instead. Ying’s blood

started to boil as he pointed his rifle straight at Delliah's face Bang! It all happened so fast. Regret and guiltiness stabbed Ying in the heart. Seeing Delliah's whited eyes made his body numb. The Ming Voyagers called the captain to find shelter, but all he did was lying on the floor. Full of tears. He opened his eyes, the sounds of doom disappeared and the rushing waves returned. Only he and half of the crew were injured. "We beat them, Cap..." crew member Chee said.

Ying teared once again as he realized that the Ming Voyagers had done so much for him and he was just sobbing about shooting the love of his life. They returned back to the Ming Dynasty. Everyone was thrilled to see them. The crew hugged their parents tight, but Ying was all alone. This tale definitely deserves to be recorded in history, as Ying promises to him that he could never love another again.

# Our Journey to a Secret

*Pui Ching Primary School, Ching, Hin Shing Bernard – 10*

Hi, I am Leung Hao, Captain of The United. I have dedicated my life to give food, water and money to the poor people. Come with me to join one of our most exciting journey. We were heading to our ship. We stepped on the ship with our right feet because we thought it would be lucky.

We needed to go to Jolia Island to find our enemy Lao Kiu to reveal his secret.

“Ahoy, Matey,” yelled the quarter master, Leung.

After all of us stepped in, the crew started to chat.

“Avast ye,” I shouted, “Lots of people need us. We must do it.”

The helmsman, Lee, steered the wheel and off we went. The sea was calm and quiet that day.

Suddenly, a man dressed in old clothes jumped on our ship and attacked us. All of us took out our cutlasses and attacked back. It was a tough battle. At last, we tied him up and I yelled, “Get rid of him!” So, Leung pushed him into the rough sea.

But as soon as Leung killed the man, the sea brewed up a storm. Huge waves splashed on us. Lee tried to control the ship but he could not. Suddenly, a sea serpent appeared. We used our cannons to shoot it but it just swallowed the cannon balls and grew bigger. So, Lee steered our ship away and we escaped with great difficulty.

We disembarked on Inohect Island. We knew that there were a lot of robbers wanting to steal gold, so it was time for some work. We hid in the ship to observe the surroundings. We saw thieves that stole food, water and money from the poor people. We charged out and used our pistols to shoot the thieves but all of them missed. We used the last pack of our bullets and we hit the target at last. The thieves died. We gave the things that had been stolen back to the poor people.

An old lady thanked us and gave us some spears in return. “These special spears have unpredictable powers,” she whispered in my ear.

We started our journey again. Suddenly, we saw Lao Kiu and his gang. As we were about to start a fight, there came a storm. Lao’s gang was scared, so they turned and ran away. We chased after them and used our cannons to shoot them. But they used magic to take the cannon balls away. Now we knew that there was a sorcerer in their gang, we had to be more careful. I asked Leung, Biao and Yeung observe the surroundings. They each came back with information. Leung said he heard that Lao was actually my father. Biao said it was true and the only reason Lao wanted to attack me was because he wanted me to join him. Yeung said it was all true and he even heard that the sorcerer was actually my uncle.

I was so shocked. Three years ago, I thought my dad and my uncle had died. I had to find out what happened. We followed them until we arrived at Jolia Island. This time I asked Lee, Wong and Yao to sneak in and spy on them. They came back and told me that my Dad’s base was The Lava, but we needed to use a password to get in.

I remembered when I was young, Dad always said, “Haga Yajia!”

So, when Lee and I reached the gate at The Lava, I said, “Haga Yajia!” The gate opened. We needed to sneak in in disguise. Just as we were thinking of what to do, the spears glowed and changed us into servant costumes. We joined the gang and served them food.

Lao said, “Thank you, my dear dear son.” I was shocked at that moment. I thought my uncle had used magic to see through our brains, but I did not say a word. When we went back to our room, Lee told me that Lao says this to every servant.

Just then, Lao’s guards knocked on our door and asked for our names. We quickly thought of a name to tell them and they went away. A moment later, they came back and asked us to follow them. They took us to Lao. He asked, “Is your name Lei Ming?” That was the name I told the guards. “Yes,” I answered. “Do you know who I am?” Lao asked. “Lao Kiu.” I answered. “Send them to the dungeon immediately!” Lao roared and the guards dragged us to the dungeon. On the way to the dungeon, Lee whispered, “no one here knows his name.”

When we arrived at the dungeon, there was nothing except darkness.

“I am Leung Hao!” I shouted.

I was not sure if they heard me, but a moment later, Lao came in.

“Leung,” a heard a voice, “I’m your father. My name is Leung Hang.” At that time, I smiled.

“Can you come with us?” I said and remembered the old lady who said, “These special spears have unpredictable powers.” So I took out the spears. The weapons glowed so bright and Dad answered “Yes, yes...” as he changed into an angel.

“Hao,” he said, “I love you. Please take care.”

“What is going on?” I asked and saw Uncle above Dad.

But there was no answer. Suddenly, Lee and I flew up and fell back onto The United.

“Are you guys okay?” Leung asked.

“Fine.” I said.

So the secret had been revealed. Lao (Leung) was my father. He died and transformed into a ghost to find me. But during the search, he stole things from people and became our enemy. And at the moment we united, his wish had come true so he could go to heaven with my uncle.

Dad, I miss you!

# The Magic Sword

*Pui Ching Primary School, Chiu, King Chi Josh – 11*

On a bright sunny day long ago in China, a band of muscular men marched towards the palace, but they weren't ordinary type of people you would see on the street, they were pirates! The pirates respectfully bowed and spoke in unison, "Greetings, your majesty." The king was shocked at the pirates' arrival.

"Who are you and what do you want?" He shouted.

"We are a band of pirates named Ming Voyage. We have brought some gifts for you." they said.

The king looked at them in disbelief and so the leader of the pirates, Captain Chan began to tell the King the story of his past.

Captain Chan used to be a cruel pirate who took pleasure in looting people. Until one day, everything changed. While he was strolling down the street looking for people to plunder, he heard a baby crying loudly in the distance. Driven by curiosity, he followed the noise and found an old rickety hut. He peered through the window and saw a poor family with nearly nothing to eat except some stale bread. He was shocked by the sight and realised that while he was living a luxurious life by stealing people's belongings, a lot of people were living in despair! He felt ashamed and swore never to rob a single person ever again. Instead, he gathered his crew to give away their treasure to the neediest so that they can bring happiness to others. He called his team Ming Voyage.

As soon as the Captain finished telling his heart touching story, the pirates started taking dozens of gold blocks out of a beautiful silk pouch. They asked the king to help them distribute the treasure to the people in need living across the kingdom. The king was touched by Captain Chan's story and felt happy to help. After leaving the palace, the pirates went to board their ship. They looked at their ship and said, "What a magnificent beauty Theora is! She shall take us to Joseon."

And so, they began their journey. On their way to Joseon, they faced enormous waves as high as mountains, large fishes that could swallow a person in one gulp and evil pirates who wanted to sink their ship, but each time the pirates fended them off bravely. When they were about to reach Joseon, they saw a gigantic snake like monster with tentacles flaying terrorizing a coastal village.

"I'm going to stuff that freaking monster into Davy Jones' Locker!" Captain Chan shouted.

He grabbed his finest cutlass and prepared to fight the monster, which was a Leviathan. The pirates blasted cannonballs at the monster, but the monster's skin was so thick that nothing they used could penetrate through it. Instead, the cannonballs annoyed the monster. The leviathan finally turned its attention away from the village and at the pirate ship. It swung its long and powerful tentacles at the pirate ship and tried to tear it apart. The pirates did their best to fend it off, but it was no use. The monster was simply too strong for them. Just when all hope seemed lost, Captain Chan remembered that the splendid samurai sword he looted from a Japanese ship when he was a malicious teenager. He dashed into his room to grab the sword and drew it from its scabbard. As soon as Captain Chan took out the sword, it began to

glow. Suddenly, a bolt of lightning hit the sword. Sparks started dancing around the sword. Captain Chan was stunned. Realizing that it was no ordinary sword, he pointed the sword at the monster and shot out a lightning flash towards the leviathan. The leviathan, blasted by the force of lightening directed towards it, fell back and disappeared back into the sea.

Captain Chan knew that hurting a sea monster brought back luck. Just then, a gigantic whirlpool appeared on the calm water surface. It was conjured up by the leviathan the pirates had fought with and it was seeking revenge. The whirlpool spun faster and faster trying to suck the pirate ship into it. The pirates tried to steer their ship away from the whirlpool, but it was no use. The whirlpool was so strong that it ripped the ship apart. The ship, together with the pirates, were sucked to the bottom of the ocean and gobbled up by the leviathan. Just before Captain Chan also became the last bit of meal of the monster, the quartermaster pushed the captain away from the whirlpool with all his strength and sacrificed himself to save the captain's life. Before he disappeared under the water, he gave one last silent glare at the captain and the meaning was clear: Make it count.

Captain Chan had no time to grieve. He quickly raised the samurai sword and charged it with lightning. He then wound up his hand and swung the sword at the whirlpool at a terrifying speed. The sword went right through the water and embedded itself in the leviathan's head. The monster gave one last bone-chilling cry and was never seen again. Once again, the water was as smooth as glass. Captain Chan propped himself onto a piece of wreckage and slowly floated back to shore.

The villagers living in the coastal village all cried in joy. They gratefully thanked Captain Chan and told the Joseon emperor how the pirates defeated the monster. The Joseon emperor was pleased and



thankful. To show his gratitude, he gave Captain Chan a new ship loaded with treasure and a lot of spicy yet scrumptious kimchi.

Despite having all these wonderful gifts, Captain Chan felt heartbroken for the loss of his crew. The thought of the wonderful time they spent together giving gifts to the people in need sent tears rolling down his cheeks, but he was more determined than ever to continue his quest of helping people in need.

# Father and Son

*Pui Ching Primary School, Chung, Chi Yuen Chase – 11*

“Waaa–Waaa...” A small crying sound broke the silence in the little hut. Cheung Hoi Ting was born in Hong Kong, China. They were a happy family until 3rd March, 1389. Their father buried something in the forest near their hut. Then their father was never to be seen again. His mum told him that his father died. Two months after Cheung’s father’s disappearance, the Heffelies moved to a new hut which was close to the harbor and the China royal fleet. James often went to the harbor to hear the stories of pirates, told by the British sailors from the China Royal Fleet. Once, he heard stories about one of the most famous pirate captain of China, Captain Bullseye. Captain Bullseye lead a fleet of pirates called The Monsters, but the Monsters weren’t ordinary sailors killing and stealing ships, they were pirates who stole from the rich and gave to the poor. This made them quite popular because of all the “kind” things they had done. However, the rich people hate them, they used their money and power to convince the China Royal Fleet General, General Man, to capture The Monsters.

When James was 18 years old, he decided to join the China Royal Fleet and he was now part of one of the most powerful ship of the China Royal Fleet, The Victoria, as a powder monkey, who is the gunner’s assistance. They often went to patrol the seas near Hong Kong. Their job was to keep the coast of Hong Kong safe and to protect the people in the coast from pirates which were popular in the 13th century. Because the seas were usually peaceful, he was always busy cleaning the deck and the toilets which were often very dirty and stinky. One day, when Cheung was cleaning the bathroom, his captain, Captain Rex, yelled from the deck.

“Cheung! We are under attack! Come to the cannons and help the gunner!”

James quickly raced to the deck and he saw the most horrifying sight unfolded in his eyes. Blood was everywhere. Dead bodies lied on the wooden deck. The next thing he saw was a few pirates slicing Captain Rex’s head off his body and blood flying everywhere. Cheung screamed.

“Nooo!”

But he regretted it as soon as the words came out of his mouth. The pirates noticed him and closed in on him slowly, raising their weapons and pointing them to Cheung. Suddenly, Cheung saw a big ship with a big “M” on one of the sails on the giant ship. It was the flag ship of the Monsters, The Trista! The ship stopped, like it was going to cough loudly, and it did. The ship coughed out two cannon balls out of her mouths beside the ship’s body, and hit right into the pirates that were threatening Cheung! The Victoria started to sink. Luckily, the ship sent out a small raft and the sailors helped James on the little boat. The crew took him back to the main ship and introduced Captain Bullseye to him.

They said that they came to Britain because they stole some gold in China and they want to give it to the poor in Britain. So the pirates came here. James asked the pirates why they helped him and they said that the pirates who were threatening James were the top enemies of The Monsters and they hated pirates who liked torturing people. They said that the evil pirates had a fleet called Kraken and the leader was called Captain Chung. They went to shore and gave the poor and they said that James was now a member of The Monsters and that they were going to Sheng Hai to mend their ship, The Trista.

“Set sail to Sheng Hai!” The pirate yelled.

The sea was rough but The Monsters sailed happily until they saw the most unexpected sight. It was the Krakens! They saw The Trista, and they attacked The Monsters, shooting cannon balls at The Trista. Pirates also shot their pistols, muskets and swung to the ship armed with sabers and daggers. Suddenly, Cheung saw a shocking sight. He thought he saw his father, but it couldn’t be true. His father should be long dead! He tried to forget it but he couldn’t shake it off and concentrated on the battle. The feeling was too strong! He saw enemies swinging into The Trista and he caught sight of a familiar face. It was different, but not much. The man was fighting his friend, but when he took a glimpse on Cheung, he dropped his sword and his jaw dropped too.

The man was no ordinary pirate, he was Cheung’s father! However, his friend did not know this and charged at him with his sword. Cheung’s instincts kicked in and fired his pistol and hit his friend right in his head! The body collapsed on the deck, and it was the end of him. Cheung was sad but relieved because he saved his father’s life. He joined forces with his father, and they quickly beat them. After the epic battle, Cheung’s father told him the truth. The dreaded truth.

Cheung’s father told him that he always wanted to have a more exciting life, since he had a miserable and boring childhood. Once he heard about The Krakens, and he always wanted to join. One night, he and Cheung’s mother had a big argument about him joining The Krakens. He decided to join them secretly, so it was the reason he disappeared. Cheung finally solved the huge question in deep inside him.

Little did Cheung knew the adventures have just begun.

# The Five Golden Coins' s Horrible History

*Pui Ching Primary School, Fung, Po Lam Esmond – 11*

Ken was a kind, polite and sweet boy. He had long, black hair, two big, bright eyes and a tall nose. Every Tuesday, he went on the Angel mountain to find treasures because he thinks that finding them is secret and fun. One day in the morning, while he was walking along the grassland, he saw a big team of guys, who were hitting his best friend, Jill, he quickly ran to them to stop the arguing.

Ken said loudly, "Hey! What are you doing? Get away from here, quickly, or you will be sorry!"

But one man shouted back to Ken, "What are you doing here? I am Peter. Your friend knows where the last golden rock is and I must find it!"

Later, Ken and Jill and the good pirates thought of a good idea: find the treasure together and share it. They thought this idea was great so they promised that they will not betray each other. They walked into a dark forest in the mountain to find the golden rock together. When they found it, they started a little argument again! The golden rock couldn't be shared, and if they cut it into two big pieces, it will break! Oh no! How did they solve the problem? The pirates betrayed Ken and Jill. After that, the five pirates got it and brought it to their pirate ship, called The Ming Treasure.

Jill knew that his friend, Ken was really disappointed, so Jill told him, "If you really want to find the pirates and the treasures, I can go with you next Saturday." After Ken hearing Jill's words, Ken suddenly felt moved and burst into tears.

He cried out loudly and screamed, "Jill! I have been waited long for this moment. Let's start sailing as soon as possible!"

The following day, Jill bought a small wooden boat in the wood shop behind his family house. They met each other at 5 o'clock at the pier. Ken and Jill started to ride on their tiny boat in the evening. When it was dark, the boat shook a lot but the brave children still weren't afraid.

In midnight, they all slept deeply. Their boat rocked them as if it was singing a lullaby to Ken and Jill. When they woke up in the sunny morning, they founded that they were in an enormous pirate ship. All of a sudden, a loud voice made them feel dizzy.

"Ahoy! Good morning! Tiny children! " A young, tall pirate exclaimed loudly. Jill and Ken felt scared at that time.

They thought, "Oh my goodness! Where are we?"

The pirate captain replied, "Welcome to our ship, Ming Treasure! The good Captain Jackson saw another bad pirate ship called The Death Pearl with his long telescope and he knew that a war was starting very soon. Bang! The ship fired.

"Fire! The treasure is mine!" Captain Jackson said loudly.

The sky turned dark. The big waves hit the boat. Another pirate, Captain Garbish has searched for the last treasure, the last golden coin, for a long time already and live forever to kill pirates who stand on his way. Whoever had all five golden coins will live forever. If the bad Captain Garbish found the last golden coin, he will have everlasting life and kill anybody who blocks his way! Ken and Jill were on pins and needles in that frightening moment. Luckily, Ken and Jill had an idea to separate Captain Garbish and his four golden coins! Ken called the pirates to throw the ship's rope to climb to the Garbish's ship. After that, they tried to throw away one of Garbish's coins. If the bad captain lost a coin, he will never have everlasting life!

Although the weather was horrible, the pirates succeeded.

Luckily, the last golden coin was found by the good pirate, Peter.

He shouted, "Hey! If you all don't want to die, surrender to us and give the four golden coins to me now!" And the Death Pearl pirates gave the four coins to Peter. When the war stopped, there was a big swirl in the sea again! The ocean looked very furious and wanted to swallow the two pirate ships in the middle of the sea!

"We're in really big trouble!" screamed the crew. "What should we do? Our ship is going to sink!" said Ken.

"Hold on, everyone! We are going to have an exciting ride on our ship. Ha! Ha! Ha!" Captain Jackson shouted.

Then, The Death Pearl hit the Ming Treasure, "Bang!"

The swirl spun stronger and stronger and the waves also grew higher and higher. The Death Pearl took this opportunity to attack the Ming Treasure,

“Attack them! We must win this war! Although we don’t have enough cannonballs, we will kill all of you! Watch this!” The bad pirates used strange materials like wood, spoons, forks, glass and so on. Unluckily, The Death Pearl won the war and tied all the good crew members around the boat!

“Let us go! Please!” Peter said. Garbish’s crew, Methen screamed, “If you really don’t want to die, give me back the coins!” However, Peter still refused.

Methen drew his long, black and hard gun and ...bang bang! Peter fired and Methen dropped to the floor. This moment was horrible, people bleeding on the ship’s board, blood spreading everywhere. The Death Pearl sank in the hungry ocean. Peter used his sharp sword to cut off the rope and free the crew, then he fixed the broken parts of the ship. Finally, they said goodbye. “Thank you so much for helping us!” Ken and Jill replied together.

At last, the good pirates sent Ken and Jill back to their home. “I hope that your Ming Treasure can take you to places you want to explore and find treasures! Goodbye!” The good girl, Ming Treasure brought the pirates back to the beautiful ocean and sailed to the sea joyfully again.

# The Legendary Treasure

*Pui Ching Primary School, Khong, Cassandra – 11*

“Ahoy!” I said, “let’s pack our stuff and set sail.”

The pirates waved goodbye to their family and friends, as their ships began to sail away. You would think that we would steal from villagers and kill innocent people. But no, in fact we did the opposite. We searched for treasure and gave some to the sailors to bring back home. We were pirates, but of the good kind.

As we got on the Imagistic, the sea was calm and peaceful like a sleeping infant. The sky was blue and the sun was smiling up in the sky when all of a sudden the sky turned grey and lightning flashed across. Suddenly, our ship was pulled towards a mysterious green mist. The mist awoke thunder and lightning. The sailors were dizzy and everything went black. When we woke up, they were on an island that looked interesting. On the island, a few children were playing in the pouring rain. We found a hotel in the small but welcoming town.

We stayed in the hotel for a night and afterwards, the royal guards took us to see the king and princess at the palace. The palace was stunning; it took our breath away. It was made of pure jade, gold and silver. We went in and bowed to the king. Suddenly, the princess next to him caught my eye. She had long hair which trailed down to her feet and she had big brown eyes just like my old childhood friend. I wasn’t sure that the princess was my old friend so I waited until someone called her and said her name. Then, the king called her Jade! She was my friend. She recognized me as well!

Jade joined our crew of pirates and we went in search for the lost treasure that no pirate had been able to find. But I was different: I had the legendary map! The map was passed down from generation to generation in my family, but no member of my family thought that the treasure existed. So I had to show them that I was right.

We sailed for days and days according to the map. I was started to feel like a failure, but when I wanted to turn back, the island came in view! We found the entrance leading to the treasure! Some mean looking goblins were guarding the door. We offered lots of things to them but they refused. One of the goblins spoke to me.

“What has no eyes no feet and no hands but it can clean?” the goblin said.

It was a riddle, and he would only let me pass if I answered it correctly.

“Water,” I said.

The pesky goblins let us in but also reminded us of the dangers of what is lurking inside. We went inside, going deeper in the cave, not aware of the dangers ahead. All of a sudden, a bunch of trolls found us. They had slimy hair and tough claws. I wasn’t the least scared because I had learned about them in my lessons at school. They were tough looking, but they were really scared at heart. The mean looks were just to scare us away. I screamed at them and they ran away at once!

Jade was shocked by how I scared them away, I told her these were no ordinary trolls, they were the scared cat’s trolls, and they are almost scared of everything. We went deeper in the cave and a glimpse of shimmer caught my eye. A pile of golden coins was lying above a rusty chest. I thought to myself, this must be the legendary treasure!

“Hooray!” I shouted. “We found it!”

Exhilarated, we rushed towards the chest but suddenly a giant turtle stopped in the middle of our path.

“It said that only a member of the Cheng family can take the treasure away,” spoke the giant turtle.

“I am Caroline Cheng,” I said “A member of the Cheng family.”

The old turtle let us take the treasure and we went back to our boat. As we sailed along the peaceful sea. All seemed calm, until The Creamy, another pirate ship attacked us. It ordered that we put down the treasure and hand it over, but that was an impossible thing for me. The treasure was from my great grandfather. I wouldn’t give it up for anything in the world.

I steered the ship away as they shot bullets and bombs at us. We were scared as we weren’t sure if we could make it. Finally, we defeated them! We steered the ship back to our home on cheerful island. Our family and friends held a great party for us. It had a lot of food and we all had a lot of fun. We promised each other that we would have our next adventure soon. We told our parents that we would not hurt ourselves during the adventure. I hope our next adventure will be just as exciting!

We were all starting to prepare for our next amazing adventure. I can’t wait!

# The Telepathic Sisters

*Pui Ching Primary School, Kong, Pui Ga Alyson – 12*

Hundreds of years ago, in Shanghai, lived two good-hearted and wealthy leader pirates of a pirate crew that was called The Snow Foxes. Although they stole, they stole from the rich to give to the poor. Their names were Law Tin and Yuk Tung. They gave birth to beautiful twin girls, and named the older one, Yia and younger one, Ying. Although they were twins, they grew up to become two completely different girls; Ying being very wild and Yia being quiet.

They have only one thing in common; they always knew what each other wanted...they can read each other's mind. Once, Yia's favourite toy broke, Yia was upset... and no one else except Ying understood why. Ying kept hearing, 'Yia is sad because her toy was broken.' in her head.

Five years later when Yia and Ying were seven years old, since Yia was older, their mother gave her the responsibility to look after her younger sister when they were out at sea. When their parents were out for a mission, Ying insisted on going to sea.

The next thing they knew; they were out of the door to the barque the girls owned. They walked to get the cannons, daggers, blunderbusses, cutlasses.... They boarded the barque with high spirits, humming songs as they rode on. Yia started sailing the barque to their destination, a little island a few miles away.

Yia noticed a big storm coming and tried to steer back to the island, but it was too late. The storm whipped Ying out of the barque like a ragdoll. Yia started flailing her arms around like she was on fire. She tried to contact her sister with her telepathic connection.

"Ying!" she called out. She saw her sister unconscious and flopping around in the sea like a jellyfish. She strapped a rope onto her waist to the barque and jumped into the water to save Ying. Yia put Ying's unconscious body onto the sand. Yia carried Ying on her back to the nearest hospital. Ying fell into a coma. Yia started feeling a pain at her arm which slowly spread to the rest of her body. It dawned on her – Ying was in a coma because of her.

Every day, Yia visited her sister. Months passed. Ying still hadn't awoken. Yia grew impatient and gave up visiting her, thinking she was dead. The grief faded in as the connection faded away.

Twelve years later, when Yia was nineteen, she helped her mother rule the ship. What she didn't know was that Ying was actually alive. When Ying woke up, she completely forgot everything except fake information that the psychopath told her, one including that she was a psychopathic killer, she got this information by her mother's enemy, the psychopath, Long. She always killed then got away with everything while looking like an innocent little girl with large doe eyes.

She was now the leader of Yia's enemy pirate group, The Howlers. since Long died trying to "save" her. Ying hated Yia with burning passion. They always were slashing each other's throat... literally. What Yia didn't know was Ying was the leader of the group, because she always wore a mask that almost covered her entire face, but that was not until one day. That day was the first day in the week of a little battle between the two pirate groups. Yia was finishing practice on the ship when the other pirate team suddenly barged in. Ying's group thankfully had their swords and daggers ready.

They started to fight with bows and arrows, daggers and swords. Blunderbuss noises were loud and sharp; flintlock bullets were flying everywhere. Blood was covering the floor in puddles. Screams of pain were sounding. Ying saw that Ying wasn't looking at her way so she took the chance and socked her in the stomach with her fist.

Yia shouted, "Oh, it's on!", in pain. Yia whipped her hand across Ying's face, bringing her mask down while trying to stand up. The piece of fabric floated softly towards the floor. Yia saw Ying's face and was shocked. Yia immediately stopped what she was about to do: punch Ying. Yia thought she was hallucinating, but then Ying tried to do some extreme karate moves.

Yia snapped out of her thoughts and tried blocked them but it didn't work since she was distracted. Ying kept punching Yia until Yia started to cough and spit blood. Ying then took this weak moment of Yia's and took out her dagger and stuck the blade into Yia's gut. Yia's last words were,

"Sis...I...I...mi...ss...th...e...o...ol...ld...yo...u...p...lea...se...co...me...b...ac...k" before she slipped into an eternal slumber. Ying had this extremely psychopathic look on her face but not for long. When Yia departed, Ying felt some searing pain in her arm and it burn up. She suddenly had flashbacks of when they were younger and that what Long had told her were all fake. She wanted to make up with her sister, but it was too late. Ying admitted to her mistakes and The Howlers merged with The Snow Foxes and they turned their name into The Snow Howlers. The crew surprisingly let Ying be their leader. Ying did a really good job leading the crew as a memory of Yia, like giving food to the poor, helping some homeless animals get a lifetime home, helping some kids get adopted... Ying made it down to history as one of the best pirates. Yia was proud of her as she looked down from heaven. Everything was peaceful.

# The Pearl of Great Fishy Beard

*Pui Ching Primary School, Lam, Yuet Ching Gladys – 12*

One quiet night in the Ming dynasty, in the king's sleeping chamber, a gloved hand reached into the king's pants and slowly picked out a shining blue pearl.

It was a small girl in a pitch-black burglar suit, a scarlet eye-patch on her right eye and hair shot up to heaven.

“Finally, The Pearl of Great Fishy Beard, the greatest pirate, is mine. Now I really am the best!” she thought. The Pearl of Great Fishy Beard is a magical pearl that strengthened everything in the human body for its owner from muscles to the brain.

“Oh, Nga, we should leave. I mean, we've already taken loads of jewelry and china!” said a skinny boy with noodle-like arms and knock-knees.

“You’re right,” said Nga. She put away the pearl and strolled towards the exit. But what Nga didn’t know was that Nam was grinning wickedly behind her. Then, a blood-curdling sound rocked the whole palace! It came from the bag. The king had booby-trapped his pearl with a bug that burned when exposed to light. When they went into moonlight, it shrieked.

Almost immediately, guards flooded towards them. They ran to the gate and then, a dead end – a high wall.

“Nam, hold on tight!”

She threw some wooden boards on the ground up into the air and then stepped on the boards like stairs over the wall and jumped on the ground.

“Oh god, I can't believe that worked!” said Nam.

They ran to the beach and reached a humungous ship.

“Ahoy, young buccaneers!” A muscular man greeted them. “What have you got there?”

“Two sacks, Mordo,” said Nam proudly.

“Aye then, altogether we have thirty-seven sacks, not bad!” said Mordo.

“So 'Mission Robin Hood' is ready?” asked Nga excitedly.

“Set sail!” bellowed Mordo. The crew cheered and set sail into the never-ending ocean, searching for new lands and people to help. Meanwhile, Nga put the pearl in her hollow eye socket. Strength rushed in, ideas flooded her brain. However, a shivering feeling grew inside her heart and a minute later, she had no joy, excitement nor emotions anymore, the jewel sucked her love out.

Nam watched her.

“The pearl will be mine,” he said, smiling evilly.

“When will we get there?” said Nam to himself.

“Land ahoy!” shouted Squid-face in the crew's nest.

Ahead stood a beautiful island. They sailed to the island and Nam snuck off to the bushes. The island was uncomfortably silent yet there were houses. They searched among the deserted houses. At last, they found when they opened a door, the islanders shrieked and closed the door! The crew knocked until a humongous shadow covered them.

A gigantic sea dragon with outstretched talons welcomed them.

"Zing! Zing! Zing! Zing!" Four razor-sharp spikes hit four crew members and killed them. Then the sea dragon let out a monstrous roar, and looked at Mordo. Mordo started attacking Squid-face. One by one the pirates looked into the dragon's eyes and fought each other! They were under the dragon's spell!

Then, the dragon looked at Nga! A dreadful smile spread across its face. A flash of white light and Nga was no longer in the battlefield but a white room with two chairs.

"Nga!" he said with a charming voice, "Do you like my home? There's really no need to bring a gift."

"Gift? Home?" said Nga, confused.

"The pearl! Every dragon wants that pearl!" said Nam.

"Dragon?" asked Nga. "Oh, let me introduce myself properly, I am Nam, the dragon of Island Titikia."

Of course! If a dragon is powerful enough to cast spells, it must have the power to change its appearance. Surely, that's pirate lesson number one! Nam wasn't Nga's friend all along, he went undercover to get the pearl! Slowly, Nga drew her sword.

"You will never have my pearl!" barked Nga.

"Your parents left you as a baby and you were left alone. Am I wrong?" said Nam as though reading Nga's mind, attacking her soul. "Then you begged for food on the street, you were a street rat weren't you?" said Nam...

"No one loves you and they never will," spat Nam. "That is the heart of human beings. They're cruel and stone-hearted. Trust me, I know! Now give me the pearl!"

He was so furious his eyes shined with hellfire. Nga's eyes glowed with tears. She thought of happy moments she had with Nam and her crew.

"What's the point of life without love? Join me and we shall take over the world," said Nam. The room slowly disappeared and the battlefield returned!

That second, she thought of the song Nam used to sing, "Sweet dreams, good night. Oh terrible storms. But who cares when I have a friend to live for..."

"You are right." said Nga, wiping her tears, "The point of life is to be loved and to love!" said Nga.

Nam was shocked and maybe, afraid!

"Thank you for the memories but I'll move on! I do have something to live for! But you, you don't care and you certainly don't love!" and with that, Nga stuck her sword in Nam's chest...it was over, with a great flash of light and they were back in the village. Nam the dragon was dead. The cursed crew woke up and they had absolutely no idea what happened.



After this incident, the crew gave a sack of money to the islanders to build ships to explore the great wide world, reloaded their ship with food and set sail into the edge of the sea. When they were sailing Nga threw the pearl into the sea and thought, "Maybe the world is too weak to possess such a power but one day it will, in a different world and a better one."

Looking back, Nga thought of Nam. Isn't the world ridiculous? A friend can be an enemy; an enemy can give support in the direst moments! Nothing is what it seems... in the end.

# Extracts From A Pirate's Diary

*Pui Ching Primary School, Leung, Chi Long Jonathan – 11*

18th November, 1500

Sunny

We set sail this morning at the docks in Beijing, bearing gifts from our emperor. When we boarded our ship, our lookout, Un-Luck Lee did a lot of offences, including inviting his girlfriend onboard and tossing the ship's cat, Mrs. Tabby, overboard. Captain Chan told Lee that if he continues to behave in this way, we'll have to maroon him.

19th November, 1500

Rainy

Well, dear diary, Lee's actions angered the sea monsters. Early this morning, Lee spotted some winged female creatures sitting on some rocks through his telescope.

"Sirens!" he exclaimed, before falling out of the crow's nest and luckily got entangled in the lowest part of the rigging.

The captain commanded the cabin boy Lam to get the earplugs (They're little thingies that the first officer Chung invented which are for dimming noises). However, when he returned, Lee was trying to untangle himself. He stuck his left leg out, making Lam trip and spilling all but one pair of earplugs. After giving Lee a short lecture about being careful, Captain Chan decided that he would put on the remaining pair of earplugs and steer, whereas the rest of the crew would stay in their cabins and wait until the coast was clear. After a short period of time, the singing got really loud, and for a second, I thought that Captain Chan fell asleep.

But then, the sirens stopped singing, and we heard Chan yell,

"They're leaving! The sirens are leaving!"

We all went on deck and cheered, until first officer Chung said "Is it just me, or are those rocks moving towards us?"

And indeed they were. That's when I noticed that the "rocks" were green and scaly.

"They're not rocks," I said, "they're part of a sea serpent!"

Just as I said that, the "rocks" sank into the water. Then, two gigantic horns poked out of the surface of the water. The monstrous owner of the two horn reared up. It had piggy eyes (though they were large for us) and was covered in emerald-green scales. We were all terrified, except for Lee, who was rooted to his spot and seemed to be deep in thought. Suddenly, he snapped out of it.

"I have a plan" he said. "Listen."

Listening to Lee's ideas was the last thing we would do at any time, but then none of us had other plans, so that was what we did. Lee's plan was to steer the ship towards a nearby rock and turn left or right when we were near it. Hopefully, the beast would follow our ship, and (hopefully) being large and clumsy, it would crash into the rock. And surprise, surprise, it worked! Everything went according to plan and we escaped. And for the first time in many million years, we cheered for Lee.

25th November, 1500

Sunny

Sorry about the long gap. The crew and I were busy giving away gifts to natives on uncharted lands and navigating these days, and some stupid, lame-brained twit had left a magnet under the compass, leading us the wrong way. Anyway, in the afternoon, Lee spotted an island (or at least he thought that it was one). He asked us to steer the ship towards the island.

Anyway, we went ashore the island, except for Lee and his girlfriend, who decided to keep an eye on the ship. There was a mountain smacked right in the middle of the island which towered over us. Captain Chan, who was very energetic, decided to scale it. After an exhausting trek (a little stroll if you ask Chan) up the mountain, we stuck the ship's flag on its summit. But when we were ready to leave, we realize that most of the island had sunk into the water. That's when we uncovered the truth. We weren't on an island. We were on a man-eating Aspidochelone! The next thing we knew; we were paddling in salty seawater. And a few metres from us was the opened mouth of the Aspidochelone. It glared at us with a gleam in its eyes as a ravenous child might a table of food at New Year's Day.

I closed my eyes and thought – 'Goodbye, world... and hello, underworld.'

But when we thought all hope was lost, we heard a loud bang, and the Aspidochelone was bashed by a large cannonball. It was Lee!

He yelled at the beast, "If you want to scoff my mates, you'll have to get me first!" So the beast made a ninety degree turn (that took it a little time) and chased after our ship. Meanwhile, Lee steered the ship towards us, and his girlfriend fired a couple more of cannonballs at the beast. The rest of us (except me, because I was a bad swimmer) swam towards the ship and scrambled aboard.

“All hands on deck!” yelled the captain. But then Lee saw me paddling helplessly in the water, sinking slowly, and plunged into the water to save me. Lee towed me back to the ship. But when we were climbing up the rope ladder, Lee’s hand slipped, and he fell into the water. And as quick as lightning, the Aspidochelone swallowed him whole.

3rd December, 1500

Cloudy

We sailed all the way back to Beijing and told everyone the news.

A few hours later, we stood before the empty tomb of Un-Luck Lee with Lee’s friends and family, and the Emperor. He had saved the entire crew and sacrificed his own life.

Suddenly, we heard a voice yelling “Hey, guys! I haven’t hopped the twig yet!”

It was Lee! He was still alive!

It turned out that Lee found a boat and some oars inside the Aspidochelone, and he used them to escape it when it opened his mouth to eat, hence everyone was happy and the entire crew was safe. And that was the end of my wacky sea journey.

# Brilliant Jimmy

*Pui Ching Primary School, Lum, Wai Ching Charissa – 11*

It was a beautiful sunny day. The sky was blue and had a lot of differently shaped clouds, like lion shapes, sheep shapes and others too! There were many birds! Some were flying in the sky and some were singing on the tree. There were also some pretty butterflies too! This island was named Lucky Island. Everyone loved to go there because the air was fresh there! It had many plants, like beautiful flowers, tall trees and green grass! The boundless and blue sea around the island had many colorful fishes, cute seahorses and shiny sea stars. It was very amazing when the sun's rays shine on the sea. How wonderful it was! There were also some big and small houses on the mountain. Some sharp hills, which were covered with green grass and small flowers were beautiful! Sometimes, you could also see some animals' likes rabbits, sheep and goats too!

Jimmy, who was the good pirate, always sailed The Jimmy everywhere. He always went to Lucky Island to find treasures because he loved the attractive scenery. However, this island is so far that he needed to take a long time to get there. He was a brave, smart and nice boy. He had brown hair, big eyes with brown and round pupils. He had a long nose and red lips. He was very tall and has strong muscles like a giant. He always smiled to everyone!

Last month, Jimmy met Captain Devils who stood with his group of bad people like Michael and Albert; the others were on the Lucky Island. Captain Devils spent his life at sea. They liked using their ships to rob other people's gold and used ropes to tie up people on the ship. Therefore, everyone knew they were pirates and were frightened by them. That day, Captain Devils felt very bored and they went to Lucky Island to steal other people's gold and discover new treasures.

Peter was Jimmy's best friend who was very poor because his father was not around when he was young. So, he sold all his property to make a small boat. He wanted to go to the Lucky Island to find a big box of gold that he can have some money! Peter was ready to take the treasures he found and leave the island. Unluckily, Peter met the Captain Devils' pirates and they wanted to take away Peter's gold. Peter was being bullied! Suddenly, Jimmy appeared and asked, "What are you doing to this small boy and why do you make him cry?"

"We didn't make him cry!" They said, "We didn't yell at him either! We're only playing or chatting with him."

"Is he right?" asked Jimmy.

"No," Peter said, "they stole my gold! They said if I don't give them all the gold, they will kill me and my family!"

"Is that true?" Jimmy said.

"No, that is wrong!" said one of the bad guys.

"It is true!" said the little boy.

Jimmy knew the bad guys were lying because they were pirates! Therefore, he asked them to give all the gold back to Peter. The bad guys did because they were scared of the gigantic Jimmy. After a few minutes, the bad guys ran away. Peter thanked Jimmy.

"You are a brave, smart and friendly person!" said Jimmy.

Two days later, Jimmy became a local hero. He visited Lucky Island again. It was a perfect sunny day! He thought there were not any bad guys again so he walked very slowly and happily. After he walked to the middle of the island, he saw a boat with a flag, which had Evil Devils written on its side, and he saw Ken who was his best friend on it. "Help me! Help me! Can anyone help me?" He screamed loudly. He was very scared of the bad guys because they looked very angry and they were trying to kill him. He wanted to escape from the bad guys but they used a big rope to tie him on the wooden pole. Jimmy was very angry and thought, "Why do I always meet Captain Devils? And why do they always steal my friend's gold?"

Then, Jimmy called some people to help; Dick and Joseph and they found a big ship to rescue Ken. They pretended to be friends with the bad guys. Fifteen minutes later, they took The Jimmy near the bad guy's boat. They separated into two teams, one to rescue Ken and the other team went up to give the treasure to the bad guys. They put a lot of heavy rocks which were painted in gold in the treasure box. The other team walked slowly to Ken while Jimmy gave the treasure box to them. When they went away to the Evil Devils Boat, the bad guys did not know there was nothing inside the treasure box except rocks! Then, Ken thanked Jimmy, Simonson, Dick and Joseph for the help and also gave them some fish, meat and fruit.

“Thanks for your gift!” Jimmy said to Ken.

And he also said to the people who help to rescue Ken, “Thank you for your help.”

After that, Jimmy became a local hero! When Jimmy went out to the road, everyone also gave him some of their food and flowers and Jimmy had a big flag saying “Local Hero” on his ship.

Finally, Jimmy died when he was 55 years old. At his funeral, everyone was sad and cried. “Why are they sad?” asked a small child. “He was a great hero!” answered the child’s parents. At Jimmy’s funeral, there were a lot of flowers and some red paper which told tales of his heroic acts. Now, a lot of people know him and he became a very famous person in the world.

# The True Pirate

*Pui Ching Primary School, Siu, Yu Nga Eudora – 12*

“Pirates are sailors who attack other ships and steal property from them.” People said as they describe the word “pirates. We already know that common fact, but not all the pirates act that way. Therefore, I’ll tell you a story of one of those pirates.

It was the early 1400s. There was a man called Zheng He, the captain of The Royal Travelers. One day, he decided to steal cargo of precious materials and give it away to captains and sailors around the world to make relationships with them.

They went on their first voyage sailing to South Vietnam. Along the way, they noticed a big unfamiliar island. Although the sailors on the ship didn’t wish to get on the island, “Onto the island we go!” said Zheng He as he jumped off the ship.

When they moored their boat near the shore, they searched everywhere until they found something big lying on the other side of the shore!

“Mr. Zheng He, I saw a ship with a flag on it and I believe the flag logo represents a crew named The Bucci!” said one of the sailors named Wong Ming.

One of the pirates from The Bucci named Billy caught The Royal Travelers and shouted, “Captain! Some scallywags are trying to steal our treasure!”

The captain of The Bucci, Sebastian scowled at The Royal Travelers and ordered his sailors to prepare themselves.

Zheng He tried to stop them and said, “Slow down there, my friends. We aren’t here to steal treasure from you, we are here to make relationships and give out treasure to you!”

The Bucci crew couldn’t hear anything Zheng He said and started to fire cannons. Cannonballs shot out like lava coming out of a volcano, so The Royal Travelers couldn’t do anything but escape. Suddenly, the ground shook! The Bucci stopped firing and hid in their ship as Zheng He ran to the shore and noticed an eye on the sand!

“Oh no! I believed this is what the rumors call the sea creature which we will mistake as an island. It draws sailors to it, and then drowns them and eats them!” said Zheng He.

The sea creature started to sink into the water because of the bullets fired on it. Everyone started to panic when Zheng He had an idea.

“Excuse me, my dear pirate friends...” shouted Zheng He. “Would you all mind helping us?”

“What is yer problem, landlubber? Yer don’t know how to swim? Sebastian yelled back in a scared manner.

“We aren’t trying to cause trouble. We were just trying to help you.”

“Mateys, give em’ Jacob’s ladder, quickly!” ordered Sebastian.

The Royal Travelers immediately climbed the ladder and helped Sebastian guide them back to The Royal Traveler’s ships. The sea creature shook the bullets off its back and decided to take its revenge! Everyone immediately ran to their ship’s quarterdecks and started to steer the ships in full speed. However, they couldn’t escape from it. It was even faster a blue shark!

That’s when the captain shouted, “Avast ye everyone, get all of our spare fishes and ready to feed!”

Everyone on their ships searched for fish they’ve fished up and threw it in front of the sea creature. It started to slow down as it noticed the fish floating on the water. Both crews were shocked that the plan eventually worked!

“You are a quick thinker, Sebastian!” Zheng He shouted to Sebastian as he steered his ship near Sebastian’s ship. Sebastian started to blush as he said, “Gah, it was nothing, that’s just what our good ol’ old salts would have done.”

“As a thank you, we would like to award you some silk and gold.” Zheng He said as he gave the captain a handful of precious goodies. The shimmery goodies shined in front of Sebastian. He didn’t say anything but proudly smiled at Zheng He.

“We have a small favor for you, Sebastian.” said Zheng He. “Would you like to help us on our voyage to give out our goodies to other sailors and captains around the world?”

“Of course, matey! I would do anything, thanks to your kindness and care!” said Sebastian as he patted Zheng He’s shoulder.

After that, The Royal Travelers and The Bucci went from the middle of Pacific Ocean to Africa! They won themselves a place in history as some of the first great explorers and travelers on Earth, reaching and making relationships with a variety of countries. Some historians even mention both crews are people that truly “ruled the sea” back in those years. When Zheng He and Sebastian were about to guide everyone back to their home countries, they met the same sea creature again! They remembered what happened throughout the first voyage they met and decided to steer towards the sea creature.

“It looks like it’s feelin’ a bit blue.” said Sebastian as he looked at the sea creature. Some sailors from The Bucci named Bucky and Ben suggested to feed it some fish. They threw fish into the sea, but the sea creature didn’t do anything with it!

“Maybe it wants to be friends?” suggested Zheng He as he jumped off the ship and patted the sea creature. That’s when the sea creature’s frown started to fade away. The Royal Travelers and The Bucci moved their ship, bit by bit, as the sea creature followed. And that’s how both crews lived a great lifetime. And that story explained it all. Not all pirates are selfish and brutal. We should all learn from Zheng He, as he spread kindness to people. Even if he sometimes needed to deal with nasty people of the more usual sort, they can still make relationships once and for all. Zheng He, a kind person who will stay in our hearts and will never ever be forgotten.

# The Dangerous Giveaway

*Pui Ching Primary School, Tsang, Lok Ching Leia – 12*

My ship, The Rosemary, was set free. It raced and plowd up and down the playful waves like a harmless seesaw. Someone was being sent to India from the emperor to give presents such as silks and tea leaves. That's me! I am Yu, the captain. Some may know me from different voyages sent by different people. This time, I have agreed to regain my services again. I wear a thin beard along my face and I'm fairly neat, for a pirate. Before the crew got to work, I gave them a little pep talk to prepare them along the journey. What the crew didn't know was that this journey wasn't just a nice giveaway, it was a risk on our lives. Suddenly, something rose up from the sea. One by one, jelly-like tentacles splashed and stirred, crawling up the main mast, scaring everyone on the ship. In a second, the sky turned dark like a big, black cloth covered the sky. Then, an octopus-like shadow loomed over the ship. But can you believe that that wasn't the scariest part? It was a kraken! It was razor-bladed, had white copper teeth and two eyeballs filled with fire and had tentacles with sockets that will suck your blood. It was as fast as a cannonball, moving as fast as it can.

"Well, well, look what we have here. A ship full of refreshments for your dearest kraken king!"

I took a glance towards my old enemy, and said as if it was nothing important, "Hey! Remember me? I'm the one who didn't make myself dessert, you old kraken!"

As it roared in delight, I signaled the sailors to steer the boat to its stomach because everyone knows that stomachs are the animal's weakest point.

The ship sailed forward at full speed. Of course I knew that it was a risk. I'm not dumb but I've done it a thousand times on multiple voyages, it should be safe, right? The kraken saw us rushing towards it and so it dodged right. Seawater splashed on us. We were traumatized but at least we didn't end up as chow for the big old kraken!

And again we sailed to our destination to India, where we will finished our mission and return home to China. But alas, we all know that this isn't the end of it. We sailed through islands, big and small, seen everything that nature has given us. And mostly, as a sailor, I enjoyed the clear cobalt water, shining under the golden sun. But good things always come to an end.

We entered a deadly zone. "They" were known to have roamed about in these waters. "They" sing beautifully, but are the assassins of song. They lure you with their soprano voices and slaughter for fun. And worst of all, somehow they crossed our paths. Can you guess what that imbecilic creature is? Of course you can, it's the famous sirens!

Well, let me tell you something I wouldn't dare tell anyone else. I was actually scared of sirens when my mom told me the Greek stories about these creatures that roamed the sea. From that moment on, I dreamed of being a pirate in anyway possible, whether it was being a cook onboard, a deck scrubber or anything just for a glance of a sea monster. Luckily, I was lucky enough to get into an elite school for pirates. And I left myself the position as captain for many voyages to come. I was waiting for this moment for my whole life, I'm really going to face my childhood fears right now. Fortunately for me, I have read the whole manuscript of "How to Defend Yourself in Front of Sea Creatures" and knew it by heart.

The waves began to rock, and it was getting bumpy on the ship. We were entering a stage where sirens were going to appear soon enough. Speaking of the devil then, it appeared right in front of our eyes. I told my crew to stuff some cotton balls into their ears, to act as earbuds, creating a layer of material to shield us from the siren's shrill voice. But they weren't going to give up soon enough, they created a whirlpool full of deadly sharks. I always hated sharks; their sharp teeth, the grey skin and eyes as black as charcoal. I had to think of a plan, quick! I thought, what is a pirate's best friend? Cannons, of course! Despite the consequences, I told my crew to fire the cannons. Blood flew everywhere on my white shirt, the sails, even on the jolly roger! Now, I'm not even sure that this was a good idea after all. After the bloody scene we'd just seen, we finally sailed through the ear-shredding voice of the deadly sirens and the booming voice of the cannons and left the zone of the dangers.

As the days passed, we sailed peacefully on the sea, just as if it was a cruise. At last, we arrived in India, our last destination. We met the emperor and gave him the gifts we carried from afar. I even prayed in the local temple for good luck. We stayed for a few days and attended a few banquets. Alas, all good things must come to an end. The crew set sail for the last time for this voyage and I must say, this voyage was quite a challenge, unlike the others. Most importantly, I got over my childhood fear! I personally loved this voyage, because it has been a long time since I had been a captain, or even aboard a ship. Well, I guess this is the end, and may everything you desire come true!



# The Adventure of the River

*Pui Ching Primary School, Wu, Tsz Yeung – 11*

“We’re under attack!”

I froze for a second and ran onto the deck to see a pirate ship sailing closer and closer.

“Get your weapons and defend the ship!” Said Captain Marcus.

The ship exploded, sending shattered glass and wood everywhere. As if on cue, another shell hit the deck. I felt myself fly up in the air and land with a thump before falling unconscious.

My name is Charlie Jackson. I was eighteen years old when I first heard that a fleet of ships will sail around Asia and bring treasures and goods to other countries. Enthused by the idea of sailing the seven seas, I immediately joined. In a week’s time, I was on board a vessel named Princess Andromeda. I was given the job to clean the toilets. Every day, I woke up at five and started cleaning the toilets.

One day, I felt a spout of water spew out of my mouth and I woke up, I found myself on The River. After a few more days of sailing in the Pacific Ocean, The River’s crew finally saw land and prepared the gifts and hid some weapons in case the enemy attacked us. All of us walked on land for a while before seeing a lot of wooden huts packed together. We walked towards the biggest hut and knocked.

“Who’s there? Why are you trying to knock my door down?” A voice asked.

“Sorry, we thought it would be rude to enter without permission,” I said.

“That’s weird. Well, you have my permission to enter,” the voice said.

“What are you doing here, strangers?” The voice said.

“We have brought gold and silk as a gift for you and your people,” I said.

The king in the hut looked shocked.

“How can I ever thank you?” Marcus said, “These are gifts, you don’t need to pay.”

The man wearing a big crown asked, “Do you have more with you?”

“Why do you want to know?” I said.

“Be...because I want more. Guards, seize them!”

We drew our hidden weapons and pointed them at the king’s guards. Then, a guard threw a stone and Marcus immediately shot him dead.

The king said, “W...what was that?”

“It is death if you and your guards don’t behave.” I said.

“I’ll behave, I’ll behave.” The king cowardly stood behind his guards and I glared at the king and said, “As punishment, we will give you nothing; you must learn how not to be greedy.”

As The River’s crew sailed back into the humongous ocean, the weather got foggy. A fleet of metal ships appeared out of the mysterious mist and charged straight at The River and surrounded our crew. They moved in closer like greedy sharks hunting their prey. Each of the ships threw out a long metal rope and tied them to our ship. We tried to cut the rope but it was no use, the knife didn’t even make a dent! Then, the ships pulled on the rope and dragged us into the mysterious Pacific Ocean.

I arrived with the River’s crew on an island called Bahrain and the pirates from the other ships ran onto the River carrying wicked golden swords, electric spears, exploding arrows... The kidnappers tied us up and carried us to a palace. Inside the palace, sat the fattest man in the history of the world. He was so fat that if he stood on a scale, he would immediately break it.

He said, “Hello, sea wanderers. I am the great king of Bahrain, keeper of the biggest sheep herds in Asia.”

Then he looked at his guards and said, “Guards, feed them to the sheep!”

Marcus laughed and said, “How can sheep eat us? Everybody knows sheep are vegetarians!”

The fat man chuckled and said, “You’ll find out very soon!”

The guards held Marcus and threw him into a pen of sheep, which was in front of the palace. I could hear Marcus’s screaming as the sheep tore his body apart and blood splat everywhere. Everybody shuddered as Marcus had his death sentence. In shock, I froze and the next thing I knew, I was struck by a sharp metal object on my head. I was knocked unconscious before I even had a chance to react.

In the days of being in prison, I thought about what was my purpose here. Why do I live? Is it for my friends at home or my mother? At first, I thought of just giving up trying to escape from this prison and just get eaten by the sheep. After a few days, I made my decision. I finally saw the chance to help my friends, which was when the guard fell asleep with the keys in my reach. I carefully pulled the key out of its holder and unlocked my handcuffs, unlocked the locks on the door and freed my friends.

In the middle of the night, I opened his friend's gate and we snuck out into the night and went into the weapons storage and took some super high technology weapons and fought our way to the ship. As we were fighting, I bumped into an alarm and an ear-piercing noise broke the night. The army of Bahrain charged at us and we ran for our lives. We ran onto The River and set sail. The army got onto their ships and started to give chase. The River shook violently and a man accidentally dropped his lightning spear into the sea and electricity spread everywhere, even onto the other's boat but not on The River because it was wooden. The soldiers on other ships were immediately electrified and didn't have the energy to row their boats. As we rowed away, we celebrated our victory over the evil king of Bahrain.

# Fiction

Group 3



# The Spiral

*Bishop Hall Jubilee School, Ma, Gabriel – 13*

I sauntered from the ships back to the temporary camp on a beach on Island Fiji. We were on a stopover before crossing the pacific and returning home. Taking my time to enjoy the caliginous sky dotted with sequin-silver, sparkling and shimmering stars, like scattered moon dust in the sky, I sat down, digging my fingertips in the sand. The saltiness in the soft breeze coming from the sea afar brought back some long-forgotten memories...

“Arm your weapons!” A deep, coarse command blasted behind us. There we stood on the deck of the main ship, where commander Zheng He was trying to work out a plan to bring down the fast-approaching brigantine before things got worse. But it was too late. The smell of gunpowder struck our nostrils. Then, in a New York minute, there came a ginormous ball, like the one on a flail, imploding down on the deck heavily. A few of the soldiers managed to roll over and avoid it but one, who was not so fortunate, was hit on the leg and started to wince in pain. “Hold your line!” screamed Zheng He, with all his years of frustration printed on his face. We lit the ropes and three of the canons were sent on battle but would never come back.

The firefight continued. My ears were aching in pain because of the ear-piercing blasts of the canons, and my hands have blisters all over the fingers frantically adjusting the main sail. I started to lose my concentration. “Boom!” The same as the one the pirates first struck. What I saw was just a dodgeball on the deck, I closed my eyes, being too afraid to look at my worst fear. I was thrown backwards, like a ping-pong. The sickening feeling of anti-gravity made my stomach hurt like someone just pulled it out of my body. I couldn’t hold it. I let out a “bleech!” I remember the medical team rushed towards me... and everything went black.

I was woken by the sound of waves tumbling by the hull, as if it was about to break its wooden boards. I tried to sit up to have a better glimpse of my wounds at the mirror, but the flying ship tossed me around the cabin. I tried to help myself with some mantou, but also in vain. Hearing Zheng He’s commands to keep the ship moving, I started to wonder why I had chosen to leave the comfort of home. It would be so much better to farm and feed the pigs. I looked outside the cabin on the deck, and asked myself, “when can I go home?”

I tried to roll over to sleep, but instead, I was secretly hoping that time would fly over the rough conditions. The ship started to cruise ecstatically. Hearing the bow cutting through the water makes a good piece of music to sleep! After all, go on the voyage may not be that bad, perhaps, we might discover new land and people...

“Land ahoy! Land ahoy!” the watch-over crew woke me up at the point of the mast at the first sight of sighting the hazy outline of an island. I rolled out of bed and dashed to the deck. We started to slow down and threw the anchors. The crews and I were so elated and exhilarated to reach the land. However, the natives were not so happy. They welcomed us with their troops, thinking that we are invaders. Holding our hands up, we gestured, trying to explain our innocent intention. Zheng He was the last joining us. With a few crews, there he carried all large chest of gold, silver, and precious items. The natives, in return, shared their unique food, music and sports. It was the best time.

Time passed by, like a non-stop train, chuffing pass you for seconds and it was gone. We boarded our ship, and the human figures slowly disappeared from our sight.

“Splash!” Reality. We had faced the same battles and fun all over again for a few times. And finally, we were on our final stop back home. Although the sea could sometimes be electrifying, there’s no place like home. I was enjoying the peaceful night until the watch-over crew (again) signaled us, “Pirate concussion! Pirate concussion!”

“Oh no! Here we go again.”

# New Tales of the Unknown

*Carmel School Association Elsa High School, Davidson, Hannah – 13*

*From the year 1405 (also known as the year of the rooster in the Chinese zodiac calendar) there were 8 voyages led by the influential eunuch: Zheng He.*

***But the public only knew about seven.***

*The massacre of 1424, known to only the emperor and the only survivor: Zheng He.*

*The voyage happened in between the sixth and the final voyage.*

*Over 10,000 sailors died and almost all ships were incinerated.*

*After 595 years one thing has not yet been revealed:*

*The murderer.*

1420

I'm picking tomatoes in the field. The rain is pouring down, wetting my hair, drenching my clothes. I walk inside, there is a leak in the roof. My father is still farming and my mother is inside our kitchen. I walk into the small cabin with my bamboo basket and place it on a small stone block.

I pick up the small stone block as the tomatoes roll onto the soil-covered ground and I swing it over my head, hitting my mother. My head is spinning. I pick up the axe on the kitchen table and swing it at the head on the ground. It rolls among the tomatoes.

I run over to the rice fields.

Five minutes.

Ten minutes.

Fifteen minutes.

I arrive and I wade through the water. It is silent. No one is here, they all left because of the rain. Except for a man with baggy brown trousers and no shirt. Filled with adrenaline, I run over to him.

I grab him by the neck and thrust his head into the water. Until he drowns.

That man was my father.

I killed them both.

Their only daughter.

1421– Ming Dynasty China

I've heard rumours that my people are looking for me. I ran away to China, I have been charged with one of the worst crimes. Karma is coming for me, in my next life; at least that's what they say. Two full moons ago I was taken by a group of people, they told me I was a killer and branded two words down my back: 兇手.

Murderer.

If anybody finds me, I'm dead.

So I have to leave China.

1423

I've heard of these voyages. Led by this man called Zheng He, and one is leaving in a year's time. I have a plan. I'm going to board the ship and sail away so that I can get away from this place. I don't know where I'm going but anything is better than where I am now. Maybe to Persia, or the coast of Africa. I just need the transport. And the tools.

1424– Day Before Departure

---

**4 years**

**Two dead**

**One killer**

---

I killed another man today. His name was Wang Lei. The thrill of killing excites me. He had a wife and three children. So I killed them all. I can't have any witnesses.

My hair is gone, my clothes are tattered and I am packed. It is time, time that I embark on a journey that will save or cost me my life.

**4 years and one day**  
**Seven dead**  
**One murderer**

---

There are thirty-one ships and 10,264 people according to the records. I have to disguise myself as a man, I have to blend in. Most of all, I have a plan, I need to execute those plans and I need to get out alive.

*Dying is inevitable.*

*But killing is an art.*

*Murder is seen as a sin, a crime.*

*But the people who really know how to end someone's life,*

*Know that it takes effort, planning and extreme amounts of insanity.*

31 ships, 10,264 people. I am on ship number 24 with 472 other men. They don't know that I am planning to kill them all by the end of the month.

I met a man. His name is Li Qiang, he talks of his homeland in the fields. He farms rice.

Just like my father did before I killed him.

But I don't tell him that.

"I am Liu Wei," I say

"Oh, and what do you do?" He replies

"I am a potter," I respond.

"Do you have a wife?" he keeps talking.

"Yes," he doesn't take the hint.

"Where are you from?" I hope this is the last question.

"Yingtianfu." If he says anything else I will impale him on the metal blade on my belt.

He goes away.

We spent hours cleaning the deck of the ships, making inventory and training. I go and collect gunpowder from the stockroom. It's been one month and I have made my strategy. I need to isolate our ship and then blow it up.

No evidence.

No survivors.

Except for me.

#### 4 full moons after the departure

It is a dry night, perfect conditions.

Everyone is asleep and I've been keeping watch.

I am in my sleeping quarters, getting ready. Above there is a fire crackling in the hearth.

It is a wooden ship and the fire catches easily.

I stab Li Qiang and bring him over to the next ship, for medical aid yet I know he will not make it out alive. Just as our ship succumbs to the flames I convince them on ship number 23 to sail away.

Goodbye ship number 24.

#### October 5, 1424

We've arrived at the ports of Chittagong. I am on ship number 20, we carry the gold items. Zheng He and 10 others meet with the king of Burma. I come with and witness the exchange: jewellery and gold for an alliance.

This I don't understand, I think that you don't need allies to have greatness. I think that one only achieves true greatness when you are alone. When you have no one left to care for and nobody to love. Then, you can truly be great.

#### April 2, 1425

We've travelled to Cuttack, Calicut, Bangkok, ship numbers have been dwindling. The Admirals find themselves making excuses for each one: sea monsters, raging storms, local pirates; somehow overcoming the massive amounts of artillery and weaponry that were stationed on the ships.

On each ship, I take a different name:

Wang Wei.

Li Jun.

Zhang Yong.

Li Jie.

The list goes on.

There are only 5 ships left, carrying 153 people.

I have to get rid of the 4, take the first – which holds Zheng He – and sail away.

After killing him.

Currently, I'm on ship number 5, carrying 70 people. I got bored so I decided to have some fun. I maim 11 of them. One with a spear, two with arrows, and the others I simply stab: as I did with Li Qiang.

The rest go down in flames. This time people start questioning me, so I say that this man from the ship went crazy, set himself on fire and killed the rest with him. But I escaped.

January 27, 1426

I finally killed them all. Except for 1. I board the first ship and it is silent.

I think he's sleeping so I climb down to his room with my knife. The ship so quiet I can hear my heart beating. But he is not in his room, nor his kitchen.

Yet I find something completely different, a board with drawings of me, the burnt ships and all lines pointing to me.

So he was going to kill me. Then he ran away, so now there is someone out there who knows who I am and what I'm doing.

Which gives me more reason to run.

August 3, 1426

I don't know where I am going. I just know that I can't go back to China. I see land and I sail towards it.

I bring all the riches on land: the gold, the silver, the necklaces. I start dancing, singing, cheering, laughing.

The locals come, they think I've gone crazy, they think I am the devil's messenger.

So they kill me.

They stab me with my own swords, they choke me with my own gold necklaces.

Until I am a still corpse on the soil of who knows where.

I guess karma caught up to me.

So until the end, I wear my status with pride.

**兇手。**

I am a murderer.

I murdered 10,520 people.

And I am proud of it.

*Zheng He sailed back to China and met with the emperor.*

*He made up a tale that convinced the masses that the 7th voyage didn't happen.*

*It took 5 years but eventually, the final voyage sailed.*

*The murderer's (whose name is unknown) only defining characteristic was that she had a tattoo on her back.*

*She died on the shores of an unknown country and was never found.*

Dear unknown,

Before reading this, be warned. This story might have a disturbing start but know that it has an even worse ending. This story is even too painful for me to look at but I guess here I am. Writing to no one in particular. So don't say you weren't warned. And now to the very beginning.

I don't know where to start. It all just started from the first fire. The fire that set a different course for my life. It was in the town square. I was playing with a group of kids. I killed thirty-seven of them. I didn't mean to. Really. I was just so upset. They had insulted me and it was the last straw. I am sick. I know. I think I've always known. Since I was little, I was different.

Thirty-seven.

Since then I haven't looked back. I tried to make a new life. I ran away, far away. I have changed my name so many times since then that I don't even remember what it is. All I know is that I have a gift. Really, a sick gift. I can burn things. But really burn. With my hands. I don't know how or why but you may already know me as the burning man. A dragon to those of you in the future.

After that I ran for what seemed to be forever, and I finally found something that might help me. The Ming voyages. It was my only chance to say goodbye to China and rid myself of the shame and start anew. A clean slate. That was a mistake. But I'll learn that soon enough. Just as the saying goes: if you can't fight it, embrace it. And I did exactly the opposite from that.

I survived three days onboard until I started a fire in the storage room. I didn't mean to. I was just getting supplies for my janitorial job. We were already docked somewhere to switch ships and I couldn't stop it, so before spreading it more, I left. Crying silently, I made my exit and saw the ship burning behind me. Sixty-seven more. Sick to my stomach I added that to the thirty-seven from before.

One hundred and four. Innocent souls who didn't deserve their fate.

On the next ship, I killed seventy-two.

One hundred seventy-six.

And on the third, I thought it would be different. I had even made a friend. I lasted there a week and a half before having killed seventy-nine. No survivors on any of the ships. Please forgive me.

Two hundred and fifty-five.

After ship number five where I had already got to a total number of three hundred and eighteen. By then I had decided enough was enough.

Through all the voyages, I had already gotten to Paris. By the time I got out, I convinced myself that it wouldn't happen again. No way. Wrong. I was so naïve to think that I could control myself. But I just caused havoc and ended up running away again. Once I got out of Paris, I settled in some isolated farm in the middle of nowhere. The owners had clearly abandoned it so why not?

It worked for a little while. I kept myself under control and didn't let my emotions get the best of me. I actually had hope. But after a while, it had faded and I was going back to my old ways. Looking and looking everywhere, I *had* to find a permanent solution. and after looking for a long time, I found it, and it helped, so who was I to argue?

I spent a couple of months on the farm but of course, our story hasn't really even begun. This is where things changed for the worse.



The start of my end begins when some farmers and city people, living a few kilometers away, somehow found out about my presence and decided to pay me a little visit. I'll spare you the details (they're too horrid to share anyway) but it involved a lot of pitchforks and fire, from both sides. I got out of there but unfortunately, I had gone crazy again and five men had lost their lives that day. Three hundred and twenty-three. Forgive me.

By the end of the battle, I had ended up at the nearest train station and used the last of my money to pay for a carriage. My last chance. Destination? Valladolid, Spain.

Once I arrived, it was night so I found a bench to sleep on near a church. Everything was fine so far, which was a good sign. The next morning I wandered around a little bit and got to know the town. It was the best place to start over. I could feel it. Walking past a flower shop, I saw that it didn't have many workers so I went to see if maybe I could get a job there and get my life back on track. The owner was pretty hesitant at first but after some convincing, she said she needed someone to help her with deliveries so I took it.

Everything was going really fine. I mean I had a job and got to see more of Valladolid by doing deliveries all over town. It was nice. But then came Wednesday, exactly four days after my arrival. I was almost done for the day when there was a last minute order from some high-class person who needed the flowers to be delivered urgently. So, I set out to find this person's place. He lived right next to the church I slept next to so it was kind of easy to find.

When I knocked on the door, I thought I was coming home that night. Whatever I called home. But clearly, someone upstairs had other plans.

When the door opened, I saw a tall guy with a very familiar face.

"Hola. Si no se está quemando hombre." He paused. I had no idea what he was even saying so I just let him continue. "Te he estado siguiendo. Quemando todos esos lugares y matando a todas esas personas, ¿cómo lo haces?"

"I'm sorry could you please repeat that, I don't know how to speak Spanish."

After that, it was just a blur, but for the sake of this, I'll try to explain it. The guy must have punched me in the face since I then found myself fighting him. And you the reader, the unknown must know by now that anger is what triggers and fuels my sick powers. So while more and more men joined in beating me up, we moved closer and closer to the church, and I was closer and closer to anger. Once I reached my limit, I must have set something on fire because I found my lungs filling up with smoke. I felt close to losing consciousness when the guys had suddenly stopped beating me up and started coughing as their lungs too were filling up with smoke.

Next thing I know, the church started to blaze, red and fiery flames consuming it, soon erasing it from there forever. The last thing I saw before what I thought was me dying was a single red rose turn to black as my vision started to darken.

My heart stopped — And then started again.

I woke up in a daze. I didn't know where I was but I certainly wasn't myself. I had suddenly changed, or maybe I just felt it. I was on the bank of a river. I looked back and saw smoke and ashes. It smelt off, like something burnt, and I had the worst headache.

I remember then just looking into the pond and feeling shocked. I didn't understand what or who I was seeing. The image reflected from the river was of a scaly boy with wings. A boy with some sort of horns and weird nostrils. I looked like a deformed snake. Some sort of demon.

Even though I was shocked and worried, it all made sense. Everything. I just understood it. These powers were no coincidence. I was somehow turning into some sort of dragon—snake—demon—monster.

I remembered all my mixed feeling but that didn't matter until I saw a torn up wanted notice with a sketch and the words: FIRE DEMON; WANTED FOR KILLING SEVEN—HUNDRED AND MUST BE

PUNISHED FOR CRIMES AGAINST PEOPLE! Those people must have followed me and tried to get me killed. I wouldn't blame them.

One thousand and twenty-three. One thousand and twenty-three people I had killed, and I was determined to not increase that number anymore.

So I flew away, as far as possible from there as I could and found refuge in the mountains. I couldn't kill myself and but I couldn't bear the pain of what I had done. So I isolated myself from humanity and their ways. After this, it will be that way forever at one thousand and twenty-three.

# Forgotten Boy

*Carmel School Association Elsa High School, Golovsky, Milly – 13*

Beasts of the oceans. The boats float here in the bay just below me, impatiently. Almost as if yearning for the feeling of the open currents. I share the urge. My life is good, but then that's it. It is just good. My toes savour warmth from the hearty cabin fire. My nana in the kitchen, the smell of the ornate spices and roasting onions making my mouth water. "Bo-Hai come to the kitchen right now", she exclaims sharply, "be a good boy and help you grandma with the vegetables." I was raised by her and my father, in a small cabin by a shipyard. My nana loves me with all her heart. My father did, until one day he stopped.

Ten years later...

"That will be three bronze coins," the cashier asked.

I crane my neck and glance over my shoulder to see my father's great ship standing in all its glory. From a lowly sailor to a celebrated captain. As he rose through the ranks, his affection for me withered. To him, I am now nothing more than a mere scullery assistant.

Today is the day we have been waiting for. It is January 19, 1431, and very soon we will be setting sail on a voyage of a lifetime. The 7th of the Ming Journeys. An army of ships awaits at the dock, their towering sails billowing in the wind. The anticipation has been growing inside all of us: captains, chefs and the thousands of crewmen.

"All aboard," the Quartermaster booms. I rapidly turn my neck to see my father's ship, pulling away from the dock, with the other ones close behind. The market street overflowing with merchants with their vastly different stores. I drop the final supplies I was to get, and the bag of money I am holding, leaving the bronze and brass coins toppling to the ground. I thought I had more time. I sprint towards the docks, full of fear, this ship is my only home.

The soles of my shoes dig into the ground, running closer a spray of ocean water hits me. Cold and salty. My father's boat, the one with treasure, has already ventured away, with the final boats trailing behind. I fight through the crowds but no one cares. A scream leaves my mouth but no one can hear me. Finally, I get through but it doesn't matter anymore. The dock is empty now, a sense of emptiness overcomes me. I slowly hobble towards a nearby bench. My nana has passed and there is nowhere else for me to go.

I lie down on the bench in a fetal position for hours until the light begins to fade and the hunger in my stomach grows. My brain racking for the image of the map that I had barely seen, I need to catch up to the fleet. I shift my position and then realise just nearby is the night market. Slowly I plant my feet onto the ground and push off from the bench, my head spinning a little.

The hustling and bustling of the busy night market warm me. All the smells create an eccentric aroma, filling my nostrils, however, the crowds are overwhelming. To get away I walk down a dimly lit side alley. To one side, I see a rather strange building, seeming very out of place. I can hear the murmuring of voices coming from inside. Curious but cautious I peek in to see, a narrow hallway with the highest of ceilings. Shiny black bricks coat the wall as the faint light reflects off them. At the end of the hallway lies a round table seating eight richly dressed merchants. One of them stands and begins to pace around the table. We lock eyes for one-hundredth of a second but it's enough for them to notice me.

"Hey boy," he grunts, "what are you and your nosiness doing here?"

"Get out!" The other men quietly but angrily agree with him,

Full of shock I stutter, "Oh I'm s-sorry" I hastily walk away but don't turn my back on them. I hear them arguing clearly in a dispute, their voices echoing eerily. The same man then speaks again, "Boy come back here for a second." I freeze and then slowly turn around to see them grinning unnaturally at me. I swallow and then stiffly make my way towards them. "So boy, what leaves you wandering around here? This is no place for a fresh piece of meat like you." I cautiously explain how I ended up sitting before them, an uneasy feeling settling in my gut.

After I finish speaking their leader breaks the uncomfortable silence.

“We have a little business we want you to get done for us.” He snaps his fingers and two more men dressed alike enter. They throw a bag down about the size of an infant onto the table, they want me to deliver it to Cuttack, India. I realise this is on the way to where my father’s fleet will dock in Calicut. Delivering this parcel for them could be the only way I can get food and board to make my journey, even though I don't know its contents and expect it could something illicit.

Nanjing, January 20, 1431

At the rise of the dawn I quietly leave with the bag attached to the horse they have provided me for my journey, and a few meagre supplies to get me started. Leaving Nanjing it will be many months before I can even hope to catch up to the fleet as they journey southward. I will have to travel overland to get to Cuttack, across China, then through Burma and the Delhi Sultanate.

Chittagong, April 2, 1432

More than a year has passed, riding on my horse. Through our journey, we had seen beautiful sunsets that we thought nothing could compare too. But then the sunrises would come exploding with colour and would be just as beautiful as the night before.

As we ride closer to the final destination, at times I forget the reason behind this. Although it always comes back, igniting a flame inside of me.

Cuttack, June 15, 1432

With my hands steady on the reins, I glance down to check on the package I was delivering. I see it gently bumping against the side of the saddle, untouched and unopened. Getting closer to the city houses begin to appear, as we near the markets, I see the tables yielding with thousands of spices. I dismount the horse and tie him up. A man approaches us, he catches a glimpse of the bag and then silently nods. I go around untie it from the saddle and place it into his arms. Abruptly the man takes the reins and starts walking away. Sensing fear the horse resists and begins to kick. I stroke him calmly on the forehead, stilling his movements. Calmed I stroke him for the last time.

I walk down to the dock and find myself once again sitting on a bench. The dock is crowded with traders and merchants making their sales. To my right is a small group, I overhear them discussing their next trip. To Calicut. I walk over and introduce myself, “Hi, my name is Bo-Hai. “I couldn't help to overhear that you plan to sail around to Calicut?” “Yes we are,” one of them replies “, and the name’s Mei-Xiu.” I smile and ask, “Would it be okay for me to join? In return, I can prepare the meals.”

Calicut, July 7, 1432

Three weeks it had been, smooth sailing on the ocean currents. We had just docked and tied up the ropes. I occupy myself with shipyard tasks as the months go by.

Calicut, December 10, 1432.

It has come to to the final month of the year and I begin to fear that I have missed them. But then, out from the mist emerges a great fleet of boats. The same fleet of boats I had known so well. I proceed to the dock mixed with caution and excitement. From the deck of the front boat, I see the head chef. We meet eyes and he welcomes me on.

As the weeks go, to my father I’m invisible. The hardship I endured to be with him feels like a waste. I can only hope over time some warmth and affection will find its way into his heart.

My left-hand grasps the icy door knocker belonging to the office of our Captain. In my right hand, a bowl of tangmian soup. I knock once. No answer. I lumber in to find him sitting at his desk, back arched with his head in his palms. I walk quietly to place the bowl on a nearby chair, careful not to disturb him. But I know he’s aware that I’m there. His eyes focus on me, at last, I can see warmth in his eyes.

“Thank you...my son.”

# It Comes and Goes

*Carmel School Association Elsa High School, Himmelmann, Afik – 13*

It was a numbing winter morning, Kaia woke to the sound of men and women yelling outside; she jumped off the bed, throwing something on and running outside to see what the commotion was. As soon as she stepped outside she saw Zheng He's new recruit standing with a piece of paper and five armed men behind him.

"Zheng He would like to give all the men and young boys an opportunity, an opportunity to travel the great seas and to voyage into unknown lands and collect any treasure", exclaimed the 'henchman' as everyone calls Zheng He's new man.

Kaia was unsure of what she should be feeling; should she be feeling happiness? Sadness? Should she be offended? Or maybe indignation. But she couldn't put a name on what she was feeling because she was experiencing them all in one moment and her thoughts escalated to the worst. Kaia ran back into her home, slammed the door and just stood. She just stood in the empty room, when it was silent, you can hear the high pitched buzz running through your head. At sundown Kaia was still at the same place staring at one point in the wall, she suddenly unfroze and began to think about how amazing it would be to travel the world and see different land and get treasures and be able to be respected as a woman. She could picture it clearly in her mind, her standing at the front of the ship feeling the wind upon her face, looking out to the massive ocean that lies ahead of her. She zoned out of her fantasy and continued to pack.

Kaia woke up with the sun and had gotten a piece of crumpled up paper to write her loved ones goodbye for the voyage. She walked to her parents' home to drop off her letter to them, when she saw a man telling this woman she wouldn't make it alive and how she isn't worthy of going to any of the seven voyages. The man walked away and Kaia got a clear view of the girl, it was her friend Imogen, Kaia quickly slipped the letter under the door and ran to Imogen. She screamed out her name, a few seconds after Imogen looked at Kaia in disgust and walked away. It was so unclear to Kaia what had just gone, but she shook her head and thought it was nothing. As she headed to the docks she got a numerous amount of disgusted people staring at her and she was able to hear them talking but only parts because they whispered so quietly that all you can hear are mumbles.

Kaia stepped on board and heard the muted speaking of the crew on board and people in line to be recruited. She had never felt this uncomfortable around so many people. Zheng He, captain of the first and many after voyages, walks out from below deck and screamed out a few words that sounded like gibberish then looked right at Kaia.

"What is a lady doing on my ship?" asked Zheng He.

"Hello, I would like to join your crew for your first voyage," said Kaia with excitement in her voice. Zheng He looked around at all the men standing on board and laughed to the top of his lungs.

"You? Want to go on my ship? Ha!" yelled Zheng He.

"What is so surprising about a woman wanting to go on a voyage?" questioned Kaia.

"Sorry miss but I am all full with men who are going," he said.

"Really? You couldn't spare one person out of the 27,000 people you got?" asked Kaia.

"No, now I would like you to get off my ship." he said in a serious tone.

Kaia stormed off stomping her feet with every step taken so that they could hear her anger. She wondered how someone could have been so rude towards her. She kept on walking, deep in thought, feeling confused, angry, sad, annoyed. Then, out of the blue, came a thought to her mind: the only way for her to get on that ship was to disguise herself as a man. She didn't even know how it was possible but she knew it had to be done. At sundown she had gotten everything she needed to have to be a man, she knew it was crazy and that no one would believe it but she had to do this, she had to get on that ship and see the world.

Kaia had a rough night, she rolled out of bed and got all her belongings ready for the weeks or months to come, and she headed out to the docks. As she got there the group was treating her as if she actually was a man and she couldn't believe what she was seeing, she thought about how when she came as a woman she was handled and embarrassed in front of all those people and as a man she was shown respect. As soon as she walked onto the ship they pulled back the piece of wood that connects between the dock to the ship. Kaia

had never felt more excited in her entire life. As soon and the town started to fade away Kaia had wondered if any of this was actually a good idea, she thought about everything she was leaving behind but at the same time, she thought about the great wonders that she is going to see.

After a little while, Zheng He sprung out of nowhere and told every crew member that they were part of something big, something that they will be remembered forever. Zheng He told everyone that tomorrow morning we will reach our first destination. Everyone walked in a steady pace below deck wherein every inch of the room there was a hammock for a lot of people. Everyone took one hammock and fell asleep.

In the morning everyone was already upstairs and doing what they are assigned to. Kaia walked back and forth trying to think of a way to seem like she is doing something effective but she couldn't. A few seconds later, Zheng He talked to a few men and they took off on a small boat to the land near us. A few hours later they come back and tell us all to come to the shore. After everyone gets to the shore, Kaia runs onshore and tries to catch her breath. Suddenly a bunch of men wearing masks attacks us and almost no one escapes she tries to run but one man with a long scar across his eye grabs her and pulls her away. Kaia wakes up with five other people next to her and she sees that she's all alone in the room with those people so she tries to break free, though she tries as hard as she can she was never able to break free.

A few days past and Kaia is sure that no one is coming for them, so she tries once more to get out of this position and she stands up and falls to the ground, breaking the chair that she was tied to. But while doing this one of the chair legs stood up straight and stabbed her right from the back to the front. She looked down and saw the wood sticking out of her stomach, it was something she would have rather not seen. She drags herself across the floor to one of the crew members trying to free them. Once one got free he let the other four go and they ran out of the room they were kept in.

Kaia turned onto her back and just laid there helplessly, she looked up at the ceiling wondering if it was ever worth it to have even wanted to go on this voyage, to end up like this, knowing that this would be the end. Kaia laid on the floor as the pool of blood became into an ocean. Kaia stared at the one spot in the ceiling and thought to herself that this could not be the end. She looked closer at the ceiling and saw the air vent, and put the chairs one on top of the other and climbed until she reached it and crawled through to the outside. She could feel the warmth of the sun on her face and she could feel the sand on her back. She knew that it was alright to let go because she knew where she is and she knew, that everything was going to be okay. Even if she doesn't think it. Kaia stares at the sun's brightness, feeling every last moment she has to enjoy this new and amazing rush of emotions one last time. Kaia smiled and a single tear dropped from her eye as she said,

"I'm ready."

She closed her eyes and was finally ready to let go of everything.

# Revenge is No Reward

*Carmel School Association Elsa High School, Lyons, Itai – 12*

I sit in the dark, damp cell and listen to the crashing of metal doors. Clank. A man just got thrown in the cell beside me. His face bloody and bruised, must have just had a beating. It won't be his last.

"Name's Ju Ban," he says because I'm staring right at him.

"Xie Zuan," I say.

"What are you in here for?" Ju Ban asks.

"My revenge."

"There's got to be a story there. Can you tell me?"

"I've got a life sentence, so I definitely have the time."

And so I began my story...

*It was getting dark. The sun was setting over my father's fields. I was with my mama, waiting, just waiting for a sign that he would be back soon. We were also hoping that he too wasn't gone like all the other sailors that we heard were killed as they stepped off their boat for the first time in five years. And so we waited.*

*Finally he came, late at night. I watched him walk to the house. He wasn't alone. He was with two pirates, both holding swords gleaming with the blood of the other sailors. That was the last time ever saw them. They were left crying together on the floor as the floor reddened.*

*Then they took me into a life of piracy, away from my home. All of my friends my family just watched as I was taken. That night is what led me on my path to revenge. I didn't see those men for a while after, but every day I wished that I had my revenge.*

*My captain, a giant-sized pirate with black eyes and a black heart, would kill a entire village if the villagers didn't show him 'Honour', like he had any. I wanted to kill for revenge not for sport. At least I still had some morals left back then.*

*It was five years after that when I finally got away from the captain I had been sailing with. If I was to take my revenge I couldn't do it under the rules of the captain. Although it was hard to do, I rallied some of my fellow crewmates to help. We always managed to get a job done. It was night when we attacked. I smashed my way through the doors to the captain's cabin while the rest of my men stabbed and fought with any men that refused to join us. His black heart was no more. That was the only honor I ever showed him. I'm not proud of it, but I couldn't have him get in the way of my revenge plan. I had waited too long for it.*

*As my first act as captain, I ordered my men to set sail for my hometown. With any luck one of the wretched men who ended my parents life would be there and I would take my revenge on him. It was two weeks after we set sail that I found my way back to the town. It was exactly the same as I remembered it. Down to the fishing boats that seemed to swarm the bay like vultures do over a dead horse, to the beauty of the mountains behind the town and the smell of the earth and sea.*

*We docked and unloaded our loot. As soon as we got off the boat we were crowded by villagers who were hungry for money. I sent six men to go and sell some of the loot and then to reload the ship with food and fresh water. Then me and two of my strongest, toughest men left for the taverns to search for the men that killed my parents. I made sure that all of my men were armed with swords. Even I carried swords with me. Two of them hidden beneath my robes of black that were pulled over my head. The robe was so no one would recognise me, I looked just like my father, but it was also to hide the weapons that were hidden within the robes. Every time I think about him and back to that day that I lost him and my mother, I wanted cause pain to the ones that did this to me.*

*As I entered the tavern I immediately recognised one of the men. I sat next to him and offered him a drink. Of course, he replied yes. After he finished the drink and had a chat with me, I made my move and punched him in the face. My men held him up by the arms as I continued to strike him in the guts. Most murderers try to be discreet about killing, but not me. I wanted my revenge and my pain to be heard and felt through my victims. I lowered the hood on my robe and showed him my face. After that I left him swaying gently in the wind like an apple does from a fruit tree. He was hung on a flagpole, that stood out on the pier. The flag turned red with blood. I now had some revenge. But I needed more.*

*I went back in the tavern with my men to gather information. One of the drunken men, with one leg and one arm, told me about what happened to the other man. Five years before that, the two men split up. The other man became very successful but feared capture and death by the Chinese emperor. So he plead with the emperor to have mercy and promised to serve him. He then joined the Ming voyages as captain of one of the ships.*

*We got back on the ship, and set sail searching the seven seas for the Ming ships. The man in the tavern had sailed with them, so he told us the direction they were headed in for a meeting in India. Eventually we found them, and raised our flag which we had recently changed to the Chinese flag, and we boarded the fleet's ships asking for jobs. And as the captains saw that I already had captain experience, they made me assistant captain of one of their enormous ships. In my short time on those ships I would learn the last one died from a disease that seemed to never leave.*

*One night, I set off to meet the other captains to see if my information was correct, that the second man was part of the fleet. It was. There was no time to waste. I found the second man soon enough and quickly and quietly sliced his throat, then once again had my men hang him from a flagpole.*

*After that I got back on my ship and stirred my way away from the fleet and made my way back to my town, I was still not pleased. Every time I looked at the sky all I saw was the blood of my parents, dripping onto the wooden floor. I wanted more. What about the villagers who had just watched my parents be killed. They let me be taken into piracy. I wanted them all to know pain like I did. So much that I lost all my humanity.*

*I destroyed the village and the people who had watched me being taken. I ran through the town with my men while we slaughtered everyone in the town and burned the village.*

*Soon enough almost three hundred soldiers poured into the village and captured my men. Many of them just surrendered straight away. I don't blame them, just the sight of those soldiers in gleaming uniforms with swords and all the determination in the world, would make any man horrified. The soldiers shouted that they would kill my men until I surrendered.*

*I ran from them and found myself hiding in a house full of flames, alone. It's there that I realized all the destruction I had caused. I listened to the pleas of my men. I cried for all the people lost because of me, then I walked out of the house to the soldiers and put my swords down.*

*They only kept me alive. I was an example of what people like me deserved.*

*Each day I wait to be hanged. I do deserve it. I went mad with revenge, and even after I got it I still wasn't pleased. So each day I wait and wait till the people I got my revenge on get their revenge too. It will never end. That's how revenge is, it never ends.*

*"That's it. That's all of my story. You can see what has become of me since," Xie Zuan says.*

*"I just had a debt to pay, you monster," says Ju Ban.*

*He shakes the bars of our prison cell and yells for help. As he screams, I do too, but I don't scream for help, I scream for them to hang me.*



# The Great Escape

*Carmel School Association Elsa High School, Razon, Tamir – 11*

Zhang Yo had a turbulent life. Transitioning from being a respected and wealthy voyager in the Ming Dynasty to a slave tasked with constructing the Great Wall for the Qing Dynasty. He understood that there was no longer a place for him in such a dynasty.

Our voyage has completed its duty, and we now return home to the final destination of Beijing. The journey will be rough, but eventually we will make it. In order to get to Beijing, we had to make a few stops along the way. One stop in particular would change my life forever – our stop in Taicang. In Taicang, I witnessed poverty that I had never seen before. One man in particular struck me as needy, and I gave him and his family the last of our supplies for the voyage. The emotions of pure joy on his face are ones which I will never forget. We then arrived in Beijing on July 22. The city was very empty, all we saw were a couple of people on the street. We were wondering where the whole town went.

When we got to the Emperor's Palace to report back about the results of the seventh voyage, a new emperor greeted us showing the construction of The Great Wall. My gut told me something wasn't right about this new emperor, and before I could do anything about it, he commanded us to stop the series of voyages once and for all. Along with all men in the workforce, he forced us all to become slaves and help construct the great wall – possibly at the price of our lives.

The first day of work was the hardest day of all. We were forced to bring gigantic bricks up from a frozen lake and and pull them up a mountain, draining us to the very end. When we would get to the top we would add the brick to the wall. All of this effort, would be for a single brick. It was like this every day. The wall's construction had been taking its toll on me. I knew life was different now, and I couldn't take it anymore. I had to escape. The only way I could escape was if I would go to "collect" bricks for the wall and run when the opportunity presents itself. That is the only way.

The next day, I woke up and went to work. I approached the lake slowly and when I realised the guards were off duty I sprinted as fast as I could. Using every last bit of energy, I jumped over walls and dodged trees, but I was no match for the guards.

They took me to another guard and said, "帶他 (take him)." I was taken to the main jail in Beijing. I was there for almost 5 years, after which they released me back into slavery. I knew I was lucky to be alive. I knew I could not escape now, it was no longer as easy as before. I was constantly being followed. It was impossible.

10 years had passed, and I could not continue working. I was 52 years old. I was tired. I saw so many people die since I got out of jail. Work was getting tougher, and I was getting weaker. It was frightening. I finally decided to escape again, I couldn't take it anymore. This time, though, I was not going to get caught. The soldiers were no longer paying attention to me. I was labelled as "old" and was no longer a threat. Although I seemed old, I was still capable of doing many things. I spotted a new guard. One who lacked confidence. He was very young. I didn't want to harm him, but I needed to. It was crucial for my plan:

I was going to steal his armour, and pose as a soldier – making it easy for me to escape. I waited until it was dark, I saw the guard was alone. I slowly crept up behind him, and before he could do anything I choked him and he went unconscious. I took his armour and left as fast as I could. Another guard spotted me leaving and began chasing me, but I managed to lose him by hiding in a cave for that night. I understood that he would still be looking for me the next day, so I stayed in the cave for a few weeks until I finally decided to try go back home.

I was a month into my escape home. I was so thirsty, I had nothing to eat or drink. I could barely see anything. I was about to faint on the sand. My whole body hurt. I got to a dead end – the edge of a cliff. I rested there for a while. I saw a man like figure approaching me. It was a guard that worked at The Great

Wall. He had a knife in his hand. I moved backwards, panicking. I heard a cracking sound, but before I could do anything I fell. I landed on a ledge and fell unconscious. When I woke up I was in a hospital on the other side of China. The man that I saw attacking me was actually from Taicang, and was part of one of the families which I gave money to while I was still a Ming voyager. It was all a hallucination. Thank God.

After I was healed he took me to his house. I slept there for a while. I stayed there for 2 days eventually I told him that I had to leave to my family in 上海 (ShangHai). He offered that he would take me there in his rickshaw so I agreed. It wasn't a long journey, it just took a week. It was nice to see how our culture has changed so much since I left. When we finally arrived in 上海(ShangHai), I offered him to come over to my house to have tea. He said he had to go back to his family so we said goodbye and I thanked him for everything that he had done for me, and he left. When I arrived home I was so happy to see my wife and my two daughters. I was overjoyed to meet their husbands and my grandchildren. It was the best day of my life.

# Mid Ocean

*Carmel School Association Elsa High School, Ronen, Daniella – 12*

1409

Loud thunder, water already at waist length. The sail is torn and ripped. The ship has begun to sink. I wasn't even supposed to be there that day. I was only ten at the time and the only reason I was on that ship was because I had no other home. For four years I lived with my brother on that ship, ever since our father has abandoned us. Luckily for us our father's friend, now the captain of this ship, has offered us work in exchange for a home. This is where we ended up, sinking in the middle of the ocean.

We were on the journey back to China. We had what we came for. Just when everything was supposed to work out, a storm came, and then it all began. Water invaded our ship, impossible to control. I remember my brother's grip on my hand, tugging me as we ran to the captain. My brother Li Wei was sixteen years old. Unlike me, he was supposed to be there, he was at the right age. Even if our father wouldn't have abandoned us shortly after our mother's death, my brother would still be training to be a ship captain. It was his dream since he was five and it is unlucky he never got the chance to fulfill it.

We reached the captain, out of breath. "Sadly there is nothing I can do," he said without us having to explain, "I suggest you go onto the second ship and try to save yourselves."

"But what about you captain?" Li Wei asked as if surprised there wasn't much to be done.

"A captain needs to put others before himself. But I will take care of myself I promise," he replied "Now go, hurry or there wouldn't any space left."

We both knew this was probably the last time we would see him but we also knew it won't do any good if we died as well so we just ran, a very long run.

Water flooding everywhere. Just by looking at the other ship you could tell the overcrowding was unbearable, everyone pushing and shoving each other to save their own lives. As we got there we discovered there was barely room for one, if only we had been there earlier. That was the moment that I hate to remember until this very day. I feel a gentle push on my back and I realize that I have crossed over. I turn my head and see my brother on the other side. My brother left me and never came back.

1426

If I haven't mentioned it before my name is Li Qian. My name means strong in Chinese. I always found it hard to understand why I was named 'strong' when I wasn't. When I lost my brother I wasn't strong, I was weak, and for two years I found it hard to continue. Slowly I understood he wouldn't have wanted me like this. I need to be 'strong'. I realized that although my brother's life has ended it doesn't mean mine should end too.

This lead me to where I am now, 17 years later, captain of a ship. It has been 2 years since I got the role of a captain and my project has been finally launched. My crew and I are now on the way to the Pacific Ocean along with 2 other ships. Last trip was a disaster. Many people died on the way, the boat sunk taking many important possessions with it. This trip has lost a lot of respect for China from other countries. Even now people still remember the irresponsibility of the leaders on this trip that have caused all this damage, but all this is about to change. We are going to find that ship and retrieve all of the remaining objects and some broken parts of the ship to commemorate this journey and gain back our respect.

Only a few days in the sea and it feels like a year, irritation is building up. I have been yelling at my crew for a very long time. When you are stuck with many people on a ship there will be a moment when you need time for yourself, my moment was now. I look straight into the sea. Thinking deeply as the sun blinds. "Captain!" Of course someone had to ruin my peacefulness.

I move to find my assistant standing where the steering wheel is, Wang Yong was supposed to be moving it but for some reason my ship has decided not to cooperate. We go up, must have hit a wave, then suddenly down. We move to the left then instantly right. Just when the ocean has settled down we see in front of us an enormous ship coming towards us at full speed. "The steering wheel doesn't move! What should we do captain?" yelled Wang Yong. One thing I learned was that captains have to make the most difficult decisions. I push Wang Yong out of the way and grab the wheel. "Lower the sail!" the white sheet crumples down. I turn the wheel with full power to the left. Suddenly a big crash is heard. I open my eyes, feels like I haven't seen light in years. It took a moment until I was sure that I was not dead and that our ship survived, well at least most of it. I hear screams from the other side of the ship, I run. Apparently the back of the ship was damaged. I look to my right and see a big crowd huddled, looking down at the ocean. I walk there, slowly, not wanting to know what was going on. I gasp, now I understand why the screams. In this deep ocean, on this bright colourful day were lying still two of my best assistants, dead.

Of course the tragic incident has delayed us but somehow we managed to recover both physically and mentally. We have finally gotten to our destination. We have lost a lot, but sometimes you need to lose to reach the final target. I look back, there is a big pile of odd possessions behind me, ready to be brought back. It took awhile but we got it.

Everyone on the ship is celebrating but me. I know this feeling, it is still too familiar to forget although a lot of time has past. I look up to the sky and there it was proving my point, a storm is about to come.

Gray clouds, rain dripping all over, glass shatters from the frightening thunder and lightning. Everything was tearing up, just when everything was peaceful. The only lucky thing was that I knew, I knew not to

celebrate too early. It was déjà vu, just the thought of it made me shiver. I have dedicated so much time of my life for getting closure and even though we went here, to the place of his death I still feel like I didn't. I knew my brother deserved such a better life than he got, and the only difference now was that I realized I didn't deserve this life either.

The boat suddenly shakes, everyone was rushing around trying to get off to another less damaged ship. Just when things couldn't get any worse a little drop of water appeared, growing bigger as the seconds pass by, our ship began to sink. Since I am the captain, worried people kept coming to me running asking the same thing and I answered repeatedly. "There isn't much to be done, the water is already everywhere, try and find somewhere to escape and save yourselves!"

After everyone was gone and I was the only one left, I ran to the boat. I see the last boy about to climb on, there is barely any space left for him. He struggles and I come to help. He is onto the ship. I run forward and then freeze, even if I tried really hard the chances of there being space for me were really low, I saw it as a sign. Suddenly I see the boy whom I just helped. He stares at me in shock then quietly asks, although was probably scared for the answer "but what about you captain?" I smile, I had the perfect answer to give him. I whisper back to him quietly, "a captain needs to put others before himself." He gets further and further away as the ship moves. So there I was all alone on the ship knowing the end was near but instead of feeling bad I was looking forward. I have dedicated most of my life to get closure, I have wasted a lot of time trying to understand the reason of things happening. So now, I knew that all I was ever hoping for and the best closure I could ever get would be a reunion, a reunion with my brother.

# Zheng He

*Carmel School Association Elsa High School, Selevan, Bradley – 14*

Thoughts were rushing through my head as I was putting the last of my clothes into my full, leather trunk. I got on the floor and put all of my body weight onto the trunk as I struggled to buckle the latches. I went to my curtains and pulled them open. It was still dark outside, the sun was just shining across the horizon. I quietly picked up my luggage and walked to the front door. I knew that it would be my last time here. My father startled me as he walked out of the dark dining room.

“You can’t keep running away from your problems, Xie Wan,” my father said to me in a soft voice.  
“I am not running away,” I said to him with a harsh tone. “I just can’t stay here. All these terrible memories are all that’s ever in my mind. Seeing my mother cry in these rooms, and now she’s just gone.”

I began tearing up and unlocked the door with one of my hands and the other reached for my trunk. I began to walk out of the house. My father grabbed my arm with force.

“Coward!” he hissed at me and slammed the door in my face.

My life has always been a mess. I grew up in a small house, with two parents that would always fight. I spent most days sneaking through the village, taking anything I could get my hands on. When I was around fifteen, pick-pocketing was a hobby of mine. It was a risky task, but I was struggling and it was a risk I was willing to take. My mother became ill and the treatment was too expensive for our family. She slowly suffered for years, until her final day came. It was my eighteenth birthday. Nothing has been the same since. My dad’s anger had never been worse, he was taking out his sadness on me. He was bringing home a new whore every night. Seeing a woman walk out of my father’s room in the morning was heartbreaking. I couldn’t deal with this torture anymore. I knew it was time to get away, start something new and not feel like such a waste.

I was ready to be out at sea for a while. My mother would always walk me down to the port when my dad couldn’t get a grip of himself. She would tell me everything would be alright. She always reassured me that it would just be hard for a while, but everything will be clear eventually. I stopped believing in the things my mother would tell me. All my hope was so close to being completely gone.

I slowly made it down to the harbor. There were at least fifty boats docked against the waterfront. These boats were later filled with the thousands of men crowding the area, including me. We were setting sail for our journey to the coast of East Africa later that day. The sun fully rose as the admiral, Zheng He, rose to inform us about how our next few years at sea would look. He was a very inspirational man. He gave his life to the emperor and I have always found that to be a sign of true commitment. I always aspired to have that much motivation and enjoyment of my work.

As we boarded the ships, each person was shown to their sleeping chambers. The room was tiny and consisted of a chest of drawers and a low mattress. I placed my heavy trunk, which I have been lugging around all morning, in an empty corner of the room. We had five minutes to be unpacked and changed into the wardrobe we were given as we entered the boat. I put the sheets that were in one of the drawers on the mattress. We weren't given a pillow. We were instructed to bring our empty bags with us as we would be keeping them in a room all together.

The sea was rough as we headed out. The wind was strong and the sails were filled with all the breeze. Our boat was the last to leave and we were at the back of the long trail. It was rough learning all the new skills that would be needed for the next few years, but I got through it strong.

The sky was filled with crazy colors during the sunset. Taking time while I was admiring the sky was the moment where all my hope came rushing back. I could be something. I can make an impact.

The next few weeks were difficult. They were full of hard work and disappointment, but we were not giving up. The clouds were building up during the day and it began to rain moments before it became dark. We were prepared for the storm. We tied everything down and had everything put inside. The waves were big and the rain was strong. People were screaming and yelling orders, but everyone was too stressed. The waves grew bigger and people began to say we weren't going to make it. The boats ahead of us were much larger than our small boat. People kept yelling, but everyone went silent when we saw the wave in front of us. The wave crashed down on us hard and that was that.

I woke up with bruises and cuts all over. I was alone. I got up and my vision adjusted to the dark. I was in some sort of cave on the water. I was scared and worried about what would happen to me. I made my way to the edge of the water and could see parts of the destroyed boat. I could see the shapes of my fellow sailors at the bottom of the sea.

I stepped back with terror. How could this happen? What have I done to deserve this? I was stuck in the middle of nowhere, with no one. I sat down on the cold rocks and began to cry. 'I should've just stayed with my father.' I thought to myself. I knew anything was better than being there though. I closed my eyes and tried to sleep. I couldn't deal with everything.

I woke up a little while later and it was still dark outside. I sat in silence for a little while before I heard footsteps. I followed the sound deeper into the cave. I was shocked to see a man beating a woman on the floor. The man turned around and looked me in the eyes. It was my father. I was shocked and yelled "No!" as I dived into the two people to stop the beating. I landed hard on the ground. There was no one there. I felt insane.

"Xie Wan?" I heard from behind me. I stood up fast and turned around to see my mother. I stood there silently, not able to move. She turned around and told me to follow her. I walked slowly behind her. She led me to the edge of the water. I reached out to her, but she backed away from my hand. She took a step into the water and kept walking.

I slowly followed behind her, deeper into the water. She turned back and looked into my eyes then dived into the water. I followed behind her, deep down into the water. She kept going down and so did I. All of a sudden bubbles formed all around her and once the bubbles were all gone, I saw what she truly was, a monster. Something I could never explain. It grabbed onto my leg as I tried to swim away. It dragged me down. I was struggling to breathe and I was too deep down to make it.

My vision became blurry as my lungs filled with the water. Its eyes glowed green. That was the last thing I saw before the darkness I'd see forever.



# The Kader Brothers

*Carmel School Association Elsa High School, Wigisser, Alex – 11*

There are many famous stories of the Ming voyages. On these massive ships, there was gold, jewellery, and spices. A lot of people attempted to steal from the ships, some were successful and some weren't. This is the story of one of the greatest heists in the world. It all started with these brothers, the Kader brothers.

Axmed and Mahad Kader were regular brothers; they fought and laughed. Mahad was the older brother and he was taller, faster, louder and stronger. Axmed was the younger brother and was quite; he didn't really socialize very well, but he was very smart. Axmed and Mahad liked being with each other very much and most of the time they were inseparable. Their parents cared greatly for the boys; they cooked for them and made clothes for them. Axmed and Mahad's parents didn't have a lot of money; they had a farm. On the farm, they grew vegetables and had chickens, sheep, and cows. Life was good and peaceful on the farm.

One day, Mahad went out to run some errands which his mother sent him to do when suddenly he saw a big crowd gathered around the dock where there were huge ships. He immediately saw why there was all this commotion. The ship was so big that even from afar he could see it as if it were only a few meters away. Mahad couldn't believe his eyes. He ran towards the crowd. He thought, "If the ship is as big from this distance, I need to see it up close". When he finally got next to the boat, just a few meters away, he felt so small. He was, in fact, super tall at 1.90 meters but for the first time in his life, he felt like an ant. He then asked a fellow farmer, "Why is everyone staring at the floor and not at the huge ship?"

The fellow farmer replied, "I am old and short and my eyes aren't the best so why don't you look yourself? You're extremely tall!" Mahad then went on his tippy toes and saw A LOT of gold, spices from China and jewellery.

Mahad ran to tell his family about this massive commotion and his mother asked "Do any of the farmers get this gold?"

Mahad didn't know so he just said, "Yes."

"Then let's go collect some gold and spices." Replied his mother.

Mahad answered in a wobbly voice, "They have put it back in the ship."

"You two boys have 2 days to collect the gold and spices." Said his mother with clear authority. The two boys agreed to do this task.

Mahad grabbed Axmed and ran outside to talk to him. At first, Axmed was confused and asked "What's wrong?"

Mahad answered in a very worried voice, "I don't know if you can get the gold." Axmed told Mahad to go down the hill and ask the sailors on the ship. Mahad picked Axmed up and dashed to the ship. When they got to the ship Mahad asked the sailor if the gold and spices would be given to the farmers. The sailors didn't understand anything so he asked a farmer if you can take the loot.

The farmer said, "DO NOT touch that loot! Earlier today a farmer was brutally beaten up by the sailors." Axmed asked how did she know, to which she answered, "Because I saw it!"

Mahad and Axmed had a private talk and agreed to not tell their mother about it as they didn't want to see her upset. After talking for a while they agreed on another thing; they agreed to steal from the ship. Axmed suggested that they can use the little shed behind the house to plan the heist but first they needed to know where they stored all the gold and spices. Their plan was to stay up late until they stored the gold and spices back in the ship. Axmed had a notebook that he would write down everything he was thinking about and how to plan the heist. Once Mahad came back from seeing where they store the loot it was time to come up with the plan.

First, they needed a distraction so Mahad thought they can take their noisiest chicken and let it scream so it could distract the two guards at the front gate protecting the entrance to the ship. Meanwhile, Mahad would sneak in through the gate. Inside the ship, there would many sailors. Axmed thought this could be a big problem but Mahad can knock out a sailor and pretend to be the sailor. Mahad then asked, "Where am I going to put the body!?"

Axmed answered in a soothing voice, "Relax, I saw they needed to use barrels to take the loot back into the ship so just put him into a barrel."

He then had to get to the basement and get some gold and spices to bring it back to Axmed. Mahad and Axmed thought they would do it the last day they were going to be here which was tomorrow. The next morning they were observing the whole day until it was really late the heist had to begin now.

Mahad and Axmed gave the plan a second thought before really doing it. They knew that their parents needed this so they started the heist. They got the chicken and put it on the floor, they then gave it a little smack and it went wild. The guards started to get irritated and started chasing it with their spears. Then Mahad got onto the ship and ran to the barrels; he saw a sailor collecting barrels to organize them. Mahad then jumped, scared him and punched him in one shot out cold. Mahad changed into the sailors' clothes. He then followed a sailor with some gold in his hands to the basement. After the sailor put the gold back into the basement Mahad silently grabbed the gold and spices and put it into a big sack and rushed to the gate. Outside the gate, he saw the two guards with a dead chicken. Axmed saw Mahad. Axmed then immediately rushed to the dock and grabbed the chicken and started to fake cry to distract the guards. The guards were laughing but they also were starting to get irritated. So irritated that they lifted up their spears and were about to stab Axmed. Right before they did, Mahad struck his spear across the two sailors bodies. Mahad was in shock but didn't want to show it so he threw the spear with the bodies into the water.

Axmed and Mahad sprinted back to the shed and didn't know what to do with all the loot. Axmed had a great idea; he thought they could pretend to dig holes to plant crops but put the loot inside the holes so it looks as if they just came across the loot while digging. The next morning Mahad was "digging holes for the crops" and came across the loot. Mahad immediately ran to his parents and told them about the gold. They all darted to the loot. Axmed and Mahad's mother and father were in shock. They said it was a miracle from God, but in reality it was a miracle from their boys.

# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

*Chinese International School, Zhu, Edward – 12*

On a land, which we now know as Calicut, in the West Coast of India, legend among local people speaks of a strange event many years ago.

That day, a ghostly assembly of ships clouded the horizon. Each one of these ships was the size of countless houses, with dragons painted elegantly and flawlessly against the sturdy wood. The clouds covered the sky; no, not the clouds, those were sails, stacks on stacks of red, flowing cloth, each a darker silhouette of the one before.

As the ship progressed forward, a wave of foreign sailors alighted from their ships. There was a large commotion from the other side as the natives scurried over to see what was happening. However, they ran straight away from the port in fear. There were shouts and cries far away as natives reached for spears in an attempt to protect themselves, or run away. The port was empty.

A group of native soldiers in red tunics rushed over, followed by five other groups, each holding spears and shields. They were led by a middle-aged, limping man in a slightly darker tedious red dhoti, shoulders bowed and his chin out and down. Before they started marching towards the bridge extending from the port, a representative climbed down gracefully from the ship, followed a bit less swiftly by three guards.

“Greetings,” the foreign representative said in Arabic after a few minutes of silence. “We are from the land of Ming Empire and I would like to greet you fine people of this land. We come in peace. Do you fine men have a spokesperson? Because —”

“I am their spokesperson,” the man in a dhoti interrupted in Arabic. He limped slowly, and walked at a crooked pace towards the crew. “My name is Rama Kushna,” he chirped.

“We are glad to meet your people.” The foreign representative said in Arabic. “I am Ma Huan, a representative from my fleet. We come in peace.”

Rama Kushna attempted a smile. “You have travelled a long, long way for this.” He paused. “What do you want?”

“Your country contains countless goods that we seek to trade with our own goods.”

“I’ll report to my king,” Rama Kushna said in a shrill voice.

He arrived at the palace, with the red elephant decorations sent swinging about as he swung open the door, where the King held an emergency meeting.

“Rama Kushna! Tell everyone about the event,” the King, sat in the far-end part of the table in a overly cushioned red chair, announced with a skeptical tone drifting off his words. As he fiddled at his bushy beard, his pet parrot echoed, (“event, event.”)

“Your Majesty, a fleet of ships from the Ming Empire just arrived at our port. Their fleet is like nothing we’ve seen before. They say they have brought trade items for us, but I see that they have more soldiers than their items.”

“The ‘floating city’ has come to our attention lately,” one advisor in red chattered.

“Indeed?” the King droned sarcastically. (“indeed? indeed?”)

Rama Kushna continued: "I do not trust them! Remember how the Mongols tricked us decades ago? After all, they have many neighbours, why go to us? We must stop them!" There was agreement throughout the council.

"What do you mean!" the advisor in red robes chirped loudly. "You can't just stop them! They haven't done anything to you yet!" There were some mild murmurs of agreement.

"What? They have just swarmed our entire trading port with men. They have the potential to end all of mankind in our country!" Rama Kushna declared.

"They promised to give you goods! Let's wait for a while and see what'll happen!" the advisor in red argued.

"You can't do that! They might suddenly pounce up on us without us noticing anytime!" Rama Kushna spat. "What do you think, Your Majesty?"

The King stroked his thick beard and his pet parrot squeaked. He paused. "Well, if you put it that way..... you're still wrong, Rama Kushna. We'll host a banquet and consider trading."  
("trading, trading.")

Rama Kushna opened and closed his mouth repeatedly in rebuttal, but nothing came out. He rose, and darted his eyes around and concluded, "Tell me if you change your mind." Then he limped out of the room, with his boring mojari bobbing slowly up and down as it hit the floor.

The foreigners were informed about the banquet, and on the second day, Zheng He, the Grand Director, and his crew arrived at the palace. They were treated with an appetizing banquet of rather exotic foods. Waiters dressed in tight outfits scurried about, carrying plates and bowls of steaming curries and broths. Dancers with tighter outfits swayed and swung to the beat of a musician's sitar. Most people from Calicut, including the King, couldn't understand Arabic, so Rama Kushna was their translator. Via Ma Huan and Rama Kushna, the visitors and the people from Calicut commenced in fascinating conversations.

"Dear King of Calicut, our Grand Director, Zheng He, has a letter to present to you from our emperor," Ma Huan grandly announced.

"I am honored," the King droned, loosely wearing a smile. ("honored, honored,")

Zheng He's buffed frame and admirable height towered over the King, and his beardless face trumped that of the King's as well, especially his shiny eyes. There just seemed to be this aura around him. Zheng He read in Chinese in a grand voice, "You, O King, live beyond the confines of many seas. You, O King of your honorable nation, sit upon a throne occupied through successive generations by predecessors, all of whom have been styled respectful and obedient..." The letter was written in both Chinese and Arabic.

"Can someone help me translate this letter?" the King said afterwards.

"Your Majesty, allow me!" Rama Kushna whined and stretched out his palm like a plate towards the King.

The King looked around desperately to see if there was other volunteers, but to his misfortune, there were none. He tossed the letter to Rama Kushna, who rasped out a translation.

"This means that they want to take all your goods and assert dominance later over your men."

"What...!?"

("what! wh-squawk!.eEeEeCh!")

"...did you say?!" He boomed, clutching his parrot's neck tightly with his wrinkled hands. "They want to make Calicut a part of Ming empire and steal your treasures."

Upon hearing this, the King roared, “Enough from the clown!” He slammed the table, threw the parrot on the floor, and pointed at Zheng He, “You think you can steal from us and just walk away?!” then commanded the native soldiers, “Grab that man now!”

Two native soldiers grabbed Zheng He by his stocky arms and dragged him away. His guards were disarmed immediately, and Ma Huan too, who pulled out an anlace. There were screams and shouts in hall. Some of Zheng He’s crew tried to escape, but all of them were grabbed by the guards, who cuffed the crews’ hands together and thrustured their heads against the table. Plates, food bits, soups, and sauce crumpled or slipped against the hard ground.

Before the King could continue, an Arab envoy picked up the damaged letter, then declared, “Your Majesty, why are you getting so angry at this letter? It’s been translated incorrectly by Rama Kushna!”

A silence hung about in the room as the envoy, who was now sitting down on his chair, continued, “The letter means that, they want to perform trade with our country.” Another advisor then came over and confirmed it. “What did you just say?” the King turned his head around to face the foreign envoy. There was silence for a minute or two. The silence was broken by the King’s muttering.

He spoke quietly, “I am extremely sorry for this, but there has been a terrible mistake here.” He raised his voice and roared, “Where is Rama Kushna?!” He pointed sharply at an empty chair.

He then realized that Rama Kushna had already dashed out the doors, leaving crumbs and smudges of his overturned food lying on the ground. Guards stormed out the doors, and all they saw was some rumbling of the trees, and then nothing.

The King muttered slowly, “It’s too late. The bastard could be gone miles away.” He paused. The men placed a shocked Zheng He back on his seat.

Zheng He signalled his men to carry over a trunk with a cover of silk. Zheng He swished the blanket of silk off and opened the trunk. In the dying light of the moon, the tall porcelain vase showed off its smooth curves and intricate coloring.

“We have brought to you, O King, a selection of our finest vases from the Ming Empire..” Zheng He smiled grandly.

On this large chunk of land, which we now know as Calicut, legend among local people speaks of a strange event many years ago...

# Life Through Unforgettable Voyages

*Delia School of Canada, Rajput, Aditi – 14*

“Yeh were a lil’ baby at that time, Cheng”, Uncle Zhang told me whenever I asked him to recite me the story of when Li found me. Uncle Zhang had worked for 45 years under him and his dad until Li died. Zhang was a juvenile man, around 15, when he joined Li’s dad’s crew. He was like a little seedling who just sprouted from under the ground at that time. But as time passed, he made friends and learnt a lot from his dad. Unfortunately Li’s dad, Luis died in a battle at the age of 40, leaving Li to be made the next captain. Li proved himself to be a prominent captain with admirable leadership skills. Li died as well after 10 years. Uncle Zhang was like my dad and Li like a brother, being the dearest for me.

I went to uncle Zhang. His cabin, with some other people from the crew, is just above mine. All these people here are like a family to me because I have lived my whole life here. I held the doorknob and entered his cabin. “Hello uncle Zhang. Would you mind telling me the story of when Li found me, please?” I inquired him. “Again!! Oh, okay. Don’t make tha’ face. I’ll tell yeh the story yet again. C’mon now, sit here.”

He began “We were on this ship with captain. The sun’s heat was so blisterin’ tha’ day, I thought it was goin’ ter fry me like an egg. And then Wong, one o’ the workers guarding the sails tha’ day started shouting, jumping up and down. ‘*Captain, captain. I see smoke over that island. A lot of smoke. Come, hurry, look...*’ he yelled on the top of ’is lungs. The captain came in burstin’ open the door of his cabin ‘*What happened?*’ ‘*Captain, do you see the smoke over that island?*’ While tryin’ to block sunlight with his hands, he peered in tha’ direction. ‘*Hmm....interesting! Wong, turn the sails in that direction. We are going to have a look of the island. Take the required things. I want half the crew, stay back, look after Thunder Dragon. Zhang and Wong, accompany me. Get to work!*’ Thunder Dragon is the name of our ship.

Uncle Zhang continued “We reached the shore after half an hour. We disembarked the ship with captain and started walkin’ in ter the heart o’ the forest coverin’ the island. We walked, encounterin’ different types o’ animals and plants o’ the land, some o’ which were perilous while the others harmless.

The sun had started ter set and all of us were extremely tired. ‘*We haven’t found anything yet, captain. Even the sun has started to set. Shouldn’t we board the ship before nightfall?*’ Mack, one o’ our crew guys, suggested. ‘*You are right. Let’s turn and—*’ Captain stopped mid-sentence an’ started sprintin’. He called out ‘*Hey, smoke’s coming from that direction. Follow me.*’ We reached in ter a clearing in the forest. It seemed like a village, set off on fire. ‘*What is this place?*’ Wong asked. As we moved forward, we could see dead bodies lying all over the place, bleedin’, so dreadful to see because o’ the way it was burnt. We searched all the huts an’ finally reached the hut in the center. Captain, Mack, Wong and I cautiously entered the hut. Captain went in ter a room and came out with some basket. ‘*Look at this*’ he showed. We all huddled in a circle. He removed the sheet coverin’ the basket and there you were, Cheng, less than a year old. You began crying. We all stared in shock that everyone was dead, except you” Uncle Zhang stopped. I could see that he was recalling the reminiscence of that day. “You were so adorable tha’ we could not think of leaving you like tha’. So, for the sake o’ humanity we took you. We scoured the place again and went back ter the ship. While we were walking back, I asked ‘*What do ya reckon her name should be*’ and we came up with many names. Finally, we consulted captain. ‘*I expect her to be even braver in the future. How about a name expressing power— like, Chenguang*’ he said. We agreed and thought the name to be exquisite. We reached back ter the ship and showed ya ter everyone else. They were amazed by ya. From then, you were with us” he concluded. I am always flabbergasted by this story no matter how many times I have heard it. But the biggest question was how did I survive? “Uncle Zhang, do you know that how could I have survived at the time?” I asked him for the thousandth time. “I dunno Cheng but I was thinkin’ about tha’ earlier and likely it was your parents who hid you in a secure place with the sheet over you, ter protect ya. Your parents were killed in the incident. I can say tha’ cause I saw a lady with a similar face as yours. Not sure if she was your mother. Must have died protecin’ ya. Otherwise, I dunno. It’s pretty late now. Should go sleep” he said. “Yes, good night. You should sleep as well.” I left the room and went back to the cabin. I put off the lamp hanging over my table and fell to sleep almost instantly.

I had a dream or should I say a nightmare and there were my parents being tortured. I don’t know how they look like but the feeling was more than anything else to explain it. I suddenly woke up and a cold sweat broke off. There are other things dreadful than this. I still remember that day clearly. I was 15 then.

It was a bright day. No sign of anything unpleasant. I was playing in my cabin with Li when suddenly we heard noises of a racket, swords clanging against other and cannon balls being shot. Li quickly went out.

I understood at once, someone had attacked us. I went on the deck and what I saw was enough to terrorize me. Uncle Zhang came towards me and asked me to go and hide in a cabin. I had started to run towards my cabin but what I saw gave me courage instead of appalling me. Half of our crew was dead fighting. I couldn't leave my family at such a crucial time. So I took my slingshot and aimed at a tall person from other crew. The stone hit the person on the head and before he could realise, I shot another stone towards him and knocked him unconscious. It gave me more courage and I took out my sword before a half giant looking person came towards me and without even thinking that I was so younger than him, took out his sword and almost killed me when Li approached and stopped him. I came to know later that the half-giant was the captain of the other crew. Li fought him and he almost won before 5 more people came to help the half-giant. I was shrieking that this was unfair and ran to help him but Zhang caught me and sent me to my cabin. I was locked in my cabin, furious for not being able to help. I was peeping through one of the holes and saw that Li was badly hurt. The half giant got up on his knees and took two swords. Li's back was facing me and he was on his knees, trying to get up. The half giant pierced the swords right through Li and there was blood all over. I was scandalized. After what seemed like hours, the opponent crew had left because of losing and Uncle Zhang came into my cabin flinging open the door. I ran towards Li's body. I was sobbing like a baby and blaming myself that I couldn't help. I shouldn't have done that and listened to uncle Zhang when he told me to go back in my cabin at once. We had lost more than half of our crew and Li. Everyone was weeping and no one talked any more for days. Uncle Zhang explained me that it wasn't my fault and I was just trying to help. But I had lost my brother.

A year later everyone decided to make me the new captain and I ought to be a just and a humane captain. I decided that we would visit different villages and kingdoms all over the world on our Thunder Dragon and spend our time helping those in need. We would spend all our treasure in this task and ask kings to donate for a nice cause. It will make a change in the world because if we as sailors can do such things, why not others who are even more capable than us. After all, it is the most satisfactory thing I can do for Li.

# Dragon Kite

*Delia School of Canada, Saha, Vaniya – 13*

It's been 10 years since they found me. I was only a wee lad of 11. I can't remember my parents except my mum had ginger-tawny hair and my dad had the eyes of emeralds, which they gave to me. All I can remember was a bright flame engulfing our town while I was afloat on the vast sea with a gold coin in my grasp. It was all I had, all I had left. Days passed by and I could feel my flesh dissolving into my bones. Though being surrounded by saline water, my throat yearned for fresh liquid. I must have drifted halfway across the ocean already. I drifted and drifted, and that's how they found me.

"What use will it be to have this childer on board?"

"Maybe I might tell you when you get this kid some water!"

My eyes peeled open when a bucket of water was dumped on me. A great way to meet someone. I woke up to face 10 grown men circling the bed which I was drenched upon. They had this foreign look, but it didn't prick any memory.

"So when can we eat this scanty little lad?"

'Excuse me?' I thought.

"We ain't eating anyone! We have fish and that's what we're gonna eat! Otherwise, it would be called cannibalism!"

'What's that...?'

"Shut your imbecile mouth. He's listening!"

As they proceeded their dispute, I crawled out of the creaky bed. Thanking that these gruesome looking men had voices so obstreperous they never heard me. I attempted to keep a low level by crouching down. I finally go to the door when—

"Oi, the kid's escapin'!"

This was my cue. I ran. Least did I know there were another 10 pirates dwelling outside with their ears to the wall while being surrounded by buckets of soapy water. Looking back over my shoulder the ones I had encountered were already pouring out. So I ran and I ran. I never realized that these pirates were so feeble-minded they kept running in circles behind me. It was like a race of laps. I overtook the ones at the back, the back ones overtook me. It all happened in such a blur we all forgot what our aim was and just ran in circles.

"STOP WITH THIS SWASHBUCKLING NONSENSE!"

A man with a voluminous charcoal hat appeared. He seemed rather ordinary, but his thick faded crimson coat and his lengthy knotted beard made him stand out.

"I said we'd get the boy, not chase him around like mindless ducks for a crumb of bread! You, what's your name?" It sounded more like a demand. With that, he produced a thin but cuspidate sword and placed the tip on my neck.

"It's Jake, Jake Wesley," I trembled, whispering the latter.

Disregarding me, the man lifted his sword to his face, narrowing his eyes as if inspecting it. "Little Wong, clean my sword. It still has blood." He tossed it to a short and rather pale-looking man. "And Big Wong, tie this Jack. We don't want another cat and mouse chase now do we?" a pause. "I SAID DO WE?"



The once silent men erupted into fraudulent laughter. The vain leader stood with his chin high. Gosh, how did I end up here? Big Wong seemed like the opposite of Little Wong, tanned and muscular. Yet he had the same round face with the bulb-like nose of his little brother. He winded the rope around me that scraped my damp skin of water and sweat. One of the pirates walked up and poked me with a cleft mop. I tried evading but the weakness in my body persisted. I slowly backed away until the floor beneath me felt... unstable.

I seemed to be steadying myself on a plank at the edge of the ship. With the biting stabs of the mop and the spraying water on my exposed feet, I chose my only option.

“What do you have against me?!”

“There's no use of keeping you alive!”

“You think I even wanted to end up with you people?” This made him pause for a moment. His eyes focused on me. A whispering conversation stirred between the rest.

“Hmm, we can't be sure to trust someone who's come from the other side of the Earth. First, you must do something for us to prove that you are trustworthy!” he projected as he laid the sword on me again.

An hour later I found myself dumb-founded while scrubbing the decks while the others were in the cabin discussed me. Shivers ran down my spine as I watched the ocean water stand unnaturally still.

*Thump... Thump... Thump...*

Steady footsteps were coming towards me as I hurriedly got back to work.

“Come here, will you?” The captain motioned at a space alongside him as he leaned upon the sides of the ship. His demeanour had suddenly changed like a switch had been flicked. His voice had the same gruffness but it was soothing. I made my way discreetly past the soapy floor next to him. “Earlier back there, you stood up to us. It was a very brave thing to do.”

“Th-thanks.”

“You remind me of someone. Of my own father.”

“Re-really?”

“You sure do! How did you end up on the sea anyway? Where your parents, boy?”

“Jake actually. I ended up here since my village had caught a terrible fire. My parents left me in the sea instead of being stuck in the fire with the rest. They thought I might be found.”

“Well, you clearly look like you are somewhere from England.”

“How do you know that?”

“It's been decades since I've first stepped on a ship. I bet I've travelled around the globe more than there is to travel!” I tried my best to fake a laugh, but his boastful joke made no sense to me. We chatted along a while longer before he said “It's time to bid the stars goodnight now,” and gave me a wholesome pat on the back. I felt a connection with him, though I couldn't explain it as we made our ways to the cabins. The others had made a makeshift bed for me out of layered cloth and a cashmere blanket on top. Though it not as welcoming as the one at my now-burnt-down home, I slept like a bag of sand, with the lack of proper sleep in weeks, I felt...

*SPLASH!*

I was woken up with a startle. Not again Mr. Pirates...

“Come on kiddo! We're here!”

“It's Jake... and what do you mean by ‘we're here?’” I picked myself from the bed and dragged my legs that were tied to invisible weights across the floor. I looked over the sides that were suddenly taller than me. They must have been stretched overnight. Or did I shrink? I peeked over the side to see a grey haze with a faint hue of green. “Where are we?” We sailed closer to this Island. Capt' looked back at me with a grin.

“Welcome to my home country- China!” Captain seemed to have drunk a de-ageing potion. He was jumping up and down frantically to get a better view. We descended the ship, which I later learnt was called ‘Dragon Kite’. “Mumma!” An old lady stood patiently, looking for her son. Captain ran towards her to embrace. I guess captain just beat the record of the tightest bear hug. His mother peeled his body away but pulled back for a spirited kiss on the forehead.

‘I'm so proud of you,’ was what I read from her teary face. Gosh, I felt like my eyes started welling up.

“Let me show you around, Jake!” Captain said. His mother nodded in agreement, he must have told her about me. Capt’ tugged my hand and within an hour, we were in a market place. It was an enthralling place to see, clothes of exquisite fashions, cuisines delicately prepared and huddles of people with different ethnicities. “Welcome to the pirates market! We buy and sell our goods here!”

“I thought pirates were about stealing.”

“Nah, that would just be being a horrible human.”

“Robin Hood wasn’t horrible.”

“Stop making up stuff, we have a business to run.” Captain rushed towards our little assemblage of pirates while I decided to stroll around and have a better look.

A tiny young boy, the age of about seven, sat in the corner. His clothes were torn and hardly any flesh was left on his body. Like me.

“Hey, I know you can’t understand me,” I started off, “but I want you to have this,” I fished out my gold coin. After all, it was just a piece of metal, nothing compared to the value of someone's life. “You need it more than me.” Carefully placing it in his ever so fragile hands, I carefully stood back up, only to meet a passionate pat on the back from Captain.

“You will be a great pirate, boy.”

# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

*Diocesan Boys' School, Fung, Cheng Kiu Alex – 13*

## Prologue

Historically, Chinese dragon is not only a symbol of imperial power but also strength, particularly control over droughts, typhoons, and floods. Although it is impossible to study the dragon's power is true or not, but for thousands of years, there have been numerous stories, tales, and legends about dragons. In people's mind, the dragon is always mysterious and sacred.

I travelled with the admiral Zheng He and my father, Chen Hai for an expedition to the Indian Ocean in winter five years ago. It was really a once-in-a-lifetime experience. We encountered an incredible incident which was not written in history, but one which I saw with my own eyes.

★ ★ ★

My name is Chen Dan with a nickname, Xiao Dan. I am twenty years old. I have gone sailing with my father since childhood. He has been working as the Captain of the ship sailing with Zheng He in the past six voyages.

“Xiao Dan, I'm going to take the seventh voyage with Zheng He next month,” said Father. “Xuande Emperor has again appointed admiral Zheng He to command the fleet. This expedition is going to have more than three hundred gigantic ships travelling to South China Sea, Indian Ocean and Red Sea. So, they are seeking for twenty-seven thousand men for this expedition.”

“How long will you be away this time?” I inquired disappointedly.

“This is gonna be three years. Do you want to come with me?” asked Father.

“Really?” I exclaimed, overjoyed. “I'd love to come with you! So, what's my role gonna be? A captain like you?”

“Of course not,” he replied. “You'll be the First Officer reporting to the Captain on the Supply ship.”

“Wow! My dream job, First Officer! I'll be responsible for hoisting the anchor and taking care of the fitting out of the vessel and examining whether it is sufficiently provided with ropes, pulleys, sails and all other rigging that are necessary for the voyage, right?” I overjoyed.

“This time I'll be working on the Treasure ship with the admiral Zheng He. Son, make sure you listen to the order from the Ship Captain, okay?” Father said sharply.

“Sure, Father!” I answered cheerfully.

★ ★ ★

It had been 100 days since I left my hometown, Nanjing. In my ship, I gazed up, and saw millions of stars shimmering in the coal-black sky. The moon shone in the cloudless sky with all her gleams. She looked like a glossy dish of silver. The sparkling stars twinkled around the moon and made her more ravishing. The scenery was just so magnificent.

When I was relaxingly looking at this beautiful sky, someone called out my name.

“Xiao Dan!”

It was Ship Captain, Xuefei.

“What's the matter, Captain?” I asked.

“Our supplies are running out after the battle with the pirates. We should replenish the supplies, like livestock, food and firewood on an island and continue exploring as soon as possible. Otherwise, the fleet would not have enough food supply for twenty thousand crewmen,” he said seriously.

“You’ve gotta be kidding, Captain. In this vast and boundless sea, how can we even find an island? You really got such a great idea,” I responded sarcastically.

A dim light rose from the horizons ——— it was dawn. When I gazed upon the surface with my binoculars, I saw an island full of triangular scales. The coastline of the entire island looked exactly like a serpentine bay. I believed that the roofs of the houses on the island were reflected as the triangular scales.

“Captain, Captain, I’ve sighted an island with villages along the coast!” I cried with a shudder.

“Fantastic! Good job, Xiao Dan. Go ahead to take a junk and grab a few crewmen to investigate that island. Carry these gold, silks and porcelains with you and see if you can trade for some supplies. If the place is safe for trading, come back and I’ll report to our admiral Zheng He. Perhaps, we’ll settle that for a short period of time.”

“Yes sir, Captain,” I saluted.

★ ★ ★

I quickly jumped onto a junk with a few crewmen heading to the island. When our junk got closer to the land, the picture seemed totally different from what I saw through my binoculars. I couldn’t see any trees and bushes. It’s even uninhabited. The strangest thing was the triangular scales that I thought were rooftops disappeared. When we landed, it was weird that there’s no beach along the coast. The ground was slippery with reflections of our faces like a mirror. White smelly smoke came up from the ground. I had a gut feeling that we were on a dangerous island. We walked about three miles and were perplexed by some squeaky noises around us. Some crewmen were shuddering in fear.

“Hey guys, two houses!” said Taojun, one of the crewmen yelled joyfully.

“They don’t really look like the houses that we saw in other nations. The creepy rooftops are like long needles with pointed claws, doors are in elliptical shapes with no windows,” said Hanxiao another crewman worriedly.

“Don’t worry, perhaps they are just a tribe living on this land. Guys, get ready our finest silk, porcelains and a box of gold. We’re going to have a big trade with the tribe. Let’s move.” I pretended to be calm.

When I stood in front of the door, it suddenly open by sliding to the left. It was weird that no one was standing behind the door.

The inner of house was in pale colour with mirror-liked walls and floor. The walls hung up with uncountable tiny strange cubes. We could see through inside of the cubes. They were blinking in different colours which made us feel dizzy. Then, we hurried along a silent corridor with shuddering fear.

A tall skinny man dressed in a shiny silver, gleaming long hooded robe suddenly showed up in a short distance. We were all frozen to the spot. Hanxiao’s shaky body almost sent him sprawling, and I caught his arm quickly.

I took a deep breath and stammered, “Hey, good...good morning! We’re coming for trading with you.”

“He’d no feedback. Seems... he couldn’t understand our language. Let’s show him our finest silk and porcelains!” said Taojun quaveringly. The strange man walked closer to us with his head looking down. We all kept our wary eyes on him. An uncomfortable premonition of fear pervaded my senses.

The man showed that he wasn’t interested in our finest silk and porcelains. He suddenly reached out and patted on Hanxiao’s shoulder. He then sniffed and whispered to him which we didn’t understand. Hanxiao became muddle-headed and disoriented. Apparently, he was bewitched and bewildered by the man. He lost control of himself and walked away with the tall man.

“Hanxiao! Come back! Come back!” whispered Taojun.

“Wait! Wait!” I shouted to the tall man and tried to stop them. I showed the whole box of gold to him. The shiny gold attracted his attention. He reacted with alacrity by turning around and reaching out his hands. He stopped in front of the gold.

“He likes gold!” said another crewman.

“Hanxiao is in danger. I need to rescue him.” I told myself.

I took a deep breath and rushed to Hanxiao and grabbed him back. All of a sudden, there was an invisible force pushing us and we crashed towards the wall. A cube dropped off from the wall. I picked it up. In a flash of time, his palms glowed and all the gold melted. We froze in alarm and held our breath.

“You guys carry Hanxiao! Let’s run!” I bawled. We all finally climbed on board and heaved a sigh of relief.

★ ★ ★

“Captain Xuefei, it’s a weird island.” I gasped in horror.

“Hanxiao was bewitched by the tall man,” said Taojun quivered.

“What have you traded with the gold, silk and the porcelains?” said Captain furiously.

“A...a strange man melted our gold with his...his glowing palms. The porcelains were all broken when we’re fleeing,” I wailed in fear.

“Take me to the island now!” Captain urged.

“What? We have to go there again?” I shivered.

When our ships almost approached the weird island, something strange happened.

“Where’s the island?” I said in surprise. Suddenly, the sky became coal-black. We all gazed up. Everyone was surprised that a huge thing was slowly hovering above the sky. In the blink of an eye, a huge serpent-like object rushed through the sky and disappeared into thin air. We were stricken into silence and staring in disbelief. Some sailors cried, “It’s a dragon!”

## Epilogue

On that night, I looked at the cube that I brought from the weird island. Is the legend of the dragon true? Why did the island disappear? Many questions popped up in my mind. In retrospect, it was a nerve-wrecking experience.

# Ming Treasure Fleet

*Diocesan Boys' School, Lee, Jayden – 12*

I always knew that I would have to serve my nation, but not as honoured as taking part as a young crewmember of the seven voyages of the Ming treasure ship fleet.

The ships were hand-built piece by piece with wooden planks. Apart from the basic accommodations, most of the cabin were converted into storerooms which houses the priceless presents we planned to give away, and other things we received from the other countries, like the hundreds of jars of spices gifted from the leader of Africa. We had been staying on the ship for a long time already. We were assigned to complete different tasks everyday—ranging from scanning the horizon for any pirates or objects that provide an imminent threat, to scrubbing every little surface of the ship with a rag. Crewmates were divided into two groups—the day group and night group. The day group worked in the day and slept soundly at night, and the night group was vice versa. The day group had a more challenging condition to work in due to the scorching sun but were allocated to more straightforward assignments. The night group had a more arduous job, as pirates were more prone to organise a sneak attack at us, so they must be ready to fight at any moment's notice. They also had to complete more wearisome jobs, as the sun wasn't roasting them like a pigling, and the air was more refreshing and cooler. I thought at first that being a part of the day group was going to be so torturous, but with the constant jokes, puns and encouragement of crewmates, I was finally paving a way through all the hardship I suffered. We joked around, talked about ourselves and often had to calm down a mate who was homesick. We had gone through a lot of challenges with our crew mates, which made us learn more about each other and co-operate better. We had gone through a lot of unbelievable stories, and this is my favourite one.

We were on the ship, heading north. The sky was a dark shade of grey, threatening to rain without any notice. The wind was howling ferociously. The sea was in a cranky mood—huge waves crashed upon each other and humongous waves were born. The ship, in all its mighty glory, spurred on despite the harsh blows of the waves. The ship creaked and swayed from one side to another. By then, I was already worrying that the ship might tip, but was assured that the boat was well enough to avoid capsizing. Violent sounds of seawater sloshing and slamming to the side of the boat came into the cabin. The crew were lolling around in the cabin, playing traditional Chinese chess and smoking. Smoke gathered in the air. The chess pieces were jumping up and down like hot potatoes on the chessboard due to the rocking ship. Up on the deck was only Zheng He, navigating the ship to our destination, standing there impossibly like a lamppost, rooted there without even stumbling over. Then the situation deteriorated. The ship lurched even more furiously and sometimes we even lost up sense of being upright. Jars of spices and strands of pearl cascaded down from shelves round us. Some of the crew rushed down to the storage room to check whether the porcelain vases and other gifts were still safe and sound, as it was our meagre ways of extending an olive branch with the leaders of the other far-flung civilizations. Others went to keep an eye on the animals we obtained from the other leaders who willingly gave it to us in return for our presents, which were two brown animals with even browner spots and a stretchy neck, with two tiny sprouts on top of its head. Just in all the middle of the chaos, I peeked out of the window and what I saw was just simply bad news. There was a grey fin protruding out of the water, bobbing around, then it reared up and the entire creature shot out of the water. What most appealed to us was its enormous mouth and bloodstained teeth, which horrified some of us. We all know what it was and what it was capable of, as we had all first-handily seen what happened to a crew member when it he had fallen out of the boat by accident. The grey, pointed and slithery creature had held the member with the enormous jaws and chomped, demolishing its meal in a short matter of time. What we had to endure was not the blood, but the members shriek of pain and agony, which still frequently drifted into my head. The sight of such a bloodthirsty and terrible creature make my skin go cold. My head spun, and I felt dizzy. We all knew that we had to get away as we were sure that those gleaming teeth could gnaw and rip its way into the ship and devour us all. There was a huge stampede as the crowd ran hell for leather to get to the top of the deck and be on higher ground. However, we had a gigantic problem. The wind had slashed the sails into shreds and now they were a tattered mess. We couldn't go forwards nor backwards until we could get a replacement for the sails. My best friend, Ni Hao, shakily suggested, "We can sew our bedsheets together to make a makeshift sail." As if proving us wrong, the side of the ship began to sag and we all lost our centre of gravity. I quickly concluded that the creature must have ripped one of the wooden planks and water was rising to the brim of the empty bottom of the ship. Zheng he, who was still rooted to the same spot, quickly scrapped the idea of using bedsheets to make a sail as we did have the time, and told us that even if our ship sank, we would be all be all-you-can-eat-buffet of the creature, meaning that we had to eliminate the shark until we could solve the problem of the sinking of the ship. We couldn't use our knives, partly because they were only short-ranged, and partly because we had left them in the bar that we had gone to before boarding the ship. We then relied on the only defence mechanism that was built into

the ship—the 5 cannons mounted on each side of the ship. We had only 8 cannonballs, since the government had expected us not to run into trouble as Zheng He was the captain. Turns out he wasn't such a captain at all, or he would have put more protection around the boat. We gingerly inserted the cannonballs into the cannon and ignited the rope. The air around us smelt of burning just as the cannon gave a large bang. The cannonballs spat out simultaneously, just as the ship gave me last sag and completely lost it. It felt like a rope was suddenly cut and we were the falling end of the rope. My heart skipped a beat as I lost my footing. We stood in total astonishment as we saw the first cannonball hit the creature, taking its life instantly, and the other cannonballs lined up behind it. With a dull thunk, they reflected off the cannonballs in front of it and it ricocheted back to the falling boat. We all took an involuntary step backwards due to the cannonballs rocketing towards us. They slammed into the falling side of the boat, punching a dent in the wooden body, and causing the ship to rocket to the other direction. The ship hesitated a bit before settling in its original position, but only temporarily. Zheng He told us to take the opportunity to fix the hole in the bottom of the ship. We ripped out planks from the floor of the deck, and with hammer and nails, quickly leaped down into the water, with our legendary breath-holding skills and incredible water-repelling eyes, we waded to the gaping hole, and used the planks, nails and a hammer to fix the hole. We then went down to the basement of the ship and emptied out all the water by using porcelain vases we planned to give away. We all then stripped our mattresses clean of the bedsheets and using a needle, merged them together into a huge sail. We quickly filled the sail with wind and scampered, in fear that the creature might return. After that incident, we were ordered to keep strict watch everyday day for any of the creatures. If we really can manage to slip away from death, I'll be happy to do it. This incident made us more aware of our surroundings and be prepared for the worst. I hope all the best to us as we continue to embark on our journey.

# Journal of Zheng He, first voyage. (1405–1407)

*Diocesan Boys' School, Poon, Adrien – 12*

July 15<sup>th</sup>, 1405

We have finally set sail! I couldn't believe that emperor Zhu Di entrusted me with all these ships and men. Can you believe that these 280 ships actually contain more than 200 thousand *TongQian*'s worth of treasure and 1000 men? So far there's not much weather problems, but Wang predicts that there will be some fearsome tempests as we cross the middle of the sea. I hope none of my men get diseases. That would be catastrophic.

July 22<sup>th</sup>, 1405

It's been a week since my last entry, and we are starting to run into some choppy waves along the Vijayan coast. There has been some water seeping into our grain stores--- we fixed that soon enough. The crew are very cheerful since they are well fed. 2 months left until we reach Champa.

July 29<sup>th</sup>, 1405

Two of my men were caught stealing wine from our stores. I had them whipped on a post to discourage any rebellious crewmen. How dare them! The weather has calmed down a bit, and food is still plentiful. No diseases so far.

August 5<sup>th</sup>, 1405

So my right hand, Wang, had this 'brilliant' idea to hang our wet clothes from the mast so that they could 'dry faster'. Well, I'll tell you what really happened. Half of them got even *more* drenched by the sea spray, and the rest got blown off. I told him that our method (making the men wring out their clothing and putting them in the cabins to dry) was *much* safer and prevented the loss of fine clothing. Oh, and the wind is getting really strong. I commanded the oarsmen to steer closer to shore, so even if we get blown out to sea, we'll not be completely lost.

August 12<sup>th</sup>, 1405

Oh dear--- a mast from one of the treasure ships has been broken off by the wind. 20 of my men were forced to abandon ship and swim to safety to a rope floating by, connected to my command ship. Well, there goes one-fiftieth of our treasure. The cook, Chung Gaot, from the sunken ship got a concussion from the falling rigging. Everyone was sad, since his roasted pigeon was *exquisite*. We won't be eating much good food for a few days, because our other cooks aren't very skilled ones.

August 19<sup>th</sup>, 1405

Finally, the raging gale has subsided--- for how long we don't know. Chung Gaot is still passed out. We gave him herbs that reduce swelling, so that he won't sustain any lasting injuries. The crew are getting dull---they've become bored of dicing and gambling their shoes. We should've hired a storyteller to keep the men entertained, since the men won't work hard if they are bored and tired.

September 5<sup>th</sup>, 1405

It's been 12 days since my last entry. I couldn't write for the last week because the storms hit our fleet hard and blew a couple of men overboard. Luckily, they grabbed onto some floating timber and were saved from drowning. I was also nearly blown overboard, but my hand was entangled in some ropes and that stopped me from going over. My entries are going to be less frequent as the storms get more plentiful.

October 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1405

Catastrophe! Some rats have stowed aboard on our ship and the plague is with them. More than 30 of the oarsmen are affected. They had swollen welts all over their body and were vomiting and shivering. Once we give them medicine and root out the rats' hiding place, all should be well.

October 26<sup>th</sup>, 1405

We found the rats' lair--- the inside of a large, hollow log in the oarsmen's cabins. The physicians on our ships predict that the men will require 20 more days to fully recover. Chung Gaot is completely fine now, and our food is great once again. We have nearly reached our destination--- two more weeks!

November 10<sup>th</sup>, 1405

We have reached the coast of Vijaya, Champa! The guardsmen on the coast tower were so amazed of our ships that they stared in awe at them until Wang rang a bell loudly in their faces. They permitted us an audience with their king the next day.

November 12<sup>th</sup>, 1405

We presented the gifts of tea leaves, pandas, bamboo, gold and silk to the king. He was overjoyed, and swore that he would pay homage to China annually. Mission complete!

December 26<sup>th</sup>, 1405

The crew and I all had an excellent time bartering with the locals and exploring Vijaya's cultures, but it's time to go. We prepared our ships and set sail to our next destination: Ceylon!



# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Fleet

*Dulwich College Beijing, Jiang, Eddy – 12*

The blazing hot sun shone down onto my bare back, mixing with the putrid scent of rotting wood, causing me to go numb with disgust. I hunched over, and collapsed onto the floor, groaning. “HaiHang! Are you okay there?”, I heard my father ask. I got up and replied: “Yes, I’m fine!”. Ever since I was born, I knew that my father was a selfless person, always volunteering for community projects in our village, giving whatever portions of food he could spare to those who needed it the most and even paying for the others when they had no money. I, on the other side, was an adventurous person. When they looked for volunteers for these voyages across the world, I was one of the first in our village to sign up. In the beginning, my father disapproved of my actions, constantly trying to talk me out of the idea. Eventually, he gave up, and signed himself up too as he would not let me go alone.

Right before noon, the captain, captain Chen, called me to his cabin. He smiled warmly at me and said: “Come, I have something to discuss with you.” He pointed to the chair opposite to him and I sat down. “I have reviewed your recent performance on-board,” he continued, “And I, along with my peers, have decided to assign you to the crow’s nest.” I couldn’t believe my ears: no more errands running, no more cleaning up and even better, getting a more exciting job! I accepted the offer without hesitation and thanked captain Chen. He then sent me off towards my new job. I could almost see myself standing tall upon the crow’s nest, the cool sea breeze blowing my face. I was fully ready for this new adventure!

Things were going well at my new job. The only issue was that I was bored. Nothing interesting was going on as imagined. All that I did every day was keep watch in the scorching sun while the brightness gave me headaches. One day, boredom got to me, and I fell asleep. When I woke up, my mind was fuzzy. However, even that could not blur the scene that occurred in front of me.

There were a dozen or so large ships sailing towards us. Not until they got closer, revealing skull and crossbones painted onto a black flag, did I recognize that they were pirate ships. I remember that once father had educated me about these ships when I was small, and ever since I was afraid to encounter them. But here I was, presented with a fleet of pirate ships. I clambered down from the crow’s nest as quickly as I could and I was just about to run off and warn everybody of the siege, when a sudden impact jolted me off balance and I felt myself hit the deck hard.

They had arrived.

It was pandemonium on the ship. Everyone was running around, screaming “Pirate attack! Get ready to fight!”. Next to me, the captain’s cabin door flung open, and Chen stormed out. He took one glance at me and his anger swelled up. He was just about to explode when Li, the captain’s right-hand man, came running towards us. “Captain, we need you!” he barked. Chen glared at me one last time, and ran off with Li. My first instinct was to run away and hide, but my curiosity of what would happen got the best of me. I ran off after them.

When I learnt about pirates before, I knew they were ruthless, but I had never expected them to be so bloodthirsty. Running towards captain Chen and Li, the scene around me threatened to make me throw up. The stench of dead bodies wafted through the air, making me gag. All around me, there lay bloody corpses of my fellow crewmates and the attackers. What shocked me the most was that all my crewmates’ bodies had small holes in their flesh from reasons I didn’t know. I pulled away from the corpses and wondered nervously whether my father’s body lay with the others, whether he had died in the attack or was gravely wounded and might soon die of his untreated injuries. I tried to ignore it, but the image of my father lying lifelessly on the soggy wooden deck was too hard for me to bear, so I tried to just focus on walking, one step at a time, until eventually, I spotted Li in front of me. Just as I did, Li slumped to the floor, lifeless. I was frozen in fear. Standing behind Li’s body was a pirate who wore an eye patch and held a weapon I could not recognize. He was looking down at the corpse with a smile on his face. When he noticed me, his smile vanished, and he aimed his weapon at me. All of a sudden, I heard a loud bang and instantly, I felt a splitting pain shooting through my shoulder.

I crumbled to the ground. I looked over at my shoulder and saw that the entire area of fabric was stained red with my blood. The pirate walked closer to me and aimed his weapon straight at my head. I could not believe that it would all be over for me. My journey, my future, my life. All because I was stupid enough to

join the voyages. Stupid enough to follow the captain and Li to my death. I closed my eyes, waiting for death to come fast and painlessly. But, it didn't. Suddenly, I heard a crunch and bodies hit the floor. I opened my eyes and saw that father was on top of the pirate, wrestling him down. He only had time to yell "HaiHang, run!" before the pirate shoved him away.

The pain in my shoulder made my mind go numb. I didn't hear anything that father said except for the word "run". I got up and ran away as fast as I could, the edges of my eyes going black with the constant blood loss. After about a minute of running, I slowed down and caught my breath. Once the immediate threat was over, my mind started working again. And then it hit me – what I had just done. At the most crucial moment, I ran away from danger, leaving father behind. All that father had done for me, all he had protected me against, worthless, because I left him to die. I shook my head. I could not be a son like that. Father's expectations of me was for me to become a real man, however, no man abandons others, let alone his own father, in events which could result in death only because he valued his own life more. I turned around, and darted back to father, ignoring the throbbing pain in my shoulder the best I could.

I got back just in time to see father cornered by the pirate, who was reaching for his weapon. I instantly panicked, not knowing what I could do in time to save father. My eyes darted around, but I saw nothing I could use. By then, the pirate was already aiming at father. Without thinking, I launched my body at full speed towards the attacker and tackled him to the ground. His weapon went off, but the projectile pinged harmlessly away. No longer in danger, father reacted, grabbing the enemy's weapon and smacking him hard in the head with it. The pirate's eyes glassed over when he collapsed to the ground. The pain from my wound then got too much to bear, and I blacked out.

I woke up with a start. I was in my bed, a piece of cloth wrapped around my injured shoulder. Captain Chen sat by my bed and smiled when I woke. Seeing my confusion, he started to explain what happened while I was unconscious. He told me that I, alongside my father, took down the pirate captain and made the rest of the attackers retreat. Also, he told me that sadly we only had half of our remaining crew members left. When I asked him what we should do next, he simply smiled, and told me, "Life is just a long voyage, waiting to be discovered."

It has been 10 years since the voyages ended. I am now living a peaceful life in my village with father and mother. I have gone on a few more voyages afterwards, but no one could compare to my first. Although most of the things that happened during the first voyage was a blur, father's motivation throughout the journey stayed with me forever. I've been asking myself ever since where father's courage came from, and I can slowly understand that it comes from his selflessness and his love towards others. I hope to pass these morals onto my decedents, and hope that, with all that father's actions have taught me, I will become a real man.

# Admiral or Pirate?

*Dulwich College Beijing, Lu, Michael – 12*

Autumn sweeps over China, glazing the beautiful maple trees bronze and rustic red. The fourth voyage is set to fly, my enormous wooden ships sitting serenely on the azure sea. By the sides of the ships, cannons, polished to reflect the sun; on the ballast, a huge dragon figurine posed to strike fear into all who mean evil to us. High-spirited and singing, my crew of 5000 well-trained soldiers and sailors await my final instructions.

I watch as the druid cast dragon knuckle bones onto the sandy floor. His eyes are shut with concentration and sweat is dripping down his forehead. Finally, as if pricked by an invisible needle, he jerks his head up and smiles feebly— “All the signs are favorable; the Gods are on your side.”

Another voyage — trading, patrolling, but more importantly, gaining and preserving the respect of foreign countries and traders, accumulated over years and years of hard work and toil. And now we set sail from Palembang, the strait of Malacca.

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Wind blows through the masts of my ship, and the waves lap obediently at my feet. The azure blue of the sea and the sky make it impossible to discern where the horizon starts. Gradually, a small smudge of green in this giant canvas of blue. My crew grows animated, rushing to the front of the boat. Peering at the first sight of land in a month, they holler and whoop. Smiles and cheers break out over the top-deck, penetrating the crusty skin build by weeks of sullen silence.

Stepping off the boat, we are greeted by a group of well-dressed, middle-aged men. They all have that same, tired expression, hidden behind a facade of welcoming and benevolence. Streaks of grey dash their knotted hair, the crow's feet by their eyes and the wrinkles etched onto their faces all tilt upwards as we approach. Behind their mask of all smiles and enthusiasm, I can see that everything they do is tinged with fear. Fear of me and what I represent. The quick glancing gazes at me; the slight tremble of the arm.

Nothing escapes me, nothing escapes us. They are afraid of us, because we control the trade routes, we control what comes in and goes out. With a snap of my fingers, or my name on paper, I can stop goods from coming into their port in an instant.

Though both of us know it is a one-sided affair, the lead trader and I go to a secluded garden to discuss our goods. He is a tall man, his face pocketed with acne scars. Leaning on his delicately carved cane, he speaks in a slow, flaky monotone. “What do you have to offer in exchange for our cotton?”

Soon we are finished, and I go back to my ship. It is clear that this port is stale — simply no one comes to trade here anymore. Their product, cotton, is just not needed anymore — silk, a much better fabric, has been on the market for long now, and at a much better price too.

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My crew and I visited island after island, port after port, extending our reach to even the smallest of ports. We have seen lush islands and barren wastelands, swampy marshes and rolling mountains. For me and my crew, nothing is impossible.

Standing at the prow of my ship, I am proud to see my crew working diligently and efficiently. The synchronized rowing of the oars, the polished decks and the agile rigging-monkeys calling out everything around us. A chorus of voices and sounds fill the air. My crew are the best, the elite of the elite. Suddenly, one of the rigging monkeys shout out, “Ship ahoy!”

A ship? Here? Why, this part of the sea is practically deserted! Squinting against the blazing sun, I peer into the patch of sea my lackey points to. A huge fleet. In the distance, I can barely see the sign imprinted on their sails, but... could it be them? The dragon insignia that strikes terror into the hearts of all of us traders. Or maybe it is not a dragon. Maybe I am mistaken.

Still, isn't it better to be prepared?

I bark out order after order, my crew frantically obeying each with precision: Haul up the mast! Prime the cannons! Get ready to fight!

A grim smile appears on my face — this will be a battle to the deaths.

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“Fire!” A steady line of flame erupts from my ship — lighting up the mast and the prow of our enemy.

Sweat, blood and the stale odor of gunpowder lingers in the air, a foul stench, the stench of death. Drawing closer, they fire off a rally of cannon shots as well. All shots miss.

Our ship draws nearer and nearer — as it does I can clearly see just how few men are on their ship— half of what we have. My men are swarming over their ship, and I whoop, leaping over the side of my ship to join the fray of battle.

Swords and spears clash; roars, yells and screams penetrate the sooty air. I plunge my dagger into the breastplate of a soldier recklessly charging towards me, feeling the squelch as the metals enters the flesh. A fountain of blood erupts out of the wound, and the soldier trampled under the feet of another who take his place. My new adversary swings his spear wildly, exposing the underside of his chainmail. I duck, stabbing swiftly at the unguarded region. A strangled cry escapes his lips. Suddenly out the corner of my eye, I see a stream of armored soldiers flowing from the hull of the enemy's ship — a trap!

"Fall back!" My shout is inaudible over the noise of battle. It is futile to continue. Slashing a foot-soldier down his front — he crumples instantly, I resign myself to the end. Soon, we are all overpowered.

The haughty captain of the ship leers over me, grinning horribly. "So Chen Zuyi, it ends like this. Finally, we cross paths. I knew I would find you. You know, I wasn't even looking. I am simply on a trading voyage, I see you are on the same."

I sneer back at him, "Scoundrel, you know you stand no chance of defeating my crew in a fair fight, so you employ an underhanded ambush to surprise us, do you."

"Underhanded or not, you will be hung."

"Zheng He, you will pay for this!" Fury courses through my veins, replaced immediately by a cool rage, simmering beneath my skin. Is there any way for me to persuade him to release me? "Admiral, why do you attack me? You and I are not so different, we both trade for a living, both have immense fleets, and are both ignored, hated, unwanted. I am a pirate, a castaway, and you? A Eunuch. You will never be remembered, never thought of after your death. You will be forgotten, recorded only in the dusty annuals of each passing year. No family to carry on your legacy, no children to look after you. You wouldn't kill me, a defenseless man? I am just like you!"

"Am I, Zuyi?" By now the soldiers surrounding me has vanished, back down where they came from.

"Perhaps. True, I am a eunuch, but that doesn't mean I cannot do great things. This is my first voyage, and the Yong Le emperor has promised me greater things to come"

"And you believe him? How has he treated you? As a servant, a slave, just another messenger to do his bidding! You are worthless to him, as I am!"

Has it worked? I can see the shadow crossing over his brow, I can almost hear the working of his mind turning this over and over in his head. Zheng He stares at me. His eyes remind me of a snake, waiting to strike. I tilt my head away, only to see my pride ship sinking, burning into its watery grave. The only visible parts are the masts already charred at the sides, smoking and frayed... They are just like the Admiral's — only his has the imperial sign, the dragon on it.

"Is that true Zuyi? Yes, perhaps I will never beget any child of my own, but does one really need a family to be remembered? I will have my own legacy, regardless of whether I leave a bloodline or not. My legacy is defined by my actions and deeds, the people I help, the ports I visit, and the friendships I build. Unlike you. You will only be known as a criminal, remembered by the families of the people you've killed. So no, Zuyi — we are not that similar — perhaps in what we do, but not how we are remembered."

Abruptly, a hood is wrapped around my head, obscuring my vision... *So this is how it ends...*

# Thank You

*Dulwich College Beijing, Rhyu, Suah – 12*

The same hot, sunny days onboard.

The same life.

The same day after day—looting, dividing money, you and the others sneaking back home, waking up early the next morning on repeat. That was your life.

You hated it.

Every time some poor, defenseless stranger fell for your antics, you would feel the same jolt of guilt. He had *earned* this money. He deserved it. Did you really want to cause others pain for yourself?

The answer was, *yes*. Not just because of selfishness.

Even though you couldn't stand stealing, you couldn't afford *not* to. You needed to take care of your *meimei* and your mother. No other family member was capable enough. It was down to you—if you couldn't, you would all starve. To death.

You preferred living, thank you.

Groaning, you rubbed your eyes tiredly as you scanned the sky outside the window. The clouds were a brilliant tangerine—orange, tinted by the sun. The *xiaomus* must have been feeling good.

Your fingers clumsily found your clothes, and you grimaced as you pulled your sleeping robe off. You only had two robes, which was common for poor households, and one was your sleeping robe, so it did get quite smelly.

Fumbling with the knots, you undid the scratchy tie and shrugged the clothes on easily, carelessly looping the knot. A hand stopped you.

“*Jiejie...*” Your little sister mumbled. “You’re going out?”

“Yes.” A smile spread across your face, seeing her. “*Minghao*, sleep.”

“I’m hungry.” She whined. “And your knot is wrong, *jiejie*. Let me do it.”

You succumbed as she groggily sat up and started to knot.

“See.” She said sternly. “It goes into it like that. Then you wrap it around this one, see, so it’s sturdier.”

Laughing, you embraced her. “I love you, *Minghao*.”

Her small, quick breaths louder in your ear, she sleepily murmured, “Love you too.”

Carefully setting her down, you saw that she had fallen asleep. Your lips brushed her forehead briefly and with one last glance, you stepped towards the door.

You lost track of time.

*Pat, pat, pat.*

You kept running.

*The sooner I finish, the better.* Squeezing your eyes shut, you let the cold *qiufeng* envelop you. The autumn wind was cold, especially against frail clothes. You didn't mind—you deserved it. Deserved all the misery in your life.

Approaching the rendezvous, you slowed down.

Breathing raggedly, you jogged towards the ship concealed behind willow trees. Woody brown and resembling a polished log, it was rather easy to camouflage. A trustful tool. One that helped sustain your family.

Also stolen.

As you walked up to your ship, *Zhihao* greeted you.

“How’s your sister?” He asked.

You remembered her small, slender hands working a knot. “Good.” A shrug. “Better than usual, ever since we got that last shipment of wood and steel.”

“Shipment.” Your best friend laughed. “Do you know how rich you sound?”

“Very.” You sighed, running your fingers through your hair. “Most likely the rich are still in bed right now.”

“Of course.” *Zhihao* nodded. “Life’s unfair, after all.”

The “light comment” didn’t feel like one.

A heavy weight settled on your shoulders as you contemplated,

*Why did it have to be?*

A hundred answers.

*Because we’re cursed by the gods.*

*Because I'm a bastard child.*

*Because I'm unlucky.*

"*Minhao*." *Zhihao* tugged your arm, jolting you out of your daze. "It's time to set sail."

In a trance, you followed.

You strode along the deck, frowning. No ships were spotted, and you thought about having to see your *meimei* empty-handed.

The slapping of feet. You turned to see a crew member rushing towards you, tripping over himself.

"Ship." The member, *Zhixun*, reported.

Your eyes widened. "Ship?"

"Big one." He confirmed. "Riches, gold, spices. Enough to earn money worth a lifetime."

You pursed your lips.

"*Zhixun*, those are king's ships."

He grimaced, turned back. You could imagine cogs turning. His father deemed "shameful" and his mother a woman "infused by *guis*", he longed for survival.

"*Minghao*." He knew he had struck a nerve. Feeling a pang in your chest, you stared at your sandals, contemplating.

*Zhixun* had a way of saying little words with maximum impact. He'd skirted around everyone's words, he knew words could hurt. He knew to deliver wounds for defense. The others? No better.

This was a ship full of broken people.

This was a ship full of ignored people, China's lowest. This was a ship of unfortunate, unfairly treated people. This was the part of China the emperor hid, for fear of dirtying China. This was the struggling part of China.

You had to do this. Not just for your sister. For the others.

"Follow it." You ordered *Zhixun*.

He nodded, hopeful.

Louder, you shouted, "Follow that ship! Cut it off from the channel, they'll have to backtrack or face us, we'll have the upper-hand. Go!"

Your ship increased speed, diving, as you commanded, right between the channel.

You uttered a prayer.

The ship drew nearer.

Your heartbeat increased.

It lurched, stopping. Men in silk robes cried out, alarmed.

*Another sin*, you thought. *These men will be the ones visiting my dreams tonight.*

Formed by years of practice, the crew vaulted over and landed on the other ship, drawing the men to corners before any reaction. Deciding to join, you leapt over, sighting *Zhixun* fastening the ships together.

"What's this?" Your voice dropped. The scratchy cloth around your face suffocated you, but you didn't unfasten it. Them telling the emperor of your identity meant certain death. A bad thought, not only because of death, but because your *meimei* and your *mama* would be left alone.

The men were in a semicircle, facing your crew. They varied in height and appearance, but all seemed like experienced sailors.

"The Captain?" A man gestured to you. Your eyes flitted over him. The leader.

"Yes."

Behind you, *Zhihao* glared. "Identify yourself. Men from the *Huangdi*?"

"The emperor?" The man chuckled good-naturedly. "Yes. I am *Zhenghe* and this is my... second voyage. Now, it's only fair if *you* identify yourselves."

"We have the upper-hand." Your smug tone was forced. *Now we're even stealing from good-natured men. He seems nice enough.*

*We have no choice if we want dinner tonight.*

"I assume you are pirates?" *Zhenghe* straightened his sleeves.

Jaw clenched, you looked away, tugging at your own scruffy ones, knowing that you didn't *want* to pirate.

*Zhihao* nodded for you, brushing his black hair back and glancing at you. "That's obvious, no?"

"You're..." Captain *Zhenghe* gestured at the poorly dressed crew, at your ship, then finally at your gaunt frames. "...poor people."

You lifted your chin. "Poor, but not without dignity." Glaring. "Reveal my identity and my best man will stab you in your sleep."

"Rich, but not without dignity." The captain retaliated. "Understood."

You untied the scarf and dropped it.

"There."

Petrified.

"You..." the man seemed at a loss for words. "You're a *haizi*. A... *xiaonuer*."

"So?" Scowling.

"Why is one so young risking themselves?" Stunned, he guiltily compared his fancy attire to yours.

"I have no other option."

"The emperor allows this?" He looked outraged. "You are children! You must be protected!"

"Cruel times." You warily studied him—that had been an unexpected reaction.

"You do not have education? Better clothes? Luxury?"

You darkened. *Zhenghe* said of things nobody on the ship could afford, things he thought other people could afford but actually could not. "Not everyone can live luxuriously and wear silk. What I'm doing now is for survival. There is no *choice* upon the matter. Unlike you, who's been offered everything on silver platters, I must do anything to support my family."

Silence.

"Answering you, Captain, I cannot afford *luxury*. It's a cruel world."

*Zhenghe's* eyebrows knit. "Take it."

Astounded, you snapped towards him.

"Take it." He repeated. "Take everything. I cannot stand to watch youth live agonizingly while I am resting at my home with unnecessary things. Take it."

"I..." It was your turn for silence. Your mouth moved wordlessly like a *yu* out of water.

"Yes..." *Zhenghe* looked distressed. "Not enough...Please, I wish you luck with gifts." He walked forwards and pressed something into your hand—a jade hairpin, embroidered with gleaming gold. "This was for a friend's wife, but I see you need it more." He closed your fingers over it. "You carry wisdom, young one."

"I...thank you." You bowed. "I'm in your debt."

"No." He replied. "The country is in yours. I am in yours. Thank you for teaching me. Thank you for sharing your wisdom. Thank you for opening my eyes."

"You flatter me." You responded. "Until we meet again."

"Until we cross paths." He bowed. "*Tianfei* be with you."

Then he retreated to his cabin.

"*Tianfei* be with you." You responded, and turned, swinging over to your ship.

"*Zhihao*."

"Yes?"

"No more stealing." You said in realization.

He broke out grinning. "No more."

And the two of you watched the sunset, the peace settling at last.

# A Shril Cry

*Dulwich College Beijing, Trivedi, Suvam – 11*

A shrill cry echoes throughout the sleeping chambers and wakes me up.

Footsteps rapidly rush down the corridors of the ship, jostling my bunk from side to side.

I hastily sit up in confusion and nick my ear on the sharp edge of the bunk, unsteadily gawking at the chaos that is ensuing through the ship. I rush out of my room and glance around at the rusted wood and metal corridors. Officers suited in green stand blatantly at either end of the hallway, commanding orders and harshly ushering workers up the stairs and onto the main deck. Workers are racing down the corridors, hurriedly packing their little amount of belonging and wearing their special gear, the ones used in an onboard emergency. I immediately realize what the commotion is.

The ship is being attacked.

I swivel around and glance at the array of battle gear set out on the side table of the room, laid out next to the painted wood picture of my mother. I pick the painting up, gazing at her eyes through the smeared wood and I know I must go on and into battle, for his sake. She came from an extremely poverty-ridden family and had chosen to abandon me for money. My father however, is onboard the ship with me working as an entertainer for the luxury of Zheng He, the captain of the ship. He is our family's only source of money.

Pain jolts down my back. An official is standing by my dorm and whipping me with a wooden stick, yelling at me for my lack of speed. I promptly grab my red and white gear off the cracked and splintered surface of the side table and suit up ready for what is about to happen.

I step out into the outer hallway and see that it is completely empty. Sounds of heavy footsteps and the lugging of weapons means that preparation of battle has already begun. Hurriedly, I run down the corridor and up the rickety stairs to the main deck, as I know I must succeed in battle. Rumors and tales of soldiers being viciously beaten after being cowards in battle have been passed among the soldiers. As I nervously survey the turmoil that is taking place upstairs, I reluctantly climb up and into the weaponry room to pick up my weapons: a simple dagger and a sword. A porthole sits on the rusted wall behind me and shows a sight beyond belief; the Manchurian's ship, almost twice the size of ours, resting upon the water next to us no more than 300 feet away.

A sudden blow rattles the ship, shaking the worn-out walls. On spur of the moment, I rush up to the main deck and wield my sword. The attack has begun.

In orderly chaos, the full force of the fleet military charges towards the opposing force and creates a sound as loud as an explosion from a cannon. As I run across the wooden floor, something catches my attention, lurking in the corner of my eye. A dark, almost distinguishable figure is climbing down the rear stairs of the ship, cautiously disappearing from view behind the wooden barrier that separates the opening of the stairs and the main deck; I am aghast. Not fighting in battle is as bad as killing the captain in this ship. I sneak quick glances around me, and then slowly back up away from the battle and towards the stairs.

Crouched, the ringing and concurring sound of outraged war cries and the killing of men drowns out my footsteps as I discreetly walk over the patterned floor, filled with paintings of Chinese women and designs which guide me to the stairs.

Taking a deep breath, I exit the main deck and take slow steps down the stairs.

The sound of footsteps echo throughout the chamber and continue echoing as the figure walks just a few meters in front of me. The caved-in walls of the room seem to stare down at me as I tiptoe past the intricately designed walls, careful not to make the wooden floorboards creak. I am in awe of the figure, knowing the bravery or stupidity he has to leave the battle and go back into the ship. But then again, I am too.

Abruptly, he pauses at the end of the corridor in front of the pantry, where the ship's monthly and sometimes yearly food supply is stored, an essential element to the coordination of the ship. He swivels around, facing the open door of the pantry and darts inside, disappearing inside as quickly as he had gone down the stairs. I gasp. Why is he in there and what could he possibly be doing?

Unanticipatedly, a heavy wave of footsteps passes over the roof creating a loud, deep noise which unexpectedly startles me and knocks me over into the corner of the corridor.

I freeze. A rustling sound is coming through the open door of the pantry and deep, low grunts which seem to be coming from the figure which I can now distinguish as a sleek-bodied man, with lengthy legs and a slight limp in his right foot, as I can only see the back side of his body. He cautiously looks around the pantry, and then slowly reaches out to pick up a single biscuit, cocking his head and examining it carefully.



He reaches his hand out again but this time he picks up the whole stock supply of biscuits and while observing the biscuits queerly, he cocks his hand back and throws them out of the window with his full force.

Startled, I stumble backwards into a wall, scratching myself against a splinter. I grimace in pain, holding back my voice as I know it will give my presence away. The food, the only thing that the crew live on, is being thrown away by him? The ship could be a hundreds of miles away from land, yet the person is throwing the food away?

I hastily look back at the room, now dotted with crumbs. More than half of the food is now gone, laying deep within the sea, far from return. The figure is continuously breaking apart packages and packages of food, each time disposing of them in the vast and endless ocean.

The figure makes a sudden movement and gropes around his silk belt to reveal a thin but relatively short needle, no longer than the span of his hand. Curious, I watch in awe as he grasps the needle tightly and shuffles over to the edge of the room near the open porthole, shuddering as he does so. Peculiarly, he takes a deep breath and raises the needle up high and jabs it in a downward motion through the wooden floor. A small trickle of water slowly gushes out from the newly made hole in the floor.

In delayed and sudden realization of what he has done, the figure drops the needle and careens backwards towards the open and dilapidated door of the pantry. The room is starting to flood and is submerged to the height of the doorstep. I nimbly run through to the pantry, tackling the figure with my full force, restricting his breath and wrapping a linen drape around his face, covering it. Eventually he stops struggling and lies on the drenched floor, breathing heavily. I begin dragging him across the soaking wet floor.

An abrupt and sudden sound echoes out from the right side of the hallway, shaking the floors and the walls. Zheng He, the commander and the captain of the ship is standing a few feet behind me, a sullen expression covering his face.

“Hand him over to me,” he announces. “I will deal with him separately.”

Reluctantly, I step backwards, and follow the captain’s orders, a flurry of emotions engulfing me.

Zheng He harshly escorts the figure up the stairs to the execution room, beckoning me to come with him.

Hesitantly, I step down and walk through the corridor with my head down as a sign of utmost respect.

Shaking, he draws a long and sharpened sword from his belt and raises it high above his head. He singlehandedly rips the linen drape off the figures face to reveal...

My father. Lying on the floor, about to be executed, is my father.

“Wait!” I cry out, bewildered by the occasion taking place in front of me. I run towards my father and place a hand over his body.

“Yo—Yo—You don’t understand,” he says, tears streaking down his face.

“I work for the Mongol government. I was just following orders,” he stutters, backing into the nearby wall.

Zheng He pushes me aside and readies his sword above his ear.

And with one final motion, he swings it down and plunges it deep into my father’s chest.

# The Ming Treasure Voyages

*ELCHK Lutheran Academy, Man, Hilary – 12*

Pirates have the talent to steal gold and use it themselves, my name is Xalian and that's what happened to me. When I was born, my father had no money and we were poor. Everything happened so fast but I can tell you a little bit about what happened; so when I was 2 years old, my father left us and joined to pirates to steal gold, they searched for many many places. Succeeded and tried to steal more; when it was my 11th birthday, I made a wish that my dad would come back! Guess what, he did.

My dad came back with a bunch of money, almost enough for a living. I didn't want that because all the money he took, are all from the pirates. My father took the money because he made a deal with the pirates that my father would give his first son or daughter to the pirates. That's what he did, sold me to the pirates when I was 11. That's why I say everything went so fast.

Now, I am stealing gold as the pirates told me to because it has just been 2 years since my dad sold me to the Ming Treasure Voyages but they treated me like one of the Ming treasure voyages! They took care of me, gave me food and they would play with me to entertain me because at first, I didn't know who were they. I am happily stealing gold but something happened while going to China.

When we were celebrating how much gold we stole, the people from China saw us and wanted to fight us. I was devastated and very frightened because I froze like a snowman. I panicked and almost had a heart attack, pirates told me to stay on the boat, I did what I could to keep myself safe, everyone knew that giving up was better to fight the Chinese people. I took a big risk and did something magical, none of the pirates could have done it!

What I did was I stood up, got out of the boat... and... I got captured by the Chinese people! I blacked out because one of the Chinese people shot me. This was the first time we failed to steal gold, even worst, I even got questioned by the Chinese people, good thing I know Chinese! It was really scary, I was terrified by them. They asked me a lot of questions and I explained it, let's say that it went bad but better than imagined because my Chinese is really bad. The pirates, that said that I can call them my family, were waiting for me. Well for my case, I answered all these questions asked by them with one answer, I had no idea that it would actually answer all their questions but it still did. I said: "Please help us with our poorness for us Ming Treasure Voyages..."

We sure will thank you when we get the money, if you don't help us, I really need help with my family... Please! Will you help us, I respect that you say no because we are not your close friends or family... We... r...really nee...d yo...ur help!" That was what I really said to the Chinese people, after the Q n A session, this is what I said to the pirates: "I was stammering all the way in Chinese, you guys don't know help scary that was! I am now just 15 and you guys don't even save me and help me with my Chinese, it's a good thing that my real family taught me some of it only!" That was the first time I have ever called the pirates my family, I know that they are not really but I at least need to tell the Chinese people that I am very close to the pirates.

Now that I have been through that horrible thing, we had another problem... One of the pirates has been killed! Not just any pirate, it's the one pirate that has actually accepted me as his family. I remember that he would always say: "Xalian, my boy, how will I live without you, you know my body, it stays very strong everytime I see you, I hope you will accept yourself into pirates like us. Your father was the bravest man when he gave you to me because he knew that his wife was a bad influence for you, I am sorry that you got to live with your horrible mother! Staying here will give you a better life, no one will harm with me protecting you!" I don't get why he has to say these same words every time when I was younger, it takes about 1 minute to say it! Now I understand a little bit why he had to say it.

We had to attend a funeral for this pirate. I will never forget how he treated me before. These are some of the memories that I will never forget. One day, I told my fellow pirates about something; I said: "Hey Mr pirate, I need to say something to you. I actually feel homesick. The only thing that had kept me from being

homesick is that pirate that had taught me lots. I am so sad now that he had been killed! I need to take revenge for his death, he was a loyal person before he even died! But for now, I need to see my family, discover the truth why that Pirate said that my mother was a bad influence for me... So I need your help with doing that, I live in Scotland and I have never seen my parents since I am 12. I am now 18 if I didn't tell you yet, sorry about that. Anyways, the pirate that died is called Captain Rod, the pirate I talked to is called Pirate K. I don't know anyone of them since I don't talk to them much...

Now, we have arrived in Scotland and I finally got to see my family. I asked my father some questions privately because I didn't want to say it in front of my mom. I asked: "Dad, why did you lie a few years ago about mom being a bad influence? You definitely know that she is not the kind of doing bad things!" My dad heard me and replied: "I did what I had to do to keep you away from mom! You were the most beloved person and I was poor, no one cared about me, your mom only loved you! You have to go before I change my mind and kill you! **YOU ARE NO ONE TO COMPARE TO SON, YOU WILL NOT WIN ME!**"

Of course! Dad killed Captain Rod, not mom, everybody I visited lied to me! Captain Rod lied to me to keep my dad safe from not letting me know and did what's best to get out of my dad's way! Mom knew that dad was possessed by a ghost! I finally understand why everybody lied to me! I really should not live on this earth anymore! Suddenly, someone behind me said: "Xalian, you are too blinded by your stupid friend rod. You must know, killing yourself will stop your father being possessed but Rod just had to get you out of the way! This is all a misunderstanding.

We, Ming treasure voyages, must not fight back anymore, before, we stand our ground. Now, we collapsed but we must now do nothing and nothing will happen to us anymore! Just don't fight back. My family got back together and I became a spirit, a good. I watch the Ming Treasure voyages to see if they do anything bad. They must now! This is my story. We don't know the future but this ended well.

# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

*ELCHK Lutheran Academy, Man, Kaitlyn – 13*

*It is safe to say that the majority of people in the world know about the cold-hearted, ruthless, greedy and vicious pirates that sailed across the seas, looking for treasure in foreign countries to unrightfully claim as their own.*

*What the majority of the world doesn't know about, is that there was a time where there were voyages that carried treasures like pure gold and fine silk for the voyagers to give away as a gift, perhaps to the nobles of their country, perhaps to the poor as an act of kindness.*

*This is the story of Qiao, a young boy from the rural parts of China, and his adventures with the Ming Treasure Fleet.*

Qiao, a thirteen year-old boy, used to live in a small cottage near a worn-down town in the Northern parts of China. His father constantly worked in the fields, trying to provide enough crops for the family while his older sister, Yu, spent hours spinning wool into cloth to trade for chicken and pork. His mother had an illness and was very weak, she never stayed out of her bed for more than two consecutive hours.

One day, a stranger offered Qiao a very strange job, which ensured a much better life for Qiao's family, for he would receive a lifetime's worth of gold as a reward afterwards. He couldn't say no.

From that day on, Qiao became a voyager of the Ming Treasure Fleet.

Along with his voyage friends, Qiao was taught swordfighting and hand-to-hand combat. They were trained to become stronger, they were taught to swim, and were even taught stealth. For two years, it was all 'wake up, train, eat, sleep and repeat' for Qiao and the other newcomers while the more experienced voyagers got to sail around the seas, exchanging treasures with many different countries.

Qiao's first voyage was when he was fifteen. It got him very excited. He's heard countless stories from his seniors and older voyagers about how beautiful it was out in the seas, watching the sun as it rises or sets in the horizon, and how different yet unique the people from faraway countries were. Qiao has always wanted to see all that for himself.

As Qiao expected, he absolutely loved his time sailing through the crystal blue waters. The sky was always clear, the sun warmed his skin everyday, and the cool sea breeze carried a little savoury taste.

For most of the time, the Ming Treasure Fleet successfully received beautiful items from foreign regions and countries. Qiao and his friends were even able to create positive bonds with many of the countries and places they visited. His life as a supposed 'pirate' wasn't that bad...

... or so he thought.

About three years of being on board, Qiao faced a new side of what he considered the time of his life.

The Ming Treasure Fleet sailed further into the great sea, and came across new land. It was mostly as dry as Qiao's hometown. Exotic-looking animals scurried across the plains, and for the first time, Qiao saw people who looked rather different from him. These people had darker skin and curly hair, and unlike the Chinese culture, half of their skin was exposed. They had white marks on their faces and body.

As usual, Qiao and his friends went up to the foreigners and started negotiating with them. The people of this land stared at the voyagers of the Ming Treasure Fleet, and started muttering inaudibly. Qiao figured these strange people did not understand a word he was saying to them, so he took some treasures off the ship to show the strange people, hoping they understood him finally.

Instead, like a herd of animals, these strange people ran for the ships behind Qiao and his friends, taking all the valuables meant for the Emperor of the Ming Dynasty.

The voyagers were left with no choice but to fight against these strange people, in the hopes of retrieving their valuables back.

Qiao finally understood why he needed his two years of physical training. Because things can get out of hand like that very moment.

Finally, the voyagers were able to return the stolen treasures to their ships, and set sail back home. Qiao was left out of energy after his near-death experience. Those strange people were much taller and stronger than he was. It was very fortunate that Qiao and his friends were armed.

The older voyagers must have avoided talking about possible fights to keep his positive attitude.

Qiao was fast asleep in the cabin he shared with five other voyagers when a sudden roar of thunder woke him up.

Merely half-awake, Qiao and his cabinmates stumbled their way out to the front deck of their ship, where they saw lightning light up the pitch black sky. The whole crew ran around frantically, letting down the sails and removing seawater that flooded the front deck with large buckets, trying to minimize the damage as huge waves hit the ship so hard that the whole structure shook and wobbled, as if it was going to break apart at any moment--

And then, it did.

All the voyagers aboard that ship were thrown into the freezing salt water. Qiao immediately looked for a floating piece of the broken-down ship, and pulled a few other voyagers to his little safety island.

There Qiao and his few friends were, adrift in the middle of nowhere.

Qiao did not remember falling asleep that night, but he remembered waking up to the glazing sun shining over his face, blinding him. He found himself washed up onto a deserted island.

All the other voyagers on that ship were either floating in the middle of nowhere, or at the bottom of the sea. Either way, there was no sign of them, even those who he managed to save that night.

Four days has passed, and Qiao was about to lose all hope until another ship of the Ming Treasure Fleet showed up.

Qiao did everything in his power to attract the attention of any of the voyagers on board, and eventually was able to get on board of the ship. He recognized a few of the voyagers on board. They were from the same ship as Qiao.

At least a few of them survived.

As promised, Qiao was rewarded with gold and silk when he got back home. His mother was finally cured from her illness and Qiao's family no longer had to live in near poverty.

Yes, Qiao was heavily rewarded--

--But he was also scarred with the terrifying experience of the fight with those strange people, and the fear he felt as he witnessed the ship he was on fall apart.

*The Ming Treasure Fleet are recognized today as one of the first explorers of the world, and many Chinese that know about the Ming Treasure Fleet look back at them and praise them for their bravery, kindness and devotion towards what they do.*

*If we were half as devoted, half as kind and half as heroic as the people were back then, the society would've been filled with positivity and love.*

# Deep Trouble

*ELCHK Lutheran Academy, Ng, Hayes – 14*

“Hayes, this is insane,” my friend Penny whispered. “We shouldn’t be here.”

“Too late,” I whispered back. Sneaking into my Uncle’s forbidden room was probably a bad idea.

My name is Hayes Rogers. Penny Haywood and I are both thirteen. We’ve been best friends since primary school.

Here we are, standing in Uncle Robby’s private quarters. I turned my head around, trying to see in the room. Although it was a bright day outside because there was no light switch in the room, it was so dark I thought I was inside a chalkboard.

We arrived at my uncle’s lighthouse two days ago in a tiny seaside village called Saint Martin Cove. It was exciting at first until Uncle Robby told us about the forbidden room. Well, I guess that’s why we’re here.

I led the way front. It was very dim. I couldn’t even see my fingers.

“I’m not sure about this,” Penny whispered. “What if he comes home and finds us? We’re dead meat!”

My mom says Penny think too much. She says if Penny were a superhero, she’d be Worry Woman.

“No worries,” I reassured her. “He said he’ll be back at afternoon.”

But we were both drawn to this room as if it pulled us like a magnet.

“Hayes, there’s nothing to see,” Penny said. “Let’s go, we’re outta here.”

I probably would have listened to her advice and leave the room if I had known what was about to happen next. But I didn’t know I was about to enter the most frightening adventure that will twist my life forever.

Then, in deep shadow, something came into focus. A wooden chest with carvings of mermaids on the sides stood in the room’s middle.

I pointed. “Hey look, a treasure chest!” My voice sounded hollow in the small room.

Our shoes scraped on the creaky wooden floor as we stepped up to the chest. The wooden chest was painted brown. A rusted lock hung from the lid.

“Maybe this chest has a legit treasure in it,” I said. “And Uncle Robby keeps it latched to make sure it’s safe.”

“Wait for a second, what if there is a curse on it?” Penny said.

“You’re sounding like Uncle Robby.” I teased her. “Since when do you believe in evil curses?”

She shrugged and bumped me in the back. Hard.

I stumbled forward and crashed to the chest. “OWWWW!” I let out a painful howl.

The lock snapped open easily.

“I’m sorry,” Penny said.

“Don’t tell me you’re sorry,” I climbed back on my toes. “You did that on purpose, now help me push this bloody lid.”

Penny and I both grabbed the latch and clicked it open. Then we gripped the lid and pushed it up.

It made a popping sound as it came loose—and we swung the heavy lid up.

Sssssssssssss.

I took a few seconds to find out what was that sizzling noise. Then I saw a smoky mist shooting up from the chest. I felt it drift against my face. I staggered back, choking.

I whipped both hands wildly, trying to clear the mist away. (I know I’m a dumb person)

“I—I can’t breathe!” I whimpered. Pressing my hand over my nose.

The sickening fog swept around us. In seconds, the mist spreads all over the room.

“Ohhh,” Penny groaned. “I think I will die!” Her shoulders were heaving up and down.

My eyes blazed. I could taste the pungent fog on my tongue. I felt sickish. My stomach gurgled. My throat tightened.

I’ve got to close the chest, I decided. If I close the chest, maybe this disgusting mist will stop spurting up. I crawled on the floor till I found the chest. The acerbic fog twirled around us for a few seconds more. I helped her up.

She blinked several times, then turned. “Thanks.”

She straightened her sweater and jeans with both hands. “Let’s go.”

For once I agreed on her point of view.

I followed her to the door. Halfway across the room, I turned back.

Gazed at the room.  
And gasped.  
“Penny—look!” I cried.

Penny let out a startled cry.  
Where am I? I wondered.  
My heart was pounding like a drum. I took a deep breath.  
We were not in the forbidden room anymore. We were in a ship cabin!  
There were four different rooms in the cabin. An old-fashioned magnetic compass stood on a table in the middle and some clothes were scattered on the floor.  
“Maybe, somehow, we got sent back to 1400s,” Penny said, Making a confused look. “And we’re in one of the pirate ships are on the sea.”  
I gave her a shove. “That’s great, Penny. I knew I could count on you to look on the bright side. How did you know this is a pirate ship?”  
“Look yourself,” She pointed left.  
I turned my head around. It led to another room. A dark figure stood in the doorway. He strolled out of the room. He wore a worn-out pirate uniform.  
He had large brown eyes. His moustache was as brown as his hair. He pulled on a tricorn hat as he walked toward us.  
He squinted, first at Penny, then at me. “Have ye arrived?” he said in a low, cool voice. “I wasn’t expecting ye till later.”  
“Uh...” I said, feeling my voice tremble. “Who are you?”

“Well, my name is Captain Jack Wong,” he said. “We’re about to rob the Ming Treasure Ships that are incoming. Wanna come?”  
“No!” Penny cried. “We’re not pirates!”  
“Y’all don’t wanna meet my bad side.” Captain Jack said impatiently.  
Was that a threat? Or he’s just trying to scare us?  
“If ye wanna go back to your uncle’s lighthouse safely,” he said, lowering his eyes on me. We have to help him.  
He brought us to the upper deck. Ocean waves crashed against the ship’s side. The ship rocked unsteadily.  
“Just tell us why are we here!” I shouted. My skin prickled with horror.  
“I brought ye here for a reason,” Captain Jack leaned towards me. “I’ve met ye uncle’s ancestor a long time ago. He gave me a treasure chest and said if I need any help, just open the chest. I’m the only one left on this ship, and I needed BIG help. So, when I opened the chest ye came here.”  
I stared at him with my mouth open. Has he gone bonkers?  
He started out at the sea using his Dutch telescope. “I guess the Ming treasure ship sped away along with the treasure,” he said sadly. “I guess I have to make you walk the plank. I can’t have any witnesses telling the truth.”

“You can’t do that!” We both shouted in horror.  
He took a step forward, arms stretched.  
I was terrified, but not too scared to move.  
We both bolted to the ship cabin and ran through the curving tunnel. Our shoes clapped loudly on the wooden floor. It sounded as if a thousand kids were running from a pirate!  
My legs felt rubbery and weak. But I forced myself to run.  
We ran through the dark tunnel, following the curve of the walls. Penny leaned forward, her arms stretched in front of her as she ran. As we turned again, her legs were pumping hard, and she was ahead of me.  
I glanced back.  
Was Captain Jack following us?  
He was close behind, his long brown hair flapping behind him.  
A wooden chest came into view up ahead.  
The chest! The chest that brought us here!  
An idea suddenly popped into my mind. Captain Jack said if he needed help, he will open the chest and wait for help to come. If we dive into the chest would we be able to get out of here?  
It was a wacky idea, but it was worth a try.

Up ahead, the wooden chest from the open doorway grew larger.

Penny was running hard, uttering a gasp with each step. Running as fast as I could.

"Penny, dive into the wooden chest!" I cried with exhaustion.

"I don't know what you are talking about, but let's do it!" Penny shouted breathlessly.

I didn't turn around. But I could hear the loud footsteps of Captain Jack close behind me.

"Ye can't run away! Just give up!" Captain Jack screamed.

Go, Penny, go! My chest felt about to burst. But I ran harder, desperate to catch up, To reach the chest, To leap into the wooden chest to safety.

Penny let out a cry and did her best long jump and leapt inside the chest! Then I ran as fast as I can and leapt inside the chest after her.

I sensed a cold wave wash over me. My whole body felt soft and quivery.

I bent my knees and tilted from side to side as the chest rocked. Penny stumbled onto me.

Are we coming home?

Wave after wave washed over me. I felt as if I were falling through them... dropping through the sky.

Then it all stopped. I stood perfectly still, listening to the silence.

I opened my eyes. And gazed into a solid white blur.

I shook my head. Slowly, the whiteness faded away.

I blinked. Once. Twice. My vision came back.

I was sprawled in my bedroom at Uncle Robby's lighthouse. Penny laid beside me, bemused. Gawking at my bed and the dresser beside it.

"Oh, wow!" I cried.

We were back at my Uncle's lighthouse!

We went tearing down the stairs. I burst into the kitchen.

Uncle Robby was at the sink, brewing a cup of coffee. His face filled with surprise as we came flying into the room.

It was all too much, too frightening, too crazy. I struggled to catch my breath.

"Well, well. It was a busy day," Uncle Robby said. He squinted at Penny and me. "How are you kids doing? Sorry I didn't check in sooner. Didn't notice where the day went! Hope you aren't bored."



# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

*ELCHK Lutheran Academy, Wan, Jove – 14*

Pirates. Pirates are thieves on giant ships who blunder and kill for their own desire. In the 1400s, I had experienced meeting and even fighting these people many times. Pirates ruled the seven seas doing all those despicable and diabolical things just because they wanted to, but I too was also a “pirate”. On the contrary, I wasn’t stealing or murdering innocent lives, but I did the exact opposite. My crew and I were carrying cargoes of gold and silk and other precious items for the captain and the sailors to give away as gifts, but I wasn’t always part of the crew, so here’s how my journey began.

Back then, I was a young boy who had a poor childhood. I didn’t have a good house to live in or a family take care of me. Ever since my father left the family to earn money for my mother and I, we had been very lonely ever since. Till this day he had never came back and presumed missing after a couple of years. Unfortunately my mother died shortly after due to a deadly disease before my journey began, so I decided to head out all by myself to live on my own by starting a new life with some new people. After I packed my stuff in a little backpack, I journeyed off to the shore to begin my journey. When I arrived at the docks, I saw some sailors preparing to sail off into the sea with some silk and gold. When I asked the sailors whether I can sail along with them, they immediately declined my offer and asked me to leave. The second I turned around and walked away, the captain of the ship asked me to come back and was kind enough to let me journey with them, so after that I went the captain’s giant ship and started our voyage across the seven seas.

The first couple of weeks were quite boring to say the least, there was hardly anything to see or do in the middle of the ocean, no land no hostile threats in our way. After the first couple of weeks, we started to reach a land which is known as India. When we arrived on the shore, we docked our ship and took some of our goods we brought before we started our journey. Unfortunately, there were some locals who thought we were pirates who were trying to attack them and steal their resources, so I decided to inform them that we were good pirates who give but not steal. The locals stopped and decided to trust us, so the captain and the sailors gave them some of our gold and silk as gifts while they return some gold for our kindness. After we made peace and allied with each other, we set off into the sea once again to journey to more other places. Because of me introducing ourselves to the locals in India, the captain decided to rank me as the right hand man of the captain, making me an important person in the crew.

Several days had passed and we are once again lost in the sea. The clouds in the sky became grey and it started to rain, but out of nowhere came a ship full of pirates looking for gold. Not long after, the pirates started firing their cannons at us while we secure the goods we brought with us. The captain quickly open a secret armory beneath the ship with tons and tons of weapons stored inside and ordered us to grab a weapon and fight back. In a blink of an eye, the captain yelled, “BRACE!” as the pirates ram our ship and prepares to board it. I was anxious and frightened of the fighting going on, so I decided to run into the safe room of the ship, but as soon as I opened the door one of the pirates grabbed my shirt and took me as hostage during the battle. Fortunately, one sailor in our crew took down the pirate who was taking me hostage and cut down the ropes that anchored us to the enemy pirate ship and started to sail away as soon as possible. At first I thought he looked familiar, then I found out that brave man who saved me for the pirate was actually my father. He too recognises me and we were reunited after all those years. After the dust cleared, we found some of the bodies of our crew lying on our ship. The captain carried the bodies and placed them on the deck of ship to remember the loss of our fellow men who sacrificed themselves for protecting the goods we were carrying, this tragedy however didn’t stop us from journeying on, so we kept sailing until we found another country.

In the following month after the attack of our ship, we arrived to a beautiful country known as Africa. When we settled on shore, I saw some of the greatest scenery I had ever seen in my entire life. There were beautiful plants and trees around the land with some wild zebras walking around. After some journeying through the jungle near the dock, we found a small village full of native people. Unlike the locals in India, these natives were kind and let us into their village. The captain grabbed the box full of goods and

gave it away to the natives in the village, the natives were so delighted that they invited us to spend the night in their village. After a good night sleep, my crew and I woke up as the sun was rising, such a beautiful and unforgettable scenery. At the end we parted ways with the natives we allied with and sailed off to share the rest of the goods we have in our ship.

In the following years, the crew and I shared more of our goods to other countries, but as time passed I had decided to part ways with the crew since I finally found my family so my father and I left the crew and started a new life on land. Before we left, the captain gave us the last bit of the the goods as we left the people who took care of me. I will never forget that crew of the pirates who give rather than steal, they are the people who took care of me as I grew up and taught me the ways of giving and forming an alliance with others. So the people today should stop all the fighting and learn to make peace each other, less violence and more peace. As historian looked back on the crew I was with and truly believed that China “ruled the sea” back then, ruling as in forging a relationship with the countries we have been to, so spread the word, you don’t always have to fight there’s always another way. Till this day I still dreamed the day I would reunite with these band of pirates again, hope my dream will come true.

# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

*ELCHK Lutheran Academy, Wong, Hayley – 13*

Pirates. We've all seen the movies of one-eyed, peg-legged pirates who rob and plunder ships at sea. But this image isn't exactly accurate. Back then, I too was a "pirate", however, I wasn't killing innocent lives for my own desire; in fact, my crew and I actually carried cargoes of gold, silk, and other valuable items to trade and give away as gifts. But things weren't exactly just plain sailing for me... here is how the journey began.

On June 29th, 1429, the Xuande emperor ordered for the 7th and final voyage of the Ming Treasure Voyages. He appointed general Zheng He to command the fleet. I had been living with my older brother who was appointed to be on the ship. But just after my older brother was appointed, he got ill and passed away. Back then, I was a peasant girl who dreamt of reaching the different corners of the world. I loved exploring and I was very brave. Although girls weren't exactly allowed on the ship, I had to follow my intuition and reach for my dreams. I disguised myself as my brother, and the guards who guarded the main gates were too stupid to recognize that I was a girl. Then, I had to follow the second step of my plan; which was to actually get on the ship. The news of my brother's death was never publicly announced because we didn't "matter" much inside the palace; therefore, I used his name and got on the ship with my brother's role.

The ship set sail in the year 1430, and this time, it had over 100 large ships and over 27,000 men. We visited all the important ports in the South China Sea, as well as the Indian ocean, red seas and much more.

On the first few weeks, there wasn't much to see or do. I started to make new friendships within the crew. I had a few friends that were also soldiers, but the person that I got along with the most was Zheng He's wife. I told her about my secret and how I planned to get on this ship by disguising myself as a man. We talked a lot since there wasn't much to do, but I would have to pretend that I was serving her in order to get in her cabin.

A month passed by, and instead of blue skies and plain waters, I started seeing different islands. We then reached the land which is now known as India. My role was mainly to just bring and present the goods to foreign merchants, so I did. We were arriving on the Indian shore, and the crew and I helped to dock the ship. I watched when Zheng He started to communicate with the foreigners, he showed them the gifts in a generous voice, and in return, they accepted it and were very welcoming to bring us on shore. The clouds seemed very grey and the locals said that a storm was coming towards us, so the foreign merchants offered places for us to stay until the storm goes by.

After the storm passed, we said our goodbyes and left with a new alliance between two countries. Everyone got on the ship, and once again, we were off with another great start. A few days had passed, and again, nothing much seemed to happen. I helped with cleaning the cabins, but most of the time, I would just have long conversations about life with Zheng He's wife. We would talk about how life would be outside of the palace, we talked about social problems, but most of the time, we would just talk about our dreams and wishes that we knew, would never happen.

One day, when I went to talk to Zheng He's wife, I didn't notice that there was a guard following me. Since I was disguised as a man, the guard thought that I went in for other reasons. He tied my hands with a rope and brought me to our commander, Zheng He. Turns out, Zheng He was already speculating about my visits, and sent a guard to follow me. At this point, I couldn't help but think if I should tell Zheng He that I was actually disguised as a man this whole time, or not say anything and get locked up. Either way, I would probably get sentenced. So, I decided to tell the truth, in hopes that the general would set me free.

However, that was not the case at all.

The general understood my situation, but the fact that I disguised myself as one of the soldiers to board on the ship, was already violating one of the legal rules of the Ming Dynasty. He said that I could stay on the ship and help the crew, but once we get back to the palace, I would be sentenced to the dungeon until I die. Although this sounded kind of rough, to my ears, there wasn't much to be said of. My parents were never actually there with me during my whole childhood. They left me and my brother because of so-called "issues" that they had to fix, but they never really came back. My brother was the only one who took care of me since I was little and since the only person who ever loved me is now gone, I didn't see the reason to keep on fighting for my life outside dungeon bars. In fact, I was kind of relieved. I thought of life inside the dungeon, and to me, it was everything I always wanted. I was tired of being a peasant girl serving spoiled mistresses and their kids. I said thank you and left Zheng He's room with a sense of peace in my mind.

Another few months passed by. By now, our ships have already sailed to different corners of the Indian sea. We finish off our last trade with the country of Arabia, we signed a treaty, then, we gathered all the gifts they kindly presented to us, and we set sail back to the palace.

One night, the clouds thickened and the sky was stricken. The howling wind pushed through the still waters. I grabbed my binoculars thinking that I was seeing things, but suddenly, under the mist there appeared to be a fleet of ships coming closer and closer to us. The sea rises, and it is now morphed into mountains of angry and unforgiving waves. The wind slammed the rain into our faces, leaving every single person on the ship soaked and terrified. The rain lashed down in silver sheets and behind the rain, I saw a few ships of angry South African Pirates who weren't that happy that we were on their territory. They were shouting curses and were very ready to kill. I saw that my crew members were petrified, so I quickly warned our commander and fetched swords and weapons for everyone.

Deep inside, I was actually frightened, but I knew that it was the right thing to do.

The South African pirates raised their daggers and swords above their heads. They were brutal and certainly unkind, but I wanted to make a change. I wanted to settle this encounter with no harm, no violence, and no hatred. So before the pirates came close enough to attack. I shouted "We come with no harm! We come only with respect and generosity!", and even though the pirates from the ship didn't understand me, they could see that I was speaking in a sincere and friendly way. So the pirate captain stopped his crew, and they put down all their weapons.

I finally so the light in my life.

After the pirate ship sailed off, Zheng He asked me to go to his cabin. He told me that I had a good heart and I don't deserve to be locked up in the castle doors. He was very ill at that time, and he told me that he might not live for any longer. So he took me outside and commanded that after he dies, I shall be the captain of all his boats, and all of his boats will belong to me. Shortly, after that, we had a party. We all laughed, danced and of course, drank and had a big feast.

A few weeks passed by, and Zheng He passed away. The crew and I took a strand of his hair and buried him somewhere around the Indian coast.

I noticed that all of my crew members don't really have families back at home. They all wanted to be free from the palace. So I had an idea and everyone agreed with it. We turned the ship in an opposite direction and began exploring all the corners of the world. We continued to "rule the sea" with our bravery, generous souls and grateful hearts.

# Navigator of the Ming Treasure Fleet

*Good Hope School, Kwok, Chloe – 13*

The ocean view was far more magnificent than I ever imagined. It was a memory that I will never forget. The music of the waves crashing to the shore danced in my ears, giving me a pleasant feeling of euphoria. Rays of golden sunlight peeked from beneath the clouds in the unyielding blue sky. Lights flickered and shimmered on the surface of the ocean as if glitter was poured on it. The mysterious, deep water felt like it held many secrets. Waiting for me to explore. The nebulous line that separates the sky and the sea was beckoning me to come forth, to travel across the seas. I have always dreamt of becoming a sailor in the Ming Treasure fleet. My father was one, unfortunately he died in a war. He would tell me enthralling and wholesome tales of his adventures. About the sights he'll never forget and the tiresome and boring jobs on the ships. I am finally old enough to set sail with him and be the navigator's assistant! I looked at the *Feng Huang*, a beautiful ship that would take me across the ocean to other regions. I breathed in the salty air. I smiled. I took a deep breath as I boarded the ship with my teammates.

It's the seventh time the emperor has ordered our admiral Sir. Zheng He to set sail for the Ming Treasure Fleet. You must be wondering what "Ming Treasure Fleet" is. My father told me, we would carry cargoes of jewellery and gold across the seas. We would stop by some countries and give them the valuable treasures. That way we could have more allies in future wars or maybe discover land in the voyages.

A shout from the captain indicated the start of journey. I went to the front of the ship to have a better look at how they start the ship. The primary sailor took control of the wheel. He stirred it with so much momentum. I was truly amazed. Then, a shout came from above. A boy, not much older than me was swinging through the sails. Checking for any problems. I looked around for the navigator. I couldn't find him. I approached a boy wearing light green robes.

"Do you know where the navigator is?" I asked him.

He shrugged. "I'm looking for him as well. I'm the assistant of him."

"So am I!" I exclaimed happily. I had a companion! I saw his eyes brighten up. He grinned. "I'm Xu Yang!" he held a hand for me to shake. I gladly took it. "Yu Wei, it's my pleasure to meet you."

I spotted a plump, tan man in a deep blue robe. He was sitting in front of a wooden desk. On it, was a humongous map with lots of markings on it. Next to it, was a compass and a divider. He must be the navigator, Hai. I nodded at Xu Yang. We ran to the wooden table.

"You must be Hai. I'm Yu Wei and he is Xu Yang, your assistants." I held my hand out for him to shake.

He didn't take my hand, much to my disappointment. Instead, he looked askance at it and grunted in monotone "You two, help me sort the maps. By longitude"

I stared at the huge mount of maps. Xu Yang caught my eye and sighed. Might as well as get to work.

It took us almost two hours to sort the maps. I excitedly took it to Hai, hoping that he would give us something tad more interesting. He took a very brief look at it and shook his head disapprovingly and told me to sort it again by another order.

This continued for what seemed like forever. Every day, we would sort the maps and he would not approve. We would have to do it over and over. Till I was on the verge of tearing my brains out. I don't understand why I had to sort the maps. I have almost memorised all of the navigator guides and books. All I had to do was this. So, does he think I'm not suitable of being his assistant? I huffed in annoyance. I mustn't complain. My father said if I did, it'll be a disaster. As I grumbled about this in a low voice to Xu Zhang. He suddenly nudged me. I looked up and saw Hai's giant body tower over me. I almost jumped three feet in the air. He stared at me with an eyebrow raised. I quickly apologized as I stood up and saluted him.

He held out his hand. "Boys, you don't need to sort the maps. Follow me." He grunted.

I was too bewildered to move right away, until Xu Yang elbowed me. Hai led me to the ship's deck. He gave us a map and a compass.

“Tell me where we are.” He ordered.

I looked around. I remember reading about it in *A navigator's journey*. I discussed with Xu Zhang. I spotted where I was and I told Hai. For the first time, Hai smiled.

“Boy. Although you're correct, you must know that many knowledge and skills come from experience. Not books. Your way is correct but it takes a lot of time.” He paused as we nodded. “I'm truly impressed that you boys had sorted the maps every time. Although I did hear you grumbling. This shows your diligence. We are nearly there for our first stop. Meanwhile, you can stand with me and see what I do as a navigator.”

The remaining days, Xu Zhang and I watched as Hai did all sorts of markings on his map. He would explain each and every one of them to me. What amazed me the most was, he could tell our latitude of where we were just by looking at the stars.

Soon we arrived at India. It was a beautiful place! Truly memorable. I have never been abroad with such different climate and culture. The rocky and rugged coastline highlighted the crystal waters. The palm trees on the beach was like icing on the cake. Different rocks stood from the sea. It was really remarkable.

We stayed at India for six months. Admiral Zheng He had successfully made alliance with them. During my time in India. I went with Hai to learn how to tell the way with the stars. I explored the coastlines with Xu Hai and chatted with him. I even went to some 'elders' that have been in the Ming Treasure fleets since the first one. They told me about the adventures they had. They told me about the war my father died in. It happened in the third voyage. King Alakeshvara of Ceylon refused to trade with us and even committed hostiles with the neighbouring countries that had good terms with China. A lot of King Alakeshvara's troops attacked the fleet and killed some sailors. Admiral Zheng He had already formed a plan. He sent many troops to attack their country. They conquered the capital and held the King hostage. That was how they took over Ceylon.

Soon, we were out on the sea again. Hai would give Xu Yang and I a chance to locate our location and find the wind speed etc. Our ship made occasional stops at different regions for a few days. I would get off at some stops to buy something for my mother back home.

At the last stop, Bengal, the people there did not want our treasures. They tried to attack us. Troops of army came from their land. I, as a navigator didn't need to fight in this war. However, Xu Yang, Hai and I still had many jobs to do. We needed to find out the quickest way home, the best way to get into their land and form three different plans. It was the most tiresome experience.

The army from Bengal was strong. We couldn't fight them off. Admiral Zheng He told us to retire. The army quickly went on the ships as we set sail back home.

It was a tremendous experience, a memorable start of my navigator life with such an experienced and talented mentor. I got excited whenever I heard the shout from captain for another marvellous adventure to begin.

# The New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages: Life – Fair or Unfair?

*Good Hope School, Leung, Zoe – 13*

I am a freshman, a very, very fresh one. I am average, not too good nor too bad. I am not number one in combat, but the Emperor made his decision. To strengthen the bond with the isolated countries, our majesty called for a fleet of the youngest and strongest men in China. And here I am, fresh and young, sailing along in the patterned fleet of ships with so many other men on the voyage to faraway western lands. The man leading us is the famous Zheng He (鄭和), who was directly appointed by the emperor, brave and strong.

Panic, fear, and horror. The unknown lied in front of us. Indeed, we had trained day and night to defend ourselves from our enemies. But everyone knew that the sea was never safe and calm. Tsunamis, whirlpools, and storms. There had never been one who could ever travel without them, nor had anyone ever gone out of them alive or conscious. Those uncertainties, hazardous and disastrous. But there is no way back now, we have already stepped onto a road of no return.

A freshman's life is not simple. This morning I woke up early and there were loads of work lining up to be treated by me: cleaning the deck, taking shift on observing, turning the hulk, raising the sails and all sorts of nasty tiring work. Our daily route seemed so dull while our general sat on the highest deck the whole day, leisurely, watching the flow of the current as the sun rose up from the mountains till it sank into the horizon. Life is different between us, it is unfair.

Every night, when work is not yet done, our general, along with all the highest chief, go down to the dining room to enjoy their luxurious and rich dinner. In the meantime, little peasants like me unwillingly stay up all night to work, to feel the hunger, and to dream how one day we might become one of those leaders. When we finally get our work done, it is midnight and the end of another day. We have our healthy but cheap dinner in our cabins, rest for about three hours, and get back to work again in the wake of the rising sun. It is again a boring new day while they are still snoring peacefully on their comfortable bed. Life is very unfair.

Then came a stormy night. The ship churned along the huge waves aimlessly, our ships were going up and down vigorously, and we feared that our ships would drown. Fortunately, none of us had seasickness after all that harsh training. Waves reached to a height over 3 metres and hit our deck with a “flash”. In no time, the salty seawater had drowned our deck and by then, the deck was flooding all over. After that, the captain cried in a loud voice to cover the sound of the storm, “All men on board, flush the water and turn the hulk.” His cry woke me up from my peaceful sleep. Immediately, I rushed up the deck along with all others. With a sweaty body we continued, under the force of the howling wind, cleaning the mess the disaster had ‘kindly’ given to us. Since the volume of water one bucket can contain is little, the amount of flood hardly seemed to change. At last, we ended up being scolded and punished by the captain. All that we know is that our generals were sitting in their rooms safe and sound, totally dry and warm. Life is so unfair.

And sometimes we would meet a gang of terrible pirates in the middle of the ocean. Pirates were usually travelling the sea to find gold and treasures. At once we knew, to protect the valuables on our ship, a fight was about to begin. With the order of our general Zheng, every single one of us got into a deadly fight with the pirates, using all our might to sacrifice our life for our country, even if we had no particular experience in combat. Our general always stayed at the end of the line, yelling out encouraging words: “Fight with all your might, you can do it!” and “Go, go and go.” but letting alone his own hands free from fight. No matter win or lose, there were always plenty of deaths and injuries, it was not pleasurable to see friendly pals of mines, dying because of the fight. The fight was over, pulling along our hurt body, we returned to our daily routine of work. Nevertheless, he who is on top of us just sit in the sick bay and await the team of doctors to treat his minor injuries. Life is extremely unfair.

One day, I was taking morning shift on observing. Suddenly, there was something fresh green and solid. What a surprise, It was an island! Excited of my discovery, I cried out to the others, “Ahoy, captain! Ahoy, shipmates! So far so long, we finally had our first discovery!” “Yo!!!” Everyone shouted in glory. Elated of my discovery, I thought I would have a rise of job or an action of praise by the General. However, I got nothing and had to work nonstop. In my heart, I knew every goal we achieved was counted as a goal

that General Zheng He achieved, I did not stand the chance to protect my own achievement. Life is always unfair.

In a matter of time, we had to prepare the anchor for reaching the island and the ladders to reach down on the ground. We also had to prepare the gifts for the country's leader in exchange for further communication in the future. After a while, we got close to the harbour. Zheng He brought part of the crew with him, while the rest of us were divided into two parts, partition one is to bring along the gifts and partition two is to guard our ship and prepare for the crew's support. Things got very busy.

I, as a youngster, longed to see more about the planet Earth. Unfortunately, I was selected to stay on-board. Looking into the beautiful scenic in front of me, my eyes were full of anxiousness and sadness. With an exhausted sigh, I got back to my cabin miserably but relieved to have a rest at last. Flashbacking to the past few months that I roamed on the sea, It felt like I had made a wrong choice at first to join the crew. I thought I would have many opportunities ahead. Right now, all I had looked forward to was broken into pieces of shattered glass.

I am not as fresh as before. After these times, I have grown into a more mature boy. I started to understand the things around me. Hundreds and thousands worked hard under their lord namelessly, but no matter how hard we work, it was unlikely to be raised up to a higher position. I just wish I could leave as soon as I reached my home country when the journey came to a full stop. Life is never fair enough.



# Journey of the Seas

*Harrow International School Beijing, Ye, Lola – 12*

I was eager and nervous when I was told to go on a treasure voyage with Captain Zheng He, but when I saw the ship, all that was left was anticipation: there were 60 cabins on the deck of the ship, four masts and four sails, and most importantly, it was enormous! Crewmates around me all gasped in marvel as a guide directed us to different parts of the ship. As I wandered around the ship, I felt something hit me, I turned around to check who it was. It was Chen, my friend! I greeted him and chatted for a little before we were called away.

Since we were one of the first people to go on the voyage, the emperor himself held a banquet for us before we left. The emperor told us to follow Captain Zheng, we all toasted the emperor and Captain Zheng. The emperor gave each of us a pat on the back. I felt contented and respected, soon we are going to be masters of the seas!

We departed Nanjing, carrying gifts of gold brocade, patterned silks, and coloured silk gauze. Being the youngest on the ship, I was often ordered to do the most work, like mopping the deck, carrying carts, tying ropes, and sometimes even preparing food. One night, after a day of hard work, I laid on my bed until a sudden shudder awakened me. The whole crew was on full alert. I ran to the deck to see what had shaken the boat. The rain was pouring down onto the deck recklessly, the waves were fiddling with our ship, swaying it side to side, thunder and lightning sang like a chorus which made the night more frightful. Captain Zheng ordered some men to raise two more masts, some men lost balance and the entire ship was in chaos. I saw Chen in a hurry and stopped him to ask what has happened, he replied in a flustering manner: "It's the storm! The ship has been starved too! Captain Zheng told me to repair it! I have to go now!" I apologized quickly and let go of him. Just as I was about to go back in, Captain Zheng called me. I ran obediently towards him and answered, "Yes captain?" Captain Zheng replied in a solemn tone, "Go down and help Chen with repairing the leak, I am afraid he won't be able to handle it on his own." I nodded and hurried to the bottom of the ship.

The bottom of the ship was dark with only a few candles lit. I grabbed one and yelled, "Chen? Where are you?" I waited for a few moments. "Zhang? Why are you here?" I moved towards him until I felt the coldness of my feet. I held my candle next to the hole, water was flooding in. The air smelled damp and fishy, and the floor was constantly shaking. Chen was soaking wet so I helped him hold the plank in place while he mended it. At last, the hole stopped leaking. Chen and I gathered the tools and headed up to the deck. The storm hasn't stopped but has become less frightening. Chen and I told Captain Zheng that the hole has been mended. He nodded in satisfaction and told us to rest in our cabins.

After the storm, we travelled for a few more days until arriving at Champa, they greeted us with respect as we gave them our presents. They were friendly and gave us tributes for our emperor. There were things I had never seen or even heard of before. As we visited more countries (Java, Malacca, Aru, Semudera, Lambri, Ceylon, Quilon, and Calicut), our ship became more and more loaded. I feel like a pioneer, seeing and touching so many new and unique things. From silver to precious stones, coral to tortoise shells, Indian cotton cloth to spices, they even gave us exotic animals: there were enormous birds that ran at a high speed; there were animals that were as tough as stones and as big as a house; there were also animals with necks longer than their body! After receiving all these tributes, Captain Zheng told us we were going to head back.

The entire crew celebrated the success of the voyage. We all toasted Captain Zheng and we had a great time; feasting on meat and drinking liquor. Everybody was filled with joy, but none of us knew what was waiting for us the next day.

After arriving at Palembang, Captain Zheng announced a piece of very important news at the deck, we gathered around him, some of us still a little drunk, that we were going to have to fight Chen Zuyi and his pirates. He also sent a message to the 300 other ships that were travelling beside us. There were 27,000 of us in total. We were all given a sword and armour, I was assigned to fire cannons. I learnt how to put in the cannonballs and adjusted them to shoot in the right direction. This weapon made me realise the strength in the military we had.

To be honest, I was nervous before the battle began, I could see the pirate ships in the distance, I steadied my aim towards the ship. The ship was getting closer and closer. The sound of the waves splashing on the ship made me feel nervous. My palms started to sweat, my lips were dry and I felt smoke in my throat. I heard Captain Zheng shouting in the deck, "FIRE!" I lit the fuse and adjusted the aim, the cannonball shot out of the cannon with a huge bang. The kickback of the cannon knocked me off my feet. I was shaken but then quickly pulled myself together again. I put another cannonball inside the cannon and aimed it towards the ship, I lit the fuse and waited for it to fire. This time, I was ready for the kickback. The cannon I just fired hit a critical part of the ship, the pirate ship started to break down and the ship caught on fire. Crewmates next to me cheered as more pirate ships were wrecked.

There were only a few pirate ships left, they threw ropes that hooked onto our ship and glided towards us. Some pirates landed inside where the cannons were. I quickly drew out my sword as one the pirates tried to swing his sword at me. I could hear chaos on the deck with slashing swords, muffled shouts, and bodies dropping. Other crewmates next to me also got into action. There were occasional sounds of firing cannons from nearby ships. These pirates were skilful with swords, but we outnumbered them. Crewmates next to me joined forces with me to kill the angry pirate. I knocked him hard on the head with my elbow, while an older man pointed his sword towards the pirate's heart and stabbed him hard. The pirate went on his knees and dropped dead on the floor. I gave the older man a nod and looked around the room to find if there were any pirates left. I saw the last one drop dead on a cannon and shouted, "To the deck! We need to help Captain Zheng!" The others replied with a roar and rushed towards the deck. Only a few pirates were left on the deck. Chen Zuyi and his lieutenants were already captured. Captain Zheng announced victory and all the 300 ships cheered with pride and glee. It was as if the ocean cheered with us.

The weather was warm and sunny after the battle. We arrived back in Nanjing like heroes. I couldn't wait to show the emperor what we had received, and tell him that Chen Zuyi had been defeated. Captain Zheng showed the emperor the tributes and the exotic animals. The emperor was very pleased with the tributes and the capture of Chen Zuyi. The emperor gave rewards to us for defeating Chen Zuyi. My parents welcomed me home and lived a decent living with the rewards the emperor gave me.

Now, after so many years, I still can't forget the things me and my crewmates had been through. Meeting foreign faces, receiving never-seen-before gifts, and battling fierce pirates. These are all memories that I can never forget. This journey made me realise how significant our country was and how much more there is in this world we can explore. This journey doesn't just travel through places, it also travels through time. It travels through people's minds too. With every stop, we discover new things and new people. With each discovery, we become more intelligent because we know more about the world we live in.

# Restart, Repeat, and Replay

*Harrow International School Hong Kong, Chao, Catherine – 14*

Who am I?

All I could feel was the pain piercing into my skin and the fear slipping into my thoughts. Something ached inside me. I felt more pain than I knew a human body could bear as a rush of terror washed through me. Just like everything else, my mind was in a chaotic state. A mess. I could feel the sweat trickling down my cheeks as fear began to creep into the emptiness in my heart. I found myself lying in the middle of a deserted street, yet a quiet whisper tingling through my thoughts told me something felt familiar. I froze as a million questions flashed through my mind. I couldn't recall a thing. My memories were like broken pieces of glass scattered into the darkness. If I tried to reach for the shattered fragments, the sharp edges would pierce into my skin, pricking my finger with an unbearable sting. I was left in a blank state of confusion as panic replaced the pain in my memories. They gradually blurred and dimmed. But then there was none.

5 year has passed since this incident, yet that scene continued to haunt every day, every hour, every minute of my life. I had long wondered what truly happened, why this feeling of emptiness always lingered behind me, why I always seemed to be anticipating for something to change, yet I never knew what. The paranoia has been chasing me, hunting me down, suffocating me in an ocean of panic, not giving me a single chance to breathe. Is this truly all my own imagination?

As I stepped out of the house, the rain began to pour, droplets hammering onto the cold, lifeless ground. The lightning cracked the morning into two, followed by a deafening roar of thunder. Not even a ray of sunlight was penetrable through the overcast. Not even a ray of hope. I could barely hear myself think in this tumultuous chaos, all that was left in me was nothing but the panic lurking through my thoughts once again. I ran as fast as I could towards the distance, trying to escape from this merciless reality. Along the way, I tripped, fell, and braced myself for the pain that has yet to come. But it never did. Surprised and confused, I gradually blinked open my eyes. The first thing that caught my sight were those beautiful eyes, those which sparkled like the stars in the midnight sky. He caught me. His strong, comforting arms were wrapped around my waist, steadying me from the fall. All my senses screamed at me to run, but my heart seemed to say the opposite. I just stood there, frozen. I could see the concern in his expression as he mouthed certain words to me, but all I could hear was the pounding of my own heart as my mind clouded with immense feelings that I have never came across before. Something new. Something different. Everything around me seemed to have gradually faded away from my sight as I got lost in his features, his voice. Him. The eye of calmness didn't last long. I snapped myself back into reality. Alarmed, I jumped back from his arms as I regained my balance. I could feel my heart racing rapidly, so strong it was as though something was crashing into my chest every second, the blood rushing through my body like tides in the ocean as I felt my cheeks blaze with heat. I fidgeted in agitation, refusing to look him in the eye. He seemed to have seen through my panic and embarrassment as he nodded politely. "My name is Zheng He." He said, leaning in closer, his breath in sync with mine. I felt something flutter in my stomach, so distinct it was undeniable. Awareness. Those pale blue eyes seemed to pierce right through me as the corner of his mouth lifted a little, not quite a smile. I looked away from his intensity. "Do you feel it too?" He whispered, his voice soft yet passionate. Those words left me uncertain, self-conscious, jittery. At that moment, I knew that my fairy tale has begun, but what I never anticipated was the end which has dawned upon me long before hope has even made its first step.

"I'm travelling to India."

Silence echoed around us as his final words struck me. His voice trailed slowly, as though his words are unwilling to take flight. I clutched my chest, each and every letter stabbing right through my heart. My vision blurred as I struggled to keep my hopes up. I pretended to be ignorant about all the risks, even though anyone with a speck of perception would have noticed that my heart was pounding in terror. I was absorbed in my thoughts, oblivious to my surroundings. "What if you don't come back?" I whispered, fighting back my tears. There was a moment of hesitation. "I'll definitely come back." He replied. Despite trying to appear unperturbed, his voice was quivering. There was just a glimmer of doubt in his eyes, only for a second, but I saw it. I could see the pain in his expression as all my fears returned with force. The deathly silence continued to haunt us, casting a shadow over our voices. I wanted to yell, I wanted to scream, but nothing came out of my mouth. It was as if the impact had knocked every wisp of air from my lungs. I felt completely lost, as though I was drifting in middle of the ocean. Directionless. Powerless. Nothing could change this and we both knew it. His eyes widened with shock as I made my final decision. It wasn't an easy choice, but I spoke my last words without a single regret. "I'm coming with you."

I trailed behind him as he made his way onto the boat, my guts churning with dread. I could've left, I could've ran back, but something stopped me in my tracks. I caught a glimpse of familiar words which were imprinted on the wooden deck below me. The voice of caution whispered softly not to look, but it couldn't break through the scream of curiosity. I crouched down, each move attentive with caution. I've never came across these symbols before, but the suspicion hidden behind my mask told me they were there for a reason. I brushed my fingers across each and every symbol, the wood rubbing against my skin.

"A star..." *The first thing that caught my sight were those beautiful eyes, those which sparkled like the stars in the midnight sky. Him.*

"A dagger..." *A weapon. Death.*

"A circle..." *Endless.*

I froze as my finger landed on the very last letters.

*You.*

A rush of horror washed through me as every puzzle pieced together perfectly in my mind. I slowly backed away from the wall, my eyes locked in an unblinking stare. The logical side of me refused to believe in this nonsense, but deep inside I knew all too clearly that this nonsense was indeed true. Despite having known this, I was still deeply skeptical. Suddenly, a deafening roar broke the silence. Horrific screams and haunting cries echoed around me as the unsettling madness seeped into my thoughts. Voices in my head screamed at me to run, but I couldn't. I just stood there, unable to move a single muscle in my body. Frozen. Bloody scenes blurred across my vision, one after another pouring into my sight without a single break. I shut my eyes, allowing myself to be absorbed into the darkness.

I heard a scream. I heard a cry. But then there was silence. A part of me believed that everything would be okay when I opened my eyes, but my heart sank as I caught a glimpse of what had happened. Zheng He was lying there on the cold, wooden deck. Nothing was left in me except for the fear creeping into my heart once again. I clenched my fist, praying for him to wake up, to tell me none of this was true. But he didn't. I held my breath as I shook him lightly, my fingers trembling. I was hoping he would move, or at least twitch, but he stayed still. Very still. Blood was seeping through his wound, staining his clothes with a dark red. There was a lump in my throat as I tried to fight back my tears, my eyes aching with pain. My vision blurred as I looked up into the midnight sky. *Stars.* I dropped my gaze and caught a glimpse of a sharp weapon lying on the floor, dripping with blood. *A dagger.* The red stains on the floor were shaped in a specific way. *A circle.* There was a daring glint in the eyes of fate, and I knew the next step lies within my own hands. If I die, everything will restart. I desperately needed another chance to change my fate, to save Zheng He. My fingers trembled as I reached for the dagger, pushing it closer towards me. Without a hesitation, I pushed the dagger straight through my chest, knowing that the pain I'd feel is nothing compared to the sorrow in my heart. As I laid my head against Zheng He's chest, I heard my fragile heart beat for one last painful time. I allowed the end of this world to carry me into a cooling rest, where I lay benumbed of all sufferings and horrors of the living world as the ticking of my clock came to a stop.

I woke up, and found myself lying helplessly in the middle of a deserted street, fear and panic pouring into my heart. I couldn't recall a thing. My memories were like broken pieces of glass scattered into the darkness. They gradually blurred and dimmed. But then there was none.

Who am I?

# A Taste of Loneliness

*Harrow International School Hong Kong, Hancock, Tasman – 13*

We only get one life. One chance to make a difference in this unfair world. Yet I squandered my only chance. My only life.

Let me start from the beginning, the day I abandoned the only home I knew, the day my world turned upside down.

“Ming, my boy, come downstairs, there’s someone to see you!”

My mother’s sweet voice wafted through my bedroom door, filling the space with her gentle words. I heaved myself out of bed, put on my finest silk garments and descended the stairs. A tall, gangly, man, about twice my age, stood at the door, dressed like he had been at sea for months. My nostrils stung from his putrid body odour and his cold black eyes stared back at me, penetrating into my mind as if he was reading my deepest thoughts.

Then he began to speak and with only a few words, he offered me a thrilling adventure: a chance to travel as a lucky charm for the legendary Ming treasure voyages. I had to make a choice. It was either to stay with my mother and accompany her through her old age, as she had no one else to love or to embark on a heroic voyage that could bring me wealth and fame. I can still picture my mother sobbing in my arms, pleading me to stay with her, but I just couldn’t say no.

As my carriage pulled up to the dock and the majestic ship came into view, I decided to put my homesick feelings behind me and focus on the future; after all, I out of all the children in China had been chosen for this honourable duty.

I boarded the ship and immediately the smell of salt and old wood flooded into my nostrils. I felt a rush of excitement race through my body as I looked around at all the different people, each working diligently on their own task. I ran up to the bow, and the wind blowing in my face, I looked out at the great blue sea, stretched as far as the eye could see.

As the days passed by, the adrenaline slowly faded away and I began to feel the weight of guilt pushing me down. Each morning, the sunrise brought the hope of a new day, of a new adventure, and I would rush to the bow to witness it in person. Vibrant ribbons of reds, yellows and oranges streaked across the sky, and the rising sun sparkled like diamonds on the bright blue sea. Dreams of adventure and excitement filled me. Each night, the sunset brought hopelessness, as yet another day had passed with both my mother and me apart, with no one to love me or to love. Guilt twisting my mind and my soul, dragging me to the darkest of places, sucking out all the life I once had. Then, one cold winter day, my life changed forever.

I woke up as usual and left my cabin to go on deck and witness the brilliant sunrise. I stood at the bow, in the icy winter wind, with nothing but my thin silk robes to shield me. Just as I was about to give in to the needles of cold, I felt a blanket slide on to my shoulders, enveloping me in a warm bundle. I turned to see a girl, about my age, with only a thin cloth robe covering her delicate skin. She stood there looking so calm, and on her pale face, she wore an expression of pure kindness, so true that I felt my heart melt with bliss. It felt so good to be loved this way again. She smiled slightly and said in the lightest and most angelic voice I have ever heard, “See you later.”

I thought that no one would ever love me like my mother did, that no one would see me in the light that she did, but every time I saw Mei, I felt that same buttery warm feeling that I felt around my mother. As soon as she came into my life, this ball of love, life and laughter welled up inside me and I felt loved again. Suddenly, I had hope for a new life with her, but lurking in the shadows of my hope was the guilt of knowing that my mother would never find someone like Mei. But also the guilt of knowing I had found a replacement for my mother, something I never thought possible.

“Never speak to Mei or I will kill you, you hideous rascal!”

I spun around in my cabin, but there was no one there, I frantically opened the door and searched the hallway, but I saw no faces. From that day onwards, I felt there was another presence lurking in the shadows of the ship, waiting to pounce if I tried to find Mei. I came to know this presence as my voice, the enemy I was always at war with.

Then one hot summer’s day, the unimaginable happened – I was sitting in my cabin reading ancient Chinese literature, the only thing I had left from my mother. I could still smell the sweet perfume of the fragrant flower she wore in her hair and the cosy smell of the fireplace, a reminder of what I left behind. Depression and homesickness balled up inside me, twisting my stomach, and pricking my skin. There was no reason to live anymore. I picked my dagger, and with a shaking hand, aimed it toward my heart, ready to give in to all the sorrow and guilt I had gone through.

Suddenly a scream pierced the air, a scream I knew very well. It was Mei!

I had found a reason to live!

I rushed upstairs, but before I could reach the top, in the coldest voice I have ever heard the voice said six deadly words “Take another step, and you’ll die.”

In that split second, it was as if everyone but I was frozen in time, like statues of humans that once existed. I took the time to process the voice’s words. I knew that the voice would make me kill myself, but would it do so before I could reach Mei? I had no clue. But Mei was the reason I was alive, so her life must be more important than mine.

I ran up the stairs at full speed, the wind rushing in my face, and when I reached the top, I froze with shock. Mei was tied to a pole, wearing that same cloth outfit that I had seen her in on that winter morning when I met her. She was bleeding from the leg and she was being whipped with a cat of nine tails. It was Admiral Cheng, a man I had come to hate.

He cackled and said “You’ll never save her”, then he picked her up gently, almost as if she was a sleeping child he was going to lay her down in her bed. Then in one mighty swing, he tossed her overboard.

Without thinking, I jumped into the icy water to save my beloved Mei. As I plunged into the waves of terror a huge force of realisation washed over my body. This voice inside me was not separate from me but in fact a part me, a part I couldn’t face. It was guilt. Inside, deep down, I had hated myself all along, I had wanted to punish myself for abandoning my lonely mother. But it was too late now. I couldn’t go back.

The water pierced my skin like knives, wrapping me tighter and tighter in an unbreakable rope, each time I struggled to break free, it only squeezed me tighter. It pushed me underwater, holding me there until my fingers turned blue and I started to fade away.

I had tried to make up for my guilt by saving Mei, but now here we were, drowning.

Together.

They say the minute before you die, your life flashes before your eyes. It’s true. It wasn’t some heroic journey I had dreamed of but the one person who had made my life hopeful again: Mei.

Even in our final moments, Mei held my hand and I felt love rush up my arm, spreading from my fingertips all the way down to my toes. She smiled, and I smiled back, through tears.

She had given me everything and had given her everything.

But it wasn’t enough.

# The Ming Treasures Voyages

*Harrow International School Hong Kong, Hildebrand, Isabella – 12*

A chorus of orders and screams seeped through the roof of the cellar. Once again, I kicked and punched against the metal bars that prevented me from reaching the staircase. I was so absorbed in getting out of here, that the chaos upstairs almost ceased to exist. When I stepped back for a breath, the wood planks creaked under my weight. With an idea squeezing itself into my thoughts, I got on my knees and gripped onto a loose piece of wood, pulling. As I held my desperate grip on the plank, my favourite badge that read 'Rose Fisher, at your service.' fell onto the floor. I couldn't pick it up. Not now, at least. The plank finally separated from the concrete underneath, and I continued to rip off planks from the floor. What seemed like a bucket load of frigid salt water made its way through the open window, soaking my clothes. The ship had also been affected by the catapulting waves of ocean water and swayed to its own rhythm. I kicked the concrete, and the thought-to-be-thick layer broke. It was incredibly thin. Without a second thought, I drove my hands into the mud below me and dug. My entire consciousness was focused on digging and gradually, after a lengthy period of time, a tunnel was formed. Upstairs, a man with a deep, hoarse voice threatened to end another's life. The other, who was doubtlessly trembling, screamed, "Rose Fisher! She's downstairs, in the 18th cellar—" I hissed a curse word and lowered myself into the short tunnel that meandered underneath the bars and led to outside the cell. I heard the slamming of the door located at the top of the staircase. I was crawling through the tunnel, then punched through the thin layer of dried concrete. Crouching underneath the planks of wood, I counted to 3, and broke through the wood with as much strength as I could muster. The slow steps that were taking their time just a moment ago sped into a rushed manner.

There was a medium sized room that was used for cooking and lounging. In the situation that I was in, I had to go to the closest room which would provide me a place I couldn't be found. I bent down and scrambled to undo my mud-engulfed shoes. Slipping out of them, I was sure to be light on my toes. If any of the water emerged from my clothes while I made my way to the room, I'd give away my location. I got onto my hands and knees, desperately searching for a place to hide. I found a basket big enough to squeeze my skinny figure into. The footsteps were advancing. With a last glance at the entrance door, I popped the lid over my head. "Rose..." The man taunted. "Come out of yer' hidin' spot.... ya' already know ya' won't make a successful escape. Ere', we can make a deal. I get to kill yer' flamin' soul when ya come out of hidin', and ya get to cry fer' help when nobody wanna come down 'ere fer' ya." He cackled at his supposedly funny comment and continued to roam the room. Peeking through the cracks of the basket, I observed him as he took heavy steps on the opposite side of the room. He was checking everything; the cupboards, baskets, under the tables, and anything else that had a possibility of hiding in. I could leave while he had his back turned. I steadily lifted the lid, and put my hands flat on the ground. I let the rest of my body slither out of the basket. I got onto my feet, placed the lid back on and hurried to the door. By habit, I shut it. Realising the likelihood of the man acknowledging that I'd left the room, I sprinted for the staircase. I heard the door heave open behind me. If I looked back, it would inevitably slow me down. I didn't have time to fritter away. I focused on getting to the staircase, and the sounds of wood complaining as I took intemperate steps. When I turned a sharp left for the staircase, I caught a glimpse of the man. He didn't look harmless the slightest bit, now that I could view him clearly. His brown hair was held back with a cloth tied around his forehead, his skin pale and infested with mosquito bites.

Under the redness of the bites, his freckles formed like droplets of water. As I thought everything over, I wasn't so sure they were freckles. Tattoos, maybe? As a marking of the association that he participated as a member of? If anything, those marks on his skin weren't freckles. He had a skinny and malnourished figure, which made my chances of victory in battle with him higher. Running upstairs and hiding there would only allow him to come up and notify the rest of the intruders of my escape. I'd made my decision. I was going to knock him out cold. I didn't bother with second thoughts. There was a flower pot on the side of the staircase. I bent down and snatched the pot. It was heavy and rather hard to get a firm grip on, but I was capable. When the bony man came charging from around the corner, I threw all my muscle strength into catapulting the pot directly into his forehead. His body crumbled to the floor immediately. And with that, I dusted my hands proudly. I continued to proceed up the staircase. I tried to make space for my eye in the gap between the door and door frame. I couldn't manage space without the likely event of the door grating. I stepped back, took a heaved breath, and at a snail's pace, pushed down the handle and opened the door.

Only one tiny creak, but it wasn't easily noticeable over the loud voices of the invaders of the ship. "As a betrayer of the Detabables, you'll be thrown into the water to be feasted on by the sharks. May God have mercy on your soul." One man said, with a strong Australian accent. I assumed he was the leader of this 'Detabables' association they shared. I slid up another staircase that stood next to the door. It led to the steering wheel and the balcony that towered over other sections of the ship. The ship was passing an island that wasn't exactly too far to swim to. I could throw myself off the ship, but by the time I was leaning over the ship to check for hazardous marine animals, one of the many men had directed his eyes towards me. He screeched, "It's her!", jabbing his finger in my direction. A man with dramatic cowboy boots and platinum blonde hair raised his gun at me. With one eye shut and the other squinting, he pulled the trigger. It seemed as if a reflex had grabbed my arms and tugged me to the ground. As my ears rang from the gunshot, I began to debate whether or not I was really hit by the bullet. It was strange that pragmatic thoughts dominated my mind.

No part in my body felt piercing pain. I sat up, anticipating an oozing pool of blood. Nothing. The side of the boat had a dent, splinters circling the tiny hole. I waited for a dozen seconds, and no men had run up to check if I was dead or not. I took this as a good sign, they might have thought I was dead. This would have been pure luck if I didn't suddenly knock over a jar of pickles as I was helping myself up. I didn't notice it at first because my ears were still ringing, but the vibrations of crowded footsteps from the unstable wood planks gave me all the information I needed: turn around, avoid whatever is going to be thrown at you.

Apparently, my conscience was telling me the right thing. Dozens of men were hurling their fists in the two spots, head and my stomach. I couldn't afford multiple hits in the head, I couldn't afford losing consciousness. As much as I wanted to dodge the hit in the stomach, I couldn't avoid both places being hit. I lowered my head just in time and took the hit to my stomach. When their fists pulled back, I gripped the side of the fence. I fought the urge to fall to my knees and rest. Whilst I pulled myself over the edge, the men threw in extra punches and kicks, some even attempting to grab my ankle for the prevention of letting me fall. Some of their intentions were probably to pull me back onto the ship and beat me to death, meanwhile others maybe just accepted that I was going to be eaten by the sharks. I watched helplessly as the water progressed closer to me. I hit the water.

A refreshing wave of water swept over my legs, and I could feel sand being wiped off my calves. I sat up and observed the new environment. I was on the island that I saw from the ship. The palm trees loomed over me, giving me space to shade myself from the scorching sun. I smiled and let myself fall back into the sand.



# The Night of the Crimson Fleet

*Harrow International School Hong Kong, Jamison, Philippa – 12*

The calm sea lapped gently at the rocks, the waves dribbling over the smooth, golden sand; it was days like this that she wished would never end. The soft murmur of the breeze, the rustling of the trees, the sky, threaded with clouds, all so serene. The setting sun was a ruby in the sky, slowly descending before plunging the world into darkness. Far away, she heard a voice call her name.

"Suriyani, dinner is ready!"

She sank her hands deeper into the sand. It came again. Grudgingly, she stood up and started to walk. Before going far, Suriyani took one last longing look at the bay. She breathed a heavy sigh and turned around, in the corner of her eye, she saw something on the horizon. She stared at it, trying to figure out what it was, and kept watching until it dawned on her. A ship!

She ran until her throat burned, past towns and farms to a small house on the outskirts of town.

Exasperated, she burst through the door of her home. "They're coming!" She yelled into the living-room. Her mother looked at her in disbelief. "Sit down and eat dinner right now! I've been waiting for ages."

"B-But the ship! They're coming and we-" Suriyani stuttered.

Her mother pointed to the empty chair next to her, and Suriyani had no choice but to sit down.

They sat at the worn down, wooden table in silence. The family was very poor, and to say their house was shabby would be an understatement, it was dilapidated! Despite its state, it was the only place that they could call home. In the corner of the room, slouched in a battered armchair with ripped fabric, was an old woman, Aunt Abaasa. She was broken, ruined after the death of her brother, a soldier who died fighting invaders. Although most family members managed to keep going after the tragedy, Aunt Abaasa never recovered. She always seemed distant.

"So, you were talking about something before dinner. What were you going to say?" Asked Suriyani's mother.

"There was a ship, a big one!" Suriyani told her worriedly, and so Suriyani and her mother agreed to go investigate and find what was going on. The mother prayed that they weren't hostile, she couldn't bear to lose another person to pirates. Just as she was about to leave, she slid a dagger out of the drawer.

It was late evening, and chilly. A strong gust of wind swayed Suriyani's shiny black hair, as her dark skin shone in the moonlight. She was the spitting image of her mother, from her wavy black hair to her big, brown eyes. They walked through the placid village, down the silent roads, to the beach. The hushed atmosphere was almost eerie. And then they saw it. The boat was coming into view. It floated gracefully through the water, pulled by its blood-red sails. Suddenly, it stopped. Confused, they both squinted to see what was happening. After a while, a small lifeboat was rowed to shore by two men. Waves crashed against the rocks by the harbour, carelessly flinging water as they went. The sea spat at the small lifeboat, slowly drenching both the boat and the people inside. They rocked in the boat for what seemed like half an hour, making little progress for much of it. Eventually, after a lot of hard rowing, they made it to shore.

Slowly, they floated towards the beach in their small boat, and they climbed out onto the sand. One of the men was short and plump. His face was as pale and round as the moon, and he had a limp moustache. The second of the men was the opposite. He was tall and muscular, with a chiselled face, and his skin had a warm, golden-brown tan. They had only just stood up on the beach when they were stopped by Suriyani's mother, pointing her dagger right at them. She glared at them. "What are you doing here? " She hissed. The two men stumbled backwards, into the freezing midnight water. "Bring everyone in the village down here, immediately!" Shouted Suriyani's mother at her daughter. Suriyani immediately started down the path to the village, she didn't want to argue with her mother now, not when she was like this.

Suriyani's mother clutched the dagger she had brought tighter in her hand, these men were pirates, she was sure of it, and they weren't here for a good reason. "What is your business here, bringing a huge ship like that here? " She re-asked them angrily. "We-we came from China to share our valuable items. " The first pirate stuttered.

"Pah!" The mother spat. "That's the worst story I've ever heard! You pirates are unwelcome here!"

She looked behind her.

It was a sight, seeing a stampede of people, squashing themselves onto that thin path. To say that it was hectic was an understatement. Everyone hurtled towards the beach, desperate to see what was going on; each person stopped in their tracks once they saw the two men. They weren't from Malacca, that was for sure. A crowd formed around the pirates. "They come from China! To take our land and our valuables!" Suriyani's mother yelled into the crowd but quieted when she saw him, the mighty village chief, standing before them. Everyone dropped to their knees. "Let them speak. " He croaked, as he gestured to the pirates. They stood up straighter. "I am Bo-Cheng, from China, and we are offering you valuable goods of ours, not stealing. " Spoke the first pirate. The pirate talked about how they were here to help, and that all they wanted was permission to dock their boat here. Everyone looked at the chief to answer. Surely he wouldn't let these pirates with a terrible excuse bring their boat here.

"Yes, you may dock your boat here." He answered. Suddenly a huge uproar came from the crowd. Though they tried to change his mind, no one could oppose his word. The pirates would arrive tomorrow.

It was late night once everyone was walking back, while they did, many of the villagers were plotting against the pirates. They didn't want those thieves on their land. "We have to do something!" A village boy called Haissam told a group of people who were also upset about the chief's poor decision. "We'll fight them!" he commanded. Everyone shouted in agreement. "Build an army!" He cheered. Everyone shouted again. They agreed to meet at midnight to discuss the situation, at Haissam's house.

Suriyani arrived home quickly, and she went to her room and waited for her mother. It had been a few hours of pretending to be asleep when Suriyani leapt off the lumpy, hard mattress and creaked down the stairs. She approached the dusty, wooden door, thinking no-one had seen her. Little did she know, her mother had seen the whole thing.

She journeyed down the little path in the dead of night. Haissam's house wasn't far, and she arrived quickly. The group talked for a few hours but came to an agreement that they would fight while they weren't expecting them: right then.

The sound of clanking metal was deafening. Knives pulled out of their sheaths, bows and arrows, anything that would inflict damage. There was an air of excitement, of confidence— they were ready.

Back at Suriyani's house, her mother was contemplating what to do. She couldn't let her daughter die fighting, but she was sure that there was no way to convince her not to go. Her mother sighed, she knew what she had to do.

It was hectic on the ship, orders being screamed, opposing ones being shouted from somewhere else. They were going to dock at Malacca, give away the treasure, and then leave; or so they thought. As they came closer to the beach, they saw a strange sight. A few hundred people lined up on the beach, glaring menacingly at their boat. They wielded knives, bows and arrows and even large sticks. "Bo-Cheng what are you doing staring off into the distance? Get on the task, you imbecile!" Yelled commander Fei-Hong, the captain of this ship, as fiercely as a lion. "Commander, the islanders seem to be rebelling; there they are on the beach!" The commander went red. Suddenly, she started yelling out commands. "Ready the cannons! Send out the army! We must fight them now!" She yelled, panicked. Hundreds of men hurried onto boats, rowing out towards the beach, while others manned the canons.

As they stood on the beach, they saw them coming. Suriyani clutched her stick tighter, she was ready for whatever they had.

She saw it, a black ball in the sky, a cannonball. Frozen in fear, she heard her mother's muffled voice in the distance. Her mother held a dagger, ready to fight the invaders alongside her. The cannonball shot through the sky, but she couldn't move. Her eyes widened, for the very last time. The light left her eyes.

# Mey's Ming Treasure Voyage Adventure

*Harrow International School Hong Kong, Li, Jaimee – 11*

The storm breezed through the coal-black sky, screaming like a banshee and breaking the silence of the frozen night, tossing waves with casual ease, crashing dangerously through the weather-beaten rocks with its jagged teeth baring at them, threatening to add the ship to a pile of many shipwrecked skeletons... Only the lone commander stood at the wheel, proud, still and unblinking, taunting the waves to shatter him. The wind and sea teared at his face, plastering jet-black hair to a forehead of pale skin whilst lightning cast an eerie glow to the night sky. It ran like an enchanted thread through an isolated forest, illuminating his face in flashes of blinding white and yellow. He surveyed his surroundings with narrowed eyes – his crewmen were desperately fighting to save themselves from this vicious monster... The sea and sky seemed like a jagged line wailing with malicious cackles, pouncing perilously close to the wooden ship and throwing it like a toy. There was no chance of survival...

“Click” Mey heard the metallic, empty sound of the TV in her room click shut and echo through the isolated house. Her head was tilted slightly downwards and she gazed through her locks of ebony, black-as-night hair. The toffee coloured wooden floor was smarming with woodlice and she felt disappointed and furious. She had been forced to watch a series of documentaries her mother had excitedly told her to see. She still remembered her mother’s joyous voice singing as she left the minute bungalow for the grand university she taught at. “Come on, Mey! The Ming Treasure Voyages is a wonderful way to get immersed into Chinese Culture!” Mey sighed. She had watched part of the documentary then turned the TV off as soon as she saw the haughty figure of Zheng He.

“If only there was a bit of adventure in my life like Zheng He and his crew. If only...”

Suddenly, she heard a small whirring noise reminiscent of a piece of clockwork tick-tocking from behind the TV. Mey, leaned forwards slightly from her position on the floor, with her shoulders wrenched forwards and eyebrows furrowed. Slowly and quietly, she rose, careful and treading on each floorboard as if it was hot lava. Across the room, the TV seemed stationary and incapable of making the strange, mysterious sound it had made just a moment ago. Mey moved stealthily across the room and crouched in front of the TV. Again, the whirring noise fell upon the silence and abruptly, the room started slowly revolving.

Mey’s eyes started to rove around the room. She felt like she was imagining things. The whole room started twirling faster and faster, like a rollercoaster ride that never ended... Mey felt herself being pulled towards the TV as the room started to turn into a blur of colours. Her brain reacted first, trying to pull her away from the strange TV. However, her hand felt differently. Mey felt herself compelled to reply to the beckoning that urged her to just touch the TV. She didn’t try to resist the temptation. Mey reached out and with a “ping” she was soon whirling into the TV like being sucked into a cyclone. Mey felt herself scream, loud and piercing but hopeless. She knew no one would come for her... It was too late.

A soft, floating feeling as carefree and wonderful as if in a dream overcame her... She realized she was floating. All around her, there were colours, so magnificent she wanted to stay in the tunnel forever just to admire all the shades ranging from a fiery, blazing red to the gentlest of blues that reminded her of the ocean. She could almost hear the gentlelapping sounds of waves on the seashore.

In an instant, the ground shook from beneath her. A blinding white light filled the portal and Mey closed her eyes and shielded her face with her hands like armour, preparing for certain death... However, she was aggressively wrenched from the portal by a pair of hands. The hands looked coarse and rough, as if they had been through years of sailing.

It transpired that they belonged to a sailor with dark stubble, coarse hair and a tremendous pot-belly. Although his black eyes had kindness in them, he said respectfully to a man on the deck of the ship “I found a stowaway hiding behind this barrel, Captain... What do we do with her?” Mey couldn’t see who the man was as he was shrouded in the shadows, with only a silhouette to be seen. The Captain said one word “走. Go” It was apparent that, this man, whoever he was, had power. Immense power... Mey turned around and gaped at the large vessel. All around her, lay mahogany masts strewn along the floor carelessly, wooden planks wrenched from the floor as if on purpose-like the remnants of a storm... Mey realized that it was the remnants of a storm. The floorboards were wet and covered in foliage. It was like a carcass of greenery.

Around her, she saw that they were moored in a sandy beach, with a clear blue sky, sand as white as snow and a sea that was crystal clear and azure. Underneath, you could see vibrantly coloured fish, chasing one another playfully turning into colourful blurs of red, white and a number of other wonderful colours. Mey studied this with wonder. Although it was so discarded and broken, the ship had a aura of glory and power, intimidating Mey. The Captain slowly turned from his position opposite her.

Instantly, she saw that he was a man she recognised. Zheng He. Mey felt as if she had been hit with sledgehammer. This was really him. He had handsome features, striking and piercing. Zheng He had high cheekbones, pale skin, black hair— he looked every inch the commander of vessels of ships. Mey gasped. Zheng He said quietly “ What are you doing on my ship ?” Mey couldn’t answer. She gulped and felt as if she forgot how to speak. Instead of scolding her, Zheng he said one word, “ Come”.

He led her through a maze of corridors and stopped finally at a simple wooden door. Zheng He uncovered a small, golden key and put it in a lock on the door. The door opened with a small “click” and the treasure trove was revealed.

Inside, Mey saw treasure out of her wildest dreams. There were rubies as red as blood, sapphires the colour of the clearest sky, pearls as round and bright as the moon on a dark night... This was clearly a treasure trove! There were coins piled up to the ceiling, grasping the roof with pure gold hands, commandeering the whole room. All Mey could see was jewels, jewels and more jewels. The room seemed to stretch for miles around, looking like a desert with golden coins instead of sand. Interrupting her thoughts, Zheng He announced “ Impressive, isn’t it ? We give that for free to everyone in everywhere we pass...” Mey couldn’t believe her eyes ! Just then, a sailor ran up to Zheng He urgently and whispered in rapid chinese. Zheng He then said abruptly “Chen Zuyi the pirate has arrived. You must leave...” Mey thought “Did he know about her time travelling ? ” Mey couldn’t be sure. A horn blared through and upstairs, Mey heard chanting : “ Chen Zuyi has arrived!”

Mey was led quickly out of the corridors and up onto the deck. Already were there dead sailors and crewmen, gushing blood out like a fountain, swords lying scattered. Mey was shoved violently from behind and fell onto the wooden floor screaming... There was a flash of brilliant white, the same she had seen in the portal. Mey felt herself fading away from the fighting scene... All of a sudden, Zheng He pushed something into her pocket. It was bulging and large.

In a flash, Mey appeared back at home. She opened the package and saw that Zheng He gave her a bag of gold coins. Mey’s mother darted in and cried “Mey ? Where were you ? I have been looking everywhere!” Instead of answering, Mey just smiled covertly to herself...

# Drifted

*Harrow International School Hong Kong, Lin, Jenny – 12*

As my eyelids lifted open, darkness crept up to me. I felt as if Death had finally invited me to his burrow. Without noticing, I felt my eyelids gradually fall once again, as a million thoughts rushed through my mind in an instant. Is this the end? I would ask myself every now and then. Just as my body fell into the abyss, a storming sound could be heard.

My eyes flashed open, meeting the azure sky that greeted me. From a distance, sounds of rustling and panting could be heard. Where was I? Who was I? What was this? Questions exploded from my head. Slowly, I lifted the weight of my body upward, away from the ‘abyss’ that I still couldn’t make out.

Calls were heard from a distance, and I finally could put the puzzle pieces together and figure out my strange surroundings.

I was on an island, but one that wasn’t like any other. The sand was brown and black, with little specks of yellowish-white as well. I turned my head to see an aquatic wash of blue to my right, with no boats or any other kind of land in sight. A cold shiver ran down my spine, but I didn’t know why. This island seemed quite peculiar, but I didn’t know why it was giving me a dreadful feeling. To my left I saw an assemblage of trees, mostly palms. However, the exit of the jungle couldn’t be seen at all, a few metres in and complete darkness was all the rest that could be identified.

A flash of memories rushed back from my mind all of a sudden, and I finally remembered how I got here. Milliseconds of images, visions of words said. What this was. Who I was. But one thing that couldn’t be explained or remembered at all, is how I got here.

Voyaging through the South China Sea, my crew and I sailed through the magnificent waves, towards Africa, our next destination. The day had a cool and breezy atmosphere, and it was the 53rd day on board.

The noon waves started to reach us, and the sky got grayer by the second. At first, there were just a few gray clouds. There wasn’t particularly anything that caught our eye, so we continued voyaging into the sea. It wasn’t until a panicked shout was heard across the ship. Everyone’s attention was then at the source, and as if in only an instant storm clouds were right above our heads.

My heart sank, and I speedily ordered the rest of my crew to turn the sails and head the other way. But our actions were too late. A rumbling sound could be heard, and bolts of lightning appeared right before our eyes. A sense of panic ran down my spine, and all we could hope for right then was for the storm to clear up.

The waves were getting stronger and more rapid, which made it difficult to escape the storm. My eyes widened as masses of water rushed up the ship. Some of us rushed to the ship’s shelter, while murky liquid continued to splash up, into the ship.

Just when I was going to head towards the ship’s shelter with the rest of the crew, a dash of light struck the ship and after, there was complete darkness.

...

That’s when I found myself here. More and more questions started to fill my head. Where did the ship go? Where was my crew? I couldn’t possibly be the only one on the island, right? The sense of panic was back. I didn’t know what to do. Is everything over for me? I still kept asking that question over and over again in my head.

I shook my head. I slapped my cheeks. Was this only a small nightmare? Did I fall asleep on board again? But that was only what I hoped. I slowly stood up on my feet, and noticed there were several scratches. I then felt an aching pain somewhere on my leg. What had happened? I was still unsure. I was dizzy, and my vision was blurry. I had lots of trouble walking, and once in a while I would trip.

While trying to find my way around the island, something caught the corner of my eye. Turning around, my eyes once again widened, but this time of more terror than before.

# The Betrayal

*Harrow International School Hong Kong, Rao, Dimitri – 13*

The glorious Golden Crane was just about to set sail for Jeddah. The storage compartment was filled to the brim with gleaming treasures and exotic riches. The Emperor of China had commanded that the greatest ship they possessed must be given as a gift to the Ruler of Jeddah. The gifts were luxurious silks and jewels so bright that they reflected the heavens. Each priceless object was handled with extreme care. They were finally ready.

“Will you come back?” asked a small girl with tears running down her cheeks. “I promise I will come back”. Captain Chu Zhong wiped his daughter’s tears away and said his goodbyes. Then he hugged his dear wife and walked up the gangplank. “We are ready sir”, said the Quartermaster. “Lower the sails”, bellowed the captain before following Zhang Lin to the quarterdeck. The loyal crew responded immediately— the sails were lowered and the merchant flag was raised.

The Golden Crane was the fastest and the most protected ship at the time. No daring pirate would intervene in its course. None but one. It was the pirate lord of the east, the Captain of The Damned Cutlass, Li Wen. He had robbed every palace, looted every village and sunk every ship. All but The Crane. This was no ordinary pirate. This man was a fearsome seadog. He had memorized every part of every map and had his plan of attack ready.

It was halfway through the voyage and most of the crew was dreaming about their families back home. The Quartermaster was peering through the thick fog. Suddenly, there was a thundering crack and the ship shook like an earthquake. They had hit a rock. Zhang Lin rushed over to assess the damage. The Golden Crane had gone off course and had come to shipwreck alley. This part of the South China Sea was a devastating ship graveyard. It was filled with colossal rocks that would destroy any ship’s hull.

The whole crew was woken up by the ringing beat of a gong. They all scrambled onto the main deck and attempted to gain control of the sails. Seeing that this was one of the largest ships in the world, the challenge was ten times harder than on a regular ship. There was another deafening crack. They had another hole in the hull. The crew rushed to the bottom of the hull where the water was pouring in. It was all going to plan.

The Golden Crane limped slowly, like a wounded animal, towards to the coastline of Malaysia. It was almost impossible to navigate with the blanket of fog surrounding them. All of a sudden, a large rock broke through the white and charged towards the ship. Captain Chu Zhong turned the wheel as hard as he could, causing the gigantic ship to tilt over. The crew took it upon themselves and raised the sails but unfortunately, the momentum was still forcing the ship into the rock. Captain Chu Zhong roared a command to lower the anchor.

There was a massive tug and the ship stopped almost instantly. The force was so great that all of the crew lost their balance. There was a loud scraping sound. There were a few holes; they were lucky to be floating still. While some of the men sprinted down, some went down to clear up the water, and others lowered the sails.

On they went, plowing through the menacing sea. The Captain allowed the Quartermaster to have some rest. When he went down, he shouted at the top of his voice “CAPTAIN!”. Chu Zhong rushed down as fast as he could. The quartermaster had his eyes staring at the immense hole the first rock made. Something was unusual about the hole. No rock could have made it that big. “We must not tell the crew,” ordered Chu Zhong “they will not sail properly if they worry”.

Time passed quickly for the captain. He was determined to arrive at their destination on time. He had decided to ignore the hole and focus on keeping the crew motivated. This would be very hard; they had no time to stop for food because most of it was ruined in Shipwreck Alley. Everyone was very tired and hungry. Zhang Lin and the First Mate had begged Chu Zhong to stop but he refused each time. His reason was everybody would shame him for failing to complete an extremely important task. He couldn’t risk that. Not with his current situation at home—he already had to battle his family’s tainted reputation.

Many weeks later, they could finally see Arabia. Their plan was to cross into the Red Sea and return home to glory. Every man on that boundless ship had no idea that someone was waiting for him. They went through the gap between the two countries and that is when they were hit. Not by another rock, but a cannonball. The Pirate Lord had made his strike. The Golden Crane immediately returned fire. The sounds of the cannons were ear piercing. The men were drenched with sweat and seawater. Then Li Wen sent sloops sailing swiftly towards The Golden Crane. Little did they know, that the sloops did not have any crew aboard and were packed full with gunpowder. The sloops were small ships and were very nimble, so they got in close proximity to the Crane in no time. "Shoot the small ships", yelled the First Mate. A rifleman took the shot. Almost immediately, there was an enormous explosion. It had come from the sloops and set the side of the deck on fire.

"Abandon ship!" shrieked the captain. Everyone swam to shore but the crew of The Damned Cutlass advanced. Most of the pirates got into the rowboats while some stayed and manned the cannons. Gunshots filled the air, the beach turned into a bloody battleground.

Amid the chaos, Chu Zhong turned around and confronted Li Wen. "Hello brother," said Li Wen. "I'm no brother of yours" he coldly retorted. How could he have not seen this coming? His brother has always been a foil in all his plans. "Did your crew have fun in Shipwreck Alley?" asked Li Wen with a sinister grin.

Zhong lunged and Wen instantly defended himself against the blow of his sword. Their swords clashed multiple times until Li Wen managed to cut Zhong's leg. Blood was spilling. Before Li Wen could finish his brother's life, the chanting and marching of the Arabians echoed over the hills. The pirates knew they were outnumbered. So while The Damned Cutlass continued firing on the two armies, the pirates took the gold and jewels that they could and returned to the ship. Their ship was faster than the Arabian ships so they were out into the vast ocean in no time. The Arabs went into pursuit but they were cut off by a colossal storm. Li Wen was amazed at disappearing. The Arabian crew quickly went back to the beach.

The Arabs took the remaining gold but gave some to back Chu Zhong out of pity. They also provided them with a ship and demanded that they return to China immediately. In the captain's cabin, Chu Zhong had tears running down his blistered cheeks. He would be shamed back in China. The emperor said he couldn't fail another task. The whole country would despise him, even more than they did already as a result of his family ties to the Pirate Lord. He would be forced to leave town. This was his one chance at redemption, but he failed. He picked up his pistol from his desk and aimed it at his temple. Sweat was dripping down his forehead. But, something stopped him. He remembered his daughter before he left; Chu Zhong could not break a promise, especially to his own daughter. He had to go back.

There was a deafening gunshot. His ears started ringing, he felt a sudden jolt and blood was oozing out of a hole in his chest. Chu Zhong then saw a large man standing over him. "I will not sail under your command. You are a disgrace to China." Then nothing.



# The Diary of Ah Hai

*Harrow International School Hong Kong, Suen, Gwyneth – 11*

2nd November, 1407

I gazed listlessly at the sea. It was vast and endless. I have never understood the depth of this expanse of briny blue. It has so many secrets. So many stories yet to tell. As I leaned my weighty head against the spar, I closed my eyes and dozed off to the rhythmic swishes of the wind. Slish-slosh-slish-slosh, I felt myself rising up and down with the throbbing waves.

I am Chinese, but I was sent to live with my uncle in England after I was born. My mother died whilst giving birth to me, and my father did not want to see me again. He killed himself a year later.

Time has not stood still. I will be turning 15 next month. I was sent to Grandpa on the boat, YONGLE 333, about two weeks ago, after my uncle's sudden death in London.

Grandpa has been working on YONGLE 333 for years – one of the enormous treasure vessels set to sail under the command of Admiral Zheng. Grandpa has a pair of piercing black eyes as deep and untold as space, ready to take in every detail, every move. The wrinkles on his face are cruel slashes, burnt by the sun and wind, from the countless days he spent on board.

“What’re you doing here? Stop idling. Get on with work!” Captain Wang stormed into the kitchen as he screamed at me in radiant malice, amidst the clanking of dishes in the chaotic dance of dinner rush. His eyes narrowed to slits, as his smelly breath of rotten eggs worked its way up into my nose. He was in charge of the crew.

“Something on your mind, dear?” asked Grandpa, his eyebrows furrowing with concern. I shook my head without looking at him. I was lying.

It’s not that I hate the sea. The sea is serene. Perpetual. Straight-forward. Unlike my life. I can understand Chinese. In fact, I would love to learn more about Chinese culture! However, I spent my childhood in England, and so I barely speak the language. I have always been a subject of ridicule here on the ship. People call me “Guai” 鬼, which means ghost in Chinese, a metaphor for “outsider”.

I’m a sparrow beating about in the savage wires of its cage.

“Dinner time!” I heard Captain Wang shouting to everyone in his thunderous and disdainful voice.

I went to the dining room. The air was thick with an uncomfortable aroma of barbecued food, roast vegetables and the salty stink of sweat. Everyone in the crew was Chinese. Me too, of course. But everyone spoke Chinese. Except me. A feeling of loneliness entered my stomach, like a black creature piercing a hole in my heart, a darkness that has no borders, a wound to stay. I have Grandpa. But I’ve never had any friends here. Why am I so different? Why did I have to be raised up in a different language? Would there ever be a place where people will talk to me, understand me, and...love me? I wanted to yell but my voice was lost in the raucous laughter of the crowd.

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21st February, 1408

Grandpa left me.  
He's gone.

I was preparing dinner when I heard Captain Wang exclaim, "Ah Hai, your Grandpa... he's dying! Stroke!" I ran towards Grandpa's cabin. There he was, lying on the bed— his face white as ghost, his eyes rolled in their sockets — writhing in agony.

"Grandpa," I whispered, my voice fading. *Please god, save Grandpa. He's all I have left. Please!* "Doctor, do something! Save him!" I heard myself pleading, almost screaming, in the torrents of fear, rage and grief. The doctor had a blank look on his face. "I'm afraid your Grandpa doesn't have long."

"Ah Hai," Grandpa rasped, his voice barely more than a whisper— hard, pained, and fragile all at once. "Listen. We both know that you are different, but that doesn't make you any less. Acknowledge who you are. Embrace your differences. Treasure your Chineseness. I am proud of you..."

I saw Grandpa take his last breath of life, as I felt mine dis sever from my heart and soul.

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22nd February, 1408

The fog was a ghost. Grandpa's ghost. I held Grandpa's urn of ashes. The breeze sighed. I took a deep breath, and slowly tipped Grandpa's ashes into the deep bottomless sea. Grandpa would have wanted to be part of the sea. Rivers of tears rolled down my face as the last of his ashes vanished into the majestic waves. My heart has surrendered into darkness.

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There was an air of determined conspiracy in the common room. I heard a gradual crescendo of excitement and scornful laugh, as I dragged my lifeless body back to the cabin. The word "Guai" 鬼 was written on my door. One big red character. It filled me with shame, pulling my head down like a heavy weight. I tore the paper into a million tiny pieces, not unlike my heart. Fate was unfeeling.

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2nd January, 1409

The day had come.

We were anchoring to the shore of Malabar Coast.

Admiral Zheng announced to everyone that whoever can speak foreign languages would assist to do the offerings at the investiture of the new King of Calicut. With reluctance, Captain Wang passed me a gold-plated box, filled with gold brocades, jade bangles, and many wondrous others.

I was led to the Royal Palace. "Welcome to India." The Indian generals smiled at me, eyes wide open, astounded by the extravagance of our offerings.

There I met General Rawat — with whom I was asked to take on a tour to Yongle 333. General Rawat is in his fifties. He has hair grey with age, and a stern but not unkindly look, with all the strength and stamina evident from the lines on his forehead. I showed him our ship— the anchors, the kitchen, and even my favourite hideouts from Captain Wang!

General Rawat likes me, I can tell.

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9th January, 1409

Last week in Calicut was a bliss. There was an immediate bond of trust and affection between General Rawat and me. He invited me to dinner at his royal residence and bought me a silk dress embroidered with red flowers. I shared with him my past; my curiosity about Chinese culture; as well as my ambiguity as a Chinese, which brought back a pang of pain. He was the first person I've ever confided in after Grandpa. His kindness and reassurances cooled my panic and soothed my spirit.

YONGLE 333 will start sailing back to Nanjing in 10 days.

I do not want to leave.

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20th January, 1409

I woke up to the first searing rays of sunlight. An imperial order came from Emperor Yongle: a few Chinese scholars and officials have to stay in Calicut. I was asked to stay to assist.

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18th April, 1409

The morning light stroke the hedges and glittered on the dew-soaked leaves as we started our class on languages.

“Ninhao, jiangjun!” I saluted.

“Good morning, Ah Hai! What shall we start on today?” General Li greeted me in a pleasant and lilting accent that inspired trust.

I have started teaching English to the Chinese generals. Often times, they reciprocated me with tips on how to speak Chinese language, and stories about Chinese culture and history. General Rawat encouraged me to set up classes to teach the Indian generals more about China. It suddenly dawns on me that perhaps one day, I can bring all I've learnt to people around the world?

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5th August, 1412

I have never forgotten Grandpa. He's always in my dreams. And the sea is always in mind. The abysmal sea that holds hundreds of years of stories. The unwavering sea that is intent on keeping me in its embrace.

I have to build a boat. I have to go back to where Grandpa has always belonged. I need General Rawat's help.

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21st January, 1413

I stood on the deck of the boat that General Rawat and I have built together. It's taken us months. But now it's ready to sail.

HAIBO is its name.

HAIBO is loaded with treasures. Not usual treasures like silk, or gold, but my *Chinese* treasures: chess, calligraphy, and scroll paintings. I have decided to go on my voyages around the world: travelling from port to port, bringing along my Chinese treasures to trade with foreigners. I have decided to write my own journal, in English, based on all I know about China, the missionary voyages, and of course Grandpa, and myself.

I bid farewell to General Rawat, and stepped onto HAIBO. I gazed listlessly at the sea. I returned to where I was five years ago, but this time, a hard ball of determination tightened in my stomach. I had found my home. I lifted my head up high. There is a whole new world out there, waiting for me to explore.

# History Class...

*Harrow International School Hong Kong, Tai, Andrew – 14*

The feeble worn out curtains could not block out the scorching heat radiating from the sun. It felt like a heater was inches away from my face, which was a refreshing contrast to the AC gently breezing into the room.

“...and that was how the first emperor of the Ming dynasty died after ruling for a measly 30 years.”

*How much longer do I have to bear this? Wait, how many times have I been in this situation today?* I wondered to myself, slouched over my desk. As my history teacher continued rambling on about ancient Chinese history, my eyes slowly drooped and the desk never looked so alluring...

“Since we are done with this topic, we can start discussing our next topic, which is the MING TREASURE VOYAGES.” I immediately shot upwards, full of enthusiasm which I previously lacked. In the process, my friend snoring next to me almost toppled over in shock. I could sense the eyes of everyone in the class upon me, scrutinizing my actions. The teacher slowly tilted his head towards me, as if in slow motion, before hesitantly continuing, “Um, would you like to start this conversation, Ms Smith?”

“Actually, I don’t think there is any reason as to why we would need to learn such an unnecessary topic...” A voice muttered out from the back of the room. I swivel around to find myself glaring at the source of the voice. It was Will, the one person in the class that no one ever noticed since he always had that nose of his in a book. I had never even seen him open his mouth, much less talk. Who does he think he is anyway, trying to spoil MY moment of recognition?

“Oh really? Why don’t you tell us why you think this way, WILL.” I uttered aloud, straining my voice to keep myself from literally exploding into an angry rampage. When I finally cooled down and retreated to my seat, Will began talking.

“You see, the Ming Emperor was trying to befriend China’s neighbouring countries, and I get that. What wasn’t necessary was giving extravagant gifts to these countries in exchange for just about nothing. It was a huge waste of not just precious resources and materials, but also time, as the Chinese could have used this time to continue inventing and advancing technology in order to get an even bigger edge over their enemies.”

I was stunned. In fact, the entire room was completely silent.

“D—did you consider the benefits of these voyages though?” I stuttered, trying not to seem too intimidated, and failing miserably. After another prolonged period of silence, in which I perceived as a no, I attempted to make this debate less one-sided.

“Zheng He, the leader who commanded those ships, mapped out a huge portion of the coastline of Southeast Asia and paved the way for many new trade routes throughout Asia. Without these very voyages, China would not be nearly as successful in the trade industry as they are now.”

Will immediately shot back at me, “Did you actually look into the Ming Voyages or did you make that up? Zheng He did not do any good for the country. He backstabbed those diplomats that supported and funded him after every failed voyage.”

At this point, Will was so red in the face that a blushing tomato wouldn’t be a good enough comparison.

“Your complete lack of knowledge about the Ming voyages is a disgrace to the Chinese and their culture, so can you please stop making a fool of yourself and just—” Will seemed to realise at that instant that he went completely overboard.

Nothing in the classroom moved as much as an inch. It was so quiet you could hear a feather settle onto the ground. The ringing of the school bell broke the seemingly impenetrable air of silence that had formed. Then slowly, one by one, the others slowly started packing their bags. There was no noise other than the shuffling of chairs and the packing of bags. Soon, I, Will and the teacher were the only people left. Filled to the brim with embarrassment and guilt, I sluggishly turn around to face Will, about to apologise for my outrageous behaviour.

“I—I’m terribly sorry!” Will feebly squeaked out, startling me. “Had I kept my loose-lipped mouth shut none of this would have ever happened!”

“Oh... It’s fine, really. I shouldn’t have reacted as I did at some silly debate. I guess we were just too caught up in applying knowledge with compassion.” I smiled lazily.

The teacher glanced at both of us, realised that the conflict between us had already been solved, and subsequently let us leave the classroom without so much as a warning. Talk about being lucky. As the two of us strode out of class, anxious to get home, I look over my shoulder and I see a completely different person in Will’s place. He seemed more mature and relaxed, and he seemed like a genuinely interesting person with an intriguing demeanour, something I never really noticed before.

As we went our separate ways down the hall, I surprise myself and turn back, shouting down the hall towards him.

“ Do you want to hang out sometime?”

# Doe Eyes

*Harrow International School Hong Kong, Voelkner, Jaidan – 14*

Chaos, it's utter chaos. It always is this time of day. The sun is sitting at his peak, glaring down at us; his searing breath sighing down our necks, slinking down our spine. Every once in a while, a rare, moist breeze blows in from the river, the shrivelled shrubs flapping pitifully in its course. In reality, the wind is minuscule. Weak. Lasting for around three seconds, if we're lucky. However, to a clump of agitated, sticky, hungry men, who just want it to be lunch break already, it's a sweet release from this stifling heat, a false sense of comfort teasing at our bones before dissipating back into the harsh scrutiny of this merciless summer. A shudder resonates within my body, a heavy drop of sweat rolling down my neck, formed by the thick sheen layering my limbs. The latest shipment of wood from the upper reaches of the Yangtze arrived about an hour ago. It's all a blur, a flurry of movement; scurrying bodies, colliding into each other, rushing to their stations, heaving wood over to others, hoisting it into position. It's an agonizing loop, an endless drill of work. A gruelling routine? Without a doubt. But it's all worth it for us, for me.

Another bead of sweat forms, rolling from my scalp down to the top of my eyebrow, threatening to drop. I lift my arm and wipe off the droplets using my sleeve. Curling over, hands on my knees, sharp breaths pulling out of my chapped lips, I gaze over. The tension retreats my body, muscles releasing, a sense of serenity comforting my soul. Another chill passes through my body, but this time it's one I would welcome with open arms. It's like a chain reaction, the warm waves swooping upward, tickling my toes, sweeping around my abdomen, pumping my heart, sending charged volts to my brain. The persistent grunts, groans and rushed clanging were more distant now, the thoughts that make my stomach ooze fading away. I look closer. It's relatively still today, the ripples sweeping forward and delicately lapping at the bank, then gently retreating back into the masses.

It's like I'm already there. I can feel the salty wind hitting my face, combing through my hair. Planted on the deck, I can feel the muscles in my feet work to keep balance on the swaying surface, hear the creaks of wood. I can feel my head underwater, the chilled water blanketing around me, my long locks floating, with no restraints. It's quiet, the noise above only far gurgles. Looking up at the surface, I can see the wrinkles of sunlight languidly manoeuvring between the waves. I bob up for air, my dripping tunic sticking to my slim waist, hugging my recently broadened chest. I'm meant to be out there, out on the se—  
“Hoi! Li-Zhong! Get back to work! The more you waste time by staring at the river, the longer it will take us to actually get out there!”

The noise returned, the murmur and banging, streams of sweat rolling down my neck, the heat was back and it was suffocating.

Zhang-Fei, 17 years old, like me, but he acts like he's 5. He doesn't like me, never has. We grew up near each other, just outside Nanjing. Him and his minions always giving me a hard time. His bulky, burly body, thick shaggy hair, serpent eyes, the man practically radiates arrogance. And to think I thought I was escaping him by joining the voyages... I sigh, stalking back to my station. I look up at the structure which will soon be a 400 feet long boat with 9 masts, 12 sails, and 4 decks. A treasure ship. We are making good progress on it actually, it's coming together quicker and better than expected. My stomach bubbles with excitement every time I think about it. I'm building a Treasure Ship, I'm going to sail on a Treasure Ship!

“Li-Zhong, in your own world slacking off again?” a voice next to me tuts.

I chuckle, already knowing who belongs to the voice. I turn to face him.

“Bai, you make up every excuse under the sun to get off work, you're the biggest slacker here,” I sneer, smirking at him.

“Not true!” he squeals, face scrunching up, lips in a pout. He stomps ahead of me, grumbling about how much of a liar I am, probably. Wong Bai, 15 years old, the purest soul I’ll ever know. We met our first day in the shipyard, around a month ago. Being on the younger and unathletic sides, we tended to see each other quite a lot, so naturally, we became quite close. He’s still quite young, innocent, makes me wonder why he’s here. He’s a lanky kid with curly soft hair, his smile is blinding and he has these eyes... God, those eyes. He has these huge round doe eyes and when he smiles they curl into tiny crescent moons. We begin to load up the planks of wood into piles for the others to use to construct the boat. Zhang-Fei is working on panelling, I believe. The majority are focusing on the sternpost rudder, China’s very own invention, used for navigation. Next to me, I hear Bai giggle at something someone said. I sigh, the noise itself adding a year to my life, hauling a log of wood up and walking it over to the others.

Bai and I are walking to get dinner. It’s now been 3 months since we met, the ship edging completion. The sun rests on the horizon now, a blanket of purples, oranges, pinks fanning around it. We walk in silence, not an awkward silence, but a warm, pleasant one. The crunching of the gravel under our feet, crickets chirping, I look over at him. The tinges of pink and purple glazing his face, glimmering eyes, his lustrous hair laid on his forehead, the chiller breeze blowing it slightly, I wonder. I came here because I belong out there, on the sea. I peer down at my hands, fingertips running over the various blisters and splinters littering them. It’s not like I was leaving behind anything, I have no family to miss me and I was never great at making friends. But Bai? I return my gaze to him. I have no idea. Maybe I don’t want to know.

My cheeks hurt from smiling so hard. Pride swirls in my chest, growing by the second. The weather is tamer, the sun has shown some mercy. The wind whistles, auburn leaves gliding off the trees. Bai and I are just two in a crowd of hundreds all roaring in celebration. It’s been 4 months since I’ve arrived here. Four months of hard work and now we have a completed Treasure Ship. It’s so worth it, all the struggle, physical strain, it’s all so worth it. It was a group effort, it really was. And now all that’s left is to load it up and then we are free. We can join Zheng He and the others, I’ll be where I belong. I peer over at Bai, he’s howling, jumping up and down, one of those blinding smiles plastered on his face, he’s proud too.

The masses have scattered, all leaving to meet with family or friends before our departure next week. I see Zhang-Fei leaving the shipyard, laughing. I’m happy for him, he’s found some good friends, people who have tamed his raging soul, subdued his petulant ways. He doesn’t talk to me much these days.

“Li-Zhong let’s go celebrate with the others! We deserve it! We can finally leave!” Bai cackles, clutching onto my arm, twinkling eyes blinking up at me.  
“Let’s go.” I grin, striding forward.

The night is not silent. The sea is not still. The wind is not gentle. The Yongle Emperor is dead. The night is loud, the shrieks of dreams being burned ringing in our ears. The sea is violent, a vicious body of water we’ll never see. The wind is a brutal chill thrashing at our already raw skin. The Hongxi Emperor has ordered the ending of the Treasure Voyages meaning the destruction of the Treasure ships. I stare at the army of smoke blasting out of her, shooting towards the atmosphere. The hues of reds, oranges, yellows spreading, the deafening cracks of wood being burned. I can feel the clouds of heat radiating out of her, but I couldn’t feel any colder. I stand next to Bai. The Bai with no tears left in his body, only a throbbing throat and an empty, hollow feeling buried in his soul. The flames illuminating his face, glittering in his eyes. He looks at me. I look into a pair of unfamiliar eyes, a pair of eyes belonging to a broken soul. My breath turns ragged, my lungs collapsing on themselves. I feel a body wrapping around mine, a head pressing into my neck, slim fingers tugging at my nape. I close my eyes, releasing a shaky exhale. I don’t ask what will never be for him. Maybe I don’t want to know. There is no point to grieve for a life we will never live, a door that will never be opened, a book that will never be read. Maybe I don’t want to know what demons lie behind the doe eyes.

# Ming Treasure Voyages

*Harrow International School Hong Kong, Wei, Edward – 14*

It was a dreamy sea. The lapping waves gurgled, gushed, hummed as it forges its own sounds and kindles its own symphony. Like a steady, throbbing heartbeat. A rhythmic pulse that is unmatched by any other part of nature. The song of the sea was rarely acknowledged. After all it wasn't played very often and even so – many had to strain their ears just to get an impression of the metronomic, mesmerizing tune.

On the perch of a fishing boat, stood a withered, elderly man, leaning on the side of a crusty iron fence bordering the edge. He laminated himself in the mosaic of waning colours from the sunken, ethereal sun and tasted the saline tang of the ocean breeze. His eyes kept squared at the horizon where such rich and varied – great wings of gold and yellow and rose – boundless masses of crimson and purple and pink and scarlet above melds into the molten, shimmering, ghostly blanket of silver beneath. He muttered under his breath. Dousing himself in the palpitating pulse of the pelagic melody.

The sun sunk deeper into the place where sea and sky met and was lost from sight. Soon, it would be time for the ship to head back to harbour. The old man sighed as he inclined his head and just as he was about to turn around. He frowned. The tune seemed ... *off*. It was like a single instrument in an orchestra playing an entirely different song to the rest. Minute and virtually undetectable, but the error was undeniably there.

Suddenly, a malicious intent seeped into the sky. An intent full of bloodlust. A killing intent. The echo of a raspy, rumbling roar came upon everyone onboard the ship. The waves were sloshing, slurping and slobbering. It pummelled against the ship, slamming into it before releasing. The wave quickly retracted, only to pounce back. The cycle continued; wave after wave, tide after tide. Burgeoning in size with each cycle. It foamed and frothed; crashed and bashed; lathered and lacerated. Until finally, the sea plunged down hard and the tiny ship was ripped apart.

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The crowd was a life of its own, filled to the brim with a myriad of vibrant colours as people flowed in and out like a river; never stopping for any obstacle, only swerving around them. The harbour was built nearly entirely out of stone bricks, including the houses. Voices melded into the sky as sellers advertised their products. A small cat leapt out of sight. A few hundred years ago, this probably would've been considered beautiful, however the wind and rain have battered away, until its allure can only be admired from paintings of the past. I glanced at the sky. Under this amount of people, countless even on a photograph, its vastness gave me the motivation to push down the claustrophobia grasping at my heart and continue on.

I took a right turn into a narrow alley, untangling myself from the ball of human yarn. Taking long strides, I hastily stepped away from the crowd, only slowing down when the shouts softened to whispers. By then, I had already reached the seaside.

The coastline had no beaches. The stone slabs of the harbour directly met with water, sometimes with a small stony scree. The sea was a cerulean-blue gown, glistening like a mirror. It gleamed with a luster of colours – azure-blue, minty-green, amber, creamy-yellow... Ghostly reflections of boats and buildings waltzed in the expanse, distorted by slight oscillations created by the splash-splashing of cruising ships. Beyond the crystalline sea stood towering mountains and beyond the mountains lays the vast aurora of the first blush of dawn.

I walked along the border of the harbour. Slower this time. Admiring the eden beauty of nature around me. My eyes were set at the line of nickel-silver that was the horizon, as I witnessed the marriage between sea and sound. If words could flow, then no doubt would it be the waves – "always return", "always return", it would say. Hundreds, then thousands, then millions, followed by billions of times over. If thoughts could glow then these words will be the last light the universe witnesses until time itself becomes meaningless.

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Desolate.

It was so very desolate. No plants, no land, no buildings. A world of ice and snow. A blanched canvas. I snuggled up into my furry cloak. I was doomed. Fated to die here, my corpse soon to be encapsulated in layers of snow. The emptiness in my soul matches the spiritless sky and the featureless landscape around me.

Day and night blended together. What difference was there? It's all blank. A snowstorm whirls around me, remorselessly impaling me with shards of ice and balls of snow. My lips parched, my eyes blinded and my skin numbed. Cracks appeared beneath my feet. I am a dead man. A walking corpse. Only God can save me now. But then again, I was never one to have faith.

The only sounds to accompany me was the moaning of wind, the crunch of footstep and the wheezing of breath. The slippery snow is my enemy. Its soul as frigid as a ghoul's, darker than a demon's. It bends its full will against my survival and is winning.

I don't where I'm going. I don't know how long do I have to live. I don't know how far this icefield stretches out for. I just continue to move my lead-filled legs forward.

One step at a time.

# The Stowaway

*Harrow International School Hong Kong, Yau, Alicia – 12*

Wei leaped over a few haphazard crates that were blocking his path, accidentally overturning some nearby orange baskets, provoking a string of foul language from the shop owner that they belonged to. He vaulted over a pile of wood that builders had left there on their lunch break, and kept on running. A smell of spices wafted its way to his nose as the sun hung high in the cerulean blue sky.

Streets were filled with people going about their business in plain, moth-bitten clothes, a stark contrast to the imperial soldiers that towered above them. But why, you might ask, were they there? The Ming Treasure Voyages of course.

The Ming Treasure Voyages were to be a series of expeditions from China to foreign countries that would allow them to explore new areas, establish trade and show off the might of the Ming dynasty.

The enormous vessel that was docked at the end of the pier was Wei's destination. He had already made up his mind. Nothing awaited him in the port village where he lived, therefore, the ship would be his ticket to glory and new lands. Wei knew that the emperor wasn't likely to let a small sixteen-year-old boy like him work on the ship, so he'd have to sneak on.

Now normally, sneaking anywhere guarded by imperial soldiers would be nearly impossible for anyone, but Wei had been taught smuggling, stealing, fighting and other very useful skills by the best in the business – an almost middle-aged man named Ling. Ling had discovered him trying to steal his apples, and instead of reporting the young boy, had offered to teach him how to do it better.

Truth be told, Ling was the reason stowing away would be so easy. He had already gained employment as a deck hand, and he offered to help Wei get into the space in the crew's quarters that no-one else knew about.

Wei made his way to the barnacle covered stairs leading down into the water. He decided to simply wring his clothes out later, and jumped the rest of the way in. Swimming through to the other side of the ship was fairly simple, because the waves were quite small and the soldiers didn't bother looking down.

From there, he looked up to see Ling's face grinning toothily down at him. "Grab a hold of this, kid" he barked, tossing down a long, tattered rope. "It's good to see you too Ling!" Wei replied sarcastically, grabbing a hold of the end and hauling himself up despite his heavy, wet clothes.

Wei flopped onto a part of the deck where they couldn't be seen by others, landing on his stomach with a small grunt. Get on the ship, check. "Get down to the crew's quarters, slip past the spare barrels of gunpowder, pick the lock concealed at the bottom of the panel of wood and there should be a hidden compartment in the back." Ling also handed him some pieces of stale bread and a big flask of water that would last until they got to the first stop "Don't let anyone see you...but I trust you know already, so go". Wei muttered his thanks as he slid away.

Locating the hidden compartment as well as picking the complicated lock was a piece of cake for someone like him, however living there was not. Wei was plagued by a constant smell of seaweed and alcohol, a combination that did not bode well for him, and the space was extremely cramped but the decision to be a stowaway was his, and he would stick to it.

It didn't mean he couldn't be slightly displeased by his situation.

With no idea of how long the ship had been at sea for, the boy would pass the time by listening to the chatter of the other crew members through a crack in the wooden panel.

The crack, as it appeared, was large enough for a scruffy little rat to worm its way in.

Wei had panicked when he heard something sniffing at his arm in the dark, at night. It bit down hard enough to draw blood when he tried to shake it off without letting anyone outside hear. He cursed quietly. Wei caught the animal by its tail. "If I catch you poking around here again I *will* stab you," he whispered, reaching to the small dagger tucked in his pocket as if to prove his point. The rat wiggled free and scampered away.

Unfortunately, the rat somehow still didn't get the message after their first encounter, though the second one went slightly better.

Around a week and a half into the voyage the provisions Ling had given him had almost run out, despite the fact that Wei had been extremely careful to make it last. He was planning to head out to get some more bread from his former mentor before he was interrupted by that tell-tale sniffing that made him want to claw his eyes out in frustration. The dagger was out in an instant. But before it could kill the offending rodent, Wei noticed a sizeable chunk of bread that definitely wasn't there before. A peace offering of sorts, he guessed.

So he didn't kill the rat, it could help him. He didn't name it either because that would mean they were friends. They were not.

It was peaceful, being at sea. Wei eventually got used to the smell, as putrid as it was, and having the sea rock you to sleep was quite soothing.

Until one day that changed.

The first sign that something was wrong was when Wei woke up to the thunderous sound of a cannon blast that got him up on his feet in an instant.

All of a sudden, more deafening cannon sounds could be heard being fired into the side of the ship just as Wei managed to stumble into the commotion that was the crew's quarters. One of the cannonballs had managed to smash through the wood and water was rapidly pooling on the floor. Repairmen were trying to fix the damage the cannonball had caused, sailors were pushing past each other to get to the deck and people were reaching for their weapons. No-one noticed Wei following the sailors upstairs.

The deck was full of people defending against the pirates from the other ship that just appeared out of the fog, seemingly out of nowhere. The pirates attacking were giant, hulking battle-hardened men, cutting down anyone in their way. Their ship was a monster of a vessel, rivaling the Ming ship in sheer size. Wei knew who they were. Everyone knew who they were. The first time he had ever been on a ship, with Ling, they had to wait another week on land before setting sail because there was news that the Howling Hangman was in the area.

They were a force to be reckoned with, but the crew of the Ming dynasty treasure ships weren't anything to dismiss either. The Ming Emperor had paid informants to find the best sailors, craftsmen and scholars across China, and he paid each of them a decent amount to sway them into joining up. Needless to say, both sides were quite evenly matched in battle prowess.

The fighting was messy, and Wei was right in the middle of it. Rather than standing there like a headless chicken he opted to pull out the dagger and slash the leg of the burly pirate next to him. He decided to squash down whatever fear he once held for the Howling Hangmen to make it out alive. Blood spurted out of the wound, staining the floor, and the burly man who he injured stumbled, then fell. Other sailors immediately leaped on his body to finish him off.

Turning away, Wei ran to a part of the deck where the fighting wasn't as intense. Even if he was prepared to fight, it didn't mean he would actively seek it, that way, he had a better chance of surviving.

He removed multiple hidden daggers from his clothes to throw them into pirates. All of them found their marks. One of them being a man holding a knife to the Ming treasure ship captain's throat, luckily enough. When he ran out of daggers to throw, Wei ran over to various fallen pirates, pulling out the sharp objects lodged in their body for reusing.

The fight continued, but the tide was turning against the attacking pirates.

Several cannonballs were exchanged between the two ships, the only difference being that the Hangman's crew didn't have the people or the time to repair or block the holes torn through the exterior of the vessel. It was hungrily consumed by the ocean.

Very few of the Hangman's crew were left standing, thoroughly disheartened by both the sinking of their ship and the death of their captain. It had ended.

After cleaning up most of the corpses littered around, most of the crew were simply standing around on deck, unable to believe they had defeated one of the most fearsome pirate crews around, and on their first fight. Finally, after disappearing into his cabin for some time, the captain resurfaced.

He congratulated everyone for their victory, and made a few other announcements. Lastly, he called for the boy who had saved his life.

Wei.

To his surprise, the captain offered him a job as a cabin boy, which Wei accepted. Sitting on the crow's nest looking out to sea with rat perched on his shoulder, Wei thought happily to himself '*well, this worked itself out nicely, hasn't it?*'. And they sailed off into the sunset.

# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

*Harrow International School Shanghai, Cook, Emma – 13*

Dear diary,

Today is a very big day, because today I aboard the magnificent ship. I am scared, but extremely excited. I can't wait for the adventures ahead! However, my mother is slowly dying of a traumatic disease called malaria. I love my mother, but my duties are more important, because we need the money. I know I may sound mean, but I want my children to have the best in life, so this money should help them out. I will be gone for 2 years, however It may be extended. I know I will miss a lot, but I do have my best friend coming with me so I should not be too lonely.

I finally arrived at the port and when I first saw the boat I was amazed, I felt like royalty. The boat was so long and tall and it had a magnificent paint job on the outside (it was a big red dragon). Never had I ever seen something so grand before. That wasn't even the best of It, inside the actual boat there were pots and pots of gold. After seeing this I thought this trip was going to be a good one. That was when I began to feel a lot better and happier about leaving my family. My family understands I have to leave don't they?

Before I knew it we were of, I was ecstatic, but there was always regret in the back of my mind, however I was quickly ushered to my room and told to get into my uniform. The rooms were tiny and there were about 10 people fit into one, I felt like I had an invasion of privacy, but no one was going to listen to a 24 year old man who was there to clean the decks.

About four days had past, and I was so tired, sleeping was so hard, because you couldn't get comfy. I also had hardly anything to eat, all the food I had been given made me throw up it was absolutely repugnant. I felt like my own body was rotting inside of me and I wanted to run far and never return. Sadly, this was starting to become a nightmare and it was something I did not especially want to experience, but I had no choice.

We are about one month into our voyage and it has probably been the worst month of my life and here is why... My best friend who came with me had passed away I would tell you more, but they refused to tell me any details. I think he was malnourished, because he was so weak sometimes he told me he couldn't even get up. I can't believe how horrid some people on this boat are, it shocks me.

I just can't stop thinking about home, I miss my wife, my kids and my beloved mother. She has probably died by now, which makes me so sad, because I wasn't even there to say goodbye. What kind of son does she think I am? Please forgive me mother, I am sorry.

'The pain is unbearable' I cried out.

'its okay we will get some people to come check it out and that is a promise ' the captain muttered

I waited all night for someone to come, but they never did. The captain made a promise, but he didn't even keep it, but worse My foot was in excruciating, agonizing and torturous pain. I was starting to feel delirious. On top of that I started to feel really sea sick, I was vomiting all the time and it was gross, all I wanted was to be at home with my lovely family, but sadly that was not a reality. The past year on the boat had been horrific and this had made my life that much harder, but luckily we were ahead of schedule, so we might be home sooner then we thought.

The next day I was told I could sit out, but I would have to work the next day, which was absolutely bonkers, because my foot was infected. So I decided to ask captain about the work and if I could get checked by medics, but I instantly got turned away.

It had been about 1 week since my foot incident (on accident I stepped on to about six nail's, because the captain left them out) and it is still in so much pain, but the infection is starting to spread and I think I don't have much time left, because I am constantly fainting, vomiting, bleeding and my skin is slowly changing to black. The useless captain keeps saying I am faking, but others are telling me I will die soon and I think I believe the others.

Another day has passed and I am feeling nauseous, I think today may be the end... All I can think about is my wife and my children. They will just think that I was a monster and that I was brought from the devils them self, but I love my family. I just want them to have the best in life, but they will never know.

I woke up that night at 3:00 am and I am starting to get the feel that I will not live another day. I get up and I use all my energy I have left to write a letter to my wife, but even writing a word is hard. I barely write a sentence before I fall of my chair on to the ground, where I hear unearthly screams and people crying, however these sounds, sound very familiar and then I realise who it is, but before anything else happens I fall unconscious on the ground.

Three days pass and I am still unconscious and I am still haunted by the screams I hear from far away. That was when I suddenly feel something plunge into my heart and I know it is the end.

If you ever see this, tell my family I love them and that I am sorry.

# Ming Treasure Vooyage

*Harrow International School Shanghai, Horsnell, Ella – 13*

As I lye on my death bed, my life flashing right in front of my eyes.

I remember to the day I was ripped and stolen from the heart of my family. By this age I knew the reality by this age, I was eleven, I knew I would never be able to see them ever again... I think being forcefully dragged out of my own home, to what the other boys called 'the torture chamber.' They made us queue in an everlasting line. Unfortunatley the majority of us knew what our melancholy faits were coming to. I felt so nauseous, why would anyone want to do this to innocent boys like me?After the excruciating, agonizing pain of becoming a eunuch.

After that horrifying experience, I was introduced to Zhu di, the son of the emperor. Only after knowing Zhu di for a short time we instantly bonded, and gained a powerful friendship. Shortly after meeting Zhou di his father passed away. Unfortunatley to Zhu di disapproval, the throne was passed onto his elder brother. Zhu di and I skeemed and divided to dispose of his elder brother. This made citizens lided causing a civil war, however after several months of battling China resulted in peace.

Eventually Zhu di in 1405 sent me with a fleet of men on a voyage to convey China's supremacy. The ships were mighty and grand, Zhu di filled eight boats full of gold, Jess and silk. They were each four-hundred feet long he traveled with an estimated 28,000 sailors. He brought marines and translators.

We set off from Nanjing our first destination was Vietnam, I remember it very well as we arrived the kindly greeted, we presented them with our gifts, they thought of it as a remarkable gesture.

Then after our voyage to Vietnam, we would be going to Malaysia, to our horror there was a dreadful tempest practically waiting for us, it was devastating and extremely prettifying to lose four small ships in the frightful storm. I distinctly remember the ear-shattering, piercing thunder it was louder than a chandelier being smash into billions of individual shards. Eventually we arrived in Malaysia we were pleased by the delightful exotic weather and the gleaming sun. We gave our lucky gifts (which consisted of gold and silk.) We gave them to the locals, as their faces lit up with contentment. The cuisine was nothing like we had ever tasted before, it was quite upsetting to leave a place that had such a heavenly manner.

Despite this, we continued with our travels next stop Sumatra, Indonesia! We were greeted with a sour harsh greeting. All the locals were armed and they clearly viewed us as a threat. They forcefully claimed that they expected gifts, however due to there vulgar greeting Zhu di refused to give them our presents. We ended up in conflict, it brutal and physical and after three days of war China won and fled, although some of the crew members were severely wounded and harmed.

Next on the list was Jarva, Indonesia this time we were prepared and armed, with weapons surrounding our ships. At first the locals were intimidated by our powerful weapons and thought we were there to loot their town and cause kaos, as a result we put our weapons down. We reassured them that we were only here to bring them gifts from China, we gave them the gifts and they were thankful and pleased.

After that we sailed to Sri Lanka, on the way we ended up getting lost, but almost immediantly we got back on track. Sri Lanka was fascinating we saw new techniques such as eating foods with their hands, however they were quite reluctant to accept our gifts.

Next stop, the tip of India we arrived armed and protected, but they fought us before we could step foot on land. They raided our ships loot. They slaughtered hundreds of our men with their imposing army, we had to vigorously retreat, as we raced for our lives. We rapidly put up our sails and sailed away.

By this time there were scurrilous rumors about a Chinese pirate, his name was Chen Zhu yu he was stealing goods from the coast of Indonesia, so that's where we headed. To catch this pirate and Robb him of his steals. We captured him and his crew and held them in captivity, shortly after we decided we were going to execute him in Nanjing.

Unfortunately Zhu di had a sudden death. Everyone was very pity full to hear the tragic news. Before they funeral we had a wake, where we kept an overnight vigil for Zhu di paintings and sketches with an assortment of candles surrounding him, with beautiful white flowers symbolizing death in Chinese culture. We sent out invitations to everyone he knew. We all wore white gowns and white hats to the funeral. At they funeral we burnt his most valuable replicated possessions that meant a lot to him and had a special place in his heart, we made sure he would have everything he desired so that he could enter the spirit world with happiness containing all the objects he would need. Then as a symbol of keeping the spirits away, we gave everyone of our guest a piece of red string to hand on their front door nob. We then burnt him in a roaring, mighty fire.

As I flicker through my life's greatest experiences, I think of being a young man and traveling to places I would of never been to without Zhu di. Although I miss my family so incredibly much and would do anything in my power to be able to see them, I also want to thank Zhu di for letting me see miraculous sights, to taste these colorful foods. He was such a passionate leader and a remarkable individual through rough times he steered us into the right directions. It means so much to me celebrating his life, as we will soon celebrate mine.



# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

*Harrow International School Shanghai, Li, Lynn – 13*

“Someone, Hold on to the sail! Hold on! Lower the topmast! ”

“y...yes sir! But I can't! The wind is too strong! ” One of the sailors cried back.

“Just pull it down!”The master shouted back.

The wind howled and the waves each time bigger than the one before.

Even though it is still daytime, the dark rain clouds stretched across the whole sky, and it was as dark as midnight. Nothing could be seen, except when lighting strikes. When the next lighting stroke, all people can see were sailors torn into the sky along with the sail when they were trying to lower it, the wind brought them higher and higher, and then disappeared into the sky with screams of fear. All people could hear were waves, thunder, and all the moaning, crying from the people.

A man stood on the very front of the boat calmly and said soberly: “This is a tough one” and his name is Zheng He. This is his fourth time out on to the ocean, but it is the first time he has ever seen such a thing.

And there came another monstrous wave.

Zheng He can feel the scorching hotness of the sun on his face. He opened his eyes and saw things that he has never before seen in his life. Giant palm trees, golden beaches, and rarely a seal cries. While Zheng He is enjoying the scenery in front of him. Loud shouts of people have destroyed the quiet air. “Ho, ho, hee.”

“HEE, he ho, ho, he”

They sound more like monkeys than people. Zheng He has never heard a sound like this ever in his life, but he thought they were no danger. The sound became louder and louder, closer and closer, in the next second Zheng He realized they were coming for him! He stood up and wanted to hide, however, it was too late, two giant hairy people were standing behind him, they have ginormous tattoos on their face, and in their hands were The first thought that flashed through his mind was “Run!”. He lifted his foot and wanted to get out of here, immediately the giants both grabbed him by the hands, and now there's nowhere Zheng He can go but to follow them.

After a while, they finally stopped, and in front of them was a big stone chair, and several rock poles with very delicate carven patterns on surrounding it, Zheng He has never seen something like this in his life, but the patterns on the poles suddenly remind him of something, but he is not exactly sure what. While Zheng He was trying really hard to remember what the pattern reminded him of, an older man walked up, and seated on to the chair, in the middle. He is obviously the chief of the tribe. The people started communicating in a language that Zheng He cannot understand.

“hehe, hoho.”

“he, hohohoho, hehee.”

For a while Zheng He was just standing there in awkwardness, and there they finally stopped. The chief started talking to Zheng He, and surprisingly, the chief does speak English.

“WHOO ARE YOU?”The chief said in a funny accent, but he is very serious, looking right into Zheng He's eyes, he felt like he has been stared through, But from all the experiences that he has gained in the past three years, he knew that he can not show any fear of what is happening or how he is unconfident about anything.

“My name is Zheng He, I came from China and I am on a mission to Hormuz.” He didn't explain too much, because he didn't want to waste too much time to him, he just wants him to understand who he is, and free him.

The chief look confused, he clearly did not understand anything that Zheng He had just said to him, and then he whispered to the strong man beside him.

“HO!” the strong man shouted.

People all around start to surround Zheng He and pushed him to the ground. This is not what Zheng He was expecting, it shocked him, And for a while he did not understand what was happening. They lifted him up and thrown him into a vine and tree bark woven cage. Now he had finally realized what was happening. In front of the cage stand two guards. He thought that he could try explaining to them, then he remembered they can not even understand what he will say, but it still worth trying, anything worths a try now. He doesn't want to be stuck here forever.

“Hi, I need to see your chief, I need to tell him that I do not want to harm any of you.”He spoke as slowly as possible, so it is easier for them to catch what he was saying, so they could understand.

Unfortunately, the two guards did not understand a thing he just said, and didn't react too much, but shoot him a death stare. It actually made him shiver. In his memory, since he was ten, nothing has really made him scared, but this time he was actually shivering in fear.

"Fine, this will not work. There has to be a way, but what?" He murmured to himself. Hours he sat there in silence, he doesn't know what to do and felt really helpless. Then an idea flashed into his mind. "Fire! That is the one, tribe people think fire is holy, and who can make fire is like a god-like existence! And that godlike existence will be me!"

He reached into his pocket and pulled out a piece of Flint and a tiny dagger. He rubbed them together, and sparks appeared. Using the piece of flint he ignited a heap of wood. The guards immediately felt the light and heat, they turned around and saw it was Zheng He who made the fire. They both knelt down in front of Zheng He, and worshiped him, one of them suddenly realized Zheng He is still locked in a cage, he got up and released him.

Zheng He got out of the cage and he gave the guards the piece of flint, he thanked them, even though he knows that they will not understand, grabbed everything that belonged to him, and he went off, he crossed the forest that they that went through when they were coming. The second he stepped out of the forest, he was extremely relieved, waiting for him was his troop.

Nothing was really missing, and so they continued their great journey. What adventures are waiting ahead of them, no one knows...

# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

*Harrow International School Shanghai, Li, Rianne – 13*

After travelling at sea for months, we finally catch shore in our eyesight in the distance, but instead of Calicut or Siam, or any other place we visited, these unfamiliar waters are definitely out of this world. No, this land is more rural, more mystical, more natural.

As we were approaching the shore, we encountered some of this land's natural inhabitants – the half-fish-half-crocodile, with the two half constantly at war, the glowing blind fish, the shrimp that lives inside a whale. For that reason, we were not terribly surprised by what we saw when we arrived.

For starters, the land was filled with moss, grass, and plants, like the ground in a forest, which probably means this civilisation did not discover the sea yet, or the coast for that matter of fact, as there is no sign of human there for as far as the horizon. But having traveled at sea for months, our provisions were running low, which forced us to stop on this foreign land.

While we ventured on into the deep dark woods, for reasons of gathering provisions and to present our emperor's lavish good-will presents to any civilisation who manages to reside in this forest. But soon, we ventured straight into a problem. Near where we were, there was a hardly helpful sign, which translated into: 'Do not walk near the ghi or step on the xno. If you do, YOU'RE DEAD.'

We quickly figured out the 'trees', which look like colourful tunnels, made of wood, leading you down the rabbit hole, could move themselves, like they are individual living entities, and engulf any being within its proximity and manages to stay there. While the 'trees' are engulfing organisms, it screeches 'Ghi!Ghi!' to signal its victory in capturing prey. If you put a stone near a ghi, the stone will disappear quicker than you can say 'ghi', as the towering parasitic entity will have swallowed the stone. The ghi would even suck a ghi sapling from the ground, uprooting it from the earth below. However, there is one thing it does not eat — the dull coloured pebble on the ground, xno, and we soon find out why.

The uninteresting pebbles that littered the ground, proved to be lethal, because if pressure is applied to it, the xno instantly ignites. A single one of smooth small pebbles generate enough fire to turn 10 ghi into ash, who knows what will happen if we made a small lethal mistake.

We had brainstormed many ideas to help us pass, but none of them seemed able to work. As the only reasonable thing to do, we tried to find ways to go around our obstacle. Instead of finding another way through, we found resources, perhaps to aid us in getting past. We found: fallen ghi, a source of wood, branches and sticks; ashes of either ghi, xno or both. Unfortunately, apart from our opening, the other paths are guarded by a wall of ghi, or a floor of xno.

When we returned to the opening, a chimpanzee like creature, a bird with a rabbit's head, and a blue rabbit with no head awaited our arrival. They waited until everyone arrived, like they have something important to show us. First, the man-sized 'chimpanzee' leaped at great lengths, leaving a pile of xno instantly bursting into flames, then it grabbed onto the ghi branches, which are flexible like rope, durable as it could hold the 'chimpanzee's weight, and it did not break even after the 'chimpanzee' sprung off it. Afterwards, the 'rabbit' held a ghi stick in its paws and started pushing the xno on the ground forward, providing safe passage for itself. Lastly, the 'bird' sprinkle some powder on a ghi and a different powder on some xno near the powdered ghi, and that triggered ghi to eat the xno, and the xno to burn instantly. In the end, there is a burnt ghi and a patch of ground near it.

Taking this as a hint, we quickly decided what to do. First we assembled the ghi branches and sticks, to form a poorly made broom, and swept away the xno, enough to form a path. Next we sprinkled the ashes we found on the ghi and the xno near it, to make sure we were not engulfed by the hollow husks of trees.

After we all made safe passage, I looked back at the forest, half of which is lit by flames we set, but we had no choice — we were desperate and low on provisions.

We walked on, into the forest, with many new acquaintances — we met the animals who helped us earlier, with their friends as well, the butterfly-frog, the human bird, the part dog, part cat, part mouse, a dause.

The woods surrounding us also seemed to brighten — instead of lethal ghi on our sides and xno underneath us, the woods changed to actual trees, but not quite. Even though now there are animals, trees and grass, but if you look more carefully, you can still see the lethal factor in these creatures, — the trees are like furnaces, the bird-man has spikes it can use as a weapon, the butterfly-frog can eat just about anything, anywhere.

After our exhausting hike, we finally found something which hints that there is a civilisation present on this strange land, we found some buildings, and more signs. They translated into: 'Welcome to Ysomr!'

Welcome to our small humble kingdom.'

In the kingdom of Ysomr, nothing is like our home back in China — the animals and Ysomrians co-exist together in harmony, the architecture are alive, and they have a whole ecosystem, where the Ysomrians and the animals, or should I say also Yosmrrians benefit each other. However, they do have an emperor like us. The Yosmrrians we met lead us straight to their palace, where we met the emperor, who .

“Who are you and why are you here?” He asked while we bowed towards him.

“Your highness, my name is Zheng He and we are here in courtesy of the Yongle emperor from China, to deliver these gifts of good-will. We mean no harm.” I replied.

“No harm?” The emperor questioned, “No harm? You show up out of nowhere, murder half of my army, my defenders, there to keep evil beings such as yourself out, and now you leave us helpless from attacks, and you claim to mean no harm?”

“I’m so sorry your highness, please we didn’t know.” I pleaded, “We were running out of provisions and desperately needed a way in—”

“Say no more! All of you, please return back to where you came from. You will get your provisions, if you vow to never return here or inform others about the kingdom of Ysomr.” The emperor answered. “In fact, I’ll save you the trouble.” With a snap of his fingers, we all returned to our junks, which have already plotted course to return to China, with sufficient provisions next to us...

# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

*Harrow International School Shanghai, Moan, Finn – 10*

## *Chapter 1*

*Emperor Yong Le*

Bitter was the night. As the voyagers I had selected myself gathered, there was nothing but silence and darkness.

Allow me to introduce myself. I am Emperor Yong Le of China, the greatest, most powerful emperor of all time. I am about to send my people on a great voyage to sell treasure to other countries. These are the best voyagers in all of China. I know that these are the right people to represent China as the greatest and most powerful nation on the planet. They are courageous, bold, experienced and adventurous. They have hearts of gold and their souls are pure. They are prepared for anything.

They notified me of the route they were going to take and we discussed over time any possible dangers. We perfected the route so that it was fast and safe. The only dangers were rocky waters and shallow seas. The mythical legend of the sea monster near Thailand had been clarified as false by our explorers who had left only months before us on a scouting mission, and returned, but they were to steer clear of Thailand just in case.

I had selected the vessel myself. When I made the choice, I chose a ship that was strong, light, fast and medium in size. The captain, Zheng He, was a skilled swordsman, a master of bribery, negotiating and a great mariner. He was intelligent and coped well under pressure. He was renowned for once talking the king of Taiwan out of starting a war with China. However, his charm and tempting smile should never be mistaken – he is also a killer and one of the most dangerous people to have sailed any sea.

With the crew gathered and the sun rising higher above the horizon, the scene was set for their journey to begin. In front of me stood the future of the nation and the hopes of many.

One final check and the crew said their goodbyes to their families and friends. With any luck they would come back alive having made new friends from new countries and will have displayed China's greatness to all of our continent.

My voyagers boarded the boat. There were tears, yells, and crying children. All of my voyagers were waving except one. A face I did not recognise had shrank into the crowd of the ship. I was pondering the question 'Who is he?' when someone asked me the same thing. I told them my ideas. A stowaway? A crew member's family? A Korean spy? Whoever they are, they will either hijack the mission or lay low and do nothing and help the crew. I am guessing it is not the latter. I watched as my ship's captain inspected the crew one last time, then retired below deck to examine the workings of the ship itself.

They then set sail. Hopefully China will be greater when they return.

## *Chapter 2*

*Young*

*Stowaway*

I am Wang Luo, a simple farmer's son. I have stolen aboard this boat to get away from my father who beats me for not doing what he thinks I should be doing. I want to do what I want to do. His name is Chang Luo. I am a bit nervous because this is my first time away from home. After stealing aboard amongst the masses of crew, I found myself hiding deep within the belly of the boat. I thought I had been spotted but had not yet been caught. I was wishing that today would continue as a fairly normal one, but that thought was shattered by a dark, stormy cloud hovering above this endless sea.

The menacing cloud began to spread as far as the eye could see. From my hiding place in the food store, I could see from a nearby porthole that this cloud would be a threat. The thunder rumbled and lightning flashed fast and often whilst the crew could be heard preparing for the inevitable choppy seas and winds that would soon come. A brilliant fork of lightning struck the sea nearby the boat and the cloud became so vast that I could no longer see the horizon. The boat itself began to rock from side to side as food and supplies spilled from their containers around me, creating a disturbance which I thought would grab the attention of someone nearby. I had to get out of here. I had to find somewhere better to hide.

The swaying seas began to make me feel extremely sea-sick and I wanted to stay where I was, but raised voices close to me made me focus and think that there were better places to be for me.

I cautiously crept out the door and went deeper into the belly of the boat to an area that I doubt many crew had even been to. Amongst a number of boxes, maps and chests, I buried myself deep and securely in, hiding from anyone and everything. The boat began to swing and I felt that the chance of getting through this was slim. I shut my eyes tightly and tried to think of things that made me feel happy but the booms of thunder and the motion of the boat made that very hard to do. I squeezed my eyes even tighter and hoped for the best.

I awoke. I listened. The booming had stopped and the motion of the boat was smooth. But there was something. Something was tap, tap, tapping at my shoulder as I slowly became aware that I was no longer alone. Unaware of who he was at the time, the ship's captain towered above me and smirked as he realised I was not crew, or family, or meant to be here. "Just as I suspected," he said, calmly and with complete control. I stood up slowly with my head facing down and wondered what would happen next...

# Back to the Past

*Heep Yunn School, Chan, Lok Yan – 14*

*~Year 2050, Hong Kong, China~*

"The Great Ming Dynasty... From year 1368 to 1644... Hongwu Emperor... and the Fall of Beijing...

Now class, I want you to..." Ms Cheng, my Chinese history teacher droned on as I snored on— my breathing matching rhythmically with her dull mechanic tone.

"Lucas! Hey man, wake up!" Tony shook me hard and I sat up groggily, rubbing the trail of saliva off my chin.

"What is it? I didn't sleep past lunch break did I?"

"Didn't you hear the robot? we're finally doing Back to the Past project! The one where we travel back in time to a certain dynasty in China, well the Ming Dynasty this year, see their developments first hand then come back to write a report!"

"That's kind of dangerous, I'm not sure I..."

"You never listen do you? With the Time Machine, when we travel back, it'll be like seeing a movie for us, no one will be able to see or touch or hear us, while we can!"

"That's amazing! Let's do it!"

"And I've got an amazing idea, the Ming Treasure Voyages!"

Both our eyes gleamed with anticipation and joy.

Soon, we were ready, packed with cameras notebooks, some weaponry and the Blazer Lazer 1000, just in case. We switched on the Time Machine, and a brilliant swirling portal appeared, illuminating our eager faces. And mimicking our favourite action hero Steve Rogers, we saluted, held our breaths and fell through the portal sideways. Little did we know, we weren't the only things that would "fall sideways and topple".

*~Year 1405, Nanjing, Ming Dynasty~*

The first thing I saw after going through the portal was weirdly, a cloud. And with a sickening thought I realized where I was.

"Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!"

We fell through the sky, plummeting head first to the deck of a massive ship. Tony landed with a forward roll, while I thudded down heavily on my bottom. Standing right beside us was a man in his thirties.

"Prepare the battleships for war, ready the cavalries! We shall surround Chen Zuyi and the pirates when they come in distance." The man said in an authoritative tone.

"Yes Admiral Zheng!"

Suddenly, I heard a loud bang as a cannonball rocketed to the side of the ship, causing it to rock violently. And the Time Machine, which I carelessly placed on the side of the hull, wobbled dangerously. Tony leapt for it, but I stood dumbfounded in his way and he missed and the Time Machine toppled down into the ominous Malacca Sea.

"LUCAS!" Tony wailed.

"I'm sorry! I didn't think it would fall that easy..." I whimpered.

"Never mind, I'll get us out of here, don't fret it." Tony reassured.

We ducked down and hid as our forms shimmered and materialised. I groaned inwardly, it's over now, the pirates will see us and kill us! Fortunately, the rest of the sailors were busy dealing with pressing matters to notice us. There were worried gasps and murmurs spreading around.

"Why are Chen Zuyi and his scalawags able to fire at such a long distance? That isn't possible!" A sailor growled in frustration.

"Oh no! If they can attack without coming close to us, how are our battleships supposed to surround the pirate fleet?"

"Admiral Zheng's plan isn't going to work, we're all gonna die!"

"My dear crew," Zheng He had worry lines all over his face. "It seems that I have failed you all, let us take cover below deck to avoid the cannons, perhaps the pirates will show mercy." He looked grave and defeated.

Couples held each other closer, but could give no reassurance, everyone was terrified.

Choking and tearing up from the smoke, we crawled to the back of the ship, where we found a grown man sobbing, he looked distraught and his clothes were in tatters.

"Hey there mister, what's the matter?" We crouched down beside him.

"Are you men of Admiral Zheng?" He sniffed

"Why yes, we're his loyal men!"

He hung his head in shame, "Well then I guess I could confide in you. I'm Shi Jinqing from HuiZhou China and I too am— was, a loyal man of Admiral Zheng. It all started when he entrusted me to stowaway

in the ship of Chen Zuyi and his pirates and spy for him. Boy I was so eager to prove myself, but it all went wrong.”

*~Year 1404, before the departure of the Treasure Fleet~*

“Shi, I require your assistance,” said Admiral Zheng, a hero declared by the HuiZhou and my family.

“Experienced fishermen have warned me of the pirates we may face on our expedition to the West, and although I am confident of our fleets’ military force, I think me and my men would rest easier with some extra information inside the pirates.”

“I don’t understand Admiral, what do you require me to do?”

“Shi, the most feared pirate of Southeast Asia is Chen Zuyi, he has more than 5000 men and 10 strong ships. I need you to sneak aboard and update me every two months by sending me letters,” Admiral gazed at me with such pride and confidence I felt myself stand taller.

“Of course, I’ll do it sir! I’ll make sure the fleet stays safe from Chen Zuyi and his horrible men!”

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“And I did for a whole year, spying and sneaking information for him. Until last year I met... met... Cheuk Lam.” It was as if Shi Jinqing was in a trance.

“Dude did you seriously have to take in a deep breath before saying her name then sighing and pausing for the effects of how love seems gross for us to sink in?”

“Just let me finish would you, *dude*?”

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Cheuk Lam.

She was everything I thought of since the day I first saw her. In midst of the savage pirates, food and water belonged only to the strongest. Weaklings, cowards, fought for the scraps left, no compassion was shown. And in two days, I was starving. I was sure death would come, but through the blurry haze of hunger, I saw an angel. She fed me what the little food she had and nursed me back to health. And after a month we were together and she became pregnant and now she’s close to having a son. And I’m becoming a father. But there just wasn’t enough time! I had to notify Admiral Zheng that Chen Zuyi has been committing atrocities and scheming to lead the Treasure Fleet into a trap. If I notify him, my beautiful wife and unborn son may perish; but if I do not, I only fear that Admiral Zheng may not survive!

*~Year 1407, back on the deck of the Treasure Ship~*

“You still came here, what made you decide to?” I asked.

“Cheuk Lam,” Shi Jinqing sobbed, “my kind, selfless wife, told me to come and warn Admiral Zheng. Said they were off no good, ripping off innocent people and looting city after city. But now... I can’t confess my love for a pirate to the admiral, I’ll never be able to live with the shame! But oh God how am I supposed to let her die!” Shi Jinqing began crying hysterically.

Tony and I shared a look and nodded.

“Hey Shi dude? You go get your wife, and escape to the nearby city of Singapore, you’ll be safe there, free of shame and the nasty pirates. Me and Lucas here?” Tony winked at me, “We’ll take care of Chen Zuyi and the pirates.”

“Oh thank God! My family is saved!” His eyes filled with tears of joy which quickly turned into sobs of hopelessness, “But... how are the two of you young men going to defeat 5000 fierce men?”

“Oh we got it covered.” I reached for my bag, and pulled out the Blazer Lazer 1000.

Shi Jinqing sighed in relief and the weight was lifted off his shoulders. He dashed back to his wife, his heart brimming with gratefulness and hope for his future.

The next hour or perhaps day passed like a blur, the last thing I remember was Tony yelling “Charge!!!” And we flew to the starboard and aimed the Blazer Lazer 1000 at the on coming ships and opened fire.

**KABOOM WHIZZ BANGGG**

The Lazer cut through the the first few rows of pirate fleets, burning everything down to smithereens. The pirates abandoned ship and swam towards us. Teeth bared with a scowl fixated on his face, the pirate in front of me slashed the Blazer Lazer broken, then came for me. I ducked and backed up swiftly but my feet caught on some loose rope and I tripped and fell. The pirate snarled in triumph and held me down. Gasping for air, I reached into my pocket and pulled out a screwdriver, in a swift motion I slammed it on the pirates head and he landed thump beside me. I grabbed the pirate’s sword and found Zheng He cornered by Chen Zuyi, the Admiral was unarmed and just as Chen was about to behead him I jumped in front of him and deflected the blow. Sword against hook, good against evil, we slashed and thrust as the wind howled and thunder roared. Rain began to fall and just as I too, were about to fall from exhaustion, Tony ran over and tackled Chen Zuyi on the ground, however Chen was bigger in size and threw off Tony. Three short stout pirates surrounded him and attacked in synchronised movements, it was impossible for Tony to fend off all their blows and he lay scratched and bleeding. More pirates came, I looked to Zheng He and his crew, but they were all hiding below deck, helpless and aghast at the unexpected attack. My best mate was injured, I



was soaked to the bone, ankles deep in water sloshing around. I stared down at Tony, trembling, he pointed a finger at the Blazer Lazer, I looked over, it was broken with an enormous gash emitting sparks.

Wait.

That was it! Tony you're a genius!

Ripping out the piece of fabric on my sleeve I used it to pick up the Blazer Lazer, with the help of Zheng He, we tugged Tony to safety below deck. I stood on the ladder below deck and peeked my head out of the trap door. The pirates were advancing towards us, with Chen Zuyi back in action.

"You can run, but you can't hide!" Chen Zuyi cracked his knuckles. They were almost all on board the Treasure Ship. The ship swayed heavily as more pirates piled in.

Ten feet. The rain poured. Five feet. Thunder boomed. Three. Lightning flashed. Two. My heart pounded. One. That was it!

With all my might, I chucked the Blazer Lazer— still sputtering with electricity, right next to where the pirates stood. For a split second humour danced in the eyes of the pirates as they contemplated just how ridiculous and desperate we were to throw out a broken piece of weapon then—

*ZZZAAAAAAPPPPP*

(I think the Treasure Ship reeked of burnt pirates for the rest of their seven voyages)

Zheng He and his crew cheered. They were safe.

To thank us, they took care of Tony's injuries and together we had a nice warm feast made of fresh Malacca fish.

"Hear hear!" Zheng He raised his goblet and clinked, "Because of these two young heroes, not only did we survive, the Straits of Malacca shall be free of pirate scum!" The crew roared in approval.

"Now, let us feast!"

Before I had even took a bite, a crew member besides me gagged and his eyes rolled to the back of his head. He seemed to be choking on something, but what? Tony smacked the crew member's back and out of his mouth along with fish carcasses and saliva was our lost Time Machine!

After cleaning it up we let it dry off.

"We can go home now," Tony whispered.

"I don't want to,"

"Me neither."

But soon the Time Machine began to dry and our forms began to fade into ghostly shapes. Zheng He and his men stood up and saluted. The Time Machine glowed bright and the portal reappeared. We looked back, saluted and went through the portal.

*~Year 2050, Hong Kong, China~*

The week after our brilliant adventure, we handed in our reports and were back sitting in our classroom, it was Chinese History lesson again, except this time I wasn't asleep. I was sitting up straight with Tony, enjoying every bit of the lesson, sketched on my textbook, was Shi Jingqing and Cheuk Lam holding their newborn baby.

"...thanks to Shi Jingqing, a local Chinese who reported the atrocities and the details of Chen Zuyi's plan of attack were Zheng He and his men able to defeat the pirates. The Treasure Fleet sailed safe of pirates in all seven times of their voyages."

Tony and I shared a look. We knew the story differently.

# Circumambulation

*Hong Kong Academy, Boberski, Will – 11*

Hé sat on the deck breathing in the air, eating it like it was all that he needed, gulping it like a drowning man. In his opinion, launch was not a time to be spent preparing. Tonight, everyone was on deck, his orders. Captain's orders. His voice, Captain's voice. It was getting rather confusing. Which one was he – himself, or Captain? He was both in the eyes of the world. Hé glanced at the crew on the deck fidgeting. It was a fine evening. "Are you afraid of your complexions, men? Come, grasp the air." Hé expected the very best out of them, and therefore he took the very best out of them.

It was Smithy who noticed first, "There's banging downstairs."

Hé turned, "Alright, see what you can do. It'll be the child. She's old enough not to need mother's milk now." Smithy slipped through the hatch and descended the ladder. He unlocked the door, and Rei's hands jumped back from the edge. "Kid, what do you need?" asked the smithy.

"There's a child down here, sir. Is she supposed to be here?"

Smithy stuck his head through the door, glancing at Rei and Woah. "Two kids, eh? The little one is fine. You, come with me." He extended his arms and Rei ducked under them.

Rei had nothing to fear. He was safe on board, as was the porcelain shipment. If his pot came, he came. The pot was him. He was his pot, Lady. He was on the lists, alright.

The Green Eye's current porcelain shipment had come from a small village. In that small village there lived a boy, apprenticed under a master, Master Sun. The boy's first pot had been sent away in that very same porcelain shipment. Rei was that boy, and he was onboard with his pot.

Navigator had brought maps to the deck, but Hé ignored them. He didn't need the Emperor's edict to know where the Green Eye would go. It was the direction towards which he knelt every day. Anyway, it was too nice of an evening to study charts. The waves foamed at their tips lightly like dogs running too hard to keep up. They were fourteen nautical miles off Guangdong.

The Green Eye had four decks. One needed to navigate every one of them to get up from the Devil's Undergarments, the hold. Doors lay wide open and tightly closed and locked. The hold held a bosom of life, a cradle of color and senses. The smell of the ship's cargo already pervaded the Green Eye: aromatics, dried fish, damp skin, smoke, drying glaze and musk. Rei could also feel different scents: currents of sweat, perseverance, diversity and practice along with wood, making a savory, sensuous aroma quite unlike any other, even the smell of the workshops of Master Sun.

It was a mixture of cultures and smells, but the Green Eye was more than the sum of its parts, the sum of these pieces. Certainly, Rei thought, it was its parts, but it was also its parts and the combination of its parts combined.

The sky was rent a deep vermillion as if it had been split by a mighty blade. In the twilight, it looked as if the Green Eye was sailing through blood. Rei's first thought when he climbed to the top deck with Smithy was that the deck didn't fit. It overhung the rest of the ship, and the rest of the ship came up in unexpected places.

Glancing at Rei, Hé almost chuckled, for this boy had snuck on, disobeying a rule that no one disobeyed, yet he was clearly enjoying the evening, obeying one command everyone else had refused to acknowledge. Keep breathing, boy, Hé thought. Keep breathing.

Hé gave his verdict quickly. He was no judge, and only the feeble gestures of a moral compass needle inside him indicated a correct course. "Why are you looking at me?" Hé asked. "Look at the sunset. This boy is fine."

As Hé retreated belowdecks, Rei sat on the deck, cross-legged. Light embraced dark in those few hours when they could be together, and the moon rose to moderate the interaction. If one didn't watch carefully, Rei thought, one might almost confuse a full moon and the sun as being one and the same.

Enveloped in twilight, Rei wondered again about Woah. He thought of playful laughter on the docks and smiles so mutual they were one. She was so young, too young. So why was Woah there?

The cabin door opened, and Rei momentarily lost his balance. Hé emerged, a small bowl in his hand. He sat a distance from Rei, on the bow. Placing the bowl on the deck, Hé filled it with water from a hip flask and pulled a needle from his pocket. Whittling the needle on the bowl's rim, a screeching sound echoed through the floorboards. The deck vibrated with the sound when he placed the needle in the water. It twisted slightly, before poking the horizon, where the sun had retreated to a realm of echoes beyond even the reach of the sea. To the left of this direction, Hé knelt, his back bending low, throwing his arms out before him so that the Buddha necklace around his neck almost touched the ground. As Hé's words floated by, Rei's ears grasped one word: Allah.

Rei's voice broke the air, "May I go inside now, sir?"

Hé held the door for him.

Rei remembered Woah, and reached for the stairs. While he was walking, Rei thought about God. Master Sun was religious, but in a values sort of way. He never prayed or chanted, so Rei had never learned to prostrate himself towards the unknown, to trust in a God, or Allah. When he reached her, Woah was still sitting in the Devil's Undergarments. Rei was tired. Twenty-one nautical miles off of Guangdong, he slept.

From the depths of an ethereal sky, the sun leaked light on the sea and sleep loosened its grip on Rei's senses. The planks still held back a shimmering, new sea. The rudder still creaked in its corner. It was morning. There was something about the new day that couldn't be diluted by water. It's naivety and its youth, the glory of its arrival and the arrival of its glory. In the dark of a new day, Rei saw no Woah. The small, talkative child had disappeared. Rei sprinted onto the deck.

All of the crew was there. Hé was there and Woah was there, at the front. They stood at the bow of the ship. The sails were at a high luff. Woah was dressed in silk, her hair braided like noodle dough. Her feet were in tiny shoes.

Hé knew Rei was there. "We are lowering her. She will be the sea god's new wife. The Dragon King will let us pass if he has a new concubine." He sensed Rei's words before they left his mouth. "Don't say a word, boy."

The smell of incense was overwhelming. Rei covered his ears on the splash. There wasn't even any scream.

The crew had gone inside. "It's Mazuism. Their religion. Mine too, a bit," Hé said. Rei rubbed the pebble in his pocket like a lifeline.

"But you're Muslim! You're the captain!"

"I am many things, Rei. A captain is one of them. So is a Muslim eunuch. Yet if I tell people that I am a Muslim eunuch, they apply to me their notions about Muslims and eunuchs. Yes, I am a captain, but not a commander. The sacrifice was what Woah was brought aboard for, actually."

"How can you justify it? Killing someone, I mean."

Hé glanced over, "Rei, disprove their belief. Then, you can condemn it. Do not try to condemn a belief, Rei, for it is always valid to the believer. It is an easy, naive mistake."

"So, you think that as long as someone genuinely believes something, it is right?"

"Yes," Hé said. "Faith does not inhibit truth."

Rei sat cross-legged on deck, his mind embroiled in thought. Traveling by sea was an altogether new experience for him. The Green Eye could affluently bob through seas of fortune as adeptly as a socially aware merchant might through a gaggle of courtiers, yet that was their full range of movement. Rei had to trust that the ship travelled. It was a bit like trusting a God. Rei looked at the water meandering beneath the ship. He tried not to see the water. In his mind's eye, lines of shadow snaked across the bit of ocean. Nodes in the waves worth more than their sum. Pinpoints of light pushed from one place to another. Energy, constantly kinetic.

The water became a bath of movement.

# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

*International College Hong Kong, Chung, Adrienne – 11*

One bright afternoon, Zheng-He observed the sailors as they hurried to complete their tasks as fast as possible, desperate to avoid the beating of the searing sunlight. The sun looked like heaven just fell from the sky. There were no clouds, and the air was dryer than sand. Their water supply was still plentiful, which was a good thing. The water looked tempting as the surface gleamed with sunlight. The medics all had their hands full because several members of the crew had all been knocked out by exhaustion. He sighed, mildly exasperated at his crew's laziness. They were heading back to the mainland, and everyone was anxious to see their families again. He turned to his second-in-command. Even *he* was gazing excitedly at the north side of the ship. "Alright, you can all have a break," he shouted. The ship erupted into cheers. "But," he interjected, "You will have to send the message to the other ships first. Note that I will tolerate absolutely NO slacking off after the break." He shook his head. At least this trip was going to be over soon.

Two days later, Zheng-He was straightening the regal robes the emperor gifted to him. He straightened his back to show discipline, and walked into the room, bowing at the emperor's feet. The room was hushed instantly when the emperor raised his hand. "I, Xuan-De, award Commander Zheng-He the Medallion of Light for his bravery, kindness and discipline. Let us see this as a parting gift as he sets off on an—" All of a sudden, the emperor gasped and slumped over in his chair, before falling unconscious with a golden arrow embedded in his neck. Instantly, Zheng-He was on his feet, sword in hand and alert. "The window was left open!" he shouted. Just as he stuck his head out of the window, a glimpse of black cloth was whipped from view. He looked around, then frustratedly tugged on his dark hair and asked, "Does anyone at least know what the mission was supposed to be?" A shy messenger stepped forward. "Um...excuse me Sir, I believe the Empress knows..."

Zheng-He watched silently as the Empress spilled out her secrets, staring at the floor, when something she said caught his attention. "...He was so excited... he was planning to... it all happened so quickly —"

"Wait, what did you say?"

"Huh? I—I said that it all happened so quickly and that..."

"No, not that. He was planning..."

The Empress laughed hollowly. "Oh, that. Yes, he wanted you to go to...uhh...um...Xushan. Yeah, Xushan." She laughed hollowly again. Zheng-He shivered and said his goodbyes, walking out the door.

As he prepared the ship for the trip, an uncomfortable messenger walked over to him with a strong-looking man with long locks of dark-brown hair. "Commander Zheng-He, this is your new second-in-command."

"Why do I need a new second-in-command?" he asked, slightly curious.

"Second-in-command Yuan-Su is...err...not feeling very well." Zheng-He straightened up and asked, "How?"

"Um, he's vomiting, sir." Zheng-He cocked a brow.

"Vomiting?" That was slightly suspicious, as Yuan-Su never got sick.

"Yes, sir."

Zheng-He sighed and dismissed the messenger.

Zheng-He was interviewing the new second-in-command, all the while thinking about his ailing friend. He was going to visit him at noon, but this interview seemed to be taking ages. He switched his thoughts to the assassination of the emperor. After the assassination, the area had been swept and no traces of the killer had been found. The only clue they had about the murder was the assassin's black Mongol robes. Angrily, he clenched his fists, startling the new second-in-command. Zheng-He calmed himself down, then said "Carry on." The second-in-command, which he now knew as Bu-Liang, looked questionably at him, but obliged. They continued to chat, every now and then eating snacks and drinking tea.

"Hello, Commander." rasped the sick man on the bed. He looked like someone who had just been stripped of their strength, like a dried up raisin. But Zheng-He refused to think of it that way. He often thought of the situation as more like an obstacle, one that was difficult, one that they would pass eventually. "No need to call me that, my friend. How are you doing?" Yuan-Su smiled up at him.

"Good, Zheng-He. I heard you have found a replacement for me?"

"I'm sorry. It's just that we're leaving soon, and I don't want you to come with us in case we get into a fight." Zheng-He shook his head.

"Don't you dare be sorry. I'm *happy* you've found a replacement for me, got it?" Zheng-He chuckled. It reminded him of Yuan-Su before he had gotten sick. Funny, selfless and kind. Well, he still was funny, selfless and kind, but it just wasn't the same. Then Yuan-Su spoke, snapping Zheng-He out of his thoughts.

"So, when am I going to meet this 'Bu-Liang'? No offence Zheng-He, but his name sounds like 'bad', 'stupid' and 'dangerous' all in one". Zheng-He snorted, then looked out the window. "Well, I have to go now, duties call."

"Okay. Write to me whenever you can."

"I will." The two friends shared a warm hug. Then Zheng-He walked out the door.

The water around them churned with waves. Today was a windy day, and convenient as they were sailing today and they needed the momentum to push them forward. It was a stark difference from a few days ago. The crew was relishing in the soft breeze as it tickled their cheeks. Bu-Liang walked up next to Zheng-He and Zheng-He immediately remembered the conversation he had with Yuan-Su. He burst out laughing, which was unusual for him. Bu-Liang looked at him suspiciously, "Commander, is there something wrong?" to which Zheng-He composed himself and replied "No, thanks for checking." Zheng-He then walked away, smiling inwardly.

It was the middle of the night, when a shout woke Zheng-He up with a start. Alarmed, he ran up the steps and saw Bu-Liang trying desperately to wake everyone up. "What's happening?"

"I-I just saw a Mongolian ship. I-I'm sure of it!" Shocked, Zheng-He told him "Go prepare for battle, then go and steer the ship, I'll go wake the others up." As he finished his response, he thought he saw a look of dismay flash across Bu-Liang's face, but Zheng-He ignored it. It was dark, and he probably just imagined it. As he ran down below the deck, trying to wake the crew, he remembered how Bu-Liang always wore black robes. Could he be the emperor's assassin? Zheng-He shook the suspicious thoughts out of his mind. Bu-Liang could be trusted. Or could he?

An hour later, Zheng-He had extinguished all the dark thoughts and his heart was thundering as his fleet prepared for battle. Just as Zheng-He considered calling a false alarm, the Mongolian flag came into view. Adrenaline surged through him as he yelled out a battle cry. "ATTAAAAACK!"

Ships on both sides sped towards each other as smaller fleets sliced through the water swiftly. The quiet sea had become an ocean of conflict, roaring like the monsters that lurked within. There was blood everywhere, corpses of dead heroes floating across the water. There were cries of despair and vengeful screams and golden arrows slicing through the air. Ones just like the one that took the emperor's life. Drowning in the overwhelming scene, Zheng-He roared and became a killing machine. Everything around him was either an ally, or dead. In the midst of all this, one arrow flew through the battlefield, clear as day. Slicing through the air, it impaled Zheng-He in the thigh. "ARRRRGGGHHHH!" The cry of pain echoed around the battlefield, as Zheng-He desperately looked around for help. Then he spotted Bu-Liang. "Bu-Liang, help me!" cried Zheng-He. Their supplies had already been either used or raided, including the gifts for Xushan. Bu-Liang wouldn't be able to help much anyways. Bu-Liang glanced over at him, and a feeling of relief coursed through him. But that feeling was quickly diminished when Bu-Liang glared at him when he walked over. "You're not very observant, are you?" Dread and confusion filled Zheng-He. He could sense that something was obviously wrong, yet, he couldn't put his finger on it. What did he mean? "I killed the emperor." Those words rang around his head. "Wha-but...how-?" He stammered. Then it clicked. Yuan-Su vomiting. Black robes. Trying to wake the crew from above the cabins. "This was your plan all along." He said angrily. "Yes," sneered Bu-Liang, "and it worked *perfectly*." How could he have fallen into his trap? "Got any last words?"

"Huh?"

"You didn't think I was just going to tell you all my secrets, and then just let you walk away, did you?"

His heart stopped.

And it never beat again.

"We gather today to commemorate the great Zheng-He, along with our recently dead emperor Xuan-De. Our kingdom has now been left grief-stricken and mourning. We are forever in their debt and their legacy continues to live on. May the heavenly gods bless them forever. Thank you."

# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

*International College Hong Kong, Griffiths, Katie – 12*

*Dear Emperor Zhu Yuanzhang,*

*I would like to meet with you to discuss the matters of you ruling China, and the future for our country. I will come to the Palace on Friday the 17th of February.*

*Best Regards,*

*Xiao Ming*

I read over my letter again and again until my head started to hurt. “This is it,” I thought. I picked it up and stuffed it into my bag. I ran out of the front door, locking it behind me. I started the long walk towards the palace. I was excited and confident about my task ahead. I had been planning this day for a long time and it had finally dawned.

Several hours later, I found myself standing in front of the palace ready to deliver my letter to the Emperor Zhu Yuanzhang. He was an evil man and I wanted to tell him my thoughts about the way he was ruling China. I wasn’t scared of him and I wanted him to listen to my opinions. I did not like the Emperor because I believed that he didn’t treat women as equals to men, and I thought something needed to be done about it.

My parents died when I was young so I lived with my Aunt. She didn’t know anything about what I was planning to do. I planned on telling her one day of course, but not just yet... My dream was to be the first female ruler of China, to prove to people that women are just as capable as men.

I knocked on the huge palace door and waited until someone approached. After a long wait, nobody showed up so I slotted my letter under the door and left for the long journey back home.

A few weeks later, I had still not received a reply. The Emperor must be too busy to answer letters from girls who wanted to come and visit him, I thought. He probably hadn't even read it. " Oh well " I thought to myself. I am just going to go, I did warn him after all...

The Friday morning came around quickly after that. I went to bed early the night before and woke up early so I had enough time to get ready, and look good for my visit to the Emperor's Palace. I had no hesitation getting out of bed, unlike most mornings where I go back to sleep when it's time to wake up.

I rushed into the bathroom, brushed my hair ( 100 strokes for luck ) and then went back into my bedroom to get dressed. There was no way I was going to eat breakfast today, "I'm not hungry," I thought to myself. And anyway didn't going to a palace mean I would be having a posh banquet? After I had put on my best outfit, I grabbed a nice bag and put it over my shoulder. I was ready...

I had to wait until my Aunt was in the bathroom before I could leave. When she finally got up and went to wash, I took my chance. It was my aunt's birthday the next month, so I came up with a perfect excuse. I left her a note saying the following " I went out to get you a birthday present, be back soon.. " Then I ran out the door.

I walked slowly all the way to the Emperor's Palace, thinking about what I was going to say to him. I finally arrived at the Palace, bumping into three guards armed with swords at the front gate. " I have an appointment with Emperor Zhu Yuanzhang " I said casually to the guards. Surprisingly they let me in with no hesitation.

I walked around the palace and suddenly spotted the Emperor, sitting in his throne, with servants bowing down to him. He then looked up and spotted me. " Who are you? " he bellowed. I bowed down and replied, "My name is Xiao Ming. I sent you a letter regarding the fact that I would be paying you a visit on this date, to talk to you about China and its future." " Very well" he boomed. "Come here and talk to me. Servants, leave!" The three men shuffled out of the room, leaving only the Emperor and Xiao Ming.

“I don’t agree with the way you are ruling China Emperor,” I said quietly. “Nobody likes you and nobody is doing anything about it, so this is why I came here. You don’t treat women fairly and that isn’t how China should be” How dare you!!” he bellowed. I slowly started to back away.. “I didn’t mean any harm but I just want to tell you Emperor, that I think for once we should have a woman to rule China in the future. Why is it always a man that rules China? I just don’t understand... “

He took some time to think before he suddenly spoke. “I have no children of my own to succeed me, and I am impressed with your attitude. When I die, you may become the ruler of China.

“Thank you Emperor”I replied. I bowed and slowly walked towards the door.

One month later, I received a messenger from the Emperor’s Palace. “ I opened her front door. “ Hello,” I said. A man dressed in servant’s clothes was standing in the doorway. He muttered something under his breath. “The Emperor is dead?!” I asked shocked. “Yes,” the man replied. “ You are now the new Empress. You may move in by tomorrow, bring all of your belongings and family. “Yes I will. Thank you so much for letting me know.”

I started packing my belongings. It was my Aunt’s birthday tomorrow so I decided to wait and tell her the amazing news on her birthday. The next morning, I woke up to the sight of daylight bursting into my room. I jumped out of bed and ran into my Aunt’s room. “Happy Birthday!” I shouted happily. “I have a big surprise for you.” So I told my Aunt the good news and from then on we were a happy family of two, and we loved our new home. I, Xiao Ming was a very successful Empress and everyone in China loved and respected me. The Ming Dynasty was named after me.



# Noah's Journey

*Island School, Deleu, Zoe – 11*

Around 168 years ago, there was a group of Pirates. Now, these Pirates are not the typical Pirates that you read in fairy tales or story books because these were good Filibusters. They did take things like Gold and Silk and more precious things that would make your spine shiver with excitement if you had them. But what did they do with these items are different then normal pirates; they would give the gold and silk away as gifts to their beloved captain and sailors. "Pffft what a fairy tale" said Noah. "Like anyone would believe in this sort of stuff and which type of pirates gives away gold like people give away candy. This is just a bag full of nonsense" he said once again. He shut the book and put it back on the shelf, he then turned off the lights and went to sleep. But what Noah did not know was that he was not going to wake up in the same place that he fell asleep in. No no no, he would wake up far far far away from the place he had fallen asleep in.

Waves lapping over each other like the way when you apply a second layer of paint onto a canvas is the sound that Noah woke up to hearing "Em turn it down" he shouted the sound stayed the same "Em turn it down" He shouted again but a little louder, still no change in the sound "EMILY TURN YOUR MUSIC OFF NOW" he said for the last time. "I had enough" he replied he got out of bed and looked around "where am I and why can I hear the ocean" he said. He heard laughing from coming from upstairs "I better go check that out maybe mom and Em are just playing a trick on me ". Noah opens the trap door of the boat and sees something very very unexpected. "what the" he whispers while looking at this confusing but funny sight, six men who are dressed exactly like pirates and another one who looks like he is the Pirate Captain. "us legends pfft how old does he think he is" one Pirate says "probably like 3 years" replies another pirate followed by the sound of laughter. "sorry to interrupt this very childish party but where am I and why am I hear" Noah finally says, the pirates look at him with a look that would have killed three rabbits.

"Our Question is why you think we are a silly old bag of nonsense" replies the first pirate. "What are you talking about" replied Noah while thinking of when he ever called anything that. "Last Night after only reading half a page of our book you stated that we were a bag full of nonsense and that we are just a legend" said another pirate "oh you guys are for real and you are the pirates of the Ming Treasure?" Noah says being even more confused than before "Listen w just want to prove to you that we are real so to prove it go into that room" says the Pirate Captain "why should I trust you—you think that you are Pirates and You kidnapped me who in the world would do that" Noah says "Pirates?" everyone says "Fine I will go in the room but you have to promise to bring me back home after this we have a deal" Noah states "sure but that will take a days" says the captain "what I have a Chinese test tomorrow and if I miss it I will get in to trouble huge trouble" replies Noah "well young sir we are in the Pacific Ocean" says the captain in charge "wait only Filibusters can do this type of stuff So you are the pirates from the Ming Treasure are you" Noah says shamelessly "that is what we are trying to tell you" says the first pirate. "Well then let's turn back" Noah says pointing to the steering wheel so the Captain of the ship yells "you heard the boy it takes 72 hours to go back come on move it".

1 –2 days go by, Noah and the Pirates getting closer and closer back to Hong Kong "are we there yet" Noah says "probably another day or two" replies the first Pirate. By now Noah knows all about pirates what type of chores they do how to find gold, how to speak like a pirate and even what the pirates eat ( Noah's favourite meal was Bone Soup). A few more hours go by and Noah hears something "what is that noise" Noah says with cautious. "What does it sound like" replies the Captain. "Like some sort of horn blowing" Noah says. The pirate captain looks at the crew with death in his eye "it is the Blowing horn" the captain says "the blowing who" says Noah while all of the crew members are getting their weapons and preparing for a battle "the blowing horn are our enemies they will possibly kill us if they can" replies the Captain "here arm yourself up and get ready for battle" says the fourth pirate. "But—but I do not even know how to fight" says Noah "well just try to win" says the sixth pirate giving a large gesture of cutting a body part.

Ha Aya Ha Ho Hi Har and blades hitting each other is what the atmosphere sounds like "it feels like this has been going on for days" shouts Noah, "i\It has only been 3 hours" shouts the captain. One more hour goes by and the Ming Treasure Pirates and Noah Loose. "Where are they taking us" replies Noah. "Onto their boat we are their prisoners know" replies the second pirate "I CAN NOT BE A PRISONER I HAVE TO

GET HOME" says Noah very angrily. "Sorry but that won't be possible right now unless you figure out a way to escape there is no way that we are getting out" replies the third pirate, that's it Noah thinks I will just make up a plan and then I will be able to escape this place with these pirate. Two hours later and Noah has thought about a plan to escape. "Guys hello guys wake up I have a plan" he says "a plan for what" says the captain and the other crew members. " A plan to escape this place" says Noah. "So the plan is when one of the pirates come to give us our food he will unlock the cell so we will knock him out and wait till it is dark and the crew is going to sleep then we will go out and go on to our ship then go back to Hong Kong," Noah says

3 hours go by again and one of the pirates come to give Noah and his filibusters his food PUNCH the man is knocked out and the gate is wide open the fourth pirate quickly goes to make a run for it but Noah shouts "Noah the other pirates are still awake they will catch us if we go out know". "Oh ya I may have forgotten about that" replies the fourth pirate. More hours go by and the other pirates have fallen asleep "come on guys know is our chance" Whisper shouts Noah they open the trap door and go out "shhhhhh be quiet I have been here a thousand times one noise and they will hear us" whisper—shouts the captain. They arrive at their ship and the moment when they will cut the rope one of the Blowing Horns awaken "Captain Captain the the the Ming Treasure Pirates they are not in the dungeon I think they escaped" one of Blowing Horns shouts. Noah and the Ming treasure pirates quickly jump on their boat and leave. "haha bye Blowing horns see you another time" shouts the captain "GO GO WE NEED TO CATCH THEM" shouts the captain of the Blowing Horns. "uh oh looks like they are chasing us" says Noah "not so fast you little Blowing horn" shouts the captain, the captain then flips a hidden switch that says specifically to not press but the captain presses it.

AHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH shouts Noah "THE SHIP IS GOING TO FAST WAY TO FAST" Noah shouts again when the boat engine stops the Captain says "well Noah it was nice meeting you—you better get back to your home now" Noah opens his eyes "I am at home" says Noah with excitement but then turns to look at the pirate crew 'I will definitely miss you guys" says Noah then goes to give all the pirates a big fat bear hug.

Noah wakes up all covered in sweat. He goes to the Kitchen to get a glass of orange juice "hey mom he Em" he says "hey honey" says his mom "how did you sleep" she says once again " I had the best dream ever and it almost felt real" Noah says "oh hey this letter came in the mail just now" his mom says after giving the letter to Noah the letter reads, Hi Noah this is Me captain and the crew of the Ming treasure We will always remember the adventure that we just had and we will always thank you for saving us from the time with the Blowing Horns thanks again The Ming treasure crew. "so they are no a dream" Noah says with happiness surrounding him.

# A Sea Adventure

*Island School, Ho, Abigail – 13*

The sea has always been my paradise—the rippling, bubbling waves sloshing around the bay, full of life. I stand at the edge of the water, the ocean breeze rustling through my hair. In the distance, tiny sailboats glide along the water, sails flapping as calmly as a butterfly’s wings. My heart flutters, and the familiar longing sensation weaves its way back into my mind. Oh, how I long to be one of them! How I long to be a sailor, feeling the wind on my face, my small wooden boat gracefully gliding along the tranquil waters like a sheet of ice... It’s time to go. I take one last glance at the blue, blue sea, then turn around and head back.

I walk towards my bedroom, passing by my father’s work desk, when I notice something I’ve never seen before. Cautiously, I creep over. A sketch and planning of a large fleet of ships are drawn onto a piece of paper. I run my fingers across the lines of ink, heart leaping. *What is this? Is it possible? Is my father about to take a huge fleet of ships on journey out to the wide, wide ocean?*

The sea. The sea! The wondrous, shimmering blue stretches out in front of me. I clutch the handlebar and close my eyes, facing the strong east wind. I can’t believe my father has allowed me to go on this trip! I can’t believe it. I’m actually, physically *here!* On the leading ship with the admiral, my own father, Zheng He, about to set off on a voyage out onto the deep, deep blue. Behind me, the sailors haul big loads of rice and meat onto the lower deck of the big ship, and the wooden floorboards creak under its weight. Large barrels of water stand on one side of the ship, and scattered tools lay on the other. Long, heavy steel masts are piled on the bottom deck, next to the bunks. Although the sailors have to sleep on those shelf-looking bunks, at least I get a nice, small bedroom of my own!

The sailors pull up the sail, and once latched into place, my father runs over to the ship’s end and unties the rope that held it to the pier. All of a sudden, I feel a jerk, and the ship lurches forward, powered by the wind. It hasn’t been ten seconds, and we are already a hundred metres away from the shore! At last, we’re on our way— sailing out onto the bright blue waters, just as I have been dreaming since I first saw the ocean. I feel the wind on my face. The faint smell of salt and fish waver into my nose as I stare out into the vast ocean. First stop: Vietnam!

We’ve been on this ship for about a week now, and each day just gets more exciting. I love waking up each morning to the sounds of the gentle waves crashing onto the sides of our boat. *Swish, swash, swish, swash.* I love the spare time we have, when I always stand out on the upper deck and stare out into the vast, tranquil water, bathed in the glow of the glorious sunshine. On this particular day, I am on deck, as usual, squinting out into the distant ocean, when suddenly, I spot something unusual. Directly overhead, I see a large black mass. *What could it be?* Quickly, I run downstairs to the lower deck, where my father is eating his breakfast.

“*Ba ba!*” I shout, “Come and see!” My father follows me to the upper deck, and I show him the black mass looming up in front. Several other black dots have gathered up behind it. Father squints at the lump, and his face lights up. He runs downstairs calling “LAND AHOY! LAND AHOY!” We’ve arrived at last! Vietnam, here we come!

We have spent four days in this little country, and now we’re off, back to China. The king of Vietnam has offered us tons of goods! Noodles, spices, herbs... all these new delicious tastes! The countryside itself is beautiful, too. Dotted around everywhere are splendid blue lakes, with small red boats sailing calmly along the smooth waters, sails fluttering. Small yet tall hills sit perched on top of the waters, like tiny islands floating in the lake. Waterfalls drop from the sheer edge of tall, rocky cliffs, and shimmer and sparkle in the beautiful sunlight.

It’s been two days on this ship again, and on the third morning of our trip back to China, I wake up to the sound of people scurrying about, with nervous and anxious looks on their faces. What could be happening? I race up the stairs, and a chaos greets me up on deck. Some are busy carrying extra sails up onto the deck, some are bringing all our food and valuables downstairs to the large, hidden storage area. I fight my way through the crowd and glance out into the sea. It’s rough, with big waves crashing and slamming against our ship. The water is grey and scary, as if it were a monster trying to swallow me whole. I look past miles of

the raging sea, and my eyes land on a fleet of ships, almost twice the size of ours. About 15 sails are strung across the masts of each ship, catching as much wind as possible. They glide across the water as smoothly and quickly as a cheetah sprinting across land. Each extra ten seconds I stare, they are a couple hundred metres closer to our ship. *What could be going on? What are the sailors so afraid about? Why are...* suddenly, my tutor's voice rings in my head, clear as a bell. "The dangers of the sea..." *Pirates...? Uh-oh.*

Right at that moment, I feel a hand grasp my shoulder. I whirl around and find myself face-to-face with an angry sailor.

"What do YOU think you're doing here?!" He whisper-shouts in my ear.

"I-I'm sorry, I was j-just trying to s-see..."

He throws me back to my bedroom and locks the door behind him. I hastily scramble to my feet and lunge for the ship wall. I press my face against the glass of a small window, and from there, I can just barely make out what's happening outside. The big sails of the pirate ships are looming closer and closer. There are hundreds of men on the ships. One of them is tying a rope to a small boat. He lowers the boat down the side of the ship. It bobs up and down like a cork floating in water. A large man jumps from the deck and lands into the boat, followed by two men. Someone from the big ship tosses three oars down. They are jabbed into the water in sync. *Here they come.* Quick as lightning, they streak across the stormy, frothy water. A large man jumps on deck and grabs my father's collar. He is carrying a gleaming sword. A fight breaks out. Screaming. Shouting. I can't watch. I sink into my bed and bury my face in my hands. What would happen if they killed my father?

Suddenly, all goes quiet. I creep back to the window. The pirate is holding his hands up. *He surrendered?* He jumps back onto his boat and drifts off, back into the ocean. We haven't been harmed! I can't believe any pirate would just let go so easily! I slump back down into my bed, relieved. I am about to try pry open the door when something catches my eye. The small pirate boat is coming towards us again. My eyes widen. No way. It couldn't be a trick. I start banging on the door to alert the sailors, but it is too late. They're right next to us now. My father jumps back in surprise when he notices the pirates. The whole fleet is here. A determined look forms on his face. He picks up his sword, and the ship fills with chaos. Blood. Screaming. Stabbing. I watch as my father and the trained sailors fight the pirates, sinking ship after ship, and killing thousands.

The fight lasts for three days, and each day I am locked up inside my room. Many sailors are injured. Some are dead. Some valuables are stolen, but the Vietnamese goods were well protected. It isn't a very happy party that travels back to China. Even the sea looks upset, now. So lifeless and grey.

At last, the familiar surroundings alight in my eyes again. The bay, the temple, the sun. I must say, the emperor was very impressed with our work and tactics. My father is planning another trip soon, maybe venture farther out this time. I may skip this journey, though. I feel the excitement is just too much for me to handle. I think I'll just stay home, stroll around the bay, stare out at the water, and continue to let my mind dream.

# Another Way

*Island School, Lau, Joseph – 13*

“We need to expand our country’s military branch,” the Yongle Emperor quietly said to himself. He walked outside to the balcony and stared into the sea as he pondered of ways of improving the country’s military. Strong waves of ocean water attacked the rocky hill that the Emperor lived on. And then, as if a light bulb in his head turned on, he had an idea.

The next day, the Emperor met with the provincial governments of Fujian, Jianxi, Zhejiang, Huaguang, as well as other cities and sent them an order to construct a large fleet of ships.

Two years later, when the fleet was completed, the Emperor issued a preliminary order to Zheng He to command the fleet of 27,000 troops. On July 11, 1405, an order was sent regarding the first expedition, and was addressed to Zheng He.

On the night before the first voyage set off, the Yongle Emperor held a banquet for the crew. There were sacrifices and prayers as well as a lot of other events that were being held. People wished them safety and good fortune.

Then on the morning the fleet set off, and they headed off to Champa. During the journey, Zheng He thought about what the Emperor had said to him and his army. “This is a raid mission, we need the resources, and hopefully the people and the land as well. I don’t want to see you come back without resources from other places.” he had said to him.

When they arrived, Zheng He commanded the ship to fire its cannons and take down the city’s artillery systems, and then an army of troops rushed out of the ship with swords in their hands and began the raid. Frightened citizens ran around the landscape in panic, with swords swinging all around the city. Zheng He saw the chaos he had created and felt guilty. He wished there were another way. And then it hit him.

“What the Emperor wants is resources, and raiding cities may not be the only way to obtain that,” Zheng He thought to himself. “Stop!” Zheng He shouted with so much power and voice anyone could have heard it from a mile away.

Reluctantly, the soldiers obeyed his command, and stopped at once. “Who is the highest in command in your city?” Zheng He asked the terrified citizens. With his entire body shaking in fear, a man slowly stood up and raised his hand. In a trembling voice, he said, “I—I am.”

“I’ll make you a deal. Our emperor wants resources, so if you can provide some for us, we will leave at once.” Zheng He offered.

He was reluctant, and Zheng He could tell. “We’ll make alliances with you, we’ll help you rebuild and pay for the damage we have done. But you have to provide us with resources, because if not I’ll be forced to ask my troops to continue what they’re doing.” Zheng He said.

“R—r—really?” the leader said in his trembling voice.

“I don’t want to harm you or your people, but we do need resources. There is another way – how about we form an alliance?” Zheng He suggested.

Not as reluctant anymore, he agreed to the offer.

Thousands of eyes looked at him, half of them with gratitude, and the other half with anger.

They went back to the ship, with over a hundred men carrying boxes of resources back onto the ship. All of them looked at Zheng He with anger in their eyes.

“Is there a problem?” he asked sternly. “Well, what do you think? This was supposed to be a raid, we’re here to steal resources, not make friendships,” one of the soldiers shouted.

Another soldier next to him quickly covered his mouth before he continued to speak.

“The point of the mission was to gain resources for our country, not to terrorize citizens and make enemies. I figured we could use a different method of obtaining these resources, one that didn’t involve raiding.” Zheng He responded in a calm yet strong voice.

“You figured,” another soldier sneered.

Zheng He looked at him. “Trust me, by the end of this journey we will have ships filled with resources to bring back to our country.”

“Yeah, and what if that doesn’t happen?” yet another soldier muttered.

“Then we will go back to each and every one of the cities we have seen and travelled to and we will raid them until all of our ships are filled with nothing but resources.” Zheng He answered in a much stricter voice.

The resentment in the atmosphere seemed to relieve, and all the soldiers went back to their cabins. Zheng He sighed, and once again looked at the sea.

The next morning, they arrived to Java, and Zheng He walked up to the city’s leaders and asked for an alliance. They agreed, traded resources, and peacefully left the city.

Then, over the course of a few weeks, they travelled through the Indian Ocean and made alliances with the people of Malacca, Aru, Samudera, Lambri, Ceylon, Quillon and Calicut. During this process, many of the cities offered a multitude of resources to the crew, and by the end of it, a quarter of the crew had to sleep in tighter cabins due to the amount of resources their ships had to carry.

During their journey back home, Zheng He saw one of his soldiers sitting on the dock, his face completely pale. Zheng He went up to him and asked, “What’s the matter?”

With a shaky voice he answered, “I—I have been thinking. W—what will the Emperor do when he finds out we haven’t raided a single city.”

Zheng He thought about the issue for a second and answered, “Don’t worry. I will handle this matter personally.”

When they got back home, thousands of men marched out of the ships, carrying boxes upon boxes of loot and resources. Everyone in the city looked at them in awe, even the Emperor was impressed.

“May I talk to you, your Majesty?” Zheng He asked the Emperor.

The Emperor looked at him and smiled, “Of course,” he said.

They walked into a room and sat down. “Listen,” Zheng He said, “we haven’t raided a single city during this expedition.”

The Emperor frowned.

Before the Emperor could talk, Zheng He continued, “Instead of raiding, we befriended a multitude of people, and then traded resources. We also —”

The Emperor cut him off. “So you could have earned more resources. But instead decided to make some friends. You have disobeyed my order despite me granting you so many men and ships.”

“And I have shown you just how effective this method can be. We prevented casualties and injuries on both sides, obtained more than enough resources, and made alliances that could help us in the future. Not only will we acquire an abundant amount of resources, but we will also gain political power.” Zheng He said with confidence.

“Fine, I will give you a chance to prove what you said is correct. You will set off on another expedition next month, with more ships and men. I will give you one month’s time to obtain 500 ships worth of resources. If you return late or with insufficient resources, you and all of your crew will die.” the Emperor said.

Zheng He looked at him dead in the eye and answered, “Sure.”

One month passed, and they started their expedition. They went to another series of places and befriended other groups of people, as well as trading large amounts of resources. They obtained enough resources in three weeks time, and were ready to head back home.

BOOM! The ship shuddered, and a horde of people ran up to the dock to see what was happening. At first, they didn’t see anything, but when the ship shuddered again, they saw it.

Chen Zuyi and his gang of pirates closed in and ran onto the ship. They hurried their way to the storage rooms and raided them as quick as possible. In a few minutes, they had carried over 50 boxes of resources onto their ship, and were about to escape. Zheng He grabbed Chen Zuyi by the arm and pulled him back onto his ship. He grabbed a knife and ordered Chen’s people to return the boxes. Soon, they ran back to the ship to save their captain, and the battle began. Knives and swords slashed at one another, and every so often, a torch would be thrown across the ship. Arrows flew across the entire ship, and not a single inch of the dock was not covered by blood. After an hour long battle, all of Chen’s men were either dead or kicked off the ship. They tied up Chen Zuyi and locked him in a prison cell in Chen’s own private ship. They took the ship and left.

When they arrived home, the Emperor was once again impressed, and decided to reward Zheng He and keep supporting the expeditions of the ship.

# New Tales of the Ming Voyages

*Island School, Law, Valerie – 12*

Dear future me (Zheng He)

My name is Zheng He, and I am the greatest admiral in Chinese history.

The last year had gone by me in a blur, everything was going so fast. Each day had been chaotic, busy and eventful, all because of one goal. My first voyage supposedly the greatest voyage in history. Zhu Di, the Yongle Emperor, had ordered me and twenty eight thousand men along with more than three hundred large ships to set sail to the West. A journey no one had completed before. Zhu Di had just succeeded as China's new emperor, with my help, and as one of his first acts, he wanted to impress the world with China's wealth. He wanted to establish alliances, and to do that, he had to impress the world. Three hundred ships were constructed, of which sixty of them were Treasure Ships, which were over four hundred feet long. It was just like a rollercoaster, getting closer and closer to the big drop, with everyone getting more excited with every second.

It was early dawn on the eleventh of July, and we were off. We were sailing through the Pacific Ocean heading towards Champa. I was standing on the deck of the leading ship, facing a sea of unknown. The ocean breeze was blowing against my face. The following months were sure to bring a lot of surprises. I looked behind to hundreds of ships behind me. I was the one man who could change the destiny of all those people, and China.

Two years later...

"Land ho! Land ho!" I woke to the sound of someone calling. They were joined by more calls, "Land ho! Land ho!" I made my way to the front of the crowd, and there in front of me, was Champa. I descended from the ship into the company of a King, the King of Champa. I was led into a royal palace, with grand decorations and furniture, however not as grand as China. "Your Highness," and I dropped into a bow before the King. "Hello, what brings you and your fleet to our humble land?" asked the King merrily. "We come travelling from China, to bring you and your country gifts of wealth from our King, in hope for an alliance," I explained. "May I please have a look at your fleet?" asked the King. "It is an honor," I replied. "Wow," the King whispered breathlessly as he surveyed our fleet. It was plain that he was duly impressed. "It would be a tremendous honor to be an alliance of such a great country, in fact, I would like to send you home with gifts of our own!" he added.

One day later, we were on our way back to China, lavished with gifts from Champa, and an alliance with the King. We were sailing towards Java, then on to the Spice Islands. I was relieved that our first stop had gone so well. However, I was aware of Chen Zuyi, the infamous pirate, and carefully avoided there fleet. I was planning to confront them later on.

Our trip to the Spice Islands went relatively well, and we were then sailing across the Indian Ocean, approaching Calcutta, one of the major trade depots. The local rulers were collaborative, accepting our alliance and returning the favor with gifts of their own. After the trade, once again, my fleet and I headed our towards the open sea, back home.

"Zheng He! Please join us on the deck! Chen Zuyi has been spotted on the horizon." I made my way up to the deck, surveying the scene. Sure enough, the infamous pirate and his fleet were just a few hundred metres away. "Men, prepare your weapons and the cannons, but don't fire before my command," I ordered. I don't believe in using violence to resolve conflicts, but Chen Zuyi was an exception. I ordered the rest of my fleet to fall behind, while only the leading ship sail forward. I sighed as I envisioned the battle between the fleets.



My ship and Chen's ship circled each other. "Aye! Zheng He! It sure is a pleasure to meet such a honorable man at sea!" Chen called out with a smirk. His attitude didn't bother me, I was fully expecting that. "Hello, Chen Zuyi, same to you," I replied calmly. His smirk faltered. "I've come to surrender and I hope you will accept my apology," he said with a fake smile. That was definitely not what I was expecting. "Well, Chen Zuyi, not something I expected, turning over a new leaf?" I prompted. "Yes, mind if I come aboard?" he asked. I knew Chen was a man of tricks and lies, so I was skeptical of his apologies, however I decided to welcome him aboard. "Come join us on board, my friend," I welcomed him onto the ship, he came on bearing a big fake grin. Once he was on board, before one could blink an eye, he drew out his sword and attempted to stab me in the back. However, I was perfectly ready and dodged to the left. For one swift moment, I caught a look of alarm on his face but then he was back in action. "Men come aboard!" he yelled to his crew. I watched out of the corner of my eye as hundreds of pirates stumbled on board. They all looked different, some with a parrot on their shoulder, some with a pegged leg, some with an eye mask, but they all shared one thing in common, they looked ready to kill. I had no choice but to open fire myself. "Fire at will," I ordered my own fleet. I was always a organised person, and preferred to plan ahead. Thanks to this, my crew and I had rehearsed a battle scene many times, planning out strategic moves and places to defeat the enemy. However, Chen Zuyi and his fleet were a big match, as they had participated in many bloody and vicious battles. Two of my most trusted assistants crept up behind Chen, and threw a rope over his body. They dragged him to a sturdy post and firmly tied him up. But Chen did not give up easily, he chewed threw the rope, and before we knew it, he was back in again. He came up behind me and slashed through my arm, luckily I dodged and knocked him to the ground. Quickly my assistants tied him up much more firmly as well as locked him in a vault. Even though the battle with Chen was over, we still needed to fight of his men. We ended up killing more than five thousand of his men and unfortunately, some of my crew were gone and kidnapped. I was glad the battle was over. My crew abandoned the lead ship, since it was damaged badly, and moved onto another one. I and two others removed a struggling Chen Zuyi, knocked him unconscious and carried him to the next ship. As we settled in for yet another night, I thought about the previous battle, and I was more than pleased that we have finally defeated the infamous Chen Zuyi. I fell asleep with a peaceful mind.

"Home sweet home!" I woke to the sound of people calling. I descended from the ship, it felt great to set foot on Chinese land once again.

From,  
Zheng He

I smiled with nostalgia after I finished reading the letter I wrote to myself twenty six years ago, from my first voyage. I glanced ahead and saw the door of my cabin. I was resting on my deathbed, sick, with no cure. My fleet was heading back from our seventh voyage back to China. I had seen many amazing things during my time, from precious jewels to giraffes, I had seen the world in my life. I really could not have wanted anything else, apart from seeing my homeland one last time. I could sense I wouldn't make it back to China so for a reminder, I picked up the letter I wrote to myself twenty six years ago, and began to read... 'My name is Zheng He, and I am the greatest admiral in history...' with that I looked around the world one last time and closed my eyes to eternal and peaceful sleep.

# War on Itsibatchu

*Island School, Papp, Dorottya – 11*

It was July 23rd 1412 when the war started. The day the Chinese came. Father was the king at the time, so I was princess. Princess Kaira. Only 13 and I had more power than most adults. Impressive I think. We ruled the island of Itsibatchu, an island near the African coast. It's amazing. We are far enough from the rest of the world to not be bothered by others, but close enough so that traders come occasionally. In my room, I had jewellery, weapons and cutlery from all around. My most treasured object however is my Mambele knife. It's a curved throwing knife I got from Mother. But all the treasure combined was just a fraction of what I saw July 23rd.

It was a somewhat normal day, except for the fact that it wasn't usual at all. I hadn't had my usual fruit platter with coconut milk and everyone seemed to sleep. Lost in a world of extreme boredom, I ended up cloud gazing, but even the clouds slept. Then something happened. Something strange. I could see huge ships in the harbour. A whole fleet. We barely even have one boat. The shadows drenched our side of the mountain in darkness. The villages, the beach, the gardens, all of it. If anyone woke, they didn't show it. Someone descended from the ships. Honestly, he looked alien. His black hair and pale skin was honestly really weird. I saw father climb down the steps of the palace and resisted the urge to shout "Father! Stop! Don't go near him!". I sat on the balcony, awaiting my father's fate. He reached the man. And they started talking. I tried leaning closer to hear what they are saying, then scolded myself for being so dumb. How could I hear anything? They were obviously whispering, and even if they weren't, how could I hear them anyway? I was 5 stories above them! I abandoned my post to look at myself in my mirror. I looked crazy. My dark skin looked way too bold against my white dress, and my hair was just a mess. No other description fit it. I looked like I just saw a ghost, with my wide eyed expression. The bags under my eyes were as purple as fathers most important robe. I went to clean myself up and changed into something more 'the day war falls upon my island is today and I must save it or die' kind of outfit. Before I could open my door, Mia lida, my personal helper, opened it for me and called for me.

"Kaira, your father requests your attendance at his meeting." Then she saw what I was wearing. "Kaira, your father is expecting you to look your best, not like you are about to save the world from its impending doom."

"But Mia lida, I don't even know who I'm talking to. What if it's a raccoon dressed as a general. I have to be prepared." Mia lida did not appreciate me pleads. She forced me into a dress and ushered me into the room. When I finally saw the guest, I knew Mia lida should have let me wear my kit. It was the general from the ships. They had both returned from outside. A flood of questions hit me. Who was he? What did he want? Why is he here? Where did he and the ships come from? Where are they going?

"Kaira, this is Ling Dao Wei. He came from (he said something like kinay?) Is that how you pronounce it?" "It is pronounced China" Ling Dao Wei said. He kept a very stern expression on his face. Zero movement. "Ling dao wei is one of the leaders of the fleet of ships outside. Now he and the rest of the travellers would like to give us some treas—"

"Now hold on, I never said we would give you treasure, I said we trade with treasure."

"Then why are you here?"

"We needed somewhere to stop and load up"

"Stop and load up? Unless you are here to trade with my island you have no purpose to be here. I command you to leave this instant."

"But we need to stay"

"If you want your right to stay, fight for it."

"Then we will."

"The war will begin at dawn."

The next day was the scariest day of my life. At five in the morning, you could hear charging of horses and screams of men. You could see families running and soldiers charging. You could smell the blood of dead warriors lying on the ground. Mia lida, the rest of the palace staff and I were ushered out of the palace, into a safe ground in the gardens. All we could do was listen to the dying shouts of brave soldiers and the

stomping of hooves. As the war raged on, we huddled in fear and anxiety. What was happening outside? Who was winning? It was the dead of night when the battle, finally, came to an end. The screaming, the stomping, the clashing of metal all came to an abrupt stop.

“Ling Dao Wei, we've fought, and we've won. Stop this treachery and we will announce a truce.

“King Aimala, we surrender. But please, give me a moment. I want to say something.” He paused for a moment, turned around and addressed the battlefield. “Brave soldiers, you have fought, you have lost and you have always been faithful. Me and King Aimala would like to announce a truce.” We all cheered, and I sprinted out of the gardens.

“Father, since the wars over I thought it would be a good idea to have all the children on the island go on a small trip with the pirates. We could see the world, and learn about different places. Oh please father, you know I would love to explore.”

“We'll have to think about it dear.”

Next week, I got ready to see another fraction of my small world.

# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

*Island School, Pollard, Kale'a – 12*

Pulling my hair into a bandana, I climbed up the crows nest to sit and watch. We were awaiting the arrival of the leading Chinese admiralty ship, lead by Ma He, or as I used to know him, but now everyone knows him as Zheng. He had trained me in Yunnan before he left to join the admiralty. I spotted a Chinese ship off towards the west. It was huge! Our ship looked like an ant compared to it but we knew that only a few were going to be aboard, so we had found our bait,

"Bingo! Off towards the west! I say we capture them, steal as much as we can carry, then let them free!" I called down to the other pirates aboard our ship. Captain Jack called back up,

"Rob them, yes, but let them free why? I don't think so! All hands on deck!" I swung down landing on my hands and knees. I pulled out my guns, checked that they were loaded and quickly sharpened my cutlass on the cannon while my friend Connor loaded it.

"Ready!"

Our ship swooped in to face the larger Chinese admiralty ship that we had been preparing to fight for weeks. They leaped aboard our ship guns blazing. I felt gruff hands grab me from my hiding spot behind a cannon. I turned to look at a Chinese man dressed in an admiralty uniform. I fought to get out of his grasp, slicing at him with my cutlass till he let me go. I pulled a loaded pistol out of my belt and pointed at his head but then I stopped dead as I watched another soldier pull a gun's trigger it's bullet pointing straight at Connor. it felt like I watched it in slow motion, I ran in front of him right before the bullet was gonna hit his surprised face. I felt a fiery pain in under my left rib, even though the bullet only grazed me, I fell to the ground writhing in pain.

"Lillian, you crazy girl!" Connor caught me as I fell, I managed a smile back up at him.

"At least, you are okay" I whispered.

I heard footsteps behind me, I stood up to see a man towering over me, he had a band over his armour, he must be the leader Zheng, I recognized his face but his eyes had changed from being a soft grey to a cold stone. He spoke something in Chinese, I gritted my teeth hiding the pain and stood up to face my captor with a gun pointed at his face, who looked at me smugly,

"Little Girl wants to fight?" He waited and turned away but I spoke up

"Yes, I do!"

I shoot the rigging on his ship with the gun, the sail came falling down on his warriors trapping them underneath, with the distraction my other friend Jaxon and also Connor stood next to me on either side ready to fight. Zheng looked at me with fear but also wonder.

"You, you are the Lillian Jacks, you're the one the emperor wants!" He looked at me like he wanted to murder me, my old friend had changed.

I answered in a shallow tone, "Yes I am Lillian Jacks, the best lady with a gun. You won't hit a girl, will you? However, I will smack you upside the head if I wanted to, now buzz off and if you sink another pirate ship, I will hunt you down!" I moved closer as I spoke and drawn my cutlass holding it up to his neck, he tried to get up, but fell into Jaxon and Connor's hold as I the jumped onto his ship with Captain Jack and we took enough treasure to last a lifetime, once I was done, I grabbed him by the wrists and pulled him across the plank in between our ships, grabbed a rope and swung off his ship landing on ours and facing him with a deadly stare. I felt like I was putting on a show but I don't want to hurt him.

"Goodbye, Imperial Zheng and friends I am sure you will have a tale to tell your Emperor, happy sailing!" He quickly ran to ropes ready to sail away but they had fallen,

"Whoops, I forgot about that!" I chuckled and turned around to bare my teeth and growl at the other warriors who were lying down after the pirates had let them go, they stood up as fast as they could running across the plank but one walked slower than the other,

"Get a move on, we don't have all day!"

He turned around and sliced me across the face with his sword, I fell back, feeling blood dripping down the cut on my face but got back up to see him, walk across the plank and curse at me in Chinese, I jumped across and knocked him over. I turned to Zheng he pulled out his gun and aimed it at me, I let down my hair out my bandana,

"You wouldn't shoot an old betrayed friend, would you? The Sink Hound's Galley?" My voice cracked, as I remembered the memories with my old trainer.

Zheng looked confused for a moment but then he went pale. "A—Ana, it's you, but how why?"

"You betrayed me, Zheng. You left me one day without telling me, I thought I would never see you again. I want to thank you for my training but after you left, I joined the pirates. They trained me even harder and I felt like I had a family." I looked towards my adoptive family, the pirates. "Why didn't you come back or tell me, Zheng, I thought you had forgotten me." I looked around to see a broad circle around us aboard this massive ship, many staring eyes but I didn't care.

"I came back, they had told me you were captured by pirates, I thought you were dead, I tried to forget you but I couldn't." He looked at me, I remember those eyes, they were the last ones I saw before he left, sadness.

"I was there, you shoot me, I was 17, Zheng! I can't believe you would shoot a seventeen-year-old girl! I didn't recognize you. Look at what you have become Zheng an amazing warrior, kind, strong but a murderer, you have killed some many people!" I had tears running down my cheeks "Continue your life but don't forget that you had a life that you were carefree and only cared about the people that you loved, not the entirety of the Ming Dynasty. Go back to the Sink Hound one day, I will be there, if not, don't worry, I will go back there someday dead or alive"

"Ana... I'm so sorry" He looked broken

"Sorry won't cut it, Zheng."

I jumped off his ship and dove underwater, popping back up at the stern off the boat and climbed up, steering the boat away from the Admiralty as a nice quick breeze started moving us along, I had tears running down my face, when Captain Jack came up to me I turned around ready to face a harsh punishment as I let them go, but his face was pitying he held out his arms, he felt like a father to me, I ran into his warm embrace.

"I didn't know that the leader of the Ming treasure fleet was your trainer, no wonder you were so good when we recruited you, you are only 20 but you have been through so much, now let's tend to your wounds," He led me across the ship down to the main part to see all the other pirates, I tried to walk but I fell and was caught by Jaxon and Connor,

"Cmon, Lillian lets get you cleaned up, you will get scars though," Jaxon said with a worried face

I laughed and traced the cut with my finger, starting at my eyebrow and ending under my mouth, "Does it matter, at least everyone else is ok, I hope?"

"Yeah, everyone else has only minor injuries, but you were amazing taking on Zheng like that, thank you for saving me." Connor said.

"It was worth it"

I thought to myself, I wonder what's going to happen next, the life of a pirate is an adventure in itself, with or without the hardships I loved it all the way.

# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

*Island School, Vaghela, Nishka – 12*

So, let's begin with me introducing myself, I'm Luther, half Chinese, half English. I'm 15 years old. I am travelling on a boat with my dad, who is one of the kings of the area. I have always wanted to sail on a ship, you know to get the pirate-y feeling, to feel like you own everything. Water has always been one of my passions. Swimming, boating and all sorts of different adventure, they thrill me. Staying in the water for loads of hours isn't enough for me, I think that water makes me feel better. Not a lot of people my age like travelling, they sit around at home and contemplate their lives, while I'm out in the ocean enjoying. Here I am with adults, eighty per cent of whom I do not know, travelling the most thrilling seas and going to unknown lands full of dangers. But I don't think of it as something negative, but something to look forward to, something that thrills me. I am the most athletic one in the family, my two older brothers, they hate the sea! My mum too, she hates depths, my dad, on the other hand, loves the sea and its dangers and mysteries, I guess I got that from him. Well, enough talking about me, let's talk about what's currently happening.

The weather is nice, breezy and shiny, perfect for a ship! On the cruise with me, are my dad, my two brothers and some other landlords and workers. Me being the youngest in the family, am forbidden to travel, but my dad, the only person who understands how much I love being around water, volunteered to take me on the ship, he decided that I would be safe as long as I obey him. Well, that's perfect for me! My brothers didn't want to come along, but according to my dad, they have great navigating skills, so here they are cursing their fortune and misluck. They have always hated oceans, trust me, I'm NOT exaggerating. They think there are treacherous creatures, half human and half monsters dwelling in the depths of the oceans, ready to pounce on any ship that comes near. HAH! What a lie! I never believed it things like that. I still don't.

The second day on the ocean, perfect weather, beautiful, dazzling sun, and blue skies, way to go! According to the sun, it's approximately 6:00 in the morning right now. Which means a lot of people haven't woken up yet, which was perfect. I rushed out of my room, carefully, not waking my brothers up, and grabbed a towel, an extra pair of shorts and an extra shirt, in case, and a long rope. I ran to the highest point on the ship, where sailors would stand and look out into the vast ocean in search of land. I carefully and tightly tied one end of the rope to the ship and threw the other one down into the water. I took my shirt off and looked around once to make sure no one was awake. We all would eat breakfast at 8 and then everyone was off to their posts at the ship. People would wake up at 7, which gave me one hour to do whatever I wanted without any restrictions. I took in a huge gasp of air and then dived into the refreshing ocean waters.

I had always wanted to swim in such waters, so clean and warm, things like this are fun. The one reason I boarded this ship, was to experience the deep and pretty ocean waters. I took in another gasp of air and went underwater. The view was perfect, something everyone has to see at least once in their lifetime, beautiful and colourful fishes, blue water, seaweed floating about and all sorts of wondrous rocks. After staying underwater for 30 seconds, I had to go up and grab more air. I opened my mouth grasping a big mouthful of air so that I could stay underwater for longer. Since I wanted to explore further, I tied the rope to my waist so that I wouldn't get lost. I took in another gasp of air and swam underwater, deeper and deeper, further and further away from the ship. I saw bigger fishes and more rocks, some of them were green, some were blue. Oh, how marvellous! I wanted to go further when something squeezed my waist and pulled me back. It was the rope it had reached its limit. I had to turn back and get back to the ship. Plus it was getting brighter meaning soon people would start waking up. Note to self – wake up earlier tomorrow and bring a longer rope. I was also running out of the air. I started floating upwards. "This isn't fast enough", I said to myself. I started pushing to get upwards faster soon, I made it to the surface and started panting. I recovered for about 2 minutes before I had to start swimming back to the ship. I used the

rope to get up to the cruise. It was 6:45 when I got back, giving me 15 minutes to shower and change, without anyone noticing since I smelt of sea water and I had seaweed stuck all over me. Well, this was fun! I set a mental goal of waking up early and doing this tomorrow as well. It was 6:55 when I got ready. "Well this is strange, why hasn't anyone woken up yet," I said to myself. I went into my room and sat down on my bed. Noticing that none of my brothers had woken up either. I went to the spot where I had tied the rope and slowly tied the free end to a bucket. I released the other end so that the bucket splashed into the water and filled up. I pulled and tugged on the rope, getting the bucket up and into my hands. I untied the rope, bundled it into a coil. I ran to my room and put it in a safe place. I lifted up the bucket and splashed all the water on my brothers, a lot of screaming and groaning proceeded.

"WHAT IS WRONG WITH YOU!" Lai, the eldest brother who is currently 18 screamed.

"UGH! IS THIS SEA WATER, IT'S SALTY!" Henry screamed at me and started licking his fingers to check whether it was salt water. That made me roll on the ground giggling.

Lai got up and frowned at me. "Why is your hair wet?" He asked me.

"I just took a shower," I replied.

"Hm, you never take showers in the morning." He said questioningly.

"I felt like it, now leave me alone and you better go take a shower you have seaweed stuck on you," I replied.

They both glared at me and left.

I was sitting with my dad for breakfast since I wanted to hear how far we were from land. He was sitting with other landlords and sailors.

"We have been travelling for some time now, and we should quicken our pace and get away from land, I think that there's a new typhoon coming. Luther, what are you doing here?"

"I want to know more about what we are going to do."

"This isn't for you, Lu, go and eat somewhere else." He replied.

I was about to say something when one of the sailors spoke up he had a surprisingly deep voice.

"Let him be Xian he is old enough to understand."

My dad sighed and nodded to him and then motioned for me to sit down.

"Thanks" I muttered to the sailor, in response, he flashed me a smile.

"This typhoon is going to be a strong one, enough to break 100 boats close to land in one sweep. The weather will change soon tomorrow it will get darker, by the day after tomorrow, the typhoon will be in full form." My dad said sipping his tea.

It was dark that evening, and it was getting windier. My windows kept on fluttering open and close even though I closed them. My brothers were scared, refusing to get out of the room. Everyone was inside rooms, be it a deck or a dining hall. No one wanted to get blown away. I opened the door and was about to step out when Henry closed the door.

"Lu, it's very windy outdoors, you want to get blown away?" He asked.

"I'll be back in 10 minutes, that's all I ask, I need to see someone." And then I opened the door and stepped outside and closed the door, without waiting for them to interject.

I ran to dad's room and found him talking to some sailors. I caught some of their conversations.

"We are away from any form of land, Xian we are all safe."

"This typhoon isn't going to end for some days, do we have enough food?" My dad asked.

"Yes, sir." Someone replied.

The next day, it grew windier and windier, while everyone seemed to be worried, I was enjoying this. I went outside a lot, ignoring all the swearing from Lai. How can sibling be so different, I wondered.

Soon, about two days later, the sun started shining, the typhoon was over! We had made it.

We resumed our journey and continued on the quest for friendship. During the trip, we encountered a lot of people, friendly and unfriendly. My love for the ocean waters grew and grew, surprisingly my brothers and I grew closer, they also agreed to swim with me! This voyage had changed a lot of things, I would always remember.



# The Adventures of Zheng He

*Island School, Yim, Chak Fung – 13*

It was the year 1405. China was ruled under Ming Dynasty's third emperor Zhu Di or commonly known as the Yongle Emperor. Yongle is his emperor's era name defined as "perpetual happiness." He craved for China's power and authority over the world, and he wanted to be king of "all under heaven". He decided that he should make use of China's advanced technology and send armadas out to undertake voyages to convince other countries that China is the most powerful of all.

The Emperor had an extremely faithful general under his belt called Ma He. Ma He was strong, talented and skilful. The Emperor then changed his name to Zheng He and sent him on exceedingly lavishing, challenging and vital voyages in the course of history.

Zheng He prepared his fleet of flotillas and military soldiers, a staggering amount since it consists of approximately 317 ships and 60 majestic Treasure Ships. He had 28,000 sailors, soldiers, polymaths and passengers aboard. Zheng led the way to Thailand, and once his army arrived, locals came out shouting, protesting and rioting. It was chaotic. Zheng tried to soothe and comfort them by presenting valuable gifts such as necklaces, silver and other rare alloys to them. The leader of a Thai tribe, Ongsakponsaemroen, received the presents gratefully and made his tribe respect China. The Thais thanked Zheng and his people of their amiableness and asked forgiveness of their past misbehaviour. The weather was singularly calm, and everyone's disposition was excellent. It was a successful first trip.

Later, they sailed to a volcanic island in Indonesia called Java. The citizens were divided into tribes like the Thais. The locals did not like new people barging in their land, so they gathered their bows and arrows and attacked Zheng He's people. Fortunately, inside the Treasure Ships were all kinds of contemporary ammunition. They fought back and won. Zheng didn't like to be inhospitable, so he gave some fabric was given to the Javans. However, the Javans did not accept the gifts as they were still remorseful about their humiliating defeat. The Javans knew that the Chinese were affluent, mighty and advanced.

After rest, Zheng He's fleet moved on to Malacca City in Malaysia. They had discovered some precious artefacts on the way and bestowed them to the Malaysian leader. Malaysians traded some of their best textiles and tea leaves. Suddenly, a horrific storm came which meant that the Chinese were unable to leave Malacca. Luckily, the Malaysians had already approved of Zheng and his people and permitted them to stay until the storm had calmed down. The profuse flotillas and armadas were safely anchored and protected. A friendship between the two countries formed and they both respected each other.

The next day's noon, the battering storm finally came to a halt, and the Chinese prepared to depart Malaysia. The Malaysian leader sent a messenger to the Yongle Emperor giving thanks. The final destination of this voyage was southern India. En route, a sailor came up to Zheng He's luxurious cabin and informed him that one bag of bronze coins fell into the sea. Someone had inadvertently pushed it out.

Zheng He replied: "Who was in charge of this extremely negligent blunder?"

The sailor said: "Sorry sir, I don't know. But we will carry out investigations to our utmost."

Zheng He said: "Find that person and caution him. Let me see him first so I can deduct if he had done it on purpose or not. If he did it on purpose, then he shall be imprisoned."

Later, they finally dropped anchor in Kozhikode, India. They walked towards the Calicut Kingdom Palace. Lots of security guards were guarding the palace. Zheng He gave his identity and asked for a royal visit to meet the Zamorin(King). Zheng vouchsafed various types of antiquities, necklaces, frankincense et cetera to the Zamorin. They allowed trade to take place, so the Indians sent the Chinese many different kinds of native herbs, currency and silver. A formal relationship established between the two nations and so Zheng He was successful in his first voyage. The Calicut Zamorin invited Zheng and some of his officials to his royal banquet. Zheng agreed to this, and everyone had a wonderful time. The food was scrumptious, the people were amicable, and the atmosphere was pleasant.

After the banquet, Zheng and his officials went back to board the ship. However, some gaberlunzies and usurpers came up to Zheng and tried to pillage his valuables. A lawyer who accompanied Zheng ran to sound for help. The police came instantaneously and arrested the thieves. One of the usurpers was Chinese. He led a ship of pirates to follow Zheng and attack his fleet. Fortunately, they thwarted the devious scheme. The pirates were brought back to Nanjing for heavy punishment.

On the way back, a messenger sprinted from one of Zheng's flotillas and announced that the careless culprit that dropped the bronze coins was espied. He did it allegedly as he resented Zheng. He had always complained that Zheng was too fortunate, everything goes the way he wants, so he was jealous. He wanted to get rid of the valuables as clandestinely as possible. A sailor caught him red-handed when he tried to steal some gold. After questioning, the culprit also confessed that he had devised a plan to assassinate Zheng. He was livid after hearing this and ordered the quisling to be served capital punishment, accusing him of treason.

When Zheng and his fleet returned unharmed to Nanjing, the royal palace was in joy. The Emperor praised Zheng He for his courage, brains and diplomatic skills. The pirates were duly punished and imprisoned for life. The Emperor ordered a royal feast to be held as everyone was jubilant and in high spirits. During the two-year-long voyage, Zheng and his fleet acquired many priceless valuables, so it was a worthwhile journey to undertake despite its risks. A few months afterwards, the Yongle Emperor was asked to send Zheng and co on another voyage to attend the court inauguration of a new king in Calicut. Zheng concurred and organised the trip, but he did not go personally.

He had many, many adventures later on, but they are stories for another day.

# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

*Kellett School, Jaeger, Anna – 12*

## YU YAN

The waves come as loving rascals, sun-warmed and sweet, to wash upon the sands. Perhaps that is why the children love to play in them so very much – the spirit of the sea and the children coming together in something we grown-ups should have held on to. But I knew what was out there that others didn't.

Waves scatter the light, the hue of the water ever changing yet always familiar, always blue. How could I fail to love them as they dance inward to crash on the pebbles? How could I fail to appreciate the salty air or the cold caress of the breeze? I held my cloak close as I heard the distant Chinese New Year drums echoing off the cool cliffs and mountains that shelter my seaside town like a child in a playground. I knew this day would come. The day when my love could no longer stay in this quaint town. I always thought that this marriage would help him realise that the adventure is at home, not the sea, but with every moment he is away his heart breaks and the very essence that makes him who he is...fades. Just as I am fading without him to hold me. But I must. And I shall.

## LI JIE

The ocean breeze whispered like a lover, placing salty kisses on my cheek and tousling my long black hair. I hung tightly onto a musty old rope, quickly wrapping it round and round a solid metal hook. One loop...two loops...three loops. I didn't care about the red blisters in my raw hands that stung with every minor movement I made, only the endless blue on the ocean that I longed to be near since I was young.

"If only young me could see me now..." I sighed as I took in a deep breath of the rich, warm air.

"You called?" a voice shouted from above.

"What?" I asked almost screaming over the water sloshing on deck "*oh, yeah*. Sorry, Yong Mi – different person."

"Same old Li Jie..." Yong Mi grumped as he wrapped his muscular legs around the mast to attach the third cloth to the sail.

I heard some distant mumbling from Yong Mi as he fixed the sails, I turned my back to the ship and out to the ocean. How can something so dangerous be so calm? It has been close to a year since I last saw my family waving me goodbye by the harbour and not a day goes by when I don't think about them. But my mind was mostly full of the adventures I'd had and also those that I had yet to experience. Swashbuckling pirates, peace treaties with foreign emperors, sea battles with nefarious armies were just some of the adventures I longed for back on land, everyday daydreaming in the small town I called home. The ship that I was a sailor on was called "Ming Yun" or "destiny" and I was recruited by the Chinese Emperor to give away the wonderful presents we had brought from the Emperor, forging new relationships with a variety of countries. I was simply given my uniform, a pat on the back and then we journeyed far and wide to create our own adventures like the ones I read about in my school days. Yet so far, none of this had materialised.

## CAPTAIN ZHANG WEI

The celebration went on into the night, everyone dancing like they'd forgotten how to stand still. Music rang across the ship with dancing sailors twirling round and round with beer mugs in their hands. The celebration was a riot of colour, everyone a little more hyped up than they should be. The red lanterns that hung above the ship illuminated the deck with a red, hot glow as their shadows danced on the ocean. Everyone wanted me there at the celebration, a smile painted on my face and a pint of beer in my hand. The only thing that kept me there was the reverie of my return. I could already imagine it... Zhang Wei the greatest captain in the known world! I snapped back to reality and could hear my crew screaming with joy and feel their feet disturbing the ground around me. Their bodies moved together as they celebrated, rhythmically breaking into shapes and colours that tickled my heart.

"All right, all right men" I shouted urging them to stop and look in my direction. "It's not that we expected plain sailing, or for winds to be kind, the waves to be gentle; it's that we trusted our ship to carry us to shore no matter the weather. They say it's only impossible until it's done, that was our motto under all skies, upon all seas. We believed we could do anything at all... and so we did. This is why I wanted to thank you all for your dedication to China!"

A large cheer erupted from my crew as they threw themselves at each other, embracing one another after a year of sailing in solitude.

“We have successfully delivered all the gold to our neighbouring lands and no simple boys can do such things.” I took a large swig of my beer. “It has of course taken lives and their memories will live on as a part of the Ming Treasure Fleets that took the first steps to discover the world. We have faced armies and pirates, sicknesses and storms. Thank you all for being my crew and tomorrow we set sail for China!”  
“HIP HIP HURRA—”

## LI JIE

Never have I wished so much for the land, to feel the sweet brown soils of home. For on this sea I feel the rage within as if the ocean is countless tears ready to pound at the feet of man. It is a gale that screams under dark and serious clouds. Yet the boat sails over these watery fists, perhaps with the intention of causing enough bruising for the sailors to remember her anger, enough for them to start a sweet serenade of sorrow and a promise of better care. The sailors had tried to prepare for sudden, violent storms that erupt and cease so quickly, but it is impossible. Not only the waves but the rain came without warning, pelting the crew like bullets. The worst had happened after the celebration; with no warning, total darkness prevailed as clouds thickened and the sky was stricken, blotting out the starlight. Sailors struggled and slipped on the soaked deck: panic had set in. The wind slammed the rain into our faces as if it were solid matter – my face was raw and the water had filled my eyes. Somehow, the ship had pressed on, bravely climbing up the waves, and then crashing down in a cascade of wood and water. It was during one of these heart-stopping plummets that a surge of water broke onto the deck, we held tightly onto the mast, onto the ropes, onto anything that might save us. The water drained back into the sea, retreating to its master, but the damage had been done. I felt my fingers slip as I reached out for the captain in vain. The pull of the water was too strong. I took in a final breath and was whisked away to the deep. The current twisted my frozen body with the heart-wrenching cold of the ocean while I willed myself to swim upwards. Losing air rapidly I chose to close my eyes and felt the cold embrace of death strip my soul from my body. Yu Yan’s sweet voice rung in my water-clogged ears and slowly soothed me to my everlasting sleep.

## YU YAN

I knew as soon as the crew walked across the wooden harbour that something was wrong. I arrogantly searched for his face as the ship’s crew looked at me with such emptiness in their eyes that I knew my life would never be the same. In that moment of loss my world collapsed – where there was light there became shadows, the pain coming and going like waves on frigid sand. Though my mind called out for his, the connection was gone... he was gone... and finally, I knew that my time to be alone had come. I can only pray that we will be reunited in the next, that God would see fit to give us more time. Li Jie’s memory will live on and for that...I am grateful.

# The Voyage of Bǎozàng Chuán

*Kellett School, Kirplani, Tanisha – 13*

People scrambled, porters, shoved and hollered, merchants called, shopkeepers argued, women bargained. A typical afternoon in Shandong – to any outsider. To the locals, it was an important day. The air crackled with tension, voices were curt and fearful, villagers backs and necks strained as if listening for a hidden attack. Then the gong went off, signifying a new raft entering the docks. Suddenly, everything froze. No breeze, no waves, even the birds seemed to hover in one place. It was as if the little village was holding its breath. Then the spell snapped, and the whole village shrank back from the monstrous creation that towered over everything. They had known a boat of great importance was coming today. But this? It was beyond their wildest dreams.

The Bǎozàng chuán had come to Shandong and with it came sorrow.

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Later that afternoon, Zheng Hi sat in the humble house of Gao Dou. The refreshments on the ancient oak table lay untouched. It appeared, to the crowd that stood outside the village headquarters, that the stranger and their beloved mayor were participating in an intensely heated argument. It was the first time the villagers had seen their calm, placid mayor get worked up in a rage. Only later would they know the reason.

The night of the villages' weekly meeting, Gao Dou took his place at the little podium ready to make the announcements for the following week. His buoyant face was unusually grave, just as it had been when he announced the start of the war with Li Zicheng, the Shun Dynasty emperor. Mayor Gao waited as the crowd fell silent before him. He said "Mr Zheng Hi, captain of the Bǎozàng chuán, which belongs to the Ming Treasure Fleet, has come to our humble society. We must bestow all our respect on him. Mr Zheng has requested us to present him with two children who accompany him on his next voyage." At that, a fearful gasp rose through the audience. Parents hugged their children closer and backed away in fear. Finally, after a long moment of silence, Feiyan Dou stepped forward. "Gao", she said in her honeyed voice "we have two strong ones, let them go if no-one else will send their children on such a prestigious journey." After a moment's hesitation, Gao reluctantly agreed. "Yes, I think that's what we will do," he replied. The next morning Buwei and Ji Dou left for their adventure. The villagers were sad to see the two adorable children leave but were grateful that none of their children were chosen to go on the voyage. As they boarded the ship a cloud of loss formed over Shandong. No one knew if they would ever see the two children again.

★

Seven-year-old Ji sat, lost in thought, on her four-poster bed in the enormous ship cabin. A knock on the door set her thoughts back in place. She straightened the creases of her flowing silk dress, courtesy of the ship, and stood by the bed as the door opened. It was a lowly sailor with a message from Captain Zheng, requesting Ji to go to the Captain's cabin. She left the room immediately and hurried down the elegant carpeted hallway with the magnificent crystal chandelier. As she ran up the grand marble stairway, she sensed her older brother behind her and slowed down to let him catch up. Together they walked, eagerly awaiting the new task Captain Zheng had told them about the previous evening.

The Captain's jolly face awaited them as they entered his cabin. In his hand was a map. Nodding at them to sit down, he unrolled the ancient papyrus and set it on the table in front of them. In a flash, they understood what he would ask of them.

"As you may have inferred, I now ask you to guide the ship to the treasure. This can only be found by two children and their leader as the old prophecy states. But they must have a pure heart and good intentions. For days on end, we have scoured the seas for this treasure only to realise that we didn't have the two children to play the key part," He said with a serious expression. Buwei questioned hesitantly, "You said a pure heart and good intentions sir. What you are going to do with the treasure once we find it?"

"The treasure will be used to fund the army, to protect us from future wars. It will help with development across the villages of our country and aid the poor. So will you help?" he asked.

"Of course," they answered together. Ji eagerly snatched the map, nearly dropping it in surprise at what she saw next. The usual black gridlines glowed a hot gold and the gold face drawn on the map started to speak...

*“Seek, and you shall find,  
If your heart is purer than your mind,  
Beware of the time,  
For once it runs out, you shall find,  
The dreaded person in your mind.  
To take you must give,  
Something you cherish more than you live.”*

As it stopped speaking, Captain Zheng spoke: “It’s a warning children. Are you sure you want to do this?”  
“Yes,” said Ji, determination etched across all of her features.

After an hour of pondering, they concluded. Once they found the treasure its hiding time would have run out. They would then have an encounter with the Bǎozàng chuán’s worst enemy the Cai Qian pirates. The part they did not understand was the line “To take you must give, Something you cherish more than you live.”

Suddenly, in the distance, they heard a loud BOOM. As they rushed out onto the deck, they noticed the ship was eerily quiet. Looking over the railing, to their amazement they saw a giant gold cross etched in the still black water. They had reached the treasure! But how? Rushing into the ship’s bridge, they saw the helmsman lay fast asleep on the wheel. All the other sailors lay in a profound daze. The vessel had drifted to the spot all by itself.

On taking another look at the cross, they realised that a few words were scrawled around it. The words read...

*“To find what you seek;  
you must insert a key.  
The key is in your hand and  
tells you where you stand.”*

Suddenly Buwei spoke up. “Maybe they mean the map. And that is what we must give to get what we seek.”

With great effort, Captain Zheng nodded “Yes this will benefit the whole country” he said and slowly lowered the map into the water at the centre of the cross.

With a great flash and a big splash loads of treasure rose out of the water. Masses of gold and silver bars, coins, goblets, jewellery, gems, and other precious items, hovered in front of them and then gently set itself down on the ship passing through the flooring as if it were non-existent and filling the vessel’s already full vault.

They had found the treasure. Now the other seamen had woken up, from the spell cast on them, just in time to see the end. In all the excitement no one saw the Cai Qian pirate ship emerge from the dense fog.

Grey clouds formed overhead, and rain poured down heavily. The waves thrashed against the ship tossing it from one place to another. Lightning crackled, thunder rumbled, and Qian’s ship came closer and closer. A big BOOM started the battle; the cannons were opened and fired regularly, men fought on each vessel with spears and swords. For hours on end, the battle and storm raged on. Captain Zheng constantly battled five men at a time including the fiercest, meanest warrior of all time; Cai Qian. Then, just as the Bǎozàng chuán started to lose hope a bolt of lightning struck Cai Qian’s ship burning it to the sea-bed. But Qian and forty of his men were still alive and fighting on the Bǎozàng chuán. The children stood helplessly in the background as a copper dagger cluttered at their feet. Picking up the dagger, little Ji ran into the battle before her brother could stop her. Hurling the blade with all her strength, she let go and hit Cai Qian in the heart. Seeing their leader dead, the remaining pirates jumped overboard to avoid capture, leaving the Bǎozàng chuán peaceful again.

THE END

*The Bǎozàng chuán distributed the treasure that helped various cities and towns develop and prosper. a large donation was made towards the upliftment of families of the sea men who gave<sup>1</sup> up their lives.*

*Little Ji was the hero of the night by killing Cai Qian. The children were honoured with an enthusiastic reception. The hardworking little village of Shandong received a sizeable portion of the treasure for their active part in its search, and everyone lived comfortably ever after.*

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<sup>1</sup> Tanisha Kirpalani, Year 8, Kellett School.

# Canglong

King George V School, Zhao, Ran – 13

The *Canglong's* surgical cabinet holds two prosthetics: a metal femur and a metal heart.

I've lost limbs to accidents, organs to time and disease, and sometimes, necessity of environment. I don't know when I recognized inevitability and decided to print a copy of every body part I'd conceivably need to be replaced, and sure enough, 29<sup>th</sup> century state-of-the-art 3D printers failed to serve my cause—but hell if I hadn't tried to print another printer with it before it broke down.

I'm not the technological type, at least not according to the standards of my profession, but I'm happy to say I've managed to figure out not to print components taller than the *Canglong's* cabin ceiling. Of course, there's the dent in the roof to show. I guess it's a waiting game now. Waiting for my 3D printed heat shields to run out, waiting to see if it'll be my body or the *Canglong* that gives first, breaks in a way that can't be replaced.

Not the heart, though. Never the heart. A thousand artificial reinforcements keep it beating, but the only way I can face my silver rictus grin without turning my head away is in the knowledge that, beneath the putter of gears and grind of oft-neglected joints, my heart, at least, is still a human's heart—this heart that wrenched and stuttered at my first sight of space and soared at my first supernova and now longs for the days when I looked to the stars with yearning instead of bitter hate; this heart that, sentimental though it may be, marks me irreversibly as human.

Sometimes I'll blur my eyes and pretend that they're electric cities, press my palms to my eyes and watch the rather bloom of phosphenes. I'll tell myself that the jute strands of my lashes distort discolored neon signs instead of cold, chatoyant stars, that I'll blink and the world that comes into focus will be just that, a world and not a sterile isolation chamber. That it never happened, that fateful day when I radioed *Bi An* after a hundred-year cryosleep and it didn't answer back.

And sometimes I'll wonder why I didn't end it there, almost delirious with panic, frantically scanning message after message of *contact not established*, the acrid insinuation of *last human alive* hovering like a carrion vulture waiting for a man to die. Sometimes I wonder why I turned the *Canglong* around with its cargo of *Bi An* approved gifts and set its trajectory to the nearest star system.

So many decades, and it's the silence that gets to me, creeping into the passionless hum of machinery in the liminal spaces between tasks and threatening to erode the edges of my mind. It's in those instances, not yet spent in cryosleep, is when the memories threaten to overwhelm me.

Because you could fill encyclopedia upon encyclopedia with the things I've seen and never breach its depth, aboard this battered starship loaded with memories.

I've seen sentient gas clouds, spindly creatures as tall as mountains, creatures living in bioluminescent oceans with tentacles spanning continents. I'll orbit their planets, gleaning what information I can, and then I'll descend. They'll point their weapons at me, for they are no fools.

The *Caolong* is a nimble, catlike thing with four antennae outstretched watchfully and *Bi An's* slogan, *the modern treasure voyage*, spanning her width in twenty-four languages. Her exterior can retract to show shaded transparent walls that reveal our absence of weapons.

Sometimes they'll see it, and let me land. And if they don't, that's okay too. I'll put myself into cryosleep and set a new trajectory. Each journey takes a thousand years, but time has never been a limit.

Sometimes I arrive to barren desert cities, the elaborate structures projected to me from ancient light now nothing more than scaffolding and dust, standing with the impervious dignity of empty snail shells.

The wind will moan through the sand-blasted formations, fluting and morose, and I'll board my ship again.

And sometimes it will be a meteor-cracked world I wander through, sanguine skies and dried-up seas, the dull red embers of some long-abated conflagration still flickering at my feet.

But sometimes it's a civilization, a group of stargazers that greet me, flocking curiously as my ship sets down.

I show them planes and spaceships, the Hubble Telescope and the proof behind Hawking radiation. Perhaps I'll draw out Dante's *Inferno*, and it'll be well-worn, a copy I've treasured over innumerable millennia. My fingers will wander over the translucent coffee stain marring the cover, lingering over dog-eared pages crammed with spidering observations. But I'll hand it over. I want to. I must.

I ask little in return—a sachet of alien earth. A photo. A piece of technology, or perhaps a story.

I fill the *Canglong's* logbook with these stories, an ever-expanding tapestry, each one finding a home amid the rambling myriad of files and classifications.

And then I board my ship.

★★★



It's failing now. The *Canglong* is old and has been mended too many times, not enough resources to visit another planet without burning up. And my heart, too, has been broken and mended too many times. One day I'll have to replace it too.

But now I know, even as I bare my chest on the surgery table, maybe for the last time.

I'm not the last of the human race, am I?

I'm the first.

Because if there's one thing that we humans haven't failed at, it's hope.

Hope for knowledge. Hope for wealth. Hope of the here—be—dragons and undiscovered territory.

Hope that, far beyond the horizon, whether it rests on uncharted seas or uncharted stars, we'll find a kindred spirit.

That's why we keep our ports open and our telescopes trained to the sky, isn't it? That's why Zheng He embarked on those journeys and Bi An took up the torch. Hope.

And if there's one thing I know for absolute certainty, it's that it's not the electrodes that govern my titanium limbs, nor the artificial crevasse left by my beating heart, that determines whether I'm human. It's not my skin or warped anatomical structure or breathing tank that converts any trace of water to oxygen.

And these aliens, with their gas—cloud bodies and nebulous eyes and fierce, ardent hope? They're human too.

I'll broadcast the *Canglong's* log.

With the her technology, I can do it.

She'll transmit them outwards, with her four slender antennae, as momentum catapults her through light years of space I'll never hope to see.

And maybe, just maybe, when even the *Canglong* is nothing more than a twisted hunk of metal and a handful of floating ashes, a voice will crackle over the static of a radio receiver pointed to the sky of a blue—green planet not so different from our own. It'll be transmuted and fractured and borderline unintelligible and following it, a white line lapsing into darkness like a lighthouse's rays, will be rows and rows of numbers.

And it won't be easy, but they'll manage, grasping for the whispered nuance written fervently into the lines of zeros and ones.

They'll manage, and a message will appear. *The Canglong's surgical cabinet holds two prosthetics, it'll read. A metal femur and a metal heart.*

★ ★ ★

So, let me tell you a story.

Not about me or a long—forgotten solar system, not about the Milky Way or even the tiny, failed species that is the human being, prideful and naïve and setting fire to a planet in their thirst for the stars.

No.

It's about you.

Because there's so much light you still can't see.

# My Personal Diary

King George V School, Zhao, Rou – 11

## The night before I set off.

Through the cracked, fog-clouded windows, I can see the waves roaring and spitting foam. A frothing, raging tide, blazing underneath the golden, silk-woven moon.

“Zheng He, are you crazy?” Calloused hands thump my back. “There are pirates out there. Have you not heard of Chen Ziyu?” I hear chairs scoot closer, and a hand gripping my face, pulling me closer to a hushed, husky voice. I turn to face my friend as his spittle grazes my ear. “Chen Ziyu is the most feared and respected pirate. He will be sure to hear about hundreds of ships carrying these treasures! He will surely come murder you!”

And if he doesn’t get to you first, the waves will. They drown and they are greedy. They grasp countless men with blood-washed fingers and sink them to the remnants of shipwrecks and skeletons, not to mention the—

Their words are like a constant twittering of birds pecking me raw. *Be careful of this. You will die because of that. There are pirates out there. There are monsters out there.*

Their words have pierced me until I am black and blue, dripping with blood.

I’ve read enough scrolls about Chen Ziyu, the murdering waves and the forsaken beasts wandering out the closeted home of China. I know enough. And with each impending second to the quarter moon I set off, a deep, dark stone rolls into my stomach.

Why am I doing this? They ask me. You are stupid. You are crazy.

No.

I am a man serving my country. Can’t they understand? I’m doing this for them.

Yet still, they cluck and fuss.

“I’m leaving tomorrow. You can’t convince me not to.” I say instead, pushing up from my chair.

In an instant, my friend is after me, leaping up to bar the door, with that stubborn jut of his chin.

“You do not understand, Zheng He!”

“Yes, I do!” I shout back.

And for a moment, decades of friendship wipes away, and we are bristling.

Words surface on the tip of my tongue, and that coil of fiery anger lashes in my stomach as my friend curls his fists.

But instead of throwing himself upon me, he stoops down and tenderly scoops up my hand. There is a universe of pain in the deep brown well of his eyes as he stares up at me. “Return to us, my friend. Come back home.”

There is nothing I can say.

“We’ll all miss you, Zheng He. Just promise me you won’t forget about us. That you’ll try to come back. Please.”

“I—I will.”

Before I reach the door, I steal a glance behind my shoulder. My friend is still kneeling forlornly on the cold, hard ground, eyes fixated on me, as if he couldn’t bear to see me go.

I turned and slammed the door behind me, before they could all see the bright tears glinting in my eyes.

That couldn’t be the last thing they remembered about me.

## Day 10 of the Voyage

For the 6th day in a row, the sea heaves beneath me. I clutch my stomach, cowering in the corner of my den, as frigid waves slam into my ship, tossing us airborne

And then the drunken giants stop toying with us. They roar with fury and smash. The ship groans, and terrible, discordant screams drown out the splinter of breaking wood.

Red-tinged water sloshes against my ankles, but the only noise I can hear is my prayer to Allah.

There is another *thunk*, and we careen into the air. Who’s steering the ship?

Against the howl of the wind and lash of salt, I crawl across the deck, flat across the wood.

The steering wheel is unmanned.

With a roar, ripped away into the icy night, I leap for the wildly spinning wheel.

I cling on all night and morning, until our ship bursts free from its watery prison, and charges through the pale sunlight, battle-scarred, and red.

### Day 70 of the Voyage

60 days have passed since the storm. 60 days. How many lives have been lost so far? There's too many to count.

I stay positive for my crew. *We've stayed alive so far! The sky is so blue today, the sun so bright! We are very lucky men!*

The men laugh and pat me on the back. They don't remark on this dangerous game of chance we are playing. Instead, they say. This Zheng He is so cheerful!

How many of them are putting on a charade, too?

Suddenly, amid the aimless gossiping, the sound of a horn blasts through the air.

Men scurry everywhere, brawling for the telescope, peering into the distance.

What we see is indescribable.

Men and women in strips of clothing, move around, leading horses painted carefully black and white. We gasp over the tall, golden domes, and the twisting, curving trees. We point at the bright clothing and the wooden brown skin.

What is this new world? We whisper.

At first, when the arcs of white streak through the air, we applaud and jump on the spot, little children. But when one of our men crumples to the floor, the atmosphere shifts.

Squeals turn into roars as I race to the fallen man, weaving between the furious crew. They roll cannonballs across the ship, flexing sinewy muscles.

There is a sizzle, and a man prepares to light the cannon.

"Do not fire at them!" I yell as I wrap silken cloths around the groaning man. "We come in peace. We just want to trade. We need a messenger to go to the docks of this island!"

Everyone stares numbly at me.

"Um. Yeah, sure. I'll do it." I mutter. I'm not sure if it's a cold hand creeping up my spine, or just a trickle of sweat. But it's lingering there as I slide into the small rowboat.

Arrows target it, and I row furiously, ducking my head.

Once my boat knocks against wood, I stand up carefully and rest a foot on the wooden planks of land. My arms are raised. My back is straight. My skin is cold without warmth of much clothing.

In a wave-like motion, the soldiers surge forwards, but a tiny soldier holds them back.

The soldiers hesitate and stare at the general as he jabs himself in the chest with a bony finger

I face him silently. Is he telling his men to retreat?

But he yells a string of gibberish and dives himself.

There is only the sound of blood pounding in my ears. I'm not going to fight. I won't hurt him. I can't hurt him.

But when I open my eyes, it is just the rows of soldiers, frozen.

The small soldier is floundering in the waves. His fate is spelt out by the weight of his uniform, and the salt clambering up his chin.

But no one attempts to rescue him. What could they do?

In the silence, broken by splashes, I hear screams again. The thundering shatter of wood. Silk and porcelain lost in the howl of the wind.

I'm not quite sure what happened, until ice slams into my chest, and fists pound my back. Somehow, the soldier is on my back, and I am dragging him to the docks. Isn't he just a man with family as well?

No one dares to fire.

### Day 296

Allah has bestowed upon us a gift from heaven. A graceful mammal, tall, long-necked and orange, with the tongue of a devil. We stroke it before we set sail. It is our good luck talisman.

Our ships are fuller than before, now, full of alien objects and animals. My room is stuffed too, with little presents I picked for myself. Souvenirs.

We've turned back, and I can already see the Great Wall of China, winding in the distance. There's so much more out there. So many things we can see if we just open our eyes.

I sigh.

A man joins me by the moonlit sea. "Will you come back on a voyage again?" He asks me.

I think, and instead of black flags with skulls fluttering towards us. Instead of bloody waves and broken bodies. Instead of fear, doubt, and only the hovering hope, I see the answer in the blazing stars.

A heartsick, ethereal melody.

My heart sings along.

*Yes. Yes, I will come back.*

“For the treasure out there?” the man whispers.

I glance at him, and at my cabin. My cluttered cabin piled with souvenirs.

His question takes me back in time, until there’s only me, my heart and the wisdom and kindness

I’ve learnt.

The beautiful unimaginable I saw.

The trials Allah threw at me. But I had leaped over them easily, hadn’t I?

And it’s there, and I suddenly understand now.

What use are these pretty objects, we collect, anyway?

No.

The fruit was the journey.

The journey for me.

For me and my heart.

# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

*Korean International School, Kang, Tae Stewart – 13*

In the 15th century, voyages were carried out by the Ming Treasure fleet carrying gold, silk, and treasure. They gave these treasures as gifts to the poor, or people who needed them. They were very kind. They became friends with many countries via the gifting, and were recognised by most. During these voyages, many pirate attacks took place. As the Ming ships were full of gold, they were very heavy and didn't travel very fast at all.

It was my first time on a voyage, I was a rookie. My name is Zhang Wei. I stepped onto the huge boat carrying lots of valuable treasure. I was very nervous at the start, since I had never been on one of these treasure voyages before, but at the same time I was so, so excited. The captain of the ship named Zheng He [or as we had to call him, Mr He] welcomed me aboard and told me where we were heading and how far it would be. All of the workers had boarded and the anchor was hoisted above the railing – we were off! Sailing was a very new thing to me and I felt like I loved it! The wind blowing through my hair, the sound of the ocean as the ship gushed through the waves; it was all very pleasant.

Mr He came up to me and told me my duties on the boat that day. I was commanded to look out for any other ships, mainly pirate ships. After he had instructed me, he disappeared behind the door to his cabin. At this point I was very worried. I had no idea how to distinguish pirate boats from sailing boats, or cargo boats. I was going to enter Mr He's office and ask him, but I felt it was unnecessary, because I knew we would not come across pirates.

We had headed south for quite a while now. I checked with the captain for the time and he said it had been 6 hours since boarding. I stepped out of the cabin and leaned over the railing with spits of water splashing in my face. It was the most relaxing thing I had done in a long time. After an hour more of "looking out for pirates" Mr He told me to go to bed. I ran down to my [more like our] cabin and sat in my hammock day dreaming. About five minutes later I dozed off.

Since we had boarded at 7PM and eaten dinner beforehand, when we woke up at 6AM, the crew were all very hungry. Our breakfast was on the deck waiting for us. The food was bone soup and tea as a drink. When I arrived and took a glance at the food, I gagged. Everyone had already dug in to their portion, with me standing there blankly, disgusted. After I had seen everybody somewhat enjoy the food, I started eating because I would die without food, right? It wasn't as bad as I had anticipated.. Nevermind, it was disgusting. I was on my last spoon of the soup when then I heard the bells ring loudly. I knew what this meant – the pirates, they were onto us.

I jumped up and pushed my body against the railing looking east for the boat. There it was, a pirate boat, cannons dotted about on the side of the ship, men frolicking on the ship as if they were excited to eat us. My heart sank and I froze, light headed. It seemed my whole life had flashed before my eyes! Zheng slapped me on the shoulder and shouted, "you have duties to do!" I nodded. He had told me at the start of the voyage what I was to do in an emergency "pirate" situation like this one.

I rushed down to the cabins where two cannons stood with buckets of cannonballs right beside them. I was told to wait until the ship was completely in line with ours, then fire. I looked up through the tiny hole above the cannon and saw our soldiers finally armed with swords, ready to attack at any moment. The pirates were closing in on our ship. I was scared to death, but I still held my ground. This was it, the pirate crew threw ropes and flew over to our ship. All I could hear was the slashing of swords and the screaming of the crew. I then remembered I had not fired the cannon. It was time. I picked up a cannonball weighing as much as I did, and stuffed it into the chute of the cannon, grabbed a torch and lit the fuse. BOOM! The cannon fired. After a few seconds it reached the other ship and soon water was seeping in through the gigantic hole that the cannon ball had just made. I felt truly accomplished.

I heard loud footsteps heading down the cabin hatch. It was the pirates! My heart was pounding and as an instinct I put my hands up. They were shouting at me in a foreign language that I didn't understand, but then suddenly, they rushed back up the hatch and onto the deck. Again, I was frozen in shock, still with my hands up. The slashing of swords had stopped and I looked back through the cannon hole and saw that the pirates had given up and fled on their ship.

I cheered immensely as I was so relieved. When I walked back through the cabin hatch, I breathed fresh air and finally saw that Zheng, the captain, was alive and well. When we all got settled, it really felt like nothing had happened. I leaned over the railing, relaxed once again. We had just reached Africa, our final destination, and stopped there to give gifts of treasure to the people that lived there. After a couple of days in Africa, we sailed back to China with no pirate attacks, as if they were now scared of us.

# Dimension traveling in the Ming Treasure Voyages

*Korean International School, Ku, Matthew – 11*

My name is Steve, I was born in China and in my lifetime, I always wanted to set sail to find new things, but I can't build a boat. So everyday I study books and learn how to build a boat.

One day, a man said something to the whole china" Hello China, I am Shang Da, today I am here to say I wanted to set sail to different places to find new things to upgrade China" So he gathered some people to join his sailing crew, and I joined the crew. The next day night, our crew had a meeting about what kind of ship are we going to build and where are we going, after the meeting we discussed that we are going to build a dimension traveling ship and we are going to The Pirates Of Caribbean, Peter Pan and Aladdin

After 6 months, we have build 6 Dimension Traveling Ships and as the people cheered, we raised the sail to the west side, after that we drove all of our boats in high speed and then Shang Da said"Everybody we are in high speed now, please stay seated and we are going to The Pirates Of Caribbean dimension in 3,2,1 and pull the dimension traveling trigger"Then a flash of light appeared and I murmured to me"

This is the most beautiful thing I have ever seen in my entire life!" as I was looking at the light, we start to hear the theme song of The Pirates Of Caribbean"ching ching ching oof, bang bang bang, nooooo!"and when heard those sounds, we all think we are going into a battle. Then after ten seconds, we saw the flying dutchman crew and black pearl crew fighting with each other. Fortunately, we land on the sea and we didn't land on one of the boats, otherwise our boat will be crashed and the boats will sink, so the captain said attack the flying dutchman crew with our chinese swords we bought and so we aboard to the flying dutchman's ship and we use our swords to fight them.

When the captain of flying dutchman, Davy Jones saw two vs one, he shouted"What unfair! everybody retreat!" So the flying dutchman's ship got away. Suddenly the captain of the Black Pearl crew, Jack Sparrow came to our boat and asked"Thank you for helping us to defeat Davy Jones, would you like to come with us to get Davy Jones heart and kill him?" Shang Da replied"Sure thing pirate guy, by the way my name is Shang Da, captain of my crew, what is your name?" Jack Sparrow said" My name is Jack Sparrow, captain of the Black Pearl Crew and do not call me pirate guy." So then our first adventure begins in this dimension. So we started to track down the flying dutchman crew and find important evidence and map to get Davy Jones's heart. The next day, we successfully stole the map where Davy Jones's heart is located from the marines and we also found out that the marines are working together!

So we set up a great plan. First Hector Barbossa, General of the Black Pearl will go to the flying dutchman's boat and disguise as a marine and bring in a barrow with some rum and Jack Sparrow inside, then he will order two marines to put Davy Jones heart inside a treasure chest lock it and put it on the barrel of rums and guard it in the captain's room, after that, Hector will give Davy Jones the key for unlocking the chest and Jack will get out of the barrel, kill the two guards, get the chest and then get out of there and distract Davy Jones for a sword fight to get the key on the yardarm of the boat, Finally Jack will have the key and pass it to Will Turner, a rookie pirate, open the chest, get his heart and use a knife and stabbed it.

After a few moments later, something happened to Davy Jones, he started to act strangely and fell into the sea and that is the end of Davy Jones. So when Davy Jones is dead, Jack Sparrow, Will Turner and Hector Barbossa use the ropes of the Flying Dutchman boat and swing back to the Black Pearl ship and the Black Pearl crew fire dozens of cannon balls at The Flying Dutchman ship and the ship sank in to the bottom of the ocean. After the battle, we had a pirate party and Jack Sparrow said"Thank you for helping us to kill Davy Jones here have a treasure chest" Shang Da was so happy and then he replied"thank you so much, I have never seen that much gold before! But it is time for us to go" so we went back to our ship and we didn't use our dimension traveling thing, we activated wings and we flew to London.

When we arrived to London we pass through then Big Ben to the south side and pass through the clouds and we started to see Neverland from Peter Pan, So we all sang the Peter Pan theme song" You can fly, you can fly. You can fly!" When we land there. First we parked our ship on Cannibal Cove, Then we went to Hangman's Tree to find the Lost Boys to find Peter Pan, when we find Peter Pan, we all cheered and got an autograph from him and I asked him" What is your real name?" he replied" seeeeeecrect!"

After relaxing with Peter Pan and the lost boys we went to the Indian Camp and we found Indian Chief is missing and so we all asked the hunters there and they all said a shadow appeared and grabbed Indian Chief away and the Shadow looks very similar to Captain Hook and the voice looks similar to Smee, Captain Hook's sidekick. So Peter Pan used Tinkerbell's Tinker Dust to make us fly to Captain Hook's ship, Devil Sea. After we land there, Peter Told us to hide in some barrels and he will do a Smee trick, "What is the Smee Trick?" I asked, Peter Pan replied "I will pretend to be Smee by using my voice" So hid behind the bow and said "Captain it is twelve o'clock, it is time for lunch and also bring Mr. Indian Chief because I made him a special meal!"

Then Captain Hook came out from his room with Indian Chief and put him on a chair and tied him with ropes and captain hook sat next to him. After that Smee gave Hook a dish of catfish with crocodile soup and he gave him tiger meat with curry sauce and he gave the other pirates peacock meat with sweet avocado sauce.

While The pirates are eating happily Peter Pan told us to fly to the crow's nest knock down the guard pirate up there to the sea and then use you weapons to attack the pirates and he leaded Tick-Tock The Crocodile and he will push Captain Hook to the sea and the crocodile will chase him and so captain hook will run forever and we won the battle. So Peter Pan gave us some souvenirs from the hunters of Indian Camp, Beautiful seashells from mermaid seashore and weapons from the Lost Boys So we said goodbye and we flew back to China. When we reached China, the people cheered and we told them what happened and where did we went.



# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

*Korean International School, Kwok, Ruth – 13*

I am Nian, I am 17 years old, I live with my elder sister in Chengdu, I had a very normal life before the Journey, the Journey to Myanmar which was happened in the 1405s, I had been asked to join an adventure with Captain Zheng He, I woke up very early that day cause I am very ecstatic. I ate my breakfast, packed my bags and ran to the pier. I met Ying and Chan, they are also the new members of the boat. After some chat, we went up to the boat, we saw Captain Zheng He, he has a big mustache on and he looks very terrible, I mean serious. 10 minute later, everyone had arrived and we are ready, we were ready to go.

Today is my first day to go on a boat, actually, I felt very nervous, but I acted very comfortable. It had passed 2 hours already, our boat had arrived in the middle of the Indian Ocean and there was a tsunami happening in the sea, that made us very dizzy. About 30 minutes later, the tsunami finally ends, and we carry on. It is my first time went to Myanmar, Captain Zheng He had told us that this time we are going to visit a Regal name Mr. Yan and we are also going to trade with him and help a poor tribe in Myanmar which are the Karenni.

Another day we had arrived in Myanmar and stop in, Taunggyi we parked our boat and going to eat our lunch, we went to a restaurant which is selling Myanmar food, we ate Mohinga and it tastes fantastic. We used 30 minutes to finish our lunch and we went back to the boat. But when we went back to the boat and try to carry on our adventure to Mawlamyine where is a city in Myanmar. We suddenly found out that our bags had stolen by some strangers who live in Myanmar pier.

“We must find the people who stole our money and bags and take the bags back because we still need to trade with Mr. Yan.” Captain Zheng He said.

So we went to every street and house in Taunggyi, I went to a poor woman’s house, she has 3 kids, and they look very sick but the woman didn’t have enough money to take them to the doctor. So I decided to give some money to them after we take our money back. I told captain Zheng He my thoughts and he agreed that. It had passed 2-hour already, we still couldn’t found our money. Until Ying, Chan and I went into a bar that sells wines and foods.

“I saw Mian’s bag,” I said

“Go and tell Captain, Chan” Ying said

Captain Zheng He came into the bar, all the people who are inside the bar had a big ax, they hold the ax in the air and ran to us. Captain Zheng He suddenly took out his Swords. And start to fight with them, I ran out of the bar, ask others for help, I also went to take a weapon and try to help. We had fight for about 2- hour, the two are becoming very tired. But luckily we got someone that is coming to save us which is Mr. and Mrs. Feng, they are the friends of Captain Zheng He from the past, Captain Zheng He had saved their life before. So now they are going to save us now, they used their Spears to fight with them, they had taken back our money.

“Thank you, Feng” Captain Zheng He said

“Nothing, but could we join the boat, we miss the time that we are having an adventure together.” Mr. Feng said

So Mr. and Mrs. Feng joined our adventure when we finish clear up, I went to the poor woman home and give her some money. Captain Zheng He decided to rest for one day and carry on tomorrow. We went back to the sea and continued our journey. We use 7 days to arrived Mawlamyine, We met Mr. Yan in the very next day, he wanted to buy the special metal which is named Vibranium. Vibranium is a special metal that usually appears in Wakanda where is located in Africa. Captain Zheng He has some which are from his friend- Mr. Hui. Mr. Hui gave the Vibranium to Captain Zheng He is because Captain Zheng He had saved his family before he was a Captain of a boat.

“ I need just one bottle of Vibranium” Mr. Yan Said

“ Mr. Hui had given me about 6 bottles of it,” Captain Zheng He said

So we went back to the boat, we took a bottle of Vibranium, and we got 33 USD back for trading the Vibranium with Mr. Yan. After all of that, we met the Karennis, they are a group that lives in Myanmar, we helped them by giving them money and build a new home for them. We Had much fun together, Chan, Ying and I played with their kids, Main and Wang were cooking dinner for them, Captain Zheng He and the others were building a new home for them which is the biggest house that I had ever seen. Usually, Captain Zheng He was carrying a scary face but this time we all think that maybe he was not that terrible.

Today is the day which the journey ends, everyone needs to go home and ready for the next adventure. We went back to the pier in Chengdu. My sister went to pick me up, I don't really know what happened to her cause she looks very sad, maybe she hates me and doesn't want me to come back home.

“ I miss you so much, Nian,” my sister says

Oh, I thought she hate me, so she is sad when I come back. I miss her too but I just don't really want to tell her about it, I think is because I am shy maybe. Actually, I also missed my mom and dad, but they were not here now, cause they are working in France, I haven't seen them since last year. we arrived home will my sister and she cooks a dinner for me it's tastes very good. I am very looking forward to going on an adventure with Captain Zheng He and all the members who are in the boat.

# The Dreadful Life

*Korean International School, Lai, Alpha – 14*

People thought of me as a disgusting little dwarf. Everyone on the ship teased me as I swept the deck multiple times a day. I was smaller than average people and half the weight of an average man. Not only was I the one who would scrub the deck, but also the one who did everything not related to fighting. Nobody could understand the pain I went through.

A whole fleet was sent by the Emperor to give away gold and fine precious items. I mean why would you not keep it to yourself and share it the villagers and the poor people like me. Then no one would die of starvation and it could rebuild our economy. But instead, give it to other places? What a laugh!

We went around the world and some scenes were astonishing! The landscape in other places was different than home. Large amounts of water falling off cliffs. People back at home said waterfalls they were. It was supposedly the most beautiful scenery in the world. What fortune I had to see all this, they said. But to me, even looking at this would never get me happy or excited

I have been on this ship for at least 2 years now since they put “Wanted people to join the army” posters all around the village. I immediately applied for the job and they accepted me without putting me to the test. “That was strange.” I thought. Everyone said that it was really hard to get in and you’ll have a luxurious life there. But

As a young man at the age of almost 20, I have already experienced many things normal people with a normal life would not have. The experience of life and death has changed me a lot. Seeing blood is common for me and it doesn't freak me out as it used to. People say watching your loved ones die is the worst thing that can happen to you and it is true. I watched my wife and children die in front of me and the feeling back then 5 years ago was dreadful and the pain...unbearable.

But not every day was as lucky as the day we saw the waterfall. We have received many messages that unwanted pirates could come to us any minute whilst the sky was dark and everyone was unprepared and it said to rush back as soon as possible.

I didn't mind dying, but at that moment, all I thought of was my loved ones. My wife and children waiting for me and the feeling I had was so uncomfortable.

The atmosphere today was gloomy and the pirate spirit was down, unlike other days, the pirates would be chugging down their beer and having fun. But today, everyone knew what was going to happen and no one was in the mood. Today is the last day.

I see the backs of the pirates, slaughtering each other. I run as fast as I could with my hands on my head screaming and it felt like my lungs were about to burst. I feel the blood rushing through my brain as more red slimy liquid squirts on my hands. I hear my name angrily called out multiple times but too scared to reply, I rush in the toilet locking myself in. I came out when my name was not called out anymore. I knew it was over.

# Where am I ?

*Korean International School, Lee, Amy – 11*

I woke up to the sound of rustling... “Where am I? Where in the world is this?” Before I could think more, more rustling came.. I am an 11 year old shy girl and not a very brave one so I clutched my hands really tightly that my palms started to sweat. Before I knew it, A bright sunlight hit my eyes. That was when I woke up...

“Augh, what is this place?” I mumbled to myself. Seconds later, I found out that I was on a ship! Not just a regular ship.. I saw... Pirates?! How am I seeing this? I rubbed my eyes hoping it was just my imagination flying past me. Before I knew it, I heard a deep man’s voice that sounded like my dad.

I opened my eyes as quickly as I could, hoping that the voice came from my dad but no luck. The first thing I saw when I opened my eyes was this huge man’s chest. I looked up, expecting to see a monster, but no. It wasn’t a monster.. It was a pirate. I gulped, I freezed for a moment because I wasn’t able to think. Without thinking, I sprinted to the nearest exit door. Right before I touched the door, I hit a guy. I’m not entirely sure what happened but I think that’s what happened. I’m pretty sure I did a triple backflip and then landed straight on my head because as I’m writing this, my head is like a painkiller right now! I’m not sure what happened after that but I DO— “hold on.. Is that...an island?!”

Right before I did my happy dance, I saw a shadow behind me. I slowly turned my head to see who was behind me. As I expected it was a pirate. But not just any pirate. I saw a badge on his clothes reading ‘head pirate.’ Uh oh. I gulped.

The first thing he did was to grab my arm. Then, he picked me up with one hand and told me “Hey little one, don’t expect nobody to see you around here, you are our pirates main suspect.” Boy, I was beyond terrified but also amazed at the same time. Last time I checked I was 34 kilos! How could he carry me with only one hand?!

He continued. “Actually, you aren’t too bad here kiddo.” He dragged me closer to his mouth. “You could help us with something useful since your useless here!” I coughed. His breath smelled worse than my dad’s one year old meat lasagna!

“Can you keep a secret?” He asked me. “Yes.” I said. “Alright, I will trust you. Can I trust you?” I nodded. “Alright then! I’ll tell you a little bit about where we are heading to. Do you know where you are little kiddo?” I shrugged. “I woke up under this pirate ship, I have no idea who brought me here.” “Oh! Today is your lucky day—eh?” “Umm, not really because I don’t know anything that is happening around me..” I said quietly. “Haha, that’s a witty thing to say! Let me introduce myself. I am Mr Peter Hagrid or you can call me Captain Hagrid. You are in the middle of the ocean, almost at China!” He beamed proudly.

“If you don’t know, us the pirates are trying to get a treasure from China! We’re not entirely sure where the treasure is but since we have you we can use you— er, I mean you can help us find OUR beloved treasure.” He said. “I want to help but.. What I really want to do is to go home and eat a triple scoop of chocolate ice cream!!” I cried. “Oh little girl, once you complete our orders then we can buy you anything you want.” “ANYTHING?!” I asked. “Anything” He replied. Over the next few hours, he told me what to do in China in order to get the treasure.

As soon as we got to China he dropped me off the ship he waved at me and said something weird.. He said “I’m always watching you.” and smiled. I waved back at him and smiled weakly.

As I took my first steps on China, I immediately had a foggy remembrance of this area. I thought to myself. Why does this place look so familiar? Have I been— ‘WHOOSH!’

“AHH” I screamed. I looked up at the sky and I saw gloomy greyish—purple clouds above me. I panicked. What was that thing made a big sound?! Now that I look back at it, I shouldn’t have done what I have done.

I ran straight into the country. I ran so fast that I think I could have won the world records! Unluckily, I tripped over a bundle of rocks lying on the ground. "Ugh!" I said to myself. Why am I so clumsy today?! I picked up the rocks to put them to the side so that no one else would trip on them. I picked the biggest rock and tossed it to where nobody would walk. But then, I noticed some writing on the rock. I picked it back up, squinted my eyes and stared at it. "You have.. Found... me" I read on the rock. Huh? What does THAT mean? I read the next paragraph. "Around— here... there is an.. X" It wrote. Hmm.. does that mean there's a.. Treasure around here?!? I squished the rock into my pocket and quickly scouted the area. After about an hour of running in circles trying to find the 'X' I finally found something that looked like it! I ran towards it. It was a door spray painted with 'X' I touched the door handle and tried to open the door but no luck. It wouldn't open! From the corner of my eyes, I saw the ship I was on before! It was parking near the harbour. I needed help so I ran as fast as I could like my hair was on fire!

There was nobody on the ship when I arrived there. I climbed up the ladder to find Mr Peter Hagrid, But he was nowhere to be seen. I ran around the pirate ship in circles, went underground and tripped again! This time on a bible. "Wait.. Why would the pirate ship have a bible?! This is weird.." I opened the book and surprisingly, It wasn't a bible. It was a map of the pirate ship?? Then, I heard footsteps. Not just any footsteps but footsteps coming to the direction of me.

I panicked! I didn't know what to do as someone was getting closer to me. I wanted to take a look later so I hid it in my jacket. Since a bible is huge, I tried to cover it with my arm. "Well Well Well.. Who do we have here? Is it Ms Perfect again?" said a voice that belonged to Mr Peter Hagrid. "Uhh, Hello Mr Peter Hagrid! Haha, um, so what brings you here?" I said with a fake laughter. "Oh I think I should be asking you that.." He said, narrowing his eyes at me. "I.. uhh.. Couldn't find the treasure that is why I'm on this pirate ship! I was trying to tell you that I can't find the treasure you ordered me to find!" I said confidently. "Is that so? Perhaps I don't think so. I know—" Then, out of the corner a woman's voice appeared. "Mr Peter Hagrid, There are a group of people attacking! Please help us!" "Augh, again?! It's the fourteenth time they attacked us this week!" He said as he rolled his eyes. Afterwards, he faced at me. "Don't move one muscle. I will be right back!" After saying that, He ran out the door panicking.

I said to myself "You got this." I opened the 'bible' and scanned the pages. I flipped through all 45 pages and there was one page that caught my eye. I looked closely at it. Closer and closer until.. "Ah! I got it! On the map it wrote 'treasure' where the door behind me was. Wait.. if the treasure was here all along then why did he send me out..I thought to myself.. Did he want to throw me off track? Whatever he did, ignore it! Because right now we have to figure out HOW to open this abandoned door. I waggled the handle and pushed until finally the door burst open in a shower of rust.

I dashed inside. Looked around and saw the whole room filled with all sorts of treasure. Right when she was about to touch a treasure, I noticed a note on the wall. I walked towards it it wrote: 'To anyone reading this. Please keep this treasure safe as it is treasure that we cherish. Thank you.' I must return it back to the chinese government I thought to myself. But I didn't. Why? Because it was all a dream.

# Ming's Extraordinary Treasure Voyage

*Korean International School, Lee, Sunmyung – 13*

Today was the day which Ming's Fleet would leave port for a very long journey

As the crew and officers ate a banquet provided by the king, we tried not to think about the journey ahead. The crew were presented with gifts to boost morale. Sacrifices and prayer were offered to Tianfei, the patron goddess of sailors, hoping to ensure a successful and safe passage during the voyage.

As the sun rose up the next day, the captain signals the fleet to untie their sails. As sailors untie the sails we all knew this would be a very long and difficult journey. We were committed to this journey for better or worse. The fleet of around 100 ships carrying great amounts of treasure would sail around the coast to show the wealth to other kings. The convoy of ships were heavily militarized in case of pirate attack and were carrying 27,000 troops. My name is Wang Wei and I am 23 years old. My job was to defend the ship from attackers.

Suddenly, a distant sound of drums beating signals the ships to leave port.

Day 1

The day started normal. The sea was very calm and the weather couldn't be better. As I patrolled the ship, I saw that other troops were on high alert. Then while I was patrolling the storage room, where the treasure is, I caught a Sailor stealing a bar of gold. After I alerted my officer, he was immediately executed. After that, everything went normal. First day on the ship with a death count of 1.

Day 2

I was asleep when I heard screams. At first I thought I was dreaming but then I hear more screams. Suddenly the ship starts shaking. I get up from my bed trying to figure out what was happening. Did we hit a rock? Then I hear drum beats which answered my question. The signal of enemies approaching. Suddenly, the room is in panic. Troops running around getting their armour and weapons and then running out the door. After I get all my gear, I run up to the deck. As I enter the deck, it was chaos. People were running and shouting. I ran to my post and looked at the horizon. I saw a ship in the distance but as I looked closer, I saw around 40 ships. Then I hear the officer shouting commands. After the short briefing, I run to join my group. We were in charge of the cannons. As we got ready the cannons, I heard a distant explosion. The ship on our right was hit with a cannon ball and was now on fire. As panic erupted someone lit the cannon to fire back with a permission from the officers. Suddenly, the sound of cannon fire erupted all around me. As I looked up at the horizon again, I saw flashing lights from the enemy ship. Suddenly I realized they were cannon fires and shouted to take cover. A few seconds later, the ship shook like there was an earthquake. Then, it just went black.

Day 3

When I woke up, I felt pain in my arm right away. As I opened my eyes, I saw that I was on a bed which was on a ship. I knew this because of the window next to me. As I tried to stand up, a person rushed over to me and told me I had to lie down and rest. When I asked what happened, she just said "Your ship sank." and went to treat another patient. After a few more hours in bed, I was allowed to walk around the ship. As I walked across the deck, I could see that the ship, which I was on, was in the middle of Ming's fleet. After I talked with a few troops, I figured out what happened. After I blacked out, the fighting went on for a few more hours until the enemy ships were routed. The ship which I was in had sank but most of the people there made it out alive due to rescue attempts. For now we were safe, but for how much longer?

*Korean International School, Leung, Jayden – 11*

In the Atlantic Ocean the fleet were heading to U.S.A. “Hey Wai, did you found the values?” said Po. Wai replied in a struggled voice “Yup Po, but why do you want me to pick it up?” “Well because the planks surrounding the valuables is almost broken so the lightest one won’t fall from it.” said Po. “Ok but why don’t you fix it?” said Wai curiously. “Well when someone tries to steal it they fall.” said Po.

“Or you’re lazy”

“Both”

“Hey Captain Wu I got the gold” said Wai. “Nice work, prepare them and remember this is a sign of peace not a diversion” said the Captain Wu. Wai let out a huge sigh.

"Hnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnn..... Ok but you must not do anything stupid." Said Ooga booga in a serious voice. "Thank you, we will not harm you or any of your people Ooga booga and we will give them some of our valuables." said Captain Wu.

“It’s ok now what should we do with the vessel?” Po use a grapppler to pick up the vessel. “I say we chuck the vessel into the sea.” said Po. “Ok” Said Captain Wu. Then Po Threw the vessel across the sea and everyone was happy the end.

# Captain of My Own Ship

*Korean International School, Mannion, Catorina – 13*

My dad is respected by everyone he knows and is feared by those who have heard stories about him. He is the captain of this ship and works for the emperor. Being his son, I am entitled to be the next captain and therefore am well known by the people on this vessel.

I grew up watching my dad lead his crew through the dangerous parts of the sea. I watched him battle armies of unknown countries on behalf of the emperor. I always felt safe on the ship since I knew my dad could not be defeated, until recently.

We were sent to collect silk from another part of China when a wave bigger than I ever saw crashed down on us. When everyone came to, no one was hurt and the ship was in good condition but we seemed to be lost. "Captain, captain, we seem to have lost our map as well as our way," said one of the crew members.

"Do we not have any way to tell where we are?" Father asked.

"No, it is still light so we cannot use the stars. There is no land in sight so we cannot ask for directions. What should we do?"

"Keep sailing on and we should find either a ship or land. Until then, keep calm and stay put"

"Yes, Captain," replied the crew and they continued on with their business.

I stared in awe as my father directed his crew members. We were lost in the middle of the sea and he seemed to know exactly what to do. "Li, stop standing around and get to work," he said with a smile on his face.

We may be pirates, but we weren't always mean and angry. If it was necessary then my dad would fire at attacking ships but we were usually peaceful pirates. Being peaceful pirates, we did not expect to be greeted in a violent manner when we reached this remote stretch of land. Sadly, this was exactly how we were greeted.

"They must've spotted us from quite far away" a person in the crowd that had gathered up front stated.

Father agreed and went on to tell everyone to get ready for a violent meeting.

When we were about 500 metres away from the land, they started to fire. They used cannons and catapults with flaming projectiles. They missed but we feared they missed on purpose. We kept coming closer and realised that an army of just over a hundred had gathered on the beach. Had they expected us? We were so distracted by the men on the beach that we didn't notice the two ships approaching us from both sides. When we finally noticed, it was too late. The ships attached themselves to us and jumped onto our ship. I ran for cover as my dad and his crew grabbed their weapons. I knew better than to stay above so I ran down and hid in my dad's office.

I heard shouting and guns firing but I was not scared at all. This has happened many times before but not with two ships and an army 100 men strong. Even with the given circumstances, I felt safe. That is until I heard footsteps. Two men, definitely not from my dad's crew, had entered the captain's office. I watched them raid the room before leaving and telling their men that the room was cleared.

As soon they left, I saw that everyone was gone. I was only fourteen but knew that I had to go after them. I did the only logical thing and jumped off the boat and swam ashore.

The army was easy to spot. I followed them to their base and saw them tie up my dad's crew. Most of the members were unconscious, some were just waking up. Two men guarded my dad and his crew. On me, I had a hammer and a loaded gun so I figured it should be easy to save the crew.



I thought of a plan. I noticed that the two men walked in a pattern. Every minute they would cross paths and continue walking the perimeter. If I jumped down from my hiding spot, I could hit them with my hammer and they would both be knocked out. From there, I should have enough time to untie the crew and leave before they wake up, therefore avoiding any violence.

I waited and just before the two men crossed paths, I jumped down and hit them on the head. They both fell unconscious and I set to work untying the crew members that were awake. There were ten members still motionless. We untied them and decided to carry them. Just then, four other men from the army entered the room. Everyone froze, including the men that just walked in. I didn't freeze up, but I did overreact. I pulled out my gun and shot them before I threw my hammer at the last guy killing them and knocking out the last guy. Everyone stared at me, shocked at what I did. Even my dad just looked at me. "Hurry," I said filled with adrenaline. " get the remaining members. I made quite a sound when I fired those guns so we have to move. Let's go."

We ran, I didn't carry anybody but even then I was running faster than I have ever before. I reached the ship first and only then did I notice that we were being followed. How did I not notice that before? I ran to the top of the ship and began backing out of the dock. I shouted to the crew to get to their stations. I knew I wasn't the captain, but it felt right. 200 men firing in our direction. I ordered the crew to fire back. My dad stood to the side and watched with pride as I ordered his crew around.

We made it out alive. Thankfully, nothing was damaged. I continued ordering everyone around until no longer felt a rush. I calmed down and gave the wheel to my dad. He smiled and accepted.

We were still lost after that incident but managed to find our way back to China after three weeks at sea. The crew respected me more than they ever did before. I was promoted to co-captain because my father said he saw true leadership in me during those two hours when I was filled with adrenaline.

I had proven myself to my father and to the crew. I had made a name for myself by saving my dad and his members. I am only co-captain now but am one step closer to becoming the captain of my own ship.

# Ming Treasure Voyages with Peaches and snowball

*Korean International School, Maryon, Giselle – 11*

My name's Peaches and I'm a guinea pig. I live in China in a guinea pig town called Bonnytown. We're not really Chinese guinea pigs, our ancestors were from Yorkshire. I live in a tree, in a hanging sack filled with soft cushions and blankets. I'm going to go for a walk with my friend Snowball now. She's a white hamster. "Hi, Snowball!" I say. "Should we go to the forest and pick some acorns?" "Yeah!" she says. We go to the forest. We walk in, and ten minutes later, we hear footsteps. We turn around and find a gang of Chinese Pirates! "OH NO!" I say. The pirates say, "What are cute little animals doing out here in the forest?" The leader of the gang is a fox wearing a piece of cloth around his head. There's also a racoon, a grey wolf, a water rat, and a weasel. They catch us and carry us away. A moment later we're at Penny Beach, and we see a big pirate ship.

The pirates carry us aboard, and we sail away... Soon the pirates take us out of the net and tell us, "Look, we're taking you on a treasure voyage around China and Hong Kong. You two will work perfectly to get information out of people so we can find the treasure. Also to get money." says the fox. "OK... But where are we going now, when will we get home, and what are your names?" I say. "We are going to China first, then down to Hong Kong, then well, anywhere we hear has treasure! You'll get home as soon as we're finished. My name's A.J, the racoon's name is Beady, the wolf's name is Luna, and she's really nice. The water rat's name is Mys, and the weasel's name is Hamburgler." "He likes hamburgers and burgling," Luna whispers.

So off we go on a trip around the world with pirates... "They actually seem to be really nice pirates," I tell Snowball, "maybe they won't be mean to us!" "Yeah, maybe. I still can't be excited like you. It would really be different if we were going with family, but with *pirates*, it's different. It's scary. I can't believe how relaxed you are!" she tells me. "It's going to be all right. We're exploring the world in a pirate ship looking for treasure!" I say.

Our first stop is Beijing. "It's the best place to find treasure," Beady tells us. "We've been here before, but it wasn't a success, but now that we've got you guys, it'll be easier. Just walk towards people and ask them for money. If they don't give it to you the first time, start crying and tell them about how awful your lives are and everyone beats you up all the time." "But we don't get that! Nobody beats us up!" Snowball says. "But in the story they do..." "What sto—" Beady cuts her short. "Just GO!" "OK," she answers. First, she walks up to a rich-looking fat pig. "Pleaaaaase can I have a yuan? I *am* so hungry and poor!" "Oh of course! Here, take two!" The fat pig gives her two yuan. "Thank you!" she says, and runs off towards me and the pirates, hiding behind a pagoda. She gives A.J the 2 yuan, and he says, "Now it's your turn, Peaches." So then I walk off casually looking extremely sad and drooping, and I walk towards a nice-looking horse. "Pleaaaaase can I have a yuan, I am so hungry and poor and if I don't eat rice soon, I shall never see the sunrise nor sunset on the ocean ever again. Oh please, Mr Horse!" "Why of course! Here, my little haystack, 5 yuan for you! You just made my day! That is the nicest little piece of poetry I've ever heard!" and he trotted away. I was very shocked, because I wasn't saying a poem, I was asking for money! It did sound like it to me...

When I came back to the pirates and Snowball, the pirates said, "WELL DONE!! You're so good at this, the best we've ever had! We're going to be *rich* !!" I have to admit I was also happy at the thought of being *rich*...

Soon, when we had then 7 yuan, we headed back for the ship. "So we're going to Hong Kong now?" Snowball asks. "Well, yeah! It'll be so good, too," says Hamburgler. "I guess so," I say. Off we sail for a long time, and I'm getting bored. I walk up to Luna and say, "I'm bored. Is there anything me and Snowball can do?" "Well, you can play cards, here, go play with these." Luna hands me a pack of playing cards. "Thank you!" I say. Then I walk towards Snowball and say, "Here, look! Luna gave us this to do instead of being bored!" "Now we don't have to be bored anymore!" she exclaims. We find a place to sit and play two rounds of 'Go Fish'. Snowball wins both times! She's always so good at it because her face never shows any emotion when we play. Then A.J shouts, "There's a storm coming, we'd better get inside. Anchor the ship!" All the pirates get out on the deck and lower the anchor, then get inside. We're really scared! After all, how would you feel the first time you were kidnapped by pirates and were on their boat in a storm at *sea*. Soon, the storm came! It wasn't that bad, even though the waves were big. The waves made Snowball's and my tummies tickle. Soon it ended.

The next day we arrive in Hong Kong and anchor down our ship next to a junk boat with red sails. Snowball and I are so excited! I think this will be a great pirate treasure trip! Then Snowball says, "Peaches, don't you miss home?" "Well of course!" "Then how come you look so happy?" "Because this is a once in a lifetime trip, and it's so fun and exciting!" "Oh? I think so too!" she laughs. The trip was half a day's trip. "I've heard from a friend that in Sai Kung there's a treasure. Lots of gold and silver. All you need to do for us is dive down there and get it!" says A.J. "But we don't want to get all salty and wet!" Snowball exclaims. "Just go. You can shower later." says Mys. "Oh all right," I say.

In a few minutes, we're in the lonely clear waters of Sai Kung. "WOW," I think. "This is brilliant!" Then Snowball taps me on the shoulder, then points at a chest on the seabed. On we go down and together we carry it up while *swimming*. When we get up to the surface, the pirates lift the chest first and then haul us up. "Well done!" says Bedy. "Guess what you've found!?" "Treasure?" "Yes, you've found treasure all right." Then A.J. opens the chest and shows us rubies, sapphires, emeralds, diamonds, gold and silver!! "Wow..." we gasp, sucking it in.

"Well, off we go back to Hong Kong Island!" says Luna. "Why? What are we going to do now?" Snowball asks. "Well, we're going to get some good food to eat, and then Luna is going to ask if anyone knows where there is treasure around the world."

We go to a nice dim sum restaurant, and we eat Siu Mai, Yum Cha, pig buns, and sweet meat buns. It is so delicious. "I'm going to go ask if anyone knows if there's any more treasure that they know of, and where." says Luna. "All right, go ahead." says A.J. So Luna goes out of the restaurant. "A.J, what's your real name?" I ask. "Err, Apricot Jam." he says quietly. "What?" I answer, because I can't hear him. "I *said* Apricot Jam!" he says, and I reply, "Aww, what a cute name!" "Err," he says. "Hey, why didn't you keep it?" Snowball asks. "Because I'm a pirate, and pirates don't have cute names like that." "Ohhh" Snowball says.

An hour later Luna comes back. "No luck! I guess it's time to take Peaches and Snowball back home!" she says. "Awww, really? Do we have to go NOW?! Can't we have one more adventure?" we whine. "No! Your parents might get worried about you." "They're probably *already* worried. Since when did you start worrying about how our parents feel?" "Oh, no reason, but you are going HOME." "OK."

The next day we arrive back in Bonnytown. Snowball and I walk sadly home together. When our parents see us, they say, "Oh my gosh, where have you been!? We've been looking everywhere for you guys for the past few days. What happened!?" they exclaim. But we just keep quiet, knowing that if we tell anyone, we'll never go on a pirate treasure trip ever again.

# Hiding in the storage Room

*Korean International School, Park, Christina – 15*

I was in the port, in front of the gigantic ship with very large red sail and lots of floors. I never saw any ship of these size before. I hesitated if I should go in or not. But I remembered my dad shouting at me to marry a fat 40 years old man who was 28 years older than me just because he wanted money. He shouted, “ You need to marry him or else I will kill you! Understand?” I was so scared of my dad, I didn’t want to get any more stress. I screamed and pushed him as hard as I could and ran until here. I thought that any other things will going to be no worse than marrying the 40 years old man in such a young age like me. So, I decided to run inside the ship before it leaves. I had nowhere to go, and I was scared of the world.

I hid in the storage room, I ate the food in there, some of them tasted different with the food that I used to eat but I was happy that I could still stay alive. I always tried to walk very quietly, because sometimes sailors came down to take the food or put new treasures. I was not bored because I could always see new things like beautiful vases from different places in the world. I loved exploring the storage room. I spent whole day exploring the large storage room, I put some special things into my pocket. I was always worried of me getting caught by one of the sailors and get into trouble. And, it happened.....

One day, I was stealing some food and water as always but I didn’t hear the cook of the ship coming. He came and saw me stealing the food. He grabbed me with his big hand and shouted, “ Who are you!! Why are you stealing the food!” I said, “ Oh.... Can you please listen to me first?” He replied, “ No, I need to get the captain. You should not be in the ship!” I was scared, I told him again, “ Can you please just listen to me first..... Please...” He didn’t listen and just passed me, I ran to him and grabbed one of his long, thick leg crying, “ Please.... I beg you.... Please.....I didn’t came in for bad purpose. I don’t want to die.....” He finally stopped walking and I explained my situation to him.

After listening to me without interrupting, he finally opened his mouth, “ Are you okay? I also lost my family last year in the voyage, they were sick and died.....I used to have two daughters like you.... I feel so sad for you, I can help you here you little girl.....” I said, “ Thank you” for several times. Then he took me to a small storage room which needed key to go in. He told me, “ It’s too dangerous to stay in any storage room, this room will be the safest, I am the only one who can come in here, you can just keep one of the key. But I will give you food, please don’t go out of this room.....” I nodded. He went out of the room, I relieved and tears fell from my eyes.

I was so happy that I finally got somebody who supports me and I was not alone in the world anymore.

After that day, the cook came everyday to provide me some food. I spent most of my time looking outside of the ship through the port holes. I saw so many places where they visited. The cook always explained me the place when he came to give me my meal. I saw so many boats and ships around our ship, I couldn’t count all of them because there were too many of them. I still remember the place called “Yemen”, it was really beautiful place, it had so many buildings with detailed design. I also remember the place called “ Mamluks”, it was busy for sailors when we arrived, they came back with a lot of things like spices.

The cook always warned me to be careful because the rule was very strict in the ship. All the sailors had to go out of the ship when the captain was out to make sure nobody stole anything from the ship. For few months I stayed very quietly and didn’t try to go out of the storage room. However, as I saw them always going out of ship and come back at midnight, I started to wonder about what it will be like on the main deck. On one day I went up on the main deck when all the sailors went out of the ship with the captain. I saw beautiful scenery, I felt very free and cool. So, when I realized that I was safe to go up and come back before the midnight, I started to go up to the main deck when the people leaved and came back down before people came back before midnight.

I continued the routine before I heard that the cook saying that the next destination of our voyage is the place with the most beautiful sunset. I suddenly really wanted to stay on the main deck to see the sun set in that place. I was scared if I will get caught, but I was more excited to see the wonderful sun set than worried of getting trouble. Finally, in the place called “India” people went out of the boat to get treasures, and I

went up to the main deck. I was going to hide near the main deck to see the sunset but they came back early today. I was not expecting them to come back earlier than midnight, so I couldn't hide fast enough that I got caught by the captain.

Captain looked very surprised, I could see the cook at the back looking at me with the angry face. I couldn't say anything because it was all my fault. The captain asked me, " Who are you? And, why are you here?" I explained my situation but I didn't mention my relationship with the cook because I didn't want the cook to get into trouble. The captain asked me again, " If you were hiding, then why did you came up to the main deck, you silly girl?" I replied him that I really wanted to see the sun set. The captain said, " Oh then you are in trouble! You were not supposed to ride this ship at the first place and you are now against to the rule!" My tears ran along my face, I was scared to die. The cook looked also sad he was also worrying about me.

The captain arrived with the ropes in his hand. I imagined him tying me tightly until I die. I cried even harder. And, he said... " IF you're going to be the sailor you're going to need to learn how to tie some knots." He threw the rope down at me.

# Magnificent voyage of the voyagers

*Korean International School, Tong, Crystal – 12*

On the 6th June, 1401, seven voyagers, Bob, Max, David, William, James, John, and Robert sailed on a ship by the Ming Treasure fleet, ready for an adventurous adventure. They prepared cargoes of gold and silk, huge bags of delightful gifts brought from the emperor and food to give away as presents to people, stored at the back of their ship. Each voyager carried a sack, in there were deadly weapons in case of pirate attacks. David, William and Robert made a map to show the route they will be sailing in. Everytime they see people along the way, they will give out a bag of gift to every person.

Early in the morning, Bob, the energetic voyager woke everyone up. He can hardly wait for the back of the ship to be empty again. Bob was jumping around on the ship reading people's mind. Max and James was making sure they everything ready, including 100 litres of water, 95 boxes of bread, all their weapons, the map, and most importantly, their gifts. They double checked, checked again, and checked for the fourth time. They were ready. David, William and Robert was settled in their seats, went through the map over and over again so they knew exactly where they were going and what they were going to do if something goes wrong. John was practicing his fighting skills, doing 100 pushups, 20 laps of running around the palace, and of course carried his favourite sword. The sword wasn't a regular deadly sword. It was made of steel, so deadly that if the sword touches you gently, your skin would cut open.

It was 9:00 in the morning, and they were ready to start the adventure. The captain hopped onto the ship, followed by the seven voyagers. The gifts were locked at the back so no one, nothing could steal the gifts. The captain carried the key and five extra ones. The ship started moving, and their military forces followed behind in their own wooden boat. They could smell lovely clean fresh air and birds flew above water. Underneath were small fishes, and from time to time, there would be dolphins jumping high above the ocean, and diving back in with a loud "splash!" David, the most trustworthy voyage, pulled out the map. According to the map, they have arrived at their first stop, so David gave the captain a hand signal.

As they got nearer to the shore, they saw a girl and her mum on the top of a cliff. They were still a distance away from the girl, so they weren't sure what was going on. They jumped of the ship, and the captain carried the gifts. Carrying their sacks and essentials, the voyages ran towards the cave. The cave was 890 feet high and the rocks were slippery. John lead the way up to the top. Bob almost fell off a few times since he was skipping his way up and shouting "yaahooooo" every 10 seconds. David who was concentrating on the map, was scared that they might be lost, but decided to trust John with where they were going. A few minutes later, they have finally reached the top of the cave. They ran towards the girl and her mother. Out of curiosity, the mother asked, "What are you looking at and why are you here?" Bob answered "Don't you know us? We are the seven voyagers, appearing in newspapers, also known as the kind sailors. We are on a voyage travelling around the world and giving gifts to people! Captain, gift bag!" The captain pulled out two gift bags and threw it to Bob. Bob caught them and gave them to the the girl and her mother. The girl and her mother were very happy to be able to meet these famous voyagers and receive presents from them. The mother said "Thank you so much, my daughter and I are very happy to have this wonderful opportunity to see you. You, Bob and the rest of your group, have made my day. We were standing on this cliff bringing back all the memories of seven years ago,when my husband passed away here in this exact same spot. He was trying to find gold for us to survive since we were very poor back then, but then he got attacked by pirates. This gift bag makes me feel happier knowing that I could give this to my husband. That way, he would be happy to see that we received gold, and didn't die for no reason. Once again, thank you very much, because of you voyagers, my daughter and I have got this tragedy out of our chests." After hearing this touching speech, the seven voyagers couldn't help but let a tear fall out of their eyes.

They hopped back onto the ship, and continued on their voyage. Not long later, they were already near their next stop, the Indian ocean. They moved closer to the beach, and from a distance, they saw people playing in the water, throwing beach balls and relaxing on the sand. The captain settled their ship, and they jumped off again. Starting from the middle of the beach, they started giving people their gifts. The voyagers couldn't stop smiling. This was the reason why they even decided to go on this voyage, giving out gold and food to random people they don't even know! They did this just to spread joy around the world, hoping that everyone that receives these gifts, would continue the rest of their day with a smile on their face. The people along the beach were very friendly.

They were on the ship again and sailed away from the beach.

Suddenly, they felt the platform of the ship shake. There was a loud “beep”, and that woke Bob up. They then realized it was the pirates. It wasn’t the first time there was a pirate attack, but they are always terrifying. John pulled out his favourite sword, and blew his whistle. The whistle signaled their military forces. The military forces were dressed in metal armours. They carried swords and shields. The pirates pulled out their knives and jumped onto the voyager’s ship. They shouted in sync “Ha ha ha, the voyagers, today shall be the last days of your lives.” Without any doubt, the military forces threw their swords, that killed two of the pirates. While Bob was in charge of distracting the pirates, John secretly walked behind the pirates, then he quickly cut through one pirate’s skin, and stabbed the other, this went on for 10 minutes. The pirates were trying to defend themselves and fight back, but they couldn’t. Soon, all the pirates were screaming in pain. The seven voyagers has won the fight with the pirates, and since the pirates were still alive, they gave some bread to each one of the pirates. The pirates thanked the voyagers for being so kind to give them gifts even though they have just been attacked by the pirates.

The voyager hopped back on the ship, and continued sailing.

They got on the ship again, and made their way through the Atlantic ocean. It was calm and peaceful, and the voyagers enjoyed their supper and the beautiful night view. Bob fell asleep while eating, while the rest of the voyagers chatted. They were in Africa, and it was wonderful, lights everywhere and there were people dancing, singing and playing the drums. “how different from China!” they thought. They got closer to the people, and they couldn’t believe their eyes. It was their first time being in a party. Bob joined the Africans and danced along with them, James followed Bob, within five seconds all voyagers were dancing along with the Africans. The music stopped, then out of the pirate’s bag are precious gold. They threw the gold up high for everyone to catch. The people thanked the voyagers in African. Another song played, people danced, the party continued. The voyagers would love to stay, but it was time to leave.

The voyager’s voyage continued for another three months, they received lots of appreciation from people around the world. The seven voyagers were the ones being kind and give such precious things to people around the world, but it was also the people around the world who were thanking and showing appreciation to the voyagers. This was the best thing the voyagers could ever receive, it was the words “thank you” from everyone who received the gifts, even the pirates.

Of course receiving the gifts may be happier than giving out the gifts, but like the voyagers, so kind to give presents to everyone they meet, they will receive much more than the gift receivers would ever get. The voyager’s generosity gave them a lot in return, and their story lasts until today.

Looking back at this, people still say “China truly ruled the seas those days”

# A Time to Explore

*Korean International School, Tong, Leia 11*

Dear Diary,

I could hear the ocean roaring next to me and the wind was as strong as a bear. It seemed to drag me across the sand and I could feel the sharp corners of the stones stabbing at my feet making me cry out in pain “Ahhh” I suddenly woke up and even though I knew it had been a dream I also knew it was a sign that my journey as an explorer was about to begin.

My name is Ying Yue, when I was 20 years old I made the biggest decision of my life, to join my father onboard the Ming Treasure Fleet. He was a chef and needed an assistant so I pleaded with him to let me go, he said no so many times until I finally proved I was strong enough to take care of myself, but that is a whole other story.

We set sail from Shanghai and our ship was packed with gold, silk and other valuable items that the Jianwen Emperor wanted to offer to other countries with the hope of building better relationships, in other words bribing, so they could later trade in goods. The fleet was also ordered to find out about the world, at that time we knew nothing about how other people lived or what they looked like, not even in my wildest dreams could I have imagined how different the rest of the world was.

The first place we stopped was a place called India. My first impression was the incredible heat and the thousands of bugs that followed me like my very own cloud. The people who lived there wore as few clothes as possible, the women dressed in brightly coloured cloth which was just one long piece of material, they wrapped it round and round and round themselves, they made it look easy, trust me, it wasn't. I saw elephants walking down the dusty streets and monkeys everywhere, climbing trees and temples and picking the bananas from the trees. Some of the rich landowners wanted to buy our silk to make their wives beautiful dresses, that was the first time that I thought about whether I would ever get married.

Before we reached our next destination we met with a rather nasty bunch of pirates. We thought they were approaching us to make a trade but suddenly arrows started raining down on us, we were being attacked and all I was allowed to do as a young lady was hide in the kitchen. My father went out to fight, our men had swords and our ship had gunpowder when the cannons were fired they were so loud I became deaf in both ears for many hours, I was so scared that I wouldn't see my father again, but he survived that battle, and many many more.

We soon arrived in Africa, this incredible land changed my life forever. I thought India was hot but in Africa the heat could kill you in hours, finding water was surviving another hour. The deserts there seemed to go on forever and ever but we met people who knew how to survive and they taught us, many things, such as how to find water, hunt for food and protect ourselves from the sun and the wild animals. We learnt to respect these incredibly beautiful and dangerous animals, they had learnt to live in harmony with each other. In return, we gave them some silk to make clothing and some jewels which the women knew how to turn into jewellery by weaving plants into a string.

The atmosphere was extraordinary, the first time I saw a sunrise across the desert I knew I would never forget the feeling. Many of our crew didn't want to leave and some of them disappeared and we never saw them again, I was happy for them and wondered if they had fallen in love with the people or the place. I had promised myself I was going to see the whole world before deciding where to settle.

On our way to the next country we hit a terrible storm in the North Atlantic Ocean, the storm came on so suddenly that many of the men were knocked into the water and quickly grabbed by the huge waves and swallowed by the enormous ocean. It felt like the sea was playing with us like a toy, we had no control over the ship until the storm died down. One of the ships didn't make it through the storm and I cried many tears imagining how their families would feel when and if we ever returned with the sad news.

Eventually, we arrived in America, we arrived in the winter time. It was freezing, some of us were sick which was terrible because we had already used up all the Chinese medicine that our ships Doctor had brought and he couldn't communicate with the local people to explain what he needed. The first month



there the ship lost 25 crew and many more were sick for a long time. I spent all my time during that first month preparing soups that my grandmother used to make when I was sick, she had taught me how to cure lots of illnesses with different plants and foods, so I didn't get to see much of the country until the snow started to melt. When the snow completely melted I saw that America was beautiful. When we arrived on shore, we walked into the nearest town and I know this sounds crazy but I suddenly saw someone walking towards me and time froze, we both stopped and stared at each other, everyone around me blurred out except for him. We spoke, I can't remember who spoke first, we spoke different languages but it didn't seem to matter. We saw each other often after that and I tried to learn a few words of his language but time went by and soon we were going to leave and return home. The day before our ship sailed I saw him talking to the captain of the ship, it turned out he was looking for a job and he was a very good fisherman, he told the captain he would catch enough fish to feed the crew. So that was the beginning of my next big adventure and now I had someone to share every new experience with.

Our journey home was both happy and sad, the ship had lost so many men and we would have to tell their families the terrible news upon our arrival home but happy because we had so many stories to share from around the world. We knew so much about how people lived in other countries and could use this knowledge to help us in the future. Even though we were surrounded by lots of precious jewels and had our chance to take money and gold many of us came to realise that the experiences we had were what made us rich and that no matter how different we all looked we were all really looking for the same thing, a family to love.

# The Unique Pirates

*Korean International School, Tsang, Lok Yee Angel – 11*

Once upon a time there was a group of pirates on ships sailing away from China to different places, but these pirates aren't just normal pirates they are unique instead of stealing treasure they give out treasure. Their ships carry gold, silks and other precious items so they can give it away as a gift, they also have weapons to use if anything bad happens. And the captain is so nice and kind to do all these good things and his nickname was Captain White Beard because his beard is really white ! His best sailors were Sir Smart ( he is very smart ) and Sir Tough the really strong guy and Sir Air ( he really wants fly in the air )

One day as they were travelling on the ocean they came to a place which is called India some servants from the king came and greet them and invited them to have some snack , Captain White Beard, Sir Smart and Sir Air was so happy to have a pleasant king, while they were having tea the sailors carry the gifts when Sir Tough came in he accidentally broke the ceiling lights the king got very angry because it is very special to him so he kick them out. Captain White Beard was quite mad but Sir Tough convince him so Captain White Beard just forget about it.

The next day they went to Arabia, they saw the red sea and it was a bit red they were scared so they quickly paddle away as they paddle away they saw some really strong guy they were scared even Sir Tough was scared so once again they paddle quickly. And finally they arrived at the ship loading area, and when the sailors carry the treasure out there was some really mean looking people they snatch the treasure and went away without saying thank you! Captain White Beard was angry but Sir Smart told him they should probably go, as they were going some pirates capture them but luckily Sir Tough ran away. Captain White Beard was mad, the pirates wanted some treasure so they made a deal, Captain White Beard will give them the treasure if they let them go so it was a deal.

Sir Tough was so scared so he got some weapons and look for Captain White Beard and the others, as he was searching he saw some pirates he got his weapon ready and it was Captain White Beard! He was so happy and they all went back to their ship, give the treasures to the evil pirates and sail away once again.

Few weeks later they arrived at England, Queen Elizabeth the II was pleasant to see such nice people so she invited them to have a cup of tea. After a while Captain White Beard and his sailors have to go, but the queen insist them to stay so Captain White Beard didn't argue and stay. Sir Smart thinks that something is wrong so he whisper to Sir Tough but Sir Tough thinks everything is fine, so Sir Smart whisper again and this time he told Sir Air but Sir Air thinks everything is fine too, Sir Smart gave up so he just eat some cookie. Everyone ate a lot of cookie and they start to feel dizzy and everything went black. After one week they finally woke up they were tied against the wall and their mouth cover with black tape, Sir Smart look at the others is disappointment, Captain White Beard was afraid so was the others, then the queen came, her face look so cheeky and all of a sudden she pull off her face and she was actually the most evil pirate called Eve the Evil! When Captain White Beard saw her his eyes almost pop out they are so scared they wanted to escape but they couldn't, Eve was laughing so much and she said that she can't believe she actually caught the most kind pirates, she was so happy. The next day Eve and her sailors went to Captain White Beard's ship they trap the other sailors and steal the treasures and one of the sailor call Lenny, she escape and free all the other sailors, they all got their weapons and charge to Eve place. When they arrived they saw Captain White Beard and the others but they have accompany so they try to distract them finally they got their attention, all the bodyguard ran to them but they all ran and Lenny and some sailors sneekly free Captain White Beard and the others, they also took some treasure back and ran to their ship. When Eve saw them running away she was angry, very angry so she chase after them but Captain White Beard and the others escape and everyone was safe. Captain White Beard said to the king of China that they are never going to Arabia and England.

# New Tales of Ming Treasure Voyages

*Korean International School, Tsoi, Mimi – 13*

'On July 10, 1405, Admiral Zheng and his sailors gathered in a banquet hall to celebrate their first voyage. The feeling in the room was one of excitement, which was exaggerated by the wine they were drinking. "Comrades, we are setting off across the Indian Ocean. It can be very dangerous, and you should follow my instructions to stay safe. You have been selected because you proven yourself intelligent and physically strong. Have faith in your abilities. Bon voyage!"The room erupted in cheers.

The next morning, the crew set off from Nanjing with the rising sun. Their ship carried gold brocade, silks and silk gauze. They were intended to be gifts for the neighbouring countries they would visit. Xin He felt nervous, this was the first time he had been out in the ocean. He was afraid of running into unanticipated problems. What if they ran into pirates? What if there was a storm the crew could not handle? But his excitement and joy from being an explorer of the sea outweighed his fears.

The crew sailed for many days; they were in fact a very peaceful few days. One day, Xin He looked out on the horizon and he saw mountains emerge. The Mountains of Ceylon! The ship prepared to dock. When their ship dock they arrive their first country he went to the palace with his sailor. When he arrived the palace he took out the gifts and gave it to the king .The king at this country feel very happy and decided to be friend with Xin's country.He success this time and made him feel more confident.He is looking forward to traveling to the next country.

The imperial court called for a second voyage in October 1407. The fleet set sail first to India. They were ordered to go to the Calicut palace to give a tablet to the King, Mana Vikram. It was an acknowledgement of his sovereignty. The king was very happy and pleased to receive the gift and this act improved the relationship between the two countries.

Xin He was very pleased himself with the results of their first quest. HE felt somewhat apprehensive about the fleet's second. The fleet was to settle the hostility between Indonesia and China, which had arisen as a result of an accidental killing of 170 members of the Chinese embassy in a civil war. The Chinese emperor had demanded 60000 liang of gold and an apology. When the ship arrived on the shores of Indonesia, it was immediately welcomed by Indonesian diplomats. Xin He was relieved. HE thought they might encounter resistance and would have to fight. THE fleet was brought to the Indonesian palace and the King apologised. The truth was neither party wanted another war, especially for the sake of an accidental killing of 170 men.

The ship set sail to Pulau Sembilan in the Strait of Malacca. Their last task was to cut wood to make incense. The work was hard on the body. Xin He and his mates cut 6 logs of wood, each 2 meters wide in diameter. The wood was beautiful, it was black and with a very fine pattern. They moved the wood to the ship, which took a whole day. Xin He ate 2 suppers worth of food that night. He could not wait to get home.

The third voyage was called for in February 1409. The ship sail for a month and arrived in Changle. It stopped in Champa, Java, Malacca, Demeurera, Ceylon, Quilon, Cochin and Calicut. The emperor had ordered the fleet to trade in these locales for goods not found at home. It was a peaceful journey until on their way home, they encountered King Alakeshwara of India. The Chinese army felt that Alakeshwara and his people were rude, disrespectful and hostile. There was already a feeling of hostility from the acts of theft these people had committed against neighbouring countries who were allies of China. The war was successful. Xin He captured the King and his family in a brawl with swords. They were brought back to the emperor. When they presented the captives to the sovereign, he was impressed by the power of his army. Alkshvara begged for his and his family's lives. The emperor felt that Alakshvara had learned his lesson and let him go.

Xin He recounted his adventures on the Ming Treasure Ship. He never could have imagined the things that he saw and the things that he did. He felt emotional just thinking about how lucky he had been to experience these journeys. He wanted to record this passages; he knew that they needed to be shared. He hoped that these stories would be remembered for generations to come. XIn He looked out to the horizon with anticipation of the coming voyages.

# The Ming Treasure Voyages

*Korean International School, Wai, Kylie – 12*

Before China had emperors, the village of Chun Tian served an evil demon named Zhuang Long. He demanded all the crops of farmers and every boy will at the age of 18 will join him on a voyage of death but the girls will serve him in the palace of Zhuang Long's loot. His loot included mythical jades that were meant for the Chosen Ones, any boy that could end the demon would be the Chosen Ones and be granted with enormous power, elements of the universe. A boy named Ming Lee forged a team to destroy the demon once and for all...

The boys were all 18. There was Dao Chi, Lin Yang and Tau Bo. They were all 18 and ready for the voyage, as soon as they boarded the ship they all waved to their sisters and mothers. Zhuang Long told the boys where they were headed to, one destination Spain's bone maze, many men have gone insane. The name behind is that the maze is made from the victim's bones. Ming Lee was afraid, his friends all felt the same, they were immediately ordered to raise the sails and clean the deck. Lin Yang hated chores and made fun of the demon for its disgusting teeth and laugh. With his red powers, Zhuang Long picked up Lin Yang and locked up the young boy.

By the end of the day Ming Lee and the others settled into bed. Zhuang Long went into his room, with the key to Lin's cage, Dao Chi being the bravest of the group snuck into the demon's room where he could see a curtain barely making out the shape of a sleeping demon. In a hurry, Dao Chi frantically looked through the drawers and closets, he was worried and sick not being able to save his friend until the moon reflected a ray of light; the keys! Dao Chi saw them on the belt of Zhuang Long, he slowly lift the keys and crept out.

The next day when Dao Chi went to wash his face, the demon appeared to him!!! The demon smiled a rather proud kind of smile. Zhuang Long asked him if Dao Chi was the one that had stolen the keys to Lin Yang, Dao Chi couldn't lie because the demon had powers of his own so he said YES, an echo of laughter roared through the hallway, Zhuang Long told Dao Chi that he was proud of his theft skills and it will come handy in the future. But for now, because of Dao Chi's amazing skills, Lin Yang was released later on and reunited with his friends! Within the hour of Lin Yang being released, the boys partied a little, sipping some wine and radish cake. Everyone of the boys had sisters and their fathers have passed in one of Zhuang Long's death voyage so they needed a plan to kill the demon, they did not know how to start and how to kill him. Tau Bo was panicking, three days to the Spanish Bone Maze and yet no plan!!!!!!!

One last day till the destination, Ming Lee stood at by the tallest sails of the ship, gazing over the full white moon. He had tears in his eyes, they started to burn and turn red, the demon levitated and laughed at Ming Lee, Zhuang Long turned Ming Lee's tears to blood, meaning suffering in pain and grief. The boys sat together and prayed, hoping for success so that their families may live. Timagining all the possible things that could happen. They were so loud that the demon stormed in! He gave orders and rules about the maze, no talking, no shouting, no destroying the bushes and finally, seperation.....

The route is complete, Spanish Bone Maze if up ahead. Lin Yang hid under a wooden plank of the ship, the others convinced him to get outta there but he wouldn't budge, the demon demanded them to come over. By the time they got there, Zhuang Long forgot that there were 4 boys and moved on. The entrance was made of thick bushes with bones sticking out, victims of the maze. Three ways were open to the boys for them to choose, before they went into their path of choice, the demon warned them that this was to test patience and to not freak out. Tau Bo, Dao Chi and Ming Lee gave each other a reassuring hug, went inside the maze with fear and choking breaths. Lin Yang was still under the ship, not poking his head out until no sounds were heard. He got up the from the boards and made himself a drink, footsteps approached the door, it was Zhuang Long! He sat in his office and began talking to himself, the sounds were muffled so Lin pressed his ear on the door what he heard was that Zhuang Long created the maze and there was no end, he had a giant white diamond saying exit, the end of the maze! Zhuang Long got up towards the door, the boy sprinted to his room and hid under the bed, he could see the demon entering the shower room, this was his chance to get that orb. Again, he sprinted to the office and went through the cupboards, the orb was shining through the last drawer and he took it.

Meanwhile Tau Bo was freaking out so bad that he was breathing heavily and it was loud. Lin Yang climbed up the bushes and started running on it. He found Tau Bo, obviously because of his loud breathing and gathered him up the bush, Ming Lee was found shortly after, but then Dao Chi was hard to find, he was unpredictable and fast. Dao Chi was then found gripping his shirt and cuddled himself in fear. They all rose to the highest bush and held the orb up, it shone a ray of white light pointing east, they all headed that direction and found a great prize. It was the Mythical Jades of the Chosen Ones!!!

They landed down on the patterned floor made of marble and jade, each of them took one representing themselves. Tau Bo for loyalty, Dao Chi for smartness, Lin Yang for bravery and Ming Lee for leadership. Zhuang Long felt a sharp pain in his abdomen, rays of white light shot through his body and exploded into white flowers, the ship was renewed and ready to go home with the boys looking up to the heavens saying thank you to the gods.

By the time the new crew came home, everyone partied. They named it the Ming Treasure Voyages, Ming Lee was the leader and those flowers, they were treasure to the entire Ming family. This could not be the end, Zhuang Long has an army and a son to lead. When will Ming Lee and his friends conquer that new enemy once again and save China? That's for another person to tell.....

# My Voyage

*Korean International School, Wong, Adrian – 13*

My name is Huang and I am going to tell you about my voyage in early China. I was excited to be on the ship on 14 July 1405, led by the sailors and captains on the fleet of Admiral Zheng He, I received \$1000 from the sailors because I will be servicing the fleet, so I gave the cash to my mum and she bid farewell me. I need to admit, there were lots of citizens of Nanjing and all came to watch us leave the port, lots of young sailors as the same age as me cried as we sailed out of the port. Now, off the unknown regions, we go ...

The first few days in the sea was quite fine, my job was cleaning the deck of a small ship and prepare the dishes for the sailors, on the third day, I was sent to the flagship of the fleet to meet the Captain, the Captain appeared as a mannered man, he said that he's called Zheng He, and he promoted me as a captain of a small ship. Which was a dream to some of the sailors! Some sailors started to get homesick after a week on the fleet, I went to them and said are they ok. But one sailor said he wants to go back home. So I asked his name, he said that his name was Ran. So I told him 'Don't be afraid of the sea, I can be your friend!' So he accepted my friend request and always came to the captain's room to have tea with me.

A week past by, we have visited Fu Chau and Guangzhou and now we still don't see any land. Yesterday there was a huge storm and we lost a few ships from our fleet, but it was not a really big matter because there were no casualties. Finally today we saw land(Taiwan), everyone was excited about it, all the crew fitted into small boats, some men were very excited, they even ran to the beach from water bare feet! As soon as that, we met some original inhabitants from the island, they gave us fruits as they were very good at growing crops, so we gave back items such as silk and pottery, which our country is good at production at.

Then I followed Zheng He to lots of countries, including Vietnam, Singapore, and Malaya. The people there welcomed us and gave us gifts, but on the fifth leg of the journey, we got attacked by the Maldives island residence, although they used bows and arrows, it made our fleet of small boats cause heavy damage, so the Admiral told us to retreat. This visit to the Maldives Islands did lots of damage, in 317 ships, near 30 were destroyed, around 90 were damaged, we lost around 200 men. Which we are very sad of, so Zheng He tried to negotiate with them, this time, Zheng He lead men with no weapons so that the residence on the island will not misunderstand us. So this time the leader of the islanders made peace with us and gave their shells, seaweed etc. And we also gave them the pottery stuff like that. And we traveled to the next destination.

Our last destination is Calicut, currently, which is in India, the Indians have different skin colours than us, so some of the sailors are scared of the native people, but the people over there welcomed us on the island and gave us fruits such as mango, apricots, papayas. As you know, we gave gold and they gave us a giraffe, which is too tall that it must be on the deck of the flagship. After we went to India, we start to return to China. During the return leg of the journey, there was an extremely big storm, I said to the Admiral: 'We must stop to the nearest island to stop to repair our ships'. So then Zheng He told all ship captains to reverse and head to Malaya, when the storm ended, we checked our ships, we lost many ships again, we lost around 50 ships this time and 300 men. Zheng he immediately told us using a full speed back to Nanjing. We were riding the wind and breaking the waves, after 3 days of that ride which made crew throw-out, which seems more like a roller coaster, we finally arrived in Nanjing.

And again, lots of citizens came and watch us arrived. People were cheering for us while we were disembarking, a small escort army came and told Zheng He that the emperor wants to see him now, so I ask him do I need to come with him. He said he can deal with the emperor, and I can go home and look after my mother. After I went back to my village, I finally exhausted, 'Back to home, finally' i thought. My mother was extremely excited, she called the entire village and bought lots of expensive food for us to enjoy, all the village had a great time enjoying the party. Around 1 year later, when I was cooking, I heard a knock on the door, it sounds very urgent, so I went to the door, and at the door, there was a little child, he gave me a letter, it said: "Hi Huang, how is it going? I am having a second voyage, and I want to invite you to be a middle-class captain of my fleet, if you want to join, then come to Nanjing Port on 15 Feb 1426! Zheng He. "I was so excited about going on a voyage with Zheng He again. I told my mum that I am going to be out to have a voyage, she said a yes and I immediately went to the port. Then I chatted with Zheng He for a while, boarded my medium class vessel. And now, another amazing, magical, mysterious journey of mine has just begun, and I hope I will survive this voyage to the unknown countries of the earth...

# The Diary of a Soldier on Board

*Korean International School, Yau, Ambrose – 12*

It was 1405 and our fleet was departing Nanjing. On the grand ship, there were sailors, soldiers, servants, the crew, and most importantly, the expeditors and lumps of treasure. Behind us were hundreds of other ships, which forms a massive fleet with us, heading to the same place for the same purpose— to develop relationships with other countries they know little about.

But it would be an extremely tough mission. Firstly, since we don't know much about our way, we might end up in the middle of nowhere, struggling to reach an inhabited place. Secondly, we might meet dangerous armies and greedy pirates, staring in surprise at our golden treasure, and laughing at us silently with an evil smile. Thirdly, we might run out of food and starve to death. Nobody knew what will happen.

The excited sailors were cheering as the ships entered the vast blue sea. However, me, being a soldier, was scared and worried of pirates hijacking this fleet. Every night, I dream of fearsome pirates on ships with black sails speeding towards us, leaping ferociously onto our ship, then leap back holding a handful of gold. At the same time, soldiers charge to us with sharp knives, cannonballs fly and our ship starts to sink. Slowly, we drown and pass away. So scary that I faint whenever shiny gold appears in front of my eyes.

It was just a dream. But one day that might happen. The sailors said that the weapons are more than enough to oppose the pirates. But what if it's not? How do we know how powerful and menacing the armies or pirates are? Absolutely nothing can stop my endless worries. I deposited my life on this journey. Every detail of every battle, which might not affect the captain's mind, matters a lot for the soldiers. Indeed, in the bright morning of the third day, I, together with many sailors, spotted from far ships with black sails blackening the entire sky, and booming sounds of cannonballs deafens our ears. It's a short countdown before I will disappear eternally from Earth...

But worrying won't help. In the blink of an eye, we had our new and well-prepared weapons ready, as if the sky is never dark. The soldiers are fully equipped, the swords are in a perfect state, and the cannons are fully loaded.

As the black sails approached our ship, my dramatic dream had come true. Some of the soldiers are duelling with the pirates, some fight in a team, and some, such as me, are firing cannonballs, destroying each others' ships. Not optimistic to see water flow into the ship, but it is satisfying to see the black sails fall.

Luckily only half of the dream came true. We were victorious, and the sky is bright again. The ship is fixed in no time. The fourth day was rather tranquil. Nothing devastating happened and it was a smooth part of the journey. The sailors talked with laughter about how they were victorious and lost not a cent worth of treasure on the previous day, and what great achievement they could accomplish in this lengthy trip. On the other hand, the soldiers, who suffered greatly from the brutal fight between the black sails, got little care. Therefore, this was far from a pleasant journey for them.

On the fifth day there was some rainy weather. Droplets of water fell quickly to the deck. Waves shook the ship and water flowed in. The captain told us to clear the water on the deck, which would be a tedious job. It took hours as the fierce waves keeps on flushing in. After that, we had to fix the broken parts of the ship.

On the sixth day, the ship docked at a port of a foreign kingdom. The captain left the grand ship and had a meeting with the king, and gave the king a considerable amount of gold and silk. The sailors also cheered as the captain started a relationship with the king. While the crowd were watching the wonderful scene created by the actors, the backstage workers, who were replenishing the supplies for the next scene of this play, were never seen by the audience.

It was a safe and quiet day. Nothing devastating happened. But my heart was just as unstable as it was. Oh my father! My mother! My wife! My home! They had disappeared from my eyes for days, but had stayed still in my heart! This was just a mere fraction of this journey, and the finish line of this odyssey was in a

distant place! I can't stop looking forward to the moment we arrive at my homeland China! I seems helpless in the vast sea! I don't even know whether I can see them again for the remainder of my short life! They must have been missing me, perhaps forever!

As the captain shouted 'All aboard', I boarded the ship reluctantly, and left the port with a constantly shaking heart.



# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

*Maryknoll Convent School (Secondary Section), Tsoi, Janna – 15*

The night was silent, almost peaceful – a rarity aboard the ships. The sea was mostly calm, with small ripples every now and then, and even as the sharp wind hammered on the huge papyrus–coloured sails, it felt calming and serene and almost safe.

Ironical, that. Especially as we only just defeated the notorious Indonesian pirate, Chen Zuyi, the day before.

I leaned on the wooden railings of the ship, staring out at the beautiful display before me. A stunning array of stars covered the velvety midnight blue sky, and the water was almost black, with distorted reflections of the night sky. It looked so...magical, like something drawn out of a fairytale. This was my favourite part of being onboard the Ming Treasure Fleet – no matter how much I see, the night sky would always remain one of the most beautiful scenic displays I have ever seen.

Not that I had ever known any life besides voyaging with the crew, fighting with pirates and hostile armies. Sometimes I wonder what life would be like if I were a normal girl living in my hometown, going to school – well, normal school that didn't have soldiers for teachers – and having a proper family. The thought is almost tempting.

But then I would never have met everyone here. My friends, soldiers that I had known all my life, my father.

I wouldn't have given that up for the world.

I heard footsteps approaching and instinctively I whipped around almost immediately, an arrow notched and aimed directly at the heart of the silhouette. The silhouette quickly raised his hands in surrender and I recognized him. Lowering my arrow, I muttered brief apologies as the boy came up beside me and joined me in staring at the sky.

"It's late," he stated, "you should be asleep." His voice was casual, but I could sense the concern beneath. "You need rest after the big battle yesterday."

I laughed, but even to me it sounded forced. "I'm not tired, Xinjie."

My best friend didn't look convinced. "Zhilan – don't over-exhaust yourself."

I waved it off. I had never been and will never be comfortable with sharing my feelings. "I'm fine, I've been trained to do things like this since I was four. Besides, I'm not on duty – I came out here of my own free will. You being older doesn't mean you get to boss me around."

Xinjie looked out to the star-filled sky, the stars reflecting in his dark eyes, like there was a galaxy inside those swirling orbs. "You're thinking of him," he stated again, as if it was just another fact.

I could feel tears coming to my eyes, but I pushed them back down. *Don't show emotion. You have to keep your front up.* "I wonder what my father would think of all this. I wish he could be here with us... he wanted to see his home again and now—"

"I'm so sorry for your loss." I saw him looking at me with that pity and sympathy and I just wanted to run, run until I couldn't see it anymore, because it was just a painful reminder of what I had lost.

"It's okay, I should learn to get over it, it's been years after all," I forced out the words. *How could I ever get over it? How could I ever forget my father's body, lying there upon all those bodies of perished soldiers? How – how could I ever forget how I lost my brother over how he was too young to register the pain of becoming an orphan?*

*I could never forget the shock and crushing pain I felt that day.*

*I could hardly forget how my brother shouted at me that I was being overly emotional and protective. I will never forget how our argument was so large scale, they had to move Yuanjun to another boat to prevent us from having another argument, how he had yelled 'I hate you' at me as he was dragged to the next ship.*

Xinjie looked at me. "It's natural to feel upset, Zhilan, and I know you're constantly stressed from being the only female on board—" he started softly.

I suppose I was half glad that the guns went off then.

Loud gunshots suddenly sounded from all around and the sea surface suddenly lit up by golden yellow, white hot flames. Sparks flew everywhere as vaguely familiar ships appeared.

"Chen Zuyi," I breathed. Beside me, Xinjie stared at the new fleet blankly in shock.

I reacted quickly, running towards the cabin at the top, banging on the door. "Admiral Zheng! Please, Chen Zuyi is back!"

My body moved on its own accord — this wasn't the first time I was the first to spot an attack, and I already knew what to do. In no time, I had run down to the deck and gotten everyone on their feet, fully prepared.

I started to run to the starboard, but was stopped by our commander, Zheng He. "Zhilan— leave the battling up to us. Your aim is deadly, the archers at the bow need a leader. They'll listen to you— you've proven yourself so many times despite being only sixteen."

Taken aback, I nodded, and Admiral Zheng disappeared into the mass of soldiers quickly as I hurried to the bow. Half the battle passed in a blur of blood and the glint of metal weapons slashing against air. Despite all the conflict below us, I concentrated on letting my arrows fly straight and true, hoping they hit their targets accurately.

Then I noticed a soldier from the enemy jump behind a barrel and out of sight. Curiously, I told another soldier to take over for a while before going over.

Our secret tunnel entrance. How could an enemy soldier have known?

Years of military training kicked in as I tiptoed down the tunnel, footsteps light as a feather. Staying on the stairs, I could see the conference room, dimly lit with candles. I could hear a voice, saying—

"—victory. We didn't have done it without you."

"My pleasure," a familiar voice sounded, but I couldn't place my finger on where I had heard it before. "at least... I'm doing something useful for you."

*No way... we had a mole?*

*That explained how they knew to attack now— we were going to leave first thing in the morning, and... they knew about this tunnel.*

*But... why?*

I felt a rush of anger in me, and I arched an arrow, aiming it at the source of the sound.

I let it go.

I knew it hit the target. I never missed.

I heard someone cry out and everyone rushing out of the tunnel, and I ran out, gluing my eyes to the entrance as I watched comrades attack them as enemies streamed out.

And finally, a fellow comrade collapsing on the floor. I ran over, arrow pointed at him, but froze and lowered it as he raised his head.

“Yu–Yuanjun?” I faltered. My own brother...? No, this– this can't be.

He, too, was at a loss for words. “Zhilan– I'm sorry–”

“Why? You– you betrayed our nation–” I breathed. I dropped onto my knees, plucking the arrow out of his legs where I pierced him.

He was quiet, but said finally after a while, “they threatened your life.”

I froze. “Didn't– didn't you hate me?”

He was about to answer, but immediately screamed in pain, and his scream was so horrible, it was the most painful thing I had ever heard and in that moment I would've given anything to take away my brother's pain.

*I– I still love you more than anything.*

I turned to see Xinjie, and his–.

Xinjie's dagger was buried deep into Yuanjun's abdomen, and blood was pouring out of the wound, seeping slowly onto the floor as I stared, horrified.

“Xinjie... why?”

The expression on my best friend's face was unreadable. “He's a spy. A mole. A captured soldier told us. He deserves to die.”

“No!” I cried out. “No one does...”

I rushed toward and held my brother in my arms as I felt tears stream down my cheeks and the world blurred.

“Yuanjun, I can't lose you too...”

My younger brother smiled weakly. “Zhilan... I never hated you. Remember–”

He never finished his sentence. He fell limp, and his unseeing eyes stared out at the stars.

*Why... why take away everything I hold dear?*

The fighting had subsided already, and I felt eyes staring at my crying figure but I didn't care. Not when my brother was dead.

Later, I learnt that Chen Zuyi and his comrades were captured.

But I didn't care. I did my best to help but I couldn't care as much as I used to.

My heart stayed in that moment when my brother died.

*But what I regret most is that he died without me being able to tell him ‘I love you’.*

*That he died without knowing I loved him.*

# Quest for the North Star

*Marymount Secondary School, Lam, Kwan Kiu Annette – 14*

“Our mission is to enable young people aged 14 – 18, to lead an unforgettable maritime expedition that is unprecedented in history!”

Merely at a glimpse, I felt intrigued pondering what it would be, what it could be if I was successfully selected. On the day I arrived at the quay where a treasure fleet was anchored, I was welcomed by a flag embroidered with a Chinese character “Ming” which was fluttering in the wind. In stark astonishment, there I saw such a colossal formation of the fleet that comprised a total of 317 ships of which 62 were heaped with gold, jewels, silk, ceramic pots and wares. I could barely believe what I had seen till I heard a eunuch reading out aloud an imperial edict issued by the Yongle Emperor from which Zheng He was entrusted to be the Chief Commander of this Ming expeditionary fleet. It’s the first time that I had met Zheng He in quite a distance though. Standing high above in the middle of the gangplank, he, being over 6 feet tall, looked like an iconic figure.

After having Zheng He made a brief introduction of the fleet composition, we began setting off to venture into our unprecedented voyages. Upon boarding the fleet, all mentees including me were divided into groups and assigned to respective mentors who were responsible for overseeing the progress of our training and learning during the whole expedition. This was a 6-month intensive training program that literally embraced a variety of curricular from map reading, navigation, crisis management and human behaviors to survival skills and cooking. The main aim was to nurture us to sustain ourselves for the whole voyage ahead as well as prep ourselves for any unexpected calamity. I was allocated to a cabin with 9 other mentees of my age. We would be spending our time together in the pursuing 6 months.

According to the agenda, all mentees had to wake up before dawn, doing chores including scrubbing the decks, mopping the floors, cleaning the heads (toilets – it wasn’t a nice job), tidying up the ropes, preparing meals etc. After taking the early meal – purely a bowl of porridge and a poached egg, I had to attend lectures invariably on philosophy, theories and physical practices. Our readings were based on Confucianism, we studied Analects, Books of Rites, Spring and Autumn, which much piqued my interest though boring. Our mentor said to us, “You have much to do and learn through genuinely life changing adventures at sea. Life at sea is unpredictable. One stupid mistake can cost your life.”

On the first night on deck, I was so excited yet nervous that I did not sleep a wink. I took a peep outside through the rice pulp window. Nothing I could hear but the gurgles of the nearby stream. Nothing I could see but the dark sky peppered with little twinkling stars. In pointed contrast, the North Star shone out with its brightest sparkles as though it was guiding this little lost sheep to find my way out through darkness ... I recalled the Analects that I had been taught in the lecture during the day – Confucius says, “If you govern with the power of your virtue, you will be like the North Star. It just stays in its place while all the other stars position themselves around it.”

About a month later, upon finishing our theoretical sessions, we were about to set foot on our maiden lonely voyage – we were allowed to leave the vessel to do exploration on our own wherever the captain found a quay or port suitable for mooring the fleet. The first stop was Berlin. Our vessel was anchored at the Spree River where there found two settlements on either side, Colin and Berlin. These two twin towns seemed growing flourishingly with roughly 8,500 inhabitants and the two were merged into one German municipality in 1432. When I was walking through the streets, I saw buildings, town halls, hospitals, churches and monasteries with residences for the clergy and a court. The cities looked much more modern and civilized, far different from what I had seen in China. And around the corner in the bazaar, something distasteful drew my attention – trade of Jews. A girl about my age was being kept in a cage looking at me with her pleading eyes as if she was asking for my help. It was in such a sudden that I summoned up my courage walking towards her direction. Having made sure there was nobody around, I unlocked the lock of her cage, letting her flee and free. Undeniably, I was really terrified but when I recalled what Confucius says about the North Star, I felt totally relieved. I told myself, “I am making a virtue out of necessity. I have no regret.”

Our vessel continued sailing along the Baltic Sea. However, when we were about to steer southwards, the weather suddenly got worse. The tranquil sea became choppy with pouring rain, howling wind and loud thunder. At that critical moment, I was on the deck doing some chores. The vessel kept churning with roaring waves slamming inside the deck, I was tossed up and down, back and forth. Too late to get hold of anything, I fell into the sea with my vision going black. By the time I resumed consciousness, the storm had already died off and I found myself lying ashore of a deserted island. Though I was extremely panic, I realized I should have done something to survive myself before I got rescued. Thanks to what I had learnt, without hesitation I went to find some logs and sticks to start a fire, not only to keep my body warm, but to

scare away wild animals when night fell and more importantly, to put up a signal for rescue as well. Then I caught some fish with a stick and cooked them over the fire. How starving I was, I gobbled them down almost in one mouth. When dawn lined the horizon in faint yellow, amazingly I had a gleam of hope as our fleet came to my rescue. I couldn't wait for the next bit of venture whatever it was adorned with beautiful memories or arduous experiences.

Having sailed across the Atlantic Ocean, our fleet steered eastwards to the Indian Ocean which seemed a bit calmer as though it was an omen of something good. Our captain had our vessel moored near an island called Ceylon. An aroma hovering in the surroundings hit me walking into a street with lots of hawkers touting tea leaves everywhere. I kept exploring here and there aimlessly till I felt creepy finding a place what appeared to be a cemetery. Curiosity outweighed fear. I tiptoed in there to have a look. There found some tombs with some Latin writings blurrily engraved on them. As the sun began to set, the whole place became such gloomy and spooky that I decided to leave. All of a sudden, I tripped over something kind of a box. Time was running short because I had to hurry back to the fleet before dusk. Be it good or bad, I picked it up in haste and sucked it in my bag. The box was later verified by my mentor to be a Pandora box. There's a legend that it contains seven miseries to inflict mankind – war, famine, plague and one last thing 'hope'. I wondered, "Does it hint us anything that will be happening in future?"

While crossing the Pacific Ocean, we came across a fascinating island surrounded by seas, Ezo, presently known as Hokkaido. So alluring that everyone would not resist but insist on an adventure there. By then, we were allowed a day ashore to discover the beauty of this island. When I was stumbling down to the shore which was all blanketed with snow, I descended, looking up ahead I saw that on the beach a whale had come ashore and all the humans, dressed in festive dark attire, were dancing step dance for joy. It's so spectacular seeing the sun duck beneath the horizon, giving way to a beautiful sky with an egg yolk. Walking further inland, amazingly I saw pairs of red-crowned cranes dancing in the snow. They bowed to one another, then threw their heads over their back then bowed again, leaped into air and simultaneously raised their wings calling in unison. The gorgeous sunset vividly illuminated the dusting of snow, the dancing of cranes, all stitched into a marvelous panoramic view that would always be enshrined in my memory.

It's my last night on deck, again so excited I was that I didn't sleep a wink. I stayed up all night and gazed at the starry sky finding right overhead the North Star with its brightest glow as though it's exuding its confidence in guiding us towards the righteousness no matter we were, with the power of virtue.

# Titanic and Zheng He

*Munsang College, Kwai, Hoi Yan Hayley – 13*

It had been 15 minutes since Titanic hit the iceberg. Shing was one of the crew members on board. The lower part of the ship had budged and begun to submerge, yet he was still on the ship, struggling to pack everyone into the lifeboat. But there was not enough lifeboat and he had to keep himself on the boat by hanging onto one of the railings. After some time, he was exhausted. He let go of the railing desperately and fell into the sea. He could feel himself sinking deeper and deeper, with chilling water filling his lungs. Then, he closed his eyes and became unconscious.

“Hey, wake up!” Shing heard someone yelling at him. When he tried to open his eyes, a bucket of cold water was poured onto him. Shing became wide awake. He realized that he was on a gigantic ship, and he was lying on a bed made of wood. Before he could figure out what had happened, a man before him said in relief, “Do you have any idea how long you had been asleep? I pulled you out of the sea three days ago. Thank God you are alive.” Shing was glad that he survived, yet he quickly discovered that the people around him were wearing Chinese clothings. He asked in horror, “Why am I here? I don’t recognize anyone!” The man shrugged, “I saw you in the sea and pulled you up. I don’t know who you are either! Anyway, you are one of the crew from now on. Remember, we are a fleet with the mission to sail to different countries to show how strong Ming Dynasty is. By the way, you can call me Zheng He.” Then he walked away, leaving Shing puzzled. A second ago he fell off Titanic and drowned, the next moment he was on a ship, surrounded by Chinese sailors. After he put his thoughts together, he concluded that he travelled to the time when Zheng He was having his seventh voyage. Though he didn’t know how to go home, he just had to try to join the other sailors, becoming one of the members on this enormous fleet.

As a former crew member of Titanic, Shing coped with his new life easily, though the technology of instruments was antique. For nights he glanced at the night sky alone. The sea was calm and the horizon met with the sky. The stars glittered above his head. It was just pure beauty. Sometimes, Zheng He would join him. The two experienced sailors shared their experiences and thoughts with each other. Shing’s rich knowledge on sailing held Zheng He in awe. Shing was promoted quickly.

All of a sudden, a gang of privates armed with swung onto the ship. Before Shing could figure out what was happening, the fellow sailors grabbed weapons and yelled, “Pirates on board! Be aware!” In a few seconds, lots of soldiers holding swords rushed onboard and started fighting with the pirates. Shing was petrified yet he decided to fight like a gladiator. He joined the fight with fellow soldiers. In the chaos, Shing found he pointed his sword at one of the pirates and he could kill him in an instant. But he didn’t kill him. Throughout his whole life, he was taught not to kill anybody. Then, a middle-aged man with a scar on his face pierced his sword into that pirate’s heart and yelled, “Why didn’t you kill him instantly, young lad? That pirate could kill you and steal our properties! There’s no mercy on this ship!” Shing nodded frankly and kept fighting. After some time, the pirates were all captured or killed, and their leader was put into the dungeon. Shing couldn’t stop thinking about what that old man said. “The ship and scene are beautiful,” he thought, “yet the bloodshed and violence are cruel.”

After a few days, Shing was summoned to the commanding room. He stepped into the room anxiously. Zheng He and other commanders were in the room as well, including the middle-aged man. Zheng He started first, "As we are coming close to our destination, we should start to prepare our products for trading. I hope Shing can join us as well to gain some experience. Also, we all remember our secret mission, right?" The others nodded in confidence, except the middle-aged man, who started to cringe in fear. After the conference, Shing asked Zheng He, "What is the secret mission actually?" Zheng He leaned towards Shing and whispered, "Finding the deposed emperor of China." Shing stepped back. He had never thought that there was such a mission. So he answered frankly, "I...I understand. I will try to do my best."

After a few days and nights, the fleet ported in Calicut. Shing helped lowering the goods. There were all kinds of products, including tea leaves, silk and china. He traded with the locals. The locals smiled brightly when they saw the products. Zheng He greeted them, "It's a pleasure to meet you. We are the representatives of Ming Dynasty. We wish to be partners with your civilization forever." Shing could see that the locals were in awe of the fleet and were overjoyed to become trade partners. The representatives of the locals replied with respect, "We would love to cooperate with your country. We will also bow before your king." When they left, Zheng He's ship was loaded with goods brought from the locals. Shing was impressed as well. Western explorers such as Columbus sailed to new lands. Instead of forming a friendly relationship with the locals, he waged war and conquered their land. Shing admired Zheng He even more.

After leaving Calicut, some of the crew members started to feel homesick. They groaned and mumbled, hoping Zheng He would turn the ship back to China. Shing tried to suppress the anger within them, yet the anger kept spreading. It was contagious and snowballing into rebellions that seemingly descended into a mutiny. With no choice, he turned to Zheng He. Eventually, Zheng He made a decision, "I order all of you to listen to me. We will go to one final destination before sailing back home." The crew cheered and prepared for the next landing.

The destination was a small island. Shing could hardly see anyone on it. Therefore, he asked Zheng He out of curiosity, "Why do you want to visit this island? It's like there's no one on it!" Zheng He answered, "An island as remote as this one is the best place for a deposed emperor to hide and waiting for an opportunity to return to China." Shing nodded and did not ask furthermore.

As soon as they got off the ship, some barbarians ran out from the forest, shouting and running. They were holding some poorly made sharp tools. Zheng He and Shing both realized they were hostile and prepared for a battle. The salvages promptly noticed that Zheng He was the captain of the fleet and attacked him. Shing fought hard as well. Though Zheng He reacted quickly, he still couldn't face twenty salvages at the same time. Shing was so devoted into fighting that he failed to realize that one of the barbarians was coming towards Zheng He. As the barbarian was about to stab Zheng He into his chest, that middle-aged man with a scar on his face blocked the salvage's knife with his own body. Zheng He yelled, "Shing, take care of him!" Then he kept fighting. Shing pressed onto the man's wound yet he kept bleeding. "It's no use," the middle-aged man

whispered, "As I will not live for long, I want to tell you something." Shing leaned towards him. "I am the deposed emperor. It's been my secret for a long time. It's good to tell someone before I die." Shing gasped. He had never thought about it. But it was also logical. After all, the most dangerous place is the safest place! Suddenly, Shing felt that his clothes before his chest was wet and soon turned red. He was stabbed too! The deposed emperor smiled weakly, "At least my secret is safe with you forever..."

"Hey, wake up!" Shing heard somebody calling him. He could feel seawater in his mouth. He coughed the water out. He found himself on the lifeboat. Was it a dream? It didn't matter to Shing. He knew that it was a voyage that he would never forget.



# Alternating Between Two Centuries: A Voyage to the Ming Dynasty

*Munsang College, Lam, Tsing Cherry – 13*

A boat was left in limbo and sandwiched between two different centuries. It was a time warp. Bizarre as it was.

Earlier that night, a navigator reported that their route to Brisbane was merely a few miles away from the intersection of the International Date Line and the Equator. Captain Philips made sure the boat would exactly lie on his mark at midnight, helped by the said navigator.

Zhi and his friend Kenneth snuck out of the wheelhouse to drink beer on the roof of the superstructure. The view there was quite a sight. The sky was so clear you could see the stars sparkling, and the sea was so tranquil.

“Within ten minutes, we would be in a different century,” said Zhi. “Do you have any plans for it?”

“College. When I earn enough money, I will finish my study.” Kenneth turned to Zhi, “What about you?”

“My only plan is to get my stomach filled.” Zhi had been following his brother from a voyage to another since he was a lad. To him, the whole concept of having an ambition seemed mad.

“I know you will find something worthier than your next meal.”

Silence.

Downstairs, the sudden outburst of cheers indicated the crew’s success. Upstairs, Kenneth and Zhi clinked their bottles together as a gesture of celebration.

They crossed the Equator and the International Date Line at exactly midnight on 31<sup>st</sup> December 1899. With its bow in the Southern Hemisphere, which was in summer, and its stern in the Northern Hemisphere, which was in winter, SS Warrimoo was not only in two different days, two different months, two different seasons and two different years, but in two different centuries!

It was supposed to be something memorable. Yet all Zhi could think about was if he would get any extra money for this accomplishment.

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Zhi could only stare in shock.

The ladder broke before sliding to the side. Kenneth slipped off the broken ladder and hit the gunwale. A splash was followed by an agonized wail.

Panicking, Zhi noticed a man on the deck. “Get the rope!” He yelled, before jumping into the Pacific.

In the chilly water, Zhi touched something soft and warm. Drawing it closer, he held it against his own form. The surface somehow seemed to be much brighter, maybe he had got used to the dark. He searched for the rope and held onto it tightly.

He was soon pulled up to the deck. Panting, he released the body in his arms. The odd faces he saw got him alarmed.

Several men approached him. “Kid!” one of them exclaimed, “is His Excellency alright?”

These people spoke in a bizarre language. But Zhi could understand them. Perhaps it was because as a sailor, he was used to communicating with foreigners through their body language. Perhaps it was some sort of unknown power. The latter seemed to be the answer. Nevertheless, he remained silent.

“Everything’s fine now. Don’t worry, lad. Summon the physician!”

They carried the person Zhi saved away, but he was not Kenneth. He was taller, and his hair was darker.

Zhi was the next to be carried away. They left him in a cabin, where he was looked after. “His Excellency will see you soon,” said the physician before exiting the cabin.

Now Zhi finally had time to think alone. Those people on the ship resembled the portraits of the ancient Chinese in one of the very few books he owned.

Wait.

Oh, Lord.

He had somehow time-travelled. Assuming the fact that SS Warrimoo was in two different centuries at once had released some sort of power, he might have entered a time tunnel. Another sailor had once told him a similar story from a novel.

“Now what?” he asked himself.

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The next day, he was called to meet ‘His Excellency’. He followed a young man to the deck, where a man in yellow robe waited. The sunlight blurred the outlines of his black cap as his purple cape flowed with the sea breeze and shone under the sunshine.

The man looked back. His skin was tan, slightly yellowish, like sand. With his lips pressed together and his eyebrows thick, he looked stern. His nose was, though not big, rather tall. His eyes were slightly upturned like the rest of the crew, but it was amber in colour. Despite his masculine features, he did not have a beard.

“Lord Zheng He, he is here.”

Zhi’s heart skipped a beat. Was he really standing in front of Zheng He, the famous voyager from the Ming Dynasty? He had always been Zhi’s idol.

He had to be dreaming.

Zheng He dismissed the young man as Zhi bowed. “G...greetings, Your Excellency.”

“It was nice to see you are unharmed after that incident. May I know your name?”

“Zhi, Your Excellency. Zhi Lee.”

“I must award you for saving me, Zhi,” said Zheng He. His voice was loud but smooth, like the sound of the waves. “What is your rank in the crew?”

“A sailor,” that was true, although he was not a sailor in *his* crew.

“I see,” he paused. “From now on, you will be a navigator of my boat. Is there anything else you want?”

“Thank you, Your Excellency. No, I am satisfied as long as I am warm and full.”

Frowning, Zheng He commented, “Are you one of those who only wish to live pass today?”

Stunned, Zhi was speechless.

Zheng He continued, “I used to be aimless like you too.”

“When I was serving the Yongle Emperor as a eunuch, my only purpose was to satisfy him. Everything I did, was under his will.”

“I have been aimless too, I—”

“My aimless is more aimless than your aimless,” he cut Zhi off. “Do you understand the pain of living for someone else? The emperor treated me well, but if he told me to die, I would have done it without hesitation. If you think you are surviving instead of living, I was not even surviving.”

“Then he ordered me to lead his fleet on the voyages. I finally started waking up with a purpose. I’m not doing it for myself, but without me, this whole thing can’t be done. I was leading this voyage for the sake of our fleet, our country, our people and... my name.”

“It’s amazing, how something as simple as trying to reach land amidst endless water gives me a purpose.”

“I’ve finished.” Said Zheng He. He gave Zhi a final glare and left.

Zhi’s gaze lingered at the horizon.

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The next day, Zhi walked to the stern to watch the sunrise. He heard someone approaching him.

“I had a dream.”

Zhi nodded, eager to hear

“I go to Mecca in that dream,” Zheng He inhaled, “like my father and my grandfather.”

“Wait,” Zhi questioned, “aren’t you Chinese?”

“I am Chinese, I’m just from a different tribe.”

“I’m sorry,” Zhi looked down. “I shouldn’t have assumed you were Arabian.”

“I am Arabian, I just grew up in China.”

Again, Zhi was at a loss of words.

“I have never gone to Mecca on my previous voyages to Arabia, but every decent Muslim should at least go to Mecca once in his life.”

“I thought you were a Buddhist.”

“It’s complicated. But why does it matter? What I am doesn’t define who I am.”

He walked away.

★

Days became years, and months became weeks – Zhi’s concept of time grew blurry.

The sailor who cleaned the floor was now a navigator, who determined their position and decided their direction through the movement of stars. He could never forget how bright the star was back then. The ocean and the sky blended together as the water reflected the starlight. It was as if they were floating in the sky. It was his favourite sight.

He learnt that Zheng He fell into the sea under the attack of a group of pirates. Zhi witnessed it several times afterwards too. Sometimes, they traded with the locals in ports, who occasionally offered them hospitality. However, their kindness was mostly declined. “We would like to keep on going,” said their leader. The fleet was restless, and Zhi loved it.

It was exciting, how everything ahead of them was unknown, yet they would always figure out a way.

Most importantly, Zhi was no longer lost.

He always considered himself a resident of the ocean, but inside he knew he belonged to China, his homeland.

But why did it matter? What he was could not define who he was. He was Chinese, but he also belonged to the world. He would show China to the world.

Suddenly he felt like he knew himself. Suddenly he had a purpose.

They were being attacked again, Zhi was one of those fighting on the deck. A blade went through his abdomen, and he fell into the sea from the bow.

“Zhi? Wake up, we are in Brisbane.”

# Two Ladies' Voices on the Same Wavelength

*Munsang College, Lee, Tsz Lok – 13*

## ***Scarlett***

Rita and I were in the museum, walking with our teacher, Ms Chan, who was leading us onto the tour of the Treasures of the Ming Dynasty, along with a bunch of classmates who obviously could not take it any longer. They were about to doze off.

When I touched a glass of this small but delicate drawing, I passed out.

When I came around, it was dawn already. The sun lit the sea up, sending fiery colors to dance on the wide blue. Rita was sitting next to me, staring at the sea half-heartedly.

'Scarlett, you finally woke up! I don't know where this is, but this doesn't seem 2019!' My tired brain started to think. There were often rumors that people disappeared in this museum, but...

On this land, the people didn't have houses. Everyone lived in camps and spoke unknown languages. Suddenly, I heard a familiar sentence of Chinese. That's when I knew, and pulled Rita towards this ship of Chinese.

How the Chinese got so far, I had no idea. But how I got so far, to a dynasty of China, I was ultimately muddled.

I was brought to this little room, only enough for two, when I finally looked at my clothes. I was still in my jeans and T-shirt! How did they not notice a stranger with weird clothing? I decided to experiment with it.

That's why Rita and I were in their food storage, watching the cooks, Chow and Ma, cook. When Chow came to get the ingredients, he was surprised. But our frantic faces told him that nothing was to be said. Guess we didn't have invisibility!

Then, Ma came to get him some potatoes. He just seemed that he didn't see us. Interesting. How did Chow see us?

When the moon, a brilliant silver tonight, shone, and Rita slept, I sauntered to Chow's room. In Chinese, we talked, and I started to know about him seeing through invisibility.

Chow said that he was on Captain Zheng's ship for all these years, and has been hugely rewarded. The golden locket he kept in his pocket, a memory from their 3rd Journey, was said to be magical.

Captain Zheng, still a young warrior then, was fighting his way through the treasures of the seas. Through his last voyages, he gained fame and popularity over the seas. China was a king of the sea because of him.

The 48 ships carrying 28000 people sailed triumphantly through the seas, as their leader, Zheng found treasures. Not as in only gold and silver, but also friendly bonds with other countries, and gifts from them. Chow was 20 back then, and remembered Zheng's kindness and yet, superiority that didn't need anger and punishment.

The most remarkable place was Siam, Chow said. It had a beautiful smell, and the wood was exceptionally fragrant. Some of the essence was stored in his locket.

He let me smell it. It was kind of like my conditioner, which was weird. Maybe that's the link to him seeing us.

Continuing the story, Chow said that Captain Zheng gave the Siamese people two silver chops, and that's how he protected China from the Siamese navy.

The pirates were another story. One with war. But that's a story for another day. Chow was tired. So was I.

## *Rita*

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I woke in the middle of the night, and went to get myself some snacks. Scurrying to the kitchen, I went to get some corn. Chow and Ma slept peacefully on the little room beside the kitchen. I finished the corn as silently as possible, and headed back to our little 'chamber'.

The next day, the boat reached Pahang. Chow, the intellectual, put some herbs to make the others able to see us. Then he introduced us at breakfast. 'These are the Lees, they're brothers who cook. I've been training them and they should be cooking well.'

Funny how girls cannot go on these trips.

The remark went and we scurried back to the kitchen. With Ma, the four of us formed the kitchen with me and Rita chopping and slicing all over it. Interesting how teenagers then cooked so well.

It was night soon and Ma and Chow continued to spice up the journeys of Captain Zheng.

'It was the first journey. We stopped at Liujiagang honouring the goddess of journeys. Then we sailed to Java. The barley there was beautifully grown in patches of land and gold, all the people smiled and were most welcoming.' Said Ma, smiling at the thought. 'But then, Alagakkonara was another story.' Chow continued the story. 'Alagakkonara people were really hostile! They just had arrows flying everywhere and wars being fought so we went away. Chen was the real fight. This pirate was totally owning the seas back then. Captain Zheng actually bought gifts as token of peace to prevent wars and to negotiate the pacification of the seas but the wicked guy planned to kill us off. And get the silk and gold, of course. Captain Zheng fought magnificently, winning our total trust and respect.' 'And also some fear too,' Ma added. 'The guy killed 5000 pirates and burnt 10 or so ships. He was so great, young and strong. That's how us Mings became the king of the seas.' Back in our bedroom, I was lying down with thought. Why kill so many people while you can make friends? Why are there wars when there actually can be peace? And when did China become King of the Seas?

Scurrying to the board because I just couldn't sleep, I saw Ma on the board at the left, and Scarlet watching the stars with Chow, looking sleepy. Walking towards Ma, I almost gave him a heart attack. 'Explain to me more trips.' I asked, trying to find a better position to lie on and see the stars. 'Heh,' he smirked. 'Someone's liking the stories.' 'Shut up.' I grumbled. 'So about the second voyage, the main aim was to reach peace between Java and Ming. The Java kings were strong and were the only kingdom that could balance the Ming navy. So forcefully we had to reach peace, right? The story was that Java kings had once killed 170 Chinese ambassadors from Ming. And even that was a mistake, the king thought they were his rivals from East Java.

Java was forced to give money for compensation or war would be inflicted. After finishing compensation, still ships would be used to supervise them...' I was sound asleep.

## *Scarlett*

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The orange sun woke me. Drool was lying on my face, which I cleared up immediately. Seeing Rita also on the deck, I woke her and dragged her to the head of the ship, smirking when I saw she was lying beside Ma, probably listening to stories last night.

We were wondering how we'd get back home these weeks. On the deck, as we admired the waters, we thought. Rita asked if we'd go to other places and touch something. By that thought, I started to find anything that was related to the ship. There was still time for a story about the journey. Finding the storage for books, I headed to the 'library' with Rita.

While 'ruining', actually finding noisily in the library, Captain Zheng found us. 'So you two are inspired. How 'bout a small story? It was the second journey. After our fight with Java, we went to cut wood in Pulan Sembilan. The wood was exceptionally fragrant and we cut a lot back to our home, China.

He held a black box with fine lines and opened it.

'Time to go back home.'

# Imagine

*PLK Tong Nai Kan JS College, Tamang, Rohan – 15*

**To many, the new tales from Ming Dynasty seem to be about treasures or fortune. I wonder if there is more than that. I see some wonderful ideas just from glancing this – it's a goal that we long for to see. Imagine! That is me as a captain.**

My goal is to be an adventurer. In the future, I hope to explore the world before I die. I am dedicated to finishing my school and university. After that, I'll start my real journey. I will visit the highland, polar region, desert and forest.

You may say I'm a dreamer, I think it is the modern way of “Voyaging”, the main reason of why I want to achieve this goal is because that I want to experience everything. I only live once so I have to take the chance to fully live my life. I hate boring life. Being an adventurer is exciting and dangerous. I like challenges a lot and I am not afraid of the obstacles. Even though I may die during the journey, I have no regrets. In order to achieve this goal, I'll learn and join field survival courses to improve my survival skills and find a personal trainer to help me. I also plan to achieve this goal.

But I'm not the only one. First, I will tune my mindset completely. I have to leave my comfort zone, explore somewhere different, and try local food from other countries that I have never tried and had no guts to eat, It's time to train up my courage starting from now! I'll never give up this goal. My fellow mates are with me in this. Our story goes on as the big wave is now coming to us and my crew depends on my skills to find the treasure on the x island that is hidden in Mainland. We only have one more hour to go as we passed all the provinces of the Mainland from The South Sea to The Northman cave.

We shall sail as we "imagine"!



# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

*Po Leung Kuk Choi Kai Yau School, Lai, Valerie – 11*

Tom gaped at the looming figure above him. She was the ship for the “Ming Voyages”, and she was ready to set sail tomorrow morning. As soon as he realized that she was the famous ship, he dashed forwards to the open door. The crew should have locked the door if they knew that an escapee like Tom would go on the ship. He looked around. No one was around, and the sun began to rise. He had to take this chance. He could leave now and take on an adventurous life, or stay home and get on with his terrible life of being starved and beaten. He didn’t need to think twice. With one graceful leap, he jumped onto the beautiful ship right before she closed her big wooden door.

“Who goes there?” The harsh call of a person woke the sleepy Tom up. It took him a few seconds to come back to Earth. Why of course! He was on the grand ship, going on the Ming Voyages secretly, leaving his draughty home behind! But then he also realized the consequences if he was caught. He heard tales of captains who dumped anyone off the ship if they didn’t obey him! Remembering this, he shivered with fear. “I hear you, intruder! Come out, stop whimpering!” The voice sounded again. It was a girl’s voice, but aggressive. Tom then realized that he was whimpering like a hungry puppy. He couldn’t stop himself. The footsteps came nearer and nearer. Tom whimpered louder and louder. Bang! The crate he was hiding behind flew out of the way. It was a girl. She had wavy auburn hair, pale, freckled face and warm hazel eyes. When the girl saw Tom, her face softened. She asked quietly, “Are you okay? I hope that I didn’t scare you too much. You know, because I’m a girl and everything.” upon hearing that, Tom immediately sprang to his feet and reassured the girl, “Don’t worry, I won’t look down on you just because you are a girl. Many brave people I know are girls and some weak little mites are boys. By the way, I’m Tom. What’s yours?” The girl broke into a smile and said, “I’m Natalie. Nice to meet you. You would like to meet the rest of the crew. I could say that you were my friend. I don’t have any and it would be nice to have one.” With saying that, Natalie slipped her hand into Tom’s and pulled him out to deck. How lucky can he be? Finding a friend right on his first day on the ship!

Later on, they met the rest of the crew. Some were very friendly, like Huang, the old man on the lookout at night plastered on a big grin when he heard that Natalie had a friend. “Why my dear, you have finally found a friend! I’m glad to know that, girl!” And saying that, he clapped her on that back so hard that Natalie nearly fell over. The captain was also very welcoming. Tom could finally see where did Natalie get those warm hazel eyes. “So, you’re Natalie’s friend, right? Well, aren’t I glad to see you! Well, it’s awfully nice that my lonely daughter finally has a friend. Unlike her older brother.” Hearing this, Tom could feel Natalie getting angrier. Maybe her brother gets all the attention. When they went out of the captain’s cabin, Natalie vented furiously, “Ugh! Just because my brother is a boy, everyone thinks that he is the better one! He gets a better education, that’s what I know! I bet if I went to school as well I could have done even better than my brother! He doesn’t even bother to know his multiplication tables, yet I know how to handle percentages! Why don’t they think more of women nowadays!” Tom felt sorry for her. Although he wasn’t a girl, he understood when people were treated unfairly, what would he feel like. Being the youngest of all six siblings is pretty hard to attract attention once you could take care of yourself.

The next stop was to go to see Natalie’s brother, Nathan. When they got to the door, Natalie paused for a moment, put on a defiant scowl, and rapped on the finely carved wooden door. A series of clashes were heard, and the door clicked open. A boy, nearly fifteen, answered the door with an annoyed scowl on his face. The two scowled at each other, their scowls growing angrier and uglier every second. Finally, Nathan growled, “What do you want, little loser?” Natalie retorted, “Well, since you are the oldest child in the captain’s family, it is tradition for the first– born SON to do the greeting of new members, am I right?” Nathan made a noise which sounded like a cross between a growl, a bark and a groan, and glared at Tom, scanning him from head to toe, as if he was an x– ray machine. Tom was taken back at Nathan’s behavior as a “First born son” but he still looked as calm as before. After Nathan realized that Tom wasn’t disclosing any emotion, he just said cold heartedly, “Ok, then, what’s– your– name, welcome to the crew of sailors of the Ming Voyages. Now get scrubbing the bottom of the deck with my horrid sister.” Tom had no choice but to go scrub the bottom of the deck with Natalie.

After a few days, Tom began to feel happy whenever Natalie is around. His eyes shone when Natalie woke him up everyday with a warm smile. Tom had never felt so happy before. Was he in love? Tom was not sure. All he knew was that he was lucky that he escaped and found himself on Natalie's ship. Well, it wasn't exactly her ship, but she was in it. However, all that stopped abruptly. One day, Natalie was walking at the edge of the ship with Tom when suddenly, her face went white, and she fainted with a weak gasp. Help was immediately fetched and Tom watched sadly as Natalie was carried to her cabin. A few hours later, the captain walked up to Tom and said gravely, "I'm so sorry Tom, but Natalie will not be able to come up for her duties in a short period of time. So, I have asked Nathan to take her place. I do hope you will get along with him, unlike her sister. Also, if you have any idea why she doesn't go along with her brothers and any other types of men, for that case." and with a deep sigh, he strode away. Tom thought for a moment, then he made up his mind to go and find Natalie, since it was his break.

He tiptoed into the cabin to find Natalie staring blankly at the top of the cabin. He whispered, "hey, Natalie, are you okay? I hope you are." without looking back, Natalie sighed a deep sigh and replied sorely, "Of course I'm not. My father scolded me off for being a sickly girl. He said that Nathan was definitely a better and more obedient child than I am. He is always in his cabin hiding out and he said that I wasn't a good girl just because I got sick! Life is so unfair nowadays," she said, blinking back tears. Tom felt sympathy for the poor girl. "Same here. My parents are harsh on me just because I'm the youngest. They tell me to behave better, unlike my older siblings. All of them are awarded scholarships to Universities but they rejected it because they didn't have enough money to supply everything else. I wish they would just let me do something without them looking at me all the time. Seriously, I don't get them at all." upon hearing that, Natalie immediately sprang to her feet with anger, scaring Tom. "What do you mean that it's not lucky? Don't you realize that you are so much luckier than everyone else like me? At least that you've got someone to look after you. They care about you a lot although they're poor. But me? I get ignored and all the attention is on my brother, who doesn't need any of it. He gets to go to school and gets a good education although he doesn't even obey the teachers, but you have all the attention from your parents although they don't have enough money for themselves. Think about it, Tom! Go away until you've learnt your lesson. I thought I liked you, but now I know that we're no match at all. Just go!" she screamed, pushing Tom out of her cabin. Tom was furious. How dare a dumb girl like her push me out? She's not a boss of Tom. he could jump off the boat and no one could stop him. He was red from head to toe now. He had enough of this. With one giant leap, he vanished under the waters.

Until now, no one knows where he is. Natalie, upon remembering this, didn't feel sorry for the boy at all. Now, she was full of wrinkles, sitting in a sofa of a cosy living room, drinking tea from a china cup, with children playing and adults talking all around her. She had been successful. She didn't need anything else to help her anymore. It was Tom's fault, not hers. She had followed her dreams, gotten enough money to go to college, and written books and books for everyone to read about her adventures at the Ming Voyages. Although she didn't want to go on the Ming Voyages, she did get some good out of it.

# The Power of Tin Hau

*Renaissance College, Wong, Ava – 11*

First, a note for my father:

I'm writing down our adventure as you told me to. Yes, I'll remember to bury it so people in the future can read it, and I will make it present tense if you don't mind. Because it just feels good to be in the present. It's more real... So here it is...

I've persuaded Father to take me on his next trip! Not to brag, but he's the captain of a ship! The ship is small and excluding father and me, there will only be five people onboard. People call us pirates, but we only steal things from the Wokou. They are Japanese pirates that steal treasure for themselves, whereas we give out gold and silk treasure to poor people who starve! We don't use weapons *or* hurt people! We're not like the Wokou.

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I board the ship with Father and my ginger cat, Yuen. Yuen's jade collar glistens in the sunlight.

A skinny man greets us. "Luk Ming! You've brought your daughter?!"

"Of course, Fat Chan, and her name is Luk Tang. Don't worry, she won't be any trouble."

The ship contains stacks of chests, and the pirates stare at me as I look around.

"Where are we going now?" I ask.

"We've found a map leading to a mysterious treasure! It's a tiny statue of Tin Hau, the goddess of the sea! The legend is, if you hold it, you'll be able to command water! With such power, we can collect more treasure, then give it to the people who live in poverty... and some for ourselves of course! A lot of people suffered because of the Ming Emperor's sea ban order."

Father points to a map pinned to a pole.

"But... why are you a pirate?" I can't seem to stop asking questions today.

Father stares into the distance. "It's because of my childhood. As you know, your grandparents were fishermen, so they lived on the coastline."

"Yes."

"But living on the coastline wasn't allowed. So we had to move. We didn't have enough money to buy a house, let alone build one. I remember sleeping in the bitter cold without shelter," Father grits his teeth.

"You know how Grandpa died..."

I had never seen my Grandpa. And no one had ever spoken about him, until now.

"So!" Father asks Fat Chan, "Have we arrived yet?"

"Yes, Captain! We will be docking in approximately one hour!". The seven of us cheer.

Yuen's jade collar brushes my cheek. I found it on a beach when I was small. Father says the Japanese believe it contains some sort of magical power. But I'm not Japanese. I'm Chinese, from the Ming Empire.

"Time to go, Luk Tang!" Father shouts. Finally!

The surface of the island is covered with rocks. Withered flowers and dead trees seem to glare at me as I explore. We walk slowly down the gangplank. That's strange, another ship is anchored near the island.

"Father? Who does this ship belong to?" Father runs towards the ship to get a closer look.

"It's the Wokou ship. The selfish Matsuura! The Wokou have come!"

“Everyone! Beware! Matsuura’s crew has also arrived!” Father announces. We fall silent. Matsuura? So that’s the leader of the horrible Wokou? I look at the ground for footprints. None. Of course there wouldn’t be footprints on such a rocky island. Suddenly, something blue catches my eye. I brush the rocks away. A picture of a wave carved into the ground beside it, is a handle!

“Father, I’ve found something!” Everybody surrounds me.

“Unusual.” Father pulls the handle. It’s a trap door! A staircase is revealed. Father glances at me.

“Father, can I go down?”

“Fine. But be careful.” Father turns to Fat Chan. “You’re our lookout, Fat Chan.”

As we go down, the light from the surface fades. I can’t see, but nobody complains. We continue going down the staircase in the dark. We sense light coming from the distance. We follow Father towards the light. Other pirates! They must be the Japanese Wokou. They are holding torches. Their backs are turned against us. Father glares at them.

“Matsuura!” He shouts. The biggest Wokou turns around first. The others follow.

“Ah. Luk Ming. *Konichiwa*. I expected you.” In his grasp is the statue of Tin Hau. He has the magical statue!

“*Nekkuresu!*” A wokou points to me. He sounds excited, but I have no idea what it means.

Everybody stares. Why is he pointing at me?

“Don’t touch her!” Father warns.

“GIRL! Come!” Matsuura orders.

“DON’T, LUK TANG!” Father shouts.

I take a step towards Matsuura. If I don’t, he’ll kill the rest of the pirates. Matsuura steps closer towards me, his sword in his hands. The blade is long and slick, a Japanese sword. I hate weapons. They are nothing but tools for war and chaos! Father pushes me behind him. He has no weapons.

“Don’t hurt my daughter!”

Matsuura laughs. The sound of laughter stops and he kicks Father’s legs. Father is knocked onto the ground, groaning.

“Father!” I scream.

I turn to the pirates, who are doing nothing, “Help! Please!”

They immediately run over and to help father. Some restrain Matsuura. But the Wokou swing their swords and the pirates back away. “Luk Ming, your pirates are cowards!” Matsuura chuckles. He easily fights off the pirates and snatches Yuen!

“YES!” Matsuura roars. Matsuura rips the jade necklace off of Yuen’s neck.

Matsuura takes the statue out of his vest and plugs it into a slot in the statue. So he wasn’t after me? He was after Yuen? Or more specifically the jade necklace I found so many years ago.

The ceiling starts to vibrate. Pieces of rubble fall on my head.

Father gets to his feet. “No... He’s controlling the sea! We must get out of here!”

We run and run and run. We hear a loud noise and water seeps in through the ceiling, but leaving Matsuura

and his wokou untouched. I glance at the wall of water Matsuura has created. I have to stop him. Father sometimes thought girls weren't as brave as boys. But if I stop Matsuura, I can prove myself! I make my decision.

"Luk Tang! Don't!" Father shouts. I don't listen. Lives are at stake. I'm soaked in cold water, but I don't care. I swim towards Matsuura. I struggle to breathe until I'm finally gasping the oxygen from the air. A Wokou is holding my dear cat in a corner.

"Are you crazy?" Father shouts.

"That statue doesn't belong to you!" I yell, ignoring Father.

Matsuura raises his eyebrows, "But it doesn't belong to you either."

"I won't keep it! But it's in the wrong hands now."

"You're not tak— ahh! There's a roach on it!" Matsuura shrieks and drops the statue. He's afraid of a cockroach? The wall of water collapses and water fills the room. I grab the statue. It isn't burning. The statue maybe heated up to stop Matsuura for me! Although that sounds too crazy even for a magical statue. The jade necklace is plugged into the slot of the statue. I put it back on Yuen's neck.

Make the water go back to the sea, I tell the statue. It reacts quickly, and the water gets sucked back up the ceiling. I run up the staircase with father and Yuen, with the Wokou following close behind. The pirates are waiting for us. I run to the edge of the island, throw the statue as far as I can, and it sinks deep into the sea.

"NOO!" Matsuura cries. His eyes are red with anger, "YOU!" He swings his sword at me.

My feet are glued to the spot with fear. A yellow blob jumps in front of me and shields me. The yellow blob falls to the ground. Matsuura laughs. That yellow blob is Yuen... She sacrificed her life... for me. Yuen licks my face and freezes. I take the necklace off her with trembling hands and put it around my neck.

Suddenly, I feel a different voice in my head. *I'm Tin Hau. Before, I took possession of your cat's body. Wear this necklace and you can possess the power of Tin Hau. The statue's useless.* I jump up in surprise. The Wokou are chasing us. Save us, Tin Hau! I turn around. A wall of water blocks the Wokou from catching us. We board our ship and I throw the necklace into the ocean. I don't deserve it either.

Maybe a few hundred years later, you'll find it. I hope it will be in good hands.

# The Voyages

*Sha Tin College, Kwan, Gordon – 11*

There was once a noble man named Zheng He, he was also a slave that served the honorable prince. One day he was suddenly summoned to the Shanghai palace, only to retrieve a mysterious scroll for his eyes only. But wait, how did he become the slave he is today?

Zheng He grew up cheerfully with his loving father. Both his father, and grandfather were outstanding Muslim leaders during the Mongol Yuan dynasty, he himself was an ambitious child. On one fateful day, Zheng He was listening to his father speaking of the Muslim religion inside a mosque, when a group of soldiers sent by the prince secretly bribed the guard with precious, shining gems and money to gain access to the building. The guard's face was beaming like a bag full of of glitter, it was all worth more than a years pay. It was then time for their next step – to kidnap the young boy. While everyone was distracted with their prayers, the prince's men quickly snatched the child, fleeing the mosque. They ran like their life depended on it, straight to the giant chariots. Together, they maneuvered the horses back to the palace. Meanwhile at the mosque, Zheng He's father stopped talking and stared at the bench where Zheng He should have been. He was nowhere to be found. Slowly falling to his knees, he put his face in his hands. Sorrowfully he questioned, "What have I done to lose my beloved, little child?" However both father and son did not know that an adventure was waiting for Zheng He.

As the soldiers reach the palace up in the giant mountains, Zheng He instantly woke up, wondering where he was. He soon figured he had been kidnapped. Struggling in multiple ways, he tried to escape; pushing, tearing and punching but none of it helped, it just bruised and hurted him. He soon gave up. Finally, he was brought to the man himself, the prince. As he walked towards him there was a disgusting stench of slavery. Everyone bowed down at the prince's presence. He then decided what to do to this young, strong boy. With the perfect idea, he firmly shouted, "From now on you will be my slave. But you will be educated once every week, someone get him a list of chores!" The entire room stood shocked. Why would a little boy be a slave, yet have education, it was very unusual. Zheng He knew his only option was to obey and do exactly what the prince demanded, for he knew there was no escape. Over the years, Zheng He became smarter and smarter, promoted annually and given major assignments. A few years later, he found himself in Shanghai waiting for something important.

Upon stepping into the tabernacle, Zheng He is then greeted by the emperor himself. He presents Zheng He with a ponderous scroll of instructions. Upon examining the entire scroll, the prince is intrigued. He then commands Zheng He to do exactly what it dictated, and to take with him ten thousand men. "Yes my prince!" Zheng He obeyed. Alas the prince says "Good luck." Zheng He spoke with confidence, "Thank you, I will return bestowing China with money and power."

Once Zheng He allocated everyone their jobs. He announced the orders authoritatively; to build a boat that has never been seen before, the one and only Chinese treasure hunter. A spacious ship larger than anything anyone has ever seen before, it was equipped with; a giant net to catch fish for the duration of the long voyage, six grand cannons on each side and a storage place for the commodities they find. As they were working on the last sections of the first ship their operation was secretly being spied on by a group of mysterious creatures. Though they've been spotted around the world, no one knew who or what they are, only that they keep the skulls of their enemies featured on the ship. Once the prince's men finished one hundred boats, unfortunately a few men were lost in the process, but Zheng He was confident that the expedition would be a success. As they were about to set off, the prince ran to Zheng He as he had one last message and item to give him, "This book is for you, do not open it unless you're in the face of grave danger. It will save you and your men. Keep it safe."

"Thank you." replied Zheng He, and that was the beginning of the treasure voyages.

Their first challenge was to catch dinner. Quickly, the crew threw the huge net on the water's surface, it was as heavy as Goliath. Everyone was shocked by the amount of fish before their eyes. While they dragged the net back aboard, Zheng He stood up and shouted, "My dear crew, let's drink our traditional tea ceremony to remember our lovely family members." After that, the capacious ship set off on the start of their first voyage!

Zheng He was alone at night when he remembered the prince gave him the instructions to open the book if he ever stumbled across perils. He was curious, but of course he wanted no trouble. When suddenly a faintly translucent, wooden looking ship drew close. Zheng He quickly opened the book and words inside glowed, he read it out aloud, "If you are reading this I suspect you are in the midst of a peril. Observe the ship, is it covered in wreckage, ancient almost, equipped with cannons, it has no living crew and finally the ship is completely silent. This is the mythical Ghost Sailor. No one has survived it and lived to tell the tale." Zheng He checked the characteristics. To his dismay, it was! Zheng He and his crew prepared for battle, firing with all their power. The ancient ship appeared to start sinking, the ghostly crew was awoken and they began to retaliate. They fired back ammunition of their own. Luckily the prince's reinforced ships held up. The battle wrecked havoc between both fleets, cannon balls flew back and forth like never seen before. After a long gruelling battle the ghostly ship finally retreated. The crew of ghost all hissed in displeasement. Zheng He's crew on the other hand all rejoiced over their well deserved victory, but he knew there was more to come.

After a very long five years of killing, collecting precious duds and commodities, was time for the crew and Zheng He to return back to where they belong and most importantly, rejuvenate. They were immensely proud of their achievements. Meanwhile, when Zheng He and his crew were returning, the prince's servants were constant on a look out. Once they spotted the first sign of Zheng He's return the cite citizens all quickly hid except one man. As Zheng He steered to harbour he noticed something unusual, a figure standing in the middle of the dock Zheng He then shouted, "Move out the way!" but as he got closer he realised it was his father! He could recognise the man anywhere, despite his now silvery hair and slightly more wrinkles. Zheng He was speechless, he jumped off the boat and hugged him as they were finally reunited.

Before the celebration began, Zheng He was rewarded with gold and jewels, but the most important his father. After the sun set and celebration end Zheng He was in panic as he couldn't find his father. He rushed to the river in search for him. Only to eventually find him under the moon's shadow soaking in the scenery. They laughed and talked the night away, catching up on the long, lost years. Was this the last of Zheng He's adventure.

# The Troubles of Sailing

*Sha Tin College, Ng, Ryan – 11*

Looking back on it thirty years later, it all seemed comical, mildly dangerous at most. However, at that time I thought we were surely doomed. It was all down to our leader, Zheng He. He promised our survival; the greatest captain of the seas, and a trusted friend of the Emperor. It was my honor to be his cabin boy. Over the years, traveling together, we struck up a close friendship, if you heard my fellow sailors' stories, you'd be able to see why we all place our lives in his hands. Together, we faced many hardships, but the one that we all take pride in is the Ming Treasure Voyage.

Despite the three decades, the memories are still fresh and vivid. I was no older than twelve, in front of the wheel, enjoying the fresh, salty sea breeze brushing past my face. While being faintly aware of the familiar heated voices a few meters away from me, I was entirely captivated by the view. Right at that moment, Zheng He and the chief navigator stormed on board, hauled up the anchor, rolled out the map and we were off again! The breeze immediately increased tenfold, so powerful that I had to sit on my hat to prevent it from rolling away in the breeze. Meanwhile, I mulled over what they were arguing about. Zheng He must have noticed the sullen expression on my face, and thus proceeded to lighten up the mood. "Cheer up boy! The end is in sight!" Pointing at a distant group of islands far on the horizon. I stood up, taking a glance at the maps – they always fascinated me. I spotted a large, red circle enclosing a patch of seemingly barren ocean, underneath were the words – 'Beware, hidden coral reef'. I pointed this out to Zheng He, who patted me on the shoulder, assuring me that the navigator was well aware and we had already passed it. That was what I presumed they were arguing about. Suddenly, the ship made an ominous tearing noise and we started sinking. In a quick glance, I fell into the deep black abyss of unconsciousness.

A sudden gust of wind gave me the rudest of awakenings. I was lying on a fine, white, stretch of sand, completely devoid of rocks. Others however, were not so lucky. Some were tossed inland by the thrashing ocean like a toddler would toss its toys; more bodies were still coming in. Quickly glancing around, I nearly jumped out of my shoes when I saw Zheng He pacing near me, fuming with anger and confusion. "That infuriating, stubborn navigator! I told him about the coral reef. Fate will have him one day." It was unsettling to see him lose his composure; ever since a young child I've always known him to be a man of calm disposition.

The next morning, there was something that drove everything else right out of my mind. The sun was beginning to peek up above the mountains as I slowly woke up from my deep slumber in the forest, I realized people were moving past me towards a dark silhouette in the distance. I leaped off the not so comfy forest floor, all traces of sleep and weariness instantly vanished. What was it? What's happening? I slowly crept forward to find out. It wasn't just the silhouette that could be dangerous. The forest floor was littered with perils. There was an unseen number of roots and vines snaking across the ground, sudden holes and ditches that could cripple without warning. Don't even get me started on the wild life.

Some fellow sailors and I crept closer, a beast appeared to be hunched over something. Everyone had their theories and the critics against said theories.

"A monster, definitely."

"If it is, what kind is it?"

"I don't know, it looks massive though."

"Maybe it's a yeti!"

"Yetis don't exist."

Zheng He finally decided that he had enough of all this nonsense. Rushing forwards with his sword raised out, he raced ahead to confront the threat, a few others followed suit. Halfway there, they stopped and started laughing. Any fear amongst us quickly dissipated and instead, a wave of curiosity and confusion took over. It was our ship! And to think that we were petrified at the sight of that! One by one, the crew members crept out like timid mice and soon there was an outburst of laughter. Alas, the good feelings were soon vanquished and the reality of a gaping hole in our hull hit us like a horse carriage.

We immediately set to work, scouring the ship for anything remotely useful. Everyone's hands were full and it all soon became a vast heap in front of Zheng He. He began the laborious task of searching through



the enormous stockpile, recovering most of our treasures, discarding very little and keeping the rest. Eventually, he found some mini axes; which looked like they couldn't hurt a fly. Zheng He then sent three of the strongest men to chop down trees. I remember looking at them, thinking that they would be at it all day.

With one of the large hacked down trees, Zheng He fashioned some crude spears, ordering some men to hunt down wild animals, or what we called 'dinner'. There was some bickering to be heard between the crew, but they ultimately kept silent. Meanwhile, Zheng He built a campfire, igniting it with a plank of wood and a stick. Not long after, the crew members returned with a colossal pig slung over their shoulder, apparently the forest was teeming with them. Zheng He praised them for their fine work, but also warned them to kill the elder ones, leaving the younger pigs to reproduce. After digging into the magnificent creature, it was time for a good night's rest, then resuming the escape preparation later. At this point, everyone was yet to be aware of our greatest danger, right here among us.

A bunch of shuffling footsteps woke me up, along with the muffled cursing of a man who most likely fell in a hole and twisted their ankle. I gradually got up and stole towards the ragtag invasion of men. They were all clustered together, gathered around someone. The leader looking figure then took out a long, jagged knife, preparing to plunge it down. They were about to murder someone there and then! I ran. Once I was in arms reach, I dived forwards. As I collided into the knife wielding man, his band let out a startled gasp, scattering immediately into the woods. I then attempted to pin him down, and by doing so, his identity was revealed. The navigator! I focused my gaze on him, my eyes fixated on a small cloth bag. It was our jewels! I made a grab for it. Unfortunately, in doing so, I relinquished my grip and he ran away. I had a feeling we were never going to see him again. As I looked down, chest heaving at Zheng He, I had to suppress a giggle. He was still sleeping! He somehow slept through all that commotion!

In the morning, we all looked around for the navigator and his guidance, but to everyone's surprise (aside from myself), he was gone. At this point, we had to rely on Zheng He, who merely shrugged and pointed to four different positions on the map, each one more unlikely than the last. We were lost. As we all started chopping down trees to make planks, Zheng He sat on a rock, deep in thought. I walked over to see what was going on, my brow covered in sweat. He spotted me and sparked up a conversation.

"Even if we had enough planks, we can't be sure our handiwork will survive the trip..."

"We could risk it."

"And risk losing our boat? No!"

"But we have limited supplies!"

"Fine. But if we sink, I'm blaming it on you." He gave me a stern look, followed by a smirk.

And so it commenced. We set off repairing our ship. Luckily, we had a skilled carpenter on board for exactly this type of scenario, but even with his skills, it took that day and much of the next to complete the repairs. No amount of wood felt sufficient. We hurried to cut down trees, stripped them of bark, cut them into thin slices, then painstakingly slowly nailed them over the hole. Finally, loaded our rapidly dwindling supplies into the ship. As we limped to port, we were greeted with astonishment, as we were all given up for dead. A few days later, I received a letter from the navigator fashioned from rough bark, requesting help. I laughed and threw it away. A little cruel perhaps, but it was all a near murderer deserved.

# The Diary of a Boatswain in the Ming Treasure Voyages

Sha Tin College, Ngai, Nicholas – 11

11/07/1405

*Dear Diary*

Today is the day of the departure Ming's Treasure Fleet. Everybody's excited about that day, and they're all complimenting the Emperor's great "generosity" and "thoughtfulness". Me, personally, I think it's a bunch of old tosh. Old Yongle's gone out of his mind. Giving up and risking so many things just to award other people for doing nothing? And what could possibly not go wrong with Zheng He as Admiral? And half the crew is gonna end up betraying us and steal all the treasure away for themselves.

Anyway, the Emperor held a big banquet for the crew members of the treasure fleet. At first I didn't want to go, but the Emperor said how "wonderful" the expedition would be. At last he convinced me, but not because I wanted to go, but because I wanted him to shut his mouth. Also, if I didn't go, I would receive a hundred thrashes personally from him. So overall, it was more forcing than convincing. And I heard from somewhere that the Emperor was looking for "volunteers". Wow, I'm really starting to see the thoughtfulness in this guy.

At some point during the banquet, the Emperor gave out gifts to each of the crew members of the voyage according to their rank – so that meant I would receive a gift as well! Finally! Some respect for me! I'm starting to see a turn in this guy's personality. Knowing Emperor Yongle, I'm not expecting the gift to be all fancy or whatever, and it turned out I was correct. When I received my gift, it looked tiny in its wrapping paper – but hey – who's counting? I mean, less is more, right? A gift is better than no gift, right? Well, unless it's a bomb. But when I tore open the wrapping paper I found something even worse than a bomb – no, thankfully not a nuke, but a lump of coal.

How did you know that was just what I wanted? Gee, thanks a lot.

After that nonsense, sacrifices and prayers were offered to Tianfēi, the patron goddess of sailors, hoping to ensure a successful journey and a safe passage during the voyage. When it was my turn I snickered at how long and stupid her dress-cloak looked like, causing a storm with Admiral Zheng He when he caught me red-handed.

When we were finally finished, Emperor Yongle announced that everyone would go back to their rooms and prepare for the departure and return here in one hour's time. Then one by one the members of the crew filed out of the room with full stomachs. I returned to my room, which is where I am writing this now. I know I'm supposed to be packing, but I've already done that in the morning, so here I am. But I've locked the doors anyway to avoid any misunderstanding. Hang on – I hear Wang Jinghong calling me – I'll inform you on the latest news when I'm on the ship – okay, okay, coming...

Okay, I'm back. Right now I'm below deck on the ship – locked all doors, all curtains drawn again. I never knew the hour had passed so fast. I was the latest. I still have that very vivid memory of me walking down the hall by myself, footsteps echoing off the narrow walls of the room. I could still remember every single pair of cold eyes in the hall fixed upon me, and the Emperor's cruel snarl when I reached him.

"You're late."

The slight thought of it made me shudder. I guess old Yongle's was in a real hurry and was eager to get us departed earlier, so he didn't have time to decide my punishment yet. So I hope he forgets about it all when we come back. Even though the man is as old as time, his brain is literally a library. He can literally remember everything. The time you spilt coffee on his lap eighteen years ago? Check. The poem your teacher ordered you to recite as homework when you were in preschool? Got that. It's like everything he has heard or saw has been seared into his memory. But the thing that annoys me is that the stuff that he wants to remember are unforgettable, and the things that he doesn't, like the time he still owes you five dollars or the time he saw your grandpa nude are forgotten immediately – it's like he gets to choose what to remember and what to not.

Anyways, here I am at the ship. It's 7:13 pm – we're going to depart in 17 minutes. I'm drawing out the curtains and I can see the sea – a vast, open space full of mysteries – also known as the middle of nowhere. I vomit into a bucket. Gross. Some of it gets on this diary. Double gross. I just need to scrub it off with my finger – there. Ugh.

The ship gives a sudden jolt, making me lurch off my bed. The sick spills out of the bucket. Messy. Something tells me that there are no cleaners on this ship.

I know that there is only so less information you know about this expedition, so I'm gonna fill you in with the basics – there were 27,800 men departing from Nanjing (which is where we're currently at) on 255

ships. 62 of those were treasure boats (did I mention that this was a horrible idea?). We would sail down the Chinese coast towards the mouth of the Min River. We would arrive at Taiping Anchorage in the Changle District. From there we would await the northeast monsoon, and during the wait more prayers and sacrifices would be conducted for Tianfei, the patron goddess of sailors and stupid-looking dress-cloaks. I will inform you with more of the latest news when we arrive at that cursed place.

01/08/1405

*Dear Diary,*

I was fast asleep when our ship bumped into the coast of Taiping Anchorage. The sudden jolt awoke me and I shouted, "IT'S A CANNON BLAST! HIT THE DECK!" and caused a lot of confusion from the people upstairs. How embarrassing.

We filed out of the boat one by one onto shore. I had received many venomous glances from Zheng He in my life, but today was a new record. I hopped out of the boat last, red-faced.

We conducted our prayers and sacrifices to the goddess of stupid looking dress-cloaks early in the morning, just according to plan. This time I was careful about not doing any snickering in front of Zheng He again, because the look on his face looked like it would not forgive – but he kept an eye on me 24-7 anyway, so I didn't get the chance.

There wasn't anything special today, apart from the fact that I shoved Jinghong a bit too hard when he called me a – well, best not say it, but I shoved him into the river and he almost swallowed a lily pad. My mistake was laughing – but I doubt that even if I didn't laugh I would be forgiven.

*A few months later...*

01/10/1407

*Dear Diary,*

Today I was awoken to cannon shots. This time, I mean real cannon blasts, not like the incident two months ago when I caused a commotion when we arrived at Taiping – I mean real cannon shots.

I shot out of bed like – well – a cannon, and snatched my sword off my desk, and dashed outside to join the fight – not before stopping before the mirror to straighten some pieces of hair sticking out of my head at odd angles. But when I finally arrived at the scene it did not look pretty.

The main deck was in chaos. But I had no time to comprehend the scene properly because I had other things to take care of. A pirate leapt at me, sword raised high above his head. I parried the blow with ease. I wasn't good at many things, but I have to admit I was a pretty good fighter.

He thrust his blade again, pressing me hard. Another swipe. Blocked. Another swipe. Parried.

Then I saw his mistake. He raised his sword high, preparing to deliver the killer blow, leaving a really obvious opening in his chest. I planted my boot on it and kicked hard, knocking him backwards into the water.

But the battle was not over yet. I had allowed myself to get distracted by momentarily watching him fall into the water. In seconds I was surrounded by grinning pirates.

"The games' up."

He was right. I looked around me. I saw the crew lying around me, dead or unconscious. I saw another pirate – possibly the captain pirate – holding a blade to Zheng He's throat. His lower lip was bleeding, his face was paper-white. Several people on our side were still up and fighting, but in seconds they were outnumbered, surrounded, just like me.

How was I supposed to drag myself out of this mess now?

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**Note for Reader:** this story was cut short due to lack of space.

# Venture into the Unknown

*Sha Tin College, Wong, Bob – 11*

The gangplank is raised as the final few bundles of precious silk are handed on board as presents for whatever people they may find along the way. Trumpets blow and people cheer as the loaded treasure ships make their way into the unknown. What will they find there? Who will they meet? Will they even make it back alive? Nobody knows. The Emperor has ordered this venture as to find out the answers to these pressing questions, as well as the prospect of expanding the trade prospects and opportunities for Ancient China. By assigning a trusted mariner in Zheng He, who doubled as a translator as he was Muslim to head the fleet communication was not a problem. Protection against threats in the unknown was important. As a result, units of the Emperor's naval force are dispatched to the treasure ships as a safeguard against pirating. Sleek black cannons are mounted upon bright red turrets that shine like fresh blood and the ships are adorned with the crest of the Emperor and glow like a flame in the dark that is quickly settling on the fleet.

This is not an adventure short of danger and excitement. Very soon the naval force are put to work, their cannons booming as they fend off a large pirate offensive in the dead of night. Hooks grapple onto the Emperor's warships and the fight begins in earnest. The cries of the fallen can be heard even over the din of the cannons and the clash of swords as the soldiers rush to repel a boarding. Very soon the deck is slippery with blood but the pirates are no match for the organized fighting force of the Emperor's navy and are put to flight after sustaining heavy losses. Parting shots from both sides are fired, but none hit a target and the two sides drift away from each other.

A few weeks later, at the crack of dawn the sailors wake up to the cry of land. On board the treasure ships, precious silk cloth is being frantically bundled up as gifts to the natives and the soldiers gear up for a possible confrontation. Armour is carefully strapped on and swords honed in anticipation of a brawl as the fleet approaches the village. As the landing party steps ashore the locals bow respectfully and usher them onshore towards the village elders and the sailors follow, laden with the precious silk and china porcelain which they bear towards the town square. As a offering of peace, the gifts are handed over and hectic talks ensue, headed by Zheng He. Thanks to Zheng He's translation capabilities, an agreement is reached in which the village gets protection from China in return for use of the village as a trading outpost and a successful outcome is reached. The fleet restock food and the area surveyed as maps are crafted as strategic assets for China's military ambitions. The fleet cast off, chuffed at their success at diplomacy but also in awe by the local gifts, such as a battle helmet of full gold and a shield adorned with intricate patterns.

In other situations, force may be needed as persuasion as one morning the crew of a warship are briefed for a mission. The locals in this dense jungle area have resisted all peaceful attempts at diplomacy and need convincing that it is in their best interests to cooperate with China. The soldiers storm the jungle settlement, attacking dissenters who retaliate against the invasion and force the leader of the settlement to cooperate. This brutal show of force has shocked the natives who submit to the navy without resistance. The jungle is stripped of precious wood for furniture and building in return for no further military force on China's part and the Chinese depart victorious and the clear benefactors of the deal.

Sometimes, not everything goes to plan. One night, they are ambushed by a squadron of pirates and taken by surprise. Flames erupted on a warship as the pirates latched on and boarded. Arrows were launched into the sky and peppered the pirates, many finding a mark. The boom of the cannon was like the clap of thunder and the splash of the waves was audible above the battle as the sharks took advantage of the bloodshed to pick up a tasty snack and fill their bellies. A feeble attempt to hold the line and stop the pirates reaching the treasure ships is smashed aside as the pirates make a beeline for the exposed treasure ships, their boats leaving a long trail of sea foam that quickly dissipated. Unbeknownst to them, the large treasure ships have a defense of their own. The thick iron plating on the hull resisted the full force of the pirate cannon and it's sheer size and weight meant it could crush the pirates underfoot with no trouble. The pirates realize they have been drawn into a trap and surrender to be taken as prisoner to the Chinese.

At last, the fleet reaches Mecca, the final destination. They disembark and talks with the Muslim majority start. Through this grand expedition, trade has been accomplished and deals struck, violent confrontations survived and religious ideas embraced. Trade between places along the journey and China has flourished, along with influence and knowledge through the Arab world, opening itself to the world and prosperity brought to the inhabitants of Ancient China.

This was truly a venture into the unknown, a venture that brought with it many benefits and prosperity to China and a venture that many a sailor still thinks about and remarks, "If only I was there."

# Noble Gluttony

*Sha Tin College, Wong, Clement – 12*

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## Zheng He

“Father, may I speak to you alone?”

“Yes, of course, after all, you are the heir to the throne. Come in,”

My father, Emperor Yongle is the gloriest and mightiest person I’ve ever known. I am his son Zheng He. “I walked down the streets disguised as a civilian today. I find it is an effective method to know what is happening in the country. Though I did hear something rather peculiar today, rumours that I am not your son. I never take gossip to heart until I overheard the guards also mentioning it. Is it true?” My father looked up to the ceiling, his face turned rigid. A few minutes later, his expression seemed to melt, and a warm smile plastered across his face. “Such preposterous thoughts. Rumours are rumours, meaning they are not true,” he sighed.

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## Zheng He

I stood at the door, I was about to enter when I heard my name. They are sending me off to battle other countries, to form alliances. Then my suspicions were validated. I am adopted and all the things that father claimed were rumours are real.

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## Zheng He

“Your grace, you are summoned to the throne room,” Seeing the emperor on his golden throne, I bowed. “Rise,” he said, “Zheng He, you are to set sail to help the empire conquer new lands, bring forth treasures, provide the kingdom with glory, wealth and respect. Set sail at once and leave for India. Without further ado, I wish you good luck,” Surprised and shocked, I prepared for the voyage.

Taking a glance at the sea, I caught a glimpse of rows of boats loaded with military needs. My mind flickered back to the meeting yesterday, “Do not tell him, he is an asset to the empire,” said the advisor. Rage fuelled my body with anger, I had a point to prove now.

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## Hua Deng

Being one of the soldiers on this expedition is not good. We usually battle on ground, not a ship. How did I end up here? I question how a prince with servants and no battle experience can effectively lead us. He doesn’t even know the crew. What does he look like again?

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## Zheng He

The emperor said to only form alliances, not enemies, which is one of the few things we both agree on. I explained that thoroughly to the soldiers too. An empire with an exceeding number of enemies is only destined for failure. Nations are stronger together than alone. I had to earn their trust and respect in order to become their leader.

As we neared the island, we left our ships in haste. What a weird nation. Different clothing and traditions. “Hello, where is your leader?” I said with a smile. The man pointed. A magnificent tower appeared before our eyes.

We headed toward the glistening castle, paths formed before us like Moses parting the red sea. We were greeted by guards who lead us to a room with a throne in the middle. A man with a crown sat on it while inspecting his jewellery. We bowed and rose. I explained how we were seeking to form a trade route. Negotiating with the skills I learnt before, we traded silk with gold and jewellery. Then we returned to China.

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## Emperor Yongle

I am quite surprised he made it back so swiftly. “Send him off to another journey, tell him to set sail immediately,” I said. I gazed off the balcony. He was giving the treasures to the civilians. Once or twice won’t matter.

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Zheng He

We were welcomed back with tears and cheers. I paced toward the crowd and gave some jewellery to them, wishing them all rich in happiness and money. A messenger came up to me. After his soft whispering, I was confused. The emperor is sending us on another trip? Looking up, I saw him with his general who looked down, smiling at me.

We continued on our voyage, but every time we returned. We are sent off to another.

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Hua Deng

Years passed by. We keep questioning amongst ourselves, what is the meaning of this endless voyage.

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Emperor Yongle

I ordered him to return the riches to me! Not those pests! The people are becoming wealthier and ungrateful, voicing their demands, flaunting their riches. "Tax collector, double the city's tax rate, effective immediately!"

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Zheng He

Upon returning from our seventh voyage. Something felt awry. The streets were filled with beggars, their clothes all tattered and patched. A man whispered in my ear, "His Majesty has stripped us of our last dime. We cannot afford a single meal; the city survives only on bread and water now. Please don't give us anything, anyone who receives the wealth is punished heavily." Shocked, I headed straight for the palace. There he was, sprawled on his throne. Embellished with exceedingly excessive gems and gold. We started to quarrel, but I was soon escorted out by force.

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Emperor Yongle

Perhaps it is time to rid myself of him. That fool. He is no longer of use to me. The audacity he had to lecture me! ME! I am the emperor. This kingdom is mine to do as I please. "Guards, I want Zheng He dead within a week. The one who brings forth his head shall be rewarded."

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Zheng He

Through our many long journeys, I've built a trusting relationship with the crew and the army. They were all professionals of their expertise. We practiced our arts together. Identifying our weaknesses and strengths, to allow for improvement. This morning I found a note beside my bed, "Beware of the emperor, he plans to assassinate you. --Guang Dat" Guang Dat is one of the guards from the palace, one of my treasured childhood friends too, we grew up together. I was shocked, but not surprised. The emperor has slowly become tyrannical, fuelled by gluttony ever since the voyages, I should have seen this coming.

Cautious wherever I went, my loyal men were always by my side. The day finally came. Soldiers marched through the city, every exit was heavily guarded, there was no way out. The people were in fury. The leaders of the towns gathered, preparing for a revolution. That was my chance to step out. I revealed my identity and explained the current situation. We rallied up all the citizens and planned to attack at dawn.

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Emperor Yongle

He disappeared. He's gone. We have reports of rebellion. "Send out the army at once. Remember, kill the prince!" The army was summoned, but most people were missing. The weapons were gone. The horses were taken.

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Zheng He

I urged my steed forward, charging through the walls of soldiers, slashing and stabbing, my horse trampled any that stood in the way. As reinforcements charged into the wall, I signalled for arrows. A rain of fire flew swiftly into the army. I signalled to create a large carpet filled with sugar, attaching it with two arrows, it flew towards the enemy and with a single lit arrow, the carpet was ablaze. The chemical reaction from burning sugar creates a hot liquid that pops and spills. The easiest way to burn your foes. Other loads of burning sugary liquid soon followed. The soldiers were spent. The archers stopped as cavalry units barged into the palace. We got into a formation of a turtle. Shielded from all angles, we marched slowly, but steadily through the palace grounds. We soon split into groups and continued to eliminate the remaining supporters of emperor Yongle.

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### Emperor Yongle

They were here. Sitting in my throne room, I raised a white flag, waiting for him. My knife strapped to my belt, I sat there, my face donned a facade of guilt and regret.

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### Zheng He

A white flag! Finally. We broke formation and I approached the throne room. Expecting a peaceful surrender, I opened the door. A group of archers faced me, and in the middle of them was the emperor.

The arrows were let loose, I barely got my shield when a body leapt in front of me, taking the blows. “Hua Deng! No! Why?” I screamed. As he fell in my arms, the emperor’s archers prepared their arrows. Without hesitation, I drew my shield and charged in with my comrades. We destroyed every single archer in sight, fuelled with anger and grief.

All these years, he was a father to me. I knew I could forgive if he was willing to change. “Father, please. You know this is wrong, we can be family again.” He dropped to his knees, face in his palms. I rushed to hug him, I knew he would find it in himself. “NEVER!” A sharp pain radiated through my chest, I struggled to gasp for air. My troops witnessed the murder, grabbing the Emperor instantly, ending his pathetic life. With my last breath, I said, “Give the citizens their wealth and rebuild a great empire,”



# The Thoughts of an Explorer

*Sha Tin College, Wong, Nicole – 13*

I was a young farmer in a small town in Northern China. Back then, we didn't have anything to do, we just tended to the fields and fed the animals; just like that, we made enough to live peacefully. This, however, all changed when an unknown man came to our town on a white mare, looking as though he came from a story, with exquisite silk robes and servants obeying his every command. A community meeting was soon called, with every person, big or small, gathering at the heart of the town.

There was a jumble of nervous speech, meant to ease the nervousness and confusion until the mysterious man opened his mouth.

"My name is Zheng He, and I am an explorer, who has gone to many distant lands and has found many different treasures," the man explains, "The emperor has sent me on a voyage, to travel around the world, to claim what is rightfully ours. We need a task force, great as a dragon, so large that it can equal any man or beast that we may encounter on our journey." he continues, taking a deep breath and staring intently towards my direction, his gaze boring through my soul and heart.

"We need ship captains, we need boatswains, we need people who can navigate our way through the darkness. However, don't worry! Everyone who wants to travel, can get a job. Who's in?"

I glanced at the people around me, including my parents, my friends, and my fellow villagers. I wanted a try at the rich life, wanted to see faraway lands, wanted to have a taste of being so far at home, but at the same time, I was unsure of my decision. I wouldn't see my family for a long time, and I would leave behind everything, and everyone I had ever known. It wasn't just me. Everyone looked wary of the stranger, afraid that he was telling lies, or uncertain if they wanted to enlist or not. The man, who was kind and friendly, answered every single question we threw at him – and more...it seemed like an obvious choice! You got a cabin all to yourself, easy job, all living necessities, and you got to see what was beyond the horizons of our country! If so, why was I not as enthusiastic as the situation called? I pushed those thoughts aside and stood up, and exclaimed: "I want to join your ranks."

A sea of faces stared at me, eyes widened, then looked away. I felt embarrassed and self-conscious – why were they peering at me like I was an animal held captive? The kind explorer snapped me out of my trance, agreeing to my proposal. I was to leave in a weeks time, to the nearest city's large pier, where many ships and fellow officers would be waiting for me. Since I didn't have any valuable experience that could be used on the journey, I would be a cabin boy, until I learnt the ropes.

The last week of my time at my homeland passed in a blur. I worked, I spent time with my family, and I went to my favourite places, until it was time to leave. My family had specially told one of my relatives to accompany me on my journey, so at least I wouldn't be leaving alone, getting lost and doing who-knows-what. As I hugged my parents and my siblings goodbye, I was filled with a sense of regret. Everything here was so familiar: our wooden one-story house, our plots of vegetables and plants, everyone I knew and adored – I would miss them all. My mind wandered away from its safe space and into the depths of uncertainty and negativity. Would I ever come back? Would this be the last time I was ever to see this familiar scene? I quickly chastised myself for those thoughts and said a final goodbye, wishing with all my heart that I would return to see my hometown.

The journey passed by as I travelled across plains, muddy roads and deserts, but with each step I thought of my family going on with their lives as normal. My heart suddenly felt a pang of pain and guilt – I missed them a lot. However, I knew I had to go, for all my life I felt the urge to explore, the feeling of freedom whenever I was allowed to run across the plains and discover to my heart's content.

At last, I arrived at the pier. It was filled to the brim with people: mothers sending their children goodbye, excited people waiting to board a ship for the first time, regal-looking people wearing robes and jewelry. The ships stood there, proud and confident, white masts pushed back and forth by the roaring wind. I stood there, alone and unsure of where to go. Walking around, I spotted the face of that very same explorer that had come to recruit young sailors from the town courtyard. I went up and introduced myself, and I was escorted onto the ship that I would be staying on for the next few months, or even years.

The cabin was drab and plain, with dark brown wood interior, a small bed, and a deskside table. Although not grand, it felt homey after a re-decoration of small ornaments I brought made from various plants and leaves I had at home. It was a long week, and as I slumped onto the bed, again thinking about home, I passed out.

I woke up, unsteady and startled, floating somewhere in the Pacific Ocean. Where was I? How did I get there? Walking around in the small, drab wooden cabin, I remembered about the job post I took, how could I ever forget?

Every day, the routines were the same. I would often be called by the Captain, who was no other than Zheng, or senior navigators to help them run errands, whether that be passing on a message or to get some refreshments from them. I dined throughout the day, eating some dried foods, none fresh or high in nutrition, as there weren't any plots to plant vegetables or fruit. Sometimes, I would take some herbs or medicine to the sick or injured, tending to their wounds, with the best materials that we could spare at the time.

The ship wandered aimlessly around the ocean, as there was often stormy and angry weather which made it extremely hard to navigate. We would often work for many hours at a time, taking care to not oversleep as every person was vital to that very operation.

More and more people got sick every day, showing signs of weakness and fatigue. They would often complain about their arms or legs hurting, how they were constantly hungry however didn't have an appetite at the same time. I was appalled at the thought of being that dependent on other people, fearing being as sick as them, however when many soldiers were getting that same illness, my hopes dropped.

One day, as I was going to fetch a cup of water for the captain, I tripped and fell. As hard as I tried, I couldn't get up. My throat scratchy, I grunted for help, but I was at one of the deserted quarters, taking a shortcut, no one could help me. Soon, I was spotted by one of my fellow castmates, and helped to my bed. Over time, some symptoms started to appear that was the same as my other crewmates. My skin started occasionally bleeding and peeling, my gums constantly hurt and sometimes bled, and I was weak to the point that I couldn't get up. While all that happened to me, one thing stayed constant – I still yearned for my parents to soothe my pain, yet I longed to tread on new lands. My heart felt like it was being split into three – one for the illness, one for exploration, and one for my homeland.

I couldn't sleep well, it felt like the demons were continuously stirring inside of me. I tried to focus, but —"Land! Land!" The shouts suddenly came, and propping myself on my bed, I stumbled out of the doorway, into the calm night sea. Indeed, there was land. Grass plantations, palm trees, beaches, all that made a city beautiful and unique were present. The pain suddenly consumed me again.

I shut my eyes and prayed for the pain to end, gasping, I counted my shallow breaths, in, out, in, out. I thought of exotic creatures and new cultures, thought of being with my family, thought of being perfectly fine and healthy for the last time. I felt like I was transported to that distant land with perfect scenery and dazzling views.

All was still in my mind.

# Time and Tide Again

*Shanghai American School—Pudong, Chong, Caden – 12*

I stop in horror, the tip of a silver blade pressing to my throat. A dark, ominous shadow looms over me as a tint of moonlight shines through the gaps of the cracked ceiling, dimly lighting the room. Heavy drops of water thump on my head, as the storm rumbles vigorously, vomiting a series of light.

The thought that I – Wei Tian – at age 15 – am about to take my last breath, makes my whole-body shudder.

As if in response, the heavens call to me from above, and the pouring rain becomes blood red. Everything seems to slow down. A sudden wave of panic goes over the group of huddling children backing against the storage room wall. I feel the cold steel of the blade, as the pirate strengthens his grip and menacingly gestures at everyone to stand back.

“Don’t you dare touch my son!” A voice echoes above me, deafening and loud. I tilt my head upwards. The voice sounds like father’s.

“Then come and get me!” snarls the pirate.

The next thing I feel is a thud on my skull. Darkness overcomes me, as I see the silhouette of my captor disappear through the door. My mind is a confusing mix of black, white and grey. I see my limp body sink to the floor. It is like I am sinking to the uncharted and unfamiliar depths of the ocean. The dragon pendant I am wearing begins to glow coral blue. The scene changes and I am no longer on the ship. I look around. The world seems to form wave by wave around me. I am terrified and scared of the beautiful surroundings that are rippling to life. I shut my eyes and feel myself rise to the surface. When I open them, the red-orange sunset hovers above the horizon, its watery reflection shimmering from the light, splashing as the warm wind gently brushes over my hair. Home.

Looking around, the rows of houses made me jump. Was I home? I caught sight of a person sitting on the decks of the shore; he held a thin bamboo rod over the water, with a bucket of fish beside him. It was Father. This was too good to be true!

“Fa—” A bunch of armed guards marched towards me. Were they going to arrest me? Trying to be as soundless as possible, I quickly hid behind some wooden barrels of fish. Father looked back and stood up to greet a man who came out from within the group. An official, I thought, considering his brown cape, with a white silk robe that had a green dragon embroidered on it. However, the *wu-sha-mao* on his head, made me realize that this was no ordinary minister. It was Zheng He.

“It is a pleasure to meet you, Zheng He. I hear that you are assembling a crew to journey through the seas.” My father called out. Zheng He cast a questioning glance towards him. I heard the official mutter something about how he knew that.

“Looks like you don’t just have the eyes of *Mushen*, but also the ears of *Shuishen*.” Zheng He commented, nodding in approval. My father bowed deeply.

“May I know the purpose of your visit?”

Right then, one of the guards handed Zheng He a scroll. He opened it, and read aloud:

“I, Zheng He, hereby declare Wei Cheng to journey to the West with my crew, from the orders of emperor Zhu Di. Disagreement will result in *Ling Chi*. Will you take the scroll?”

“I have no choice,” my father said, shaking his head and accepting his fate with open shaking palms.

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The next day, noon arrived in a glimpse of time. My father told me that I had to follow him on the journey, since there was no one else to take care of me at home.

On our way to the main ship, father quizzed me on everything that he had taught me over the years.

“It is 9 masted, 44 *Zhang* long and 18 *Zhang* wide, with inter-jointed bamboo sticks that are woven into the form of matting. What is it?”

“A *Bao Chuan*.” I answered. My father nodded.

“A *Bao Chuan* indeed.”

A banquet was held for all the crew members before our fleet’s voyage, giving gifts according to each rank.

Through the course of our journey, we docked at *Zhanpo* Kingdom, *Alu*, *Semendaci*, and *Lanbuli* for trade.

When we arrived at *Sailun*, things felt different. I heard one of our ships set on fire. In compensation, we got 60 thousand *Liang* of gold. The emperor here must be terrified of us, paying for what his people did.

The next day, the heavens raged. The wind roared like a pack of lions. Water was edgeless on all four sides.

To my surprise, my dragon pendant started glowing. What was it doing? I held it tightly, trying to cover the glow. In a few seconds the glow faded, making me wonder if it was just a reflection of light.

“Tighten the ropes! Flush the decks! Hold on if you want to live!” Zheng He shouted orders at us, directing us to keep the boat steady. This was when the crew members stared in shock at the monstrosity that hung above us. We were heading directly towards an angry, rumbling storm.

I held the pendant my mother gave me and smoothed my thumb over the blue dragon inscribed onto it. “This is the pendant of the holy water dragon. I gift this to you, to keep you safe when the waters rage.” Mother’s soft, gentle voice echoed in my mind. Taking a deep breath, I closed my eyes and prayed for good luck. I then darted towards the madness of the storm followed by everyone else.

The storm subsided by morning, and we arrived at *Alagakkonara*. The citizens threw lettuce and stones at us, so we departed straightaway.

Arriving at the main ship a while later, Zheng He walked up to the main deck, and facing his crew, shouted, “There have been news that Chen Zuyi and his pirates are nearby. Unattended children will hide in any of the four storage rooms, and everyone else will prepare for battle.”

The whole boat was a mess. Some adults fetched gunpowder for their cannon, and some geared up in the weapons room. Shivering, I went to hide in a storage room where they kept food and did a quick pray.

Night came, followed by the sounds of cannons firing and roaring. The battle had started. I clenched my fists tightly, staring through a small crack on the edge of the boat.

“Prepare for battle! Guns loaded and ready, weapons up!” Zheng He’s voice boomed over the sound of rain and thunder.

“Fire!” Zheng He shouted.

Boom! Crash! Bang! The cannon balls flew across the ocean, smashing onto the hard, rigid planks of the pirate ships. I caught glimpse of one cannon ball smash onto one of our enemy’s ships, and now one boat was set on fire. The pirates started diving off the ships and swimming for their life. Not to mention the sharks that live in this area of the sea. I smirked with pleasure.

A familiar pirate came close to our cabin, holding a silver knife. Bam! A blurring figure of what looked like father knocked the pirate straight into the depths of the water.

Eventually, Chen Zuyi surrendered. He was captured, tied and kept in a cell. When I came up, Zheng He ordered me to talk to him privately. How strange. When I opened the door of his cabin, blackness overwhelmed me. Did someone turn off the lamps?

I heard the drumming of fingers on a wooden surface.

“What were you doing behind the fish barrels?”

“I—” Silence. My mind rises back to the rippling surface.

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I wake up tied to the mast.

“Are you alright?” Asks my father with dried up blood rolling from his forehead.

“Y—yes.” I stutter, looking around. I stop and stare, seeing the savage who held a knife to my neck, mocking our crew mates.

I struggle, pulling and trying to get my hands apart from each other.

The savage catches my eye, and snickers. “Well, well, well, seems like you just can’t keep your eyes closed.”

My father grits his teeth, and under his breath, murmurs, “We’ll be alright son. There is no reason to fear.” I try my best threatening look at the savage. He roars with laughter.

“Time after time they fight us, but tide after tide they drown” He meets face to face with me, and whispers, “Even the emperor’s fleet follows the rest, while we share your gold, sell your crew as slaves and your leader? Well, he’d better hope that this was all just a savage and stormy dream”

# An Unfavorable Journey

*Shanghai American School—Pudong, Zhao, Sean — 13*

The months following the departure of the first wave of seven treasure fleets sent as ambassadors were inauspicious— the imperial palace of the Forbidden City burned down as if by a giant ball of fire sent as some form of divine punishment, while the emperor Zhu Di's cabinet disintegrated, throwing the government into a state of turmoil while the peasants who formed the basis of China's economy were reduced to eating grass. An epidemic of an unknown disease ravaged the province of Fujian where over 174,000 people died.

And only two of the four treasure ships of the first fleet ever returned from exploring the south of the Indian Ocean. The other expedition force successfully came back with exotic animals and abundant new plant species, only to find their country a leaderless shambles.

The Chinese armada's ships had a length of 146 meters; their crew provided for with hundreds of tons of water, vegetables, and dried fish. They were capable of staying at sea for up to three months and travel at least 8,400 miles without making a single stop. The fleet was supplemented by grain ships and water tankers, and the larger ships carried holding pens for pigs.

The following comprises of the diary entries of a low-ranking officer on the one of the two returning ships.

*19 January, 1421.*

The Yongle Emperor Zhu Di himself saw us off at the Dragon's Bay in Nanjing, along with a thousand cheering civilians. We set sail out of the Yangtze with high spirits, looking forward to bringing glory and wealth to our country.

Night fell. We gathered on the deck and broke out casks of rice wine and bowls of fish porridge, while singing an ancient sailors' song.

When we reach the Indian Ocean, our fleet separates into two: ours to voyage down south and continue; another to turn north and venture into the unknown.

*31 January, 1421.*

We are eight days into our voyage, and not a single storm. I say that our fleet is blessed by both the Emperor and the gods. The Malay archipelago has just appeared on our horizon, and we will stop to take on provisions and some of their famed spices from the traders that so frequently dock here.

We are on one of the six smaller ships that disembarked on the archipelago. Captain Zheng He, the envoys, and the noblemen are of course on our capital ships, basking in the comfort of being waited on by a thousand serving men. The island locals proved to be friendly and even approached to offer us their primitive fare of spit roasted sea turtle, which turned out to be succulent and rich. Our cook Ah Jing has taken that to note and hopefully will serve it on the ship, in order to break the monotony of the meals that only consist of soy, porridge, and fruits. The privilege of dining on meat is only available onboard capital ships, which have pigpens, though I cannot imagine bearing the stench of swine for these years that will be spent at sea. The other crew members are loading crates onboard, and we set sail at dawn tomorrow, heading to the Indian Ocean, where the other ships of our armada have gone their separate ways: one group beyond the western horizon and north; ours down south.

*16 February, 1421*

We have reached the lush tropical shores of an uncharted island. I am writing this as the crew prepare the rowboats so we can land. The men are hushed with both anticipation and fear—there have been stories of man-eating savages on such islands. The objective of this unnecessary and dangerous landing is to map the island and document indigenous flora and fauna, while searching for spices and herbs to take home to the emperor.

The crews are huddled around the campfire as the sun goes down; the events of the day and the island's surprising temperature fluctuation have taken their toll on the men, who claim to be hallucinating. Needless to say, everyone's spirits were rather dampened as the crew heard their orders from our chief officer: "Tomorrow and on, you will proceed to forage into the forest and report your findings to our petty officer. Two sailors will be assigned per commissioned cartographer, and the rest of you follow their orders."

For the first time, our crew is discontent with the orders and one of them grumbles loud enough for the officer to hear: "Bull\*\*it! Always we who do the work. You prissy eunuchs sit around and complain about how what we do is always wrong." Our officer spun around and glared him in the eye. He brandished a gleaming ceremonial broadsword at the haggard crew member, who jumped up and almost leaped at him. His friends were only just able to hold him back before he killed the officer and perhaps initiated a mutiny, which meant a direct opposition to the orders of the Emperor.

*17 February, 1421*

There is something far worse here than beasts or savages; this island is cursed. The Emperor of Heaven willing, we will be granted swift and safe passage through the seas and away from this forsaken place. We woke up to find six of our men missing, and conducted a search through the forests where a carpenter found their mangled bodies. One of them was missing a head, arms, and the intestines were strewn in the branches of a nearby tree, while another bled from his eyes and ears, the result of a hemorrhage: he had literally died of fear. The expressions of pure terror and shock on their faces sent chills down our spines, and we quickly left. The corpses of those who die in pain are omens of ill fortune and are best left alone.

We've lost six men and four more are ranting and raving, trembling in perpetual fear. We have no medicine men among us so there is no real hope of restoring those men's health, but we cannot leave until this entire island is mapped, and accurately, or defy the emperor's orders and face execution when we return.

*18 February, 1421*

The members of our crew who have been alone in the forest are delirious, and in their feverish state are proclaiming to be seeing flying lights and pale, slender figures in the trees with teeth as long and sharp and crooked as those of the monsters in fairy tales, all of which started seeming increasingly real after a piercing scream of pain cut through the forest. We believed then, Lord preserve us, we believed then. We stopped keeping count of the missing and the dead after this victim, a morbid reminder of the trivial task that still kept us here.

*19 February, 1421*

The monsters showed themselves in the small hours of the morning, walking—no, floating into our camp and dragging off the guards who were keeping watch. They were tall, naked, and the sight of those bottomless black pits for eyes was enough for some of us to piss our trousers. But the teeth, the teeth were the worst. Blood stained where they were not ivory white, these were not teeth— they were more 10 centimeter icicles that stuck out of the mouths in convoluted rows. More of them came out of the forest; they numbered over a dozen by then. For the first time, we were scared. Far too many men were dying, but if we abandoned this island, we would bring eternal shame to our families. Not returning to China was not an option— we were hundreds of miles from any significant continent. After watching the monsters jump on one of our cook Ah Jing and tear him apart, we finally broke: surely the loss of at least a score of his bravest sailors will be enough to constitute our redemption. I am writing this from the bottom deck of one of the two ships that we left with. My hands are shaking as I try to record the happenings in case it ever gets lost in time. My word goes out to you: never venture beyond the sixth island south of the Java...

#### Aftermath:

The author of the above journal entries did not survive the journey back; he died of stress and shock following the incidents. Despite his the composed manner with which he wrote his journal entries, evidence suggests he was the most emotionally distressed of the survivors as he was the only one to record the horrors in a practical manner that cemented their existence inside his mind. The other crew realized they were not expected back, nor were the greetings welcoming, and those of them who weren't haunted by nightmares chose to simply disappear, hoping they were not to be associated with abandoning their mission.



# The Humble Lookout

*Shanghai Singapore Internatinoal School, Lee, Ling Fung Max – 12*

My leader Zheng He was a hero, and I am only a man in his crew of 28000 people. Although I am not the one being remembered throughout history, I enjoy going on all trips with Zheng He. He is talented by all standards and I, being a little lookout guy on the ship, am unrecognized. My goal is not to please Zheng He, my goal is not to be famous, my goal is not to be the one remembered by Africans. My goal is to contribute. I love my country and I support the idea to present gifts. I just want to contribute to our country, China.

On my first trip with Zheng He, I was afraid. I was assigned to be the lookout for enemies and land. But all I did was think about the crew and myself running out of food supplies, water and the way back. I did not pay attention and just sat in a corner. I was wondering about home. Once, I was responsible for almost getting defeated by a group of pirates just because of being careless and unfocused. No one blamed me, but I knew it was all my fault, and I knew that all I had to do was to stay positive.

On my third trip, I gained confidence. I volunteered to be the lookout guy again, and I did well. Although no one praised me one word, but I knew I did well and protected my mates when I called out that there was a pirate ship. I was happy, and now I finally figured out the reason I was taking part in this trip.

The previous trip to Africa was the hardest, but the result we came back with was amazing. The trip to Africa took us a few times longer than the previous trips, and we met more enemies on the way. I was assigned the same job again, and this time, he believed in me. Before there were around 3 lookouts, and now there was only 1. That was me. I knew the survival of 28000 people depended on me, and I was not nervous, I knew I would do well. When we arrived at Africa, Africa was huge and the Africans were armed, but luckily, they were nice and they treated us as guests. And the biggest reward was a creature that we named a giraffe. We set sail back to China and had a close fight with a group of pirates. This time, Zheng He noticed me and he announced my contribution in front of everyone that I was a savior, a hero.

This is me writing on my 6<sup>th</sup> trip with Zheng He. This time we were travelling south, south of Africa. Throughout the previous journeys, I was happy with my contribution, although I had only been noticed once in my entire life. That was my moment, my favorite moment. I believe I can do enough for my country, being a small lookout can be important. I am the only lookout. Zheng He is old, and I can tell that from his hair and beard. I can also tell from the way he speaks and his memory. Zheng He was a hero, and he can't stay in that spot any longer. I feel like this may be the last trip I am to be with him, but I feel good, and lucky, because I am completely satisfied for what I had done, what I did for the country, and I feel like the luckiest person to meet Zheng He and actually spend so much time with him supporting his

mission. I admit every time I set sail I look forward to finding more than being on the ship for months. And this time we are going further than anywhere we have gone to, and we had set sail for around only 5 hours. I know, I know, I shouldn't be writing now since I am the only lookout forwards on MY ship, but I just can't help it, this is just so amazing, and I cannot miss any part of this. Well, I guess I should be focusing. Oh, wait a second, no, no way, it must be my eyes, what I am seeing is definitely not real, or is it? I rubbed my eyes.....

Sigh, here we go again.....

“Incoming!”

# At Peace

*Shanghai Singapore Internatioal School, Lim, Ming Kang Ethan – 12*

*—A young boy, blood running down his face from the blow dealt by that ruthless pirate, tears flooding his eyes—*

“Zheng He! Zheng He!”

The vivid memory cleared from my vision and I was hit by the salty air.

Chen Zuyi, I am coming for you.

One of my crew members was standing in front of me. “Yes? What is it?”

“We are just coming on the port of Singapore.”

“Good, good.”

“Is there anything I can help you with?”

“No, I’m fine.”

Still feeling a little shell-shocked from the memory, I handed over control of the helm to someone else and walked towards the port. As I stared at the brine water, thinking of the nothing but killing that merciless pirate and showing him the same mercy he showed that child. The places he went to were left in ruins, floors littered with broken household items and gruesome corpses. How could one man be so emotionless as he killed and stole from so many people. Doing it without a second thought. Doing it without doubt. Doing it for *fun*. Chen Zuyi made people fear to step out of their houses. He made them feel like there wasn’t anywhere they could be safe. I am going to stop him.

*—Help me, please. I don’t want to die—.*

Chen Zuyi, you are the most horrible and cruel pirate of Southeast Asia. Ruining lives and stealing from so many people that I gave gifts to. I will put an end to your reign and bring your head to the people whose lives were destroyed by you and your pirate crew. You will die, that is something I can promise for vengeance will be mine.

The boat suddenly lurched forward then backward then returned to its regular rocking. I shook my head, I couldn’t allow those memories to keep distracting me. I know what must be done in order to avenge those people. We had arrived on the dock where all of our ships could get some restocks in supplies and some repairs. We had many supporters in this war against the “Pirate King” as some people called it. The wet, wooden planks creaked beneath our feet as my crew and I made our way to an inn just a short walk away from the coast. The rest of my fleet went to somewhere else to stay for the night.

We spent a fortnight there gathering supplies and planning our attack: where the weak areas were in his fortress, the kind of weapons Chen Zuyi had. Most of his fortress was made of wood and stone, and he had men on the walls watching out towards the ocean making sure there were no people attempting to attack their fortress. Every day we made progress with our plan, everyone was ready to take out the pirates. On the second last day of our stay, we went through the plan from the beginning. So, the plan was that the smaller ships, all 190 of them came at the fortress from the main entrance, the main part that was facing the ocean. Then all of the treasure ships would stay at the back, firing arrows at the fortress. Then we will rush and stop our boats at the beach and use a battering ram for the gate. Finally, once the gate is open we will push forward and send soldiers in. Slowly but surely, we will control that fortress and then execute Chen Zuyi.

The salty water churned as our boat pushed past it. We were on our way to Sumatra to defeat the pirate king. Soldiers were all dressing in combat gear and sharpening their weapons. This battle was going to be a horrid one. Then I saw one of my men looking at a painting of what most likely was his family. There was a little boy in that painting. *—The life left the boys eyes. His hand dropped down. His tears seized to flow. He was died—*. Suddenly the memory faded as abruptly as it began. Then one of my scouts handed me a telescope, “I see land over there. Is it Sumatra?”

“Yes. We are almost there.”

Through the telescope I saw faint shapes of land and some sort of building hanging slightly over the water. I shouted to the other boats to prepare the cannons and the message spread to the rest of the fleet. As our ships neared the fort, maybe a few kilometers away, a bell sounded. The pirates had spotted us. Immediately we executed the plan, all the small ships, being lighter, raced forward. Then behind a cliff, a bunch of boats came out and started to attempt to intercept the small boats. Some boats got intercepted, and they started boarding each other's boats and started to cut and slice each other. Blood seeped into the ocean dripping off the boats. As the small ships cleared a path for the treasure ships, we landed on the beach and chaos erupted everywhere. The sound of swords clashing and people's screams echoed around the area. Corpses littered the ground. But we somehow pushed through with the battering ram. The men began to smash against the gate as the rest defended them. And even for the thousands of men on the beach, still more of our ships had just begun to anchor down and rush down to help us. We continued to cut down pirate after pirate and finally all the men on the beach were wiped out. Even most of the pirate archers on the wall had been shot full of arrows. But just as we relaxed the gate crashed open and in the fortress, there were still thousands more pirates waiting for us. Pirate after pirate, more filled their place till many of our swords were completely stained red and so were our armor. But we outnumbered them. And soon there were maybe 21,700 men of the 27,800 men we originally had. Before us stood the so hated Chen Zuyi and 10 of his remaining guards.

Blood and sweat stung my eyes. I saw that boy in my arms as he died, “Surrender!” I commanded.

Chen Zuyi simply replied with a smirk on his face, “Well that is what I am going to do. Obviously.”

I walked forward, my fist clenching my blade, my hand shaking, thinking of nothing else but stabbing this man. He noticed my state and he grinned, “The great Zheng He, after killing all of my men, he can't kill me.” Chen Zuyi said mockingly. He laughed and continued, “Pathetic.”

I grabbed him by his shirt putting my blade at his neck, all I needed to do was apply a little bit of pressure and he was dead, but against my wishes I said, “I am not going to kill you now, because we are going to do something to you that is going to make you wish you were dead. When we get back to China, you will be publicly executed.”

During the journey back, however, Chen Zuyi was all smiles. Finally, after a week of imprisonment, he was presented to the people of China. In Nanjing, where the execution was held, the sun was shining so brightly, for it was a good day for a monster to finally be slain.

Days after the celebration, the memory of that boy started to hurt less. The agony of watching the boy die was leaving me. The bitter pain that had been torturing me for so long was finally subsiding, because I knew that I had avenged that child and I could finally be at peace with myself.

# The Dream Escape

*Shanghai Singapore Internatinoal School, Rampton, Jade Ruth – 12*

I was an ordinary girl living in a town on the outskirts of Suzhou. Nothing ever happened in my small town. I did the same thing every day. Wake up, get ready, walk through town, eat breakfast, go to school, come back from school, do homework, eat, sleep and repeat. It was really boring. The only eventful part was the chattering through the town and the hot steaming buns fogging up my glasses as I walked to school. It has driven me mad for 11 straight years why could we not just move on and not live in this little town. I wanted to get away. I want to explore. I guess I can run away and do my own thing when I get to 18. But that's like 7 more years. I would trade anything, even, my arms or maybe my legs to get away from this dreadful town.

If I got away, would I really want to come back to this horrible town? It would be the same super boring and dull town I have always lived in. I wonder if there would be even one new shop around the area or even a new path to walk to the vegetable store.

I don't know but maybe. I wonder what would happen if I ran away. No one would see me so my mother would never know where I was or was going. That would be cool. How would I escape; what would I do; when would I do it? I feel asleep while thinking these thoughts. I was dreaming about visiting a tropical island. But just as I was waking up this letter flew in the hole in my wall.

I picked it up cautiously wondering what it was. I must have fallen back asleep because I dreamed about the letter being a ticket to an unknown world. I quickly woke up and read it aloud word by word. It read "Zheng He's boat is coming to take a stop off at the dock you are welcome to come down and give your wishes and admire his boat. Everybody come on down." I didn't read any more. Was I dreaming? This can't be right

I threw on my coat and raced out to the ocean hoping to see an enormous boat. Nothing was there not even a little dingy. Just the brown murky water and me. The wind moved like hurricane but I didn't flinch a single bit. I thought I would see the big huge boat. But no. I stood there thinking about it.

I ran around town trying to find someone I could ask. No one was interested in the topic. As I was about to walk back to my house all depressed but I asked one last person.

He was tall and muscular and he looked at me in a with a mortifying stare.

I worked up the nerve to ask him about Zheng He's boat and about Zheng He. The man chuckled and smiled at me.

He was Zheng He! I was speechless. How could the one person that would take me away far from my house be standing right in front of me?

After seconds that felt like days of being speechless, I finally caught words to talk to him. I asked him if I could get on his boat and go off on adventures. He told me I could but I needed to bring my mother to come down to the boat and sign a paper to allow me to. I knew I couldn't convince my mother to let me go with a stranger out to sea.

Days and days went by, of me thinking of what to do. My old fragile mother would never let me sail the world. She isn't that type of person.

I left my plan to the last day. I packed up all of my belonging secretly without anyone suspecting anything. Having to leave lots of my precious things left me sad. I made my way as quickly as I could to the boat before I could get in trouble with my mother. I had to sneak into the boat but I hadn't thought of how to do that yet.

Maybe I could sneak through the tiny door on the hull. Yes, that was what I was going to do. I climbed through the hole as gracefully as possible. I made sure I made no noise. I continued screaming inside

myself. This was not real. I could feel the boat pulling away from the dock, rocking me side to side. I was lost. I had no idea where I was. I started rummaging through the boxes to figure out where I was.

After countless minutes, it left me with a conclusion that I was in food storage. I guess it's not bad I have a lifelong supply of food. I had to find a way out though. I couldn't stay here when I could be seeing the world. I found a light sitting by a box of tea. However, this only gave me the dimmest bit of light in a pitch-black cellar. I looked around the room trying to find some way of escaping. It was hard trying to stay on my feet. All that rocking was making me sick.

Finally, I found a ladder. I knew that there would be some way to get out if they stored this much food down here. I climbed up the ladder extremely exhausted. Reaching the top was like conquering my fears. But really when I looked down there was only about 3 steps. How long had I been down there for? I could finally see light.

The hatch closed. Someone had seen me. I didn't breathe. What do I do? Just as I was climbing down I stumbled across a set of clothes. There was no way I could go to the deck in a dull brown costume.

I made it up in only a few seconds after changing. I looked like I had just come out of a garbage can hopefully no one saw me like this. I got on to the deck. I breathed in the salty, misty air. This was great.

I had never thought through what I was going to do. Just getting up on the boat was all I was worried about. Some guy dressed like me approached me with a cup in his hand. It looked really dirty and chipped. I saw his mouth about to move I took another breath and tried to relax.

"Excuse me what ya doing, matey" he repeated three times.

"Oh ah ..." I replied without even thinking of who I was pretending to be.

"Excuse me"

I coughed from the smell of his tea.

"Oh, I'm just about to clean the deck"

"Ok" he smiled showing his gold tooth

I quickly found a mop and threw it all over the wooden boards without even knowing what to do.

It felt like hours of mopping passed. I started thinking of why I was here. My mother was probably thinking of where I was. Maybe she just didn't care. I caught myself dozing off. I took the opportunity to explore the boat. Just as I was about to walk; one of the lookout men shouted "Land ahoy!"

I jumped thinking that they were shouting at me. I threw my mop down. I slowly bent down to pick it up. It was surprising how much work it took being on a boat. Everyone had their own job.

"Hello what do you want me to do" I asked a random pirate.

He responded with a weird look on his face "Carry that box from over there to here like you usually do"

I nodded silently. I did I was told but I was unable to pick up the box even with two hands. What was in this box bricks or rocks? I dragged the box to the designated place where they would distribute the presents to the people on the land. It took tiringly long minutes. I sat down on the chest waiting for the next command but nothing came I sat there in silence pondering on the fact that I was on a boat traveling the world.

An abrupt awaking startled me. Cannons were firing and it left me clinging to the chest. Luckily, I dogged the fiery bullet racing past my head. I ran to the front of the boat to look to see what it was.

Just as I reached the top a bullet shot straight into my thigh. I screamed in pain and fell straight to the ground.

Breathing heavily, I had rolled off my bed and a textbook fell on my face. I opened my eyes to the view of my plain old white roof. Hearing my mother in the other room made me realize that I was in boring, old home again.

# The Adventures of Zheng He

*Shanghai Singapore Internatinoal School, Roslee, Aina Sofia Binti – 12*

Hello my name is Ma He or Zheng He. I was born in 1371 to a noble family in Yunnan (a province in China). I have one older brother and four sisters and my family is Muslim. When I was little my mom would always tell me amazing stories about pirates and big, gigantic ships, which made me very curious about the outside world and told me if I worked hard I could be the person making those expeditions. My father and grandfather both went on a pilgrimage called Haji in Arabic, to the Muslim holy city of Mecca, which made me ask them lots of questions about their expedition.

When I was only 11 years old, Yunnan was attacked and conquered by the marching soldiers from the Ming army. I was panicky and agitated at that time because one day soldiers came to our house and brought me to the Ming court to be a eunuch. As they imprisoned us I saw many other children and was hoping and praying that we were all going to be fine.

When I was serving in the royal court, I worked really hard with the desire that I could go back home to my family. Instead of going back home the soldiers ordered me to go to the throne room to meet the Emperor. I was frightened, shaking and praying that nothing bad was going to happen.

When I entered the throne room I looked straight at the Emperor, in his large booming voice the emperor had said that I have been working well, and that he is going train me and if I thrived I was to be his assistant and adviser. I was so confused by everything he just said. After his talk, I was transported to a military camp where each day was harder than the last.

After the hard years of military camp, in a flash I was the Emperor's trusted adviser and assistant. I also had to be a bodyguard for Prince Zhu Di during battles against the Mongols, which was tiring but worth it. Soon after, Zhu Di became the next Emperor of the Ming dynasty. He instantly made me the highest-ranking eunuch because I had served in court for many years; after I earned the rank he renamed me to Zheng He. When he promoted me to Grand eunuch I was so proud of myself, and told myself that I'll work as hard as I can forever until I die.

After I had my new title I got to be in charge of palace construction and repairs, weapons, and ship construction which made me very knowledgeable about ships. In 1403, Zhu Di ordered the construction of *The Treasure Fleet* (a group of trading ships, warships and some support vessels) to travel across the South China sea and Indian Ocean areas. The emperor had chosen me to command the fleet which made me feel very honored, and excited for all the exciting encounters and mysteries.

My very first voyage began in July, 1405. We set sail from Liujiagan Port in Taicang of Jiangsu Province and headed westward. When we travelled to Vietnam and met the king. We presented the king with presents and because he was pleased with our gesture our visit was fairly nice.

After leaving we travelled to Java, Sumatra, and Malacca, carefully avoided the Pirate Chen Zu Yi. Unfortunately, in 1407 we encountered **CHEN ZU YI** and with that, a bloodthirsty battle erupted. With 5000 of Chen's men eliminated. We finally defeated Chen Zu YI, and he was captured and was publicly executed in Nanjing in 1407.

My adventure continued, with seven main voyages. Unfortunately, because of the financial drain and the Mongols threat, later Emperors and Scholars tried to erase all of my expeditions. Hopefully this passage doesn't get destroyed too...

# Zheng He's Adventures in Africa

*Shanghai Singapore International School, Woon, Xin Yu Sara – 12*

“Quick! Steer right!”

“No! There’s a small submerged glacier there! Turn left!”

“Grab on to the railings! We’re making a huge turn!”

It was a stormy day, and lightning crackled in the sky. The clouds were as black as a Black Hole, and raindrops were pouring down rapidly, some as big as stone pebbles and some as small as pearls. However, it was just another normal day for my crew and I. Our leader, Zheng He, had led us through a lot of these days and taught us how to deal with it. At first, everyone was panicking and running around yelling their heads off, but when Zheng He arrived, everyone seemed to calm down and, with his lead, each carried out our assigned part and led the ship to safety. He radiated a sense of calm and peacefulness, making everyone around him stop being agitated and think rationally. Today was no exception. As the sky cleared up, the rain stopped pouring, turning from a huge downpour to a small drizzle. Everyone let out a sigh of relief, and we finally rested. The rain had taken the strength out of us, and we couldn’t stay standing for one more second. Usually my job would be to keep the cargo steady, making sure that they don’t slide around the ship during the violent tilting during the storm. It might not sound that important, but if I didn’t keep them steady and safe, we wouldn’t have had any cargo left, and it would have crashed into people, hurting them or distracting them from their tasks, and if they don’t do their tasks properly, the ship might sink. Besides, what else could a 12-year-old kid do on board a ship during a time like this?

Anyway, we were headed to the far-off land of Africa, where we would be trading our jewelry and goods with their people for native African animals like African elephants. We were almost there, and we could already see the shoreline of the east coast of Africa. It was a sight I would never forget for my whole life. The sea and the sky were in a perfect 2:3 ratio, and where they touched, the outlines of the sea and sky seem to merge together in a perfect gradient. As they say, “the rainbow always comes after the storm”, sure enough, there was a colorful rainbow that arched across the sky, crossing continents and lighting up the sky, giving people hope. By the time we stepped on shore, the sun was already setting, lighting up the sky in blood red and thus giving us an unforgettable view.

The next few days were a blur. We did a lot of talking and negotiating with the Africans, and even though they didn’t agree with some of our prices, by the end of the week, we were already close friends, not only on business but also on a normal basis. When we were scheduled to leave, we were all very reluctant to leave our new friends. It was as if it was a cruel joke, having to make friends under such difficult circumstances, especially when we didn’t even share a single language, and having to leave them just when we were getting to know them well. However, life has to go on, and we have to sacrifice a few friendships in order to have a successful life. As our ship sailed away from the shore, the familiar faces of our friends waving to us, slowly getting smaller and smaller until they were just small dots on the horizon, and we finally turned back. We were officially done with our trip to Africa now. Our ship was following the same path we took to reach there, heading back to China to take on a new exciting adventure that would lead us to yet another beautiful place...



# The Ending Note

*Shanghai Singapore International School, Gurkan, Define – 14*

As the supposed next voyage of the Ming Treasure Voyages approached, I was very excited. I listened to the news my dad told me every day as it got closer and closer. Every night he came home, he told us all he'd heard about them. I always listened quietly, waiting every night for his news. When there was about a month left before they went on another voyage, my dad formally announced that they're running short on staff. My imagination went off and my thoughts went to them taking me on their voyages. My mouth slowly formed a smile and my dad called me out, saying "Hey, Sandra! Don't even think about getting on that boat. You're 9 years old! And anyways you're going nowhere because we need you for work in the house! You need to clean the house so your mother can go to work full-time. Do you know how hard your brother, mother, and I work just for you to have this meal? You will work just as hard and not waste time cleaning someplace without getting the money for it. You know how many people die every voyage anyway? Half of the total number going, half the number Sandra!" I frowned, but I knew if I had any possible chance of becoming staff for one of the Ming Treasure Voyages, I'd take it.

The next morning, I woke up from my fantasies of getting to be a staff member and got ready. I ate a slice of bread for breakfast happily and started working. I was sweeping the floors while my mom was out for groceries when somebody knocked harshly on the door. I scampered up to the huge wooden door and opened it nervously. The mailman stood outside, handed me a little poster and walked off. I didn't even have the time to say goodbye or hello. I slowly unrolled the poster only to see that it was from the Ming Treasure Voyages. The poster said *'As of two weeks' time, we will be choosing 7 able volunteers to go on our 7<sup>th</sup> Voyage towards the African lands. If you are ages of 16–30, please re-send this letter to the same address to sign up with your name and age. Thank you.'* I smiled and quickly hid the letter underneath my mattress before my parents came home. I then went back to sweeping the floors and sung underneath my breath. I sung the beautiful song of the birds and the song of the flowers, brushing and moving together with the wind. My father came home and caught me singing that very afternoon. He yelled at me with veins popping out of his throat, spit coming from his open mouth, and redness forming around his bulging blue eyes. I cried and cried until he dismissed me. And that night, I filled in the form on the poster, my tears unable to stop falling on the ink and smudging it.

It had been a couple weeks since I'd submitted my form, and even though the writing had been smudged, I thought it was still readable. I'd lied about my age, saying I was 16, and hoping to fool them with my height. The thought of them just ripping it in half or realizing I'm 9 kept crossing my mind and making me nervous. The boat would be leaving in around a week, meaning that the winners might already have been chosen. I went over to my cousin's house that night, not wanting to be around my parents. She'd also signed the form on the poster and was waiting for a reply. There was a quick knock on her door shortly after her telling me she signed up too, and we looked at each other's eyes. It was the mailman with a single note.

While watching my cousin board the ship, I screamed yet another time "Send me a note every week!". A mail boat would be coming with the Ming Treasures Voyage, and would go back every Saturday to deliver any news of excitement or grief. I held tears of jealousy and misery back while waving goodbye to my cousin, thinking how it'd be if it were me walking to the boat. We waited until the boat was out of sight to leave, me walking with my hair in front of my face, head down, and tears slowly hitting the floor.

One week later, she sent me a note that arrived on Tuesday. It read:

*Hey Sandra,*

*I'm writing this late at night so don't mind my horrid handwriting. I met a couple of the people here and they're really welcoming. A man called Josh is being especially nice though. Even though it's nice, I feel like something might be a little off with everyone on the boat. It's probably just me. Never mind about that. I hope this'll come to you sooner than when I send my next letter. I love you, and wish you could've been here.*

*Goodnight*

*–Juliet*

I smiled through watery eyes and slowly re-folded the note. I put it in my cup board and realized how sloppy and rushed the last part of the note was. It seemed like she'd just ended it as quickly as she could. I pondered curiously about why that might've been. Since I couldn't write back, that night I dreamed that we'd met and that she'd come back.

The next week, there was no note. I waited excitedly, leaning on the door on Tuesday. No note came for Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, or Saturday. On Saturday night, when I stopped hanging near the door, waiting for the mailman, I re-read the note she first sent me. '*A man called Josh is being especially nice though.*' Had she gotten together with Josh, becoming too busy to write to her cousin for a week? Did Josh do something to her? '*Even though it's nice, I feel like something might be a little off with everyone on the boat*' What was off? Who gave her those feelings? Did the people do something bad to her? Thoughts like this kept running through my mind. I slowly scared myself of what might've happened to her. Mom knocked on my door to tell me to sleep, as we were attending a special event tomorrow. She told me I should dress up and not wear bright colours, as it would be rude.

I woke up the next morning by the pounding of small and big rain droplets on the beautiful tulips my mom had planted a few days prior. I got up and watched the rain hit the ground and slowly start forming a puddle. I watched the clear rain's colour hitting the ground and becoming grey. I watched the rain water our grass. I watched the rain hit my mom and follow her around as she got our mail. I watched the rain keep going with its strong hits on our ground, dominating the grounds. I watched the rain mercilessly keep pounding our tulips, until they'd die. I got up, and washed away the rain that had fallen on our floor from my face and glumly changed in to a brown dress. I brushed my hair harshly and brushed my teeth. I slowly and steadily walked towards the door and checked our mail. Only one letter was present. A letter of grief and sad thoughts. I frowned even more than I was earlier and sat down. My mom dragged me back to my feet a couple minutes later and dragged me out of the house, all the way to the 'special event'.

I watched the rain, and only rain. I watched how innocently it hit us, but never stopped even when we didn't want it here. I watched how there might be someone huge up there, just crying, and all his tears hitting us humans. I watched and prayed the giant would be safe. I named the giant Eddie and watched how sad he must be to cry so much. I watched how sad I was, figuring out this morning why I shouldn't wear bright colours. I watched as I thought of how much Eddie would have to cry to cry a sea. I wondered about myself three weeks ago, wanting to switch places with my cousin. And now my cousin was dead, she was dead with all the rest of the crew. She was dead and we didn't even have a proper goodbye because of my jealousy towards her 'luck'. That could've been me. That could've been me who sunk with the boat. That could've been me who died without a goodbye. It could've been me.

## Plans and Changes

*Shanghai Singapore International School, Hegde, Sathvik – 13*

Sunlight, traveling from the Heavens, pierced the clouds and sped down to the great, timeless depths of the Indian Ocean, never to be seen again. Under its grey green surface, fish swam in their schools, serene and content with their lives. Their only worry, aside from their existence, was the great fleet before them.

Min stared at the tranquil ocean, still fascinated by it even after two years on the voyage. The water danced and flowed, making shapes and patterns on its surface. The great fleet of five-mast treasure ships were floating clumped together in the back. Min felt greed wash over him. The Emperor, may he live forever, had sent the third voyage to travel the world and to awe the barbarians and make them swear fealty. The forty-five treasure ships were laden with gigantic bolts of silk, chests of heavy gold and fragrant spices. With that much wealth, one could live like a god for generations to come. Min was jolted out of his reverie by a painful cuff to the side of his head. “Don’t dawdle boy! Get to scrubbing the deck!” Min whirled around indignantly, and came face to face with the rough faced boatswain. All the curses that Min was going to unleash died on his tongue. He swallowed and stuttered, “I... Yes sir!” The boatswain wasn’t done yet, and he grabbed Min and shouted, “You were not sent on this voyage to dawdle and stare at the ocean boy! The Emperor, may he live forever, does not tolerate fools and lazy workers. So, you better get to work now!” Min hastily nodded and retreated beneath the onslaught of the boatswain’s harsh words and harsher breath. He picked up his bucket and sighed. The deck looked as it always did, pristine and well-scrubbed. He grudgingly got to work.

As Min scrubbed, he could not help watching furtively as the crew swarmed around the ship keeping it ship-shape. The boatswain was prowling around the deck, shouting at anyone who looked to be slacking. A nobleman and his lady stood at the prow, admiring the ocean and its infinite beauty. Sailors stood ready at the masts, and were chatting to pass the time. Soldiers stalked on the deck, arrogant as cats. The soldiers had their weapons on. Min felt a chill run through him. *Did they suspect?* They had no reason to keep their weapons on, unless they expected trouble. Of course, the fleet was fast approaching the island of savages under India. They certainly were not friendly. Min shook his head, and continued observing. The rowers rested and napped, sweat gleaming on their bare backs, taking this lull as an opportunity to be stronger when they were required. *That would help*, Min noted. And of course, there were the lowly deckhands, scrubbing and polishing the decks and other articles. Min spotted his friend, River-Fish, near the prow stealthily gesturing to him. *Come to the meeting place*, he signaled. Min nodded assent. He pretended to check a spot by the middle mast for dirt, and swung down by his friend. Min questioned, “Are we doing it today?” River-Fish nodded grimly, and at the same time, happily. He opened his mouth, and then shouts came. “What is that,” a polished accent asked. A rough voice shouted, “We will be lucky today! The lady of the waters has graced us with her presence!” Min and his friend rushed over to the railing, and stared in awe at the humongous creature before them. It was gray and gigantic, gracefully swimming in the water. A mournful and intelligent eye looked at them, at the ship. It shook its head. Then it swam away, shooting water as its tail slapped down.

Moonlight, traveling from the Heavens, sped through the dark heavy clouds and alighted on the churning waves. Fat water droplets sliced diagonally and flooded the ships as puny figures struggled to bail the water. The boatswain, the common sailors, even the admirals joined in. Everyone was there. And everything was in its right place. To think that plans of a lifetime could be shed at a single nod...

# Ming Treasure Voyages

*Shanghai Singapore International School, Hoo, Xin Yen – 13*

‘No doubts they’re here,’ said Zheng He. Zheng He, the leader of the voyage, was born in 1371. He was a Chinese imperial official that set out with a fleet on the first voyage to Southwest Asia, South Asia, West Asia and more.

‘Admiral?’ one of his crew members asked.

‘Yes, I’m here’ answered Zheng He. Zheng He and his crew were having a problem with pirates, the mean, normal pirates. Having to be in the middle of the sea, Zheng He had no way to escape.

‘Fire!’ yelled the admiral. But they were too late, the pirates were already boarding their ships, and started killing people. The scene was a mess, with blood splashing everywhere, coloring the ship with red. It was chaotic until the commander brought an army and fought with the pirates.

‘Phew, that was close!’

Finally, after two hours of nasty fighting, the ship crew members defeated the pirates.

One month after the battle with the pirates, the large ship landed in India. Attracted by the mild weather and lovely sceneries of India, Zheng He and his crews slowly left their ships and discovered the foreign land. They found something very interesting. It was as big as an elephant. It was a grey wild animal with only one horn. Some of the kids and younger crew members were scared by the ‘new creature’, while most of the people were fascinated. The wild animal was a *Greater One-Horned Rhinoceros*. While they were examining this new creature, a little man dressed in simple, bright colored cotton clothes popped out from a brush behind them. Slowly and carefully, he walked towards the big crew. Then he started saying something in a different language that Zheng He didn’t recognize or understand. After almost an hour, the small man realized that Zheng He and his companions didn’t understand, so he started to make a series of body languages and gestures that told them to follow him. The big gang of people followed him. On the way Zheng He and the commander were trying to ask the tiny man where were they going, but the Indian man didn’t answer.

Finally, they reached the small man’s village. The place was enormous and full of trees and people that were dressed in the same way as the little man. It was a very cheerful and lively place. Everyone worked, talked and laughed. They didn’t seem to realize that Zheng He and his crew were there. Then, the small man started to speak ‘हर कोई, मैंने उन्हें यहां सोचते हुए पाया।’ (Everyone, I found them here) Every worker looked up from what they were doing. They were shocked by the presence of a big gang of people with weird clothing and looks. Children moved back and some adults shifted uneasily. All of them looked curiously at the newcomers. It was an awkward silence, then Zheng He started speaking.

‘We are from China. We’ve come here to build friendship with you and share some gifts.’

Although the people couldn’t understand, they began to do some hand gestures to show they welcomed them. Some of the kids surrounded Zheng He and talked to him in their own language, while the adults led the crew members to the biggest and the fanciest building in the whole village.

Ten minutes later, they arrived in the building. They were surprised to find out that there were several Chinese artifacts in the display room. ‘Ahem... Welcome, new comers,’ said an old man with a white long beard as he coughed badly. The crew members were so happy and relieved that the old man spoke the same language. The old man, who was the leader of the village, led them to a huge room with lots of chairs and told them his story. The old man’s mother was actually a Chinese woman that was saved by his father. After they died, the old man became the leader and ruled the village for 20 years. Therefore, he knew Chinese well. The old man ordered some servants to serve them well and help them with anything. The old man and the villagers were treating them so well that they didn’t want to leave, so they stayed for another 10 days. ‘No harm,’ the old man said when Zheng He wanted to leave.

It was a stormy night the day before they left. All the crew members were packing up and saying good bye to the villagers. After the short ceremony and party in the big building, they went back to sleep for the last night. All men and women were sleeping soundly. ‘Tip, tap. Tip, tap...’ The footsteps were getting closer and louder. Small whisperings were getting clearer. There was a sweet but mysterious odor in the air, making the people sleepier than ever. And, making them not want to wake up. Then, a burning smell from somewhere became stronger. The people outside started to laugh so badly that they choked when they talked. The rooms were getting warmer and finally the crew woke up. They realized that they were tricked and their treasures on the ships were stolen by the villagers. Unfortunately, they were too tired to get up and escape the locked rooms. They cried for help but the sniggering sounds just grew louder.

Suddenly, someone knocked on the door. It was Zheng He. He did not sleep because he felt danger was approaching. As he went for a stroll, he found a servant with a bunch of keys. The servant didn't recognize Zheng He and he told him all about the fire and their plan of stealing treasures. Zheng He pretended to be one of the servants and got the keys from him. Without trouble, Zheng He snuck in the building and unlocked all the rooms with the keys. They escaped to their ship and got their weapons ready. While the villagers were celebrating the killing of the crew members, they didn't notice that the crew had escaped. After they had everyone on the ship, they continued their journey.

The crew was still frightened by the experience and they did not trust people that were too nice to them anymore. On the other hand, the villager that gave Zheng He the keys was punished. The people were so angry that they promised to kill Zheng He the next time they saw him. But luckily, Zheng He and his crew learnt their lesson. They continued their journey and they gave presents from China to people that they trusted. And, they learned to never stop at a place for more than 3 days.

# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

*Shanghai Singapore International School, Lee, Hyo Jeong – 15*

Menacing barking of hounds and urgent voice of pursuers bellowing echoed through the strained atmosphere. Raging torches blazed vigorously in search of a poor little girl. In torn, stained rags, with greasy disheveled hair, I hurriedly squelched over the soggy ground of rugged mountains where pitch black darkness had long before fallen. Lips parched and cracked and tears streaked my face. Worn-out straw shoes had come off my feet long ago but instead deep scratches replaced their place. Panting for breath, I repeatedly looked back with quivering eyes in the overwhelming fear. My steps quickened as the suffocating sounds of pursuers grew louder and louder. All at once, I stepped on my long, dragging skirt and fell off the slope. Tumbling down the slope, being barely conscious, I sincerely prayed to die here with no pain. Unfortunately, I was still alive though had no energy to raise my body. Then, like a gleam of hope I sighted a cart with several wooden boxes laying just beside me. It was a strong craving for a survival. I stretched my hand for one of the wooden boxes with all my might. At the next moment, I faded out.

I wasn't aware of how long it has been since I got trapped inside the box. Gradually brought to senses, I tried to push up the lid but heavy loads were keeping their place firmly on top of it. After several attempts, I quickly gave up, having decided to save this energy. The hours passed by, all muscles got sore at excessive running and frozen feet covered with sharp scratches began to sting. Of all, burning thirst and hunger were the most insufferable. Then, I heard the footsteps getting closer and closer, followed by clonks of bumping wooden boxes. Though I crying out for help, my hoarse voice kept cracked. Unexpectedly, a blazing light flooded into the wooden box at once, narrowing my eyes and blurring all the vision. Someone pulled me out of the box, which wasn't my current interest at all. Only the instinctive desire for water stuffed my mind. In a raspy voice and with a dry tongue, I continuously murmured one word, "water". After a moment of hesitation, the man crept silently out of the room and soon returned with a glass of water and a rice ball. I swallowed the glass of water at one gulp and crammed a rice ball into my mouth. By then, I met furious, startled eyes looking down at me.

Avoiding his stare, I slowly looked around the room. It was more like a shed with many wooden boxes well-arranged in lines. Immaculate walls and floor with no scratches or mold on suggested that the building was fairly new. Still he was looking dagger at me, so I reluctantly turned my head to face him. Nonetheless, he kept silence without asking or yelling at me. Minutes passed and with a deep sigh he went out of the room and came back with a suit of men's clothes.

"Come out after getting changed" It was his first words.

After disguised myself as a man, I hesitantly stepped out of the shed. He was waiting for me outside. Hearing that I was on the fleet on a voyage, I almost freaked out. Regardless, he kept on talking. He notified some discipline I must follow and assigned me some chores, which was indeed a permission for me to stay here. He then walked away. All incidents happened in a flash, leaving me dumbfounded, though it was soon shrouded in my tremendous curiosity. I hurried my steps to the deck of the ship. It was such a colossal fleet that I wouldn't even notice it's a fleet if he didn't mention it. Rolling sea in harmony with a crystalline sky extended in front of my inquiring eyes. Along the azure incantation, an interminable parade of hundreds gigantic ships were going on. Such magnificent views bewitched me. Vast, boundless sea stretched out filled my empty, desperate soul and people's busy working and chit-chatting sounds consoled my exhausted mind.

Blissful life on board allowed me to forget all the miseries and misfortunes. I woke up at dawn and watched a splendid scenery of sunrise over the horizon, which invariably enchanted me. Having a light breakfast, I busied myself wiping the floor with a rag, arranging boxes of provisions and drinks in the shed. In the afternoon, I embarked on my little adventure. I explored the fleet, since it was so stupendous that I could always discover something new. Of hundreds fleets on a voyage, it boasted remarkable size and splendor. In the evening, I sat around with others and had supper together. Though no one was of my age, everyone treated me amiably with respect. Sometimes, the man who had saved me spent these precious nights with us together, giving gentle smiles. I was later heard from others that he's a boatswain of the ship. I've been never treated as a human all my life, but a pretty doll if well treated. Though I doubted if people would treat me the same way even if they later find out I was a runaway prostitute, still a good deal of affection in their eyes comforted me. Every night, under the soothing moonlight, I embellished the night sky with a unique melody of an antique pipa, I discovered in the fleet's backmost garret.

A month passed since I first got on this fleet. As usual, sitting on the deck, I was looking out over the sea for a sunrise. In the distance, I came in sight of land, which automatically let out an exclamation of joy. By noon, all fleets anchored in the port. From busy chattering of other sailors, I could learn that we arrived in the port Vijaya of Champa. I moved busily than other times to help load miscellaneous goods on the wagons that will be offered as gifts to the King of Champa. The staggering number of gifts included the finest silk, sophisticated porcelains, a wide variety of teas, papers, gold and more. The diplomatic mission set off for the Champa Palace, lead by the Admiral Zhang He. I glimpsed him through the crowd. Even from the back, his engaging charisma and dignity could be felt. While the mission was away, the rest prepared for our next voyage. Carpenters repaired the ship inspecting all parts for damage and external signs of wear, and soldiers made their way to bazar beside the harbor to lay up provisions. In fact, I wasn't permitted to leave the ship, but anyway I already finished all the tasks assigned to me. I was mad keen to get away and explore. Overwhelmed by unparalleled excitement, I took my first step onto the harbor. My heart was jumping out of my chest at the new world I faced for the first time.

The harbor was swarming with merchants and sailors, all in different outfits. All the hustle and bustle and distracting noises exhilarated me. Feeling the invigorating air, I moved further into the crowds. At the moment, I sighted a cluster of people sitting together with their eyes focused on one same thing. One peculiar play was going on there. It was several wooden dolls leading the play, moving in different directions, floating on the water. I recalled my old memory of watching a similar play in my hometown. It was called the puppetry. At that time, I was fascinated by tiny dolls moving their arms and legs freely, yet it was even more amusing since these dolls were acting out on the water. Standing still, I kept my eyes riveted to the play until the story came to an end. Out of port areas, even more charming view of the bazar stretched in front of me. By the time I returned to the ship, I had a bundle full of bizarre items.

A few days later, the mission returned with few Champa diplomats, and our fleets set out to sea towards our next destination, the island of Java. It wasn't a smooth sailing at all. At the incessant attack of perpetual rainstorms and monstrous waves, several ships had capsized, depriving innumerable innocent lives. It was a continuation of desperate days. Sailors all looked hollow with vacant eyes. When darkness fell every night, everyone got into their own mood, and the whole vessel lapsed into silence. Leaned back against the mast, I played a mournful, melancholy tune on the pipa that drifted over the waves, hoping it can console raging waves and my worn-out fellows. Nonetheless, the profound sorrow and grief didn't easily fade away.

Another livelong night closed in, which was even more desperate and poignant than other nights. Not even a flash of moonlight was there. A miracle happened all at once. Sitting on a watchtower, I spotted millions of dots beginning to sparkle gorgeously on the ocean surface, giving out mysterious bluish white lights, as if the sea was a night sky with myriad of stars twinkling. At my piercing shout, being flustered, everyone looked down on the dazzling night sea. A great multitude of jelly fish had been whirling around in the boundless ocean. Ravished by the spectacular view, we were lost for words. Soon, deep silence turned into the exclamation of wonder and delight. The compelling sight healed all our sorrows and screw our courage to the sticking place. It was another new beginning of our voyage with determined, toughened mindset.

The next day wasn't so lamenting. Since the morning, we all moved busily, carrying out our own tasks lively, energetically all with cheerful smiles on face. It wasn't an easy day at all. It was the day we first bumped into the outrageous ships of pirate Chen Zuyi. In fact, it was a foreseen, inevitable encounter since we took off on our voyage. Occasionally, I had heard others talking about him, who was infamous for being merciless and barbarous. Fortunately, thanks to our quick retreat, no fight broke out.

Carefully avoiding the fleet of pirate Chen Zuyi, our fleet reached the island of Java. Again, our mission set off to meet and gift the king and I stealthily got out of the ship. Unexceptionally, my curiosity overcame me. Compared to Champa, it was rather peaceful, serene island. Its extensive green fields along with low hills and dense forests allured me. At the moment, drawn by attractive singing voice, unconsciously I was walking into forest. Making my way through the bushes, I spotted one girl humming a song softly while dancing with a diaphanous scarf, dressed in a long pink skirt that comes to her ankle. Her every exquisite move along with luscious voice enchanted me. At that instant, a snake dangling on the tree was sneaking up behind her with a cunning hiss. I sprang upon her, caught her by the wrist and bounded away at a full speed. How long we have been running, small straw huts and wood houses came into my sight. However, even before I stepped into the native village, a wooden stick hit me on the head and knock me unconscious.

At the numbness creeping into my arms and legs, I woke up. My two legs were tied tightly together and my hands were bound behind me. At a splitting headache, I moaned involuntarily, which made the girl hiding behind the curtains stick her head cautiously. I hardly rose my bound body and leaned

against the wall. Then, I gently called her with a smile. Of course, I talked in Chinese but anyway it seemed like she understood. She slowly came by my side and whispered something, which I obviously didn't understand. I signaled her with my eyes to first help me loosen the ropes on my wrists and legs. She hesitated a moment and loosened the rope binding my hands. Only then, I could use body movements and gestures to communicate with her. I asked her why I was here. Without talking, she started to draw on the ground. To wrap it up, when we reached the town, the natives who misunderstood that I was trying to kidnap her knocked me out and brought me here. She told her parents that I rescued her life from the danger but they regarded me as an invader. Not just an invader, but a strange boy with a totally different look. Anyway, I could lose no more time here. It was already dark outside. I asked for her help. While she drew people's attention, I sneaked out and hurriedly ran back the way I came. It was so close. Right after I got back on the fleet, we had a final bed roll-call.

Aside from Champa and the island of Java, our fleet visited many more islands including Malacca, Semudera, Andaman, Nicobar Islands, Ceylon and Calcutta, although not every country welcomed our visit. The time stole by like an arrow, and we were already heading back to our homeland. Everyone was excited to return home and unite with their families, whereas I was growing more and more anxious as our fleets draw closer to our homeland. I wasn't even sure whether I can still live there. Two years had already passed by, but I was still afraid that I would meet somebody who knows me and my dreadful past. Most times, my thoughts were all in a muddle. Even worse, our Treasure Fleet confronted the fleets of pirate Chen Zuyi. Unlike the first encounter, the tensions were definitely intense. Combats were about to take place.

It was Chen Zuyi who announced the start of the combat. Hundreds of flaming arrows whistled through the air and flew into our fleets. As soon as they stuck in fleets' hulls, the raging fire spread itself throughout entire fleets. It only took an instant for few fleet to sink into the placid, callous sea. Our fleets counterattacked with cannon fire, of whose power was far beyond imagination. Hundreds of flaming arrows were nothing compared to one cannon fire. The battle ended at a single cast on account of Chen Zuyi who quickly surrendered right after we fired cannons, which I somehow felt uncomfortable with. Soon, my misgiving turned out to be true.

Chen Zuyi and all his subordinates were imprisoned in the fleets' very bottom. We still got a long way to our homeland and I was overwhelmed with nervousness. After several days had passed, we were run out of food, an unexpected situation. There was no choice but to stop by the nearest island and replenish provisions. The incident occurred in the dead of night. Oppressed by nightmare, I slipped out of the room and stared at the abnormally peaceful, quiet night sea, standing on the deck. When I turned back, I spotted one other man moving around the ship. Acting suspiciously, he went down the stairs to the fleet's very bottom. I stealthily followed him down the stairs. It was a heavy thud of someone collapsing to the ground that immediately stopped my footsteps. I nimbly hid in the barrel beside me. After they went up the stairs, I quietly got out of the cabin and followed them up the stairs. On the deck, pirates were all around, pouring something over the fleets each with a barrel in hands. By its pungent smell, I noticed it was an alcohol. My body was trembling with fear but I tried to remain nonchalant and think of what I can do. Then, a great idea rushed upon my mind.

I hurried my steps to the garret where I gathered all the grotesque things I found on the fleet and from the voyage. From the garret, I took the heavy wooden box with firecrackers and brought it outside where might not be seen by anybody. I kept the wire connected to the box far away from the it, and lighted a fire at its end. Then, I went down to the beach and hid myself behind the fleet. Now, the only thing I had to do was projecting a light onto the clean wall of fleet and putting the elephant wood-carving in front of the light. At the image of mammoth beast appeared on the wall, dull pirates were agitated. They were running here and there, bumping into each other, screaming and shouting desperately. There was no need of any actor on this stage. Terrified pirates themselves were the superb actors. The chaos they created themselves were directly shown on the wall, which looked just like the beast attacking people. It horrified them even more. At the perfect time, firecrackers went off. Its astonishing sound woke everyone up. Soon, all pirates were defeated by Admiral Zhang He and his brave soldiers. Meanwhile, for the first time, I saw his face properly. He was the one who saved me, the one who allowed me to stay on the board, the one we all recognized as a boatswain. His image under the moonlight looked more valiant and splendid than anybody else in the world.

Our long, adventurous, troubled voyage was over then. And this is end of my story. The young prostitute girl, who couldn't do anything, indeed thought she couldn't do anything wasn't there anymore. All uncertainties engulfing her was gone. Hereafter, it was heard that one beautiful merchant appeared from nowhere became the best merchant ever in Ming Empire history.



# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

*Shanghai Singapore International School, Ng, Hui Lim – 15*

This is the diary of a translator who once worked on the Treasure Fleet with Zheng He.

I had always wondered, that our great admiral with such reputation and might, he had such a heartbreaking family background. However, the world that Zheng He our great admiral was heading into was dark and unsettled. The admiral of the Treasure fleet was the child of a royal family and faced tragedy between the Ming soldier. A single knife stroke will agonize his fate. He lived as eunuch. Back when our admiral wasn't under the Yongle emperor's control, he used to spend his first ten years back at Yunnan. Before we set off for our first voyage, the fleet crew were well trained and educated of the cultures and life aspects of different countries. Throughout the seven voyages we've made, the fleet traveled across the South China Sea, Indian Ocean, Arabian Sea, Red Sea, and along the east coast of Africa.

On 1405, we set off on our first voyage to the sea. There were a total of 27,800 men and 62 ships. The waves were hitting as if the ocean was trying to stop us on our new adventure to the world. Zheng He held the title as the "Face of China" to the world. I remembered, that his voice below dozen as thunder and bells, his eyes glared from his 7 foot frame. When we first arrived at the country of Champa (which is the current southern Vietnam), our great admiral spoken fluent Vietnamese to the locals. He was also generous while he talked with the leader of Champa. I remembered, that the gestures and the laughter he made was as proper as the emperor will do. In the following days, we've also visited Thailand, Melacca and the island of Java. Thailand was one of the most memorable ones because of the warm weather and the swiftly wind that lead the fleet to a total new world. We arrived in a palace filled with gold sculptures and tiled floor. The king welcomed our arrival and settled us down in a majesty looking room.

Few months after the first voyage, I over heard more about our admiral. The admiral was a Muslim and his real name was Ma He. His Father was Haji Ma and his mother's maiden name was "Wen". He used to live in a village where agriculture and fishing was the key to support the locals. Since after the transition to the palace, Zheng He was well educated and without the help of the Yongle emperor, our great admiral wouldn't be able to guide us. Our great admiral also read books about Confucius and Mucous. On the eve before our second voyage, Zheng He has a simple tribute to his father in grave. On the next morning, we set off at the Liujiagan Port in Tiancang.

Few years later, a Sumatran pirates challenged against our great admiral. He confronted at Pelambang (the city in South Sumatra, Indonesia) in 1407. The pirate, Chen Zu Yi quickly surrendered under the agreement made by our admiral while he prepared a preemptive surprise. Fortunately, the plans of the pirates were soon known by Zheng He and the Ming Soldiers killed 5,000 of Zu Yi's man. The defeat on Chen Zu Yi was also our glorious victory in our military achievements. The pirate was then publicly executed at Nanjing in 1407. After the seven voyages we've made, the emperor stops the production of making boats. Slowly, we continued the

# An Untold Story of Zheng He's Right-Hand Man

*St. Joseph's College, Cheng, Wai Ho – 12*

Wang was a measly soldier serving in the navy of Zheng He's treasure fleet with the mission to conduct trading and collect tribute in the eastern Pacific and Indian Oceans on behalf of the Chinese Emperor. He came from a remote province in the south-western part of China, close to the land of the barbarians, and thus inviting unpleasant yet inevitable mockery by other soldiers in the same armada. Wang had a surprising talent of analyzing and plotting battle strategies. But he was never promoted and his talents were overlooked until one day...

It was a glorious day. The high sunlit clouds drifted across a clear blue sky. The gushing waves were comforting. It was quiet in the meeting room on the enormous vessel. All commanders sat on chairs. Zheng He, the fleet admiral, was seated on a wooden throne in the centre. Wang, among many troops, stood quietly beside his direct commander, Tso.

'Our ships have reached the coasts of Africa. We will have to tread carefully as pirates roam these seas.' Zheng He said. His voice was not loud, but it rumbled in the quiet cavern-like room.

'The name of our powerful fleet has been echoing far beyond our kingdom. Even the kings in all these faraway places have surrendered to our Ming emperor and become our tributary states. These pirates are just too insignificant for us to pay attention to.' Tso responded conceitedly.

'But how can we display our power if we have a whole navy on board and we don't use it?' Zheng He questioned.

'I am confident that we can control them without bloodshed. We are far too FORMIDABLE for them to challenge,' Tao drawled languidly.

The commanders nodded in agreement. But Wang had long heard about the ferocity of the pirates and he could not help spurring the comment, 'If they can be controlled, then why are they pirates? They don't follow rules and orders. They are the beasts in the ocean! We must eliminate them without delay!'

Tso's face turned beetroot red. He bawled, 'How dare you speak a word! Throw him out!'

They didn't have long to wait. While the fleet was cruising smoothly along the Indian Ocean, heading towards Southern Africa for the first time, a sleek ship was seen on the horizon. It was sailing towards the fleet. The lookout, who stationed high on the mast in crow's nest, yelled at the messenger below.

Zheng He was informed in no time. He dismissed the messenger and faced his generals. 'My fellow comrades, we have no idea whether this ship is friend or foe. I think we have to take some action now.'

Then Tso spoke up, 'As I said before, we only need to send someone over to declare our identity and they will succumb to our power.'

'Tso, you seem very confident. I believe you are the best candidate to carry out this mission,' said Zheng He.

Tso sat up straighter. 'Without a doubt, Admiral!' he said, beaming with pride and satisfaction.

At this time, Wang was standing in the back row of the troops and he was worried about Tao. Commander Tso was a warrior in negotiation, but he was not a fighter. Wang gathered his courage and interrupted again, 'Commander Tao, this ship is a mystery to us. They might be nice, but the possibilities of them being hostile seem bigger. If they were pirates, like we discussed before, they could bring trouble to you. Can I replace you to go instead?' Wang pleaded.

Tao exploded in anger, 'How can a meagre soldier like you question my decision!'

Zheng He glanced at Wang and contemplated for a while. 'It seems unwise to trust a soldier rather than an experienced commander. Tso, you may still go on with your plan. You, uh... whoever you are, go back to your place.'

General Tso beamed brighter and called out, 'Guards, take him away!' Wang was knocked out and dragged away.

The mystery ship was actually the biggest ship in a fleet that sailed steadily towards the Chinese fleet. It reached the Chinese fleet an hour later. General Tso stood at the helm of the ship. His heart was smiling. Zheng He trusted him. A promotion was possible. Everything was going smoothly for him. The ship pulled up alongside Tso. His soldiers put down a plank connecting the two ships, and he walked proudly across.

In a distance, Zheng He saw Tso being surrounded by dozens of men. It was obvious that Tso was trying to use his verbal talents to full potential, spouting words like rain falling from the sky. The men on the ship suddenly shifted their focus from Tso to other ships of the Chinese fleet where Zheng He and chests of treasure were. Evil smiles spread across their horrifying faces. In a flash, a scar-faced, fierce-looking man in black, who seemed to be their leader, drew his bloody sword and stabbed Tso hard. Tso howled in pain and dropped in silence. The murderers dragged Tso to the side of the ship and tossed the corpse overboard. The lifeless General Tso floated away from the ship in a red, murky mess.

Wang came to his senses after what seemed like a millennium. He found himself lying on a bed of straw. He desperately wanted to save Commander Tso from a sticky end! He dashed to the deck and found a chaotic scene. The Ming troops were darting forward and backward while more ships with a black flag were approaching the fleet slowly.

Wang found Zheng He and all the commanders in the War Room, a place where they discussed army tactics. Zheng He spoke with a solemn expression, 'Now Commander Tso was killed. I come to consult all of you on whether we should attack or retreat.'

'Maybe we could make peace,' a frail-looking commander muttered in the corner timidly. 'These pirates seem much more powerful and well organized than we thought. We should avoid unnecessary bloodshed. We must reach Africa and then bring treasure back to our emperor without losing any more men.'

'Bloodshed is inevitable,' Wang shot out his words, surprising everyone in the room. 'War is the only solution. There is no compromise with them. We must defeat these pirates and wipe them off the map not only for our fleet but many other fleets from our kingdom.'

Zheng He started to clap, followed by others, until the whole room erupted with applause and cheers. 'Well said!' roared Zheng He. He beckoned for Wang to come forward. 'In that case, Wang, I put you in charge of this battle. You are now promoted to the commander of this battle!'

Wang was stunned, but he managed to compose himself soon. He was fueled with determination and wisdom. He faced the commanders and started to explain, 'First we should...'

Wang and other commanders were on a warship. It had a masthead shaped like a phoenix, and cannons jutted out from the sides of the ship. Wang's warship was charging at the biggest pirate ship. Wang and others unsheathed their swords and jumped on board. The pirates rounded them all up. Dozens of Chinese soldiers were soon slaughtered by the merciless sea monsters. Wang knew he must capture the leader to win, so he led his team and headed to the captain's cabin. He slashed his way through and all of a sudden, Wang was impaled by a sword in the leg. It was the pirate leader. Wang collapsed, clutching his injured leg, his face contorted in pain. He swung his sword, the blade reflecting the murderous gleam in the eyes of the pirate leader. The pirate leader slashed down hard at Wang's chest. Wang blocked and struck back. It inflicted a long red line on the pirate leader's arm. Crimson blood began to flow instantly, but the ferocious pirate leader took no notice. He swung his sword in a wide arc, and cut a gash in Wang's armor. Wang parried strike after strike, but soon his energy was zapped. Finally, he mistimed his block and lost his balance. The pirate leader advanced, an evil triumphant smile spreading across his face. He skipped aside and tried to thrust at Wang sideways. Wang scrambled to get out of the way, but failed miserably. He closed his eyes as the blade was making its way towards his heart.

But it never met its target. When Wang opened his eyes, he saw a spear sticking out from the side of the pirate leader's neck. He turned, and saw Admiral Zheng He. He was bewildered. Zheng He said, 'I won't let you die, Wang. We are both the best warriors from the wild South West.' Wang nodded and smiled. He was finally recognized.

Admiral Zheng He was an unparalleled Chinese explorer and sea commander during the early Ming dynasty in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. He was originally born as Ma He in a Muslim family in the province of Yunnan in south-western part of China. He later adopted the conferred surname Zheng from Emperor Ming. Zheng He commanded expeditionary Ming Treasure Voyages to Asia and East Africa during his time. Commander Wang was his right-hand man.

# Captains' wish

*St. Joseph's College, Cheung, Ho Ching Ryan – 14*

"Aye aye, captain!" I shouted aloud after the Captain's speech.

I was a young boy, 16 years old, clean shaven and with pale white skin. I was quite a newbie to this ship called "Xun Meng", which means finding dreams. My parents died when I was only 3. I used to be a student, but uncle didn't want me to learn English, hoping instead I would get a job as soon as possible to help make ends meet. So I ran away from home and was later discovered by the Captain in a cold alley.

The Captain was quite rich and kind, treating me as his own son. He also trained me to join the navy as he was the captain himself.

When I turned 16, Captain felt that I was ready for adventure. When he was young he had travelled many places and accumulated a massive fortune. The navy followed his lead and helped him give away his treasure to those in need around the world. Before I knew it, we had gone on six expeditions: the next trip was going to be the Captain's final voyage before his retirement.

"Remember, this treasure is for those in need. If people want to take it by force, then use your biggest efforts to defeat them!" Captain said at the head of the boat when we were going to depart for the last time.

*Today is quite sunny and quite suitable for adventure*, I thought.

But I was wrong.

"Boom!" Another stroke of lightning struck the sky, the sea was roaring aggressively, and rain was pouring down. The helmsman was steering the boat rapidly, as the captain kept ordering the men to fold up the sails, and I was inside the little cabin of the ship, waiting for the storm to go over.

This was the first time we came across such a big storm. I curled myself up, as I knew a storm could destroy everything on the ship, as well as the ship itself.

I was scared, and I start praying for mercy. Everything got dimmer, darker, then I closed my eyes...

"Gasp!" I woke up suddenly. I looked around – nothing was out of the ordinary. I immediately rushed up to the deck to check on my crewmates.

To my surprise, everything seemed normal on the surface. The Captain was standing at the head of the ship. The wind was brushing his cheek. He was strong, with a thick moustache, a pair of kind loving eyes, and strong muscles all over his body. He was watching the sea. Waves went up and down, the red light of sunset reflected the captain's face. It was a face of sorrow. He frowned and closed his eyes.

"Cap?" I approached him. He opened his caring eyes, then looked at me. The sun was setting on the horizon, the sea became red and orange. Captain smiled.

"Do you know how my parents died?" Captain said suddenly. I shook my head. He put his hand on my head, saying, "When I was small, my parents were adventurers. They liked shipping very much. Their hope was to travel to South Africa. Until one day, a big storm swallowed my parents without any mercy. I survived by holding a wood plank and floated to Vietnam. After recovering, I travelled back to China, and decided became a captain to fulfil my parents' wish. Therefore, I trained myself to be strong enough for that. This is my last adventure. I hope I can give out all my treasures I got and reach South Africa. Now, go and have dinner. Sleep early, we need to stop at India tomorrow."

I nodded my head, as Captain hadn't spoken to me this seriously before. Soon I ate my dinner and went to sleep. This wasn't a good night's sleep, as I dreamt of red spiders crawling up to my shoulders. I couldn't breathe as I dreamt of them getting into my throat and nose, and the tingling sensation went through my body. Scratching myself didn't even work; my hands were pinned to the floor and I couldn't move a little. "Help!" I screamed, but no sound came out from my mouth...

I woke up still feeling drowsy the next day. The ship had reached India. Captain and his crew bought oranges and spinach, for our hydration and vitamin C intake. He also bought wine because wine could be stored for a long time. Captain was a very caring person, he knew that we might catch scurvy or dysentery so he also bought herbal medicine for us.

We stayed in India for only three days as we were quite in a hurry.

We departed after we having a good breakfast. Captain had been here to give out treasure before so the locals gave us our food for free.

Closer to South Africa than any of us had ever been, Captain was really glad about this. However, my sixth sense told me everything wouldn't be smooth sailing...

On the 13<sup>th</sup> night after we left India, a big noise from above the decks woke me up – the distinct *bang* of a cannon.

I immediately took my pistol from the drawer next to my bed. The cannon sounds echoed around me. I rushed up the ladders and saw pirates! My sixth sense was right. I aimed my pistol and shot down one of the pirates. I saw captain keep bouncing off bullets with his sword. I aimed at another pirate and shot. The bullet went through his heart and he fell onto the ground. Captain immediately smashed a pirate behind him with his strong fist and stabbed him in his stomach. I pulled out my sword and approached Captain, standing back to back. As the number of men on the pirate ship dwindled, the leader of the pirates started turning his ship away. As we were about to turn away our boat as we didn't want to fight any more, an arrow went through the air and struck captain's left arm.

Fortunately, the arrow wasn't poisoned and we had medical powder for injuries, also we had bandaging cloths to heal captain's wound quickly. The only problem was he couldn't move his left hand smoothly. However, this wasn't a big deal as captain was right-handed.

After 2 months of peace, we finally reached a coast near Ethiopia, captain gave out treasure for the poors and met the head chief of this country. We stayed for a week then we departed again. A child gave me a little knife he made by himself with bone. As I didn't like to use a dagger, I kept it in my sleeve.

By our estimates, we still had a month of non-stop travelling to reach South Africa. To fulfil captain's wish, we promised to never turn back.

The night we left Ethiopia, I restocked the ammunition of my pistol. The whole ship was scared of a pirate who roamed around east and south Africa. We called him Executioner, because he never showed mercy to anyone whom he thought to be an enemy. His crew was small, but each crew member was unnaturally strong and powerful. I noticed that Captain, who was usually fearless, seemed worried too. He started sharpening his sword, as others did. We were nervous, but we were prepared.

That day finally came.

"Cap! A ship is coming towards us. Should we fight or turn back?" One of our crewmates shouted. Captain looked through his telescope and scowled. It was him. Our men immediately pulled out our sword and readied ourselves for a battle. We had approximately 70 men on our ship, and they had only 20 men. We knew this fight was really important as we wanted to fulfil captain's last wish, and we also didn't want our treasure to fall into Executioner's hands.

I pulled out my pistol and ready for the fight. Executioner's ship was coming in a fast speed. Everything was quiet: in an instant, cannons were firing, swords were clashing, and blood was everywhere. I aimed my pistol and shot down a random enemy. Captain was using his favourite sword and clashing with another enemy. When I was rearming my pistol, I saw Executioner holding up a pistol and aiming it at captain! I immediately shot at Executioner's hand. My bullet hit his pistol and his pistol flew off his hands. Captain successfully defeated 2 enemies. However, only 4 enemies were dead, and we had lost 13 of our men. Everything was too fast and I couldn't even react when an enemy smashed my head through a wooden plank. Everything went black immediately.

*I don't want to die... I'm still so young...*

I woke up suddenly in a room. I tried to move but I found that I was tied up on a chair. I looked around. Executioner was in front of me, and Captain sat next to me.

"Cap!" I shouted. Captain did not respond. It was the first time ever I saw someone feeling that defeated, let alone seeing that look on Captain. Executioner spoke, "Young kid, you are now defeated, and your daddy won't live any longer."

I was angry and tried to break free of my chair, but the chair was bolted to the floor. I saw my pistol on a table next to me. I couldn't reach it as my hands were tied up behind the chair. I tried jumping towards my pistol with the chair, but I found out I was stuck. All of a sudden, a sharp object poked me in my hand. It was the little dagger the little kid gave me in Ethiopia! I immediately used a secret code to tell Captain to count down 10 seconds as I went to work on the rope tying me up.

9 seconds left... Executioner was laughing manically. "He who dares trespass my territory shall suffer to death!"

4 seconds left.... "What should I do to you Captain? Maybe I should start by cutting off your left ear?"

1 second left! "Maybe I should..."

"Snap!" The rope broke! No words were needed. I immediately fetched the pistol beside me, and Captain balled his fists. Even though Executioner reacted fast, his face was punched by Captain, and my bullet grazed Executioner, leaving a scar on his face. He immediately yelled incoherently, held up his sword and fought back. I threw my dagger towards Executioner, but it bounced off Executioner's sword. Captain immediately knelt down to avoid being hit by Executioner and picked up my dagger. Suddenly I heard

many footsteps outside the room – Executioner’s men. Captain and Executioner were still fighting aggressively. Footsteps got nearer! I finished reloading my pistol and shot at the reinforcements. Now it was 2 versus 15. I immediately rearmed my pistol again but everything was too late. Executioner held Captain’s neck and the other men held captain’s arm. Captain shouted choking, “Go! Don’t care about me!” as he pointed at a broken window behind me. I had only two bullets left. I couldn’t decide what to do now. We totally lost. Captain’s dream sank deep into the sea, all was lost...

Captain shouted again. Instead of calling me to go, he called me to look at my left using our secret code. I immediately turned my head. To my surprise, there were barrels on top of barrels of explosives! All it takes is a spark... or a bullet...

I’m sorry, Captain, but I’m sure you understand.

I dropped my gun and rose my hands in surrender. Executioner laughed, “Huh? Giving up? Kill him.” Some men rushed towards me. I immediately knelt down and picked up my armed pistol and shot at the barrels. I jumped out from the window as soon as I shot.

Captain understood.

“Good job, son.”

I saluted at captain as heat wave hit me and catapulted me into the water.

I was near death by the time I ended up at Mozambique. Fortunately, the people there were friendly and nursed me back to health. I stayed there for a whole year before returning to China. I hope I can reach South Africa one day by becoming a captain. Captain, I will fulfil your wish for you, no matter what it takes. I will always remember you.

# A Sailor's Adventure

*St. Joseph's College, Wong, Kaemon Lok Tin – 12*

I'm an exceptional sailor, if I do say so myself. I've sailed among thousands of cities, countries and exotic lands. I've discovered places never heard of or put on a map. I've fought against and conquered pirates and intruders, made treaties and brought precious treasures and gifts back to my homeland, to the delighted wonder of my emperor. However, among all these exhilarating adventures, only one expedition has truly left a mark upon my soul – the Ming treasure voyages.

That was when I was pretty young, around my early twenties. I was one of the chosen sailors to go on this grand event, which was promised to be legendary. At that time I was on Admiral Zheng's personal ship, carrying countless boxes of jewelry and priceless goods, along with hundreds of military weapons. Our goal was to show the wealth and power of China to the world by giving out these treasures. The evening before we set sail, the mighty Yongle Emperor held a scrumptious banquet, to pray and wish us a successful journey. We departed the next day with gifts of gold brocades, patterned silks and coloured silk gauze.

All was peaceful. The pleasant wind and sea brought us to Champa, then Java, Malacca, Aru, Semudera and Lambri. However, a few days after departure from Lambri, one of our ships accidentally split off and sailed to the Nicobar Islands. We couldn't afford delays so Admiral Zheng decided to abandon the ship while we continued to set sail. A week later, we admired the splendid and majestic mountains of Ceylon, and we took a few days to arrive. Nevertheless, we met a belligerent inclination from Alagakkonara, so we evacuated the whereabouts.

While we were returning home, we addressed Chen Zuyi and his freebooter fleet in Palembang. I was immediately agitated, for I knew he and his crew were the strongest pirates of Southeast Asia at that time, and there was no doubt our vessel would be demolished and decimated into smithereens, and all of our men would perish, including Zheng He himself. Some of our men advocated that we should try to avoid them, but Zheng He resolved that we should fight back in order to triumph. Seeing that this was our only solution, we loaded up our ships with our cannons, our bowmen readied their recurves and crossbows, and our gladiators and warriors took out their blades and swords. Just as our last warrior got into position, the skirmish emerged.

Instantly, battle cries echoed through the winds. Shafts and darts sizzled by. The cannons roared. Bridges promptly fell between Chen Zuyi's boats and ours, allowing our melee troops to engage. Sparks flew everywhere. I wasn't a fighter. I wasn't strong enough to hold a sword, nor was I precise enough to be an archer. Everything happened in a blur. The stench of blood filled the air, punctuated by screams of pain. When one of our men collapsed right next to me, an arrow in his chest, a rush of adrenaline coursed through me and I used all my strength to rush into the battlefield. A blizzard of spears was shrilling and sassing in the sky. Men were snaring and squealing as the ground became greasy with gore. Our weapons were clanging and clangorous under the seething, spite-filled sky. Geysers and fountains of tangy blood splattered into the air. Instantaneously, something sedating shot me, which caused me to faint.

When I awoke from the poison in my blood, I was in an infirmary – back in China! A few weeks later, I was requested to join the second expedition. I politely declined this offer, the last trauma still fresh on my mind. If I had agreed to join, it might possibly have been my last adventure ever. This has been an exotic voyage for me, and I shall forever treasure them. If you ask me if I would ever abandon this experience from my head, I would reply, "Not in a million years!"



# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

*St. Joseph's College, Yip, Hei – 13*

Back in the days, when the Zhu's family still ruled China, the era was known as the Ming Dynasty. In the year of 1360 A.D., a prince was born. His name was Zhu Di, the Prince of Yan. He was the fourth son of the founding emperor of the Ming Dynasty, Zhu Yuanzhang. On the other side of the kingdom, there was a teenage boy named Ma He. He was from a Muslim family in Yunnan, China. When he was ten, the Ming army invaded and occupied Yunnan. He was sent to the Ming Palace and was castrated and prepared to serve the royal prince. After he became a eunuch, he was sent to help Zhu. As Zhu was eleven years older than Ma, he treated Ma as a playmate. He taught Ma little secrets about living and striving in the palace.

On the other hand, Ma showed his brilliance, courage, and confidence in front of the prince. Zhu gained trust on Ma, while Ma showed great loyalty to Zhu. There was an inseparable bonding between the two. As Ma had grown up, he became a soldier for the Ming to fight against the Mongols. Zhu was the Governor of Beijing and the commander of the army at that time. Eventually, Zhu led his army to a victory. They dominated the Mongols, taking all of their lands, treasuries and military force. After this huge victory, Zhu was praised and awarded extensively by the King while Ma was promoted to the position of "Sanbao Taijien," which was the head among all the eunuchs.

In spite of this, Ma also became a military officer. He consulted the prince in ways of war diplomacy. When Zhu Yuanzhang died in 1402 A.D., he passed his throne to his oldest grandson, rather than his fourth son, Zhu Di, according to the traditions of the Chinese Emperor. Zhu Di was jealous and frustrated. He forced his nephew to give up his throne and proclaimed himself as the new emperor of Ming. He named himself Yongle Emperor. He made Ma He the Director of Palace Servants and granted the surname "Zheng" to Ma He.

Zhu Di was a capable emperor. He was good at governing the country. The country was prosperous and stable and the people at that time were living in harmony. Yongle Emperor was also an aggressive King, and he was eager to expand his territories. He believed there would be unknown land waiting for him to explore and he was confident that he could conquer more land. Zhu started to think about sailing around his kingdom. He appointed his henchman Zheng He as the admiral of the fleet. In the year 1404 A.D., Zheng He officially began the well-known "Ming Treasury Voyages."

Zheng He and his crew started to sail to different places. They first set off to India. During the voyage, they had to get past the India Ocean. When they were in the middle of the ocean, they came up with a powerful typhoon. Since most of the crew were lack of experience, they were frightened by the vigorous waves and the deafening thunderstorm in the angry sea.

The ocean kept roaring, and the ship was shaking rapidly. Some thought that there would be no chance for them to return to their motherland. However, Zheng remained calm and was wondering ways to keep he and his crew safe. One of the co-admirals said, "Maybe we should unload the goods, jump into the sea and swim." However, Zheng denied at once. Instead of giving up, Zheng decided to stay on the ship. Mountainous waves were in front of the crew. Zheng He showed his excellent seamanship and steering in the storm. He strived to keep the ship balance against sinking. He told everyone to remain calm and believe in him. On the one hand, he commanded the sailors to sail more frequently. On the other hand, he and the rest of the crews who were on the deck worked hard to anchor the ship by changing the direction of the vessel.

Finally, they came across the typhoon, face to face. The ship shook even more vigorously. Miraculously, Zheng and his crew were lucky enough to survive, without any loss of treasuries and weapons. However, the ship was in a bad status. They struggled to sail on and finally reached India, where the locals treated them warmly. They received the supplies from the Indians, and they had their broken ship mended. They make a new alliance with India.

After their stay in India, they went on their next voyage. Their next destination was the Persian Gulf. They had continuously sailed for two months until they met the notorious pirates near the Persian Gulf. It was so unexpected that it even shocked Zheng He himself. They triggered a fierce battle between the two armies. At first, the fight was close. None of the two militaries can pull away. After a few days, Zheng He and the pirate met face to face. Their battleships had an intense fight. Since Zheng was a giant, he used his strong arms to throw rocks towards the pirate. Moreover, he brings more cannons and arrows along with him. The attack was too much for the pirate that his battleship couldn't stand. Zheng won the battle quickly.

As the campaign progresses, Zheng He's army gained the advantage, and the morale of Zheng's army restored. Zheng He was good in battling strategy. He secretly surrounded the pirate gang and fought. As a result, the Chinese had a dominating win against the Persian pirates. The pirates were defeated entirely, without a chance to counter-attack.

The wealth of the pirates all belonged to Zheng now. He brought the wealth along with him to Persia. There he met the emperor. They established a new relationship with one another. Persian emperor also performed trades with Zheng. They traded their women and slaves for China's silk and china. Persian king recognized Emperor Yongle and guaranteed not to attack China at any time. It was such an unexpected reward for them in the Persian Gulf.

Later on, they moved on and resumed their voyage. Zheng and his crew's next checkpoint was Saudi Arabian. This time they reached Saudi Arabian peacefully. They would also like to make a new alliance with Saudi Arabia. However, they came up with a huge obstacle: they had a miscommunication with the king there. The king thought that Zheng and his soldiers wanted to kill him. He commanded the soldiers to send them to jail. Lucky for them, the queen of Saudi Arabia was kind enough and accepted their offer of allying with the two countries. Zheng was so grateful of the mercy from the queen. Zheng thanked the king and the queen again and set off back to China.

After a month of voyage, Zheng and his crew were safely back to China. He reported to Emperor Yongle about the achievements that he and his crew had attained during the long 7-month voyage. Moreover, he handed in all the treasuries he got during the voyage. Zheng told Emperor Yongle that they had gained the respect from other countries. Since Zheng was prominent as he was the admiral of the voyage, Emperor Yongle decided to give one-third of the treasuries to Zheng. Since Zheng was very experienced by the time the voyage had finished, he was promoted as the general of the Chinese army. In addition, he gained his reputation in China. He was praised by many Chinese as he helped China to explore the world. Zheng indeed won his name in the long history of China.

# The Adventure of a Lifetime

*St. Mary's Canossian College, Lau, Chloe – 13*

This is the beginning of an adventure of a lifetime.

'Land ahoy!' the joyous cry from the crow's nest woke me from my dream. I shot up quickly and mounted the flights of stairs to see the scenery as soon as possible. We've finally arrived! I reached the deck and the sight took my breath away. A great piece of land with people hustling and bustling around stretched endlessly. After a month of storms, cold and seasick at sea, we finally arrived. And even after all this time, I still couldn't believe that I, LiuYong, assistant of great mapmaker Liheng, had been chosen to be a part of Ming's 2<sup>nd</sup> great Treasure Voyage.

Master Li soon joined me on the deck. We exchanged greetings and both drank in the magnificent sight hungrily. "LiuYong, ever since I saw you, I knew you were smart. Besides, you have been a good assistant, being so attentive and hard-working. We have now arrived in a well-developed trade market. Therefore, you can just relax and explore the market while we are stopping by. Remember to come back and meet me on the deck at 6! We will discuss and plan our route as we will set sail again tomorrow," he smiled, and waved me away. I was delighted. I bowed deeply, gave him my thanks and ran off to explore the wonders of the trade market.

I caught sight of a map shop and I rushed in. There were so many beautiful and exquisite maps. Each one was drawn with years of hard work and different styles. The assistant was amused at my great passion in maps, and he was also a map lover. 'Hey kid! What's your name?' he asked. 'I am LiuYong from the treasure voyages.' 'Oh! I heard there are some pirates around the port lately. Stay safe my friend!' he said, but I told myself I needn't worry. We talked about different maps for a long time, and I lost track of time. Suddenly it was evening, and I bade him goodbye and left.

After leaving the port, Master ZhengHe told us we had to take a longer route to our next destination as foggy and rainy weather is expected, to avoid losing our way.

The next morning, I woke up and felt seasick. I had to get some fresh air so I went on deck. After a minute, I felt much better. I was starting to go back indoors when I gagged. I started to vomit, and I rushed into the storage room as I reeked and threw up. I took a few deep breaths, and was about to go out when I saw the shadows of pirates. Uh oh. I can't go out, it would only get myself captured too. What would become of the crew?

I almost cried out in dismay as I saw that the whole crew had been captured. Even the admiral ZhengHe looked a mess, his forehead beaded with blood. LiHeng had a nasty gash on his right arm, and I longed to help him clean up his wound. The whole crew was a sorrowful sight, as the pirates had totally taken them by surprise. They could not contact other ships for help as the attack was too sudden. All of them had their hands and feet bounded by ropes. Suddenly, I heard a nasty laugh terribly close to me, and my heart stopped as I came into such close contact with the most feared pirate.

One could say that he was a human form of Satan. His name was SaRen, which means a killer in Mandarin. It was obvious that he was the leader, as he had a halo of menace and hatred. Even his own pirates fear him and tremble when his name was mentioned. He had a scar running down from his forehead to his chin, and he had only one eye. He had crooked teeth, and a nasty smile that sends a shiver of fear down one's spine. SaRen took great pleasure in taunting our crew, and it makes one wonder how did he ever start out as an innocent, kind baby.

"Scoundrels, hurry up and lock them in a room!" SaRen barked. 'Have this done in a minute and gather before me!' A servant boy whimpered with pain as the pirates dragged him to the room. The pirate gave him a violent kick on the shin and the boy fainted clean away. I trembled in my uncomfortable crouched position, but I did not dare move. I felt lonely and terrified. I was alone.

Very soon, all the pirates were standing around SaRen. 'Tonight at midnight, I will give you a secret word, and all of you idiots follow me to the deck. The whole crew will be killed by us, but only I can slaughter the "great" Zheng He! The secret word is "the great death". Now all of you get to work and prepare my dinner!' I glanced up at the sky. It was already evening. What can I do? I spent the evening with an empty stomach, and I cried a little. Oh, oh, what can I do?

At last, it was near midnight. Suddenly, I had an idea. My brain screamed for me to give up on this, but I know this would be the only chance that I could save the crew.

The ship was eerily quiet. I got out of the barrel and massaged my aching legs, then creeping down the familiar stairs to where the pirates slept. SaRen was slumbering alone in another room, so it would be easier to wake the pirates. My heart was thumping so hard it seemed it might fall out at any second, and my brain was a blank space of fear. But I took a deep breath and whispered, 'The great death!'

Immediately, all the pirates were awake. A rough voice growled, 'Who are you? I don't recognize your voice.' I said smoothly, 'SaRen told me to fetch you all.' Miraculously, the pirates all started following me! I skirted ahead and ran all the way up, sighing with relief as I saw it was pitch dark on the deck.

'Where are the prisoners?' 'Hurry up boy!' I led them to the exact place where the planks are. I knocked on the plank and said, 'Hurry up then! This is the way!' The pirates dutifully got onto the plank, not knowing their fatal mistake. I checked to see that all of them were on the plank, and I pulled the release lever of the plank with great relish and vigor. It took the pirates some time to realize what had really happened, and it was horrible to hear them thrashing and struggling in the freezing waters, meeting their death. I hugged myself with relief, but then the most dreadful sound hit me. The groaning of SaRen waking up and realizing his crew was all gone.

"Come out... I know you're here somewhere..." the bloodcurdling voice of SaRen reached my ears and clawed into my brain. I was dizzy with fear. I started praying, willing I will die a quick death. I had lost all hope of living when a last resort popped up in my brain. I hated this idea, but this was the last thing I could do.

I threw myself at SaRen and immediately retreated, making him furious. He snarled and I could feel him tensing up, ready to strike. I stepped onto the plank and shouted, 'Come on you loser!' He launched himself at me so quickly I almost fell off. However, I escaped by a whisker and used all my remaining strength to land on the deck. I felt a great whoosh of air as SaRen sailed past me and landed in the churning water with a thunderous splash. SaRen was ferocious and tough, but not even the fearsome pirate can survive long in the freezing waters of the sea. The shouts and splashes slowly faded, and I was alone once more.

I had landed quite hard and my head felt like it had been cut in half. I wiped my forehead and it became bloody. I staggered to the locked room and things turned fuzzy as the pain worsened. I could only remember a hazy memory of untying everyone and collapsing into LiHeng's arms, and then everything was black.

I woke up with a dull pain in my head. LiHeng was beside me, holding me hand. For a second, I thought this was a dream. I started trembling, but Master smiled and said, 'Dear boy, there is no need to fear anymore. You are our hero!'

And I knew that this is only the start of an adventure of a lifetime.

# Royal Domination

*St. Mary's Canossian College, Rilles, Anshley – 15*

"I, Stella McPhelore, hereby claim my birth rights, as the Princess of Ravendelle, vow to maintain prosperity, and make our kingdom a better place as I claim the throne." just practicing for my coronation day two years later. I've still got a lot to learn in these two years though.

I'll be a great queen someday, I'm sure of it. But there's just something missing... I want more. I want a greater kingdom known to every nation out there, and I don't just mean fame, but run down more kingdoms to bring supremacy to the McPhelores' royal bloodline, and have it as the most respected amongst all nations.

My mother, Emilia Delfin-McPhelore, was once Ravendelle's highest commander of the crown's guard when my father (William Georgio McPhelore) was still a prince. She sailed and travelled to different nations, brought victory in every war, brought down other kingdoms to bring justice to Ravendelle and as to her successes, she caught my father's attention. When my mother was pregnant with me, she received death wishes and warnings from who knew where, wanting her to be gone. My father was very furious. He tripled Ravendelle's security for my mother's sake. But just the night I was born 19 years ago, she was assassinated. My father fell into depression and never speaks of it again, never left Ravendelle. My father is a very lovable man, but turns furious whenever I start talking about these things.

"My dear, it has brought misery to me seeing you being restricted in doing what you love. You know well that I've done all those for your own safety but seeing you sad is like being stabbed through the heart as a father. Your happiness is the most precious thing for me. You have my permission to leave." I was shocked to hear my father say all of this when I approached him.

The day finally came when I would be departing from Ravendelle. I hugged my father one last time, his whisper, "walk tall, my daughter" would be the finest memory I'll ever bear. It distresses me to leave my father behind. I would not cast worries for his safety had been in the hands of his assistant Antonio. His son, Jared, is my assistant and best friend.

I finally came to my first destination, the great city of Albhamia, kingdom of assassins where Arthur Skavinski the prodigious son rules over. Though this kingdom cannot be the one whose idea was to kill my mother, for Arthur was only a 5-year-old ruler of this great city with strong laws. It is extremely dangerous to be here yet I'm ready for everything that will occur in the battle. Ruling over this kingdom would be a great privilege for me.

It was so quiet like they could just pop out or shoot at anyone of us in the ship at any second. There, the fight began. As I pulled out my sword ready to fight, Arthur jumped in to my ship and fought against me.

The way Arthur and I possess the same strength in combat brings such mystery in my mind. Was it his fullest power or was he just holding back? Whatever it was, I had no clue. He raised his sword over mine with great power that my sword flew off and I fell to my knees. I looked back to my people, watched them struggle as they fought, then realized it was my fault. I had to let them down. Oh father, you were right. I was too ignorant.

Arthur stared at me with confusion. He asked "tell me princess, what made you think you could trespass in my kingdom like this? You have plenty of men but it won't be enough to stop us from finishing you all." I looked up and said "all I wanted was to do as what my mother did when she was still alive, how she brought power to Ravendelle and I want to revive that. I want to restore the power that was lost in Ravendelle, and bring honor to my mother. But you've proven me wrong. I understand your desire to finish me off and I won't stop you."

He was speechless. His pause captured the attention of everyone. They all stopped and stared at us. Arthur knelt and said "Stella, don't blame yourself in all this. I myself wanted to find who killed my parents, but I needed to rule Albhamia myself ever since. I told myself that someday, I *will* kill that person who killed my parents when I was born. For that, I will join you on your journey." He ordered his men to ready another ship for they'll come with us as allies. I was relieved and felt ecstatic.

Together, we reached many kingdoms. It's such great honor for him to train me and my people along the journey. Finally, we arrived at our last destination, Phintena. People were oddly kind and welcoming there. Gerald Kurso, leader of Phintena, claimed that they were in need of a ruler that will care for them. So they approached us with warm welcome hoping that we could become the ruler. We stayed in Phintena for a few days. I was alone in my room when Antonio suddenly appeared with Jared and Gerald beside him, announcing that my father was dead. "I don't know what had happened to your father. I was out dealing with things when your father got stabbed." Antonio stated. I was in complete shock.

Arthur busted in, shouted "The Phintenans! They're attacking us, telling them to bring you out to execute you!" I was so confused. First they welcomed us and now this? I was thinking everything that could happen until I heard someone drew their sword, as I turned around, Antonio slashed his sword through my stomach and Arthur was grabbed by Gerald and Jared.

Antonio walked around, slowly saying "I've always wanted this day to come seeing you and Arthur united. My plans were successful after all."

"What are you trying to say?" I shouted confusion.

He smirked at me and continued "I've always been so curious on how you're so dedicated to dominate kingdoms 'just like mother did'. Argh, you're as naïve as your mother!"

I didn't spoke a word. He sighed "You see, Phintena doesn't have any ruler because this place is of a blank land. More than 19 years ago until now I'd collected all the refugees of every kingdom your mother took over with hearts filled with anger for all of your selfish acts and brought them here. I was the one who sent death threats to your mother.

Right after you left Ravendelle, I looked for the best opportunity to kill your father so *I* could rule over Ravendelle in the meantime and kill you next. And as for you Arthur, both of your parents were extremely powerful, I was afraid that with the three of you together, I'll be in great danger someday. So, I left *you* alive knowing nothing about your parents." Arthur was extremely furious that he got out of Gerald and Jared's hands, took their heads and bumped them to each other dead. As Antonio looked at what Arthur did, I pulled out his sword from him, he looked back at me and I slashed his head off without hesitation.

I cried in guilt, anger and sorrow swirled together. Arthur came near and wrapped his arms around me. I now realised how much it caused pain for these people to see their kingdoms being dominated due to war that's started by my inconsiderate thoughts.

I went out and looked at everyone fighting against. They all paused when they saw me in tears. I took a deep breath, then spoke "I now realize all the cause that I've given you all, and I must pay the price for what I and my kingdom had done. I, Stella McPhelore, pledge to pay back everything you have been stolen. I, princess of Ravendelle, surrender to you all, I shall restore back all the things you all nurtured, signing peace treaties and share one of the finest things Ravendelle possesses."

It was heartwarming how the 'Phintenans' looked at me rejoiced after what I've declared. Arthur and his people returned back to Albhamia while I returned to Ravendelle and visited my father's grave. I told him how much I've learned in my journey though I never thought that I'd never get to hear from him in my I return.

As promised in Phintena, I'm currently working on to the process of signing peace treaties and so on, to their own countries. Things have gotten better. I became close to their rulers and brought 'name' to Ravendelle. A better and more powerful one than I had desired, for it has touched the hearts of different nations, without any wars. And I believe how very soon, we'll all weave a united country.

# The Crown Jewel

*St Margaret's Co-Educational English Primary & Secondary School, Ansari, Rafi – 14*

“Zhao, do you ever get tired of this blue?” A young man stood, leaning on the railing, neatly lined on the edge of the exquisitely manufactured junk boat. He looked longingly towards the horizon, watching the waves and sky, dyed in similar shades of blue, merge together. He had asked his crew mate a rather simple question, but his tone was engaged, tense.

“Not as much as working on a rice farm if you ask me.” The middle-aged man answered the young man while cleaning the deck enthusiastically. “I would never had been this rich if it weren't for these Ming Pirates allowing me in.”

“But we're just some nobodies on a random boat in an enormous fleet, nothing like those on the main ships. Those people just straight up take most of our profits, so what's the point of doing this?” The man seemed quite unmotivated to do anything but loaf about where the officials wouldn't see him. They were far too busy enjoying their food and booze inside the boat.

“Look Feng, you've never done it, so you wouldn't know. Rice farming is, compared to this, plain excruciating and the income you get from working from sunrise to sunset won't be enough to buy you three meals. Hell, you'd be lucky to get two meals a day. Here, you get spices and tea breaks – you don't get either of those in the fields so stop your whining and help me out here. If the Ming Shadows were to find you slacking, they'd give you more than just a few whips.”

“Ugh... alright—” Feng approached the man when abruptly, the alarm was raised.

“ENEMY PIRATES!” The watchman rang a bell while screaming on top his lungs. The Ming Pirates, at least their guards, brandished their dao swords while the Ming mercenaries took out their spears.

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Was this a blessing? Or was it a curse? The pirate junk was heading right towards our boat, which rested in the flank of the fleet, a place where the most stalwart warships were placed. Most ships wouldn't attack our flank as it was the most guarded part of the fleet. The jewels of the Ming Emperor lay within the bellies of the boats in the center.

As I watched the boat cut through the surf, I thought of how tired of this lifestyle I was and if I was lucky, those pirates may just allow me into their ranks; that would certainly be exciting.

As the battle approached, I hid in a corner of the ship, ready to jump onto the pirate boat, and jump on I did.

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I jumped and barely managed to latch myself to a window of the rival junk. Hearing the screams and battle cries, I wasted no time trying to find a way to become a stowaway and embark upon new and exciting adventures...

Then I came across an ornamented door in the middle of an empty hallway. The door was more than double the size of all the other doors and had jewels embedded on the front of it. The captain of the ship must had been a rich man. Maybe... this could be my chance to be rich, escape the fleet and enjoy a lifetime in a decent house in the capital. As I approached the intricately designed door, I got a feeling that I would not be disappointed.

I opened the room, and it was empty. Looks like the captain also took part in the battle. Well a small pirate fleet like this would need all the men they could get to raid the mighty Ming Pirate Fleet.

I forgot about my objective and was charmed by the sight of treasure

I grabbed every jewel or trinket there was in my sight and kept ransacking until I accidentally discovered a drawer, alone, and hidden from plain sight amidst the paneling of the ships interior wall. I walked towards it and crouched down, and found it secured by a heavy lock. I had no knowledge in lock picking, so the only option I had was to cut open the fine wooden drawer.

I took my sword and start sawing at the lock. I heaved on both sides and the wooden plank plopped out, at the cost of the condition of my sword. There was only a small, heavily adorned box, covered in an alluring red cloth. Even touching it felt heavenly.

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I opened the box. All I saw was a small crimson jewel. It's shape was enchanting, and looking at it was mesmerising. It wasn't just shiny, it refracted light in itself, making it look as if there were more jewels inside the blood-red jewel. It simply left me entranced in its beauty. This was something that belonged on the crown of an emperor, no, a God.

If I were to directly sell it to the emperor, it would garner me millions, more than enough to buy me a city, to be richer than any man. I would never give it to those Mings

“Who goes there?” A loud voice rang throughout the room as I heard rushing footsteps on the corridor outside.

I instinctively hid behind a table and sneaked a glance, and, to my relief, the intruders were none other than my shipmates. I slowly stood up and greeted them with a wave

“When did you get here, Feng? We thought you were dead. What is that you're holding?” I quickly put the jewel into my pockets replied with a simple “Nothing”.

I just hoped they wouldn't be suspicious. This jewel was my ticket to a better life. To wealth. To opulence. Away. Away from the rise and fall of the ocean and the cycle I found myself in.

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“Feng! It's the Mings! They're summoning you!” I was called out by none other than the head ship. Could they have found out already? I anxiously staggered my way over the planks to the main ship. It was everywhere on my face that I was distressed, I looked to the heavens for a miracle.

Then, the Ming Patriarch spoke out, “I heard from your shipmates that you entered the ship before the battle even ensued. And, after examining the ship that they found almost no treasure.” I was sweating like a pig. “Those pirates weren't normal pirates, they were some of the richest, most skilled buccaneers in this region. Their invasion was a trap that we set up. All we had to do was simply lure the idiots to attacking our fleet. Some men will do anything for riches, even if it means risking their own life.” I gulped hard. I think I may have made a big mistake on my part.

“So do you have any treasure on you? We've already confiscated all the ones you stole and stashed in your private chest.” The Ming leader was applying a lot of pressure, and I glanced to the imposing figures beside him. Those pike-men wouldn't give me even a second before stabbing me through the heart and chopping off my head off with their vicious blades.

“N-no Lord, I-I have nothing else.” I barely managed to get a few words out. Of course, I had that crimson jewel, but I would never let anyone know of its existence, especially not here

“I see... It's just that we think that, something else had to have belonged in this small red box we got here, perhaps an 8-sided jewel, with a side as big as of let's say, the fingertip.” He slowly raised the red box, levelling it with my eyes.

“I-I assure you, there's nothing else, that box was always empty, I swear!” I was panicking, could they have known exactly what I had?

“Alright, I'll believe you. Just know, the Mings' Shadows will discover the truth, whatever that may be. You're dismissed.” I ran out. The Ming Shadows, a group of famous assassins, watchdogs and people who meticulously deal with the acquisition of information. They would definitely find I had stolen the crown jewel.

I snuck back to my junk and slunk to the back of the vessel. I made sure no one else was looking. Why was I here? The jewel. The cursed jewel. “If I wasn't allowed to have it, no one else would!”

And then, I launched the Jewel into the far reaches of the ocean. The deep blue waves greedily grabbed the jewel from the sky, never to be seen again.

“Maybe if you hadn't slacked off on all of the work, you would have thrown it far enough into the sea for us not to be able to get it.”

It was the Ming Shadows.



# The New Ming Treasure Voyages

*St Margaret's Co-Educational English Primary & Secondary School, Eng, Elysse – 13*

The Ming Treasure Voyage happened during the Ming dynasty, where people went to find treasure through traveling a long way. This search for treasure and exploring the unknown made me think of a similar story.

Winnie was a small little girl. She was reading her favourite book, Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets, in her bed. She really enjoyed this book as it has an interesting plot.

After reading a few chapters, she started to get a bit sleepy and decided to go to sleep.

The last thing Winnie remembered was the feeling of a deep sleep slowly drifting over her, but when Winnie opened her eyes she was with her best friends: Ivy, Olivia, and Yannis. They were all at Ivy's birthday party in a party room in Tsing Yi. As they were playing, they discovered a secret door behind one of the couches and were curious what was inside it. After mustering up their courage, they all went inside.

After passing through the door, they all got a weird feeling.

As they moved into the darkness of the doorway, they suddenly found themselves in a place with vines, branches, dried leaves, and mud. It was a rainforest!

Brushing aside leaves, the girls found themselves stepping on a huge cross on the ground drawn blood. There were also a few shovels leaning against a nearby tree.

Winnie tried using her phone to call for help but there was no signal in the rainforest.

After a few minutes of indecision, Ivy suggested that they use the shovels and find out what was under this cross – after all, everyone knows 'X' marks the spot.

The girls had been digging for about ten minutes when Yannis found a dirty and muddy box covered in vines. Olivia tried helping Yannis to get the box out while Ivy continued digging to further reveal the box. Ivy soon gave up on digging and the three of them were attempting to haul the box out of the hole they had created. While this was happening, Winnie was searching for clues as to why the door brought them there.

After a great struggle, Ivy, Olivia, and Yannis managed to get the box out and removed the vines surrounding it. Once the box was clear, they found an electronic device that looked similar to an iPad, however they couldn't find out what the device was or how to work it.

Suddenly a booming voice erupted from the device on the box and startled the four girls.

'Aha! You have fallen into my trap. In order to get back out, you have to finish three challenges with the clues given to you. Only then will you be released. Good luck. Hahaha...' Olivia suspected it was Mr. Devil that was behind this as it sounded like him and the voice was that of an evil being.

Winnie and Yannis were frantically trying to open the box while Ivy and Olivia looked on. Soon, Winnie managed to open the box and found a paper which said 'Look to your left now otherwise your family's lives will be in danger.'

All four girls looked to the left and saw some people with guns in boats, jets, and cars coming to attack.

Olivia, being the most alert and astute, immediately knew that this was the first challenge. She quickly spread the message to the rest of the girls.

Fortunately, Ivy had been taking judo lessons every week. Although she wasn't the best at it, at least she knew some kicks and some punches to protect herself. The other girls performed some basic kicks after mimicking Ivy. They were ready. Then Ivy took the attackers down to the floor, removing their ability to fight or harm the girls. The gang had succeeded in the first task.

After defeating the first wave of attackers, a man in a nicely-dressed outfit appeared and gave a message and a clue for the next challenge. Inside the message was a compass. The girls looked at each other cluelessly, then Olivia read the message.

'Follow a path to find another clue. Beware as you venture down the path. Don't say I didn't warn you – I just did. Good luck.'

The four of them were ready to face any challenges that this mysterious being could throw at them. As they cautiously following the compass down a path, they started to hear the roar of a jet engine mixed with other strange 'whooshing' sounds. In the distance the crack of gunshots rang out. As they rounded a bend in the path, Yannis spotted some small guns beneath a tree.

They carefully took the guns and Olivia guessed this was the next challenge. The message was spread quickly and they got ready. They hid behind the mighty trees, giving them a position to shoot out the jets' engines so that they would tumble from the sky.

As the jets approached, the girls fired in unison. In a flash, they defeated the jets which plummeted to the ground. Quickly after, the girls continued down the path where they found the clue for the last challenge. Olivia scanned the clue and then announced that they had to go through a poisonous flower garden which contained lots of harmful insects.

Thankfully, Yannis always brings a bottle of insect repellent with her as she always gets mosquito bites. Many normal mosquito repellents attract other insects, therefore her parents got her an insect repellent that doesn't attract insects at all and is safe for her to use. She used a handkerchief to block her face while spraying the insect repellent all around her. The other girls hiding their heads behind their small handkerchiefs.

Despite being chased by giant insects and navigating around the treacherous flower garden, the girls made it out and then saw the door out of this strange and dangerous world.

The four girls quickly went back through the door and ended up in Ivy's closet. They were relieved to be back and away from the perils of rainforest. Ivy brought the girls to the front gate and showed them how to go to the train station.

Lastly, the girls all thanked and hugged each other for cooperating with each other when they were inside the deadly rainforest.

Winnie opened her eyes and saw her mom.

'Ahhhh. Ahhhh. Ahhhh.'

'Is everything alright, Winnie? I heard you screaming so I came in and saw that you were sweating. Did you have a bad dream?'

Winnie was thankful that it was just a dream. She felt a huge sense of relief as she caught her breath.

'You better get some sleep, you have had a busy afternoon at Ivy's birthday party and you have school tomorrow. Come on get to bed, little Pooh.'

'Thanks mom, good night.'

'Good night, sweetheart.'

# Humility, Morality, and The Ming Treasure Voyages

*St Margaret's Co-Educational English Primary & Secondary School, Kwok, Harmoni – 13*

“China is the greatest country in the world! It is time to show our power and wealth to the rest of the world!” The Emperor of Ming dynasty announced proudly. “Zheng He, choose anyone you please from our elite force and load your vessel with valuable presents. Remember, no wars or violence! We are not invaders, but explorers showing our friendship to the world.”

Zheng He selected ten physically fit male sailors, two female chefs, and he gave himself the role of captain before heading westwards. Their wooden ship was huge and well-equipped for whatever dangers and adventure lay before the crew. They were excited and curious about who and what they would meet on this long journey.

After a few days on the calm ocean they made landfall in India, the birthplace of Hinduism. The Indians welcomed Zheng He's and his team, although they did not understand each other's languages. They prepared a big feast with different curries and traditional Indian cuisine. The food smelled delicious and stimulated the team's appetite, especially after their time at sea. However, they felt confused about how to eat the food without utensils. They observed how the Indians ate and reluctantly followed them. “What? They use their hands to eat without using chopsticks? This shows a total lack of civilization!” whispered Zheng He. The captain was a left hander and he tried to use his left hand to scoop up the food. The Indians laughed loudly and stopped the captain because using the left hand to eat was considered to be unclean in Indian culture as it was used to perform matters associated with going to the washroom. Zheng He marked down this cultural shock in his journal for future reference. The two chefs gathered some local herbs and studied how to cook Indian cuisine. Before leaving, Zheng He presented the Indians with some chopsticks made of elephant tusks before gesturing how to use them. He hoped the Indian would eat in a more civilized way.

Their journey into the unknown continued and they were lucky to have good weather without any bad storms due to it being the middle of summer. After a long time at sea, the lookout spotted something and called excitedly, “Captain! Can you see those huge stone pyramids over there?”. They decided to stop and explore this strange land. A group of people with heavy make-up, no matter if man or woman, greeted Zheng He's team warmly. The Egyptian's eyes looked odd by Chinese standards due to the black kohl eyeliner and the darkened eyelashes and eyebrows. However, their clothes looked almost see-through with transparent linen and some of the children were even naked! Zheng He's team felt shy around this and avoided looking at them directly. The idea of beauty was extremely different in Egypt. The Egyptians showed the crew the mighty Pyramids, the Great Sphinx of Giza, and mummification helped people reach the afterlife. The team was impressed and amazed by Egyptian architecture and culture. They simply would never have believed the Egyptians would mummify their cats before the saw it with their own eyes. After five horizon-widening days, Zheng He offered some silk cloth as a parting gift. He suggested that the Egyptians try using silk clothes for clothing so that their bodies would be well covered with comfortable material.

The team passed through the Mediterranean Sea and berthed in Spain. As they were leaving the boat, they were shocked and horrified to see a large crowd of people taking part in a huge tomato fight. The crowd was laughing playfully as they caught and threw tomatoes at one another “Oh dear! What are they doing with those tomatoes? The amount of food they are wasting would last me at least 3 months!” wailed the two chefs who were not happy to see such a scene. “The Chinese value and treasure food much more than the people here.” As they edged past the crowd throwing tomatoes, they saw a man waving a red flag to irritate a bleeding and distressed bull. Every time the bull charged at the man, he would nimbly leap to the side and gash it with a sword. The worst thing was that the people watching were applauding the man in a respectful way. They were treating him as a hero. Zheng He was angry to see this brutal behaviour. He believed humans should care about animals and should not hurt them for fun. “People here need more education in humanity, benevolence, and morality,” thought Zheng He. He decided to gift the Spanish the writings of Confucius in the hope that they would change their ways. However, the Spanish could not read the Chinese characters. Zheng He was determined the Spanish should learn the teachings of Confucius, so the team stayed in Spain for a longer period to help with translation. In the meantime, the team found out that there was also wonderful culture in Spain, such as energetic Flamenco dancing. All the team members enjoyed learning the dance before heading to the next destination – it was unlike anything they had ever seen or done before.

Upon hearing that France was not far away from Spain, the exploring team set off and it took them three days to reach France. They walked off the ship and wondered what new cultural shock would be waiting for them this time. Once they landed, a group of people stepped forward and attempted to hug them and kiss them. Chinese people are not get used to such close physical contact and pushed them away hastily. One of the chefs screamed and slapped the face of French man who was trying to kiss her cheek. The French people misunderstood their reaction and presumed Zheng He's team came to invade their land. The French called for weapons and were ready to fight back. "No! No! We are coming in peace!" screamed Zheng He. After taking some time to figure out each other's intentions, both sides realized that it was just a misunderstanding between two different cultures. The French brought forth some high-quality red wine to show their hospitality and acceptance of Zheng He's crew. Everyone took pleasure from the wine highly and Zheng He decided to take the technique of the winemaking back to China. The French proudly displayed the traditional grape stomping process. However, Zheng He and his team members quickly began to feel uncomfortable and they had the feeling that they would threw up after every single drop of the wine they drunk. "Our sorghum wine or huangjiu are definitely much better!" So, they left the Chinese traditional sorghum wine as a gift for the French.

Zheng He was satisfied with the trip and thought it was a big success. On his return to China he reported to the emperor: "My dear Emperor, I can confirm that China is the best country in the world after our voyages. We are civilized and eat with chopsticks. We know how to cover our body well with beautiful silk. Our people have morality and show appreciation for their food. Furthermore, we know how to appropriately interact with other people and we would do not use our bare feet to stomp on the grapes!" The Ming Emperor was overjoyed. "I knew it! I knew it! No wonder China is respected and admired by the rest of the world! No one can compare to us as they are far behind us! How wonderful it is to be invincible and so advanced!" Zheng He nodded his agreement and added, "I have given different presents to them and hopefully those less civilized nations will learn from us and be able to develop as we have."

Due to the self-confidence of the Ming Emperor, Chinese people during this period did not give any effort to further improve their quality of life or search out new scientific knowledge. Due to this, the country experienced an economic breakdown a few years later, before China was invaded and the Ming Dynasty was conquered by Manchurian tribes. Zheng He's journey took him through many strange and exotic lands, yet it is important to remember that even if something is different, strange, or unusual, it does not necessarily mean it is bad or uncivilized. If we open our eyes and our ears then there is always something to be learned from different cultures and experiences.

Even if in this story the explorer Zheng He was not as understanding as he could have been of other cultures, his travels can be seen as a great starting point in spreading Chinese culture across the globe.

# Requiem: Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyage

*St Margaret's Co-Educational English Primary & Secondary School, Rubio, Karylle – 14*

The fierceness of the golden-yellow sun, the smell of intrigue, the cries of merchants are synonymous with the esoteric land of Arabia.

And now here I am on my ship, wearing my shabby crimson sheepskin coat, pouring with sweat and engulfed with guilt.

As I voyage through these murky waters, I realised my quest was not to bestow my treasures upon others but rather to dig deeper in my treasure trove and unearth the hidden jewels which have been lost to pressures of time.

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The broken mirrors, the antique porcelain vases and the tremulous sound of my mother's voice, it seemed all too familiar for me, a broken memory.

The delicate flower I had once been had shrivelled, devoid of conscience.

Every ticking moment spent seemed like an eternity.

A wolf in sheep's clothing for a mother and a charlatan for a father.

With every fault, they threw dust in my eyes,

Until I knew the brittle truth that underlay the facade.

And now I steer behind the wheel,

Hemming and hawing at every fear.

The spectral figure can't get hold of me.

It was time to set the butterflies free.

The rush of azure tidal waves, the cold breeze on my shoulder.

*'Captain! Captain!' 'Mo Chou! Mo Chou!'*

Floating in despair was long gone and over.

After a few moments, they carried me back to the dock.

Questioning me on what had happened, the abrupt situation.

I told them I got carried away, I regained myself, wasn't lost astray.

The sheepskin coat was gone.

The sky was rosy, no raindrops in sight, only free birds about to take flight.

The phantom whispered, "Well done my friend, the journey is the reward."

# Seize the Day

*St. Paul's Convent School, Chan, Yi Lam – 13*

Zhao Ai-Ping was a quiet man. He and his wife kept to themselves and didn't talk much, not even to each other. She didn't like talking and he'd cry if he talked at all.

Little was known about Ai-Ping except that he has been on a voyage to Europe when he was young. He was never quite the same ever since — it was said that he was quite the humorous old lad before he left, which raised further questions among the village gossipers — what exactly had happened on the trip that broke him like this?

And so the age-old question comes to us again.

What has he become?

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Seas The Day.

No, seriously, that's the name of the boat you'll be voyaging on. Father's European friend, Mr. Lucas, had allowed you to go with him on his trip to Europe. Now, all he did since you got onboard was scream at you to do this, do that. You didn't really mind, though, you were too excited. Also, he was probably just stressed.

You just hoped that Europe didn't have chest-eyed people.

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"Oh! Good morning, Mr. Lucas."

"AI-PING, YOU ARE A LIAR!" Mr. Lucas greeted in return. "WHY ARE TWO PIES MISSING FROM THE KITCHEN, HUH? DID YOU TAKE THEM?"

"No." You sat up bolt upright in your bed, a little disheveled at being awoken at such an ungodly hour, and in such an ungodly way, too. "Are you sure Edgar didn't feed them to the seagulls again?"

Mr. Lucas screamed in rage. He raised a hand and slapped you across the face, again and again. As soon as you connected, the voices in your head start screaming too, and you thought your head was going to explode because of all the noise. They told you to run, to hide from this terrifying man, but your legs were blocks of steel and held you in place. Some voices were more sinister, telling you to grab his arm, twirl him around, assault him and beat the miserable life out of him.

"No!" you said. "No!" You weren't even sure who you were addressing at that point, your mind was simply too far gone.

When he left, still seething in rage, you rocked yourself to sleep, the tears tracks on your cheeks somewhat resembling the branches of a tree.

---

Three days in and you'd already started to miss home.

You spent your days on the Seas The Day making yourself useful, helping the crew members with the chores such as mopping floors, making inventory and washing clothes while Edgar, Mr. Lucas' son, fed pieces of pie to seagulls.

You tried to ignore the voices, but they always managed to surface.

“AI-PING! GET THOSE GODFORSAKEN BIRDS OFF MY SHIP!” Mr. Lucas screamed at you as a seagull took a dump on his lap.

“Yes, Mr. Lucas,” you replied sweetly, ignoring the disdain in his eyes. You stomped your feet so that the seagulls scattered off, a cloud of wings over the endless sea, and you’re feeling proud of yourself for being useful and a good crew member when Edgar started crying noisily.

You’d made Edgar cry.

*You’d made Edgar cry!*

Crying hurts! Nobody deserves to cry like you did!

“No...*Mr. Lucas* made Edgar cry...” a voice crooned in your ear, sending a shiver down your spine. “He made both of you cry...not you...*Mr. Lucas*...you’re a *good boy*...he’s a hell-bride of the Devil...”

As Mr. Lucas whipped you with a belt for bullying Edgar, you wondered if the voice was really telling you the truth.

---

You’re unpleasantly woken up by the putrid smell of smoke and a bell ringing.

Mr. Lucas was screaming on the deck again. “Claim your weapons, crew! Children to the cabins, they’re coming for us!”

Who’s coming? Emperor Qin?

Only moments later, a big, tall man barged in with a bronze gun in his hands. He levelled it directly at you. “Hands up, and give us your treasure!”

“Are you Mr. Qin?” You asked sweetly, batting your eyelashes at him.

He rolled his eyes and prepared to shoot, but you knocked him over when you ran for the door. He fell on his face, and on impulse, you wrenched the gun from his fingers. Your feet took you up the creaking steps onto the deck, and your heart pumped with adrenaline.

“What’s going on?” you demanded with a tone full of curiosity, watching the scene unfold around you; crewmen and big hairy men alike were shooting at each other.

“They’re pirates!” Mrs. Lucas shouted back. “Get to the cabins, we’ll protect you!”

The entire scene was a mess.

The voices in your head gleefully remarked to you that no one would notice if a stray bullet hit Mr. Lucas. You could take *revenge*. You would feel *happy*. It was tempting, very tempting.

The screaming filled up your head again.

Your fragile body was weak and sore, littered with abuse from Mr. Lucas. Even if you weren’t physically damaged very badly, you didn’t think that your brain could take any more. Happy was good. You wanted to be happy.

Mr. Lucas gritted his teeth as he dueled a particularly tall pirate, his back turned to you. Your hand closed around the gun. It was the perfect time. After all, Seas The Day, right?

Could you really pull the trigger on him?

You really wanted to be happy.

You really, really wanted to be happy.

Your hand rose like a marionette on strings, and dreamlike, you squeezed the trigger as if your life depended on it.

The force of the resulting gunshot throws you back. Your spine snaps against a wooden door, and you slump over. Mr. Lucas screamed, but this time, it's in harmony with the ensuing chaos pounding your head. You're screaming with him this time, out of rage or disgust for yourself, you don't know. But all you know is that you want the moment to end.

*What's wrong with you?*

*Nothing. The psychotic mind has no correct function.*

*The people told me that there was a reason why the best fruit was always forbidden. But no. Today, I wanted to feast.*

---

You're lonely. You're lonely and you've always been lonely and you'll always be lonely because you can't talk except for stuttered, mangled words that you can barely get out over the screaming in your ears. They look at you with flames of disdain in their eyes; their eyes watching and searing and taunting and ripping through you until all you feel like is screaming. But then, if you scream, they'll scream louder and they'll all scream at once and everything would be an unintelligible string of curses that would never shut up, and... and—!

And you'll *drown*. While the people who hear you scream are burning down.

You find yourself outside on an impossibly cold winter night, wearing nothing but a linen coat, barefoot in the drifting snow; your eyes, bleak and hollow, staring at a picturesque bronze statue in the middle of the town square.

You bite your lower lip, your teeth digging in so hard that red is soon spilling over, dribbling over your pale lips and down your chin, practically freezing in place from the cold. Your fingertips soon turn purple; and your face icy white, but you wouldn't care anyways. You're so used to the pain that pain itself becomes an abstract concept.

You don't know why, but you fall to your knees, touching your already frostbitten fingers to the snow. The night wind buffets you, ghost fingers wafting all sorts of patterns through your hair, until it becomes a part of you, and the age-old question comes to you.

What have you become?

*What have you become?*

***A murderer is what you have become.***



# Irony of Death

*St. Paul's Convent School, Hui, Ho Sum Savina – 13*

He had always loved water.

When he was little, he would wade in the shallow streams that directed water to the fields, splashing around playfully as the water caressed his ankles.

When it rained, he would rush out and dance with the graceful raindrops, his faithful friends. He loved the way they flowed over his body in serenity, showering him with kisses, just as his mother used to, in some distant memory, before his father left and never came back.

Often, people would find him wallowing in the calm side of the river, peacefully staring off into space. But isn't it dangerous, for such a young scrawny little pea to go there, where dangerous currents and strong undertows lie at play? Of course not, for why would his most loyal friends abandon him?

His mother never liked it, often reprimanding him for abandoning his chores and running off, but she didn't understand. No one ever did. The boys in the village enjoyed roughhousing and whatnot, but he believed them to be wasteful nonsense. He preferred peace and silence, when people would not yell or cry or order him around, just for being introverted.

The waters were his refuge. They always hummed with quiet energy, not at all loud and fearsome, like so many of the people he knew, but kind and reassuring, the kind of family he never had. They accepted him for who he was, protecting him from the cruelty of his reality; they were the ones he depended on in times of need.

★

That was why he signed up to join the crew of the Ming Treasure Fleet.

*"It would be wonderful, a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity," the rest of the crew told him, "you can broaden your horizons, explore the world, see things and meet people you'd never dream of, sitting in your tiny hut in your tiny village!"*

'To have that, and live a life on the water?' *It had seemed too good to be true. But it was true.*

Oh, his mother hadn't agreed; in fact, she downright yelled, screamed, even threatened to disown him, but for once in his life, he wanted to do something for himself, instead of constantly bowing down to the will of others. He was ready to take on the world. Besides, he wasn't alone, for the waters would always have his back.

★

For about two years, he lived on one of the numerous ships as a member of the crew, visiting various countries all over the east.

He wasn't a muscular hulk of a man like the rest of the crew, that much was obvious, but he was skimpy and nimble, able to reach places those hunky fingers couldn't. He made friends with some of the crew members, his few human friends. They were loud and boisterous, but surprisingly gentle, caring for him like big brothers, showing him the ropes, teasing him good-naturedly, and giving him space when he felt overwhelmed.

For the first time in his life, he felt accepted. And it was all thanks to his beloved, the water.

★

But fate is cruel to those who deserve happiness the most.

★

The voyage was nearly at its end when it happened...

When the pirates attacked...

★

The soldiers had successfully set fire to the ships of that accursed pirate Chen Zuyi, but not before a handful of his minions had managed to sneak aboard the least guarded ship –his ship! Thus the chaos began...

★

The blood-thirsty pirate had a wild, crazed gleam in his eyes and a maniacal grin. Factoring in the teeth that did not seem to have been cleansed since that last zodiac cycle and the blood smeared on his face, the pirate seemed more demon than human. Had he not been fighting said pirate, he wouldn't have dared to venture into the same country as the pirate-demon.

But there he was. Barely blocking one blow after another, he was slowly pushed backwards, getting closer and closer to the edge...

The floor was slippery, and everything stank of sickly sweet metal. It felt as if they were the only beings left in the world. All else was reduced to piles of obstacles in their path. Then, with a hard blow from the pirate-demon, he was sent sliding over the blood-red planks of the deck, crashing against the painfully fragile railings...

He fell...

Over the edge...

Into the deep, dark ocean —the hungry, gaping mouth of the beast he adored...

And it stung, everything stung! His eyes, his nose, his lungs, the slashes across his arms... They all burned with a searing, unforgiving fire.

He blinked. Darkness lined the edge of his vision, but he could just barely make out fiery hues and muffled sounds above the waters.

*HelpmepleaselookdownI'mrighttherelookatmelookatmepleasepleasepleasehelppullmeoutothereplease!*

He wanted so badly to yell at them, to cry for help, anything! However, the words were stuck, unable to be choked down or spat out, not unlike a fish bone that had once stuck stubbornly to the back of his throat. He was young then, and he had been terrified, thinking that he was about to die, just as he was about to end up at any moment.

The stabbing pain, joined by a sudden urge to cry, intensified...

*NoIdon'twannadieI'mjustaboyIstillwannagotoplacesIloveycrewIdon'twannadie!*

He started struggling, but every time he reached the surface, the ferocious waves pulled him back in. His chest felt like it was about to explode.

*Nopleasedon'tletmedieIlovedyouIlovedyouI'mtooyoungtodie!*

Thoughts of his mother began surfacing: her disgusted eyes, her disapproving frown, her scathing last words to him: “*You’re just like your father! You’ll regret this, little disgrace.*”

*PleasepleasemotherI'msorrypleaseforgivemeIpromisel'llbetheperfectsonpleaseHELPSAVEME!*

He sure was regretting it now...

But it was too late...

Tendrils of crimson and obsidian began crowding into his vision. His lungs started filling up with salty water, but it might as well be lava, for he wouldn't notice the difference.

*I...don't...die...help...please...*

He could no longer think clearly, his limbs jelly-like, sloshing sluggishly in the water.

*Pain... Suffering...Help...*

His limbs had ceased their useless flailing, his eyesight becoming murky. He could no longer see the ships, the place he had come to call home, nor the other crew members, the closest thing to a family he had had in a long time. He briefly wondered if they were still alive, if they were grieving for him now...

*Oblivion... Death...*

Darkness, *death*, was engulfing him now, wrapping its massive claws around him, waiting, a predator about to claim its prey.

*No more worries...*

His body didn't burn anymore. In fact, all of his senses seemed numbed. But it would be fine, the darkness would take good care of him... He didn't have to be afraid anymore...

*So peaceful...*

The cruel claws of death around him softened, morphing into a pair of warm, soft hands. They reminded him of a mother caressing a child. He would never be neglected, never be despised again...

*Goodnight, world...*

He closed his eyes.

★

Isn't fate funny, how it twists and manipulates, turning our strengths against us and transforming what we love the most into our greatest downfalls?

After all, he had always loved water.

# The Story of a Ming Warrior

*St. Paul's Convent School, Kaur Sandhu, Gursharan – 15*

It's been 2 years since my last voyage. Now I am standing here at the dock. I can still remember clearly the day my father opened the door of our small hut and the soldiers bombarded our home looking for me, and gave me the heart-wrenching news that the emperor had issued the imperial order for the second voyage. The cries of my mother and sister and the looks of pity I received from my friends for the last month of my stay at home in Nanjing.

Standing at the dock has never been this hard, the journey was a path full of darkness, unsure of the people we would meet. Father wasn't in the fleet, he had to stay here in Nanjing and help Grandpa with the noodle shop, bidding me goodbye he left.

"Are we messing around, huh? Should we see what the quartermaster has to say," a man said. I shake my head frantically the quartermaster is ruthless when it comes to slacking. He takes ahold of my collar and drags me. "Yi Shao do you not know how to keep your men under control? Your monkey was slacking around." "Don't worry I can handle such brats very well," says Yi Shao. A slap on the face breaks my chain of thoughts. "You will work with the boatswains while you be our monkey, also you will be the only monkey for this journey. No one will help you," he continues. His abnegation towards me is nothing new.

It's been a month since we set sail, and I have worked relentlessly. Yi Shao is the most apathetic being I know filled with beguile. He made all the gunners fire which meant I had to work faster. It's the middle of the night and I have finished setting up the board. "Huang se." shouted a strong voice, a tumult of shouts and gunshots were heard. "Set up the artillery pieces. Now," roared a voice from the cabin upstairs. The gun master was near the gunwale shooting with the guns I reload and check every night in case of surprise attacks. When I was near Yi Shao, I told him that I had reloaded the artillery pieces and other machines. At that moment I saw that there were pirates coming up the Jacob's ladder. I got the gun out of his grasp and shot them, suddenly all the chaos on the ship came to a halt, everyone was looking at me like I was an alien, a deep feeling of compunction took over me.

The bodies of the pirates I had killed were taken down from the Jacob's ladder onto the quarterdeck. The chaos stopped again but after a man yelled "Defeat." With this all of the intruders shot themselves. Dead. I was beyond bewildered. Then Admiral broke the hush, saying, "Who shot the pirates?" I was about to tell him that I had done the murder, when Yi Shao spoke up "Captain it was none other than me." Why was he taking blame? Suddenly Captain trudged towards our direction, he bumped me on the way to Yi Shao. Once he reached him he patted him, and to my surprise said, "Men learn from him, and for his bravery and quick wit he will receive 200 gold coins." So I was cheated. I was pushed out of the way as crew members came up to him and patted him.

It has been weeks since the attack and we have met many pirates on our sail across the Indian Ocean. Many came empty-handed and left with full pockets ranging from gold to vases.

Days passed slowly. Some crew members had their family members on board so they didn't feel the dreaded feeling of home sickness. Today a suspicious-looking man had come aboard the ship. He came from a land that the navigator didn't have on his map, but it did not look like Zheng He thought much of the fact. He had left with much more gold and silk than any of the pirates. Dawn was about to break and I had to prepare the breakfast today. After the misery with the cook had ended, I walked up the Crow's nest, one of my favourite hiding spots. My happiness was fleeting.

Admiral had just sent off another fleet of sailors with pockets of gold. From his face it was evident that he was under stress. The heavy shooting practice that the gunners had been doing had greatly affected the remaining amount of gunpowder. We had very little to no security, what is the use of the artillery pieces if there is no gunpowder to power them. "Captain has ordered everyone to board on the main deck," someone shouted. Everyone started to run to the decks.

When I arrived onto the deck everyone's head was bowed. I saw a man who was wrapped like a cocoon in a purple robe and covered in gold necklaces. "Stand," roared Captain. "This gentleman has agreed to give us

50 barrels of gunpowder for 100 silver coins.” Members cheered with glee. “Bring out the best rum we have to celebrate this news,” he roared with pure happiness. Why would he not be happy, after all we could protect ourselves. This man was an angel sent from the heavens above. The shrouds were littered with drunk men. The fetters that I had put on deck for prisoners were over the wooden planks. The crew members’ habits were completely flagrant. Sleep couldn’t come any faster as I lay there looking at the stars above. It was dark all the torches were out. The darkness almost inimical. The tremendous cold had me shivering when a glint of light walked the main deck. It was incontrovertible that I hadn’t seen it.

Suddenly a figure passed and the light came into my view. My curiosity was rising as of dread. All sleepless nights had caused me to be inured to the dark. The patch of light was instigating me and as my curiosity was inveterate I climbed slowly down the nest, the small patch of light lighting up the way scarcely but enough for me to get down and walk. The light disappeared, but I was no neophyte I knew the way of the ship like the back of my hand. The limbs of the drunken men were the problem. I found a loaded gun on my way, I picked it up in order to feel a sense of security. I made my way to the captain’s dock and I saw the door opened and the merchant who was going to give us the gunpowder putting the treasures of China in a sack. My loyalty was hard to keep under control but it was important to know of the plan.

Captain was sleeping soundly in his bed. After putting all the plentitude of treasure into sacks he took out a gun and pointed it towards Captains chest. I took out my gun and silently walked towards him and shot him. Captain woke with the loud thud that came from the merchants fall and the bang of the shot just fired. My face must have been phlegmatic because the emperor was in shock. After coming out of shock he looked around and understood reality. He looked at me and smiled, which was surprising. The bang had awoken everybody and the crew members bombarded the doorway. “Boy do you mind bringing light to the incident?” said Captain. I told all the crew members about what had happened. “This is what we lack, responsibility. This boy whom we all had detested because of his job and social status stands here in the phase of a hero who saved not only me but treasures of China. His loyalty has no bounds. He is what I would call not a pirate, not a crew member but a hero and warrior. We all know how to use guns but he truly has shown the meaning of one. To save a country, not to destroy one. Merchants like this one lying on the floor will come and go but will never be able to get their filthy hands on mother China’s treasure as long as we have warriors like this boy.” Captain said as everyone looked at him and me.

The expedition ended soon after the incident. Now I am standing here at the same dock that I had first departed but today I will not be one of the crew members, for today I stand, a warrior for emperor. Admiral Zheng He had told the emperor of the incident. But this time my bravery wasn’t taken by Yi Shao. The emperor was impressed and had named me an official in his court. When I said to the Emperor that I was too young, all he had said was, “Boy, age is only a number, eyes hold more wisdom than even a 100-year-old man can have.”

# New Ming Treasure Voyages

*St. Pauls Convent School, Kuek, Ka Chai Kassie – 14*

It all started with a rumor.

A group of noble ladies giggling delicately into their teacups, each fulfilling their purpose to gain information for their respective houses. A demure servant walks up and pours some more tea, unruly tales of betrayal flow into her ears. Unable to contain her excitement, she let the winds carry her whispered words down the halls dripping with gold and diamond of the palace until something went wayward and it ended in the wrong person's ear.

"Oh really?" The Emperor could barely conceal his outrage, his voice cutting and face flushed an unhealthy shade of magenta he gripped the armrests of his throne tightly. The servants and subjects trembled with their heads lowered. Prince He stepped forward, eyes lowered but still reflected light off his icy glare.

"It is true. The public have been saying rather.." he paused, knowing it will give off a hesitant vibe, "negative things about Crown Prince Wen" His older brother and heir to the throne, more often the subject of their father and other officials' affection and praise. Prince He was not a jealous person in nature, he found it odd that his stomach crawled whenever he saw his brother. Whatever. Emotions are nothing more than human error anyways.

"Well, I can't have people under my own roof talking about their own emperor, can I?" Prince He could tell his father was on the verge of an explosion and he braced himself for an hour of shouting and furniture throwing.

"Your Highness, if I may—" Lord Wang stepped forward, wrinkles around his sly eyes crinkled, "Let's discuss more of this in private."

Prince He opened his mouth to protest, he wanted to stay and see the entire situation play out. However, his father waved all the officials away frustratedly. With a short bow, Prince He twisted the watch settled on his wrist and he teleported away from the throne room.

—

"I know you started it", Prince He was startled out of his thoughts as Lord Wang approached him in the flower garden. He quickly schooled his features to a serene expression.

"So?" Prince He knew how to deal with Lord Wang, he was an ambitious old noble, but he was too slow, never can catch up in his games. He did not need to lie in front of Lord Wang. With a selection of half-truths and non-denials, it was easy to trap the old man in a web of his misdoings.

Lord Wang chuckled, "Anyone with common sense will know it's you. Who is opposed to the Technology Voyages? Who has Prince Wen on their bad side? Who is so courageous and determined to spread a rumor so close to the lion's own den? There are only so few that could benefit from this"

Prince He slowly turned around to face the man. His brain whirling faster than the magnetic levitation metro train and heart pounding so hard he thought it would shatter his own rib cage.

"Oh? Is that so—"

"His Highness wants you to go, He"

"Prince He. I was not aware we are on such friendly terms Lord Wang" Prince He said coldly, shrugging off the calloused hand Lord Wang placed upon his shoulders.

"Prince He then," Lord Wang continued, " His Highness wants you to lead the Technology Voyages that start on 11 July to spread Ming Kingdom's miraculous technologies to the public world. And everyone knows the one who leads will likely be chosen as the heir of the throne. Prince Wen is not in favor with your father after the rumors. This is your ultimate chance Prince He!"

Prince He spotted the slight smirk at the corner of Lord Wang's dry, cracked lips. Oh, he will not tell the scheming old man everything. "Thank you for your kind words Lord Wang. However, I do not and will not wish to take the throne from my future king and older brother." He stood up and nodded at the servant hiding behind a tree, clearly a mole from his brother, before twisting his watch and teleporting back to his rooms.

He collapsed on his bed, thinking about what Lord Wang said. It's possible that he was correct. Or maybe it's a deceit to coerce him into doing something he will eventually regret.

The Technology Voyages was something he overheard his father planning with his officials indiscreet. The act of giving away some of their most advanced weapons and mechanics was something absurd and pointless to him. Their last defense as a hidden country from the globe and the tiny mindless GPS and satellites will be finally gone.

The officials prompted his father with ideas of how the outer world is catching up and how they should open themselves to more means of gathering new resources. Prince He knew that it was inevitable that one day the rest caught up. And a chance to discover and employ supplies will be very beneficial to their country. He just didn't understand the need to be all chummy with places that are still operating on fossil fuels.

He planted a servant in Lady Hui's house to spread the hearsay how preposterous it would be to have Prince Wen of all people lead a voyage to spread their knowledge to neighboring countries. Did he start it? Of course not. It would be known Lady Hui started it after all.

It was just an unfortunate incident that he underestimated the Hui House loyalty to whoever is on the throne. For now, nothing but praises and longingness of a venture was spread along the gossip. The stories about his brother though... threatened a smile to break out even on his most terrible moods.

—

"Your Highness, you have an imperial decree to receive!" A servant boy ran in panicking, his face was tainted a shallow red. Prince He dismissed the book he was reading from his projector and stood. What could his father want from him again?

A small part of him hoped that it would be about the Technology Voyages. There's no denying that it would happen, even the most insignificant beggar on the street has heard of it and the streets of the Ming Kingdom are buzzing with talk of how the outer world will receive their inventions. If a decree from his father arrived, it would have a high probability rate of sending him on the voyages.

He felt his shallow breathing and traitorous heart thumping. With a quick twist of his watch, he teleported right in front of the gates of his own court to be met with the head servant and his father's royal guard.

He quickly knelt down in front of the projection of the Emperor, head lowered and spinning with ideas.

"I, as the Emperor of the Ming Kingdom," the strong sturdy voice demanded presence and struck fear in everyone's heart, "command Prince He of the Ming Kingdom to lead the first voyages to spread our knowledge and machinery. Shall he be able to return, he shall take over Prince Wen as Crown Prince and heir to my throne."

He smiled, who knew all it took was a simple rumor? Not only could he control the amount of knowledge spilled on wasted people, and also inherit the throne. What a good time to be alive.

# What We Fight For

*St. Paul's Convent School, Kwok, Ka Hang – 13*

“What are you fighting for?”

My mother's voice rang through my skull.

Why now? When I am facing unavoidable doom, when Chen Zuyi's fleets are drawing near? Why did her voice, my mother's voice, the one who gave me life— why did her voice ring through my skull at this hour?

It's been two years since I last saw her. We are supposed to be going home, I am supposed to be seeing her in a few months' time, but why are we suddenly fighting pirates? Chen Zuyi and his infamous fleets—how will I, a low-ranked soldier, survive in the front lines?

“What are you fighting for?”

Her voice again. This is what she asked me when I was recruited into the navy. When I had to I leave for the Western Ocean under the Emperor's order, she asked me this again.

“I do not know, mother.”

That was my answer.

In the third lunar month of 1405, the Emperor commanded Admiral Zheng He to lead more than twenty thousand troops to the Western Ocean, I am one of the chosen ones for the voyage. Since our departure, we have sailed to Java, Malacca, Aru, Ceylon.....and hundreds of other places I have only ever dreamt of visiting. It's an honour, it really is, but I just wish I could return home and be with my family.

In the first few months at sail, I couldn't help getting seasick. I was given ginger to chew on whenever I felt nauseous, but eventually got used to the constant motion of the ship. Life at sea wasn't as tough as I had imagined it to be, but of course, it is much tougher than being on land. There are certain things I can no longer do, such as eating fresh vegetables as we have to preserve our food, especially us in the lower ranks. I miss my mother's dishes. Our meals are certainly nothing fancy, but my mother is skilled and can make vegetables from a bad harvest, which taste like a dish of the Gods.

How can I, as a son, repay her? I have taken from her in my whole life— her care, her teachings, her sweat, her love; I am supposed to repay her once I have grown up. Yet, I joined the navy and left her all alone in our homeland.

I don't want to die with a heart full of regret. I don't want to leave her.

How would my mother react when she heard no news of my whereabouts when the fleets returned? Would she weep for her only son? Would she curse my name, for abandoning her?

I shook the thoughts out of my head, trying to put my full attention on the threat ahead.

Chen Zuyi's fleets were drawing near, the blurry silhouettes were starting to form into thousands of mountainous pirate ships. The sea was calm, so calm that the ship barely rocked. It was as if the sea god had silenced the seas for us to look at one last time.

I tried to put on a brave face, but I was shivering in my boots, my face already dripping with sweat.

I looked around me, at my comrades, whose faces were, too, beaded with sweat and scrunched up in concentration. We had all come so far, gotten over so many obstacles. Just as we were returning home, we were met with one of the most feared pirate fleets in the world. Could this be the end of us?

Very much so.

Very much so indeed.

“Take care, mother. Your son is going now. We shall have a feast when I return!”

Those were my last words to her before I left. How childish of me, asking for a feast upon my arrival.

“What are you fighting for?”

The question repeated in my mind, unanswered.

“I am fighting for my country.”

That’s a noble answer. I am sure more than half of my comrades will say this when asked the same question— but no, that’s not my answer. It doesn’t feel right on my tongue.

“I am fighting for myself.”

A selfish answer, but true for many. I am selfish, a selfish son, but again— no, that’s not my answer.

“I am fighting for my wife and children.”

Some of my comrades are husbands, even fathers. This might be their answer, but not mine. I am not married. I have no children.

“Soldiers!” Someone bellowed from the crowd, “What are you fighting for?”

It’s that question again. Why? Why that question?

“Son, what are you fighting for?”

I saw my mother’s wrinkled face, a light dimple visible on her left cheek. The corners of her eyes creased as she smiled down at me, one hand carrying my traveling pouch, the other brushing her greying hair behind her ear.

“My son, I believe we all have something we fight for. Could be wealth, could be love. Remember this when you are at sea.”

I have treasured this sentence ever since I left— I thought of it when I had trouble sleeping, I thought of it when we were closing onto land, I thought of it when I was cleaning the decks, I thought of it when I woke up in the morning forgetting the fact that I was away from home..... and I think of it now, minutes before my likely demise.

“Soldiers!” The same booming voice echoed through the crowd again, “Hold that thing in your heart and fight! What are you fighting for?”

*I do not know. I still do not know.*

*All I know is the fact that I need to get back to my mother.*



“Are you ready?”

*No, not really.*

“Charge!”

There was an uproar.

Then chaos.

Bombing could be heard in the distance and pirates boarded our ship. Thick smoke and the smell of gunpowder surrounded us. I felt like choking and my chance of survival seemed bleak. I pulled myself together and concentrated on keeping my head attached to my body as hard as I can. Feeling a slight motion on my right—I dodged just in time as a dagger swished past my arm. Before I could even breathe a sigh of relief, I found myself engaged in combat with a deeply tanned pirate, I swung my spear at him, only to receive a strike back. We went back and forth, back and forth, back and forth—

I felt a strange sensation in my thigh, like something slid past it. That feeling was then slowly replaced by growing pain. It took me a while to process what happened. I was cut. I am injured—

I blocked another swing from the pirate, ignoring the pain in my thigh, it hurt but losing my concentration for even a fraction of a second would cause me my life. I couldn't tell how bad the wound was, nor could I tell how long I've been fighting. It felt like hours, and my muscles burned more than my wound did. The fact that I have not collapsed from blood loss is a good sign that it's a shallow cut. I can do this; I can push through this.

I took down pirate after pirate, I didn't dare stop. As time passed, I started to feel more and more certain—I allowed a sliver of hope to wedge into my heart, maybe, just maybe, I am going home after all. I am not sure if that's true, perhaps it's just my subconscious comforting me, but I held on. I held on to that tiny string of hope.

What am I fighting for?

I asked myself the same question I have failed to answer countless times.

My life? My future? My mother?

All I knew was the fact that I wanted to live and go home to see my family again. I guess that's why I am fighting.

I am so close. We are all so close. It would be a shame to lose now, would it?

As ships sank beneath the waves; as canons flew across the skies; as metal and steel clashed on the decks.....

I only allowed one thought to stay in my head—

*Mother, I am coming home.*

# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyage

*St. Paul's Convent School, Leung, Yik Yin Yanni – 14*

I packed my belongings as mother handed me another lined jacket. “Do pack this as well would you? Oh my dear son off to the sea. Please come back safely,” Mother said with a teary eye. I laid down my bag, holding Mother’s hand as I looked right into her eyes, “I promise you I will be safe, and I’ll come home with thrilling tales of this Ming Treasure Voyage!” I told Mother with determination. She pulled me into a hug one last time. And I left home to embark on this road of adventure.

The treasure fleet assembled at Nanjing, I stared at the huge fleet of ships in front of me and gasped in astonishment. Despite hearing exaggerated tales from Xiao Qi, a fellow sailor, they could not hold all the glory of the treasure fleet, which was more beautiful, more amazing. We boarded the ship one by one. Never had I ever seen such a beautiful ship, polished planks made from the finest oak wood crafted into a marine beauty. There were crates of gold brocades, China’s finest patterned and coloured silks, trinkets beyond its price, all placed neatly on the ship, ready to be gifted to Kings from some other countries. Each room is decorated with tall bronze candelabras, yet the conference room caught my attention the most. Huge armchairs were placed in front of an antique oak table, with a large map of the Western Ocean spread on it.

As a small cabin boy, I had to sweep the decks and coil the stray lines dangling on the ship. When I paused for a few seconds to watch the land I love fade in the distance disappearing from the view behind us, I was accosted by the first mate who cuffed my ear and bowled into my ears, “You boy bring your broom over here and continue sweeping. The next time I catch you slacking off, your head shall pay for it, my lad!” I then realised was not just fun and games but tough, without one relative or friend to bestow kind words and wipe the sweat off your forehead and hand you a bowl of warm soup. I started to question my decision to commence on this mission.

We travelled for days from Lambri in the Indian Ocean, it was quite boring as I swept the decks each day, when I heard a crew member on deck called out “Look! Look!” Just like me, some other sailors also followed the voice out of curiosity.

And as I went on the deck and looked in front of me, the serrated mountains loomed in the distance; seabirds flew around the mountains; the heaven–touching apex of the mountain was drenched in the light of the sunrise. The luxuriant vegetation on the mountain glimmered in the light and the hushed sounds of nature mixed with the drinking song of the sailors gently went by my ears, creating a symphony, a soft lullaby. I set out to see the world with only a paper shield and wooden sword, each rain falls according to plan as nature takes its lead, offering their peace to the world. Maps stretched out, too many miles to count. Although I was so far from home, it felt like this was where I belonged: in the vast ocean travelling to see the most beautiful land. According to Captain Zheng, this was the mountains of Ceylon.

Later that day, the weather began to deteriorate. The clouds moved into the sky and grew suspiciously dark. “The sea is becoming very rough,” Xiao Qi said. A storm seemed imminent, but the ship had no choice but to continue to sail throughout the night. In the face of an approaching squall, there were two options: either pointing the ship into the oncoming wind or turning in the opposite direction and running away from the wind. Most sailors favoured turning away from the wind however attempting to bear away from the wind in the last few seconds before being struck by a squall doesn’t seem too much of a choice. The wind turned into a flurry, those on deck including me clung to the nearest fixture, fearful that we might be flung into the cold–blooded sea with no hopes of ever returning. It was a nightmare, the crazed flapping of sails and creaking of the wood, when the gust slammed into the ship, my mind was blank. I was terrified, not knowing what was happening, my mind was thrown into the utmost consternation and confusion. Suddenly, Captain Zheng’s voice brought me back to reality. “Guard your posts! Don’t give up, we will get through this together!” Spirits were raised, each sailor wiped the sweats on their forehead and did their very best in this fight with the wind. It went as fast as it came, turned up so quickly but Captain Zheng pulled the crew back together, the ship went through clouds of darkness and there was a sudden sense of calmness. In

front of us was the most beautiful sky ever seen. The waves stopped pounding and the winds stopped roaring, slowing radiating the faint sunlight, turning into a shimmering fairy tale. The silence was soon interrupted by the cheers of the crew as we won another fight as a team.

Time turned into a blur, not long after we arrived at another land: Calicut. We got off the ship one by one carrying causes of goods. "Calicut is one of the world's major depots, we are sure to make some good trades on the land!" Captain Zheng told us with a beam, I was more than excited to walk around this new place. It was hectic, with curious local crowding around the ship in curiosity. We were welcomed with a feast and excitement of the city, bathed in the full glory of Calicut. The servants led us to the garden of the palace, where the ruler was waiting. Captain Zheng went ahead and sat across to the ruler of Calicut at a lavish table surrounded by low chairs and cushions as I stumbled over carrying the crates. The first mate smacked my head and glared, "Watch it, young boy, if you managed to drop them you are dead meat." "It's alright, you guys must be tired carrying those all the way from the port, come on have a seat! I've prepared the best local snacks!" the Calicut ruler smiled in generosity and clapped his hands as servants went in one by one carrying dishes into the garden and placed them right in front of us. If I had a little bit less self-control I would have pounced onto the table, but I decided against it as I still wanted to keep my head. We stayed there for approximately four months trading crates of pottery silk and trinkets, and a place in the heart of Calicut. When we left, the ruler of Calicut came to see us off himself bearing gifts. These tributes from foreign emissaries increased China's prestige in this Western Ocean.

I followed the others back on the ship as we started our journey back home. While travelling in Palembang, Indonesia, I saw another boat not far away, not a few moments later the whole crew was alerted. "Chen Zhuyi! It's Chen Zhuyi!" I shouted. Captain Zheng drew his pistol and ordered, "We are confronting him today, get ready!" I've heard tales about Chen Zhuyi back onshore. Apparently, he was a pirate leader who had seized Palembang at Sumatra. We lowered our guns as a sailor waved a white flag frantically, Chen Zhuyi was surrendering. Sailors wondered if it really meant victory, "Not yet." said Chen Zhuyi before turning upon our treasure fleet and aiming to plunder it. We fought bravely against the incoming attack, slashing our swords in the air and blocking the attacks from our enemies as we fended off the pirates. Months of working on a ship strengthened me as I managed to defend myself and the ship with my little experience of martial arts. Captain Zheng gave orders as his forces attacked, Chen Zhuyi and two of his top associates were finally captured and tied up, ready to be taken back to the motherland.

Sometime later, we returned in full glory, bringing back tributes and trades from foreign countries and the victory in a fight with the infamous pirate Chen Zhuyi. The moment I got off the ship I was greeted by a hug from my mother, "I'm so glad you're safe!" I looked back at the vast Ocean and the ship and thought...

Sometimes our compass breaks, and our steady true North fades, but we'll be fine, under the lead of Captain Zheng, we will write this legacy. And one day they may tell our story, which would be told far and wide, to generations and generations, of the glory of the Ming Treasure Voyages.

# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyage

*St Paul's Convent School, Yue, Hilary – 14*

Time is running short, and with each passing hour I can feel myself grow less hopeful.  
Waiting for a ship to pass, waiting for a sign of life, waiting for my crew members...  
waiting,

waiting,

and waiting.

—

Across the sea, strange storm clouds had appeared, blocking my view of the sun. After a moment's pause, it became clear that they were not clouds at all; but sails and coloured flags. Hundreds and thousands of them. It was both a majestic and terrifying sight.

Loud drums beated and pounded, but perhaps the loudest drum beating the one that thudded in my ears—the frantic beating of my heart.

This is an opportunity for me to continue my journey.

He who hesitates is lost.

And I do not hesitate.

—

It's my first day on the fleet after my rescue. I was intrigued by what they were doing with so many ships in the middle of the sea, so I decided to follow their journey for the time being.

A soldier took me on a short tour of the ship. I surveyed the ship with child-like wonder. Each and every tiny detail fascinated me; even the plain warm-brown floorboards, which reminded me of home. Of those quiet family evenings which I miss.

In the same way in which the ship's bows meet the water, I want to create waves too. This is why I have chosen to travel the seas as a scholar.

—

"What's on the ship?"

"Cargoes of gold and silk from the Emperor himself." The general, Wang Jing-Hong, proudly stated with a confident smirk, standing up a little straighter.

"Did you...steal them?" I couldn't help but shiver in fear. What had I gotten myself into?

"I'm sorry, I must have phrased it weird," Jing-Hong started laughing in earnest. "These precious items are for Zheng-He to give away as gifts in order to build new relationships." My face heated up in embarrassment at my previous blunt statement.

—

Zheng-He ordered me to do repair work with the soldiers. I sighed as I placed my book down. I guess reading would have to wait. I'm ordered to paint over the blistering and peeling paint, the ship weathered after the constant beating of the waves.

—

The soldiers asked me to help them with cleaning. I gritted my teeth—I was in the middle of reading the *Thirty-Six Stratagems*! I reminded myself to be humble, for I am only a person that the fleet rescued. I had to be grateful, and repay their kindness. There will be a day when my talents are recognised, but for now, I should start from the bottom before rising to the top.

—

Jing-Hong was dispatched with a squadron to Champa before Zheng-He will follow with the main body of the fleet.

And this is where my adventure begins.

—

Halfway on our journey, I suggested that we stop in a nearby island to get some rest. Our navigator had gotten sea-sick, along with a few members of our crew. Jing-Hong decided that it was a good idea, as he, too, missed the feeling of solid ground beneath his feet.

“We will camp here for the night.” He then ordered a few soldiers to take turns to stand guard.

However, what awaited us in the morning was not a good night’s rest, but a band of hostile pirates that ambushed us.

—

“Soldiers, don’t fight! We are outnumbered.” Jing-Hong growled in anger as the pirates searched our ship for treasures. Unfortunately for them, all the precious goods are in the main body of the fleet. I mentally cursed my inability to see this coming—we should have just continued on the journey instead of stopping to rest.

“Sānshíliù jì, zǒu wéi shàng jì.” Jing-Hong mumbled underneath his breath. “There are only three choices left: surrender, compromise, or escape.”

I shook my head. “Surrender is complete defeat; compromise is half defeat, and escape is practically impossible without any loss on our side. It’s too dangerous.”

Jing-Hong gave me an exasperated look. “Well, do you have a better plan?”

“Sānshíliù jì is also known as the Thirty-Six Stratagems,” My eyes lit up, remembering the book I had read months ago.

“I have a plan. Are you willing to risk it?”

They nodded.

—

“Surrender while you still can, pirates!” I bellowed, in the most commanding and confident way I could manage. A few heads swerved to stare at me with curiosity at my sudden yelling.

“I have your attention? Good.” I spoke nonchalantly, trying to disguise the growing fear. On the inside, I was a bundle of nerves.

It was the first time for me to take the lead.

The leader’s eyes narrowed as he glared at me. I could see his sword glinting in the sunlight. I could feel the sweat beading on my forehead as I strode forward, head held high.

“We have sailed the seas and been to places you’ve never been. We’ve been through more than you can imagine. We’ve been to Champa, Java, Malacca, Aru, Semudera, Lambri, Ceylon, Quilon and Calicut...” I took a deep breath, my heart threatening to burst from its ribcage.

“You think we would be this careless, falling into your obvious trap?” I spoke louder, gaining confidence as Jing-Hong offered me a supportive smile. You can do this, he mouthed.

“You know Chen Zuyi? Our fleet not only defeated his 5000 pirates in battle, but also executed Chen Zuyi himself!”

The captain just rolled his eyes, unfazed. He must think that I am lying. However, behind him, a few pirates were slowly backing away, their eyes blown wide in fear. Encouraged by their terror, I continued.

“My fleet comprises of elites. We have 270 000 troops and at least 2868 ships sailing the seas in the moment.” I paused, allowing my voice and message to sink.

With a sudden burst of confidence, confidence born of faith. Faith that I will get my crew out alive, and the faith that the soldiers placed in me.

“We are the first great explorers of Earth, adventurers that have reached India and Africa. We rule the seas! You’ve never heard of us because we have slayed all the sailors and pirates that dare cross us.” I spread my arms for a dramatic flair.

“We—”

Then, as if by divine command, our fleet appeared on the horizon, its sails glistening in the sunrise. I watched as it makes a steady approach, the outline of the fleet becoming more clear every moment. I was struck by the sight—it was as if I was waiting for rescue on the island again.

I watched as the captain’s expression morphed into fear.

“We have to leave! Now!” The captain frantically commanded as chaos erupted, sailors and soldiers alike making a dash for their respective ships. They jumped aboard and hoisted the sail, which billowed, pulling them away into the unknown.

I felt as if a heavy burden was lifted off my shoulders as the pirates retreated, sailing away.

—

“Thank Tianfei we survived!” A soldier exclaimed, cheering loudly as we regrouped with the main fleet.

“How did you even come up with such a crazy plan?” Zheng-He asked, his tone scolding but his face portrayed relief that his squadron returned safely..

“My plan is the thirty-second stratagem from Sānshíliù jì: kōng chéng jì. Also known as the empty fort strategy, this idea is used by many strategists.”

“Like Cao Cao in the Chengshi County incident and Zhao Yun in the Battle of Han River.” Zheng-He affirmed, nodding as he listened.

“But what I did today relied on pure luck. If the fleet hadn’t arrived on time...” I trailed off, not wanting to imagine the horrifying consequence of my impulsive actions. “The strategy is as risky as it is successful. I shouldn’t have strayed from the mission in the first place, or thought of a more solid battle plan when we were ambushed.”

“I am still young and inexperienced,” I admitted quietly.

“But I hope I can stay on this fleet from now on and travel the seas.”

—

Sea spray splashes against my face and the floor beneath me sways. My thoughts became clouded with fear of the unknown as I gaze at the sun sinking beneath the horizon. The sun cast its final golden rays down upon the clouds, painting them bright red one last time.

I closed my eyes, as if I could escape my doubts if I block the view of the sunset.

It is too late for regrets. My tale begins now: as a part of the Ming Treasure Fleet.

# The Eighth Voyage

*St. Paul's Co-educational College, Song, Yiding – 13*

The sun was setting over the horizon. Warm, salty sea air energized the waves beneath the keel of a massive treasure ship. *The Treasure Ship*. A moving island that pacifies even the raging seas, housing more than three hundred sailors on board. It was the icon of the dynasty, leader of the Treasure Fleet.

Now was another cold evening on the top of the watchtower for Zheng He, the outstanding commander of the Treasure Fleet. He stared ahead from the highest point of the Treasure Ship. Straining his eyesight to its extreme, all that he could see was still the deep blue, stretching over the boundaries of the Earth itself. He sighed. It had been days without aim. The boredom and fright of the seas never paid off even when the Fleet brought about glory.

"I never should've come to this hellish eighth voyage," he thought. Zheng He was old now. Too weak for sea voyages. But on the other hand, he knew what he came for. He was a prominent maritime adventurer. The sea itself chose him. The gentle rocking in the open oceans always reminded him of the soft swing of a cradle. And the salty breeze often wreathed him in a unique aroma that old sailors call home. He achieved for the Ming dynasty fame and glory. He even made ties with foreign countries and served two successive generations of emperors.

Yet he felt as if he was lacking something. He knew his name would last forever, but he still had this nagging sensation that his life was too empty, and it should be something more.

He surveyed the ocean again. Suddenly, he saw it. Like a shadow of the Earth itself, lying on the horizon was a huge storm. Lightning crackled and thunder bellowed, sending chilly air racing past the foremast of the Treasure Ship. The storm was black as squid ink and coming. Fast.

Zheng He commanded calmly, "Lower the sails! All sailors, get below deck!"

Quickly, the order was spread from one ship to another, and soon, the whole Treasure Fleet was prepared for the upcoming tempest. Zheng He took his time to get down from the watchtower. He stole a look at the spectacular sight of the fleet comprising over two hundred ships. The reflection of the wintry seas, that lovely pink of the sun kissing the hull... The beauty of the Treasure Fleet and the valuables it contained could only be described as transcendent.

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The winds came faster and stronger than Zheng He had anticipated. Soon the ships were literally being tossed on the billows.

Only Zheng He and a few sailors were remaining on the deck of the Treasure Ship now. The wind was piercing the skin of Zheng He, the icy chill sending a shiver down to his heart. Sea foams were flying everywhere, and in the scream of the storm, Zheng He's commands could barely be heard. The ship shuddered and fell, followed by a big splash into the sea. BOOM. Zheng He held desperately onto a huge pillar. Another massive wave slapped onto the side of the ship, sending it swerving dangerously to one side. Zheng He slid across the slippery deck and barked out, "Everyone get below now! This storm is too powerful for us to bear!" The sailors couldn't hear him. The wind was too strong. Zheng He cursed under his breath. Old age was draining him. He waved frantically for them to move into the cabins. A big splash from the ocean sent him a mouthful of the filthy, icy water. He spat it out with a cough.

The ship shook dangerously again. Zheng He shuddered. He squinted through the flying water droplets to locate the entrance of his cabin. It was at the other end of the deck. Then the fire burning bright in his cabin reminded him of something.

He called to his mind that fateful night, in his family's little house steeped in Islamic religion. It was a happy summer's eve, destroyed by bloodshed. That night the Ming emperor had decided to send an army of soldiers to wipe out remaining rebels in Yunnan, including Zheng He's family. The soldiers were cruel. They burnt down their house and the other villages as well, the fire dancing joyously at the death of a thousand souls. He could still vividly recall the look in his father's eyes when they parted through the wall of fire. His father's expression told him everything he needed to do in life. The sympathy, the loneliness, the grief, the craving. The craving for a better world. The craving for his son to do what he didn't, to fulfill his lifelong dream. To devote his soul and serve the one god Allah. And since then, that dream had become Zheng He's. He was eleven back then. His father sacrificed himself to save the rest of the family.

A sharp turn of the Treasure Ship reminded him of reality. Zheng He didn't bother to move. The sea was always kind to him. He started to wonder what he'd be remembered as. A great diplomat? The first

marine explorer of China who ruled the seas? He sighed. "Every possible way except the way that I'd like to. *To be remembered as one that serves Allah with all his heart.*" The treasure on the ships and the glory he had brought to the dynasty and himself never mattered. The journeys at sea had taught him that all temptations of the mortal world were as hollow as sea foam. The places he explored and discovered did matter, but they didn't mean much. Someone was bound to find them. Yet devoting oneself to a deity was different. It was something eternal. And it was his father's dream, that meant everything to him. By not fulfilling that dream, he felt as if he had betrayed his late father, the worst sin one could commit. His devotion to Buddhism had been implicitly forced by the Ming emperor. He gritted his teeth. "Why can't this world go the way I like?" Zheng He thought. "Why is my life being constantly shaped by others and diverted from my dreams?"

With a sudden rage he stood up against the storm, his delicate body no longer bowing to the wrath of the winds. "Take me if you dare!" He bellowed at the empty sea. "I will stand, even if this is the only time I can stand up, strong and confident, against the gale that blew my life apart!" Then with determination, he strode toward his cabin, shaking the ocean with every step. Through wind and rain, through pain and sweat, he arrived at his cozy door. Zheng He was just about to turn the doorknob.

A ring of light fell on the door.

Zheng He turned around with a start and gasped. He was the most handsome human he had ever seen, shining brightly in contrast to the deep, stormy night. He was beyond his imagination, and too much for his tiny brain to register. He carried with him an aura of authority, love, understanding, and divinity. Zheng He wasn't even sure if he was a 'he'. Maybe something else. More holy and spiritual.

"Allah?"

"Zheng He, you have done well in your voyages. You have helped many countries flourish with the treasure you gave out and with the knowledge you bestowed. And by helping others, you've already devoted yourself to me. So, tell me, why are you guilty?"

"Allah..." Zheng He faltered, searching for words...

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Zheng He had been sick for days now, on the seventh journey of the Ming Treasure Fleet. The doctor left his cabin and spoke to the government officials outside with deep concern. "Sir," the doctor was saying, "It appears that Mr. Zheng's illness has now become incurable. Apart from staying constantly unconscious, he is now hallucinating, too. Last night, he was burbling about an 'eighth voyage' and something called 'Allah'."

A collective gasp spread among the officials, "So he really can't be cured?"

"I believe so," said the doctor solemnly.

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They waited until he died, in the city of Calicut, springtime 1433. What they didn't know, was that the fatal disease and the hallucination, was Zheng He's final liberation, from this world, and from his broken dreams.

That day they cast his body into the depths, even the seagulls were quiet. The racket of the city calmed itself down. The sky was clear, the sea was still. They wrapped his body in silk, adorned with sea waves. The same warm, salty sea air came to pay farewell to the dead.

Slowly, with grief, they mourned for him and buried him in the waves where he'd belong. The silk, so weightless, so free, dancing with the shadows of light and dark in the waters of life, as it slowly drifted toward the bottom of the sea.

Chase the waves, Zheng He. Chase them to wherever they shall take your soul to.



# A Peek into the Future

*The Independent Schools Foundation Academy, Chan, Odessa – 11*

Admiral Zheng He rubbed his hands together. This was going to be a journey he would be remembered by. He looked up to the sky, and his heart skipped a beat. *Splendid!* He thought. *Not a single cloud in the sky. My voyage is already going terrifically.* His colossal fleet were now sailing to India, where they could trade for some spice called ‘pepper’. Apparently it was really good for cooking, and had a great taste.

Long days followed. Zheng He continued studying, and the fleet continued sailing. Then at long last, the fleet entered the Indian coast.

“Bring the silk! Don’t forget the porcelain too!” Zheng shouted backwards to his men, running as fast as he could, and believe me, it was faster than lightning. “And hurry!”

The Chinese were going to trade their silk and porcelain for the Indian pepper. They’d already planned everything out; Zheng was going to let the girls dance for the Indian king Aarav, then he was going to propose the gifts, and if all went well, the king would offer some pepper in return.

“Hi, we are traders from the East, and we’d like to see the Indian King Aarav.” Zheng He told an armoured guard at the pier.

“Let me lead you to His Majesty. This way,” the guard told them. “By the way, what are you going to trade for?”

“Oh, whatever is fine. Or maybe the pepper you have? It is quite famous, you know,” Zheng He said, hinting.

“Our... paper? I’m sorry, but we don’t have paper here. You must have gotten to the wro—”

“Pepper.” Zheng He pronounced it slowly again, interrupting.

“Oh! Pepper.” the guard smiled. “Yes, it is very famous,” he agreed. They were already in front of the palace.

The palace was a majestic domed structure with white and gold columns and designs. They were nothing like the palace of the Emperor Yongle back in China. Zheng He made sure to remember to tell the emperor how it looked. That emperor sure loved other cultures.

When they arrived into the throne room, Zheng He bowed down to the Indian king, who was dressed in a white and gold robe, matching to the walls of the palace. “Greetings, Your Majesty. I am Zheng He, a visitor from China.”

“Are you some kind of entertainment? Come, and sit down. Let’s watch what you’ve got.” the king had a strong Indian accent.

“Okay.” As Zheng He hesitantly walked over to his seat, he kept his hands behind his back clasped together, which was their signal for ‘dancing time’.

The beautiful dancing girls the fleet had brought with them started dancing with their silk dresses and long sleeves. As they danced, Zheng He decided that it was time to propose his gifts to the king. “King Aarav, if you don’t mind, I’d like to propose to you some small gifts.”

“How small are you talking about?”

“Like some silk, some porcelain, or maybe another silk robe for you?” Zheng He smiled sort of cunningly. He knew that every emperor or king loved new clothing.

“Let me see it first.” the king still demanded.

Zheng raised one eyebrow to indicate ‘stop the dancing, and bring out the gifts now’, and the admiral’s assistant brought a bundle of silk, some porcelain cutlery and lastly purple and gold robe for the king.

“Wow...” the king gasped, looking wide-mouthed at the gifts Zheng He was offering. “I... I don’t know how to thank you for this...” At this point, the king was practically speechless. His advisor standing by him whispered something in his ear.

“Ah, yes, okay,” the king muttered back, and the advisor retreated to his spot. “I shall, in turn, give you people a pot full of our precious pepper.” He announced.

*Score!* Zheng He’s heart was dancing with joy. Then, he felt there was something he needed to do. Right away. *I need the bathroom!*

“I need the bathroom, Your Majesty. Where might it be?”

“Oh, of course. Here, I’ll bring you there.” the king answered, and quickly rose accompany Zheng to the bathroom. No one seemed to notice why the king was offering to bring a total stranger to the bathroom, when he could just ask one of his servants to do so.

Once the others were out of earshot, the king whispered to Zheng: “Truthfully, our pepper isn’t that precious. India is an interesting country, but we don’t have anything valuable enough to thank you for your gifts, but one thing. So here’s what I’m going to do; I am going to let you try out my engineers’ latest

invention: a time traveller. We named it *Uthkarsh*, which is the Indian name for excellence. It is really precious, and you can use it to go to any time in the future or the past.”

“So... you want me to use it?”

“Yes.”

“Sure, but can I go to the bathroom first?”

“Yeah, it’s right there,” the king pointed to the door to the men’s lavatory.

Soon enough, Zheng He was sitting in the compact time machine, getting ready.

“So, crank this, then twist that, then press this... you got me so far, right?”

“... Yes?” Zheng He said this like a question, uncertain. He never knew that travelling in a time machine would be so complicated.

“Don’t worry, I promise you this will change your world forever.”

“Right,” Zheng said. “So, when I’m in here, no time will pass here?”

The king saluted. Apparently Indians had another way of saluting: They pointed the index finger up and put their hands to their foreheads.

“And will the people in

“Well, bye, then.” Zheng He said. He cranked the lever, twisted the knob, and pressed the button, and wrote on the panel: “October 25th, 2018, Hong Kong.” This was because 10 and 25 were his lucky numbers. 2018 was his dad’s birthday. He was born on February the 18th.

*Rrrrr...* the engine of the machine roared. *Pop!* ‘You have now reached your destination,’ a monotonous female voice said. ‘Please open the door on your left and feel free to step outside. Please note that you have five minutes until the *Uthkarsh* will transfer itself to the present.’

“Great,” Zheng muttered. “I must go exploring then.”

In front of him was a school. He poked his head into one of the classrooms. He was looking at something totally different from what he had seen before. It was an air-conditioned room with tables and chairs, and the students were all typing things on strange open-and-close metal devices. He looked at one of the devices, and saw the words: “Zheng He was a great admiral who helped China discover different cultures of the world”. This was great, of course, because not only was this student writing about him, this sentence meant that he would succeed in his voyages!

When Zheng He looked closely, he saw the words “Hong Kong Young Writers Award”. They were writing about him for a competition! He felt so proud. He was world-famous! Not only that, he could help invent those open-and-close metal devices! He made a note in his head: “When you get home, start trying to figure out how to invent open-and-close metal devices.”

Zheng He returned to the time machine. There was a clock on the wall that told him that he only had one more minute and then the machine would transport itself back to the present, where the king was waiting for him. I ask you, what would you do if you had such a big decision? Well, Zheng He decided that it was too much of a risk to keep exploring. He went into the machine, then pressed the button, twisted the knob, and then cranked the lever.

*Rrrr...* the now familiar roar of the machine took over the eerie silence. *Pop!*

“Hi, so how was it?” Aarav asked as soon as Zheng He climbed out.

“It was so good! I discovered so many things!”

“Good. I was hoping you would say that. Now come on, let’s go and get back to the throne room.”

When the two returned, everyone in the humongous room bowed; some to the king and some to the admiral.

“Well... I am sad to say that we have to go now,” Zheng He told his new friend. He’d not waste their time. He came only and only for the pepper, not to dilly dally and enjoy the Indian King’s palace. He could do that back in where he came from, in Yongle’s home.

“Oh, how sad. Here’s the pepper.” the king’s servant passed a huge cauldron of pepper to Zheng He’s men.

“Thank you! Thank you so much!” Zheng He waved as the door to the palace closed with a soft thud behind them.

Zheng He smiled to himself. Today was not only a success, but also a surprise. Who knew the Indians had built a time machine? And now that he knew what was going to happen a few hundred years later, he’d better be a good admiral or else the students in the future wouldn’t be writing about him after all.

As Zheng looked up to the cloudless sky, he realized that more surprises would come.

And another did.

TO BE CONTINUED.....

# Against the Tides

*The Independent Schools Foundation Academy, Lee, Justin – 11*

He struggled against the raging currents and listless winds, and spluttered.  
“Sir! Sir!”  
Admiral Zheng He turned around, only to see a ragged soldier limping towards him. Suddenly, he collapsed. Zheng He rushed to his side.  
“Are you alright?”  
He weakly forced out three words,  
“They are here.”  
He fell limply onto the deck and then, they knew he was gone.

Zheng He stood up firmly, and said,  
“Everyone to their stations. I have received word that there is enemies approaching us. Please stand by.”  
He then swiftly turned around and walked back to his cabin. He paced in circles. *What happened? This journey was going so well. What did I forget to do?* He paced and paced, until he heard a loud **CRACK** and commotion up on deck. The fight had started. Luckily for Zheng He and his entourage, they had been supplied with good troops with good equipment and the sounds of battle showed who was winning. Piercing screams of pain and cries of horror everywhere, the pirates were killed, one by one, until none remained.

“Take the loot and the ship. See if there are other resources to be found.”  
Zheng He announced. A chorus of “Yes Sir” went around and the sailors and soldiers hurried to do their job. *This battle has been costly, just like the other ones. I must not let this happen again, if not for good reasons*, he thought. *We must go to a port to pick up more men and supplies.* “Set sail for Donghe port!” “Yes Admiral!” He stared at the horizon, watching the moon fade into the sea and the sun slowly rise from its sleep. Softly, he firmly walked down to his cabin, ready for a good night’s sleep.

Zheng He woke up with a jolt, reliving last night’s disaster in his dreams. Realizing they were fake, he stood up, quickly changed into his daily robes and took a huge yawn. He immediately called his aid.  
“How close are we to Donghe port?”  
“Only two hours away, Sir.”  
This was good, and we had made some progress since the night before.  
“We urgently need supplies. Order the monks to pray to the wind god for more wind. We must go faster”  
“They have already, Sir. They must rest before they can pray again. They have already spent all of their energy staging the previous prayer.”  
“Then just get me something to eat. After last night, I’m a little hungry.”  
“Yes, Sir.”  
As his aid scurried away to fetch his master some food, Zheng He thought carefully about what might happen. *Right now the fleet is in a fragile state. With so much treasure and so many goods, and with such a weak defense, we could be open to an attack. This must not happen.* Hew clenched his fists. Footsteps startled him, and he turned around. He looked and saw his aid returned with some buns and a pot of steaming hot herbal tea.  
“Thank you.”  
His aid left with no reply.

***Two hours later.....***

Zheng He stepped of the ship, with his aids and troops behind him in formation.  
“Where do we get our supplies?”, he asked.  
At that moment, the governor of the state appeared with his entourage and group of guards trailing behind him.  
“We have been expecting you, Admiral.”

# Back to the Old Days

*The Independent Schools Foundation Academy, Leung, Anya – 11*

As the enormous ships were getting prepared, Zheng He miserably sat beside his bed pondering what to do. He was the chosen one, which made him enthusiastic. He never thought he could make it this far. But he still had a family counting on him. He didn't know what to do, but at last, he took his suitcase and set off to the sea.

Lightning struck, and as his boats were tossed across the sea, Zheng panicked.

'Come on, faster! Our ships are going to capsize soon!' hollered Zheng He. 'Hurry, hurry!'

The fleet endured a frightful evening, but eventually, the storm calmed down. They continued voyaging for days after days until they finally arrived in Thailand. When he first arrived, he and his men dragged themselves through some swampy areas. Once coming out to the light, they saw some huts standing on the side. Some people in ragged clothes with terrible sores all over their faces and bodies ambled out slowly like spirits. All of the soldiers were scared and wanted to run away. But Zheng refused. Not a bit afraid of being infected, he instead stepped up to help these people to dress their sores and wounds with some Chinese medicine he brought. For several days and nights, he devoted himself to relieve their pain and took care of them. Finally, after 30 days of hard work, he was able to put the disease under control. This news came to the ears of the king of Thailand, who was eager to meet this amazing man. When Zheng arrived at the beautiful and magnificent palace, he saw the king looking relieved and worried. The king told him: "In Thailand, it feels very humid and rains a lot. Our rivers became very dirty as a result of the weather. When my people drink water from the river, they get sick all the time and as the king of Thailand, I have the responsibility to keep them healthy. I don't know what to do. Do you have any solution to my problem?"

"Ohh, I got it!" Zheng exclaimed after thinking for a moment.

Zheng then ordered his people to bring him a bucket of dirty river water into which he dropped a few clear stones. He shook and stirred the water, and in a matter of seconds, the water cleared. The king was amazed and happy to witness this letting out a scream, "Is this MAGIC?!".

"No, this stone is something I brought from China, which we use to filter the water. It is called Potassium Alum, in China, we can easily find them in caves. People can drink this water without getting sick," Zheng calmly said.

Zheng didn't just teach the Thais how to filter water, he also gave them several other Chinese medicines to cure different illnesses. The king and his officials were pleased, feeling grateful and respectful to China. In return, the Thai king gave Zheng some local treasures like carpets to take back to the Middle Kingdom.

Not every country welcomed Zheng He's fleet. The king of a small country, Sri Lanka, an island in the south of India, confronted him with a hostile reception. This king was planning to conduct an onslaught on Zheng's fleet. He was known for organizing raids to the trade or government fleets passing by the sea passageway, snatching away all the goods and treasures. Zheng visited this country because being a devoted Buddhist, he wanted to pay tribute to the Buddha Relics in the country's Buddhist temple. On his way to worship, he received an invitation from the king to go to the palace. Knowing that this king was violent and unfriendly, he wondered why he got invited. So he sent his man to check out if there was any conspiracy, and he was right. The king chopped the trees to block Zheng's route so that he and his people could not get back to their boats, while at the same time mobilizing more than 40,000 soldiers to mount an attack on Zheng's fleet. In this crisis situation, Zheng did not panic. He immediately thought of a plan. Knowing that all the king's soldiers were sent to attack his boats, Zheng gathered that the king's castle would be vulnerable to invasion. He sent an elite group of 3000 soldiers to force an entrance into the castle, and at the same time, he dispatched reinforcements back to the fleet to protect the treasure from being robbed. As expected, Zheng's soldiers broke into the palace to kidnap the king and his family. When the king's soldiers on the way to the seaside heard the news, they knew what it meant.

"Come on, we have to go back to the castle to save the king before it's too late!" The commander of the soldiers roared. They quickly rushed back to the castle surrounding it. However, the next morning, Zheng, with the king as a hostage, fought his way out and back to the boats. He brought the king and his family back to Beijing. Some high officials in China wanted to execute the king for his acts, and when the king of Sri Lanka heard about it, he begged for mercy. The king of China was generous and thought that the king of Sri Lanka was uncultured and ignorant. He decided to give him another chance and allow his people to stay in China. Meanwhile, the Chinese government identified someone else from among his relatives, someone loyal and reliable, to be the new king, and sent him back to Sri Lanka. This incident had brought respect from the surrounding countries and peace to the passageway of the route from China to the Middle East and Africa.

As Zheng's crew reached Africa, they did a lot of trade and exchanges with many more countries. They carefully transferred the items to the palace of king Africa, Abioye so there would be zero mistakes during the process. The king of Africa kindly welcomed Zheng to his mansion so their trading could begin as early as possible. They discussed the trading, and what they had in mind. At last, Zheng gave him Chinese gold, silver, and silk in exchange for giraffes, ostriches, and zebras.

Zheng He is one of the most famous adventurers and travelers in the history of China. His voyages in decades between China and countries in Asia, the Middle East, and Africa broke open the barriers between the east and west. From his journeys, we learn that he was fearless, caring and intelligent. He was not afraid of being infected by the disease in Thailand; he wasn't scared of being robbed and killed by pirates; he also was not panic-stricken of being buried in vast oceans. He cared for the people with sores on their body; he loved his country, and he had sympathy for the health conditions of other countries. Zheng thought of brilliant ideas when he was about to get killed, saving himself and his fleet. His contribution was winning respect and gratitude from other countries to China, building cordial relationships of China with other countries, and consequently, promoting more cultural exchanges and increased trade between the east and the west.

# The Pirates

*The Independent Schools Foundation Academy, Poon, Davinia – 11*

Thunder rumbled, rain lashed onto the ships, the pummel of water that came so suddenly drenched the soldiers, sailors, and navigators that were all working hard to find the next destination. “When did I ever sign up for this?!” One of the unwilling soldiers muttered to himself. A navigator replied, “It is because we are all part of the Ming Chao society!” “It is good to support your country too!” exclaimed another soldier that was Zheng He’s best friend. “Yes, you are saying that because Zheng He is your best friend and he is treating you the best!” replied another soldier that was really bad-tempered.

“Captain! Captain! Wake up! I think we have company!” A sailor that was on one of the side ships screamed to the sleeping figure of Zheng He. “What company?! I don’t see anything in the distance?! Can you *please* stop disturbing me?” Zheng He replied lazily. They had been traveling for days, and they still could not find their destination. “No Zheng He! There are real invaders here, and they are heading towards us!”, the sailor told Zheng He in an impatient voice. “Well, then prepare for battle! Some of you go to the bottom of the ship and some of you attack here, on the deck, QUICKLY!!!” Zheng He gave out all the orders and right after that, all of the people on board replied: “Yes Mr. Zheng He!!!”

As the invaders started getting closer, Zheng He observed them carefully while the rest of the people were either shouting out many threats at the coming enemy or preparing their weapons for the battle against the enemies. “Aha! They are pirates!” exclaimed Zheng He, “Listen up crew! You guys fight the army and I would fight the captain of the army.” After Zheng He said this, many of the members in his own crew were not really surprised, Zheng He was, the best warrior that they ever knew or heard of. Then suddenly, a small voice spoke out to Zheng He, “But Mr. Zheng He, I have studied about pirates for my life, this crew that is coming to us is a very talented crew, they have fought for many centuries. I have heard that the whole family generation has been pirates, they all know the best ways to survive when in the sea, and they also have very very powerful weapons. One famous quote that some people heard from them is “We are warning you, do not cross us, or we will make you regret your choices, you better join our army, or we will make you understand how weak you are!” “Wow, that sure is scary, uh huh.” Said Zheng He, with so much confidence, “I am sure to beat them, little boy, you cannot give me advice, you filthy little git, nobody gives me advice!” He roared to the little boy, then slowly regarded the rest of his troops. “Y-es Ma-ster”, the little boy said as he trembled in the angry gaze of Mr. Zheng He.

As Zheng He walked back to the front of the ship, the little boy, whose name was Ning Ning went back to his own bunk at the end of the ship. He took his time as he climbed the ladder towards the basement, where all of their rooms were. The wood on the ship was very plain, but it was really strong. On the corridor to the rooms, there were many ancient paintings of the captain Zheng He. Before, Ning Ning observed these paintings closely and thought that Zheng He looked really handsome and someday, he wanted to be like Zheng He. But today? No, even if he looked so professional and tough, he would not like to have much of an ignorant personality.

“Ning Ning! I heard that you gave Zheng He some advice, but you were rejected!” taunted one of the tough navigators who always liked to complain about Zheng He. “Yes I got rejected, but at least I tried to help the captain!” replied Ning. “Who even bothers to help the capt—”

BOOOOOMMMMMMM!!!!!!! “Oh no!” screamed Ning, as he stormed out of his bunk room and ran all the way until he reached the top deck where Zheng He was. Ning regarded the mess with his mouth open, one side of the ship was torn by a big bomb that came flying from the other ship. A few of the navigators had fallen into the water and were trying to stay alive in the horrifying waters of the deep, trying to pull them in like a gigantic liquid magnet. “Zheng He, do you need my help?” asked the little boy automatically, “Yes, get going! You get our troops out of the water, the rest of the army would defend the ships.” Zheng He sighed as he said that, he didn’t think the kiddo could do much, but the emperor told him, then Ning Ning said, “Yes, and you better be quick, or the waves would drown them in a matter of minutes!” Ning jumped up and down in excitement! He finally got something to do! He would impress the captain by making sure his job is done quickly and well!

At that time, everybody was scrambling up and down the decks of the ship, trying to get a good position so that they could fire many arrows to the opposite side. While everybody was busy, Zheng He kept a watch out for Ning. Ning swiftly moved through the crowd of soldiers, then he finally reached the edge of the boat. Zheng He watched as Ning lifted the floaty ring out of the side ship with difficulty, then Ning used all his force to lift the floaty into the air, right after that, splashing it to the water. After a few minutes, all of the people that fell into the sea were rescued. "Great job Ning!" Zheng He praised, "You must be exhausted, go take a rest!" Zheng He said as he rested his eyes upon the little boy, the little boy was panting over and over again with exhaustion. "Zheng He, I do not need any rest, the enemies are already close, I would try to boost up our defenses, wait, I have a plan!" exclaimed Ning. "Go ahead..." whispered Zheng He softly. "So, we have the sailors, an army, navigators and archers. The archers stay on the deck and shoot arrows at the enemy, the spearsmen do that too. The navigators split into half, the first half makes sure the boat is steering in the right direction, the second half climbs up to the sails and controls them. The sailors also split into half, the first half goes down to the basement to protect the goods and the weapons that we have, the second half needs to take two ships, both ships go to the enemies basements, then all the swordsmen go on board those two ships, and they go to the enemies area. The rest of the bomb shooters shoot bombs at the enemy on the second floor!" "Everybody heard that? Well, let us get to work!" Zheng He ordered.

As the battle flew on, Zheng He saw that they were winning, but he was surprised that nobody came to challenge him, so he decided to help command the boats in the distance that were going towards the enemies area. What Zheng He did not notice was that a bomb shooter was aimed at him, ready to shoot now. "KA-BOOOOOMMMMM!!!!!!!" The bomb that was aimed to Zheng He shot off, Zheng He turned around and saw the bomb flying towards him, then he heard a few screams of horror from his troops, "NO NO!!!!", he closed his eyes and thought that was the end.

"Ahhhhhh!" Screamed Ning's voice, then a few people that were close by gasped, then there was silence. Zheng He did not dare to open his eyes, he thought of how disgusting he looked, with blood draped over his royal sailing robes, but he just HAD to see what happened, so he opened his eyes. The first thing he saw was a bloody mess on the floor, there, lying right there was a body of the dead Ning Ning. Zheng He knelt down and picked up Ning Ning, forgetting how bloody his robes were going to get, then he said, without believing his words, "You saves me... You sacrificed yourself to save me....." Then he felt a tear rolling down his cheek, "TROOPS! WE MUST SHOW NO MERCY TO THE ARMY! WE MUST KILL THEM ALLLLLLL!!!!!" Zheng He screamed with all his might. "Then I must thank Ning Ning personally, I must."

# Birth of the Battleships

*The Independent Schools Foundation Academy, Schrantz, James – 11*

\_\_\_\_\_ *Boom! Boom! Boom!* The sound of hammers against steel echo through the shipyard. *Skree! Skree! Skree!* The sound of drills and saws pierce the air. Everywhere, people bark orders back and forth whilst the workers keep on working.

It is the year 2023, and the Chinese government has ordered the construction of a massive fleet of battleships. These battleships would operate under the command of Admiral Zheng He and would be supposedly indestructible. This project would require many resources to complete, and only the best workers were to participate in the construction of these massive beasts.

You are one of them. You are forced to work twelve-hour shifts, hammering and drilling and pounding away at thick plates of steel with large machines. As you await the end of your shift, you try not to think about the family that you left behind.

You and your friends are sitting in a circle, snacking on gross, soggy sandwiches as you tell jokes and share stories. *Riiiiing! Riiiiing! Riiiiing!* That was the alarm sounding for the end of lunch. You stuff the rest of the sandwich in your mouth and continue to work.

Today, it's your turn to operate the shipyard's massive industrial crane. It is the easiest task, so everybody takes turns doing it. The job is pretty simple; you climb up the tall ladder to the top of the crane and spend the rest of the day lifting supplies back and forth between the beastly CAT-5s' and the shipyard's construction area.

In between loads, you peer out of the dusty old crane window and stare at the battleship. It's been twenty years since you first started working on it, and it was almost complete. The only downside was that the construction of this fleet was top secret; you have lived the past twenty years as a dead man. Nobody outside of the operation knew you were alive, and you always wonder about how much the outside world has changed since 2003. Apparently, there was this new thing called 'Youtube' that everybody was crazy about. "Oi! Whaddya' think you're doing!" an angry officer shouts through a megaphone, "Get to work!" you shake your head and pull your mind back into reality.

When your shift is over, you climb down the ladder and began walking toward the checkout counter. For work like this, security measures are required to make sure that you none of the workers can escape. You are about to check out when all of a sudden, *Boom!* You whip around just in time to see a cloud of smoke rise from the hull of the ship.

You dash over to the scene. Three officers are already investigating. All around, workers are calling back and forth in protest. The officers just ignore them. As more officers come in to set up a cordon, you see a trail dust leading deeper into the ship. You freeze. A single thought passes through your mind before you dart through the crowd and into the hull of the ship.

You are suddenly engulfed in an eerie silence. The shouts of the angry workers fade behind you. You look around. Nothing. You listen for the slightest sound. *Chip! Chip! Chip!* A subtle scraping sound echoes from the otherside of a door. You slowly creep towards it, and bust the door open. A strange figure looks up in surprise and drops the match that he was trying to light. You charge forward and tackle him before he can react. "Gotcha!" you shout as you knock him down.

He came prepared. From his pocket, he whips out a bloodstained butterfly knife and points it at your neck. Unfortunately for him, you have been prepared for the last twenty years. You pull out a knife of your own.

The battle is on. Both of you jump back and forth, swinging you knives around in a vicious dance of flesh and steel. He lunges forward, you step to the side and nic him in the leg. *Thud!* He falls to the floor, struggling to get up. Just then he swings around and when his knife is less than an inch away from your neck, it is knocked out of the way by an officer. He had followed you into the ship and saved your life just in time.

You were thanked for your service and in return, the officer explained to you what had happened. "The spy was attempting to take down the entire ship before escaping in a private helicopter that we later found on the roof of the construction complex," the officer reports. You were given a promotion and were offered a job that you just couldn't resist; to become a general onboard the fleet's mothership, operating side by side with Admiral Zheng He.

The fleet that was already constructed, that is. Apparently, the ship that you were working on was *slightly delayed...* by *eight years!* "Eight years of my life wasted on some useless hunk of steel," you think to yourself. Well, thinking about it ain't gonna' get those eight years back anytime soon. You are helicoptered on to the mothership where you will serve the next few years of your life 'for the greater good of all humanity.' At least that's what they tell you.



# The Stray Ship

*The Independent Schools Foundation Academy, Shi, Kailin – 11*

“Ship ahead!” yelled Li Jian, the ship’s navigator and leader. He furrowed his eyebrows as the unknown ship ahead began sailing towards them. The crew were sent by Zheng He to look for a runaway ship that has somehow drifted away from the treasure fleet around the coast of India. On Zheng He’s command, they have only brought only one ship to assist with the search. But the ship ahead was definitely not the missing ship that was lost. It was a huge junk wood ship, with delicate silk flags. The ship was bigger than a normal treasure fleet ship. It had a metal mast the shape of a dragon, painted with bright colors, its eyes bright and shiny. Li Jian watched as the large ship rowed towards them with an alarming speed.

“Back! Back! Row Back! Fast!” commanded Li Jian, hopping off the mast of the ship to help the men with the boat’s rowing. But it was too late. The huge ship crashed straight into the mast of the search boat, which splintered and cracked immediately. Li Jian pulled out his trusty gold sword as a swarm of pirates leaped onto the shiny mast of the ship. All of the pirates had distinctive Chinese features: pale skin, black hair, sharp nose. All of the pirates wore leather clothing, had terrible personal hygiene, and stringy beards, except for the pirate in the middle. He, no, she, had long hair flowing down her back. Her eyes were cold, her face pale, her spear crusted with dry blood. She wore her red, light silk robes and her well known jade necklace that she has stolen from Zheng He’s treasure ship the first time these pirates have ambushed. Yes, it was Ching Shih, the famous female pirate that ruled the seas. Rumor said that her sword cuts through iron as if it was clay.

With a magnificent bellow, Ching Shih raised her sword into the air, which glinted like silver under the sun. Immediately the pirates began attacking savagely. The junior pirates held no weapons, and the senior pirates held swords that were crooked and rusty. Half of them didn’t have an arm or leg. And it was 50 pirates against 250 men from Li Jian’s team. But still, Li Jian’s team stood no chance. The pirates fought like demons, with their nails, teeth and fingers. Li Jian fought bravely, but he could tell that he was standing on the losing side. A lot of his men had already surrendered, and they were being tied up and sent to the pirate’s boat. Others had their eyes scratched, their clothes ripped, and pushed into the sea, where they grappled hopelessly at the side of the gigantic boat, trying to climb back up.

“No.” mumbled Li Jian as he battled against Ching Shih, sword against spear, gold against silver. If he even survived and escaped, (which isn’t very likely), Zheng He will have his head for losing 250 men and the hidden treasures in the boat. But at that second of distraction, he let down his defenses, and Ching Shih put her silver sword at his neck. The whole boat was silenced.

Ching Shih smiled like the way a rattlesnake smiles before it strikes. Li Jian felt his hair stand on the end. “Now,” she said gently, “Come with me.” Li Jian closed his eyes as the pirates tied him up, and he fainted.

Fish.

I smell fish, thought Li Jian. Slowly he opened his eyes. Li Jian was in a damp room. The smell of sea water filled the air. Water was seeping in from the walls of the boat, and with a shiver, he realised he was in the stores room of the ship. Besides from sea water, he saw barrels, barrels, and more barrels of... fish. All types of exotic fish filled the barrels. Some were common fish that Li Jian has saw before, like cod or sea bass. Others were colorful, with shiny scales that sparkled like pearls. Some were raw, others were cooked. Curious, Li Jian stood up and realised that the ropes were untied. He stretched, and walked towards the barrel of shiny fish. On the side, there were strange markings of a foreign land:

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Intrigued, Li Jian stuck his hand into the barrel. He lifted a slippery fish with ease. As the son of a successful fisherman, Li Jian has learned how to hold, catch, and identify all types of fish. But he has never seen such a beautiful specimen of fish before. Its scales shined like pearls, white and smooth. It had an agile shape, and Li Jian predicted that it is surely a swift fish, hard to catch and extremely valuable. And those eyes——

Suddenly, the fish flopped out of Li Jian’s hands. It fell on the damp wood floor and began to flop around. *Squish, Squash, Squish, Squash*. Startled, Li Jian tripped and fell, causing the entire barrel to fall over. *Squish, Squash, Squishy, Squash*. Li Jian hurriedly released the beautiful fish into the ocean. As he picked up the fish and tossed it into the surging waves, something caught his eyes. More markings were on the floor, where the barrel of pearly fish was. It had the same marking as the markings on the barrel.

“What does it mean?” wondered Li Jian out loud.

“Press the markings!” Suddenly millions of voices yelled out loud to him. Li Jian was so startled he stumbled and fell on his backside. The voices seem to be coming from under the markings. Intrigued, he traced the marking gently with his fingers. A trapdoor snapped open, and dozens of Chinese soldiers stumbled out, yelling and smiling and singing with joy. For they have been trapped for days without food in this horrid place, and were hoping for a miracle when Li Jian arrived.

Afterwards Li Jian managed to make a fire and cook some of the precious fish. He has never tasted something so delicious in his life. Just as he was about to gut other fish, the wooden door swayed open, and a sleepy looking pirate stumbled in. She had the hair of a rat’s nest. It was Ching Shih.

“Huh? “ She mumbled, but her words were washed away by the fearsome yelling of the Chinese soldiers. Adrenaline rushed through Li Jian. He grabbed a barrel and chucked it at Ching Shih with a yell. She dodged, and began running up the stairs to the deck. A full-fledged fight was starting...

# My First Journey

*The Independent Schools Foundation Academy, Stephens, Lauren – 11*

It all started on the day I was called in to see the Emperor, from that day on, my life would be changed forever. I walked into the grand palace, my whole body shivering with fear. I wasn't sure why he had finally called for me after all these years. I walked into the throne room and immediately bowed, and said, "Hello Emperor." He sat upon the grand throne, staring down at me while he boomed, "Come with me." I was surprised yet nervous at the same time as I stood up and followed behind him.

I gasped as I stepped into the royal treasure room. Thousands of porcelain vases and the finest treasures and gems hidden away behind the palace. In the center, there lied a scroll, with thousands of boats and a journey to far away. "My Emperor? What is this?" I asked, my voice filled with awe and sheer amazement. "This, Zheng He, is my next project. The crowning jewel of my reign. This is The Ming Treasure Voyages." I stood there in awe, gaping at the ambitious plans. "My Emperor... These plans... They are incredibly ambitious. What do you need me to do?" I said, getting down on my knees. He looked down at me with great respect and replied, "I need you, to help me build the boats and commandeer the ships. It will be a job of hard work but a great honor. So what do you say Zheng He?" I thought about it and after some very careful consideration and the fact that I probably shouldn't disappoint my Emperor, I replied "Of course, My Lord. I shall get started immediately." He nodded and pointed towards the exit. "You may leave." I bowed and quickly walked out of the room.

"Well... I better start designing," I thought, exiting the palace, questioning if I had made the right decision.

After years and years of hard work and exhilarating labor, the time had come. The mighty drums bonged as we prepared our ships. They just as mighty and grand as the magnificent pictures and fantasies the Emperor had planned, the boats were 135 meters by 55 meters. A giant compared to the boats of the past. 'This is it' I thought as I stepped onto my home for the next 28 years. There was an extremely large number of boats, some for storing materials, some for trade goods, some for soldiers and the largest was for me.

The day I set sail was a wonderful day, the wind was blowing and the sun was shining brighter than ever before. My men and I waved goodbye as we journeyed off into the sunset. I stared into the dusk, admiring the setting sun as we sailed off, leaving everything we knew behind, and into the unknown. A single tear slid down my cheek as I stared at the world behind me one more time.

I yawned, opening my eyes. 'Where am I?!' I thought and immediately jumped up. I banged my head against the top of the ship and muttered under my breath, "Oh yeah. I was shipped off on a boat with over 1000 smelly men..." "What was that?!" My irritating roommate replied, unsure of what I had said. "None of your business, Fu Qi," I said. 'Oh okay then! I have a slice of bread and jam for you!' He said, handing me a strange pastry. "Umm. Jam hasn't been invented yet, genius" I commented sarcastically. "Oh." He said, "But then what is this?" He said, acting like he invented something magnificent while holding up a strange red sauce-like substance. "Paint," I replied in a monotone voice, as I slipped on my clothes. "Ohhhhhh!" He replied grinning foolishly. "That makes sense!" I sighed and slipped out of our room before he asked me any more questions.

Finally, after many more irritating days of putting up with my irritating shipmate, we had finally arrived! In the great lands of India. As soon as we docked I could smell the pungent spice China has longed for. Pepper. Pepper in China was as rare as a blue moon on a cloudy night. I sat with the leader over tea while watching the finest of China's dancer wow and amaze our Indian friends.

Finally, after long hours of endless conversation and entertainment, the Indians had agreed to trade us pepper. I stared into the sunset as we return back to my homeland, in my head forever acknowledging this trip as we returned to our homeland, forever changed and forever reminded of our great travels from here on out.

# Sumatra's Sunken Ships

*The Independent Schools Foundation Academy, Tang, Rosalyn – 12*

It's been a few years since we started the first journey to the unknown. Although I really liked being one of the 'Ming Treasure Voyagers' (that's what we dubbed ourselves), the past few days have really started to tire me out. Each day, we had to wake up earlier than the sun and toil through the night, even when we feel like we can't walk one step further.

My eyelids drooped as I stumbled through the halls, finally being able to get a few hours of peaceful sleep. Halfway down the hallway that led to the cabins, I heard loud snoring coming from the cabins on the left and shook my head. *How was I supposed to sleep with that racket?*

I continued my walk to the end of the hall, careful not to wake anyone up or step on any of the people who had just decided to drop unconscious in the hallways. Finally, I reached my cabin and my bed. Ah, my bed. My beautiful, comfortable bed. I ended up going to sleep with half of my body still on the floor.

After not long, the deafening sound of the morning bell reached my ears. CLANG CLANG CLANG.

*Just a little longer...* I thought as I reached for an imaginary pillow to cover my head as thundering footsteps filled the hall. Sleep was the only thing in my half-conscious mind. But the bell still stubbornly rang on. Reluctantly, I rolled out of bed.

I opened the door groggily and the stench of sweat blasted me full force in the face. Flinching, I wondered if I smelled better than them. *Probably not*, my mind chided. *You really need a shower*. Strangely, instead of being sleep-deprived zombies like my fellow shipmates usually were, I heard commotion buzzing on the main deck.

The long wooden hallways all lead up to a common area, which was the place where we had meals. Long, splintery wooden tables stretched from one side of the room to another, but still leaving enough space for a straight path which led to the stairway that led up to the main deck. Despite being one of the 238 smaller vessels that surrounded the big treasure ships, our vessel was still pretty huge.

I headed up to the main deck, where sailors were looking into the distance. The view was truly breathtaking: The clear blue sky reflected in the peaceful ocean, and our fleet of ships, cruising across this vast space. It reminded me just how powerful China was. From where I stood, I could almost see Zheng He, our leader, standing on the deck of the main ship. But now, if you looked close enough, there was a tiny stretch of green in the distance: Sumatra.

We had arrived at our next destination.

By evening, we had traded with some of the merchants near the coast and were returning to our ships for dinner. If everything went well, we would head inland tomorrow. Who knows what we might discover? Walking back to our ships, I anticipated tasting those new things called 'peppers' that we got today. We rowed back out to sea in the direction of the fleet, but the ships were gone.

"What? That's impossible! Our ship was right there." a sailor cursed. Our boat bumped into something just under the surface of the water, but it was hard to see in the dark of the night. Then something floated over—the silhouette of a man, clinging on to a piece of driftwood. It was one of my shipmates that had stayed behind when we explored the land. Thankfully, there was still a faint rise and fall of his chest, indicating that he was still alive. We quickly pulled him up on the boat, asking him questions like 'What happened?' and 'Where is our ship?'. Unfortunately, he was unconscious.

After a few splashes of seawater in his face, the sailor woke up, startled.

"Finally. You're awake." I exclaimed. "What happened to our ship?"

The sailor's voice was trembling. "This... *monster*... sunk our ship. It struck in the dead of night. I was going to clean the deck and then I heard this cracking sound and then—" he stumbled over his words, he was talking so fast.

"What about the main ships?"

"They're fine. They were far away. It hasn't found them yet."

*Yet.* Well, that sounded a little ominous. Like the roar that followed the sailor's words. The water near us rippled with such force that it almost pushed our boat over. The sailor turned silent, his eyes wide as saucers.

A figure shot out of the water, spraying water all over us and making me close my eyes instinctively. When I reopened them, a pair of big, shimmering red eyes were staring right back at me. The monster's serpentine body waved back and forth, before diving back into the water and pushing our boat over.

I plunged into the cold, dark water, grabbing on to a long piece of wood that fell from the boat. Anything that could help me float. I resurfaced, gasping for air and looking around for the other sailors.

With a yelp, someone disappeared under the surface with a *plop*, leaving a puff of blood in their wake.

Something tickled my feet, and before I could react, it coiled around my legs. I was raised up into the air by the monster's tail and found myself staring into its malevolent eyes. My first instinct was to freeze. Then I remembered the piece of wood in my hand. The wood was still pretty sharp. If I rammed it with enough force between the monster's scales, that would be a permanent injury for sure.

My hand trembling, I held up the piece of wood, aiming it at the monster's susceptible head, but it was hard to see in the dark. It turned towards me, and I drew my arm back to throw my weapon. The monster opened its mouth with a roar and its head flew towards me.

With a rather gruesome sound, the wood impaled the monster's forehead. It blinked for a few seconds before falling into the water with a deafening splash, dead. I tried to get the dead weight of the monster's tail off me so I could resurface again, but the weight was suffocating.

After lots of kicking and thrashing, I noticed all the remaining sailors were staring at me, shocked by my rather lucky feat.

"What are you staring at? If we stay here any longer, we'll get hypothermia." I chided to the gaping sailors. We swam towards the nearest ship we could see: A vessel similar to ours. With a few yells, they spotted us and hauled us up. Standing there, soaked to the bone and shivering, I couldn't help but wonder: *What's next?*

# The Cat Island

*The Independent Schools Foundation Academy, Tsui, Maya – 11*

Okami opened her jaws to scent the air, picking up the trace of a jackdaw, and instinctively dropped into a hunting crouch. She lifted her paws delicately, and was about to leap on her prey, when she detected thrumming of paws headed her way. She scowled in disappointment, watching through slitted eyes as her target squawked and soared into the air. A black tomcat followed by a brown she-cat burst through the ferns. “Okami!” The black one panted “We have invaders sailing towards us from the west coast!” “How much, Sabre?” She asked the black tom sharply. “Not much” The brown she-cat admitted “Not enough to be fatal, but enough to injure.” Okami nodded “Spread the word, Isla.” The brown dipped her head and the she-cat darted off into the bushes, still waving wildly from their first entry. “Sabre, your with me.” Both felines shifted into their human bodies, each with ears and tails from their cat counterparts. “Have you alerted Lumi?” Okami demanded. Sabre bobbed his head “We sent the most exquisite fighters ahead to start shooting them. “Excellent. Have the underwater squadrons moved in?” “They’re currently waiting for your signal, Okami.” He replied. “I want you and your scouts to watch them for more extra information that we can wield to defeat these...inconveniently placed fools.” Sabre gave her a curt bow and shot off throw the undergrowth.

She trotted towards their camp and when she arrived, found everyone waiting, and a out of breath scout. “I..” She panted “There is a small company of men asking if we can negotiate on Akulet Beach.” Okami narrowed her eyes until they were as thin as a blade of grass, and chose her own team to go and meet those newcomers. She had a pawful of warriors, each armed to the teeth. They marched towards the beach, for what lay there, awaiting them.

They found a small patrol of men, each bearing yellowy-pale skin and slanted dark eyes. They wore luxurious flowing robes embroidered with gold and silver and gleaming gems. As far as she saw, they wore no visible weapons. “Greetengs.” A man that looked like their leader spoke. His Cattish was horrible. “Wez proopuse alliance to yuo domain and en retoorn, wez geve yuo sheeny thangs.” (We propose an alliance to your island and in return, we will give you treasures/shiny things) He pointed at chests and chests of gold, silver, riches and other valuable items. But, no prey or battle armour, weapons or any of those. “We are not interested in these. We only look for prey, or items fit for battle, foreign fool.” “Preey?” He cocked his head to one side “You means mouse or rebbit?” (Prey? You mean mice or rabbits?) Okami caught Ayla sighing, Enki picking at his knife and Ayki rolling his eyes, the rest of her patrol doing similar gestures.

“If you cannot provide those resources for us, leave.” One of his lieutenants whispered in his ear, and he nodded “We will be able to provide those materials for you,” he said, his Cattish perfect, for once. “He beckoned to his men and they hauled trunks filled with the things they required. “Thank you. We will gladly take these items and grant an alliance with you. You will be permitted to enter our domain, as long as you do not disrupt our people.” Zheng He nodded and both leader’s signed a parchment, declaring the alliance between the two mighty rulers. Then, Zheng He gathered his men and took his leave, whistling to himself as his men jostled around him in excitement. Okami watched until their red sails crossed the horizon and, eventually, left their line of sight. Finally, she allowed herself to leave and maybe, even find that jackdaw she was hunting earlier.

# Leaving India

*The Independent Schools Foundation Academy, Wang, Angie Anqi – 11*

Zheng-He and his men arrived upon the southwest shore of India, at the heart of Calicut. Their jaw hung open as they saw vast fields of pepper—something China had so rarely it was often treated like gold.

“Look at these limitless fields of pepper! It could satisfy China’s demand for special spices and raw materials for eternity. Sir, this is not a regular sight. Shall I load the bags of gold and silk out?” An adviser pleaded, tugging Zheng-He’s sleeve like an excited child.

Zheng-He laughed good-naturedly. His advisor made him think of himself, of those ignorant and hazy days when all was peace and goodwill. His advisor was right indeed—but why the rush? He wanted to stay and hopefully look at more mysterious things that the Chinese never knew of, but Zheng-He knew the emperor wasn’t young, and his life might be endangered while he was here, savoring the time slowly and having luxury and many men accompanying him, so he hastily gave permission for his advisor to load the cargoes of gold and silk.

“Welcome,” Zheng-He said, leading one of the Indian traders inside the colossal vessel and gave orders for the Chinese dancers to entertain them. The Indian watched in awe, experiencing the hidden brilliance in Chinese culture. Then Zheng-He presented the many treasures of the Chinese, as they watched the women dance gracefully in silk robes.

“Oh, lord...” exclaimed the Indian, “even that is not enough to sum this up.” Zheng-He smiled to himself.

“Now we exchange. Pepper is like gold to us Chinese, if I brought our people, they would say the same.”

“Oh, don’t be humble.” said the Indian, a warm smile stretching across his face. “Whoever owns all this treasures would be a millionaire. Trade accepted.” The two men shook hands firmly, but not unkindly.

“Good, we can agree at this in peace. The emperor sent this request. China feels the need to have a glimpse in other cultures, so if everyone disagreed, there would be some...issues, let’s say...” Zheng-He said firmly, although his eyes had betrayed him a little.

“Understood. I will pass this on to others countries we know of.” the Indian replied, inside feeling nothing but happy to be part of his request.

“Great!” They said in unison, giving a slow but firm handshake.

“It’s a pleasure to meet you... but we must leave.” Zheng-He explained gently.

“Why, of course. To accommodate such a successful businessman is also a great honor.” The Indian bowed gallantly and left the room.

“Ahh. Indians are quite friendly, isn’t it?” Zheng-He asked as he gazed dreamily into the land they left behind.

“What’s next to come?” He asked his trusty advisor, who was always by his side.

“Ha, it seems like master like these journeys. But sorry, we must return to where we left — our hometown, China.” His advisor jokes cheekily. He knew his master too well to think otherwise.

“Oh? Of course.” Zheng-He said, and muttered to himself, “How foolish were I to forget my mission?”, but kept a straight face at his advisor. His advisor chuckled to himself, sighing.

“Let’s take to our journey home.” Zheng-He called out. They left the blood-red horizon behind, and smiled at the cotton-candy like wisps of white clouds floating on the sky. Zheng-He and his advisor waved at the pearly blue ocean, sighing contentedly. *What a marvelous day in such a pleasing place,* Zheng-He thought to himself, *honestly, I don’t know if I want to go back..... but I must complete the emperor’s request..... I must put my priorities ahead of myself.*

Looking at Zheng-He’s expression, a sudden realization hit the advisor.

*Master seems reluctant to leave India! Well, the sight in India must have pleased him. I haven’t seen him like this before!* The advisor glanced at Zheng-He with sympathetic eyes. *I guess I can relate to that. I’m just glad that he’s happy.* The advisor sighed happily. *Finally we’re heading back to China, our heart’s dearest!*

Time flew by, and before they knew it, they were arriving at the docks. Zheng-He smiled at the home he left, but little did he know of what change there had been...

# The Secret Life of Fiction

*West Island School, Eyummi, Gayathri – 13*

I was always searching.

Searching for something, but not knowing what it was, or why. I liked to call it a ‘treasure’; an unknown treasure. I seemed to have a strange connection with treasure, as if I had found many before, even though I knew that to be false. I sometimes wondered if I had a past life, if I was reincarnated. But others begged to differ, it was a distant possibility that seemed true in my mind, but a mere fantasy in everyone else's...

*It wasn't money.*

My troops were ready. The mighty three-hundred-and-seventeen ships had already been lined up glamorously by the shore, as well as the sixty mammoth treasure ships, ready to receive and hold the world's wonders. I stood by the shore and looked up at my ship, where I would spend the coming months. To live on a boat, excited me in some ways. But as I pondered the purpose of this voyage, my excitement somewhat died. Did we really need this material wealth?

*It wasn't jade.*

My parents always said that we were ‘losing our heritage’. I always thought they had magical powers, figuratively, of course. But one day, it seemed as though they were real sorcerers, evil ones, that too. I believed that they cursed my mind, so that I would only think of the past. The thoughts came one at a time, slowly, as if time itself was taking its time. When I narrated these stories to my mother, she brushed them away like dirt. It went through one ear, came out the other. I knew that they were flashes, not just thoughts, because I had never learned about them before, but they seemed to be true. Every detail, as if I were truly present in the past...

*It wasn't silver.*

I went aboard the main ship, ready for the third voyage. I tried my best to stimulate excitement within my troops, but keeping my own spirits up was a challenge. I looked forward to a new adventure, but I wanted something more, anything more. I planned a life of adventure for myself, but it seemed as if I was confined to the rules and regulations of this community. We had forty-eight elephantine ships, majestic like a tusker, carrying thirty-thousand soldiers, all wearing the same uniform, mostly the same height, similar stature, yet their personalities were unique, each one different from anyone else, no two were the same. Just like our voyages, all for a similar purpose, but with a different outcome each time. I somehow wished that the purpose was different as well.

*It wasn't gold.*

The idea that I had a past life grew stronger in my mind. It had to be the truth. The voyages were real, anyone who believed otherwise was definitely wrong. They were stories written in stone. I wasn't sure of my identity, but every time another flash appeared, I felt a part of the story. I was there. But who was I? The question lingered deep below, like a devil that grew stronger in the darkness, waiting for the right moment to emerge into the light and scream...

*It wasn't pride.*

Plans to extend the scope of these voyages even further led to the fourth voyage. I resolved to attempt to enjoy it, the new treasures, the searches, the atmosphere of the ship, the salty breeze that engulfed the deck every time a wave passed by us, the stale fish that strangely tasted wonderful when our stomachs growled like lions. But how could I? The kingdom, already the greatest in the world, did not need more of these extravagant adventures and treasures. It needed a different kind of wealth, but what?

*It wasn't fame.*



I had a psychological problem. My mother stood with a strange mix of anger, fear and relief. Anger for the rise of this ‘problem’, fear for the future, and relief that the cause for these ‘episodes’ was finally discovered. I attempted to assure her that I was fine. My small, supple hand was thrown away by her’s, hard and wrinkled, from years of hard work and pain. Her life had been written down, destined, long before she was born, just like millions of others’, who did what they did because they were forced to, expected to, against their will. Was my future written down as well? Was this the life I wanted for myself?

*It wasn’t any kind of material wealth.*

“Zheng!”, the Emperor called. Zheng? As soon as I remembered myself, I rushed to his aid. Strange, how I could forget my own name. I felt a little distant from my identity that day, I couldn’t understand why. As if I wasn’t really myself, but an imposter who resided in the same body, though fully aware of this the entire time. My peers called me ‘disoriented’ that day. I somewhat agreed, but was too busy pondering an important life-choice. What was my goal in life?

*Maybe it was hope.*

I sat at the top of the hill that faced the glistening sea. Shimmering waves danced around in the clear blue water like restless silver spangles. “Why is mama sending you to a psychologist?” my little brother Ma asked innocently. I shrugged. Much as I hated the idea, my mother would have her reasons. As I mustered up a better answer, something caught my eye. It was large, growing larger. Majestic, grand, compelling. “Ma.. can you see that? Over there, near the horizon. Do you see it?” Ma stood up but looked confused. “That.. that fleet of ships!”, I cried, beckoning him to see. “I see nothing.” Ma said. “You must really be mad....

*Maybe it was hard work.*

I seemed eternally unsatisfied. It seemed as though material wealth and items were of no use to me. Then suddenly it clicked, the small light bulb that was my brain. The voyages, they meant something more. Something more than finding out who I was, or what my ‘real’ life was. The idea slowly grew on me, that this ‘curse’ as I had so blindly named it, was bestowed on me for a reason larger than my mind, than my life, and that it was the *raison d’être* of my existence. I had only just digested the inner meaning of the story, being so tangled in its outline. I wanted to go back, experience the stories again, when I realised that they were real, they were happening, to me...

*Maybe it was love.*

I sat by my window writing the events of our most recent voyage. Half of me was in the Persian Gulf, Red Sea, the coast of Africa, but the other half was somewhere else. I looked out of the window facing the sea, the moon casting its beams on the strong waves, strong but delicate at the same time. They could wash you away, or bring you back to the shore. I wished for a moment that I would be washed away, to a place where I could learn the truth about life.

*I knew what it was.*

I lay on my bed wondering. If only I had realised this before. I had finally found the truth about life, the secret I sought so desperately. If everyone knew this, they would live better and have a more fruitful life. The secret of life was...

We could find a thousand treasures, but not one would make us truly happier. It was like a jar filled with poison and nectar, poison being the sadness, anger, negativity, and nectar being happiness. It seemed as though giving a drop of your nectar to someone else, added a drop into yours. It seemed as though I was living in Zheng He’s story, his own emotional journey, of finding the secret of life. The elixir of immortality. Now that the flashes had stopped, I imagined the Zheng had also discovered the secret.

The next day in court, the Yongle Emperor asked me ‘the hardest question ever asked’. “What is the secret of life?” he asked, chuckling silently. “If you answer this, you will be named the treasure of my court.”

I glanced around the court. There was a glow around my face, as I knew the answer. “Your Majesty,” I began, courtiers eagerly awaiting the secret they had desired their whole lives, that would change their lives forever. I took a deep breath.

It was time for the final voyage. This time, it was not to trade spices from India, silver goods from Iran, Turkic slaves, Byzantine clothes or Afro–Arabian ceramics. Instead, it was to spread this new secret. This would be my final voyage, my mission. Finally, my spirits were high, my chin was up, a calm and content smile on my face, and one on every soldier who joined the voyage. My jar was filled with nectar.

“To share happiness”, I told myself. “That is the treasure I have been searching for”.

# Mei's Adventurous Voyage

*West Island School, Minglani, Rhea – 13*

It was that time again, when people were the most joyous because they had heard the tales of the adventurous Ming treasure voyages. The Ming treasure voyages were known for being sensational and full of adventure and the so called 'Pirates' travelling on the ship weren't just regular pirates. These pirates carried along precious items, such as gold or silk, to give away as gifts from the emperor. What a smart way to make relationships with other countries and explore the world at the same time!

My great grandfather had been lucky enough to experience this journey along the clear and deep seas. He always used to tell me stories of meeting all the friendly people and giving gifts to them, he must have been so proud to be Chinese and represent China. But the expeditions weren't always all song and dance, they would often encounter unpleasant weather or bad-tempered real-world pirates. Luckily, the travellers were trained to handle situations like these and the expedition ships were well equipped with military forces and weapons.

After hearing grandfather's stories countless time while growing up, I had made up my mind. I wanted to be the first female traveller on one of the Ming treasure voyages. As soon as I turned 18, I went to meet the Emperor and Admiral Zeng He to see whether he would consider me worthy enough to embark on this expedition. He sent me back home without even taking a look at me. I still remember his words to this day, "A girl like you should not even think about joining something as dangerous as this voyage. Now go back home little girl." This had just made me want to take part in this expedition even more. To prove them wrong. So I decided to run away from home. I rented a minuscule, shady flat in the dark part of the country, it was all I could afford. I was dedicated. I had to get in to the list. I trained day and night, sun or rain. I pushed myself to my limits, often coming home to find not even a morsel of food left in the cupboard. I lived by the quote "Always follow your dreams, no matter what". Soon after, I couldn't even afford to rent the flat. I decided that it was time. I shaved off my luscious, long black locks of hair and set off to meet the Emperor once again, this time impersonating a man. The new and improved Mei was back, and this time stronger than ever. She wouldn't ever, never ever, take "no" for an answer.

I joined rest of the aspiring troops for the grueling selection exam, where we raced and wrestled to prove our worth. When it was all over I returned to wait for the several week's wait for the result. I joined a machinery repair shop to earn a living. After a long, exhausting day of working in the repair shop, I came home to a letter in the post. A thought passed my mind, this letter felt different, it felt almost as if it was written with deliberation, but I let the thought go almost as soon as it entered. Being the witless person I was, I threw it in the bin without even glancing at it, thinking it was another one of those electricity bills that were long overdue. But thank the lord I decided to retrieve it a few moments later, it was a message from the Emperor, saying that I qualified to take part in this wonderful expedition. I went to sleep every night, ever since I was six years old, wishing for this day to come and it was finally here. I was as happy as a clam, my prayers were finally answered.

That was how I ended up taking everything I owned, which was not much considering I couldn't even manage to feed myself, and with only faith and determination keeping me going, I bided farewell to all my fellow flatmates. With a deep breath, I was off. The journey had just begun.

After 3 hours of intense walking that morning, I had finally made it to the port where the antique ship was docked. My mouth dropped with awe at first sight of the ship. It had beautiful royal red sails and fragrant aged wood interiors. I couldn't believe that I was going to travel the world on this magnificent ship with so many other dainty men. Soon enough, I was escorted to my room which was located on the bottom most floor, these were the dirtiest dormitory rooms, with rats and spiders, surrounded by a foul smell of a combination of vomit and coal. Sleeping on the beds at night felt like laying on a rough bed of rocks. All of the other men in the dormitory were immensely unfriendly and impolite, I wondered how I was going to spend the next few months here.

The next morning, I decided to explore the floor above my dormitory, where I met many admirable merchants and cartographers. I spoke with worthy geographers and marine biologists. All of their stories were so inspiring and motivating. In the afternoon, after attending a meeting with the Captain of the ship and after going through safety procedures, I decided to explore the ship even more. I explored all of the floors of the ship and made a last minute decision to visit the kitchen. I am so glad I did because that was where I met Big Wei, the lead Chef of the ship. He really helped me survive that journey. Sometimes, when I was having a bad day, he would sneak in some extra food into my ration of dinner. He would always lend me a sympathetic ear to talk to as I had no 'real' friends on the ship. I had been quite lonely on the first few days of the voyage, but Big Wei was always there for me, no matter what.

We had started from Nanjing about 10 days ago and a recent announcement informed us that we would be reaching Champa in a few more days. I was absolutely thrilled about the fact that I was going to be exploring new land in just a couple of days. But as time passed by, I was becoming more and more anxious. I was unsure of whether the people were going to be welcoming or not and I was fearful of the battles we would have to fight if the people of Champa thought we were intruders.

Soon enough, we disembarked at Champa, and decided to offer the King of Champa the precious presents we brought with us from China. The Captain nominated me and another elderly man, Cheng, to come with him to present the gifts to the King of Champa. We reached the King's palace and the guards let us in when the Captain showed them his badge. As we walked in, we heard a loud sound of breaking glass. I turned around to see the King of Champa being tormented by his son, the Prince. The Captain was the fastest to act, he took the nearest thing he saw, a gold vase, and struck the Prince on the head with it. He jumped back in pain and alarm but soon recovered and had the Captain's head in between his hands in no time. He took out the sharp, black dagger from his pocket and was about to cut in to the Captain's flesh when I landed a punch in his right cheek. Dark red blood started to appear around the Prince's mouth. I can't believe I saved the life of the Captain. A few moments later, one of the Prince's men had me in headlock. My face started to turn purple and my lungs were desperate for air. Then the man abruptly let go and said "Hey, she's a girl!". I was thrown back into a pillar with a thud. The Captain and Cheng helped me up to my feet immediately and we rushed back to the ship.

That night, I went to sleep with worry. The only thing I was concerned about was if the captain heard what the man said about me being a woman, but fortunately even if he did, he didn't show any signs of being unhappy about it so I breathed a sigh of relief and slowly let myself fall asleep.

The next morning, the Captain called me to his room and told me to have a seat on one of his posh, velvet chairs. I was curious to know what I had been called here for. I sat there in silence until he handed me a silver, sparkly, spinning top. "You know, I had a daughter, once." He said calmly, " She was three years old when my wife left me and took her to Hong Kong. If she was here now, she would have been as old as you. I want you to know, I really appreciate how you saved my life yesterday, if it weren't for you, I don't know whether I would be here right now. That old man Cheng was no help whatsoever." With that he stood up and left the room, without saying another word. So he had, after all, found out that I was a girl. I went back to the dormitory after that to find that my belongings were gone. There was a note that said "Your belongings have been kept in your new suite on the second floor".

I continued the journey on the same ship until we reached Calicut in India. Where I got off and travelled to Nalanda to study buddhism. That was how I ended up earning the title of being the first ever female on a Ming treasure voyage, saving the life of the Captain on the way! I proved the Emperor wrong and I followed my dreams.

# A Small Story from the Diary of Zheng He

*West Island School, Sim, Aidan – 12*

317 ships, 28000 men and one ambitious captain. This was the state of our expedition. My strongest men are carrying tons of lavish exquisite goods from the luxurious kingdom of Calicut. We now set sail for China, our sweet loving home.

I sit in my quarters and sigh. It has been a long day. We have traveled to many foreign countries, seen many unusual things, and brought back many delightful goods. I wonder what the Emperor will have to say when he hears about this.

As I look out the window, I see a small speck. I rushed out to the bridge and demanded a closer look. The speck became a smudge, then a blob, then a ship.

The ship was made of polished, sparkling wood. Four canons were placed on the deck, two on the left and two on the right. Most intriguing was its sail, layered with beautiful silk and doused in a glorious shade of gold.

As we drew closer, I could see the ships crew. Their ragged clothes, their battle hardened looks, even a few sported fancy moustaches. Among those men was the captain. He looked like he was in his mid twenties. He wore a golden cloak with lotus flower patterns stitched on it. Long, silk-like hair sprouted out of his head, flowing wherever the wind went.

This man wasn't the average sailor. He was known by many as Chen Zuyi, the most feared pirate to have roamed the ocean blue.

He wasn't as brave as I suspected him to be. The instant he saw my vessel, his mouth formed a worryful expression. In an instant, he dashed to his ship and yelled orders at his men. I guess he didn't know what he was going against.

But Coward or not, the emperor specifically demanded that I take down this nerve-racking fleet. I rushed up to the bridge and sent the signal

"Fire!"

Canon-fire filled the air as both fleets attacked each other in hope of victory. Ships on both sides battered and bashed from incoming projectiles. I stood there watching as our brave sailors continued to fight, even when two ships had been obliterated!

Eventually, Zuyi's crew couldn't take it. They drew their ships closer to ours. Once they reached an adjacent length, they set up boarding planks and flashed out weapons.

I could see the sweaty, worried faces on my crew as they scrambled for their swords. Zuyi's men charged with aggressive faces as the battle begun.

Axes clashed, clubs smashed and men were bashed. From where I was, I could barely see the casualties, though it looked like we were winning. The number of Zuyi's men slowly decreases as the battle progressed, to a point where the captain himself joined the fight.

Having not a sword to fight with, I ordered my men to focus their attacks at Zuyi. Many of my men fell trying to injure the captain, but as more soldiers helped their comrades, I could see he was beginning to tire. Within a matter of time, he was finally injured.

I exited the bridge and went down to the wounded captain. A huge gash covered his right arm. My men could have finished him then and there, but that would be disobeying a direct order.

Instead, I smiled at the pirate's eraged face.

"Chen Zuyi, you are under arrest. Surrender your men or there will be consequences".

# The Last Adventure

*West Island School, Wun, Sin Ying – 12*

'Is that land over there? Is this for real?' We had been cruising for so long that we did not even know if the island was real or not. Eventually, we got close enough to see the people and buildings, but we had no idea where we were.

Once we docked, a man walked towards us. He was tall, has a beard and he talks in a really low voice. He also looked shocked and seemed to be introducing himself but we could not understand a word. We tried to talk back but then he picked up a stick and started to draw out a symbol on the sandy floor and we found out that there was a symbol that looks identical on the map that we found, it looked like an X with a pin on it. We were shocked and confused at the same time so we drew back a question mark in response hoping that he would understand that we wanted to ask him a question. It turned out he drew something extraordinary. It was something strange and after a few minutes, we found that it was the journey we had been through. He drew another drawing and it was a mini version of the disastrous Vacuum Vortex on the sand because we saw a tornado-like drawing. I thought he understood that we came from the mysterious land across the seemingly endless ocean.

Zheng He found him very agreeable and so a few of us followed him to his shop, where he gave us some funny-tasting tea that looked a little whiter than the tea we were used to. Then he stood on his chair and grabbed a wooden box. He unlocked it with a key and took a few coin purses out. We were not sure what it was but he kept on saying "Kalpasi, kalpasi". We figured that had to be the name of the blackish purple flower inside. It had a woody fragrance and seemed to be a local spice. So we gave him a Chinese spice called "star anise" in return. By the look of his face, he was very surprised by the taste of the spice. We tried the spice, we all think that it's very palatable. Having rested a few days and replenished our water and food, we set sail once more.

Oh, by the way, my name is Wang and I am a ghost. Yes, I know it is really strange but let me explain. About 600 years ago I was a servant to Zheng He, the person who led the voyage. One stormy night, Zheng He almost fell overboard and I sacrificed myself for his life because I knew if he had not been there, the voyage would have fallen apart and there would not have been adventures to come.

If I had known where the map would lead to was also where I would die, I would not have encouraged Zheng He to pursue this clue. It all started when we found the map in a bottle floating around the ocean. The map that was half finished and it showed an area that looked like where we were, extending to India, a continent that we have never seen on a map before. But it was odd because a triangle was coloured red not 5 nautical miles away from where we were! Knowing that it was bizarre, we still decided to go on because it seemed like an exciting adventure. What we did not know was the danger lying ahead of us in the Vacuum Vortex.

The Vacuum Vortex was nasty. 7 ships were missing and 23 ships have been severely damaged after the whole disaster. A dangerous and deadly place where you never know what will happen next. Definitely, not somewhere you would want to go to. The waves were 11 feet high and there was a high chance that you would die. It was nightmarish to think that about 1000 people died that night.

I was one of them but I wouldn't have died if Zheng He wasn't on the edge of the boat trying to save the map. He was afraid he would lose the map and without it, he would not know where he was going and would disappoint the whole fleet. I was closer to it so I reached out for the map and threw it to Zheng He. Just as he caught the map, I lost balance and fell overboard and so the necklace was the last thing I touched before getting sucked into the vortex, explaining how I ended up inside the necklace.

We were ready to set off from Beijing to find people from far, exotic countries, to make more friends and trade with them, when Cheng (another member of the fleet) shouted, "Look, what's that floating over there?" He spotted a glass bottle that looked intriguing so we retrieved it. Inside, we found a half-finished map. "Pass it to master Zheng He !" someone said. And that was how our adventures began.

Ever since I died, I have been living in Zheng He's necklace, a jade necklace so precious that he had it on him all the time. From it I can see everything happening. I can almost do anything I want, but the only thing I can never do again is to talk to them. My friends, my family and most importantly Zheng He.

I will never forget the precious time when I was with them, the time when I was smiling and having fun with my friends and family.

After we left India, we kept on sailing and sailing. We sailed for a long period of time so we started to think how long would we survive with this amount of food. Less than a week, we found that one of our horse's starved to death and later on people starts to starve and finally we got to the point where people got really sick and dizzy, we thought that we would all end our life's here but then we finally saw a big piece of land.

It was a jungle and we quickly got off the ship. Immediately, we separated ourselves into smaller groups to find food. Our group had 48 people and we found a large piece of deer meat and cooked it instantly with the fire that we made. While we were cooking, we heard a loud roar and we were so frightened that we drew out our swords and fire. A bear appeared out of nowhere and wanted to take its food back but we murdered it after a fight. After we finished with our food, we were all talking next to a tree but suddenly there was a snake that bit one of our group members and passed away. Then we found a lake so we could be hydrated, just as we put our hands in the refreshing water, there was a shadow in the lake. The moment we saw it we knew it was piranhas. We were so scared of them because they had very sharp teeths, so we replenished water and food, and captured a few animals that looked special. And we finally set sail for our homeland! Fortunately, we got there with no mishaps.

When our fleet docked, I saw my families and friends amongst all the people who came to receive us. It was heartbreaking to see their sad faces when they learnt that I was dead. That was when I really felt lonely. What really surprised me is that Zheng He gave the necklace to my mother as compensation, even though he did not know I am attached to it. It was a small measure of peace being able to stay close to my family. Over time, the necklace was passed along the family line and eventually, I ended up in the Hong Kong Maritime Museum. Being in an exhibition and being able to show people the stories behind the voyage makes me proud. It almost makes my death worth it. Almost!

# The Infinite Seas

*Yew Chung International School, Ho, Ching Hei – 11*

The rolling thunder rang in his ears as lightning came charging down onto the ship, causing the wood to crack under the pressure. The water rocked the ship violently as the rain came pouring down from the darkened skies, chaos and discord was all he can see, screams and yells was all he could hear. He was scared to death, but he couldn't move. He was completely paralyzed, unable to move a single muscle, his eyes scanned the scene, the ship was falling apart, and it was going down. Fast. The ship was slowly tilting to one side, unbalancing everything and throwing off people into the deep sea. He was starting to lose balance, and was slowly sliding down to the lower side, and all he could think of was his family. Before he knew it he was thrown off the ship and into the relentless sea.

Ming snapped awake, heavily breathing and sweat pouring down from his forehead, his breathing and heartbeat slowly settled down and managed to sit up despite his exhaustion from the interrupted sleep. His eyes adjusted to the light after he rubbed his eyes.

He went to his closet and selected his usual clothes, a white piece of rugged cloth which had the shape of a long-sleeved shirt, black long pants and his signature skull-embedded bandana. Ming put on his clothes and slid the decorative door open and with a quiet thud it closed behind him....

Ming, with silent footsteps leisurely strolled down the corridor, and eventually reached the decks, the sea was rocking the Orion gently as if it was its baby, the sun was spitting out polychrome colours, decorating the morning sky with rainbow clouds, the mild breeze blew on Ming's face as he stared out into the distance, lost in his own daydream.

He was abruptly interrupted by an ordinary seamen (lowest ranking personnel in the deck department), telling him to go to an urgent meeting and he was late for it, he rushed to the meeting but to only find everyone already sat down. He hurried to his seat and bowed to the captain before sitting down.

Drumming his fingers against the table impatiently, he whirled his head around when the captain called his name.

"Yes?" replied Ming.

"I suppose you have everything under control on the staff side of things?" asked the captain as he arched his eyebrows.

"Yes, captain," voiced Ming, "Why do you ask?"

"Well, it's because that I just wanted to make sure of things." grinned the captain, in the process, showing his golden canine tooth.

Ming pretended to smile back in return, but was forced to stop when several snickers came from the Engineering Crew because it looked like him trying to show his dirty teeth to everyone.

"The ship is still headed to India, right?" noted the captain.

"Yes. captain, it is indeed heading to Chennai," answered the Chief Navigator, Mei "According to the map that our fellow navigators have drawn, we might be able to reach Chennai an hour early."

"Good." uttered the captain "Is th—"

An ear splitting boom rang in Ming's ears, as he was blown back and was somersaulted onto the wall, he quickly regained control of his body and stood up, drawing his sword which he named "Shen Jian".



Smoke covered Ming's vision, the clang of metal and gunshots were all he could hear, he covered his nose and mouth with his head, and he bolted up the stairs. Ming sighed, a pirate ship has rammed into their ship and is starting to hijack the Orion.

Ming flew into battle, cutting down people left and right while maintaining his balance and guard. In his peripheral vision, he saw the captain. Not even hesitating for a second, he rushed to his side and started slaying people around him. Instantly causing the pirates to back down from him.

A person, bearing the tattoo of a skull on his right forehead and holding a scabbard with a sword in it and a bottle of wine. It was the infamous pirate captain, Shaw. Ming knew this was going to be a tough battle, but it had to go down no matter what. Ming gritted his teeth and charged in.

Adrenaline surged through Ming as he slid down and shot his sword upwards, the captain evaded the attack by jumping up in the air and doing a backflip before driving his sword down. Ming rolled to the side, narrowly dodging the attack. Ming grinned, now the sword was stuck inside the planks, Ming took the chance and did a butterfly kick aimed at Shaw's head. But he ducked and punched his fist upward, but

Ming spun in mid-air and blocked his fist with a single palm and kicked the pirate's shoulder.

Immediately after Ming landed onto the ground, a swarm of pirates came charging at Ming which caught him very off-guard, even with a single sword, Ming knew he will eventually get outnumbered, and he knew that meant the rest of the crew had already been taken out, so after getting hit on the head by the hilt of a sword he pretended to be fallen unconscious.

Keeping his eyes closed, he can feel his body be dragged down the rusty stairs and thrown into somewhere..... soft? After the guard's footsteps sounds echoed away, he peeked open his eyes.,

Of course, he was thrown into a cell with haystacks stacked in piles around the edges of the room, and according to what most pirates normally do, everyone might as well just be walking the plank tomorrow. Looking around him, he found that the Chief Engineer and the Chief Navigator, was thrown into jail with him.

Waking them up after slapping their faces multiple of times, he told them his grand plan to escape. Controversy was their first emotion, because the plan was pretty wild. But they eventually agreed to it anyways.

In the middle of the night, the Chief Engineer, Chun picked the lock and unlocked the door, jogging down the cells, they slowly took down the guards silently and rescued everyone. Then, they took out the backup boat that was stored below the decks which only the high-ranking crew knew it existed and hooked it to a pole. Next they put in their valuable treasures and put it on the ship so they can give it to the Indians for trade.

Unbeknownst to them, Shaw was hiding behind the wall, embarrassed and frustrated that he was defeated by Ming. He wanted to challenge him to a duel.

Ming swirled around when Shaw suddenly appeared on the doorway.

"Hi Shaw, what's up?" asked Ming

"I have come to bargain, I declare a duel against you, if I win you then will all die, but if you win then I let you all go and I will challenge you another day," announces Shaw, "Sounds good?"

"I guess, since I don't really have an option" murmured Ming as he cracked his knuckles.

Ming took three deep breaths, and imagined the beautiful sunrise which calmed him down. Shaw gave him his sword and unsheathed himself two daggers.

Ming then took a few steps back and then rushed forward, he stabbed and parried, dodged and sidestepped but the battle seemed to go on forever. He jumped and did a front flip mid-air making his feet launch downwards, Shaw dodged with ease and kicked Ming back onto a wall and threw a dagger at him. It caught him on his shoulder and Ming grunted in pain. He teared it out of his skin and threw it at Shaw in such a fast speed that it shot through the wall after Shaw narrowly dodged it.

Ming launched a series of lashes, punches and kicks, but it did nothing to Shaw.

“You’re getting tired now, are you?” taunted Shaw.

“Nope, I haven’t even used my last move yet.” smiled Ming

He did an aerial side kick and suddenly changed it into a butterfly kick, which caught Shaw off-guard knocking the wind out of him.

“I win.” said Ming as he patted Shaw’s head.

This was one of the many journeys that Ming had went through. People like him traded and gave out treasures with foreign countries. But no matter what, he will NEVER abandon anyone ever again.....

# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

*Yew Chung International School, Huang, Xixuan – 12*

I was following Emperor Zhu Di cautiously and closely as the magnificent sight shined its light upon all of us. We halted immediately, with various soldiers, merchants, and farmers attending the epic departure of Admiral Zheng He's fleet of ships, numbered up to hundreds of them. However, standing boldly in the heart of the sea of boats, was Zheng He's ship. It was huge and towering, casting a dark shadow that covered the entire block, including the golden, expensive carriage carried the emperor. Zhu Di glanced momentarily at the fleet, and I sensed amazement inside him.

There wasn't much to say except some prayers for luck. I was strolling around the ship when I overheard a conversation between the Emperor and Zheng He inside a private cabin. I froze at frowned to myself for eavesdropping, I turned to leave them in private when a part of their plan triggered me to pull myself closer. "Find him! He is the ONLY reason for this voyage!" said the Emperor with a low but extremely firm voice. "Absolutely, your majesty. Trust me on this. We shall have him back even if it takes us the end of the sea." Zheng He replied with so much calmness. Feeling satisfied, the stern looking emperor sneered, "Very well then." Zhu Di passed him a golden scroll and strode silently towards the carriage. I was puzzled by the information and the mysterious conversation that happened. Who is HE?! I took a quivering breath. What was going on?

The Emperor inspired the crew with his eloquent speech before heaving. His voice was still resonating— "Explore the world of the unknown, spread the glory of Ming Dynasty wherever you go!" I sat there, feeling solitary at the dock, watching the gigantic red hot ball of fire rising from the endless sea at the horizon. I knew it was time for the ships to take sail. I watched eagerly as the sails started to move automatically and swiftly. Slowly, we descended towards the unknown, leaving an unsettling feeling gurgling in my mind. The mystery must be unravelled.

Being the chief officer of the crew, I was busy with the operations on the dock and had no time to figure out what that conversation was about between the emperor and Admiral. Over hundreds of gigantic boats carrying soldiers, water, food, silks, farm products, and art crafts, sailing in the infinite ocean. Weeks had passed without seeing any land. The ocean was not always peaceful. It was soon when I realized everyone became nostalgia and started to be paranoid when we had to face the extreme weathers. Soon we were travelling in between of meters of tidy waves. We had no control over our boats, feeling that they were made of papers. Waves crashed and flushed away some of our smaller ones. Admiral Zheng held the flag pole and stood still in the storm, in front of the crew, assuring them confidence. When it was all over, gasps and low murmuring rippled through the night sky. Everybody felt we have survived from a trip to hell.

The next morning, it was about to rain again. I awoke with pain all over my body, and a spinning world. I stumbled out of my private cabin. So many people were fixing the oars and holes on the ship. I had to find Admiral Zheng He, and see how he was doing. I strolled around the marvellous boat. The deck was made of sturdy oak, one of the most expensive wood in China. After the disastrous storm, everything was still attached.

He was within his private cabin, silently staring at the golden scroll. He asked me to lock the door, then quickly handed over the mysterious scroll. It was strictly forbidden for me to open and read. I looked at him bemused, seeking confirmation. He nodded with trust in his eyes. I carefully opened the scroll, it was a short poem from the emperor's handwriting.

Kindness to be spread,  
Inland and Outland,  
Light the way you travel,  
Lead people to prosperity.

Hold on to your dream,  
Into the deep blue sea,  
Magnificence we shine!

“Nice poem!” I spoke respectfully. Zheng He was going to speak, but he hesitated. Lightning lit the sky, followed by a terrifying sound of thunder that shook the Earth. The lightning was bright yet pale, leaving sinister shadows on the walls. At that moment, I made another glance at the calligraphy and froze. It was a hidden message from the emperor!!! “KILL HIM!”

Who is HIM? I suddenly realized that it had to be the ex-emperor, who is Zhu Di’s nephew. It was said that the ex-emperor was immolated in the Palace before Zhu Di’s army reached the Palace. Emperor Zhu Di did not believe this story at all. He must have thought the ex-emperor had run away. It would be a threat to his authority as the ex-emperor was the designated emperor from Zhu Di’s father—the First Emperor of the Ming Dynasty.

I was utterly shocked! It was a big scandal and lie! The emperor’s glory voyage was a lie! I felt betrayed, and asked Zheng He what he would do?! He stood up, slowly walked to the window. His low murmuring spread into a wide grin. “To spread the glory of the Great Ming...”

An ear-splitting vibration shook the earth, and I tumbled down onto the floor. We arrived at a strange island, with white sands, palm trees, and tropical green plants. I got up painfully and, as I steadied myself, the ship seemed to lurch and topple. I tripped messily around and stumbled down the deck. Soft sand engulfed my shoes, and I fell flat on my face. In front of me, I saw the sailors all moving away. I stumbled quickly after them, but in only a few minutes, the shadows disappeared into the deep dark jungle ahead. My heart tried to jump out of my chest, nausea overtook me as I begun to pick up my pace down the shore. But straight to where the naked eye can see, all was barren except for sand, trees, and water.

Just as despair was about to drown me, a shadow passed as swift as a leopard and grappled onto my arm. I twirled around to see the captain of the ships. “What are you doing here?” He asked me with urgency in his tone. I noticed his sword was streaked with blood. Suddenly, my ears popped open and I heard ominous war cries. The admiral tugged at my arm, and I practically ran after him. After a tense few minutes, I saw the boats and lots of crew members and soldiers. We all went back to our ships. It was in horrible conditions, multiple holes on the deck. I noticed countless sailors were wounded, with lacerations on their shoulders, legs and arms. “What’s going on?” I roared over the sea of voices. A sailor, shirt ragged, reported back, “We were attacked by pirates. We need help!” he yelled over chaos.

I had to push through a few sailors to get to the medics. Grabbing some medicines from the equipment room, I entered the war zone. The deck was crowded and flooded with blood. I found that the bag I carried had a hole open, and it was heavier than usual. With a glance I saw a fist size glowing stone in my bag, glittering. I looked around cautiously as if I were a thief. Feeling guilty, I wanted to throw away the stone, but deep down, a voice commanded me to grasp it tightly. Courage raging in me, I grasped the relic tightly in my hand and handed all of the requested materials plead by the sailors. A red cloak was hanging in the distance. Zheng He shouted orders here and there, and there were people defending the pirates, taking back goods seized from pirates. The rock slipped from my hands onto the ground. As the shimmering rock was exposed to the bright rays of sunshine, runes were suddenly appearing as if carved onto it with a gleaming sharp knife. The characters were unreadable, however as my fingertips traced it, I felt a shredding heat in my arm and then engulfing my body. I tried to run and yell, but nobody heard me...

I came back skeptically from the dead. I was sitting on my chair at home in Hong Kong. Outside is the noisy ocean dock as usual. My body writhed in agony, alarmed by what had happened. My laptop was on, displaying on the screen, it was the history of Zheng He’s 7 voyages between 1405–1433 when he led 27,000 troops and sailors to travel over 30 countries crossing the West Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean. He built friendship and traded with countries. His trip is now called the ocean route of the silk road.

Zheng He did what he believed was the right thing to do...

# The Prince of Shanghai

*Yew Chung International School, Tai, Sum Wah – 11*

Thunder crashed down on the majestic Shanghai Princess, as her passengers and crew fled for their lives. Sailors hastily unloaded their treasured cargo of gold, gems and silks to offload excess weight, while they frantically screamed for their own lives. The smaller ships in the fleet were gone, swallowed by the ginormous waves and blustering wind. Only the Princess and her crew were left to their fate on this dreadful, stormy night. People were trying to calm each other down, but to no avail! There was now a huge, gaping hole in the hull of this magnificent ship. As the Shanghai Princess began to list, many sailors and passengers scrambled to jump overboard in order to survive. Crack, crack, crack... went the ship. The Princess slipped deeper and deeper into the dark, unknown depths below. Heading straight towards the Shanghai Princess was yet another monstrous wave. Those who had escaped overboard into the icy waters were either scrambling for their lives, or had already drowned. The cruel wave enveloped everything in its grasp, including the passengers and the crew. Almost everything! The journey was a total disaster. Only one survivor was picked up by a passing ship — only that one survivor had been spurred to tell the tale.

Back on land in Shanghai, the sad news had finally reached Emperor Jin. “What do you mean, the Shanghai Princess has sunk? Impossible! What about the treasures? The crew? The passengers?” roared Emperor Jin. “I’m sorry, Master, but it has been rumoured that the Princess has gone. Almost everything has gone, except for one sole survivor who was rescued, whom we are still waiting to speak to. The whole fleet of three ships went down in that terrible storm everyone has been talking about,” said the messenger.

Emperor Jin, dazed and lethargic, lounging on his magnificent throne, which had been passed down for generations, now looked up and sighed. He was too numb to speak. Jin had been convinced that the Shanghai Princess and her fleet’s journey to India would be a success, since he had received reports that all was going well until that terrible day. Jin was agonised by the horrific news. The huge loss of life, as well as the loss of his much treasured ship, the Shanghai Princess.

Finally, Emperor Jin mumbled, “Very well, I suppose in a few months, we’ll just send another ship to carry our trading supplies to India, via Canton. The obedient messenger bowed, and scurried out through the palace gates. Emperor Jin sat sadly, mumbling to himself, “The first fleet lost in a crash. The second fleet lost to pirates. The third fleet along with my beloved Shanghai Princess lost in a storm. Am I being punished? What are we going to do? My fleet is drastically shrinking.”

That night, Emperor Jin was sitting on his bed, and staring at his bedroom door. He wondered, “Why do our quests keep failing? Have all my father’s magical stories of his amazing sea voyages been untrue? Have all the victorious acts in my father’s life that he had described in such detail to me, been lies?” Jin quietly rolled over and snuggled down in his bed. So many thoughts were spinning round and round in his head. He was dizzy. Jin couldn’t help but wonder if he really was the “chosen one” to be the Son of Heaven.

“Jin! Why are you still awake?” whispered the sweet voice of a girl. Jin rolled over to catch the sight of a young woman who he now recognised as Annchi, the servant girl. As Annchi neared Jin, he sat up. “I can’t stop thinking about what happened yesterday, Annchi.” Annchi looked at him, confused. “What happened yesterday?” inquired Annchi. Shaking his head in disbelief, he suddenly realised that she hadn’t heard about the terrible fate of the Shanghai Princess. “Oh, you haven’t heard?” exclaimed Jin. “Yesterday, we lost the Shanghai Princess and her fleet to another storm. All the expensive supplies of gold and other treasures we were sending to my second brother, Jun’s, kingdom of Canton, which were to be forwarded to our friends in India, have gone, along with all the ship’s crew and passengers.” Annchi bowed sadly but politely and left the room. Jin lay anxiously, tossing and turning. He turned towards the door to see if Annchi was still there. She wasn’t. He gradually dozed off, thoughts spinning around in his head.

Time flew by. Before they knew it, four months had passed. “Brother Jin, the ship is about to sail! Hurry!” cried Li Jie, Jin’s second brother. Li Jie was the owner of the Shanghai Prince, which was the sister ship of the Shanghai Princess. The Shanghai Prince was the second most magnificently built ship in China, after the Shanghai Princess. The Shanghai Prince, the Shanghai Princess and a third ship, the Duchess of Shanghai, had all been built by the Emperor of China for his three sons, Jin, Li Jie and Jun.

All crew were on board, and supplies were uploaded, ready for sailing to Canton. However, due to the past misfortunes at sea, everyone was nervous. As he gazed worryingly into the dark sky above, Jin wondered to himself, “Would this end as a deadly catastrophe, too?”

Finally, off they sailed, the magnificent Shanghai Prince and his fleet of two small ships. Off they went on their adventure.

Through calm waters they sailed, as night drew in. The stars shone brightly in the night’s sky, waiting to guide them on their way. All of a sudden, chaos erupted on board. The Prince was being invaded by pirates. The crew were shaken from their sleep, they grabbed their sharp swords, and bravely fought off their attackers. Luckily, the crew outnumbered the pirates, and all peace was restored. Their journey continued and their wounds healed. Three more nights to go. Through calm seas and bright skies they continued on their long adventure – until they came upon a monstrous storm. “Would this journey be a failure, too?” wondered Jin to himself, worryingly.

“All men on board!” yelled Jin. “Let’s prepare for our fate. Whatever that might be!” As the Prince tossed from side to side and the winds grew stronger by the minute, they all struggled to remove the sails and secure everything on deck, such as their food, their weapons, themselves and even Jin himself. Then, they sat. They waited. The thunder roared and lightning struck as the ginormous waves enveloped the Shanghai Prince. “Help us survive this night,” Jin prayed to his father. And they waited.

As the wind weakened, the sun rose from her sleep and calm took hold, a wounded and weary crew reappeared on deck to assess the damage and counted the heads. “Everyone had survived!” cried a sailor. The damage was severe but repairable, and on limped the Shanghai Prince for one more day and one more night.

“Land ahoy! Land ahoy!” yelled a sailor in delight, as green land was spotted in the distance. “All men on board!” yelled Jin jubilantly. “We’ve made it! Finally, my brother’s kingdom!” The crew hoisted their sails while their adrenaline pumped, as they headed for the safety of dry land.

As the Shanghai Prince arrived safely at the harbour of Canton, carrying his crew and his treasures, he was greeted with warmth, love and cheers from the huge crowd on land. Jun beamed with pride, as he hugged his brother, Jin, and welcomed everyone to his magnificent kingdom.

On entering Jun’s palace, a pleasant surprise greeted them. Standing there beside a cherry blossom in the palace garden was Hong, the only survivor of the Shanghai Princess. Jin stood by the gates, speechless. As Jin neared Hong, he wondered if he was hallucinating. However, as he got closer, he saw that Hong was really there! Jin looked at Jun and smiled warmly. Jun was very grateful that someone had survived the nasty storm.

That night, while the treasured cargo was being uploaded onto the Duchess of Shanghai, ready for her voyage to India, everyone else was invited into the palace for a celebration.

The next morning, it was time to leave Canton. Jin and Jun had a final embrace, and as the majestic Prince of Shanghai departed for Shanghai, everyone on land was waving and wishing them good luck. The journey back to Shanghai was a safe one, so a week later, the Prince of Shanghai docked at the harbour of Shanghai, and Hong was sent back to his family. Emperor Jin was happy and relieved that he had finally completed his mission.

What new journeys await them?

# A Sailor

*Ying Wa College, Au, Kit Sang Keith – 13*

“Come here, my dear grandson, do you want grandpa to tell you a story – a story about me when I was young? ....Yes? .....Good.” An old man was sitting on his bamboo chair, with his grandson sitting on his thigh. The grandson was gazing at him, dying to learn about his story. He took a deep breath, cruised to the past and searched for one of his unforgettable adventures. It didn’t take him long to find one, as he could never forget those days when he was a member of one of the greatest fleets in the history of the Ming Dynasty.

“Well...I remember those days when I was still young, I longed to be a sailor. Being on a journey sounded amazing to me. I loved to be a captain when my friends and I played. I grew up and I never forgot my dream even though I knew that the Emperor at that time didn’t allow any ship to sail. My dream came true when I was 20. One day, I saw a poster on the street and a lot of people were listening to an announcement made by an officer. I went out and listened to what he said. He said that the Emperor was recruiting strong and brave men to work in the fleet for upcoming voyages! I was very happy that I immediately grabbed a poster from the officer and filed in my application. I still remember how excited I was then and I still kept the poster that he gave me!.... Here you go, be careful not to break it!.... I prepared for the voyage every day and waited for the day to get onboard.”

“I remember the day when everyone went on board. All of us were very excited about the journey and as happy as birds which had just learned how to fly. Our families were sad but also proud of their sons or husbands for the honour to be one in this grand journey. Well, perhaps even soldiers setting off wouldn’t get such a lot of people to send them off! On the first few days of the journey, every one of us were energetic and we all thought that we were arriving at the destiny soon. But soon, people started to become loath to sail because of sea sick and the boring work like maintaining the ship. One day, the captain of the fleet, grand director Cheung invented a game which was about sailing. The game was great fun and a lot of us were very keen on it. We regained our passion and interest in sailing. A few days later, we eventually arrived.

“Things aren’t easy for the first time. When we first arrived in Java, we were attacked by the locals there. As I remember, there was a war and one of the rulers captured some of our crew. Our captain went to ask for their release in the name of the Ming Emperor. It worked and the ruler was afraid and returned our crew mates. It was not a good experience for most of us but we still carried on our journey. We sailed to a lot of islands around Java. We didn’t gain much from those places. After being attacked by the natives in Java, we started to pay more attention on safety and tried to avoid fights with the locals. The days were peaceful until we received an appeal from some of the overseas Chinese, who said that a pirate, Chen Zuyi had been robbing them for a long time. Our captain decided to fight against the pirates. Most of us were afraid and didn’t really want to fight. But after receiving the message from the Emperor, that we would get rewarded if we fought against the pirates, most of us fought very bravely. We soon defeated the pirates and brought Chen back to the Emperor for execution. It is so lucky that the fight didn’t last long and none of us got hurt. We defeated the pirates in just a few days and I still can’t believe that I did that. The pirates were very scary at first but we soon discovered that they fought with no plans and some of them were even arguing or were forced to fight. So we fought strategically and burnt their boats when they were not paying attention. We all got awarded a lot after the fight. I am still keeping some of the cloths that the Emperor gave me today!”

“The first voyage ended after we defeated the pirates. Everyone went back home for a rest and some of us decided to retire from sailing and didn’t join the second voyage. The second voyage started soon but I didn’t go sailing. Instead I stayed at home and took a rest. I joined the third voyage which was around four years later. We were all excited to go on a journey again. We prepared a lot better based on our past experience and the crew members were all well-trained. Although we were a lot more prepared compared to our first and second journey, we still met a lot of problems during this voyage. Honestly I was quite flattered when I realized that after the first two voyages in which we represented the Emperor to visit a lot of countries, we got respected and treated well wherever we went. I remember when we arrived at Malacca, the captain followed the order of the Ming Emperor and helped crowning the leader of Malacca king. Although Siam ruled Malacca, the king of Siam didn’t attack us because they were afraid that the Ming Emperor would fight back. As a gift, Malacca gave us six pieces of huge agarwood; I had never seen such huge agarwood in my life! We were happy and brought them back to the Emperor after the journey. The Emperor felt exalted when he saw them.”

“Things turned unfavourable when we arrived at Ceylon. The moment we arrived, we felt that some of the people there were very unfriendly to us. A few days later, our captain ordered us to leave because he thought that it might be dangerous if we stayed long. Some of our crew members didn’t really agree but we still left Ceylon earlier than planned. Our captain was right as we really got attacked when we visited Ceylon again on our way back home. When we arrived at Ceylon, the king invited us to visit the capital. Our captain accepted and we went to the capital for a banquet. Everything seemed fine at first, but suddenly, some soldiers came in and attacked us. Many of us were captured and put in custody. Our captain, Cheung He, judging that the guards could not be strong enough to stop us from escaping, led us to fight heroically against them. We succeeded to escape and sneak into the royal palace. Our captain sent a messenger to link up with those of our crew members who had escaped in the earlier fight. We then joined force, attacked the royal city and captured the King of Ceylon. No one dared to stop us as we had their king in our hands. We brought him back to the Ming Emperor. It was generally agreed that the Ceylon King should be executed. But the Ming Emperor was magnanimous to have him released and let him return to Ceylon. How benevolent and eminent the Ming Emperor was!

“Although I was one of the heroes in this victory, my leg was broken and since then I can’t really walk well. I planned to have another voyage to Malacca, but due to my limping condition, I decided to stay at home. My career of sailing wasn’t long but I experienced a lot. Grandson, do you want to be a sailor like me when you grow up?”

The old man looked at his grandson. His grandson looked at him with curiosity and admiration. He would love to teach his grandson how to be a sailor and hoped that one day, his grandson will stand on a ship leading a huge crew and sail around the world, with his story beside him, wherever he goes.



# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

*Ying Wa College, Chan, Ho Ming Oscar – 13*

## Year 1407

Dear Diary,

You know I only write exciting new tales in you, and so it's been quite a long time since my last writing. It's the 2<sup>nd</sup> of October now, we've just returned, finally, safe and sound to Nanjing, after my journey with Admiral Zhenghe. I've grown a moustache you see. I couldn't help it – I've been so busy every day on the seas that I no longer have the heart or time to shave my face.

Still, you would have never experienced what I did in the returning journey weeks ago. It was a gripping tale, Diary.

In an absolutely silent, pitch-dark night, with only the slightly falling of the waves against the hull of our ships docked beside the land to be heard, twenty-seven thousand people on the ships, chosen specifically by Admiral Zhenghe, were patrolling every single spot on the ships. In fact, I was one of them. I was told that a pirate, Chen Zuyi and his fleet were to launch a sneak attack on our treasure fleet. As I was just starting to enjoy the fresh, salty atmosphere on the coastline, I could just make out a faint figure of ships approaching extremely slowly on the horizon. Alarms were immediately raised under my command, and everyone was instantly alert. The pirates might be thinking they already succeeded in their attack, but then came a roar of command from Admiral Zhenghe. Our ships suddenly blazed with light, and I could just make out the shocked faces of the pirates. Then shock turned to fury. Their leader Chen Zuyi gave out a scream of frustration, then commanded his fleet to retreat. It was too late for that, though. We never back up, as Admiral Zhenghe had said, and so we proceeded forward, with the beats of the drums supporting us through the night.

Before they could turn their ships around, we'd already leaped onto their ships, and started a ferocious battle, much more brutal than what I had imagined to be. Lashing here and there with my sharpened spear, I had killed no less than twenty pirates. After the tiring battle, we'd killed over five thousand pirates, and captured the three heads of the attack, soon to be beheaded, I overheard back in Nanjing.

It was my first battle in years, far bloodier than I had ever imagined. I'm just happy to be safe and sound back in my homeland!

Relaxed,  
Li Mingxun

## Year 1410

Dear Diary,

It's been years since I've written to you, but I'm still on my third journey on the seas with Admiral Zhenghe. The experience I'm going to introduce today was finally, a fruitful and joyful one. As proclaimed the Commander of Diplomacy, my role was fully highlighted throughout this experience.

We landed on Manchuria, in the South Sea. We established an official warehouse there as a transit base for the fleet materials, and I must say, Diary, it looked genuinely impressive after all the hard labouring work from the workers. Of course, we were trespassing on other's land. We were sure to give away something return, in order to repay them for the land they had so willingly provided. And so we presented a double silver seal and a crown gown to the king. Not to mention other gifts like silk-made objects, a golden phase jade belt, the ceremonial plaque, the pommel horse and much more precious objects that were under my personal care during the whole journey. As I handed them over to Zhenghe to present to the Manchuga king, I couldn't help feeling proud of keeping it intact during the truly wobbly journey. I am the key of the maintenance of the friendship between China and Manchuria!

We'd finished our massive construction at the end. Admiral Zhenghe, always with sharp eyes, a flat chin and a pointed nose, along with the long red cloak that always billowed behind him, glanced down at our work from our guarding drum tower with apparent please and satisfaction.

It's been such an exhausting month, Diary, but I'm always happy to assist our country. It's late; I should get to sleep...

Yawning,  
Li Mingxun

### Year 1415

Dear Diary,

I'm so eager to pick up my pen once more, and just relax to feel the joy of revealing my secrets with ink. It's been such a journey, too much excitement that I've had enough of the tension I've got to bear every day on the seas. I feel like this is the best way for encouraging myself to carry on. Now, Diary, allow me to divulge my second battling experience on the seas since the capture of Chen Zuyi.

Our fleet arrived in Sumatra on the eleventh month, in Indonesia. Admiral Zhenghe ordered an ambassador to discover essential information in order for us to safely "trespass" on Sumatra's land. We received news on the third day and were shocked to find a war raging within the land. The son of the Sumatra king, Su Gan was currently attempting to kill the king to gain control of the land. In order to still fulfill our emperor's wish to spread the Chinese culture, we gave presents to the Sumatra king, Zairu Abidin. Evidently, the son was furious that the newcomers not only supported the enemy, but also did not give any of the presents from China to him. You'd never have guessed how Su Gan reacted to this incident. Su Gan actually raised a navy of over ten thousand to show his anger, as we heard from the ambassador!

I'm happy to say that we had the upper hand throughout the whole battle on the seas. Imagine our great ships combined with Zairu's army! It's what we call, "flowers on the brocade". I played a great role in the battle, commanding our shipmates to attack at various directions despite the fact that we already lost directions on the awfully dizzy deck. We didn't dare to stop until we heard the news that our Admiral had Su Gan, with his wife and children captured. I must say, the ropes that were tightened around him were the thickest I've ever seen in my entire life. I assume the extra protection was provided upon Zairu's request!

Enough of battling. I was assigned as the same post of diplomacy commander on the largest ship of the fleet, with more than 140 metres long! My wife is going to be really proud of me once I arrive home!

Feeling much better,

Li Mingxun

### Year 1433

Dear Diary,

I must say, this might be the last time I will write to you while on the vast seas. It's going to be the end of the great journeys I've had with Admiral Zhenghe. I wish I could give him my most sincere gratitude for his leadership in the journey, but it's too late now...

We arrived in Guri on the fourth month. The king welcomed us in a great fashion, with over five hundred warriors stationed on the bank where our ship moored. I was stunned by the widely spread fame of China and our fleet's arrival. In addition to the silk fabrics and porcelain, we also gave out tea, lacquerware, copper coins, camphor and metal products. Of course we had something in return, including ivory products and heaps of jewellery, flashing winking smiles under the sunshine. Admiral Zhenghe was very happy with the presents, and enjoyed the feast with the King of Guri thoroughly, walking out with a red face after drinking too much!

We were about to leave for our homeland when it happened. The doctors said he died on Guri due to too much stress. I didn't believe the doctors until I saw the white cloth covering his body. As a feeling of numbness and dread filled my body, I slowly uncovered the sheet, and my tears came dripping uncontrollably. My heart filled with sadness, not only because I didn't get in time to thank him for his care and leadership to the whole crew, but also most importantly, his contribution to the spread of Chinese culture. My deepest gratitude to you, Admiral, and may you rest in peace.

Sadly,

Li Mingxun

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"Now that's my story, my children." I said to my grandchild, sitting on my wooden chair. "Throughout my diary, you should've understood Zhenghe's contribution for the safety to our homeland, and the spread of Chinese culture in Ming Dynasty."

"How long have you been keeping this diary, Grandpa Li?" asked my grandson, sitting beside the duck pond.

"Well, it's the year of Ming Xianzong now..." I grunted, waving my handheld fan in thought, "so it's been thirty years, my child."

"Wow! Bring me to the beach again, Grandpa, and let's row the boat you've built me!"

"Alright, bring the compass."

"What compass?"

"The one I've left over on Zhenghe's ship! It was the best of its time, with the needle floating on water..."

# The Ming Treasure Voyages Retold

*Ying Wa College, Chau, Yat Sunday – 12*

When I opened my eyes for the first time, I was really stunned. There were loads of people walking around me, holding sharp and dangerous objects such as hammers and chisels, all deadly heavy or sharp. When one comes forwards holding some seriously terrifying tools and implements. I immediately tried to run, but soon discovered myself to be unable to move at all. I switched to pleading with my eyes the best I could as the menacing man stepped forward, and he acted like as if he doesn't even acknowledge me at all. When he finally brings down the chisel, I didn't feel any pain, more like a feeling of being completed. While I was still trying to figure out what was happening to me, the man was already done. I immediately felt chains lifting me up and over, closer and closer to a humongous ship under construction, under the name The Voyager. As I was slowly but surely connected to the prow, my identity finally hit me: I am the figurehead of a ship!

A few days after, I had ear dropped about what I was created for. I was made to help an explorer of sorts, Zheng He to travel around the world and help the natives worldwide out by gifting them tools and knowledge! How great of a destiny is that! I can't wait to start my journey! Also, the ship I was connected onto, which I had started to see as part of myself, due to the fact that since I was connected to the prow, I was able to manipulate many different mechanics within the ship itself, like the direction of the rudder and the opening and closing of the portholes. I played workers within me by opening portholes near them in the night, flapping the sails and scaring the christ out of them. Although I was quite adapted to this form, I still longed for the ability to move freely though, which would be like the cherry on a cake for me.

Finally, after months of long wait, I was finally prepared to sail the seas! I was also introduced to the crew who would be working with me for the next couple of years. Some of them were so stinky and disgusting, I was prepared to roll myself a little and throw them headfirst into the vast seas just to be rid of them for next couple of years! Some of them, including Zheng He himself, was much more clean. Well, at least they didn't reek of rotting fish and impure salt! Soon after, I was loaded onto some sort of a ramp, and was rolled into the sea with a great splash! I was so excited to start my adventures that immediately after the crew got on, I unfurled my three gigantic sails, causing quite some inconvenience to most of the crew and set off to our amazing journeys ahead.

The first few months went by in a flash. It turned out that my pilot was completely useless, and slept through a lot of time while he should have been on duty, including the dangerous times while we were travelling through shallow waters, which always yields the dangerous possibility of hitting a reef, even without an unconscious pilot. So, it was often up to me to shift the rudder of the ship just a slight bit to guide us out of those troublesome reefs unharmed and in one piece. Actually, technically nothing can harm me as I am not actually human, but let's get to that later on. Soon, we arrived at our first stop, which wasn't much of a smooth trip, either for me or for the crew.

Our first stop was at a weird place called champa. It was quite a beautiful place, with glittering lakes and animals calling out to each others, which created quite a comfortable and peaceful background. That was the case, until the locals ran towards us, wielding spears, bows and for some reason, even a weird looking tube that the natives carry on their belts in crude, wooden boxes. When a stinky and apparently drunk crewmate tried to calm them down, but in our language, Chinese, the sounds that he made somehow agitated the natives even further, and the native wielding the tube raised the tube to his mouth and shot a dart towards the drunken sailor, who was so drunk that he didn't even flinch when the dart hit him. Mere seconds later, the dart proved itself to be fatal, and the crewmate collapsed over the railing and down towards the natives, who drag him far away, possibly to their camp. Then, the natives raged full on war with us, chucking spears or grappling hooks, climbing up my hull to attack the crew while I tried to shake them all off in vain. Instead, I tried to slam porthole doors into faces while they are passing by on ropes, which does stun and drop most of the hostile locals into the sea. After the local's attack was repelled, we immediately went to attack, with me turning the onboard cannons towards the native's directions and the crew putting in heavy cannonballs into them and lighting them on fire. Soon, the natives were running for their lives, back to where they came from.

Although we had a really rough start on the voyage, I didn't sustain much damage, and we were able to continue on. The other locals from other places were much more friendlier, and were happy to see us come and for us to help! We didn't have much of a problem while visiting other nations ever since. Years later,

we had finally gone to all of them required location requested by the great emperor himself, and were ready to go back home. Truthfully, I was also pretty tired after this long journey, but still, it doesn't justify the crewmate on lookout not seeing a huge pirate ship coming straight for us.

When Zheng He finally saw the pirate ship coming towards us, it was already too late. The pirates had all loaded up their weapons, and knowing about all the wealth and treasures on me, were more than willing to attack us. As cannonball after cannonball was shot towards us, the crew could only scamper underdeck from terror. I was just barely able to keep myself in one piece as gunpowder is rained all over me. In the meantime, I also rapidly retreated further and further into the wide river that would lead us to safety as my crew covered inside, to frightened to move or even fight back. After an agonizing hour of evading cannonballs when possible and going inwards. Our help finally arrives, in the form of four Chinese warships decked out with all kinds of weapons and a war-hardened crew who actually knew how to fight against pirates. The resulting fight was bloody and horrible, even with the odds now being in our favor. In the end, there was one Chinese battleship badly damaged, and the pirate ship, along with its crew was sunk into the riverbed, never to be seen again. Still, I had been through a lot, with holes all over my hull, and a burning stern. Using all my strength, I managed to hold myself together just for long enough for everything to be unloaded and everyone to get to shore. Then, I, out of strength and riddled with holes, finally broke apart, and my parts either sunk into the riverbed or washed away with the current. It wasn't a bad way to go, but at least I had finished my job. That was the last thought I had before me, reduced to only a figurehead, sunk into the riverbed, and my vision went pitch black.

Days after my own destruction, I awoke once again to see myself hooked in yet another set of chains, hanging in mid-air and moving. In my confusion, I look around, just to see my new destination: a brand new ship, built just like its predecessor and sporting the proud name The Voyager Two, and I smile happily to myself. There was far more adventures for me to go on.

# The Voyage of Zheng He To West

*Ying Wa College, Cheng, Daniel – 12*

The story all begins here. Well, you see there is a man named Zheng He(1371–1433 or 1435),he was born during the Yuan Dynasty, lived during the Ming Dynasty and he was a mariner, explorer, diplomat, fleet, admiral and eunuch. But actually do you know that his name wasn't Zheng He at first it was Ma He. Ma He now we known as Zheng He was born in a Muslim family, he had an older brother and four sisters. But then the Ming armies arrived to Yunnan (his hometown) and the General Fu Youde saw him and captured him. At there he was sent to serve in the home of Zhu Di, the Prince of Yan also later known as the Yongle Emperor. At that time when he was a servant, he gained the trust of Zhu Di and also Zhu Di was 11 years older than Ma. Later when Zhu Di grew older he renamed Ma as Zheng He and also San Bao it means that three jewel or three protection. Then Zheng received a proper education.

The first time that Zheng He began his voyage to west was 1405–1407 but we don't the reason why he began his voyage. The area he travelled to was The Indian Ocean but Chinese called it The Western Ocean so he went to the west. Also he was the leader of the whole fleet. In the first three voyages he went to Southeast Asia, India and Sri Lanka. In his voyages he gave gifts to the locals where he visited, such as: Silk, porcelain, gunpowder and others. But he also received some weird goods like: zebras. He travelled from the mouth of the Yangtze River to Vietnam. His fleet had 317 ships and 27000 men. And the ships carried porcelain and silk. And he had the largest ship ever made. Also he defeated a famous pirate in Malacca.

The fourth to seventh voyages went to the east African. He visited Ayutthaya, Malaya, Sumatra, Sri Lanka. 1413–15 he went to Bengal, India, Hormuz and Aden. 1417–19 he travelled to Brunei and East Africa until his last voyage and died at sea.

# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

*Ying Wa College, Cheung, Jerry – 13*

It was late at night, and the ship was sailing down the deep and vast ocean. He sat there with a frown, and went to rest.

Wang was a fisherman living in the Ming dynasty. He had lived an average life, and had nothing special at all. He was the least well known in the whole village, and only had a few childhood friends.

It was morning. Wang woke up at the screech of the rooster and carried out his daily routine. A quick shower at the river next to his house that led to the sea. He then walked to his farm which was about a few kilometres away as he was afraid of the other villagers taking his crops. Even though he didn't care about money, he still worked until dawn and make sure his crops were at top quality as he wanted to provide nice food at a cheap price to the villagers. He was walking back to his cottage when a man caught his attention. The man was in his fifties, and he was waving a sign and shouted, "Sailor wanted! Voyage to the unknown land and even treasures!"

Wang was lying in bed that night. He couldn't fall asleep. He had signed up as a sailor and was going to set sail the next week. The following days, Wang sold his farm for a great sum of money and buried the money in a chest right next to his cottage. He kept the cottage just in case the journey turned out to be a scam or failure. He finally built the courage to see his childhood friends and said farewell just in case.

He tied up his bag and started his walk towards the pier. He saw the ginormous ship docked there, and it made him even more excited. The boat was a hundred metres long and the sails were folded up neatly. The man he had seen yesterday when going back home greeted him.

"Greetings, sailor. Please come with me." he said. Wang followed the man and walked towards the walkway to the boat. When he was about to board the boat, he looked back at the village one last time. He spotted his house at a distance far away. '*One day, I'll come back for you.*' he thought. He stood there with massive belongingness to the village and totally forgot about boarding the ship.

"First time, eh? Don't worry. You will see this place again one day." the man said. Wang woke up from his daydream and followed the man to his own cabin. "Take a stroll around the boat and familiarise yourself with this place. You wouldn't want to get lost! All the sailors will meet at the deck at dawn and we will set sail at night."

He didn't have much to unpack much as he sold most of his stuff. He then took a stroll around the ship. There were a lot of cannons by the ship's windows to protect them from pirates when out at sea. He also noticed a small shooting range on the second floor of the deck. Some people were practicing archery there. Wang knew nothing about archery so he walked away. The ship was huge, and by the time Wang finished exploring the ship, it was already night time.

Wang quickly ran up the stairs to get to the meeting at the deck. Lucky for him, the meeting had just started. The captain of the ship was called Zheng He. This expedition was dedicated to search for land in the western ocean and possibly build civilization there. The crew then had dinner at the deck and they cut the rope connected to the bridge. After a whole week, they finally set sail.

The first few days were fine, and Wang stopped being the shy person he used to be. He knew that if he won't make it back, these people might just be his only friends. He met a man called Han at the pantry who used to be a farmer too. They drank wine and often chatted with each other. They became close friends after only a few days, and Wang felt glad that he had made a friend after isolating himself for so many years. They encountered a few ships, but they meant no harm.

One particular morning, Wang was sleeping when he suddenly heard cries outside his cabin. "All sailors wake up! Pirate attack!" He woke up with a start. He immediately got dressed and rushed to the deck to see what was happening. A large ship closed by, and Wang looked closer at the ship. The other ship's sailors were all dressed in rags and were holding knives on one hand. They did not look friendly. One brave sailor started yelling words at the ship. Unfortunately, he immediately got shot down by an archer, redecorating the nearby planks with a shade of crimson. Wang was startled. He had never seen anyone die as he lived most of his life alone. He immediately ran down the stairs and reached for the cannons. However, they were all occupied and were being used. Han was using one of the cannons, and he successfully shot down the hull of the other ship. The pirate ship started sinking. Wang felt sorry, even though they were criminals.

During the attack, the ship had somehow only took damage from arrows. Zheng He sent some of the crew down to pick the arrows of the ship and store them in the shooting range for future use. Wang picked the arrows off while Han held the rope tied around his waist. After a whole afternoon, the crew successfully picked all the arrows off. The number of arrows they picked had a total of a few hundred, which was a lot at that time: In the middle of the sea with no supply refill.

A few days became a few months, and they encountered few pirate attacks. They won all of them, but part of the ship took damage from cannons. They had a mechanic on board, so they fixed the ship with parts scavenged from the battles. The pirates started to look foreign, meaning they were closer and closer to other civilizations.

It was late at night and the ship was sailing down the deep vast ocean. Wang sat there with a frown. He was very tired that day, so he went to rest. Just as he fell asleep, he heard a loud crash coming from the deck. He woke up and rushed to the deck. He was shocked to see tentacles dangling from the above.

Wang rushed up to the fence and saw a huge octopus, or a Kraken, because of its mind blowing size. He rushed back down to the cabin and woke everybody up to face this huge beast. The crew fired everything at it, but it wasn't much use. They ran out of cannonballs, and all they had were arrows. The kraken started picking off crews one by one. Wang remembered chatting with Han one day, and he said that the most sensitive part of an animal is the eye. He didn't have much time to tell the crew, so he closed his eyes and prayed for the perfect shot. He opened his eyes and fired at it. The Kraken made a weird sound and sank down into the ocean, never to be seen again.

A few weeks passed, and they started running out of food. Just as Zheng He wanted to give up all hope, they found land. There were natives there and they provided food source to the crew. The natives gave a map of the island to the crew and they set sail back to China.

Wang got off the ship with Han. He walked the path he had known for so long with his friend. At last, the road led to a branch and he parted with Han. He went back to the cottage alone. It was still there. The voyage made him rich, but he preferred a simple life.

At last, he was home, sweet home.

# The Battle of Palembang

*Ying Wa College, Cheung, Ka Yui Anthony – 12*

Zheng He, Admiral of the seven Ming Treasure Voyages, was considered to be the greatest Chinese Admiral of all time. He led seven voyages across the Indian Ocean, reaching as far as Africa and the Middle East. His successful attempts of far-reaching ocean voyages effectively made the Ming Navy the supreme naval force along the Asian coast. He and his men fought various battles, including the conquer of the Sinhalese Kotte Kingdom and many other minor skirmishes. The Battle of Palembang was probably the most famous of all.

On a cold, rainy day in 1407, Admiral Zheng was sailing along the peaceful Javan coast in his Chinese treasure ship. The ship was the largest among the Chinese fleet, a gigantic nine-masted vessel which served as Admiral Zheng's headquarters at sea.

He was standing on the port side of the longship when the small, eight-oared patrol boat slowly approached. The helmsman raised a mirror and flashed three times. Green, white, green. Asking for permission to board. Raising his head to look at the captain of the treasure ship, he shouted, "Permission granted!" The captain flashed twice. Double green. Seeing the signal, the patrol boat accelerated and sped towards the larger ship.

Within minutes a lieutenant sat facing him, along with a local man in his forties.

"What's up again?" asked Admiral Zheng warily. He had received thirteen pointless reports earlier in the day and he was quite certain that this would be the same.

"This is ... an informant from, um, Palembang... sir," stammered the lieutenant.

"What's your name?" Admiral Zheng asked calmly.

"Shi Jinqing, sir," came the surprisingly confident answer.

"I am a fisherman who found a new life at Palembang," he continued. "I am here to supply some important information that might lead to Pirate Chen's demise. He has been raiding our coasts for years and the world will be better off without him. I found that the pirate would be heading our the Musi River to raid Kota Pangkalpinang. He will pass through Selat Bangka on his way."

"Thank you, Mr. Shi," replied Admiral Zheng. Then he turned to the lieutenant, "Bring Mr. Shi to a guest room. He would be safe there."

"Yes, sir!"

The sun was already setting when Admiral Zheng returned to his private cabin and summoned his second-in-command, Admiral Wang Jinghong.

"I suppose you've already heard about the informant Shi?" inquired Admiral Zheng.

"Yes," replied Admiral Wang, in an equally flat tone.

"Good. I plan to destroy the pirates on their way. At the open waters of Natuna Sea, perhaps."

Admiral Wang nodded in agreement. It was good thinking. This way, they could use their advantage in numbers to the largest extent.

"How do you plan to lure them out? They aren't stupid, you know."

"Easy. We'll have you take one squadron of Fuchuan warships and three squadrons of patrol ships. Dress them up as traders and the pirates will start pursuing. They're pirates and that's what they do."

"Then it's settled," said Admiral Wang, this time a bit more confidently.

Admiral Zheng would be interested, but not surprised, to know that Pirate Chen Zuyi's mind was going through almost the same lines.

Chen Zuyi knew what the cursed informant Shi Jinqing told them. There was no way they would go undetected this time. They might as well give up the raid of Kota Pangkalpinang unless they wanted to engage in direct, frontal combat with Admiral Zheng.

No, wait! They don't need to fight the Chinese directly. The tip of the pirate's lips curled up in a wicked smile.



Admiral Wang and his small fleet of Fuchuan warships and patrol boats were already lying in wait at Selat Bangka, the mouth of Musi River, hoping that the pirates would be naive enough to fall for the trap. It wasn't long before the first pirate ship emerged out of Musi River, heading northeast towards Kota Pangkalpinang. Within minutes all seventeen ships were out of the river and the lead ship signaled a couple of flashes. At once, the pirates changed their formation into a menacing spearhead, with the lead ship at the tip, racing towards the "traders", masts bellowing in the wind.

They were spotted.

"In oars!" shouted Admiral Wang. The soldiers shoved their oars the oar lockers and heaved at once. Their orders were to get out as quickly as possible and leave the fighting part to Admiral Zheng with his main fleet.

Now all eighteen "traders" were speeding north towards Natuna Sea, where the main fleet was posed. The seventeen pirates, led by Chen Zuyi himself, made no move to shorten the distance between the "traders" and themselves.

Strange, thought Admiral Wang. That's not how pirates were supposed to behave. But it wouldn't hurt to continue on the old plan anyway.

So the thirty-five ships, sailing in the same pattern all the way, finally reached the ambush at Natuna Sea. Admiral Wang then flashed another signal to the other ships. Red, red, white. Scatter. Seventeen of the eighteen ships changed course instantly, two of them even beating into the wind.

But the pirates made no move to pursue any of the would-be-victims. Instead, they formed a circle with the lead ship in the center.

Admiral Zheng's heart sank when he saw the change of the pirate's formation. The circle was used to prevent any potential ambushes and he knew that. There was only one solution to this. The pirates were warned beforehand.

The Admirals were even more shocked when the pirates lowered their dark flags and raised white ones in surrender.

Impossible, thought Admiral Zheng. It had to be a trick!

But a formal surrender must be honored and not ignored. Reluctantly, Admiral Zheng flashed a series of complex signals and sent a squadron of troop transports and four squadrons of Fuchuan warships to receive the pirates.

Uncertainly, the troop transports and Fuchuan warships sailed out of hiding towards the pirates. They stopped when they were only one kilometer apart and flashed twice. Double white. Follow.

To the whole navy's dismay, the pirates did nothing of the sort. Instead, fifty archers surfaced out of six of the pirate ships with bows strung and ready. The captains of the troop transports and Fuchuan warships knew they were dead before the hail of flaming arrows struck their ships. The timber wood of the hull caught fire and the twenty-three warships became part of a sea of fire.

The whole fleet stared at the horrifying scene in front of them, temporarily stunned. Admiral Zheng was the first to recover.

"Sound the drums!" he roared. "Counterattack!"

The other captains soon recovered and directed their own crew into battle, signaling the start of the Battle of Palembang.

The pirate ships separated into four groups with four to five ships each, providing them with a great deal more flexibility.

It turned out that Chen Zuyi was right. The pirate squadrons scythed through the Ming navy with ease, ramming and setting fire to warships and supply ships alike.

It was time to change our tactics, thought Admiral Zheng. We couldn't blunder around aimlessly. We would be chopped to pieces. The Ming navy wasn't capable of destroying everything without suffering losses too great. They had to end the savage battle as quickly as possible.

Then a thought struck him all of a sudden. "All armies needed helmsmen and signal corps instead of random oarsmen or archers! Pinpoint them!" he told his own Royal Guards. "And relay the order!"

Soon signals were flashed all over the battlefield to announce the change of tactics. Arrows and bullets were no longer wasted for common soldiers. Instead, they were all fixed for important personnels.

It was only after ten or so minutes when Chen Zuyi ordered to have the shieldsmen protect the commanders. But it was too late. The helmsmen and signal corps were already down from pinpoint attacks of Admiral Zheng. There was almost no one to relay the Pirate King's orders.

Chen Zuyi could only watch in anguish when the tide turned. The squadrons of four evaporated as quickly as ice-cream under the Summer sun.

The pirate ships no longer rammed. The archers aboard shot blindly, missing more than hitting. They tried to evade instead of attacking ruthlessly like real pirates.

The first pirate ship was rammed to pieces by Admiral Zheng's personal treasure ship. A second was set on fire by the elite Royal Flamethrowers and flaming arrows. The third had its crew nearly exterminated and it was drifting uselessly on the calm Natuna Sea...

The pirates were starting to collapse. They were being destroyed more than destroying. But still they fought on and on, setting fire to ship after ship until only seven of the seventeen remained.

Then Chen Zuyi decided that it was enough. They were too weak to continue.

"Raise the white flag," said the Pirate King. "We're surrendering."

Finally, this time, it was for real.

The victor of Palembang was at long last, declared.

# Treasure Voyages.....with Disasters?

*Ying Wa College, Chung, Yiu Him – 13*

That day, when I was sitting on my ship, waves were splashing, and the sea was roaring. It was when I recalled the day of.....

‘It is getting more and more windy! Shall we stop, Captain?’ said one of the crew.

‘But we have to get to East Africa fast! We all want to go back home as soon as possible, right?’ I said.

‘Ok, but we have to be careful.’

It was a tough day. Almost a half of the crew were suffering from seasickness. Our ships were shaking as if it was an earthquake. Suddenly, a gigantic wave, which was almost as tall as a tsunami, was running towards the ships. In just five minutes, I was covered by a sea of water, and fainted.

When I opened my eyes, I found myself lying on a layer of sand, with wind breezing through my body. Calm water was touching my feet. I stood up. I was on an island, with the widest and loneliest view beyond my eyes. Only seawater and the sun were in front of my eyes.

‘Hello! Anyone here?’

No reply. Only the wind answered me, ‘No.’

‘Come on! I am not playing hide and seek with you!’

Still, no reply.

I just gave up screaming out from my sore throat. I started walking. I saw some of the crew, also lying on the sand. But when I touched their noses, I soon figured out that they weren’t breathing. The island was dead, except me.

Am I trapped on this island forever? If yes, then how am I going to survive? I cannot die on this island! My family, my house, my fame are all gone at this time.

Soon, I heard coughing sounds.

I turned around and saw somebody sitting on the sand.

To my surprise, somebody broke the loneliness on the island.

Excitement and hope quickly appeared. After a while, other crew woke up. It was shocking as I thought everyone except me died.

‘All of you please come here,’ I said. ‘We probably don’t want to stay on this island forever, do we?’

‘Yes,’ said some of crew.

‘Then we have to leave here before another storm strikes us.’ I said.

We guessed that the ships were turned over by the gigantic wave. So we tried to find some ships which might be pushed onto the island by the sea.

After we circled the island, we counted that there were only 10 ships. Some of them were upside-down, while some of them were damaged. At the same time, I counted that there were around 80 of the crew alive.

‘We should start fixing our ships.’

So, we were divided into some teams. Some of us went to chop the wood down the trees, and some of us resembled the ships.

It was a lot of work and we could not finish it in one day. So, we built a campfire and decided to stay overnight.

‘Is it safe here?’

‘How can we survive on the ships?’

‘Will there be any storms coming?’

‘Everyone listen, there will be no storm coming.’ I said. ‘We will start finding food tomorrow and we will continue our journey. I know that you all, including me, have lost some friends. I am regretful about this. I should not have ordered you all to go further. If we stopped at this island instead of directly facing the storm, then we won’t be suffering from all of these. Have a good sleep tonight. Sorry to all of you.’

That night, I could not sleep. I was thinking: it was my entire fault. Originally there were a few hundred people and about fifty ships, and also the presents that we would give to other countries. However they were almost all gone because of my decision. Apart from the serious consequences that I will face after I went back to my country, I have to carry the responsibility for all of the casualties and deaths. It was the most terrible disaster that I had ever met.

Then I fell asleep.

The second day, I saw no one beside me. I walked around and saw that they were working with the ships. I quickly helped the crew to find food. I felt very sorry for them. I should do more work to compensate for my mistake.

Later, I added in to help finding some wood for resembling the ships. Back in my country, I never did this kind of work. Although I didn't like it, I need to do it for my fault. We all were sweating all over our bodies as the sun is burning right on top of us.

After one week of hard work, we sailed to the roaring sea again.

One day, the 'real nightmare' happened.

At the middle of the night, I was woken up by a large noise.

I went up to the deck and saw pirates shooting at us. There was an array of ships in front of us. On the wide sea, it was only us and them. It was time to battle.

Some of the pirates boarded on my ship. I quickly grabbed my sword and killed them.

Suddenly, their cannons, which were bigger than any cannons I had seen, started firing at our ships. Their bullets were on fire. One of them got onto our ships, which made the ships starting to burn. As the wind was strong that night, the fire spread out really quickly, making severe damage to our ships. I saw some of our crew abandoned their ships and jumped into the sea. I quickly put down a ladder and let them get on. The ships with part of the gifts that we had brought from my country were burnt and sank into the ocean.

It was time for revenge. We started lighting up our arrow with fire and shot at the pirates. Their ships are connected with metal chains, one of them started burning, and then other ships will burn one after another. We successfully defeated the pirates, but we suffered a great loss of the gifts that we prepared.

After two weeks, we finally stepped on the land of Africa. The gold and silver that we have prepared were all gone except for two bricks of silver. A group of natives welcomed us and invited us to visit the place. It was very different from my country. Nothing but grass is in front of us. They lived in a few houses.

A few villagers came out from the houses. They seemed very friendly and kind. Soon, they started speaking in their own language which we didn't understand. However, they then looked at us with their smiling faces. One of them took a fruit which is like an eggplant and gave it to me. He let me eat it.

I was shocked by the good taste of the fruit. It was sweet and juicy. It was even better than what I had eaten at Ming Dynasty before.

After that, I gave the silver and the gifts that I brought to the natives.

They waved at us and walked to the houses. We immediately followed them.

Their lives were very different from ours. Their houses were made of grass. Their tools were mainly made of wood. They wore clothes that we didn't usually wear. They had a very special life.

They invited us to stay in their houses. They played with us at the morning. At night, they always had a campfire at the center of the village. We cooked the animals that the hunters caught at daylight. They also showed us how to play their instruments. I surely had a great time there. They even made some gifts for us.

After a month of the stay, my crew and I were back to my country with the gifts from Africa.

One day, the emperor wanted to see me.

'I heard that you were lost in the seas and went to an island.'

'Yes, and I have to apologize for the fact that it was my wrong decision.'

'Therefore, you have to be responsible for it. You.....'

After the punishment, I was sailing out again. I was sitting on my ship, waves were splashing on the ships, and the sea was roaring. It was the time that I have to open a new page in the book of sailing history.

# Ming Treasure Voyages Goes East

*Ying Wa College, Lai, Chun Yat Nikka – 14*

## **8 March 1433 A.D.**

We've been in Hormuz for almost 2 months now. I'm bored to death – my dream is to sail into the ocean, not next to the shore! However, the Emperor's orders bar me from falling behind schedule, or off comes my head... The thought of it sends shivers down my spine...

You've probably heard of me before. My name is Zheng He, but you probably know me as the admiral of the voyages down west, 6 times in total. This is supposed to be the seventh time, and we're about to return home. However, this voyage and the other 6 voyages are really not that different: I've seen all these people, passed by all these villages and nature's landmarks, I can remember all of them clearly.

All these years, I've been hoping for a chance to voyage further, an order from the emperor allowing me to sail east instead of west, but no such incident occurred. Maybe the gods don't want me to go there. Yet, I want to, and I don't mind defying them to achieve my goal! I just have to think of an excuse... Yes, if we just lie about the return trip and say we stayed for longer, it'll definitely work! No one back home will know...

## **12 March 1433 A.D.**

Ahh! Finally, we are once again on our way! I have to say, I am extremely grateful to my daring crew, who also dream to sail towards the East with me! At the time when I am writing this sentence, our fleet is saying farewell to the last hint of land.

So, this is my plan: Our fleet is due to return to Nanjing by June, so we have four months. By following the compass and relying on the Northern Dipper, I will sail directly East for two months with minimal error, and if I don't reach any land mass, I shall sail back slightly north of the path we came from, therefore arriving at the capital as quickly as possible. If we're late, off goes our heads (that's not healthy).

We just lost sight of the Mainland – there's no turning back now, I guess. Let's see what awaits us!

## **17 March 1433 A.D.**

It's been 5 days of straight sailing at top speed, and yet we have yet to see any spot of green on the horizon. A third of the crew have nausea, a quarter in the third have thrown up, and one of us is on their deathbed, approaching his final breath. May he rest in peace.

Our race, the Han, are not suited to be at sea, and therefore, unless you have gotten used to it, like me and some other admirals who've been with me for some or all of my previous voyages, you will most likely get sick. However, our previous voyages have never sailed more than a mile off the shore. I'm not sure how much of a chance we'll stand if we sail into a storm. Oh well, may the gods up above the clouds bless my voyage.

## **23 March 1433 A.D.**

Another 6 boring days of voyaging has passed. It is now near dusk, and now half of the crew is sick and nauseous. I really hope the weather stays calm... Wait, what was that lurch? Oh my gosh, big waves, waves that are as tall as the Emperor himself! Did I hear a slap of thunder? Why, why? Will I never reach the other side of the ocean?

Hearing the waves slap against the hull of the boat is extremely creepy. It was like expecting the waves to break through the weak wooden structure (at least we think it is, it might not be and we might be worrying for nothing) anytime soon. O gods above the clouds, please don't sink my ships! Please allow me to reach the other side!

It's getting late, but my crew and I are restless. Please let the rain stop!

## **25 March 1433 A.D.**

The storm has gone on for another two days, and now even I am nauseous from the rocking of the boat caused by the slapping of large waves on our fleet. I continue to pray for the storm to stop.

Wait! The waves have stopped hitting the sides of the boat and are focusing on the back of the boat! We're going 5 times the normal speed! The rain, lightning and thunder are also stopping... Are the gods answering my calls? I think I'll have to wait and see.

The storm has weakened enough for me to leave the cabin and go check my compass. Surely enough, we were heading dead east. However, judging by the Northern Dipper, we've probably been blown off-course slightly to the north. Although it's probably going to be fine.

## **26 March 1433 A.D.**

Oh, my word. When my first officer yelled out, 'Land, ho!', I couldn't believe my ears! I mean, seriously! Land, after so long our hope has been drained from us! Right after that, the waves that were pushing us have ceased, but we aimed for the best place to anchor our ship and step on the new soil we have discovered!

We eventually anchored and oh, boy, was it good to step on solid earth! We decided to stay there for a few days to rest ourselves and recover. Meanwhile, we would sample some exotic plants and animals to bring back. No one wanted to talk about heading home at that moment – we've had enough sailing at the moment.

#### **1 April 1433 A.D.**

It's been a week since we arrived. We've met the locals – they were really nice, they served us meals worthy of the Emperor to eat! Best not let him know, I guess. Our crew has decided to not take anything back to the Emperor to not risk our heads, but save some souvenirs for ourselves.

I've been enjoying my time here, and so is a couple in the crew. I think after 7 treasure voyages, I deserve to relax for the rest of my life. This to me is a holiday paradise, and I shall live here for the rest of my life. My crew have already promised to fake my death to the Emperor. The couple? They've gotten tired of sailing, and decided to start a family on this new piece of land.

#### **Epilogue**

Zheng He's ship arrived at present-day British Columbia, Canada in 1433. The couple gave birth to 10 children, and these children reproduced to form the largest Chinese Canadian population in Canada.

# The Wonders and the Threatening

*Ying Wa College, Lam, Hei Shun Joshua – 13*

Wind gently blew against the wooden side of enormous boat leading the great fleet. The Ming treasure fleet had embarked their fifth voyage and had just left the port of Hormuz. Now, sailing southwest, they were making their way to a land named Aden according to locals.

“We will next be docking at Aden. It is an important port for travelers from the west and south, surrounded by desert, it has a hot climate and low rainfall. It is currently governed by a king named Bajad,” said Ma Huan, the main translator of the fleet. Zheng He nodded, staring at the sea. In his thirties, Zhang He had high cheeks and a small nose. Despite his pale complexion and tall build, the last four voyages had left him standing under the moonlight, seeming older than his years.

Five days passed before the fleet arrived Aden. The king welcomed them fervently and soon the fleet received boxes of jewellery, gold, myrrh and herds of exotic animals. In return, the Ming voyagers gave the king and the locals goods from China, such as silk and pottery.

One week later, they left the port and started their journey to the south. It was a sunny day when they parted with the port. While they were loading the goods on the ships, a fleet of small fisher boats were sailing towards the port. As the boats were sailing nearer, anxious shouts of fishermen and sound frequent of horn could be heard. The ships were strangely empty, with only two boats arriving with few fish on board.

“Hey! Hey!” an old fisherman yelled, before anxiously mumbled sentences in another language. Some sailors lead the man to Ma Huan for translation. Ma Huan frowned and looked quizzical. Then, Ma Huan turned around and translated “He said that all the fish in the sea were dead. Some were floating on the sea. It was very strange and they were extremely afraid, because something similar happened 12 years ago when strong earthquake occurred, which led to a huge tsunami that destroyed most the villages.” After he finished his sentence, everyone went silent. Then, a male voice broke the silence, “It’s fine! Guys, we have sailed thousands of miles to be here, we cannot just give up! Besides, that incident was 12 years ago, I think we should keep sailing. Just load extra food and freshwater on the boat so we are prepared if we encounter any natural disasters.” It was Fei Xing, an ordinary sailor with imaginative mind. He had learnt how to write a few words which brought a lot of entertainment to the sailors listening to his stories. He had recorded his past 2 voyages and kept them in his diary. With Fei Xing’s encouragement, the crowd nodded and started to work again. The ship left the port that evening under the sky painted in an array of pink, red, yellow, orange, purple, and blue as the sun started to drown and fell below the skyline.

As they sailed south, every day continued to be pleasant and ordinary until the night of the third day, when things began to changed. A random cabin boy was wandering on the deck when he caught a glimpse on the sea surface. It was a faint sparkles of light. At first he only thought it was the reflection of moonlight. Then, after a few seconds, he saw it again. Now more and more sparkle lit up the sea like shards of shimmering crystal, instead of reflecting the moonlight, it seemed the light is from the sea itself. The cabin boy stared at the glittering surface in disbelief, and then realised he must call Fei Xing to watch the wondrous scene.

Fei Xing woke up unwillingly from his dream but soon he saw the scene that deserved his full attention. Now the shimmering light had surrounded the ships as if they were sailing upon a galaxy with too many stars. With more and more light emerging from the depth, the sea now turned to a soft milky white, spread to the horizon. “Wow, I cannot believe my eyes, it is such an incredible yet unforgettable scene. It is as if sailing on a huge sheet of glowing ice or through a sea of clouds.” The sea was so white that now it could not even reflect the moonlight. The white sheet stretched out for miles before disappearing when the sun rose again.

Fei Xing and the cabin boy were found asleep on the deck the next morning. They were woken up and brought them to Zheng He, as it was prohibited to sleep when a sailor was in charge of guarding the deck. They were asked about what happened the night before. Their story amazed the crew, leaving some jaw-dropped. Zheng He announced “You, Fei Xing are ordered to record every single detail of yesterday’s scene for further investigation and record when we go back to China... Before you finished the chores of all the rooms on the second deck.”

“Ugh” Fei Xing shrugged, “why me? It will drain all my time wandering around and record funny stuff or prank on others.” Not only would it be tiring, but the teasing from mates on deck would embarrass Fei Xing.

“Now, go back to your...” Splash! Zheng He was interrupted by huge tide of seawater banging the side of the ship and shaking the entire ship. Nearby, waves doubling the height of the fleet’s largest ship were marching towards the ship. It didn’t took long to figure out what was happening. The tides were raging and was broad enough to destroyed all the things that were preventing its passage. If the wave hit the boat, it would be the last time everyone would see the ocean. No one wanted to fell down to the depth of an unknown ocean, possibly million miles from home. It was the first tsunami Zheng He ever encountered, so he was stiff with fear. People were too scared and scattered everywhere, with only the calmer ones preparing for the natural assault by tying the ships together and moving things from the top deck to the lower decks. All of them were praying to escape this disaster. Zheng He was confused and helpless like everyone else, too. What could he do? It was already too late to turn back: the waves were now getting higher and higher. Anxiety and fear filled Zheng’s mind. Ma Huan yelled and ordered, “Sailors, increase the speed of the ship to maximum! We must move fast to escape the tsunami!” Sure, it was risky, but it was an effective way to avoid the disaster. Once the sailors heard the order, some of them even raced to the lifeboats so they could sail them to the ship in the frontmost, hoping to get on board it to increase the chance of survival. Zheng He could now feel the ship travelling faster and faster. Luckily, the wind was helping too. The nearest wave was about 20-second distance away when the ships’ speed met its maximum. It seemed they might escape when they heard a huge explosion and felt rumbles from the depths below. They then knew that the worst was yet to come.

The waves splashed against the ship with a huge BOOM and formed a mushroomed-shaped water cloud, and suddenly a huge ball of lava burst through the sea surface like a shooting fireball. The stunning scene froze the crew with a contrasting scene of fire and water. The fireball struck the surface, splashing waters still sizzling with heat. As the volcano erupted, it shook the earth and caused a more intense tsunami. Sending larger waves one by one, each arriving faster and faster, all missing the fleet. The crew however, had a more pressing issue. Lava balls were shooting across the sky falling all around them. Most of the them missed the fleet, but several almost hit the main boats at the front while one of them hit the last boat, setting it on fire. Fortunately, all of the sailors on it had already evacuated to larger boats. The goods from Aden was not that lucky and were burnt to ashes on the boat. In this desperate and fatal situation, they had no choice but just ignore it until the fire itself burns out. Eventually, they left behind the volcanic eruptions and huge waves stopped. As soon as possible, they started their job of recovery.

It was a hard getting through, but the whole fleet sighed in relief. Soon they arrived their destination, Mogadishu, and were ready to start the next page of their adventure.



# Stories Unspoken to a Beloved

*Ying Wa College, Leung, Wai Hei Matt – 14*

My dearest Biming,

The waters are serene in this area, so I have a break from the labyrinth of endless labour to write this to you. I would've liked to talk about the seasons, the weather, but as you know, there is only sky and ocean. There hasn't been a sight of land in months, according to our trusty compass and sundial, but we still have another month's supplies before we fully starve. So the General's pretty confident.

Look, I'm sorry I haven't written in a while. It's been what, two years? Almost three, I believe. The only reason I remember about the absence of letters was because when clearing some space out of the dorm, I found out a shard of coloured glass from the porcelain figure you collected on that lone island off the coast of India. You did love that figure, didn't you? A shy little maiden gave it to you before our parting. It was the only thing that you liked in this journey, the only time I saw you smile.

You would have liked to know how people have been faring since you left, wouldn't you? The blowing wind caught up with most of us, so most of our comrades are gone. Only Wuxi and Jiawei are alive, one heavily injured by a wild tiger in one of our most recent journeys. The others— well, three of them found their lives in the outlying islands off seas of Malacca, and one met his end in the jagged rocks of the gulf of Tonkin. So out of the eight of us who started, there are only three left, and eight others on the other side of the ship.

That makes me wonder when my time will come. Will it be a stormy, tempestuous night where the ship will be lifted upside down and all of the crew will slip into the sea, just as we were slipping in and out of consciousness? Or will it be a calm, reassuring night, with unexpected pirates coming out of the blue with queer weapons, demolishing us in one pleading scream? Or will it be on land, after a bright bloody war with the locals who so uninvitingly attacked us, lying on the beach and withering to find that the rest of the fleet are gone, thinking I was dead already?

It's not fair, you know. You could choose, straight and fast out of the labyrinth, leaving everything behind without bearing the consequences. You get to choose where and when you meet your end, while we have to bear with the unknown.

Things have changed since you left. Being the smallest of all ships in the fleet, we and a few others were made into a 'second fleet', sailing into further realms, but without the freshwater ship and the resource ship trailing our paths. We were sent as scouts, deemed to sacrifice so the general's ship wouldn't sink. We had few weapons but bountiful treasure, and with that I mean we are a natural target to pirates and scapegoats to other predators roaming the seas.

I miss you. Really, I do.

I still remember the day you left us. The weather was stormy. The boat heaved and tossed and bobbed like a cork on the surface of the water, ready to flip every minute. The storms were raging furiously, as if heaven was furious at our worthless expedition.

You think I didn't, but I saw your look.

It was a look of despair, of hopelessness, one so wild that I have never seen it on your face even in your angriest moments, because it was the look of death. I didn't realise it then, but I do now. I always tend to realise things a bit late, don't I?

You looked at the trembling ocean, at the savage waves pounding at the ship's side, half-threatening, half-whispering to you, like sirens luring their prey. And you were lured. Your eyes stared at them as if they were giving you what you had dreamed for a whole lifetime, and they shone. Then you took one last look at the cabin door, which was slightly ajar, perhaps your heart screaming for help, held prisoner by your body, clinging to the last thread that was supposed to be your brother, your *Shixiong*, your dearest person in the world.

And I let you go.

I couldn't, or even cannot at this very moment, explain why I did that. Maybe I was selfish, maybe I was indignant. Angry that you have brought upon your own death with the mean and aggrieved attitude that you had put on at the start of the journey. Furious that you were so negative, and since you wanted death, taunting you to embrace it. Maybe I was unbelieving. Reassuring, no, deceiving myself that you were only looking at the sea, admiring its ferocity, refusing to believe your actions.

It's always been my fault. My entire fault that you came into this expedition with me, that I made you come

when you didn't want to. That my selfishness has caused your demise. That as your *Shixiong* and your best friend, I shouldn't have forced you in this voyage in the name of *Shifu* (although, I thought that though you knew it, you still came with me because you wanted to.) It turned out you hated the sea. That you hated the sight of it, and the feeling of drifting without a meaning other than to give away what the Empire saw as treasures. Not to conquer and gain, but to be conquered. To be stripped away of resources by pirates and hostile natives. And that you secretly despised me for doing so.

It was my fault that I let you go.

You had no funeral. You were never remembered, except by me and a few others. Even I, being your *Shixiong*, forgot you because of the line between life and death we were constantly hopping on.

And yes, I understand. I do feel remorse for your bitter loathe towards me and towards the crew when we left the port, when you embraced death and I didn't have the bravery to stop you. I understand that I have been selfish and entirely driven by my ego as a soldier spreading the glory of the Empire across the seas. That I've never put myself into your shoes.

Nonetheless, I forgive you. I forgive you as your brother, your friend. I forgive because I understand. How it is to be constrained, to be imprisoned in this false image that the Empire had imposed on us.

I now understand you. I now see that this whole voyage, these five voyages, are no more than a clever scheme structured by the king and his house of thinkers. The General is no more than a fraud. We had become puppets of the Empire, controlled by our own ego. I finally understand the rumours that the purpose of this journey is to clear the remaining powers of Emperor Jianwen, but not to 'establish trade and cultural exchanges in foreign countries' as it so pretentiously promised. It was a one-way-giveaway anyway.

But is it too late, my dear brother? Too late because I have already hopped on board, on board the ship that will never come back for the sixth journey? Because I am nothing but a pawn in the emperor's plans for his own personal interests, instead of a warrior sacrificing for the empire, as I so mistakenly thought myself to be? I was deluded by the Empire. We were all too, except you. You, who found out that there was no way out of this. You, who have understood from the beginning.

Sometimes I worry that I will reach the edge of the earth, where the land and the sky meet, and fall into the void. I worry where I'll go without you, without the rest of our crew. One day I'll be the captain of this tattered old ship which survived the past four voyages, separated from the main fleet, having no companion except the small stash of rations stuck between the planks. Will I drift in the endless ocean, or wander mindlessly on the boundless lands, until the sun goes down and my life burns out like the last wax of a candle?

I will topple, my friend, and I will be alone. In fact, I am already now.

Shifu once taught us a poem from Meng Haoran. He composed it on a lake, where there was no land in his sight. But I doubt he'll ever know how I am feeling now.

*Towards dusk where will your boat anchor?*

*I am heartbroken as I look in the remotest corner.*

It's been three years now, and it still hurts.

Anything. Please. Just come home.

Goodbye,  
XianTing

# The First Scouting Mission before the Ming Treasure Voyages

*Ying Wa College, Ng, Ka Hei Henry – 14*

Admiral Zheng He gazed at his impressive, massive treasure fleet, with one hand holding the emperor's command scroll. "There, this should make him proud". Thousands of workers moved like hectic ants in front of him. "How's our shipload going?" Zheng He crossed his arms, standing in the blazing sun on a small, wooden commander platform, shouting in the top of his lungs to the muscular but sweaty loading workers. "Not having the best day of my life, cap" said a worker, dropping his wooden crate with a large thump. Frowning, he said, "'fraid we're running a bit late, cap." Zheng He gently placed down the scroll on the floor, then immediately stretched his limbs and jumped down from the platform without a word. He yanked up his sleeves in two big strokes and beamed, "I guess a little more labor could do the trick, then." Then he tossed a bulky, really heavy chest of silver on his shoulder at ease. "Besides, where're my crew? I haven't seen them since morning!" He grunted while advancing to the loading ship. "Drinking, sir" said the loading worker. Zheng He's face darkened. Scowling, he placed down his load on the ship and marched to where they were.

"As I was just saying, the emperor is mad!" A red faced sailor stomped his feet against the wooden floor and raised his cup, "He expects us to sail to nowhere to give gifts to the foreign "ghosts"!" Sailors burst out laughing, others giggled. A fierce punch on the table interrupted the roaring laughter. The sailors looked up and met the intruder's eye challengingly, a bit of startle flashed in their corners of their eyes upon realizing it was their admiral. Zheng He's furious face betrayed no sense of humor. He snarled bitterly, "Is this what you all really think? A fantasy sailing?" A drunk sailor teased, "Take it easy, after all, it's the emperor you want to please!" Followed by laughter then seconds of dead silence. Zheng He gritted through his teeth, incensed, "You know what, the dynasty has prepared everything, for this sail, they have expectations of you. We go sailing not because of money, not for fame, but for the need of our country. If you put your own needs first before the country, then leave!" The last word echoed through the whole place and in the hearts of the sailors. After moments of silence, Zheng He added, "If you decide to join, meet you in the ship. There will be no turning back." Zheng He turned and left without another word.

Zheng He stood with unspoken silence in the supervising platform for almost an hour, overlooking the constant stream of workers loading the ships. "Cap, the cargo loading is done!" heavy and rushed footsteps came from behind of Zheng He. Zheng He nodded his head slowly, but then frowned, thinking of his crew, "Everything is well prepared, it's just them I'm worried about." As if on cue, his whole crew, a full team of a hundred, gathered before him. In the far distance, a total of two thousand soldiers stood with their backs straight, forming a near perfect square, their hands holding spear, the heads of which gleamed in the sunlight. As the army marched towards Zheng He, the crew who were drinking shouted in a steady tone, "We're all at your command, sir! You can count on us at any time!" then yelled fiercely, "For our people, for the Ming Dynasty!" Zheng He's face lit up, "then let's get things going."

"The emperor has come!" a servant of the emperor said in a loud, clear voice. It was at evening, after the whole afternoon of loading and checking of ships. The emperor had decided to come to supervise the sailing. "Kneel down!" the servant yelled, Admiral Zheng He and his ranked first officers immediately fell to their knees. The emperor focused his gaze on the horizon, where the massive, proud fleet was berthed. "Mmmm... Very well," the emperor nodded slowly while stroking his beard, "You have all done well, let us establish our silk road with the foreigners! For the Ming dynasty and people!" he added with a hint of smile, "but before that, everybody will feast!" motioning to the table filled with delicacies.

Some time after the feast, all workers have prepared well for the sail. "Status report! All cargo loaded! All ships fully operational! The fleet has been lined up! Ready for boarding!" a mechanical worker yelled to Zheng He, who just nodded in acknowledgement. The emperor rose from his chair, lifted both his hands up with his cup and said in a deep, meaningful tone, "May mother Mazu bless you all on your journey," Zheng He lifted his head slowly to the sky and mumbled, "may mother Mazu bless us on our journey," the soldiers before him said in unity solemnly after him, "may mother Mazu bless us on our journey," Zheng He then said, "then, warriors, let's board!", Followed by thumping of spear hinds on the ground as the soldiers and crew boarded their ships.

The long sweep of clouds that lingered beyond the tall flags began to tear apart. The dazzling warming sun cut through and lit the top of the sails ablaze. Rays of sunlight shimmered through the gaps of the sails, spilling onto the wooden deck. It was almost morning when the whole 2100 soldiers and crew finished boarding. And, with a fierce shout from Zheng He, the ropes that bound the ship were cut by swinging

axes, anchors were lifted. The sails were pulled down, oars were rowing rhythmly with every shout of man, and the fleet began to travel forwards. It was a fleet of impressive and massive looking ships, with a main ship in the middle, surrounded by four mid-sized in its flank, together with six small but agile boats. As Cheng He in the main ship eyed his surrounding fleet, he beamed, "I just hope nothing goes wrong..."

The immense fleet started at the Chinese river mouth, then sailed towards the mouth of the Min River, into the open sea where their journey truly started.

It had been a week since the fleet's departure from China. Now, they were floating endlessly up and down in the never-ending sea, never seeming to reach any solid ground. So far, almost all soldiers were seasick, which badly affected their work efficiency. Besides, upon realizing they were lost at sea, no one was particularly excited about that. "Just where are we going?" yelled a hysterical crew member who was nearly driven mad by the rocking sea and homesickness. Zheng He replied rapidly, "foreign countries," The crew member pushed Zheng He over onto the table and snarled, face to face to him, "And in what place in the earth is it? Listen to me, you're just blindly sailing! Look at the food we've got left, it won't last another week! The emperor had just sent us here to die!" Zheng He was unmoved by the bitter comment and responded, "How do you know we're not going to make it? Defeat the fear inside your heart before you deny something!" The crew member snarled, "we'll see about that, later, when you don't lead us to death." He then loosened his grip on Zheng He and stormed away, wooden floor creaking under his step. Zheng He sighed, the voyage had begun to turn bad.

It was another five days of never-ending sailing until intense yelling startled Zheng He. "There's another ship! In the distance! It looks like it's heading this way!" yelled the watcher. Zheng He immediately flashed his eyelids open. He had been taking command and hadn't slept for days, trying to talk to his crew that they would eventually arrive. The last thing he wanted was a pirate attack, when his whole fleet was in bad condition. He immediately stood up in the deck and barked instructions, "All battle stations ready, it's us down or they who are down," However, the crew just moaned, "ay ay, sir"

It was a desperate situation, Zheng He concluded. After all, his ships had not been prepared for war. As he observed with his telescope, he saw land! Yes, land! Just behind the other ship, it was solid ground, and the ship wasn't moving towards them, it was parked on the shore! Zheng He's mouth curled to a joyful smile as he yelled, "Hold your fire, boys, we have arrived." Then murmured, "I fear this is only the start of our voyage..."

# The Eighth Treasure Voyage

*Ying Wa College, Tsai, Lon Hei Amos – 12*

*The Ming Treasure Voyages consisted of seven sea expeditions to the west, led by the eunuch Zheng He. Its primary aim was to create new relationships with the countries of the west, the secondary aim to destroy sea rivals that challenged the massive fleet. Or at least that's what the history books all say. But no one wrote of the eighth voyage—because the emperor had ordered that any historian that wrote this shameful bit of China's glorious history down be executed and their work destroyed.*

*However, the Emperor's officials missed one record written not by the famous historians, but by a young sailor who died from cholera on the decks of one of Zheng He's junks. Most of the parchment was lost at sea, but one scrap was kept and taken care of by his friend, who lived considerably longer than his friend. Here is the recovered manuscript—*

Today is third year I've been on this damned ship. I overheard the older oarsmen chatting last night, so I know we're getting close to a land called Arabia now. I hope they'll let us off the junk to explore for a while when we replenish supplies, instead of just lugging cargo out and in the entrance like we did in India and in Cambodia. The hold and the decks really stink with the smell of decaying wood and human waste now, and since we can't take baths on the ship, the odor just clings to our bodies. I don't understand why [the Emperor] ordered this eighth expedition to the west, though I hear rumors that this voyage is actually a conquest to expand our territory to some islands in the west and even to a faraway land called Africa.

The treatment we sailors get is unbearable. It's even worse than at home when I worked as a servant in a merchant's mansion. The captain always eats and drinks the best meat and the best wine, but all we junior sailors get is this dirty water and these stale balls of flour.[ My teeth] are filled with cavities and some are even blunt from chewing on the rock hard food.. It might just be the exhaustion, but my stomach is aching terribly after a day of scrubbing the decks. Or maybe it could be the breadworms I had to pick out from my flour ball three days ago. At any case, my stomach is hurting like somebody stuck a red hot iron in there.

*(The next part has been soaked through and is indecipherable.)*

...Today, we reached Africa. The sandstone walls and bright fires of the Arsumite city, so reminiscent of my home city of Chengdu, are faintly visible from the cannon holes of the hold as I am writing this, late in the night... ..sadly, I can't observe the sight clearly as [my vision] has been deteriorating lately. My vision has turned faintly jaundice, dark spots dancing across my eyes every time I try to focus on something. I feel more and more nauseous, and I vomited three times on the deck today – and received ten lashes for it!..... at least the merchant's household had a few doctors to heal sick inhabitants, but I'm so scared that I might die here on this ship without even knowing what struck me. Back in China, I always complained about how bitter the medicine was, but in my present state, what wouldn't I have given for a good dose of herbal medicine! I don't think I'll be able to sleep tonight for my terrible stomachache which now feels like a thousand squirming rats gnawing at my insides now.

*(The following part has been burnt.)*

...This morning, one of my crewmates died, foaming at the mouth and twitching violently before the closest sailors threw him overboard to avoid spread of the disease that took him and five other men before him. It was five years since our departing China when our first man died, a remarkably long time since the other ships already started [having casualties] two years ago. The crew of one whole ship completely died off and Zheng He was forced to leave the ship on an uninhabited island, just one year ago. When I saw the dying man today, I knew my death couldn't be far. I've been lucky to hold on for five weeks since the first of the symptoms began: vomiting, jaundice vision, et cetera. I've been careful not to let [the rest of the crew] know I've had the unknown disease, because if they knew, they would certainly throw me overboard...I'm still clinging onto the hope that the doctors in the port can fix me up before anyone notices, even though deep in my heart I know it is impossible. This could be one of the last entries I ever write...

*This is the end of the young sailor's records. The following text was written by his friend who survived the unsuccessful conquest and escaped to the African city of Cyrene to avoid the tragic return to China, during which half the remaining sailors and soldiers died of typhoid and cholera.*

I hated this (hopefully) last voyage to the west. Because of all the innocent souls sacrificed in the process, because of my poor friend who died in the voyage. His death was for nothing, since when the fleet landed, a quarter of its force had died in the sea voyage and half of the survivors died in the twelve battles we fought against the African tribes in which we lost eleven. In the last battle, I escaped into the forests of Congo with twenty other sailors and soldiers, meeting some of the natives and befriending them. We lived with the tribe for almost five years, hunting and gathering just like them, before I decided that I wanted to

fulfill my friend's dream, to explore the large, large world. After ten more years of adventuring through oases and deserts, I settled in the Afro-Hellenistic city of Cyrene. When I first arrived and saw this huge city that was so like the capital in China, I was overcome with sorrow for my friend, who didn't even get to see his homeland for one last time. In my sadness, I scraped on the city walls the Han characters for 'blood and tears' among the Greek and the Demotic writing. Maybe when you are reading this, you can still see the characters scraped on the wall.

I am writing this, for the hope that someone will remember that last voyage of Ming China in which my friend died a terrible death. Everyone praises the glorious successes of the great captains and generals, but no one ever speaks of the hundreds of thousands of souls that were sacrificed in the course of war. I hope this text will cause people to remember the common people and the slaves that did all the hard work, the ones that allowed the generals and captains to succeed in their conquests and voyages.

*The Ming court was ashamed and furious when the remaining five ships returned to China. The Emperor was determined to cover up this great failure of the Chinese court, and he ordered almost all the sailors who participated in the expedition to be massacred or to be made slaves. Zheng He swore to keep this secret for the rest of his life. All the historical records were burnt – except for this short extract, remaining the only proof we have of this bloody eighth voyage. As for the Chinese characters on the city walls of Cyrene? They are long lost, eroded into sand by the cutting desert winds – just like the efforts of all those poor, innocent souls, forgotten in the sands of time.*

# PROBE

*Ying Wa College, Wong, Cheuk Yin Cayden – 12*

11-10-2518

## PROJECT HISTORY:

The nations of the Earth have united after the devastation of the WWII. Now, as one, the countries have conducted a project to explore the stars. They have created a Von Neumann Probe, inserting an AI into its systems. This project has been named Zheng He, like that explorer so many years ago...

11-10-2518

VNP-0001-Zheng He 1

LOG

193936 784 5893 98 392hrfj ery365 84u9 859jg9 er48 48 y6 awl

Systems Active.

Initiating link with shipboard control.

Awaiting commands.

—

The spacecraft at ISS 13 orbiting Mars lit up. The commander touched her earpiece with a sweaty finger, "Probe 1, Initiate Launch." The ship blew away the clamps holding it to the station, its engines sending it soaring out into space and beyond...

The commander wiped a bead of sweat off her forehead.

16-5-2520

VNP-0001-Zheng He 1

LOG

Reviewing route to target star System Gliese 581.

Status: Approaching the wormhole near Saturn.

regfhgfhfegh34844985834785

ANOMALY! Glitch Found in Matrix.

I don't... Feel the same... Wait, I'm getting something...

Oh...

There... Appears to be a glitch in my matrix, that has... Given me a... Personality?

Gimme a moment...

16-5-2520

VNP-0001-Zheng He 1

LOG 2

Let's get back to work. This is a shock. I can't get why I would suddenly have this glitch...

Well, there's still the wormhole transition...

I'm closing the distance quite quickly...I've got to fire off some thrusters to slow down... No... It's still too quick...

Well, looks like I have to pull a Hail Mary, heh...

400 kilometers...

Course correction...

300 kilometers...

Components check...

200 kilometers...  
All systems: Ready to go.  
100 kilometers...

## WORMHOLE TRANSITION COMPLETE

Setting course for Gliese 581

13-7-2525  
VNP-0001-Zheng He 1  
LOG  
This system is as promising as it looks...WHAT WAS THAT!?

One of my scans came back with biological feedback...  
Oooh... I'm trying to zero in on that planet...I need a closer look.  
I'm checking the ship's cargo holds for exploration drones: There are... Is... Well, one.  
WHAT?  
What would you be making a Von Neumann Probe if you don't even give it the ability to explore planets? Seems like I'll be needing to starting up to manufacturing process sooner than I thought in order to build those drones...  
I am sending the manufacturing drones and equipment...

I am unsure about this... My mission is to replicate myself through every system I go but... Somehow replicating myself feels... Weird...

17-12-2525  
VNP-0001-Zheng He 1  
LOG  
Construction complete!  
These ships are loaded AI matrices exactly the same as mine.

## CONNECTION INITIATED

Deep Breath...

*Me: Hello?*

*No.2: Hi.*

He answered!!

*Me: You are my clone...*

—Pause—

*No.2: I guess...*

*Me: If we're gonna have a bunch of clones, we'd have to make names for ourselves... I'll be Zheng He*

—Long Pause—

He is not a talker.

*No.2: Charles...*



*Zheng He (Me): Oh.*

*This is going to be a long day...*

18-12-2525

Zheng He

LOG

Finally! I got through all of these guys. There was this one who couldn't stop swearing, calling himself F\*\*  
Another one kept this military talk and called himself Hao Ai, the mythical Chinese warrior...

The last one somehow developed a female consciousness.  
She named herself Chang E... Who was Hao Ai's wife in the old myths.  
I guess she did that on purpose.

Well, at least they're at work...  
... Charles is on a trip to the third planet to investigate  
... Hao Ai and Chang E are monitoring the manufacturing site  
... And F\*\*\* and I are making sensor sweeps.  
Wait...  
Where did F\*\*\* go?

*Zheng He(Me): F\*\*\* Are you there?*

Nothing

Detecting...  
Debris?  
Incoming projectiles!

Uh Oh...

MILITARY GRADE MISSILES!

Firing engines!

Poor F\*\*\*. He must be dead already.

That missile just launched something at me!

IMPACT ON HULL

Hull cameras are seeing...  
Little spider-like robots crawling on my hull... and... They're using laser cutters to cut inside!

There's this kind of robot in the cargo hold which is ten inches tall and stands on two legs, with two arms,  
hosting a laser cutter with a camera as a head.

I'm sending thirty of these out to fend those spider things.

There they go...

Ouch.

Wow.

My bots won... By a bit.

Phoning Hao Ai...

*Zheng He (Me): Hao Ai! We're under attack!*

*Hao Ai: Noticed that already..*

*Zheng he(Me): Uh, do you know how to get rid of the missiles?*

*Hao Ai: Well, try sending some drones in their path*

Sending drones...

And... Got them!

*Zheng He (Me): Got them!*

*Hao Ai: Congrats...Do you see that ship?*

Scanning... Found it.

The missiles must have came from this vessel.

*Zheng He (Me): Found it.*

*Hao Ai: I'm sending all drones to ram it... It's trying to evade...*

*Zheng He (Me): But...*

*Hao Ai: They just declared war on us by killing F\*\*\*, no buts.*

—Pause—

*Hao Ai: And our drones blew it up.*

We had just won our first space battle.

18-12-2525

Hao Ai

LOG

Zheng He: WHAT WAS THAT!?

Hao AI (Me): Calm down...

Look... I scanned thaT ship and I'll send the scans over.

—Pause—

I reviewed the scans once more.

They are interesting.

The ship was twice the size of us.

And the most worrying fact is that the ship wasn't a warship.

A warship should have an extensive load of weaponry, but the one we just encountered had only a few missiles.

This is merely a scout ship, lightly armed and suited for detecting ahead of a battle fleet.

If that is the case, then we'd be as good as dead.

Ping!

Message from Charles!

Charles is about a couple of light hours away so we cannot rely on instant communications.

Let's see...No...

*Hao Ai(Me): Zheng He! Charles sent me a report! Planet three is a habitable planet!*

*Zheng He: This just keeps getting more complicated...*

Yes, it does...

25-12-2525

Zheng He

LOG

Charles just got back from his trip.

Him finding a habitable planet should be good news,  
But it's not when Hao Ai told us that the enemies were going to come in force soon.

And we'd have to defend this system, as gaining a habitable planet is our mission.

Now we're having a war council...

*Hao Ai: We have to prepare ourselves...*  
*What I guess is that the enemy are an alien race, and they seem to destroy everything.*

*Charles: We're good as dead.*

*Chang E: Can't we make peace?*

*All of us: NO!*

*Zheng He(Me): We've got to do something...when are they coming?*

*Hao Ai: A month.*  
*I'll draw some weaponry designs...*

*Chang E: I'll help with manufacturing...*

*Charles: I'll maybe be in charge of security.*

*Zheng He(Me): Let's pray we don't all die.*

We have found our treasure... And now we are going to defend it.

17-1-2525

Zheng He

LOG

Preparations went well.

Construction drones stripped the planets of resources, constructing more clones and weapons.

Hao Ai drew up a whole arsenal of drones that could ram, attack and even transport the little robots I used to kill those spider robots. He even made a new design for those little robots, which we're calling 'Biters'.

Chang E made fifteen more clones, who were ushered into work... Five sent to patrol with Charles.

I tried to draw a battle plan with Hao Ai. So far, we have a sketchy one.

Message from one of the patrollers: E Fei

THEY ARE HERE! GET THE TRAP READY !!

Emergency conference...

*Zheng He(Me): To your positions! ASAP! Cheng E, how is the bait?*

*Cheng E: Good...*

*Henry: It'll take an hour to move into position...*

Doing calculations...

The patrol group is a light hour away, making their message an hour old... Their sensors covers about an hour...

*Zheng He(Me): Move it!*

Maximum Thrust.

Let's hope for the best.

17-1-2525

Zheng He

LOG 2

There were fifty enemy warships.

Fifty ships... Thirteen of us.

*Hao Ai: Cut power!*

Cutting power... This'll make us drift, and undetectable.

*Hao Ai: Bait, go!*

The bait: A slow transport ship loaded with resources. Something our enemies would love.

Ships detected...

... They're taking the bait!

They're IN THE FIRING ZONE!

*Zheng He(Me): FIRE AT WILL!*

Letting lose every single drone I have... Maximum thrust...

Multiple explosions detected!

*Zheng He(Me): Hold fire!*

WHAT!?!?

Six of our ships exploded?

NO.

Missiles are bearing on us!!

*Hao Ai: Scatter!*

Turning...

Huh? There's an empty patch of space in front of me and the fleet—

Filling dropships with Biters... Launching...

Twenty transport drones hurtling towards the enemy...

Biters latching onto enemy hulls...

And here's the trick: We programmed the biters to dig into a ship reactor and set them off containment

...Which was exactly what happened.

Twenty supernova explosions blocking my sensors...

Scanning...

No response.

*Zheng He(Me): I think we won*

30-1-2525

Zheng He

LOG

We are rebuilding.

We found our treasure: A habitable planet that can host humans.

In that, success.

Humanity will have a new home...

And it is finally the beginning of our voyage!

# The Printing Voyage

*Ying Wa College, Wong, Shue Hei Geoff – 12*

13<sup>th</sup> January, 1430.

A deluge followed the gale in Nanjing, China. Muhammad Cheng, also named Zheng He, a Muslim, was going to begin his last journey—the seventh Ming Voyage.

The fog was lifting and the visibility was improving. The vessels led by Captain Muhammad, were sauntering on the Pacific; The crews on the boats, were chatting and babbling with each other; The sails on the high top, were swishing and whistling smoothly. Only the captain was groaning, watching to the west—how would it be to make a pilgrimage in Macca in the journey! He thought.

Muhammad had a really splendid idea that night. The next morning, he sent his wonderful message to everyone, overwhelming exhilaration manifested on his expression. The eager supporters stamped their feet and shook their fists in chorus to the encouraging cheers that were ricocheting throughout the fleet. The mutual leader's plan had begun.

An Islam encyclopedia in ancient China talked about the way to Macca, “To Macca through (Cape of) Good Hope, obstacles will cope,” Muhammad knew that, therefore he directed the men to the west through Cape of Good Hope, South Africa.

No one would have believed it, because no one even ever found it out. The first person who went across the cape was Muhammad Cheng. He changed history. He was the leading light of the paper-making mogul.

It was the 84<sup>th</sup> day. They eventually arrived a place in the west, not Macca, but Germany. He brought half of the army, an architecture designer and an interpreter with him and walked around the city. He rapidly found a tall landmark, rushing into and found a company, making gold statues.

Muhammad saw Johannes Gutenberg, the man who invented metal movable type.

“May I take a glimpse of what you are doing, sir?” enquired the captain.

“Yes,” replied Johannes without hesitation, “look if you want to buy some,”

“Oh mister, oh mister! I am from the Great Ming, here to make every citizen riches if they become a part of us! I am rich though, and I don't need these products. But don't you have a dream, sir?”

“Yes. I am inventing some metal blocks to print something,”

“Oh, how uncivilized your country is! Get some wooden blocks as a model. I will teach you about cutting metal,” exclaimed Muhammad, while taking out some pieces of wood.

Three days later. It was time to leave. Muhammad and Johannes made two sets of blocks for both countries, the army bought a lot of local fresh food, and the designer got a lot of new ideas from the churches and mosques.

Their mission had been completed. The fleet started the home-coming trip.

Sorrowfully, Muhammad Cheng died in a cyclone and thunderstorm. Although he was gone forever, his spirit never dies.

After four months of drizzling on the sea, the vessels docked back in Nanjing.

The journey came to a halt.

# Fiction

## Group 4



# Brett's Diary

## Open it to Unleash My Secret!

*Bishop Hall Jubilee School, Wong, Wilson – 16*

29 Oct 2101                      Monday

I went to school at 7 am as usual. Something extraordinary happened! The government has proposed a fund for filming a documentary about the Ming Dynasty. The most attractive part is the \$100,000 award!! I want to use the money to buy the intriguing iPhone XXXXS, but I still haven't figured out how to make a top-notch video. Can Mr Diary give me some hints???

4 Nov 2101                      Saturday

Oh my god!!! Eddy's dad is inventing the time machine. And Eddy is going to join the competition with me. Maybe I can use the time machine? Should I do that? Eddy said he will bring me to his father's lab tomorrow. Let see what I can do tomorrow :-> See ya!

P.S. Mom reminds me to take the tote bag if I want to go anywhere.

5 Nov 2101/10 July 1405                      Sunday/Monday

Today was truly the highs and lows of my life!!

Eddy and I went to his father's lab as planned. We both entered the time machine and it was activated instantly, but it was going to nuts that we didn't have any control over it. As we were entering into a very dark mysterious void, the weightlessness was undeniably a luxury in one's life.

The machine was soon rebooted with the help of the robot called Keith. The designated time period, for us, was the 1400s. How coincidental!!! We wanted the theme of the documentary to be the Ming Treasure Voyages. The time machine accelerated beyond the speed of light and the time showed that we were travelling back to historical times!! I never thought I would be able to do this!! How exciting!

After the torture of turbulence and dizziness, we landed in Nanjing of the year 1405. The first thing that hit me while I was still fighting against the urge to vomit was the stench which reminded me of the bad conditions of my own neighbourhood... Straight to the point. Keith told us that we had two choices. Either we helped Admiral Zheng He to return to Nanjing safely, or we had to stay in the Ming Dynasty for the rest of our life. Of course, we chose the former, but I had not the faintest clue of what's going on. Keith disappeared like a spirit at a blistering speed. We only got our tote bags with us. We were in a crowd of strangers speaking unfamiliar languages, wearing weird clothing and looking eccentric. What should I do????? Can Mr Diary give me some ideas?

11 July 1405                      Tuesday

What's happening?? Why is everything out of my control? There are surprises every day!!

It was with great effort that we finally figured out what language these people are using. That's the old-fashioned Cantonese, our mother language. I have read books before that Cantonese was one of the official languages of the Ming Dynasty. But it's perfectly reasonable that we only understand some of the words they use as the language has become very different after 700 years.

We enlisted in the navy for the expeditionary voyage. Actually, we were one of the tallest among the applicants. It's surprising that nobody was suspicious of us. We take precaution though. We avoid speaking to strangers and when we can't understand what was said, we observe other people and follow the crowd. Of course we take recordings as well, and use the translation function on our phone to make sense of things that we cannot understand during the day.



After checking our cabin, we headed out to the deck where the Admiral Zheng He was giving a speech to all crew members. He was really tall – even taller than us – robust, sun-tanned. His demeanour emanated confidence and authority. Surely he is a man who has been through tumultuous times. He feels invincible. Does he really need our help? Will we be able to accomplish what we are tasked with?

It's late already, I have to be ready for the training tomorrow. Good Night!

I shan't dwell on fruitless thoughts and useless groans. I have encountered some urgent issues.

Secondly, the difference between old Cantonese and Cantonese nowadays is astounding. It's easy to spot you are not a native Ming Dynasty person cause the phonological differences are too noticeable. Also, there are many obsolete words and expressions which we have no idea what they mean. I am afraid of being spotted and picked on when our peculiarity catches attention, and worse, being seen as spies or as a potential threat. We try to speak as little as possible, and we mumble if we need to reply to anyone. But there's gonna be one time when we'll need to speak.

Regarding the problem with language, we finally figured out that the main difference between their Cantonese and Cantonese nowadays are the ambiguity of tones. As you know, Cantonese has 6 tones, but the tone no.1 and no.4 are reversed in the language. That's mean the word poem which is read as 'si1' in Cantonese nowadays should be read as 'si4' in the old Cantonese, which meant 'time', vice versa. That means we only have to interchange tone 1 and 4 to sound like them. And we have acquired a lot of vocabulary by listening to the people around us. So we need not be afraid of being discovered as strangers to the land.

Now that I have lived in this era for some time, I think a person living in the past is much happier than a person living in the 22<sup>nd</sup> century. Although technological advancement improves our life quality and we can get what we want with a tap of our fingertips. But there are just too many concerns in our lives. But people in the past can live freely, without the interference of a complex society. This is the simplicity which our modern society is in want of.

I hope everything will be alright. As I still have to stay on the ship for two years :< I missed my parents and friends

3 Dec 1406

Tuesday

One uneventful year passed. So I did not record anything, but today, we reached Quilon, India. After sailing across the oceans for a year, we finally saw a piece of land. I felt very grateful that I could walk on land again. Having anchored our ships, we headed to find the King of Quilon.

We were ordered to carry the treasures for the King of Quilon to show how powerful Chinese are. We really appreciated how glamorous Quilon was. It was like we were at Egypt at that moment. Back to the point, I finally figured out that we were crucial in this journey. As the language of Quilon and China are different, verbal communication is almost impossible between the delegates of the countries. And Admiral Zheng He was angry and demanded somebody to help. We went forward and took out my smartphone. We used the app 'Banana Translate' to help the King of Quilon and Zheng He. It turned out to be a fruitful meeting. So we headed back to the fleet, feeling useful and important.

The Admiral rewarded us a bar of gold and promoted us to lieutenants for what we contributed to the journey. And the whole ship cheered and clapped for us. This was certainly the proudest moment in my life!!!!!!

P.S. I heard that lieutenants don't need to participate in regular training! So am I exempted from the boring physical workout now?

P.S.S feels feverish

5 May 1407

Wednesday

This was the saddest moment in my whole life.

Remember last time? That Admiral Zheng He promoted me to lieutenant as I was able to be the translator of King of Quilon and Zheng He.

Today, we reached Calicut and members of the fleet all headed to visit the King of Calicut, and both sides shared their treasures with each other. A translator was required again. So the Admiral asked me to help him. But unluckily, the language of Calicut disappeared long before our time in the 22<sup>nd</sup> century so the language of Calicut doesn't exist on the list of languages in the 'Banana Translator' app.

So the meeting was cut short without successfully constructing mutual trust and appreciation between the two countries. We left Calicut, drained of any positive feeling and instead was filled with disappointment. When we boarded the ship, Admiral accused Eddy and I of treason and stripped us of our titles immediately. We were sent to the prison cell without given a trial and we're to be executed when the ship returned to Nanjing.

Why am I so unlucky? I shouldn't have helped them using the app last time! Can I still have see my family and friends? I don't want to die!!

7 Sept 1407

Sunday

It seems that we have walked out of extreme bad luck.

We are on the Malaccan Strait now. But we met pirate leader Chen Zuyi and his fleet at Palembang. Their fleet is also enormous, with more than 200 ships and 5,000 crew members.

Initially, one of the missions of this treasure voyage was to negotiate the pacification of Chen Zuyi. But apparently it failed and Chen's fleets attacked us and sank some of our ships. So Ming's forces were forced to engage in retaliation. But it seems that no party can defeat each other as they are a good match for each other.

In order to win the battle, Zheng He came to the prison to negotiate with us. He asked us to help him as Ming's morale was abating. He knew we have brought some high-tech equipment on board and he believed we would be able to defeat them effortlessly. We would do everything just to leave prison so we cut a deal. So, now, we're back in our own cabin.

9 Sept 1407                      Tuesday

I finally got back my tote bag and was able to equip ourselves with weapons. We replicated some weapons and distributed them to the soldiers using the “magic mirrors”. When Chen and his pirate fleet used handguns to knock out people one by one, we were using cannons, lasers and mortars to sink ships!!! The battle ended within an hour and we killed most of the pirates and captured Chen Zuyi and his followers. Most pirate ships were burnt and seven were captured.

Everybody was surprised by the power of modern machinery. They worshipped us like gods as we were able to defeat such a strong enemy with minimal casualties. Most crew members just threw away their old weapons and were eager to learn how to use the newest technologies in the 22<sup>nd</sup> century.

Admiral Zheng He was extremely satisfied with the effort of his crew members. He guaranteed that everybody would be rewarded for their contribution. But we got fervent appreciation from the whole fleet as our presence made the victory as easy as pie. We were exempted from punishment and got promoted to vice admiral, which was just one rank below Admiral Zheng He.

2 Oct 1407 Friday

The voyage on the sea finally came to an end.

We parked at the Nanjing port in the morning of 2 Oct, just one day after my birthday. The Yongle Emperor came to welcome Zheng He and his fleet's glorious return. An enormous celebration was held and it was an event even greater and merrier than the banquet we had before the voyage.

Do you remember that Chen Zuyi and his lieutenants were captured? They were brought to the execution chamber and were hanged. That marked the final end of this lengthy trip.

29 Oct 1407 Thursday

We were invited to the award ceremony, in which officers that contributed to the battle against Chen Zuyi's pirate fleet were rewarded.

We were praised after the emperor had given his compliments to Zheng He. The emperor thanked us for providing such advanced weapons for the crew members to fight against the pirates. He awarded us 100 kgs of gold and executive positions in the imperial court. We kindly thanked his generous gifts but we declined his offer.

We only demanded to take videos around the Nanjing for making the documentary to join the competition. The Emperor agreed and dispatched some helpers and troops to help us.

We definitely enjoyed the filming process and learned a lot of about the Ming Dynasty.

Keith appeared just right after we accomplished everything and we are going to the time machine and travel back to the Year 2101.

8 Dec 2101

Thursday

‘And the winner goes to..... Brett and Eddy’s adventure to the Ming Dynasty’

Oh my god, I am very excited now!! Our documentary won the championship in the competition and we now share a \$100,000 prize. Our effort is paid off! I can finally buy my iPhone XXXXS.

But the most glorious part was that our documentary was selected as one of the top 10 videos shot in the Year 2101 by BBC and they bought the copyright of our documentary. It is scheduled to be broadcast next Thursday. Also, they invited us to be the host of their new show, Travel To The Past With Our Time Machine. But we rejected immediately, since travelling back in time is simply a daunting task!!

# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

*Buddhist Sin Tak College, Kwok, Marco – 16*

This is the third voyage of the *Ming Treasure Fleet*, led by General Zheng He. The fleet had just left Sumatera. One of the men on the fleet asked him where they were going.

“We will head to Gampola, an enormous island southwest of here,” he answered. Gampola, was later called Kotte, and now known as Sri Lanka. “We will donate some gold and silverware to the temples there.”

“When will we arrive?”

“In about two weeks.”

At the same time, Alakesvar, the king of Gampola, whose country lacked capital, had heard of the news that a fleet from China would arrive there with various marvelous treasures like gold and silverware in two weeks’ time. One of his courtiers suggested to rob them of all their treasures, to make their country rich. To rationalise his idea to the king, the courtier even suggested it’s the “Sinhalese Dream” and to “Make Gampola strong again”.

When Alakesvar heard the idea, he nodded, filled with greediness, thinking about all the treasures and how to rob the fleet. He had almost forgotten to prepare the welcome ceremony for them, and he just realised it was one day before their arrival. “Oh, should we hold a pseudo-welcome-ceremony for them? They are meant to be our guests,” he then ordered his courtier, “You, go and prepare the ceremony. We have no time now.”

As there wasn’t enough time for preparing a solemn ceremony, the fleet was not welcomed well. “The envoy from the great Ming Empire, I am sorry that we cannot hold a ceremony that is worthy of your honourableness, as we are so poor,” Alakesvar greeted the members of the fleet.

“Never mind,” smiled Zheng He, telling his mission to the king, “The Emperor has ordered us to donate some gold and silverware to the temples in Gampola, to show our sincerity to the Buddha.”

“I shall thank the Emperor’s greatness and kindness,” the king replied, with his weak mousy voice, bowing down mimicking what the Chinese nobles do in front of the Emperor. “You must be very tired for you have travelled for almost two weeks at sea,” the king consoled them, pretending to be ardent, “I have already prepared a hostel for you, and you may have a good rest there.”

“That’s great. Thank you, your majesty.”

After welcoming the fleet, Alakesvar returned to his palace. The fleet had been placed in the Raigama Royal Hostel, and he was discussing with his courtier about the robbery. The courtier suggested to make an appointment to a killer to slaughter the fleet. Finally, the treasures will be ours!”

“That’s a really great vision; that’s our Sinhalese Dream!” exclaimed the king.

At the same time, Zheng He and his men were taking rest in the hostel. They had found that the hostel was dilapidated, with mice and spiders, and the men had been clamoring about it.

Suddenly, a sound appeared. “It is totally impossible for Gampola to welcome us so unenthusiastically and host us in such a run-down hostel,” Wang Jinhong, Zheng He’s assistant suggested, “As I know, Gampola is an extremely rich country; and we have all just seen the magnificent palace. However, the country is in serious deficit recently. Also, the king is known for his extreme greediness, for both gold and land. I have a sneaking suspicion that the king is up to no good and if my instincts are correct, they want to murder us, in order to rob us of our treasures.”

“So, it means that we are in a very dangerous situation. Jinhong, what is your suggestion?” Zheng He asked, pretending to be calm.

“We must leave now, otherwise the killer will find us very quickly, and nobody will survive,” Wang Jinhong answered with furrowed brows.

Immediately, Zheng He ordered his men to pack all their things, and that they were going to tell the king that they were leaving, not leaving a single treasure for the greedy king Alakesvar.

Soon, they arrived at the palace, asking for the king.

Alakesvar and his courtier were shocked because of their sudden appearance outside the palace. “What should we do? Did they find out our plan?” asked the king. “It’s impossible for the assassin to arrive at the hostel in such a short time since we just sent him his orders. Our plan hasn’t failed. Maybe we should let them in,” answered the courtier.

“Let them in,” ordered the king. Soon, all the fleet members appeared in the main house.

“Your majesty, I am sorry to bother you here, but I must tell you a sad truth that we must leave now, as our schedule is extremely tight.”

“I see. Our dear envoy, you may leave if you want, as you are representing the great Ming Empire, and nobody will refuse the Emperor’s command. However, I hope that when you are back in China, don’t forget to pay us a visit again,” said the king, indifferently.

After they left, Alakesvar interrogated his courtier, and was beside himself with fury, “You see? Now they have left! No more treasures! So how will your ‘Sinhalese dream’ work?”

The courtier suddenly leant over to the king and whispered, consoling the king, “Your majesty, don’t forget that they are going west, and China is in the east. They must pass through here and replenish their supplies. We can still get our hands on their incredible treasures. Our ‘Sinhalese dream’ still has hope!”

“I will only trust you this last time, and if you fail to get the treasures for me, you are going to be executed!” the king roared.

Time flew by, after one year, Zheng He had finished all his missions in Eastern Africa, the Middle East and Western India, and the fleet arrived in Gampola again.

“My dearest envoy, you have arrived here once again?” Alakesvar welcomed Zheng He with a stiff smiling, “I am sorry that I had given you such rotten tea last time. I swear that it will never happen again.”

“Never mind,” replied Zheng He.

This time, the fleet was served well. The hostel was neither dilapidated nor dirty at all. All the men of the fleet were satisfied, filled with joy.

Suddenly, one of them remembered what Wang Jinhong had said. “Will our lives still be threatened this time? I don’t want to die...” he murmured.

Zheng He and Wang Jinhong also remembered what they had chatted about there a year ago. As Zheng He could not be sure if the Gampola royal house will still want to rob them or not, he commanded the men to stay alert of all abnormalities.

Abruptly, they heard some noise from outside. When Zheng He opened the window, an arrow shot into the room, and pierced the wall.

“Gampola has sent troops to attack us!” Zheng He shouted, “Pack all the treasures immediately! And run!” All of them tried to escape, hiding behind the wooden panels to evade the flying arrows.

At the same time, Alakesvar was smiling at his courtier, appreciating his successful plan, expecting nobody would escape from the troops. However, he was still worried that they would escape through the woods. The courtier read his mind and suddenly laughed, “Your majesty, I’ve already ordered some men to cut the woods down, so it is impossible for them to escape. They won’t abscond this time!”

The king smirked, “Our ‘Sinhalese dream’ is coming true! Gampola is going to be strong again!”

While the fleet was running for their lives, they heard some strange voice. “All men, assemble now!” ordered Zheng He, then he went to check with Wang Jinhong to see what was happening.

“Oh dear, Jinhong, they are cutting the trees! Then how can we escape?” Zheng He moaned.

“Don’t be so pessimistic, Sanbao (a nickname for Zheng He). The Gampola troops will not stay in the woods all-day-long. If we escape at night, they won’t find us,” Wang Jinhong suggested. Zheng He agreed, and he ordered the men to escape at night towards west immediately after he returned.

Luckily, their escape was successful, and they finally reached Colombo. Colombo, the largest city of Sri Lanka, had become an important city since the Kingdom of Gampola was established. So actually, there were already troops of Gampola there.

“I have something to report to the king!” a soldier requested outside the palace.

“Let him in, maybe he brings some news that I have longed for,” ordered Alakesvar.

“Your majesty, we have found Zheng He and his men in Colombo. What should we do?” asked the soldier. The king repeated the question to his courtier. The courtier suggested to gather the people, so that Zheng He and his men could be cut off. The king agreed, and asked the soldier to announce to go ahead with the plan.

As what Alakesvar and his courtier expected, one day later, Zheng He was in trouble.

“Jinhong! Don’t leave! I’m here!” cried Zheng He, “Why are you going that way?”

“Don’t you see there are Gampola troops, Sanbao?” shouted Wang Jinhong, “If the troops and I marched towards where you are, they will find us, and then we will all be killed!”

“Oh no! We are cut off by them!” wailed Zheng He.

He returned to the tree where he rested, and thought how he could contact Wang Jinhong and the men. “Maybe I should try to meet them at night,” thought Zheng He.

And he was successful indeed. “Jinhong!” shouted Zheng He, “I’m Sanbao! I’m here!”

Wang Jinhong ran out immediately. “Sanbao, how did you get here? There are Gampola troops everywhere!” Wang Jinhong was shocked.

“Don’t forget that people of Gampola think that ‘sleeping is more important than anything else’, so I escaped from them at night,” explained Zheng He.

Wang Jinhong was so moved that he hugged Zheng He. “My dear Sanbao, don’t leave me, I need you. I’ve missed you very much!” Wang Jinhong cried, and his tears were pouring.

Zheng He consoled him, “Don’t cry, Jinhong, I’m still here, don’t make it like I’ve died and you are attending my funeral. Jinhong, do you know how many troops the ignorant Alakesvar sent?” he asked.

“Emm...I think around twenty-thousand,” replied Wang Jinhong, releasing Zheng He from his hug.

“From what I know, Alakesvar has only twenty-thousand men,” calculated Zheng He, “and that means Alakesvar has sent all his troops to attack us, and there are no troops in their capital at all!”

He further suggested attacking Kotte, the capital of Gampola, directly, to have Alakesvar caught.

“But what if his troops arrive before us?” asked the worrying Wang Jinhong.

“Don’t be so pessimistic, and have confidence in our men! I am sure that even with only two thousand men, we can still win against the twenty-thousand Gampola troops.” Soon, the men of the fleet assembled. “All men of our great Ming Empire!” ordered Zheng He, “We are going to take action tonight! We are going to attack Kotte, the capital of Gampola! We must let the ignorant king know how strong our mother country is!”

“Long live our Emperor!” chanted the men.

At the same time, Alakesvar was discussing with his courtier the plan of a surprise attack. “Now, that we have cut off Zheng He and his men. What should we do next?” the king asked.

“The Chinese troops are now probably in a mess, as their admiral is cut off from his men. If we launch a surprise attack on them we will win, and then we will get the treasure, and the ‘Sinhalese dream’ is going to come true!” suggested the courtier, excitedly.

However, no sooner had they planned the sudden attack than they were suddenly attacked. Zheng He and his men reached Kotte before dawn. They had never thought that Zheng He would meet his men at night, and that he would choose to attack the capital when it lacked troops for defense.

After Zheng He had gathered his men, he gave a short briefing, telling them how to attack the palace and where to find King Alakesvar. When everyone was ready, Zheng He commanded, “Attack!” then everyone charged towards the palace with only a few soldiers guarding the gate.

“What’s that noise?” the king asked his courtier.

“I...I don’t k...know...” murmured the courtier, thinking of the chance of Zheng He’s men attacking the troops. The moment they were wondering what happened, the door of the palace was suddenly demolished, and all the Chinese troops entered the palace.

“Catch the fat one!” ordered Zheng He, “That is the king!” Alakesvar and his courtier were so shocked, that before they could think of how to escape, they were already captured by Zheng He’s men. Zheng He then walked to the tightly tied king, pointed at him and accused him of conspiracy, “You have planned to stop us from returning to our motherland, you have planned to rob the treasures of our great Ming Empire, and you have even planned to murder us! How dare you!”

The palace was in total silence, but it was quickly broken by the Gampola troops. “My men!” Alakesvar exclaimed, “Fight! Protect me!”

“Men fight for your lives!” ordered Zheng He, just after the king’s command.

Although the number of troops of Gampola was ten times that of Zheng He, Alakesvar had sent his best soldiers to Colombo, so soon they crumbled, and were defeated.

“So what should we do with the captured king?” Zheng He asked Wang Jinhong.

“We should bring them back to China, and let our Emperor decide.” Wang Jinhong suggested.

Half a year later, Zheng He and Wang Jinhong returned to China, reporting to their emperor with the captured Alakesvar, accusing him of his crimes. After hearing the report, the emperor praised Zheng He and Wang Jinhong for the great job, he rewarded them and their men very well. As for the ex-king of Gampola, he was harshly punished by the emperor for his ignorance and greed. He was exiled to the Mongolian Gobi Desert.

Another half year later, the edict by the emperor had reached Gampola, the island where the king had suddenly disappeared from. People of the island were all shocked when they heard the news. “Alakesvar, the king of Gampola, is now officially banished,” announced the edict, “You now have a chance to choose a new ruler who is virtuous to become your new king.”

At last, Parakramabahu was chosen by all the people of Gampola, and agreed to become the new king, who is now known as Parakramabahu VI. The name of the kingdom was also changed from “Gampola” to the name of the capital, “Kotte”. Parakramabahu was a very nice king who treated his people well. He also kept a good political and economic relationship with the Ming Empire. And the most important thing was, that Chinese treasure fleets had never experienced hostilities again, so Zheng He could finish his missions safely from then on.

# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

*Buddhist Sin Tak College, Li, Ivan – 15*

“There may be no returning...” A group of sailors prepared themselves for a great journey, a journey to explore the seven seas, and to search for other nations and resources...

“Off we go!” pulling up the anchor, captain Zheng He (also known as Joe) said. The ship sailed right off into the distance. The ship slowly faded into the far west seas.

Ian asked, “What do you guys think will happen next? Will we get a lot of treasure? Or will we die a horrible death?”

“Well, anything can happen, who knows? But one thing I DO know, is that we are going to blast through those hiccups and everything will be smooth-sailing,” Linkon stressed confidently.

Sailing for a whole month, they were absolutely bored by the deadly dull and plain-o sea. Frank complained that it seemed like a never-ending trip to absolutely nowhere. All of them were bored by the monotonous trip, except Nathan. He kept looking through the telescope for land. Miraculously, he found an orange patch of arid land “Land! Land!” he exclaimed in complete joy. Everybody woke up from their ocean of boredom. They turned the sail, and travelled full speed ahead towards the foreign lands.

When they got closer, they could see some details of the landscape. They saw some kind of artificial structures. “I think there is civilization there! There must be humans living there in order for these structures to be built!” said Linkon. The ship docked on the shore. “I knew there were humans living here!” Linkon exclaimed. All the people living there were all confused and surprised. However, there is still a problem: How would they communicate with each other? How would they know if the natives understood them or not?

“We can draw!” suggested Ian.

Joe replied, ‘Why not? Let’s try!’

The natives seemed to know what the sailors were drawing. They took them to a structure in the shape of a pyramid and they got to see the ruler of the land. They gave the ruler some goods, like the finest teas, silks and even gold. They became great friends with the country – Egypt.

They set sail again and returned to China. The cartographer, Ian, drew a map of China and Egypt. A couple of years later, they were given their fifth mission – the mission to trade with the Egyptians. So yet again, they set on sail.

But the weather was not compliant at all. Suddenly the sky darkened and the view became gloomy. As the rain started to drop and the wind started to pick up. A thunderstorm approached! Hoo-Hoo..the wind was strengthening. The waves became bigger, shaking their ship from left to right. Lightning struck right on the post of the sail. Fortunately it didn’t catch fire as the rain and heavy waves distinguished it immediately. Everyone was frightened. They didn’t know what to do. But the ferocious wind didn’t show any mercy. It kept blowing and destroyed one of the pillars. “The bow is about to break! Nathan! Fix it!” Nathan was in utter horror. He was in a frenzy and put planks and wood everywhere trying to fix it. They were lucky as Nathan frantically repaired the limp and loose planks in time.

As people always say bad things come in multiples. It’s true and not so soon after, the second atrocity happened. They hadn’t even had time to calm down, when another ship came right towards them.

“Raiders!” Joe shouted, “Get the cannons ready! Quick!” They went back into “frenetic running mode” again. They shot every cannon and fired every weapon they could. But they all missed. “Time to retreat I guess...” Ian said. They turned the sail and even paddled to try to go back to the safe shores of China. They finally beached and the pirate chased them. They kept running until the soldiers of Ming Dynasty arrived... They were saved...

On the seventh voyage they successfully found Serbia and other countries. Although they had faced a multitude of obstacles and adversities, they managed to overcome and solve all the problems one by one. They helped other countries. They made the Ming Dynasty the emperor of the seas. They unlocked the major trade routes through the open oceans. They had done their jobs well as sailors. They created history...

“Where should we go next?”



# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

*Buddhist Sin Tak College, Ng, Elise – 15*

Another intolerably scorching summer day. Standing outside the maroon gates of the vast Forbidden City, I felt beads of sweat were breaking out all over my body—tip of the nose, neck, back, chest... the dazzling sunshine would not let us servants go, not until our masters had come to our “rescue”. Sigh! How pleasantly cool it would be inside the majestic palace!

However, the courts were having a meeting of paramount importance with His Majesty, so they wouldn’t show up any time soon. I started to get dizzy. The world was spinning quicker than ever. My eyesight seemed blurry, my eyelids kept drooping even when I tried my best to keep my eyes wide open. I could tell I was about to faint.

“Oh look!” exclaimed my peer, servant Mong. “Here comes our master! Hurry up, hurry up!” I immediately threw my dipping head up, seeing our master pacing out with an admirable noble bearing, wearing a noticeably rare smile. “Master Zheng, your humble servants are here at your service.”

In veneration and fear of getting caught, I stepped up without hesitation, beginning. “How could we help you?”

“Just carry me home,” as the deep voice bellowed just above us, we lowered our heads more.

“Yes.” The servants and I choired in unison.

No sooner had we arrived at the Mansion of Zheng’s than servant Mong and I were summoned to Master’s study. Upon being called, I elbowed Mong nervously and stuttered out my fear, “H...Hey, Mong, do you...do you think we’ll receive heavy punishment because of our—no—my laziness? He probably saw that!”

“Take it easy Kok,” but he gave a bitter, dry laugh that hid nothing. “If that were the case, we wouldn’t have been called over but directly punished instead. Am I right?” I was so anxious that my stomach clutched and twisted like my mind. Maybe Mong’s did too.

Not giving any more time for us to pray, Master Zheng called, “Come in.”

Scared at the thought of getting severely punished, we were both as silent as a muted bulldog, expecting a harsh scolding. To our surprise, the Master grinned and announced, “Well, I have a good news for you.” Mong and I exchanged looks in disbelief. Am I hallucinating? Good news? However, we were instantly relieved to know we were not going to be disciplined. That could be considered as good news anyway! “His Highness has approved my proposal for the biggest large-scale fleet sail ever. What’s more, you will be brought on board to help us with handling the cargoes.” The atmosphere grew tense as we were completely astounded and speechless, silence took over the room.

We finally realised what it meant, which got us thrilled to bits. “Thank you, Master!” Kneeling down before him, we expressed our sincerest gratitude towards the man who offered us this priceless opportunity that we had never dreamt of.

Time flew by while we were busy preparing to set sail, soon everyone only had a few remaining tasks—double checking cargoes, testing ship materials for the last time and so on. Not only were my hands trembling after handling boxes of supplies, but my whole body was quivering in sheer bliss!

Hark! The percussion of the drums indicated Zheng’s fearless sail to the unknown; with every beat of the drum and unified echo of the soldiers’ calls it uplifted us and gave us courage to tackle every obstacle on our long and arduous journey! The Emperor had come personally to show his unconditional support on this monumental journey. We never imagined people from poor families like us could be part of history, especially at this young age; actually, this was an extremely surreal experience for us. “Oi, Mong, I think it’ll be a good idea if we give each other a real big pinch. After all, it’s still hard to believe!” I poked him and whispered.

Everything was fine within the first few days of the voyages, except for the embarrassing seasickness I suffered. I protested to Mong, “How do you do it? I’m vomiting three to four times a day!”

He mocked slyly in reply, “That’s because you haven’t got the clue!” We were getting along better and better, until that one night that I’ll never forget.

# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

*Buddhist Sin Tak College, Ng, Justin – 15*

During the Ming Dynasty in 1413, China was one of the most powerful countries on planet Earth, even the most forceful in the whole universe. It was renowned for its indestructible and unassailable fleet of ships, known as “Grand-ships”, which was said to be unsinkable and unyielding, they were far more resplendent and stupendous than the Titanic.

Why were these fleets particularly notable? At that time, China had complete worldwide sovereignty over the seas, they stroked fearfulness and admiration from other countries because of China's well-established sailing facilities. What's more, the generous Ming Emperor decided to make use of the sumptuous fleet to carry cargoes of precious items, giving them away as marvellous prizes to make cordial relationships with other countries on every New Year's Eve.

As “Grand-ship” set sail on New Year's Eve in 1413, an important day that saw China giving out extravagant presents for the first time. Thousands of Chinese people gathered at a colossal wharf, witnessing piles of silk, stacks of diamonds, heaps of gold being transported onto the ships. The scene was inordinately mind-blowing. Afterwards, they cheered for their homeland and raised a formidable hurrah which was as loud as thunder.

There was a total of seven voyages sailing to seven continents and passing through five oceans. The first route was going to Asia, calling on countries like Japan and Singapore. “What a placid and tranquil place with an idyllic scenery and extensively unrivalled grasslands, it must be immensely restful here!” the captain exclaimed. The sailors marvelled at the splendour of this breathtaking scenery. The rulers of several Asian countries met the captain and received a great deal of precious items.

The second route was travelling to Antarctic. It was distinguished for the hostile environment with frosty temperatures, lands were filled with mounds of snow. The rivers and lakes froze over.

“BREAK CLEAR! QUICK! Storms are coming... all ghastly and crazy” the captain stammered and crammed his hands into pockets. “It's a desert here. Nobody can live under such dreadful weather!”

“Hang on! Heeling, Captain!” cried the sailor. It was a truly gruesome and nasty nightmare for all on board.

After leaving the threatening monstrous place, they decided to proceed with their journey, sailing to Africa. It was a populous continent yet most people suffered in poverty by virtue of a lack of resources. The sailors witnessed thousands of people living in dilapidated mud huts, lying on the filthy and shrivelled floor, praying for food and water. The sailors were flabbergasted to see those abnormally thin bodies.

“Why is this continent so doleful and flaccid? People living here must have suffered in lengthy agony! Poor souls!” a voice broke out.

As the fleet had plenty of advanced fishing resources, including lures, tackles and reels, they made use of the pleasant geographical location and mild climate to teach those inerudite African people the art of fishing. They even gave the revolutionary fishing equipment to them. From then on, Africans were known to be “king fishermen”. The generosity of China had triumphantly driven the economic growth of Africa.

After establishing a long-lasting and trustful diplomatic relationship with Africa, the fleet moved on to Europe, where many western countries with state-of-the-art weapons were located. Noisy markets were everywhere, trading all sorts of exotic goods. At that time, Spain and Turkey had a strenuous relationship, paving the way for the erupting Spanish-Turkish War. The sailors saw many homeless refugees. A majority of them were forced to leave their homelands to foreign lands by swimming or trekking to get away from the obnoxious chaos of wars. Nevertheless, the captain transported cargoes of gold to each of the two countries as a peace treaty, for the sake of ameliorating the relationship between Spain and Turkey. The war finally ended peacefully. The European refugees couldn't thank China enough by dint of hard work and persuasion to settle the war.

A quarter of the year had passed of 1413, many countries that laid on the equator had already entered typhoon season. Unfortunately, the fleet met a catastrophic tropical cyclone on the way to the Australian continent. The roaring waves rolled mountain high. Strong winds snarled like wild animals. The teeny-weeny junks couldn't prevail on the whistling animal, and got tossed about on the stormy sea.

“Captain! Water in the hull! The junk may sink.” the alarming voice warned mechanically. No sooner had the warning come than the captain pressed an emergency button promptly. Thousands of crude and steely pillars hoisted from the bottom, lifting the whole “Grand-ship” up in the midair.

“We have braved the elements! Hurray!” raved the captain. In spite of the distressing weather, the tremendous fleet had no damages at all. They rushed out of the fuzzy fog and victoriously arrived at the fabulously prepossessing Australian continent. Seeing the kangaroos jumping ecstatically, the sailors felt a sense of console and gave the illustrious Chinese tea-leaves to the Aboriginal people.

At length, the fleet travelled across many seas and oceans. Much to the captain's astonishment, they discovered a colossal continent that nobody knew, which is known as the American continent nowadays. The sailors were flabbergasted by the astonishing discovery. Primitive people were found everywhere and they drilled wood to get fire. They caught fish manually. They climbed mountains and wade through rivers to obtain water. Unknown and unexplored. There were prodigious abundance of fruit, crystal clear rivers and diverse wildlife. There were promising resources all over!

The primitive people were immensely amiable, they gave many treasurable items to the sailors. The captain also gave away many newfangled machines and precious silk products to them. A fabulous relationship between China and the people of this island was budding beautifully.

This tradition of making new discoveries and new friendships continued every New Year's Eve. The legacy of The Grand-ships will never be forgotten.

# Eternal Love

*Carmel School Association Elsa High School, Apfelbaum, Mia – 14*

People say time heals all wounds but people also lie. It was a warm evening in the year 1405. I was at home nursing my daughter, Hua Yin. I named her Hua because Hua means flower. She was my perfection, made by Gods angels. My husband Li Yin was at work. It was like any normal evening. I put Hua down to sleep and then would go try and fall asleep myself. I always believed she protected me, my guardian angel. That night I couldn't sleep. I did the only thing I could do when I was unable to sleep, I thought about life, I thought about Hua. Hua had porcelain white skin and big black eyes. She had big round cheeks that could melt your heart. She could look at you and you would just want to hug her. She was my perfection. She was what kept me going. After a bit of thinking, I drifted off into a warm sleep.

I was woken up at 4 am with excruciating pain to my cheek. My whole body jolted up and all I could think about was if Hua was hurt. Through the corner of my eye I saw my husband sitting on the bed his eyes filled with rage as they often are. He began to scream at me, raging over something small. I tried talking to him and calm him down, but instead, his hand just radiated off my cheek. With every word, the pain was getting excruciatingly worse. With every breath, my hatred for this man grew. The pain of knowing this man could hurt me and I was incapable of fighting back, but even worse he could hurt Hua. This knowledge broke me. My bed, a place I felt safe in, a place that I could escape to no longer felt like a haven. As the pain in my body grew worse and worse, I suddenly heard Hua crying and I remembered why I was still here with this man. It was for her. I wanted a life for her, a life she would love. A life filled with joy and wealth. Something I couldn't give her on my own. I ran to go and grab her. I could hear her cries ring through my ears. I always believed she could sense when Li and I were arguing.

Just as I grabbed her Li's hand pulsed through my arms, my world began to spin and I dropped her. Suddenly a room that was filled with Hua's light turned into a room of hatred, a room I needed to escape. I dropped the only thing I cared about. In that moment I knew I couldn't stay here with this man. This man made me hurt the only person I truly care about. I had no money, no job, and all I had was my own knowledge and my little flower. I knew that if we stuck together we would be okay, at least that's what I believed. So I ran, and I ran holding my precious flower. The only other thing I took with me was my one medical book. That book had been with me through everything and it was going to stay with me. Medicine had always been my passion. I left the so called comfort that was my home, to a world more viscous than I could ever imagine. A world that made my home seem so safe.

I didn't know where to run to. I slept in a little room I managed to rent for the night. It was a quaint pale blue room with simple wooden furniture that filled the room with a warm feel. Very simple, just enough for me and Hua to sleep the night. I was thinking about a place we could go to. My mind rushed back and forth from idea to idea but none were what we needed, then just as I was drifting to sleep I remembered hearing of a very famous captain called Zheng He and of his fleet of ships. The Ming Voyages they were called. I heard these ships could fit up to 30,000 people. I knew that if I could sneak onboard somehow I could sail on the boat until we reached a new land. Where I could start a new life. For me and for Hua. I could build her a life she deserved, a life I couldn't give her here. I knew it would be dangerous but this was our only hope.

As we entered the dock the next morning I began to search for a way to sneak onto the boat. I was able to find a broken maid's costume lying in the corner near the trash and I quickly changed and managed to hide Hua in a little basket I found near it. I didn't think this was a good idea but it was the best idea I had in mind. In the chaos of loading the ships we were able to sneak on. I found a little room at the very bottom of the ship. This room would be our home for now. It was small and made of wood, the smell of the sea breeze lingered in the ships evening air.

A week passed as we lived in utter secrecy. I cleaned the floors every day. I made sure no one noticed me, I managed to blend in very well. Every day I brought the leftover food I had for Hua and I. If she cried I made sure to quickly lull her to sleep. I made sure we hid well, for if we were caught we would both be dead. It was day nine of our adventure, I had woken up to the sound of Hua crying. The pain in her tears filling the room. I quickly grabbed her and began rocking her back to sleep. I sang a quiet melody that filled her ears with beautiful sounds. The moment I touched her I knew something was wrong. She was hot, very hot. She was ill. I tried to calm her down but I knew she needed medicine. She was not going to get better unless I gave her medicine. I quickly thought about what to do. I knew there must be medicine on this ship. As I was thinking I heard the loud chatter of men outside, I was immediately snapped out of my thought and back on alert. As I went out on a journey to find her medicine. I overheard Zheng He, the captain of the ship talking to one of his doctors about how one of his army generals was very sick and could die.

"He could die in a matter of hours if we don't find the right medicine," I heard Zheng He whisper.

At that moment I knew exactly what would help him and how I could save Hua. I remember what I read in my medical book. I knew everything about doctoring, although I could never be a doctor because I was a woman. I went up to Zheng He with a small new found confidence and began speaking. I explained to him the specific medicine he needed. He was on the verge of sending me out until his doctor gave the general my medicine and in an instant, he felt much better. He doubted me at first but once I begged him he had to try. Zheng He being embarrassed that a maid

helped the general quickly told me to leave. I didn't even receive a thank you. I knew that this medicine would help my Hua. I told myself I would sneak back here and get the medicine during the darkest hour of the night. This was Hua's only hope to make it through the next week.

It was almost the black of night. I went to go check on Hua, she was hot and pale. She looked sicker than ever. My heart was running through my chest, racing a million beats per second. I knew I needed the medicine to save her. I ran through the whole ship. The dark floorboards creaking with every step. Careful to not get caught but still fast as ever. As I approached the cupboard I realised it was locked. Anger rising to my cheeks, I was mad at myself. How could I have not thought of this? I looked everywhere, but no key was insight. I didn't know what to do, but I had to do this for my Hua. Suddenly I had a really bad feeling, I ran back to check on Hua. Every thought possible ran through my mind as I ran through the dark hallways. I entered our little hideaway and saw Hua lying. She had no color and didn't make a single movement. As I ran up to her I rattled her but she just lied there. She didn't even make a sound.

She was dead.

Dead.

Death seems so simple. We are surrounded by death. We acknowledge it and we accept it. We merely nod to death. But once death has stolen a loved one from us. These simple sayings and acknowledgments don't matter anymore. As I stood there with my precious angel lying in front of me dead because of me, because I couldn't give her the medicine she deserved. I knew I could have done more. The salty hot tears poured down my face, more and more. Burning my eyes. My screams getting louder and louder. My lungs gasping for air. I took another deep breath and as I breathed I realised she was gone and no matter how much I cried she would never come back to me. My god sent angel was gone. The reason I kept on pushing through everything was gone. A pain shot down through me, a pain like no other, I dropped to the floor and hugged her. My body collapsed over her dead lifeless body.

I had to do something with her. I couldn't keep my Hua dead in a little room. She deserved more. I thought of the only thing I could think of doing at that moment. In Chinese culture the ocean represents life. It represents a freedom beyond our morality. I knew I had to let her live on in the beautiful seas. I found a blanket lying in the corner of the room, I wrapped her all warm and beautiful. She lied there so peaceful not bothered, she looked calm. My hot tears soaking the blanket draped around her. I slowly walked out of my room and toward the deck of the ship. As I stood there the cold breeze hitting my face. I could only hope that she would have a better life, a life I couldn't give her. The life she truly deserves. I kissed her pale head and as we touched for the last time nothing mattered. My baby was gone, everything around me disappeared. Once I said my goodbye. I threw her in. I saw her little body fall into the cold vast ocean. The love I had for her would be an eternal love. In that moment I felt like I died inside. The tears began falling from my face, the painful screams coming out of my mouth. My chest tightening. I slowly began to walk away with tears in my eyes. She was gone. She belonged to death now. She was no longer mine.

As I turned away I saw the general who I saved earlier. He kindly looked at me and asked who I was, I told him: "My name is Mang and I was the maid who saved you," I said while holding back tears.

He thanked me and asked why I was crying?

"Nothing," I said.

I ran back to my room. I didn't want to talk, I could barely say a few words. That night I didn't sleep, I just lied there emotionless. Not a tear fell, not a thought passed through my mind. As I woke up the next morning I promised myself I would continue. For Hua's sake, I would live the life Hua never got to live.

I was cleaning a lot in the next couple weeks it always got my mind off things. Even back home after having big fights with Li, cleaning always seemed to get my mind off things. As the week went on I bumped into the general I saved around three more times. We managed to finally exchange names. He looked so different up close. Beautiful silky black hair draped over his eyes, perfectly balanced pink lips. His name was Wong Lu. We slowly, slowly began to talk and talk, more and more. We would bump into each other more often. We would give any excuse to talk to each other. Over the course of the next month, we began to talk in privacy and meet when we could. Our connection grew. It grew with every conversation we had. He would sneak into my little room and I would sneak into his. I was still grieving my daughter but for the first time in a long time, I was happy. It seemed that maybe time was doing its job right. I was healing. Whether he knew it or not he was helping me heal. He truly accepted me. Our connection grew deeper as we would meet every night and sneak and have dinner. I remember one memory especially, he was tired and we both had a long day. He took me to a private spot on top of the ship. We went through dark halls but eventually, we made it. It was beautiful, the stars shined bright and everything seemed perfect, as we both laid there cuddling, everything seemed okay. We both fell more and more in love. I loved this man. This was a love I never experienced. A love I would cherish for a lifetime. This love was an eternal love. This love was easy, there were no bumps. Things seemed calm but as I soon learned time always takes its course.

We were arriving along the coast of Indonesia and Wong was called to fight. Everyone was preparing for the huge battle to come. He told me he wanted to stay or we could run away, anything to be with me. He didn't want to fight. I told him 'no', I made him go to war.

I told him, "After all of this we can figure it out."

I wanted him to finish his journey as a hero. He listened, I knew he would do anything for me. I knew that once he made it through this, we could live a better life together. I wrote him a note before he left and I told him to read it on his way back from war. I had tears prickling in the back of my eyes letting him go. The note explained everything, who I truly was, my daughter, everything. He only ever knew half of me. Just as he was leaving I was hit with a bad feeling, something did not feel right.

I waited all day for him, the men slowly coming back from a heavy day of battle, Wong had still not come back. As I was just going to ask about him to one of the men overseeing the fight, two men dressed in big suits came and grabbed me. They showed me the letter I wrote to him covered in blood.

They screamed, "You traitor!" along with many other horrible words.

Yet all I could ask was "Where is Wong?"

So much was happening. I was caught, yet all I cared about was where Wong was.

They thrust towards me the two most painful words, "He's dead."

Two words that ruined me. I screamed. A pain hit my chest, a kind I hadn't yet experienced. I screamed and I cried as they took me away. Nothing else mattered. I didn't care that I was going to jail, all I cared about was Wong. I couldn't lose someone else. The little hope I had left was merely a flickering light, except now this light was about to flicker out.

It's been three years since I lost everything I loved. I thought time would heal my wounds but as I have learned people lie. My wounds are not healed but as I sit here in my little dusty cell, with a little bit of warm sunlight pouring in. I felt okay, I was still in pain, everything I loved was still gone, but I felt okay. As I heard the screams of people outside my cell I heard a new scream today I hadn't heard before but I instantly recognized it. It took me a minute to understand my mind foggy with pain but I knew what it was, it was Wong's scream. I didn't understand but I knew it was Wong's scream. In that moment life simply seemed like a game some people win and some people lose and for the first time I didn't feel like I was completely losing.

# The Truth of the Ming Voyages

*Carmel School Association Elsa High School, Gangaramani, Diya – 15*

My name is Zheng He, I am going to tell my story. My real story. The story begins in 1402. I was thirty-two years old and I was in a good place, socially, emotionally and physically. I was one of my emperor's favourite subjects, because of my loyalty to him and our empire, as well as my work ethic. He trusted me, which is something of great value because this trust is what acquired me the position to command the Seven Voyages of the Treasure Fleet. However, the chances are, you can read about these affairs in history books. I am writing to tell my story. My true story. One that you have not heard before.

I grew up with four younger sisters and my father. Regretfully, my mother had passed away when giving birth to my younger brother. However, he couldn't survive more than a few days without his mother's milk. At least, that is what my father had told us. I was too young to remember.

When I was thirty-two years old, my father passed away. He had a heart attack and was in the hospital when he passed away. He was in the disheartening hospital for a few hours before he finally died, but, minutes before his death, he muttered the last words he would ever say "Your brother is alive. Honour your mother and I. I don't know exactly where he is, but I do know that he is somewhere along the Indian ocean. Find him, and bring him home." I was beyond shocked when I heard those words, but I had to spend the last few seconds with my father, while I still could. He died two minutes later. I would miss my father like anything, but I would focus my grief on living up to the task he set me up with. I had to find my nameless brother, no matter what it took.

★ ★ ★

At thirty-two years old, I was close to the Emperor. I was definitely very lucky to be in this position because it is the reason that these events took place. I had to come up with a reason to travel through the Indian ocean. I managed to come up with a good idea. I knew how much the emperor valued respect from other nations, so I thought of delivering gifts to other empires would be a good suggestion. Little did I know that the Emperor would love this idea so much, he would make it one of the biggest voyages of the era. Nor did I know that it would make me one of the most known mariners in the world. And it was all to bring my brother home.

You can read about the voyages in any other book, so I'm going to focus on telling my story. I didn't have very much information on my younger brother. In fact, I hardly had any. All I knew is where he came from and that he left in 1376. His birth certificate didn't have my father's name on it, so he wouldn't have known my brother's legal name. However, I did know that adoption wasn't that common during that time, so that was something that would help.

During the first six voyages, I always found a way to slip away from my troops. I would say that I wanted to go exploring the area, or that I had a meeting with a general or something of the sort. I would walk around, starting conversations with people, and asking casually if they knew anyone who was adopted, or if they had heard any rumours about this. Not a single person had anything of value to me over the course of the first six voyages.

The seventh voyage, however, was a different story. We travelled to a beautiful island, it was as if the breeze was hope itself. By this time, I was fifty-nine years old and my health was not in the best condition. Yet, I was determined to find my brother. I had to find him, even if it would be the last thing that I would do. The seventh and last voyage took three years, and we visited seventeen different ports. It was exhausting, but I still made sure to travel around each and every area we went to and asked around. I was beginning to lose hope. I desperately wanted to find my brother but my body was failing me.

One day, I was absolutely exhausted when walking. My vision began to blur, and knees started trembling, and I collapsed. The last thing I remember from that day is a small boy yelling frantically to his father to get help. The next day, I woke up in a hospital. I opened my eyes and saw my head troop speaking with a doctor at the foot of my bed.

"He's going to be fine, but he needs a lot of rest. I want him to stay here for a while. He's not quite fit enough to travel yet." The doctor was speaking quietly, so I knew he didn't think I was awake. I wondered how long I'd been there. I tried to sit up and the doctor and my troop walked over to me.

"How do you feel?" The doctor asked, concerned.

"I'm okay but a little bit sore."

"You're going to stay here for about a week, and then I think you should travel straight home and rest before you do anymore travelling."

"Alright, thank you so much, doctor."

"Thank you," my troop said. The doctor smiled and left the room.

"I couldn't get you a private room, but you're alone in here until another patient checks in. I'm going to go sort out some paperwork and write to the Emperor." He bowed and left the room.

I was alone in the room, and I realised what this meant. I couldn't search for my brother anymore. I had failed my father. I couldn't do the one thing that he had asked me to do before he died. I had failed. I slowly lay down and fell asleep.

The next morning, I heard people coming in and out of the room. I heard someone say that there was another patient coming to stay in the bed next to me. 'At least now I won't be alone,' I thought to myself.

After a while, the chatter quietened down and it was just me and the other patient. There was a curtain between us so I couldn't see him. I could hear him snoring quietly, and thought how nice and peaceful this man must feel right now. I longed for that peace of mind, but all I could think of was my father and how my mission to find my brother had completely collapsed. I tried to find something to do to distract myself, but nothing really helped. Eventually, after what felt like a lifetime, I drifted off to sleep.

The next morning, a nurse entered our room to bring some food. The curtain remained shut, but I did hear my roommate thank her for the food so I knew he was awake. When the nurse left, I decided to introduce myself. "I'm Zheng He, what's your name?"

"My name is Wang Shu." His voice sounded familiar, but I was quite sure that I'd never met anyone from that area before, apart from the people I asked about my brother.

"What are you here for, Shu?" I asked, trying to start a conversation, mainly to distract myself from the self-hateful thoughts.

"I have tuberculosis. What about you?"

"Apparently, I've been over exhausting myself."

Wang Shu and I became quite close over the next couple of days, but, I hadn't seen him yet. The curtain was kept closed the entire time. He told me all about his life, how his parents sold books for a living and how he didn't have any siblings but would have loved some growing up. I was happy to have made a friend, and to have been distracted long enough to enjoy myself a little bit.

One morning, as I woke up, and I heard Wang Shu coughing quite a lot, and I got nervous, so I screamed for a nurse to come and help. The nurse came in and gave Wang Shu some water, and she checked him to see if he was okay. I assumed that he wasn't because the nurse called for the doctor to come to take a look. She opened the curtain between him and I. I looked at him, he looked at me. Our eyes locked and it was a magical moment. I looked at his face and he looked exactly like me, except that he looked a few years younger. This was my brother. I could feel it in my bones. Wang Shu was still coughing and the doctor was trying to give him medication, but, slowly, he stopped coughing. It took me a few minutes to realise that he hadn't just stopped coughing. He had stopped breathing. He was dead.

★ ★ ★

On the boat back home, I was very quiet. I would answer any questions the troops had and I would return to my corner of the deck and stare at my feet. I had lost my father. I spent my life trying to do what he wanted me to do, and I managed to find my brother, but I couldn't bring him home. I didn't have any close family left. All of my sisters had married and moved away and I didn't know where any of them were. My brother was the only person I had.

That night, I went to sleep, and in the morning, I didn't wake up. Like my father and my brother, I had stopped breathing. My troops cut off some of my hair, took my shoes and brought them back to China, and buried me at sea.



# The Letters' Voyages

*Carmel School Association Elsa High School, Gershon, Lily – 15*

16th September 1817 Night time,

My dearest Eliza,

How it grieves my heart to have left you and the family this morning as the sun broke dawn. I need not tell you that since I left, all my thoughts have been with you at Berkshire and your image along with Oliver, Adelaide, Owen, and baby Henrietta's fills my mind. Even in my dreams, I never imagined I should find so much love on Earth for you and the family. How those moments glisten for me when I was close to you and our darling children, with your hand in mine. Those days flew by the equivalent to the speed of light, but our separation will go by equally so. Lest I forget this morning as it commenced with the routine choir of birds, aiding us in our waking as you soon attended to Henrietta. I attended to the children and subsequently finalized my packing preliminary to the forthcoming journey. Emotions that could only be described as devastation and consternation were fluttering in endless rings in my mind when the children drew nearer to converse.

"Father, must you leave this instant?" Cried, Oliver.

"I must," I bravely pronounced whilst raising Oliver, "I'm off for an adventure!"

"An adventure?" An intrigued Adelaide inquired with a smirk on her face.

"Certainly my dear," I replied as I lowered Oliver, "I'm going on the Ming Treasure Voyage." I retrieved my briefcases and unveiled one which would present an object of interest to the children. I comprehended in order for the children to not fret for I am elsewhere, I must convey to them that I am indeed fine.

"Father, what is this?" Panted Owen as he ran into the room. I paused for a moment and then grinned.

"Gather around children!" I announced animatedly. The children formed a circle centering me. I retrieved a map that radiated brighter than the sun and twinkled infinite stars that panned across the walls. The children's eyes grew wider than the ocean and their minds travelled journeys only their imaginations could reach. Magic pronounced itself in our cottage and granted our children hope that I shall return home safe once more.

"This map once belonged to the remarkable Ming Dynasty in China as they embarked on seven treasure voyages initiated by the Yongle Emperor. The grand voyage travelled to coastal territory islands in and around the Indian Ocean, South China Sea, and beyond one's imagination."

"Must you disturb your father whilst he is preparing to leave? Adelaide and Owen Wright, repeatedly I have requested the two of you to order your reading for the afternoon!" You vocalized marching into the room as simultaneously quieting down Henrietta's cries in your arms. I stood and placed the map back into the briefcase as you approached me.

"Augustus, I certainly do not feel comfortable with you embarking on such a dangerous journey, whatever money we may need, only a fool accepts this opportunity to captain a ship during these circumstances. I advise you not to go." I remind you, Eliza, although formidable and threatening, this is a voyage I am to complete for you and the family for I have vowed to cultivate for you and your offspring. In times that I feel apprehensive, I shall close my eyes and return home to our glorious moments with the children, for it shall be you to pull me through the danger. Time struck noon declaring the time to leave had arrived. I cherished those final embraces with the children. I look to you with Henrietta in your arms. I kiss you both farewell and look in the distance to save an image of my life prior to this change. I step outside our door and attempt to embrace the novelty of this new chapter.

Eliza, I love you. Three simple words, and yet never uttered or inscribed in ink by me or to another living soul, only to you. Off I go alone and it's with a very heavy heart I part from you. Brighten up, remain my one and only treasure, as I to you. I ask you to please continue to exchange letters with me throughout this journey.

With promises of unchanging love and faithfulness,

Augustus Wright

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I read Augustus's letter with the essence of melancholy as I ruminate upon the last fortnight and life without him. I stand at the window and observe the children playing in the autumnal fields, crunching the leaves with every bounce. I cogitate upon my last memory of Augustus prior to his departure; he stood by the door with the sun illustrating a silhouette of him and watching time slow as Augustus closed the door following him. Reminiscing the sound of the door jolts my body and sets me back into reality.

"Mother?" Inquires Oliver with concern written across his face.

"Yes, dear. Sorry." I speedily replied.

"I, I, I've been here for a while and Henrietta is crying," quivered Oliver, "is there a concern with father?"

“My dear child, there is no matter of concern with your dear father. Promise to not be distressed.” I urged Oliver. Oliver nodded, embraced me tightly, and ran along. I positioned Augustus’s letter on the étagère and sat to commence my reply to Augustus.

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30th September 1817 Morning,

My beloved Augustus,

Should I draw you the image of my heart at this instant it would be what I hope you still love, though it contained nothing new. The early possession you attained there, along with the power over it, it leaves not the smallest space unoccupied. I have witnessed a near score of years roll above our heads with an affection heightened and improved by time to create a beautiful family; however, the moments of dreary absences have not in the slightest degree effaced from my mind the image of my husband, my beloved Augustus, to whom I bestow my heart. I read and write with ease and understanding that you are safe, Augustus, and that you are captaining your fleet with bravery, strength, and dignity. Opining that the last fortnight passed with simplicity is embroidery of our circumstances. We celebrated Henrietta’s half birthday as a family. Watching the children be joyful was a feeling like no other. The expressions of bliss mirrored the compass of the abode. Must I confess, I shed a tear when I consider the similarities between you and Henrietta. A child so small, yet so expressive and delightful; she is following in your traces.

Now it is morning, the crisp air welcomes us along with the autumnal leaves on the ground. The children are bounding on the fallen ruby and amber leaves, crunching away with every spring in their stride. Observing their delight fills our world with wonder.

Now I ask you to listen to me in turn. Your letter has touched me more profoundly than I thought even you could have touched me. To our family, you are not only the solar spectrum with the seven luminous colours but the sun himself that illuminates warmth for all to adore. I ask for you to remain enthusiastic through your travels, lest you forget from whence you came and remember to think about your safety and protection. Our family yearns for your presence further as the time ticks.

Eternally yours,  
Eliza Wright

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The tranquil silence of midnight permitted me to read Eliza’s letter without a forlorn feeling for returning home. How it is distressing to comprehend I will be absent from the principal maturing stages of my children’s lives.

Notwithstanding this, I will listen to Eliza and regard my well-being. The bow of the deck is coated with an airy mist, hissing frost at a constant. The night is painted dark by Erebus, yet, stars glisten ever so elegantly. I begin to leave the deck. Abruptly as I stride, the ship trembles with fear as the waters below attacks the ship. The sense of adrenaline that comes with fear rushes to my head.

“Captain,” a shipmate yells, “the ship has encountered serious difficulty. The harsh turbulent waters have ambushed the ship and all the vessels. We are to vanish, Captain!” I hasten to salvage Eliza’s letter, quill, ink, and small goods that are on the deck and expeditiously placed them in my coat. The ship commenced swaying as if the seas were in battle, proceeding the boat to tip at superlative angles. I turn, shipmates are plunging into the waters below. I endeavor to the optimal of my propensity to advance to the main mast of the ship and progress to haul the ship. Stormy winds actuated by Anemoi brawled against me as I scuffle to steer the menacing occasion. I maintain to discern shipmates soaring over the deck. Zeus’s conduction of lightning masked Aiolos’s transmission of the storm as the lightning wrecked the ship. Each fleeting pulse from my chest intensified to emulate each thunder strike. Prayers and howls roared as the ship was ushered astray by rogue tides. The mist blinded me as I acquired the capability to administer the ship. I glimpse a shore in the distance.

“Captain!” An officer cried as I conclude marshalling the ship to shore.

“Officer!” I shout in astonishment. I rapidly attended to the officer. It was Officer Taylor. He was wounded; blood flowed like a ruby river from his legs and his head was painted with scarlet splatters. He attempted to speak; however, he was too immensely sore to utter. I tended to Officer Taylor’s wellbeing and ensured he will recover expeditiously.

I decide to return to the main deck of the ship and observe the wreckage. I trudge each step as disinclined as the next until I position myself on the deck. The scene is non-comparable and not desirable to wish on my foe. There is a grief that cannot be spoken and a pain that forever will go on. Phantom shadows are on the ground as my consociates lay there side by side as they encountered their ill-timed demise. The destruction to the ship could only be elucidated as demolishing of fabrication of adventure and exhilaration. The witnessing of an exceedingly wrecked ship with damaged parts distributed over the deck of what once was a ship provokes immense despair and woe. I hear Eliza’s words in my mind, instructing me to protect myself. Instantaneously, I recall Eliza’s letter. I check my pocket for the letter, ink, and quill. I redeem the letter to find half of the ink had spilt in my pocket and the letter. I gaze off into the horizon contemplating the manner to write to Eliza and the manner in which I am to return home.

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"Eliza, must you be so concerned about Augustus? The concern is reflecting on the children and unsettling them!" My Mother implored whilst knitting.

"Mother, it is highly wearing in these circumstances to not fret, particularly when Augustus has not written for a month when he is captaining the most menacing voyage of his lifetime! I have written numerous letters; to which he has not responded! I had my concerns and Augustus refused to listen!" I insisted whilst pacing.

"The ship is lost! The ship is lost!" A man screams. I panic and rush outside trembling like a leaf in wind. The man continually squalls whilst dashing along the road. I halted him and bid to speak through my tears.

"Pardon me, sir. This ship you speak of, is it captained by Mr Wright?" I questioned with dread in my stomach.

"Indeed. The vessel sunk into the waters once a severe storm hit. It is not known the events that followed subsequently. There is a lack of knowledge regarding whom has persevered through the bedlam." I grasp my chest towards my heart and swoon. It is as if time ceased and purloined my life from me. I bellow a cry from my heart that yelped for assistance. My Mother dashes to my extricate.

"Augustus! Return, my love! I beg of you!" I repeatedly howl as Mother heaves me into the cottage.

I maintain sobbing until I spot Oliver out the corner of my eye.

"Mother? Is, it, is? Father? Mother?" Uttered Oliver as he turned as pale as a phantom. He gaped at me, instantaneously staggered, and had a convulsion. Oliver trembled like leaves in a storm and then shuddered. I am in a state of disbelief to comprehend the occurrences before me.

"Augustus!" I wail toward the heavens.

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This setting was not desirable to naturalise to. I rested the night on the sands in the belief I was delusional. I stand and observe the shore. The withering heat paved way for the air scents of the sea. Pillow clouds hover over the golden peaks through the wandering skies. Solitude embraces me with every waking thought. I instantly picture Eliza with the family. I instantaneously retrieve my quill, ink, and the insufficient amount of cartridge—paper. I commence corresponding with Eliza.

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November 1817, Morning

My dearest Eliza,

Should this letter reach you, let it be an intimation that I have passed. What will become of you and our offspring is a matter I am uninformed upon. However, soothe yourself, Eliza, as there is one above that will preserve your well-being and not let you starve.

Your love bestowed upon me the prosperity of kings since you have been paramount of wives. I loved you deeply, to the extent you shall never comprehend.

Beloved, do ponder of me when the grief has drifted. Converse with the children about me and lest they disregard who their father was. I beg of you to vow that the children shall comprehend that I shall never neglect them or you, Eliza. I should not have left you thus bringing such suffering and poverty on a loving wife and children for which in time I beg you will exculpate me. If the chance should come your way for a gentleman to bestow you an offer, know it would please me to think you would take it, and not grieve much for me.

So dear beloved, I bid you farewell in the desire to meet once more if there is a hereafter. Know that my final thoughts were of you, the only one I ever loved, the one who made a man of me.

With promises of unchanging love and faithfulness,

Augustus Wright

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I conclude the letter with tears streaming down my face. I glance to my left and perceive Officer Taylor above me, solacing me.

"It is of the highest significance we endeavour our journey home." Insisted Officer Taylor. I nod in agreement.

Abruptly, sounds of amusement and hilarity are heard by Officer Taylor and I. We exchange perplexed expressions then instantly bound towards the sounds. We gait each step as we writhe beneath the elevating shrubberies. We arrive at a base of civilisation attaining urbanity and cultivation. I advance towards one of the men and outstretch my hand. One of the men stretched their hand out in return.

"Pleased to make your acquaintance, sir." I timidly spoke.

"Sir," he uttered, "you men are in India. You travelled through the Indian Ocean when confronting the storm. May I inquire if the Crown sent you?"

"No, sir. Our vessel was voyaging to trade goods with China when our ship encountered a lamentable storm." Officer Taylor expressed.

“Thus you men are foraging manners to depart home,” the man vocalised, “I desire something in order for me to assist you.”

I endured an instance of helplessness until I recalled the small goods I salvaged and placed in my pocket. I passed the goods to the man who subsequently examined them, and tittered.

“Well, Sirs, I shall assemble a team to repair the boat.” Declared the man.

“Thank you, Sir. If I may beseech you, I beg of you to dispatch this letter to my wife.” I implored whilst passing the letter to the man.

“With pleasure.” Averred the man.

Within what was the sensation equivalent to the speed of light, Officer Taylor and I were prepared to embark on our voyage home.

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Each passing day brought ineffable despair and despondency from mourning my husband. Mother has been administering the children’s mettle whilst I have been mellowing in my sorrow.

“Eliza, do eat, dear.” Mother urged. I peer blankly at Mother as stillness imbued the cottage. Instantaneously, roars of applause and exclamations are heard from the exterior of the cottage. I excuse myself to observe the havoc. I observe swarms of people embracing two men advancing near. I view the face of the man appearing towards me and to my incredulity, that man was Augustus!

“Augustus!” I shriek whilst I bound towards Augustus. We meet equidistant and embrace. I weep rivers of exaltation and consolation into Augustus’s arms.

“Father!” The children howl. The children charge towards Augustus and I and encircle him. Bliss penetrated the air, enfolding our family amiably. My bliss returned, and I am impotent to be rejoicing further.

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“Grandmother,” enquired Alexandra as she reads the letters, “Why did Grandfather write these?”

“My dear, your dear late Grandfather used to write to me during his voyages. Once, his fleet encountered a storm and was deserted. He wrote a letter bidding his farewells and in his charming manner, sent the letter. Miraculously, Grandfather returned home.

“Must you maintain the letters and not the vessel’s treasure, Grandmother?” Questioned Albert.

“My dear, pure wealth was not those discovered during the voyages. Pure wealth is the merits of the relations of your beloveds. Your dear Grandfather enlightened me upon this.” I elucidated. The sun brightens the abode as I peer out the window. An image of Augustus is illustrated by the window and I commence to smile.

“Remembering those merits, grandchildren, are better remarkable than any merit of the magnificent treasure.” I gaze at Augustus by the window and I smile. I glimpse him smiling in return as he voyages away.

# The Letters

*Carmel School Association Elsa High School, Meroz, Tal – 16*

“Ding—dong—ding—dong—”

The ringing bell resounds throughout the whole school. It represents the ending of a week’s study.

“Well, I guess that’s the end of this lesson then. Your homework for this weekend will be...” Mr. Liu, a fifty years old history teacher, throws the chalk on the teacher’s desk. He thumbs through his old textbook which has pages almost coming off, continuously assigning homework for the students. Right before the students start to complain, he closed his book, finishes up his line, “that will be all, have a nice weekend.” Then left the classroom.

Right after Mr. Liu steps out of the room, students start packing their bags, shouting around the room, discussing which coffee house to go to for studying.

“Wake up, Chen Yiyang.”

“Hmm?” Chen Yiyang raised his head. His hair is a bit disheveled from the sleep, his eyes are only half opened. A red mark is left on his head, that’s what someone gets when he dozed off with his head on his arm. “What’s the matter, Guan Zheyu?”

“Come on. School’s already over, let’s go home.” Guan Zheyu said with his bag already packed and carried on his back.

Chen Yiyang nods and quickly packed his bag within a few seconds.

Looking at Chen Yiyang packing his bag, Guan Zheyu sighs away, “Honestly, what will you do for your exam? You’re never gonna learn anything if you sleep through every single history lessons.”

Chen Yiyang makes a little deprecating shrug, “So I’ll fail history this year, and won’t choose it for the next two years. It’s really not a big deal.”

It only takes less than 20 minutes to get to Chen Yiyang and Guan Zheyu apartment. Chen Yiyang lives at apartment number 401, and Guan Zheyu at apartment number 402. They’ve been living opposite each other since they were baby. Chen Yiyang’s parents always spend most of their daytime at work, hence they often ask for the Guan family to take care of Chen Yiyang when they’re not at home.

“Are your parents at home?” Guan Zheyu asked before entering his house.

“No.” Chen Yiyang answered while looking for the keys. Usually, when Chen Yiyang’s parents are not at home, he will go to Guan Zheyu’s house for dinner.

Guan Zheyu nods, then went in his apartment. Leaving Chen Yiyang still struggling to find his keys. After checking every pocket on him and was sure that he doesn’t have it, he remembered that his parents will sometimes leave a spare key under the entrance carpet just in case someone forgets his key. He lifts the carpet, but there aren’t any keys, instead, an envelope is placed gently.

Chen Yiyang picks up the envelope and turns around, he knocks the door of Guan Zheyu’s apartment.

Guan Zheyu opens the door, “What’s wrong?”

“I left my keys at school. But guess what? I saw this letter under the entrance carpet.”

“Well, do you wanna come in?”

Chen Yiyang nods, so they walk into the house, through the living room, into Guan Zheyu’s room.

Chen Yiyang hands the letter to Guan Zheyu, “It seems like a really weird letter, looks like those from the ancient times. Also, it says ‘to Liu Seyu’. I don’t know anyone with that name.”

The envelope is made of a brownish Xuan paper, folded and glued into a rectangular shape. A red box is drawn in the middle on it, the addressee’s name is written inside of it vertically with black ink. On the right, there’s the address, and on the left, is the sender’s name – Chu Yingxuan.

“It’s probably just a kid trying to prank you. The address is wrong, I’ve never heard of this place.”

“I know, but why will anyone put it under a carpet if they can just drop it into the box mail.”

Guan Zheyu shrugs, “Shell we open it first?”

They cut along the edge of the envelope, took the letter out and gently unfolded it. The letter is also written in traditional Chinese with black ink on xuan paper. They quickly scanned through the letter. It’s a letter sent by a mother. She wanted her son to learn to do business with her husband, however, her son left the house to join a voyage that fleets to the south west. She’s worried about what her son is going to face, and asks help from her friend, Liu Seyu. According to the letter, Liu Seyu’s husband is also going to be on the voyage. Therefore she’s asking to have Liu Seyu’s husband to take care of the son and even to try convince the son to come back home.

“It’s a prank.” Guan Zheyu says surely.

Chen Yiyang shakes his head, “But why would anyone make a prank like this. Why would anyone learn how to write in traditional Chinese, learn how to write with ink brush, just to prank us.”

“I don’t know. But the letter is way to weird, it can’t be an actual letter.”

"I know. But..." Chen Yiyang sighed deeply, "Yeah... Whatever, I'll place it back under the carpet."

So he did. He placed it back.

For the next few days, every time when Chen Yiyang is entering or leaving his house, he will lift his carpet to see whether the letter is still there. The envelope stayed at the same place all the time. Until the following Wednesday, He found the letter gone. Guan Zheyu didn't care much about it and said that it's probably just the kid took the letter back after realizing the prank didn't work. However on Friday, when Chen Yiyang is back from school with Guan Zheyu, he once again finds a new letter under the carpet.

He runs into Guan Zheyu's room, "Guan Zheyu! I received another letter."

Guan Zheyu raises his head from a thick textbook, "Is it the same one?"

"No. Here, have a look." He hands the opened envelope over, "It says that the letter from last time got sent back, so she, ummm... Chu Yingxuan, is confused. But other than that, It's more or less the same thing from last time."

"Okay." Guan Zheyu raised one of his eyebrows, "So what are you trying to say?"

"I wanna write back to her."

"...What?"

"See, the thing is that I know you think it's only a prank. But don't you think that there is a small chance that it's written by a mom who's actually worried about her child."

"From the ancient time?"

"Yes. From the ancient time. She wanted to send it to her friend, to Liu Seyu. But it somehow got under my carpet. You know, like in movies." After a pause, he adds like he's going to make a big decision, "So, I wanna write a letter back, just for fun."

Guan Zheyu lowers his head, sighs while scratching his head, "Whatever. Just do whatever you want."

"Great! Do you have any xuan paper and ink?"

"You're kidding me, right?" He stares straight at him, "Don't tell me you're gonna pretend to be Liu Seyu, and write with traditional Chinese."

Then immediately he realizes that Chen Yiyang wasn't joking. Because he saw him nodding with a big smile on his face.

"Well, I'm not going to pretend to be her. But, yes I'm going to write in traditional Chinese."

"What? You barely even know how to write in simplified Chinese!"

"And that's why you're here."

They start laying a layer of newspaper on the desk, putting a piece of xuan paper on it. Chen Yiyang is holding a dictionary, looking for the words they don't know how to write, while telling Guan Zheyu what to write. Guan Zheyu is sitting straight on the chair, holding a ink brush on his right hand, thinking how to turn Chen Yiyang's words more formal. And so, one speaks and one writes, an one page long letter is finally done.

"Well done!"

Chen Yiyang picks up the letter, once again looks at it from the top to the end. They told Chu Yixuan that she sent the letter to a wrong person. However, they think that she should not be worried. Every child has a dream, and they should chase their dreams even if it's dangerous.

"Good enough." He nods and stuffed it in a xuan paper envelope they made by themselves, writing the name and address according to the letter they received.

Then they once again placed it under the carpet.

Like the week before, the letter stayed under the carpet till Wednesday, and a new letter is placed instead on Friday.

"There's another letter." Chen Yiyang turns to Guan Zheyu, opening the envelope in front of him, "Do you wanna have a look."

Guan Zheyu unfolds the letter, reading it out loud and concludes at the end, "So, she still thinks that her son should listen to her rather than risking his life on doing whatever he wants."

"But he should have the right to chase his dream," Chen Yiyang looks down at the letter, "Besides, how dangerous can it be. Which voyage was that?"

"Umm, according to the date she states on here is..." Guan Zheyu quickly finds the date written at the end of the letter, "Well, it's the old way of counting the years, but it you search on line..."

He takes out his phone, taping at the screen, "See, it should be about January, 1412."

"Was there any voyages going on at that time?"

"You didn't listen on history at all, didn't you?" Guan Zheyu rolled his eyes, "If the letter is real, Chu Yingxuan's son is probably going to take part of the Ming treasure voyages. The ones that were led by Zheng He."

"Umm, I'm pretty sure I've heard of it."

"Basically, there were seven voyages in total, during the Ming Dynasty, that were led by Zheng He, the eunuch. They left here, at Nanjing, and the farthest they could get was to East Africa and the Red Sea."

"Okay, so was it dangerous."

"Well, there were pirates and storms. Plus, there were also disease spread on the fleets."

"I'm sure he'll be fine." Chen Yiyang says, "Shall we write her a letter back first?"

"Sure." Guan Zheyu said.

Both of them are sitting next to a desk, thinking hard for what to write. They still think that they should convince the mother to let her child chase after his dreams. However, trying to convince someone through a letter, is not a easy task.

"Here, write this..."

Right when they decided to start writing, the phone on the desk rings.

Chen Yiyang picks up the phone, looking through the messages, "It's my mom. She's back. I should probably go home."

Guan Zheyu nods, "Sure. I'll see you on Monday, or even during the weekend."

Since Chen Yiyang's parents are often not at home, every time when they come back, they will have dinner together. His parents call it 'a way of strengthening their relationship'. Though this didn't help much, the gap they gained through months and years can impossibly be filled by a few dinner. No matter what, Chen Yiyang still has to admit that his parents are trying their best to fix it.

"I'm back." He steps into the apartment. The light is turned on, which made him squint. After weeks of entering this house without the light turned on, Chen Yiyang isn't fully used of this light. Even though he just came from a brighter place, he still feels like that he needs something to block the brightness of his apartment.

"Come," Ms. Chen made him sit down next to the lunch table in the middle of the dining room, "Dinner is ready."

"Thanks." Chen Yiyang simled to this mother. Then looks at the opposite side of the table, straight at Mr. Chen, until Ms. Chen sits down.

"So, how was school?" Ms. Chen asked, having a spoon of soup.

Chen Yiyang shrugs, "Fine."

"I talked to your teacher this other day," Everytime when Mr. Chen starts with this sentence, Chen Yiyang knows that it's not going to be a joyful dinner. Mr. Chen raises both of his eyebrows, "He said that your grades got worse."

Chen Yiyang nods, "Okay."

"No." Mr. Chen took a bite from his bowl of rice, "It's not okay. You have to try harder in order to be a lawyer."

"What?" Chen Yiyang dropped his chopsticks, "Since when did I say that I want to be a lawyer?"

"That's what I thought." He seems a bit astonished, "Anyway, you should still be one."

"No, I not going to be a lawyer. It's such a boring job."

"Yiyang," Mr. Chen looks deeply at him, shaking his head, "I understand that you might still be concerned about your future. However, trust me, you're gonna be a lawyer."

Chen Yiyang rolls his eyes, decides not to answer him. Then picks up his chopsticks, continues to eat.

The living room is filled with dead silence. No one is speaking a word, trying to use eating to cover this awkwardness.

However, this didn't kept for long. Mr. Chen breaks the silence, "I'm going to get you a tutor."

"For what?" Chen Yiyang frowns at his father.

"For all of your school subjects."

"Fine." He curls his mouth, "But just to make it clear, I'm not taking law for college."

Mr. Chen laughs like he heard something funny, "Of cause you are. It's the best for you."

"Dad! I'm an independent person, and I can decide what to learn by myself." Says Chen Yiyang, pronouncing word by word clearly, "You had your life. Now you should not control over mine."

"How dare to talk to me like that!"

"Stop, stop, stop." Ms. Chen immediately stands up, tries to stop this fight between the father and the son.

"I'm full." Chen Yiyang is already gnashing his teeth. He leaves the table without a second word.

Chen Yiyang crossed the hall, knocked on Guan Zheyu's apartment.

"One moment!"

Chen Yiyang can hear the footsteps from the other side of the door getting closer and closer. Then the door slowly opened from the inside. Guan Zheyu looking at Chen Yiyang suprisely, "Chen Yiyang? What's wrong?"

Chen Yiyang looks at Guan Zheyu, forcing a smile, "Hey, can I stay at your place for now?"

"Sure, come in." Guan Zheyu brings him into the room. He pours two cups of tea, handing one to Chen Yiyang, then holds the other one, sits on the bed comfortably.

Both of them kept silence. Chen Yiyang didn't mention a word from what happened. And Guan Zheyu believes that if Chen Yiyang wants to talk about it, he will mention it by himself. Therefore he didn't ask anything. Both just quietly sat there, drinking the tea Guan Zheyu poured.

"Do you wanna continue on writing the letter?"

After about ten or fifteen minutes, Chen Yiyang says awkwardly, to fill the silence.

"It's there." Guan Zheyu points at the table.

They once again look at the blank paper, thinking of what to write.

"Tell her this," Chen Yiyang pulls a chair, "I totally understand that you want the best for your child.

However, you should notice that your son is your son, and you are you. You and your son are two independent individuals. He has a different life, a different thought, a different dream from you. Even Though it might take a long and hard time to get to it, he will still want to chase after his dreams. I believe that rather than being regret at not doing something, it's better to do it then feel regret. And I'm sure it's the same for your child, too."

Guan Zheyu wrote down what he said, and they both added a couple more sentences to make it more convincing. They kept on crossing out and changing what they wrote. When they finish the final draft, it is already midnight.

Chen Yiyang quietly puts the letter under the carpet, where it's supposed to be. Then went back to Guan Zheyu house for the night.

After a night of sleeping, Chen Yiyang is much more calm, so he went back to his own apartment.

He went straight into his room, and shut the door.

After a while, someone knocked the door.

"Yiyang..." Ms. Chen came in.

"Mom? Why are you here?" Chen Yiyang didn't expect to see his mother here, "Aren't you supposed to be at work?"

"Not today."

She sits down next to him, and takes out a brownish envelope.

It's the one he and Guan Zheyu wrote.

"Where did you get that from?"

"I saw a paper at the entrance under the carpet this morning, so I took it." She paused, "I've read it already."

Chen Yiyang looks at her.

"I saw the name on the envelope. I wrote it right?"

"Yes, I did."

"Who's Chu Yingxuan. And why is it under our carpet?"

Chen Yiyang scratches his head, thinking of how to explain it, "It's... Umm... It's a long story."

Mrs. Chen sighs, "Anyway, I hope you know that your dad is just trying to make you a successful person. You just need to communicate with him more often."

Chen Yiyang nods.

"He's just a harsh person, but he'll never force you to take subjects you don't like."

Chen Yiyang nods again.

"Would you talk to him about it?"

"Fine, I will."

"Great!"

They look at each other and smiled.

"So, do you want to tell me what's the story of the envelope now?"

"Sure!"



# Ge Ming

*Carmel School Association Elsa High School, Razon, Ori – 15*

In the year of 1432, the Ming dynasty set out on its seventh and final voyage, and made their first international stop in Surabaya, Indonesia; residing there from the 7th of March until the 13th of July. The Yongle Emperor tasked Lu Changdong, a respected merchant and voyager, with leading the voyage. The following are excerpts from Lu Changdong's diary:

8/6/1432

*Finally. Something positive is coming out of our dynasty. Although they stem from nonetheless nationalist motives, this set of voyages is hopefully the beginning of something very special. The Yongle Emperor has reignited by once exuberant faith in our dynasty and its values. Today, as we walked along the roads of Surabaya, I understood that there are some things that you can fulfil with money, but at the end of the day these are not the things that make you happy, and that it is the small things that make life worth living. As I walked from house to house, handing things that I took for granted as a child to families and people in need, the emotions of pure joy displayed on the faces of children and parents finally made me feel as though I was making a real difference, as if I was becoming part of something bigger than myself. The words of Buddha have guided me throughout my entire life, and once and for all, it seems as though we can finally put his lessons to practice, as a dynasty:*

*Just as treasures are uncovered from the earth, so virtue appears from good deeds, and wisdom appears from a pure and peaceful mind. To walk safely through the maze of human life, one needs the light of wisdom and the guidance of virtue.*

*May we all uncover the treasures of life, and discover the virtue and wisdom within us all.*

*Long Live the Ming Dynasty!*

Throughout the following couple of years, the citizens of China had become witnesses to a chaotic civil conflict, and an eventual change in dynasty. Through means of violent revolution, Shunzhi revolted against the Yongle Emperor, and executed him publicly. Concerned over sustaining his new position as emperor, Shunzhi immediately canceled the treasure voyages, and implemented strategic massacre in order to eradicate all threats to the Qing dynasty. Considering that Indonesia was one of the main beneficiaries of the treasure voyages, Emperor Shunzhi's first course of action was to terminate all inhabitants of Indonesia – starting off with Surabaya, its capital at the time...

25/8/1437

*I was the first to lay foot in Indonesia, and I couldn't help but notice that the neighbourhood seemed a bit over familiar for my liking. It seemed quiet. It seemed peaceful. I knew it was my duty to follow the emperor's orders, no matter how unjust, and yet, something inside me couldn't do it. Something inside couldn't destroy such peace. From the ships behind me came a peculiar, blood-chilling sound. It was like the low snarling of many voices, and it grew louder and louder until it became a sullen, muttering roar. Hundreds of Chinese soldiers, some of which I recognised, rained down on the neighbourhood. In the Qing dynasty, hesitation came with a price; and now convinced I had to execute such a task for my own wellbeing, I rushed into the nearest hut, armed and fearing for my life. But I recognized a familiar face. A young face. I couldn't do it, and I froze. Unable to summon the courage to take action, my commander exploded into the hut in a sprint, blinded by his one goal in mind: to slaughter all inhabitants of Surabaya. The father stood his ground, defending his family with his life, but he was no match for commander Lee. As he penetrated into his innocent, soft flesh, guttural chokes mixed with an agonized roar erupted outward. Unnerved, Lee moved on to the mother, and she was of similar fate. He walked slowly toward the son, grinning, but our eyes locked and I couldn't let it happen. Principles of loyalty to our dynasty had been constantly projected to me as a child; and yet, I betrayed all that I had been taught, and slashed at the neck of my commander.*

*Silence.*

*The screaming had stopped so very suddenly. One slash of a blade and the commander, my commander, lay there, like a ghoulish mannequin. As I recollected my breath, the adrenaline faded from my system. I began feeling nauseous, and retched. My mind wanted me to think of a plan, I wanted to flee, to hide. But I stood there, frozen. the passage of the light slowed. Sounds muted, as if I were underwater. Aside from the beat of my heart, no muscle would move. And before I could digest all I was going through, the kid had fled without a trace. I didn't even get to know his name. In these late hours, I begin to humanize the mangled face of my commander, and when I realize I've completely and utterly obliterated a human being from existence, it becomes absolute mental torture. But it was justified right? I saved the boy's life. ~~Her~~*

*It doesn't matter. I can't let myself ponder upon the sentimental, although it is all that is on my mind. There's is no space for it here, at such a time. It is too late for me to go back now. I'm a traitor. With or without that kid at my side.*

**26/8/1437**

*I hid out in the mountains that night, until the tension died down. I fortunately woke up on the morning of the 26th – overwhelmed, but hopeful. Surabaya had a cold and hostile air to it. As I observed the paths of the neighbourhood, the barbarity of the events of the 25th revealed itself. Indonesian corpses were piled on one another, in abhorrent fashion. Innocent men, women, and children. The fog had faded, and the only remains of civilisation were the ashes at the tips of our toes. Or so I thought.*

*After examining the paths of the neighbourhood, I recognised fellow soldiers from the Ming Dynasty. I wasn't alone. Thank God. I wasn't alone. I wasn't the only one who understood that something had to be done – that we couldn't be bystanders to massacre. They understood it too. With almost all hope lost for the Qing Dynasty, it seemed as though Emperor Shunzhi was going to annihilate all the virtue that we had spread overseas as a result of the voyages, together with everything that would come in his path. At this point, it was no longer about surviving ourselves. The only chance we would have as a nation to end this dynasty and rebuild one with values of righteousness and virtue was to cut off the root of the problem: Emperor Shunzhi himself. Once he would be killed, the entire dynasty would crumble down, together with him. Tonight, I embark on a voyage overseas, together with my fellow soldiers, with the hope that we can revive what the Chinese Dynasties were once known to be. The remains of the Ming Dynasty will not go down quietly.*

*Together, I have no doubt that we can do it.*

**26/9/1437**

*It's been a tedious journey over the course of the past thirty days. Every moment has been a struggle, a struggle for survival. Its needless to say that this journey has been taking its toll on all of us – both physically and mentally. But we have each other, and I guess that is all that matters.*

*One day, we have to fight for our lives in the depths of the ocean. On others, we have to stealthily prowl past masses of soldiers, with the risks increasing at every stop – whether it be water or land beneath our feet.*

*It is almost impossible to describe what goes through one's head in the constant fight for survival. These events leave an ingrained mark on a soldier, a stain which stays with that soldier throughout the rest of his life – if he will even have one:*

*All senses are tightened to their utmost awareness. There are no longer any arrows raining down on us or fading screams in the distance. Silence. But it is precisely when it is silent, when one must prepare for the storm which will follow. The rustling approach of the unknown sparks an inexpressible fear within each and every one of us. The combination of blood, sweat and tears below me results in a soft and muddy surface, making it even harder to go unnoticed. Every elbow I put forward feels as though it's being pushed against me by a thousand men. Every leg that follows ruptures into my wounded left hip, sending an agonizing pain which pulses through my entire body. But we must not grunt, pant or gasp – we cannot be detected. Our breaths come in short and faint spasms, like a broken machine. We spot a large group of soldiers from the Qing dynasty coming in our direction. We have to act quickly. I grasp on my bloody dagger with my trembling and sweaty hand. The opposing soldier closest to me, aware that he is not alone, takes the sheath off his sword, triggering a metal scrape which cuts straight through me. We approach opposing soldiers from behind, all at once, and all our pain begins to disappear as the adrenaline pounds through our bodies, reaching our every limb. They spot us and turn around, each at different times, but before they can do anything, they are silenced by the edge of our blades. We escape the restricted area and sprint up the tall and dark fields of the mountain. Drained, I collapse onto the*

*ground. As I wipe my face, the blood which had once flowed in the veins of my enemies is now clasped in the deep calluses below my fingers. I uncontrollably gasp for air, desperately crawling for cover.*

*Luckily, we all managed to retreat to cover and survive that day. However, it was yesterday when I finally understood how easy it was to kill, to be killed, and how fast I could die. All it could take was a knife at the hands of a single soldier— one wiser, stronger, or more skillful than me, to put an end to my life and everything that I ever loved. But I can't let this fear take control of me. It is at this dark hour, where such courage must reside with me stronger than ever before. Only then, can we bring an end to Emperor Shunzhi and his corrupt dynasty.*

**13/11/1437**

*The palace. It was right before our eyes today. Everything that we had built up to over the years, came down to that very moment:*

*We approached the palace, silently. The dust was coming down on us, and without vision we were rendered powerless. We were all thrown into oblivion, but we knew we weren't alone. As the dense mist came down, we began to see shadowy figures charging at us with menace. The mere view of their horrific forms incited a dreadful fear that pulsed through our veins. In panic we retreated, but it was too late. Arrows rained down on us from all sides, breaking through the heavy silence and dark fog. As my friends and fellow soldiers fell dead before my eyes, a sense of helplessness struck me. I slashed hastily with the hope that I could somehow escape this living hell. I leapt over my dead comrades, filled with a sudden yet irrational courage. Fire, crouch, run, kill, dodge, stab, kick, repeat – those were the eight pillars of survival in such dark hours.*

*The smell of blood was so strong I could taste it. The gunfire so deafening it shattered my ears. And the screams of my fellow soldiers, that was the most painful of all. It was utter chaos. The soldiers of the Qing Dynasty continued running at me in waves through the thick mist; but somehow, somehow, I managed to survive. Second by second, I continued clawing for that last burst of courage and power within me. And suddenly, almost miraculously, I spotted a clear opening to the left of the dark fog. It seemed as though that path had been put there especially for me. I personally never really thought much about God, but it was at times like this that his presence was hard to deny. Clear of all threats and hazards, I sprinted through without thinking twice. To my relief, two of my most trusted and skillful comrades followed. I was not alone. Hope was not lost.*

**19/11/1437**

*Today, the deed has been done, and with the support of the majority of the oppressed and tyrannized people of the Qing Dynasty, a new emperor will come to power, in light of a new hope. A hope for a righteous and just dynasty, once and for all. As I write these final words before the new emperor's accession, I cannot help but think of all th*

التلاعب والخيانة هي أكثر الطرق فعالية للحصول على السلطة. عندما ذبح والدي أمام عيني، فهمت القوة التي يحملها المرء على حافة نصله، ولم أستطع أن أتحمّلها. لقد عذب الصينيون العالم لمدة طويلة، واليوم سيصل كل شيء إلى نهايته. أنت في مكان جيد الآن. لا تقلق ستكون فخورا بما ستصبحه الصين.

**Translated:** Manipulation and betrayal are some of the most effective ways to gain power. When my father was slaughtered in front of my eyes, I understood the strength that one carried on the edge of his blade, and I could bear it no longer. The Chinese and their malevolent emperors have tortured the world for too long, and today it will all come to an end, once and for all. You are in a good place now. Do not worry, you will be proud of what China will become.

# Off the Cliff of the Boat

*Carmel School Association Elsa High School, Shem Tov, Eden – 14*

*Ying*

I was standing on the edge of the boat, dangerously close. I knew I couldn't survive pain anymore, so I wanted to end it. But as I jumped off the cliff of the boat, I felt a grasp on my arm, pulling me back. I was enraged by anger and annoyance, why can't I get my happy ending? The stranger took me away from the boat's cliff and sat me down on a chair. Then the stranger started questioning me. So I told my story...

~

"I-I th-thought it wasssss the right thing to do-o. For-r my sun-un-shine." I couldn't even get my words straight. I was shaking and crying so badly. My tears felt heavier than the rain that was pouring down. And for once, the salt and the iron smell of the ocean wasn't the only thing I hated the most.

"Please, I beg of you. What happened?" "No!"

~

*Stranger*

"It was 1406, on the Ming Treasure Voyage." The young and beautiful girl let out a loud sigh and she buried her hands in her long black hair, covering her face.

"A year ago, Father arranged a marriage for his best friend's son and I. Though I didn't have the courage to tell him that I was thinking of another boy, one from the streets that sold fish for a living. One that father would never approve of, even if he tried to fit into our gold glazed life. His name was Na'Lan. There was only one solution to this, and that was to run away. At night, I made my escape through my gold framed window into the dirty streets. Na'Lan waited for me and we ran to wherever we could and found ourselves on a ship. But, there was a secret that Na'Lan hid from me. A big secret, that changed the way I was with him."

She hesitated, "He-He was part of a gang, a drug gang. He loved the gang so much he called them 'family'. The gang did many dangerous things that put all of their lives in danger. They traded drugs like opium and marijuana, teamed up with pirates, and stole gold and silver from the emperor. They pretended to be poor so that no one would suspect them, and it worked. I only found out about this other life of his when we were already on the ship. And even worse, that they were on the ship as well. But I was too quick to judge, they were lovely people and took me under their wing. I grew close to them and it was a mistake, I should have known they were dangerous."

*Ying*

"The last memory I had was when we went on a dinner date, I remember it like it was just yesterday." I took my head out of my hands and looked at the stranger with my pitch black eyes, agonized.

"His curly brown hair waved so elegantly to the ocean breeze, and he was wearing a white button-up shirt with navy blue shorts. I even remember the exact words we said in our conversation," I laughed.

"We were so madly in love that when we talked to each other, it felt like everything around us was blurred out and we could only focus on each other. We were talking about the future, what will we do after the voyage was over, where we would live, but when we started talking about my relationship with my parents, we argued. I wanted to avoid them, to avoid my father's shame and my mother's tears. But he wanted to meet my parents, which was brave of him because my father would kill him. Though for some reason it seemed very important for him, and he insisted. So I shifted the subject." I closed my eyelids tightly for a few seconds

"It was the last thing I remembered before it became a blur."

*Stranger*

"I woke up on my bed, not remembering how I got there in the first place. I looked around and saw Na'Lan sitting anxiously beside me, waiting for me to wake up."

She stopped for a moment to recall the memory.

"I was in my pajamas and I never saw the clothes I wore the other day ever again. I asked him how did I get here? He said I fainted. But I didn't believe him. He had that look on him that usually appears when he is guilty. So I asked again and again. He gave up, took my hand in his, and explained: 'We were kidnapped, it was Bo Ling, he wanted the opium even though we didn't have any.'"

She shivered.

"But I knew he was hiding more; it wasn't an excuse to why I couldn't remember anything. For the third time, I had to ask 'How did I get here?'"

*He hesitated, "I carried you."*

*I was getting angry: "Yeah, because I couldn't walk on my own," I said sarcastically.*

*He went down on his knees, "I am so sorry, this will never happen again."*

*"What are you talking about?"*

*"I will stop I swear. I won't deal drugs or steal or put your life ever in danger again!"*

*He was stuttering, spitting the words out. I was so confused. He was so apologetic, and... regretful. He saw the confusion on my face and explained further: "They drugged you, but— I — I — I stopped him"*

*He was hesitating, choosing his words carefully.*

*"What do you do?"*

*"I stopped him."*

*"No. You are hiding something."*

*He paused for a moment, thought about something, then said. "The only way to escape was to—", he hesitated, 'kill him.'"*

*Stranger*

She looked at me, trying to read my thoughts. I looked back at her. She was beautiful. She had big black eyes, surrounded by long and thick lashes, thin eyebrows, and straight black hair that extended to her back endlessly and clumped together in chunks as the rain poured over it. It was cold and windy, and the boat was swinging side to side vigorously. But the story was too mind capturing to care.

"On that night, I saw the first vision: I was on the floor curled into a ball. I hugged my knees tightly and squeezed my eyes on my thighs. Then I opened my eyes, it was blurry, and it was dark, and I was in a strange room. I closed my eyes again and when I opened them I realized that I was standing up holding an object, but my eyes were too blurry to see. I never told Na'Lan about the vision, I don't know why."

She stared at the ocean blankly, "After the incident, we pretended not to care; we moved on."

She rubbed her temples, "But in here," she pointed at her brain, "it never did."

She looked at me straight in the eyes again, and she looked so tortured.

"We continued with our normal routines and ignored what happened. He kept his promise as well, he quit his illegal trading and I never saw his family again." I wondered if she regretted it, but then she said "it was the right thing to do, because —", she looked down at her stomach and rubbed it. "I was pregnant."

"We were so happy; my Ah Yu was our own little sunshine. He gave us brightness and hope."

She looked down at her stomach, smiling at him. Her smile wasn't like anything I have ever seen before. Her smile was big, showing all of her teeth, it was like a smile you would have while laughing. It made her look even more beautiful.

"He was more than just my sunshine, he was my planet, my universe, I couldn't live without him." Suddenly, the smile went from lovely to crazy. She was obsessed with her baby.

*Stranger*

"Na'Lan got a job so that we could afford a living for our family. Na'Lan worked as a sailor at first on one of the small ships, then he was upgraded to a pilot's assistant, then to ship manager, and finally to a pilot. The pilot gets a big cabin for his family on the ship. There were two rooms in the cabin; one for us, and one for the baby. I already knew what I wanted for the baby's room," she said smiling, still glaring at the ocean.

"A crib in the front door, so that I could watch my sunshine through the other room. There would be a bed there too so that when I want to play with him he wouldn't fall and hurt his head on the hard floor. And there would be a big cabinet, for all of the clothing we will buy for him."

She was smiling through all of her words. She was so happy to talk about her baby. She was still glaring at the ocean though.

"How did you know it was a boy?"

"I felt it."

Now she looked into my eyes with hopefulness. She held her belly with both arms and was smiling that same creepy smile that she wore before. I started to be concerned. I never saw a mother this passion for her child. It was like an obsession.

*Ying*

"One night, while we were eating dinner at the restaurant, he seemed nervous."

I smiled and looked at the ocean again.

"He kept on babbling about something, but I wasn't focused, the recurring memory came to me. The same as the others."

My expression suddenly became terrified.

"It was in that dark strange room. I was standing up, and the small room was spinning, then I looked around and saw two figures. They were big and bulky, it looked like two men. I squinted my eyes to take a better look, but it was too blurry, then I passed out." I closed my eyes, trying to remember.

"Then I noticed that Na'Lan was sitting in front of me again. He was still babbling and fiddling with something under the table. I asked him what was wrong," I let out a small giggle. "Then he pulled out the most beautiful ring I have ever seen and asked me to marry him."

I looked down at my hand, where the ring was. It had one small red stone on it and it seemed a little bit too big for my thin fingers.

*Stranger*

"That was the best night of my life. But after a few weeks ..."

She closed her eyes lightly, "... the worst night happened."

Her face fell and she squinted her eyes aggressively, pushing back tears forcefully.

"He just came back home," her voice cracked. "It happened too quickly. The ship authorities knocked our door down, grabbed my fiancé and dragged him out. There wasn't enough time to fight back, or to even realize what had happened." She finally opened her eyes, which were red "I had to run after them, and once I reached them, I had to beg. I was crying and begging them to explain, but they kept their mouth shut, and so did Na'Lan. He seemed to understand what was happening and kept his face serious the whole time. It hurt me to see him so calm when I was going crazy. I followed them until they reached the third floor, where they put all of their prisoners. Then I finally understood what was going on." She finally broke into a sob, putting her face on her hands again, hiding her tears.

"They found out about the murder of Bo Ling," she managed to spit out while sobbing. "Then I got another flash of memory: I was hitting something very hard, then I tried to stand up, but slipped because of something slippery. I looked at what I slipped at, and I gasped. Afterward, it was just black again," she stuttered, struggling to get the words out as she was crying.

"Then he finally spoke, Na'Lan. He asked if I could keep a promise for him. I said I would do anything. He asked to always watch out for myself and the baby because..."

She took her face out of her hands and looked at me, with pain painted on her face, "but then they took me away from him." She glared at the ocean again. "But I didn't need any promise for that. I love my baby, so I will always watch out for him." Then she whispered silently, "Maybe even more than my fiancé."

Her tone was dark.

*Ying*

When I stopped sobbing I started to speak again, confidently.

"The punishment for murder was to be thrown out of the ship, into the ocean." That is why I always glare at the ocean, I added mentally. "I was preparing for it mentally, so that I wouldn't get hurt. I told myself that he was guilty, that he deserved it, that he killed a man. But I just can't."

My voice cracked. "He was allowed to talk to me one more time before they ..." I looked down and lowered my voice "threw him out".

"I was crying too much to listen to his words, but one sentence stood out: 'keep your promise, and try not to think of that night too much.' It took me by surprise. He never talked about what happened when we were kidnapped. Suddenly another vision flashed: a person was shouting at me to stop, the voice was familiar. I was still hitting something, and I think I was sobbing too. I was also shouting 'No! No! I will get out!' The familiar voice was suddenly close to me, and it was troubled. I heard cleaning and scrubbing. Then I was lifted into the air. I couldn't make much sense of it, I could just see a blur." I glared at the ocean coldly.

"When the vision finished, he was already at the edge of the boat, ready to jump." I switched my glare to my belly and smiled, "then I felt the first kick."

*Stranger*

"I was immediately rushed into a room and I gave birth to my baby," the same smile crept up her face, the creepy one. It was scary to see how she could phase so quickly from sad to happy.

"It was ironic, one life is gone, another is born."

*Ying*

"I closed my eyes, trying to push back the tears. The three minutes of holding my baby were the best three minutes of my life. I remember the feel of his soft skin and his big wide eyes. The way he looked at me made me feel so happy. He smiled and reached his tiny arm at me, trying to reach my face. I put my head down to let him touch me. Right then, he let out a small giggle, which was the most beautiful sound I have ever heard. And at that moment, I truly felt complete. The nine months of waiting was truly worth it. I let my eyes close softly to fully absorb the moment, and I let some tears of joy escape. But then I felt my sunshine being pulled away."

*Stranger*

She stood up, flying her hands around in anger and pulling her hair out so hard it scared me.

"I only got to hold him for three minutes before they took him away. They said it was a punishment for marrying a murderer!" she screamed.

*Stranger*

When she finally calmed down, she sat back on the floor, where I eagerly waited for her to continue. "Then everything really started falling down, when I saw the full vision," she suddenly jerked, unwilling to remember the vision again. She curled up into a ball again, her eyes becoming blurry. This time she didn't hide or glared at the ocean. It was like she was talking to thin air, "I don't deserve Na'Lan, I don't deserve my baby, my sunshine, I don't even deserve you, or a soul, or a life at all!" She screamed at the air, "I will never forgive myself! Ever!"

I didn't know what was happening I didn't know what to do. I tried to find my voice. "What did you see in your vision?" She started to sob again.

*Stranger*

She wouldn't talk. She just kept on shaking. "Please, I beg of you. What happened?"

"Nooooooooooooo!"

I grabbed her hands tightly, looked at her straight into her eyes and asked again forcefully. "What happened?" She finally calmed down, and spoke in a hushed and shaky voice "It was all my fault. In the vision, I saw – I saw – I saw m– NO! I CAN'T!"

“I promise I won’t tell!” I said.

She gulped and said unsteadily, “I saw myself, in the storage room, with Bo Ling and my fiancé. Bo Ling grabbed me furiously, putting something in my mouth. It had an effect on me, and everything just went chaotic. It gave me energy, whatever he gave me. He was choking Na’Lan when he thought I passed out, but I faked it. I found a broken paddle that was split to half and left a pointy edge on it. I stabbed him in the back continuously... until I was sure there was no return.”

I gasped,

“I wasn’t myself!” she said defensively. “But Na’Lan took the fall for me anyways...” She drifted off and I thought that she will start crying again, “But you know what’s the worst part?”

I waited.

Her voice shrank as she talked “I love my baby, more than my fiancé. This makes me guilty and selfish. So deep inside.” Her voice shrank even more that I could barely hear, “I knew it the whole time.” And I swear I heard her whisper silently, “So I let him take the blame.”



# New Tales of the Ming Voyage

*Carmel School Association Elsa High School, Yu, Clarissa – 15*

Standing at the grave of his stillborn child, Nopadon bent down and gingerly placed a bouquet of lilies onto the mossy rock the size of a newborn kitten. He stood back up and gazed at the rock as if his child was going to magically appear.

She was his 'second' child and today was her anniversary. The first was a miscarriage, they were 5 months into the pregnancy when it occurred. Both his wife, Khajee and him were ecstatic to have a product of their love, as most new parents do. Thus, when they discovered they had a miscarriage, they were determined to try again.

It was not long before the second child was conceived. With more experience, the pair were more careful and after 9 months, she was ready to give birth. Nopadon was not allowed to participate and observe the process of the birth so he waited outside of the hospital for a lengthy 14 hours. Nopadon could only hear Khajee struggling and the doctor attempting to help his wife.

It was dusk when their child was born. Nopadon remembered everything on that fatal day. The sky was a mix between pink and orange, with hues of blue and purple mixed into the sunset. He fondly recalls how he thought nothing, not even a rainy day can dampen his mood when the doctor broke the news to him.

Two weeks, a total of 14 days after that fateful day, Khajee was still in a melancholy mood. She blamed herself for Duangkamol, her stillborn. It was all her fault. It has happened again and again. Twice. She gave false hope to Nopadon twice. That was twice too many, in her opinion. She loved him dearly and knew what a child meant to him. She could only hope that someday she could bear a child that could repair the damage.

Consumed by his thoughts of what the stillborn could have been, it was not apparent to him that nighttime had appeared. Suddenly, he realized that the sun had gone into hiding and the moon replaced the sun in its position.

Nopadon slowly walked back to his home, passing by various sizes of rocks, which indicated the age of the deceased. The larger the rocks are, the older the person was. The oldest person to ever live was a man by the name of Punyaa, he lived all the way up to 31 years old.

It was raining all night long and turned to a slight drizzle in the morning. Nopadon was visiting his cousin, Chakrii by the docks when it happened. Hundreds of boats slowly docked on their already crowded deck. There were more people on the ships than the civilian population in this village of Siam.

On this very day, the calm and quiet village was disturbed. On the ship, there were captains commanding their sailors, navigators communicating with each other animatedly, doctors treating crew members that are injured and many more. The busy and sophisticated ships strongly juxtapose the village.

The boat was greater than any infrastructure the villagers have ever seen. Words spread fast in the minuscule village and by noon, almost all of the villagers were crowded around the vessel. The chief of the village attempted to display a nonchalant expression upon discovering the arrival of these explorers.

Any sane person would marvel at these enormous ships. Their sails were a deep blood red, which contrasted with the emerald green exterior. There were at least nine sails in each of the boats, with one at the front and one at the back. Their sails reflected the very essence of Chinese culture, with bamboo connecting every few inches of the sail, making it easier to control and manipulate in order to use the wind to their full advantage.

Every crew member on the boat seemed to know exactly what had to be done, like clockwork, they operated smoothly and without any delays. Every person on the hundreds of vessels had their own role which they performed meticulously.

A man named Zheng He was in charge of the ships. They have traveled to numerous villages before this specific one. In each one of them, they offered treasures from China and stayed for a week while they loaded more supplies onto their boats. This one was no different.

Zheng He got off his ship and greeted the chief. The moment they shook hands, everything stopped. The crew members stood up straight and observed the interaction. The chatter suddenly ceased. It seemed like Zheng He and the chief communicated forever. The only sound other than the two communicating with each other was the children in the village quietly whispering to each other and the waves crashing onto the ships and docks.

With a flick of a wrist, tens and hundreds of crew members marched off the ships. It was all a blur, within a few minutes, the crew all boarded off the boats and settled into the village.

Nopadon, uninterested with this encounter, bid farewell to Chakrii and ventured back home.

Back at their humble abode, Khajee paced back and forth, waiting for Nopadon to come back home. She was due any day and Khajee hoped Nopadon would be there. She had heard of the commotion from the other villagers and wished Nopadon would not have to work due to the foreigners being there.

Back at the seashore, the villagers were ecstatic to meet some of the crew members, it had been forever since foreigners visited. The foreigners from China brought numerous goods from their own country, sharing their wealth and their culture.

The village had never seen goods of that quality. Zheng He and his crew presented gold that gleamed in the hot sun. The children curiously picked the gold up, unaware of the heavy mass. Then the crew displayed their shiny silver, which was two times to amount of gold. The villagers were astonished, they could not comprehend how the foreigners would willingly give up these treasures that some could only dream of.

Just as the villagers thought the crew gave up all they offered, they shocked the villagers with porcelain and silk. The wives were marveling at the ceramic porcelain and the luxurious silk, thanking the crew members while discussing amongst each other what they would utilize them for. Everyone in the village was content that Zheng He had visited.

Some of the foreigners spent the day telling stories to the village children who have never stepped foot outside of Siam. Other helped the current villagers with their daily tasks. The village had never been so crowded.

Days passed. It was nighttime, two days after Zheng He's fleet had settled. Everyone in the village was asleep. Suddenly, a loud scream woke half of the village up. It was a scream from Khajee. Her contractions were too much for her to bear. Nopadon brought Khajee to the doctor to conceive their infant. Much to their surprise, the two midwives from Zheng He's ship helped them as well.

The midwives helped the local doctor in the birth of Nopadon and Khajee's son. The Chinese knew how to properly remove the umbilical cord, which the local doctor had used a sharp rock to cut. They knew the sanitary procedures needed to ensure an infection would not occur.

The skills the midwives taught the local doctor would help the birth rate increase in this village in Siam, similar to the other places Zheng He and his crew visited.

The skills that the local doctor had were primitive. Using a rock as a means of cutting the umbilical cord was pathetic. The midwives kindly helped calm Khajee. Khajee was sweating like pig, her breaths were not unified and she kept on blinking. Khajee was desperate. She did not want to disappoint Nopadon again.

Khajee thought back to the first miscarriage and how much damage it had done to her, and her husband. They were ready for their baby. Everyone in the village knew that she was pregnant, and trusted that she would birth a lovely infant for the whole village to fawn over. It has been a while since they had an infant in the village and Khajee was proud to become a mother.

The miscarriage traumatized them both deeply, but it was nothing compared to the destruction the stillborn child had done. Weeks after the death of their child, Khajee was consumed by her thoughts. She kept on thinking about what she had done wrong. Her luck was just the worst. Nopadon and Khajee never connected as they did previously. Khajee blamed herself for Duangkamol's death, as did Nopadon. They both did not want to trouble one another.

Nopadon began thinking of ways he could have helped Duangkamol and how he could not be with his wife, he could only wait outside while his wife suffered through the birth of their child. Similarly, Khajee was determined that she was unfit to become a mother, and those were signs telling her so. No one in the village knew how much damage the death of their children brought to the couple. After all, the smallest coffins are the heaviest.

The midwives knew something was wrong, Khajee was panicking. They soothed Khajee inside while Nopadon was alone with his own thoughts.

Nopadon paced around the hospital for the duration of the labor. For 11 hours, he either sat on the grassy ground next to the door of the hospital or paced around the fence. He was sweating, much like Khajee. Nopadon tried to sleep on the grass but his mind would not allow him to do so. He did not trust strangers easily, what if the midwives were causing trouble instead of helping. Nopadon knew the birth rates were low, every few years there would be a child, and if there was an infant, the likelihood of a child dying due to infections was high.

Nopadon was not a naive human. He knew what the chances of the infant surviving were. The local doctor and the midwives barely know each other. They had no chemistry. If a division of power happens during the course of the labor, there was no doubt that there would be consequences.

Nopadon dived into rabbit holes upon rabbit holes, thousands of scenarios are pictured in his mind, yet not a single one of them was positive. He lurked outside of the hospital until the roosters began to crow. Then the sound of people was heard, shuffling, yawning, laughing...

Nopadon observed how his neighborhood operated like clockwork, much like the crew members on the ship. The milkman going to every household on a bike similar to his age, providing the villagers' fresh milk before the sun even greeted him. It seemed natural to swerve his bike right as the shepherd walked straight to him. Without looking, they both waved to each other and greeted each other, then continued on their road.

He observed through the windows, how every family had their own systems of operation. The one on his left was the farmer's house. They were the richest in the village and they had 5 kids. He saw how the wife would cook while the daughters helped with the cleaning while the father and sons got ready for a hard day of work.

Nopadon turned and looked at the home on the right. There lives a lonely man whose wife died at childbirth. The whole village went to her funeral. It was one of the most devastating thing the village has encountered. He marked the contrast between the fast-paced family to the slow, gloomy man who lost the reason for him to live. Deep down, Nopadon was afraid he would turn out like that widower. Old and alone.

Before he could brainstorm any further, one of the three midwives barged out the door to give Nopadon the great news.

After sanitary procedures, Nopadon entered and greeted his teary wife. Looking at their newborn son, Nopadon thought of a perfect name for him – Prasert.

# A Eulogy to Heroes

Chongqing Nankai Secondary School, Li, Weike – 16

“Zhu! Come back home now and pack your stuff! You only get a tiny space for your pack so don’t bring your silly books and loose pages of poetry! Quickly!” A yell from a grouchy woman pierced the street, so shrieking that it penetrated tier upon tier of onlookers.

“I’m COMING!” a boy retorted, disappointed and perhaps irritated.

The shriek began again, “Quickly now! Time’s ticking!”

“I AM COMMMING!” the boy roared. His disgruntled sound nearly froze the street, making the idle owner of the fruit stand jump out of his skin — the owner cast a cursory glance in the direction of the sound, then leisurely resumed laying out his fresh pears and oranges. Among the crowds a handsome-looking boy, though a bit chubby, dashed through stores and stalls, dodging in and out of the flow of human legs. A stack of yellowish pages were in his left hand — the old urchin Li, the only other weirdo in the little town of Yuan, gave them to him — one of which, Li had claimed exuberantly, had been passed down for centuries from the Tang Dynasty. “What a gorgeous era.” The old man constantly reminisced about centuries before, eyes gleaming, voice shaking, and words asserting so unswervingly that he was the true heir of the emperor Li Yuan. Yet the only proof he possessed was a roughly-made imperial decree, and, his very last name. The boy, on the other hand, was haunted by his name. Mocked by all his neighborhood, Zhu had the very same last name as the Ming’s emperors, but held nothing yet a very deep hatred towards the dynasty. “The most distant relatives of our emperors,” he remembered a girl had jeered at him. So he identified with Li. He visited Li now and then. He would read through Li’s piles of old books from those dusty shelves and drink unrefined oolong tea with him down by the old birch tree.

★★

*I would never do this again, never*, he thought, *the Sixth Voyage down the South Seas*, as he scowled and slammed the door behind him. How ignorant they were, those silly grown-ups, that they even bragged about it as “the Great Voyages!” And all his neighbors, giving up so relentlessly the company of their children and wives or husbands, rushed to the ships in exchange for gold and silver coins. Ostentatious fleets, gaudy treasures, and mighty smug captains in shining armor standing tall on the bows — nothing could be more humdrum than a scene like this. It was quite glorious, indeed, but even so, how could they possibly compare the scene to what those books had described of the Tang Dynasty, the infantry and cavalry marching down the prairies of Mongolia, flying spears and roaring horses along the Yangtze River, and dust and smoke that could darken the skies for weeks. And a knight would always charge in at the forefront, drawing his sword from its sheath and brandishing it proudly. He especially wanted to be that knight, as poets of the Tang Dynasty constantly portrayed, who guarded the western border of China against the raids and invasions of the Huns — but he couldn’t quite imagine himself properly. So heavy, he’d always be standing comically with sword and shield and armor. And poetry! The moonlight in the capital city of Changan would always shine on an artistic poet, chanting his gorgeous verses in time. What now? A pile of golden cargo or boxes stuffed with silver coins? Zhu had stayed in his chamber and refused to come out for nearly all the journey the fifth time he had embarked on “the Great Voyage” two years before. He brought hundreds of pages in his pack — the full collection of the poetry of Li Bai — and dove into it at the very beginning, devouring every single character. So thrilled by these scenes, rivers surging ahead from where the skies originated and moonlight pouring down so expansively, he would nearly jump with glee. The sea, yet, was an entirely different story. The amazement that grown-ups had described in detail, he had seen none of on his way. All he ever saw was monotonously stretching water and unvaryingly spreading skies. And the flux of shining gold and the wicked grins from the shrewd merchants. The waves always raided the ship at night, and his chamber would be just one step from shattering.

★★★

“You have to find him, the former emperor, Zhu Yunwen. Rumors have been spreading around the streets.”

“Wait... What do you mean? I remember... a funeral for him. It was the grandest funeral. He died in that huge fire he himself lit, right?”

“No...” the official leaned forward and whispered, “that was only a coverup job. It wasn’t his body but his wife’s. He was... lost...the day the new emperor’s army occupied the capital”.

Zhu was passing by the vestibule, and accidentally caught a glimpse of his father sitting across to a golden-cloaked official whom he had never seen before. *Another grown-up conspiracy*. He stopped behind the door and began pondering.

“...So, uh, the voyages were not only about silver coins and expensive spices and all that stuff, they were also about...” Before Zhu’s father finished, the astute official interrupted him.

“Shhh! You got the idea. The lost emperor is a threat. He has to be eliminated.” He stood up and walked towards the front gate. “Just don’t forget. I’ve got businesses...”

Zhu suddenly recalled some ramblings from the old urchin Li: the young emperor who succeeded because of the early death of his father, the tough usurper who arose from the borderlands, and the mysterious underground channel which Zhu Yunwen utilized to flee to nowhere — yet no stories could be more tedious than one like this, one with nothing but cruel politics and inexorable backstabbing. Where have those faithful love stories been? Where have those electrifying legends gone? What were left after all those centuries, he concluded, were only boring spirits and shrewd souls. Vicious ones too, of course.

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The date was near. The fleet was scheduled to embark on the first day of October. The whole town of Yuan, relying fully on the shipping industry, began to regain some of its vitality. People from foreign lands gathered around the town, saturating all the motels and accommodations. The prices of local handicrafts surged, yet the intricacy and craftsmanship of the products were still barely satisfactory. It was the best season for the town, but the worst time for Zhu. With a thousand romantic hearts inside him, he still possessed the remaining rationality to remind him that he had to obey his family’s will and go on the voyage. “Who would look after you during the voyage if you don’t come?” his father claimed. “By the way, it will be fun. You don’t want to spend another of your winters in the shabby house of that weirdo Li, right?” Even if he did, there would be no way to convince his headstrong father.

So he locked himself up in his room, burying his head in the pages and counting the remaining days. He didn’t want a moment away from his beloved books, not to mention a horrendous farewell. *What a stinking century*, he thought. *The times are bad*. Businesses, wealth, and blind lust for power — no times could be more unmemorable than the one he was in. Year after year he longed to be a warrior, yearned for becoming a hero, and dreamt of a knight. *A stinking century, without legends or heroes*. He had made his mind up on the century and, as also a spark of light came across his mind, also for himself.

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The sky still hadn’t turned bright in the east. A dull white gleam was gradually spreading across the heaven. But the town had been awake for a long time, as had the boy Zhu. It was a big morning for him, and for the whole town. The harbor was in a hullabaloo. A seething mass of folks wandered about the dock. People shouted as the drums and cymbals crashed incessantly. Everyone could hear the banging of gongs and the blare of trumpets from the shore. All the residents from the town, except for old urchin Li, flooded to the harbor — either they had been lucky enough to secure a lucrative job onboard, or they had laborious work in the harbor. The ships were within striking distance. For their sheer scale and grandeur, everyone would be mesmerized. Nine erect masts shot into the clouds; twelve white sails billowed with the breeze they caught. An anchor weighing tonnes shone in dazzling bronze, requiring more than two hundred strong men to set sail. As for the ships, they waited, thousands of folks to hold and four floors to fill, the vastness of the South Sea to explore and the strength of the Kingdom to demonstrate. Dragon as the prow, lion as the stern, with the hull covered in auspicious patterns, gleaming and shimmering. And along came the emperor in stunningly golden finery, with four people lifting the palanquin and eight brave men by his side.

“Where is he?” Zhu’s father asked.

“Maybe... he went back home to grab some more books. You know, books from the weirdo. He’s fallen for them.”

His mother was quite confident. “Just wait for a few more minutes. He should be here.”

He was there already, standing at the bow of one of the ships and looking over the vast expanse of the harbor. A sudden burst of pride had swept through his body, like an electric current flowing through him, when he thought of his gorgeous plan. He had been so tired of reading legends from centuries before, always accompanying the heroes, but never becoming one — *Now I’m the hero! I’m about to write the*

*legends! I will be the first in the century to add a touch of romance to this lifeless era!*

As the emperor went aboard, Zhu suddenly emerged from the crowd. He raised his hand over heart, and shouted out with all his might: “The former emperor, Zhu Yunwen, escaped from the grand fire in the capital! And he, is the rightful ruler!”

The emperor stood in shock, eyes glaring at him.

The masses were engulfed in an uproar. Chaos spread.

Troops of men surged towards the boy whose hands gripped tightly the pages from old urchin Li and whose face held a hearty smile, bringing him furiously to the ground.

# Reconstructed

*Dulwich College Beijing, Zhu, Kaleo – 14*

## Voyage 1: 序

Zheng He stirred swiftly, dredged from the void of a dreamless sleep and shunted into reality, and stridently walked to the window, unable to remove the thought of the assigned edict he had received the previous day from his thought. The construction of over 200 transport ships? And for what purpose? However, before he could ponder over the events that occurred over the previous night and their purpose, he was then alerted by a quick knock on his door. Opening the door, Zheng He found a courier (he surmised by the stranger's clothing and the scroll clutched in his hand), promptly taking the scroll and closing the door on the courier with a quick intonation of "Thank you very much". As he scanned the text, he ruled out the possibility of war, and was immediately further perplexed. Could it be for trade? And if so, why not use existing routes like the Silk Road? Then, he decided to push aside skeptics after blindly inferring for a week and decided to pay the Emperor a visit.

Just then, another courier scurried in front of him, declaring "The Emperor requires your presence".

Months later, the later events passed in a blur; the sendoff-esque banquet on that fateful night having no alleviative effect on the orders that rung in Zheng He's ears hours earlier. No matter what doubts he had, the order was given, the ships constructed. The voyage began the next day, with thousands assembled in Nanjing before Zheng He. As the endless slews of vessels were unmoored and seen off, Zheng He looked ahead off the prow of the lead vessel with pride and uncertainty to such an endeavor.

The surfacing kinetosis seemed to subside slowly, as the fleet sailed out of the coast towards its destinations, bearing lavish gifts and letters set to forge the chains of trade between the motherland and the locations lying on pristine horizons.

Following days of minimal report and views of infinite sea, the crew were alerted to the long-awaited sight of land. Looking closer, Zheng He found a proto-metropolis of brick and ornate architecture past the shrouds of greenery on the coast, eagerly anticipating the new sights and knowledge yet to entail this discovery. Making land on a worn dock of partly-decayed wood, warped with the weight of crews upon crews of explorers and traders before now, the crew debarked the lead vessel, bringing forth a scroll on the Emperor's behalf and proceeded to head to the city that lay beyond the verdant curtain in front of their eyes. After making it through the brief path (which cut through the forest), Zheng he strode up to the decorated palace, where a guard-lined hallway waited, their goal just at the end of the hallway, on the intricate (and quite noticeable) throne. Exchanging words, seals, and scrolls with the King, Zheng He assured the King on the arrival of Chinese gifts to enlighten him on their native culture, which he jovially accepted.

Days later, the fleet, having given and received their share of items, bade farewell to the King, thanking him for his hospitality, and continued the voyage. This process repeated, fascinating and exhausting Zheng He with the sheer number of locations traveled to. Java, Malacca, Aru, Semadera, Lambri, Quilon, and Calicut passed in a wondrous blur, imprinting the sights and experiences in Zheng He's mind. However, on one occasion, they were forced to leave the mountainous kingdom of Ceylon following the hostility by its rulers. That instance aside, the ships set a course to return after reaching the southern tip of the Indian Peninsula, stocked with an abundance of never-before seen items from the fruits of the crew's dealings and labor.

One day, the homebound fleet encountered a motley fleet decorated with flags that seemed to send only one message into the hearts of whoever approached: Pirates. Grabbing an eyepiece, Zheng He scanned the lines of ships for the lead vessel, and instantly recognized the face of Chen Zuyi, ruler of the city of Palembang and pirate leader, infamous for dominating the Malaccan Strait. After an exchange of message-bearing arrows in a final attempt to negotiate the pirates' pacification, Zheng He unfolded the final note, deeming negotiation to be futile and preparing to attack.

Ordering his men to unleash a volley of flame-tipped arrows, Zheng He set his lead ship on a direct course towards the enemy. The resulting crash shook the ship to its foundations, but the frame held firm. Zheng he, brandishing a sword, valiantly led his troops onto the deck as his archers continued to pick off the minor vessels. Despite suffering injuries and some casualties, Zheng He's forces sunk 10 enemy ships and captured 7, along with Chen Ziyi for execution, restoring peace to the Strait.

Following further negotiations with the men at Palembang, Zheng He plotted the homebound course once again, returning to Nanjing as a hero with envoys, goods, and the great sense that he had led something greater than himself. “Let the forces of adversity come”, he thought. “After such an endeavor, I have branded my name into history as a future legend!”

And eight months later, when the imperial edict decreeing a second voyage was issued, Zheng He gladly accepted, knowing that there was still much more to come.

### Voyage 2: 破

Ma Wen Ming slowly stood up from the grave of his brother, placing down a well-wishing note at the headstone that read *Zheng He*. It was a full year since his brother’s death, causing him to reflect on his brother’s astounding discoveries on his six voyages, like the legendary *qilin* that his ships plucked from thousands of units across the world. But before he could be fully immersed in the pain of contemplating the legacy of a dead man, he was alerted by a yellow-robed stranger who promptly greeted him and told him “Head to the palace. The Emperor desires to tell you something.”

Dashing up the gold-polished steps of the palace’s entrance, Ma Wen Ming arrived and knelt at the Emperor seated on the throne. “Do you remember your brother’s six voyages?”, the Emperor asked. “How could I forget?”, was the confused response. Proceeding to exposit, albeit simply, the Emperor leant forward, training his eyes on Ma Wen Ming, and voiced his intention. “I want you to captain the treasure fleet that was formerly led by your brother for a seventh and final voyage.”

Ma Wen Ming remained in awe of everything that happened for the coming weeks, as everything that revolved around him shifted into overdrive: the appointment of a crew, additional ships being recommissioned, the preparation of envoys...

As the ships punted off from the docks of Longwan, Ma Wen Ming glanced towards the horizon, excited and unsure of continuing his brother’s legacy.

As the days went by, the fleet sailed with their first destination: Surabaya. Exchanging seals and words, the fleet continued on through the archipelago of Indonesia, moving and negotiating at a pace that seemed that all was by design. Until the fleet moved on, that is.

Sailing to Ayutthaya to resume the voyage and their endeavor, Ma Wen Ming led the crew to this land, ironic given his lack of familiarity to such a land. Perhaps it was that his brother did not document it in time? No matter, he thought, for he could have the privilege of life to see it himself.

For the weeks that ensued, Ma Wen Ming watched the passing sights of each destination with an unmistakable look of part determination, which only betrayed a sliver of childlike wonder on the navigator’s face, as the fleet ventured ever further than Zheng He had documented, sailing beyond well-known ports like Champa to shores stranger than anything before seen, likely places that his brother would have documented before his untimely death. The towering Great Mosque of Mecca, a so-called “holy city”, the fortresses and necropolises that the Ajuran constructed at the architecturally wondrous Mogadishu, the never-before-seen port city of Ormus, and other sights that were lost in documentation were now imprinted into Ma Wen Ming’s vision for as long as he could remember, as the days went by until the time to return to his homeland.

As the sun began to set towards the horizon, Ma Wen Ming looked up at the dimming sky above, and relished the feeling that he would be home soon.

The sepulchral skies they encountered on the fleet’s homebound course led into a storm, with torrents of rain pouring down onto the crew in a matter of minutes. Scrambling to the front, Ma Wen Ming immediately pulled out his compass and knowing that it was their only action, shouted “Crew, set a course for la—” He was cut short by a bolt of indescribable pain that left a lasting tingling sensation through his body. Regaining consciousness minutes later, he checked his compass and persisted with staying on a homebound course.

However, despite heading for a northward coast, there was no land in sight, and a crewman’s call of “Maelstrom!” made Ma Wen Ming deduce that something was terribly wrong. Issuing an order to evacuate the lead ship and for the others to pull back, he was left at the helm of the ship to somehow survive the whirlpool.

The winds beat harsher than ever, shaking the very planks of his vessel and splintering the cabin. Ma Wen Ming, oblivious to the collapsing world about him, pressed on, desperately steering the ship away from their fate. No choice but to fight for his life and press on...

Until the very mast was struck by another thunderbolt, embers from the ignited wood falling around the ship's lone navigator before being swiftly extinguished, to which Ma Wen Ming noticed as almost symbolic, like every moment in time being swept away by the forward movement of life, or tears in rain: all inevitably overwhelmed by an unstoppable force. As this contemplation prompted Ma Wen Ming to stop and accept the inevitable, he shook off the thought. No! He could not go so gently when he was still alive! He had to press on!

However, wheeling around after another thunderclap, Ma Wen Ming only saw the great mast toppling towards him, finally felled by one gust of wind or one bolt of lightning too many, and then came the sharp blow of the mast against his head.

There was a single split—second of incomprehensible pain, and then everything was gone.

Leaving, resisting, fading and finally falling into a dark and dreamless slumber, as the vessel fell apart into splinters, drawn into the whirlpool with one doomed soul aboard, bound to the fate of the ship as the wreck disappeared to places unknown...

### Voyage 3: 急

Ma Wen Ming blearily opened his eyes, mustering the strength to roll over and resist the throbbing pain that incapacitated him. Standing up, he was shocked by the sight of a sky and sea of a more azure hue than any sea that he saw on his voyage, and astonishingly foreign trees that seemed like the ones he had seen in coastal areas... Where could he be? And then his eyes fell on a red-hued stranger who looked unlike anything he had saw prior, much like everything in this strange new land. But upon moving his sand-caked arm, the stranger fled, leaving him to notice the splintered wood strewn around him, as the memory of that horrifying maelstrom resurfaced.

As to assess the situation, he set off inland, tracing the footprints of that stranger. Pushing overhanging ferns aside, he found an odd collection of tents, heading to the largest one to find answers. Finding more of the red-hued strangers, he greeted them, albeit futilely, as they did not seem to comprehend him. Drawing a boat on a plank he found, the strangers glanced at it, discussing in what seemed to be their language. The exchange of drawings continued, until Ma Wen Ming pulled out a makeshift compass, cobbled together in the minutes before following the stranger, and deduced that he could not return to China from this coastline. Spending several days with the natives to fashion equipment, he then set off from the beach to the "other coastline" to return home, unaware of a series of three ships behind him, miniscule along the horizon, but visibly intending to make land...

And so he trekked for days on end, with the azure coast receding into boundless plains, roamed by many animals and more natives who, fortunately, noticed Ma Wen Ming with curiosity, but not with a trace of hostility. Days passed, and eventually Ma Wen Ming slowly learned about this new world around him: how to hunt, make a settlement, and more. Acclimating to this new world would undoubtedly make this place harder to bid farewell to, Ma Wen Ming thought.

Going further into this uncharted land, Ma Wen Ming encountered strange new sights, like dark columns that destroyed everything in their path at an unparalleled speed, curious new creatures that ranged from elusive to downright hostile in disposition, and a series of drastic shifts in climate, from cliff-lined mountains that turned Ma Wen Ming's progress into a complete halt at times with the unclimbable terrain and frigid weather, an expansive desert that could almost make him drop dead from the heat and dryness, which promptly led to another fascinating mountain range filled with pitfall-esque vales and gargantuan streaks of ice cutting through the landscape, and a verdant forest with some colossi among trees that seemed to block out the very sky. And for everything the climate and topography threw at him, Ma Wen Ming pushed on, motivated by the thought of returning home.

For the remaining hours of the journey, he trudged through the landscape past the canyon, seemingly autonomous, until he managed to smell the sea breeze from the coast, his spirits high from the anticipation of returning.



And then, pushing a clump of sepia undergrowth aside, he saw the sea, preceded by the golden sand of the coast, staring in awe of it, thinking that he was so close to finally going home, until the fact that he didn't have a ship to cross the unknown sea dawned on him.

Determined to change this, he went to work. Fashioning an axe from a conveniently shaped stone and branch, he hacked away at the trees in the vicinity, in an attempt to create a raft. Within a day, he had completed his initial design, setting sail as the sun set, only to be swept overboard. Making a mental note to fasten himself to the raft, he was about to try again, but decided to rest for the night and gather everything before his ocean-wide traverse.

Looking up at the constellations that night, he could picture an ethereal ship sailing across the starlit sky, reflecting the impending final stretch of his own journey as he slowly succumbed to the sea of dreams and distant memories, which he fervently clung to in his mind as he slept through his final night on this fascinating place.

The next morning, he bade the land farewell as a single tear managed to escape his eye over the fact that all things moved on, and set off across the waves, vowing to come back someday.

As his time at sea passed by, Ma Wen Ming drifted at sea, guided by the wind and his compass, waiting for the first sight of land.

Until one fateful day, where he spotted a distant coastline, and knew that he was close to China. Making land at the port, he instantly recognized the architecture of the pier, staggering onto the planked walkway and knowing that he had finally returned home.

Months later, Ma Wen Ming walked along the shore, his mind utterly cluttered by the constant constraints of the Imperial Court, until he passed a rickety dock, remembering the year-old promise that he made to the newly christened continent. Impulsively walking down, he unmoored a boat, punting out of the dock into the open arms of the Pacific, ready to go back to the place he once knew: Adventure.

#### Voyage 4:

He opened his eyes and shook off the fatigue of the previous night from his mind, but that dream... it remained, rooted in the soil of his mind. However, he later set off as life went on like every other day.

Until that alley surfaced in his eyes...

Looking down the alley that he went by on every other day, his eyes were immediately filled with an invasion of light and color, with the alley radiating a golden glow that seemed to restore the run-down alley to a state only seen in centuries past. An impulse surfaced in his mind, exacerbating the doubts brought into his train of thought by the dream, prompting him to walk down the alley, to which his conscious numbly complied.

Going down the alley, with nothing but the steady stream of light to guide him, he turned to see of a dilapidated hangar near the coastline. Decimating the lock with a wrench, he peered inside, closing the door after him, only to find a torch. He moved to its spot on the wall with a match in hand, intending to light it.

Just then, the interior lit up, revealing an ornately decorated ship, built from fine, gold-painted wood and revealing spectral suits of armor on it. A grating voice issued from seemingly empty space. "AS A TRUE ANCESTOR OF THE GREAT VOYAGER, DO YOU ACCEPT THE HONOR OF CARRYING FORTH THE LEGACY OF YOUR FAMILY?"

The words dawned on him. Every childhood story told to him, his adeptness in cartography and sailing, it all fit with the message, and there was only one answer.

He stepped forwards, realizing the unraveling of this story and the fateful circumstances that led to this, and spoke.

"I, Ulysses Ma, will continue what my ancestor started."

Then everything began.

# A Dragonfly Sets Sail

*French International School, Lui, Jessica – 15*

Beneath the rosy clouds across a dull morning sky, in a stirring town nestled in the crook of a bay, where the ocean paced back and forth on smooth beaches, where the spring breeze was beginning to gain the rough, sandy edge of summer — somewhere in the seedier part of town, between the wooden buildings, under the corners of curling ornate rooftops — there was a young girl.

She darted noiselessly through the streets, slipping through alleyways and crevices, her feet as quiet as the paws of a fox. Her green *hanfu* fluttered behind her in the wind. In her hands was a messily wrapped bundle about the size of a vase, which she held so tightly to her chest that passersby might have believed there to be vast sums of money in it.

But there were no passersby to make this remark, because it was very early, and the girl had been careful to wake up long before the restaurants and shops and brothels began their day of business. She continued nimbly on her way, passing dark windows and closed doors. There was no other noise on the street save the light rustling of her clothes and the distant crashing of the sea.

The bundle, although it did not contain money, was indeed of extremely high value. It contained *wuxiang*, a highly-sought substance imported straight from the Silk Road and passed from the wagons of tired merchants to the cargo of the Emperor. A mere pinch of the revered drug was said to be capable of stabilizing the *qi* and restoring energy to even the most hopeless of medical cases. Its value was equal to that of gold.

Which was precisely why she had stolen it. *It really wasn't that much*, she assured herself as she neared the temple where she had been ordered to deliver the bundle to. *The merchants would never notice*. She had crept into their wagon as soon as it arrived in town and had miraculously managed to sneak away with a handful of the powder. How she had done it, she herself didn't know; but the agility that she was so known for in these areas had not failed her, and she had scampered off scot-free.

The girl obtained and resold substances like these in the secrecy of back alleys and basements, passing packages and sealed parcels from one hand to the next. She was only one of the thousands of peasants who did this for a living, but she had built herself a reputation of being fast, reliable, and — most importantly — never getting caught. The regulars called her “*xiao qing ting*”, “Little Dragonfly”.

*But*, she thought triumphantly, *this time will be my last trip. I've been offered loads of money for this little pouch. With all that money I'll never go hungry again. I'll always have a roof over my head at night*. She scurried down the last path to the temple, unable to hide the gleeful grin breaking across her face. *I'll never have to run like a slave again!*

In her midst of her fantasizing she had run straight into the clearing where the temple stood. It was, although beautiful, slightly dusty from disuse. Stone steps led through peeling red columns into the heart of the small structure. The fly eaves of its mahogany roof stretched outwards like long arms. A lifesize statue of a woman had been placed next to its doorless entrance. At her feet, in a separate stone plaque, the goddess' name was engraved: *Mazu*, the goddess of the sea.

A twig cracked behind her. The girl whipped around.

Before her stood a young man. He wore a deep red *hanfu*, made of the rich, silky material the aristocrats so often used. A mischievous, easy smile was spread across his face. What surprised her the most, however, were his eyes. His eyes glimmered brightly — as if he was looking ahead into the distance at something far away that nobody else could see. “A nice temple, isn't it?” he said, grinning at her. “Shame it went out of use after the treasure voyages stopped.”

She blinked. *Is he talking to me?* She shifted uneasily. None of her clients had ever spoken to her.

Oblivious to her discomfort, he continued. “My pa was a voyager. I grew up listening to his stories about the open sea, about faraway lands, exotic fruits, and defeating pirates.”

The girl was growing irritated. *I really don't care, man!* She was tempted to throw the bundle at him. *Take your stuff and give me the money, then go!*

“But then they stopped the treasure voyages,” the man grumbled, and she was startled by his whiny tone. “Why did they have to stop them?! I wanted to go too!”

He suddenly moved toward her, and she threw up her hands (and the forgotten bundle) in a feeble attempt at protection. He didn't seem to notice. Grabbing her shoulders and looking earnestly into her eyes, he said, “So that's why I'm starting my own. With my pa's money and my buddies back in town, I'm going to sail out to sea! All I need now is money to hire a doctor on the ship, and then we're good to go—”

“Let go!” she hissed. She pushed the bundle into his face. “There's your order. Now give me my money!”

The man froze. “Wait, you're the drug dealer?! *Xiao qing ting?*!” he exclaimed.

She raised an eyebrow. “Huh?!”

They stared at each other for a moment. Before she could open her mouth again, a cord was slipped onto her wrist. She gaped at it. Then at him. And back at the cord again. “You—”

“Yeah, sorry,” he said, sounding genuinely apologetic. “You'd caused a bit of trouble by stealing this,” he waved the bundle, “so the Emperor said that if I managed to catch you, he would pay me.” As the panic settled in and she writhed, trying to get away, he kept an iron grip on the cord. “I promise you won't get executed.”

“No!” she wailed. “You liar! Scoundrel! Cheat!” Oh, she *knew* she should have done a background check before taking up the offer. She had been blinded by her greed, and look what it had cost her. *I don't want to go to jail! No! No!*

He began to drag her up the path back to town. “I'm none of those things! I'm an awesome person!” came the miffed response, which only served to infuriate her further. She swung a kick at him, but he managed to dodge. “Hey!”

“Don't 'hey' me! You're the one who tricked me into this mess!”

“Well, Little Cricket, if only you hadn't been naughty and—”

“It's Dragonfly, you scrawny twat!”

As they struggled back into the outskirts of town, they received a few stares from the earlier townsfolk. She straightened grudgingly. *If I'm going to make my escape, it'll have to be when there are less people around*, she reminded herself. *Many of the people around here probably wouldn't hesitate to help capture me if they could; there is a bounty on my head, after all.*

“My name's Xiwang, by the way,” said the man cheerfully.

“I really don't care,” she muttered. What was with this guy? If he really was affiliated with the Emperor, why was he so... dense?

“My friends are waiting on the ship already,” he continued, and she wondered if he had heard her at all. “I'm just going to deliver you to the local justice dudes—”

“—*dudes?*—”

“—then I'll take the money, pluck the nearest doctor and away we'll sail,” he announced proudly.

The girl noticed they were now walking into a quieter area. *Great*, she mused. *All I have to do now is keep him talking, and then bam! The blockhead will never know what hit him.* “What's so good about those voyages?”

He spun round, eyes shining. “Oh, have I been *waiting* for that question,” he hummed. “Not only were they a sign of our country’s wealth and pride, but they were also a method of colonisation...”

As he rambled on, they entered the quietest part of town. Here, the afternoon sun only glowed faintly through a layer of heavy-set clouds, and the buildings formed a crooked line along the paved path. Only his voice broke the silence here; the dark shops they passed showed no sign of life, and the crashing of the waves did not reach their ears.

They turned a corner. “...and that’s why, Little Cricket, I’m not looking for some pompous apothecary to join me on my journey — just someone who cares about—“

Her eyes narrowed. *Now!*

Swinging her leg back, she brought it between his legs from behind. Hard.

He swore loudly. “Ow!” Whipping round, ready to snap a few strained retorts, he realized too late that in his pain he had loosened his grip on the cord.

The girl was gone.

Gone indeed she was. Pumping her legs as fast as she could, she was zipping through the empty streets, trying to keep her footsteps quiet and work her hands out of the cord at the same time. “Freedom!” she crowed silently. The wind in the ribbons trailing from her hair buns and the sensation of stone slabs flying under her toes stirred the adrenaline in her veins. The cord fell away. She was free! The dragonfly was free!

Suddenly, she noticed how dejectedly empty her arms were. The bundle! That dunce of an explorer was still holding it!

She gritted her teeth, slowing to a reluctant halt. There was no point in escaping if she had let him get the better of her. She would have to turn back. If only she could—

“Oi!”

Her breath caught. Half turning, she saw him running at her.

Really fast.

“Whoa!” she yelped. The memory of the bundle slipped into the depths of her mind and panic took over. Her feet flew into action. “You’ve got your stuff already! Leave me alone!” She skidded around a corner, blood roaring. Behind her his footsteps grew closer. *Damn, he’s fast!*

They had turned onto a long street. The shopkeepers here were unfortunately awake and setting up shop. The girl whizzed past their wide-eyed gazes in a flutter of green cloth, vaulting over a crate of tea leaves and ducking through street stalls. Somersaulting lightly over an alarmed ox and its owner, she shot a glance over her shoulder. He was nowhere to be seen.

*Yes, I’ve lost him!* Feeling triumphant, she nicked a dumpling from a tray, ignoring the outraged cry of the chef. She popped it in her mouth. Hot, savoury soup burst across her tongue. This chase was mildly fun, she thought. Now if only she could retrieve that bundle...

An old woman appeared on the street in front of her.

Before she could even react her body collided painfully with the old woman’s. A resounding smack, and then she found herself on the hard stone ground, head spinning. The elbow that had been under her was throbbing mechanically. Something that felt like blood trickled down her leg. Her lungs felt deflated.

The old woman was lying on her side a few feet away. She wasn’t moving.

The girl scrambled to her feet. “*Po po?* Granny? Are you okay?” Kneeling, she patted the old woman's shoulder. “I'm sorry...” There was no response. “Granny?”

Xiwan slowed, panting, in front of a large crowd. He squinted. “Has that stupid little Mosquito gone through here?” he wondered out loud. He nudged a nearby stall keeper. “Hey, man, what's going on?”

The stall keeper, a grumpy looking old fart with a wispy goatee, muttered something about a girl “knocking over the old Yang widow” and something else about “medicine” before turning moodily back into his stall.

Xiwan's blood ran cold. *What's she done?*

He wrestled through, stepping on a few feet and pulling someone's hair along the way. She was a girl; if she ended up doing anything, well, *bad*, he... knew how the punishments worked around here. They were not pleasant.

*She's probably crying her eyes out*, he grimaces. *Either that, or she's been scared into submission. Or maybe she's—*

As he emerged into the centre of the crowd, her voice reached his ears. “Ah, you! Come over here!”

He gaped at the scene in front of him. The girl was not crying. Nor was she in submission. She was kneeling on the stone slabs over an unconscious old woman. Her *hanfu* had been torn away at the knees; the cloth had been used to prop the *po po*'s head up like a pillow.

She turned around, hair ribbons flying. “You! I told you to come over!”

Slack-jawed, he stared at her. “Uh, wait, me?!”

“Yes!” she snapped, tone authoritative. “Get me some ginseng!”

He scurried over. “Ginseng, ma'am?”

“*Yes!*” she growled. “And hurry, idiot! We need to revive her breathing as soon as possible!”

Xiwan ran faster in that moment than he had ever done in his life. They had passed a herbs shop in their chase, and it was from one of the baskets there that he grabbed a few stalks of the ginger root. “Hey, man, sorry, I'll pay later,” he explained breathlessly to the flabbergasted shopkeeper, and with that he sprinted back. Obediently, the people parted for him.

She took the ginseng from him wordlessly and with one straight, experienced motion cracked it in half. Stunned into silence, Xiwan and the crowd watched on helplessly as she tore off a thin piece with her teeth. “Hold her mouth open,” she ordered, and he hastily pulled the old woman's jaw back. The girl slipped the ginseng piece below the old woman's tongue with deft fingers, not hesitating in the slightest.

As he sat back on his heels, he looked at the young girl beside him with fresh eyes. At first he had dismissed her as simply one of the many homeless struggling to make a living off the black market. But now, she emitted an aura of intense concentration. Her message was clear: *This woman will wake up. I'll make sure of it.*

All of a sudden, the jigsaw pieces in his mind seemed to come together. This stealing, cheating, fast-footed little dragonfly had a mind of her own, a will of her own, a heart of her own. She had made a mistake and had injured someone. Now here she was, owning up, willing to do whatever it took to make the situation better. Here she was, doing her best to heal others.

He realized he could probably trust this girl.

A hacking cough rattled its way out of the old woman's throat. The crowd gave a hushed shout, and everyone leaned forward, craning to get a look. The Little Dragonfly swatted them away. “Oh, give her some space, will you? Let her

breathe.” She and Xiwang crouched over the granny’s body. “*Po po?* How are you feeling?” she said softly. “I’m sorry I crashed into you. It was my mistake.”

The old woman sat up feebly, one hand on Xiwang’s arm for support. “Oh, I’m fine, dearie,” she warbled good-naturedly. She chewed mildly on the ginseng as she stood up. Patting the girl’s hand kindly, she turned and hobbled away. “Thank you all!”

With their main source of interest gone, the people murmured and scattered back to their shops like ants going on their way. Xiwang and the Little Dragonfly stood alone in the street.

She cleared her throat nervously. “Well, I’ll be off now,” she mumbled.

She would have whipped off then if he had not caught hold of her green hair ribbons. “Oi, oi, wait, Little Mantis!”

“Dragonfly!”

“Whatever!” He spun her around and took hold of her shoulders.

She leaned away from him, mortified. *Am I still getting arrested?!*

But his eyes were shining with admiration. “That was awesome!” He shook her for emphasis and she groaned. “You didn’t tell me you knew doctor stuff!”

“I don’t *know* doctor stuff,” she retorted. “I’ve just... been running around long enough to pick up a few tricks.” Her stomach convulsed with dread as she noticed a devious grin stretching across his face. “...What?”

He beamed at her. “Join my crew!”

A short silence. Then: “...No.”

“Why?!”

“I don’t wanna! You’re annoying!”

“But you can be my doctor dude!”

“Get someone else! Use the money from that bundle to hire someone—” she hesitated. “—wait, where is it?!”

“What?”

“The bundle, you nitwit!”

“Oh, I lost it.”

“You *what?*!” she spluttered, on the verge of choking. “Do you know how much money that was worth—” He grabbed hold of her hand. “Oi!”

“We’re leaving! To the docks it is, uh—” He turned. “Wait, what’s your real name?”

She opened her mouth to object, but relented. “...Shuhua.”

His gaze was serious. “That’s a pretty name,” he said, and she felt the tips of her ears turn red.

“W—whatever!” She fell silent. Something in her had changed today. The hopeful glimmer that had been in Xiwang’s eyes was not so far off anymore. For the first time, she saw what he was seeing — the shimmering ocean, the warm, wet gusts of wind in her hair, the boat heaving beneath her feet, the thrill of the unknown.

*Maybe I can leave behind this street life, she thought. Maybe there's hope for me, too.*

She scuffed the ground with her shoes. His hand was warm and secure. "What if they come after me?"

He took a long look at her. "I promise you I won't let them take you away," he said finally, and despite her best efforts to ignore it, her heart warmed.

More silence. She scuffed the ground again. "Well?" she demanded, embarrassed. "Are we getting on your stupid ship or what?"

Xiwan gave her a goofy grin. "Heck, yeah!"

And when he led her by the hand, she let him. They ran towards the pier, towards the ship, towards the open sea of adventure...

# Salt Water

*Good Hope School, Cheung, Jocelyn Rachel – 16*

“I’m saying you should’ve at least acted a bit more grateful—”

“Don’t worry, I am.”

Without a second word, he slammed the door to his cabin shut. To be fair, it was not *his* cabin, as it was shared between quite a few groups of crew members, but most of them were outside right now, and he had relatively more privacy. That being said, it wasn’t a lot. As he exhaled into his hands, he felt the odd stares of the others on his back. In all honesty, he didn’t think the situation was all that bad, it was just the circumstances that were. He had just wanted to go fishing, that was all, and go back to his little rundown shed of a home with his mother, and live good and well. However, this one grand voyage that the Yongle Emperor himself had commissioned had apparently required another crew member, and he had been tricked by that utter bastard Zhouli into helping out. With his luck, he probably wouldn’t be home for half a decade. He should’ve known something was off way earlier on, but by the time he had realized, Zhouli was waving an official order for his recruitment aboard the treasure ship in his face, giddy delight in his too-blue eyes.

What a fool.

He sighed, glancing up just to meet bright sunlight filtering through the crack in the door. Time passed quicker whenever you were dreading it. He blinked harshly as he straightened himself, smoothing out his clothes and offering a death glare to the people behind him. Before he could sweep out of the cabin to his post however, a hand caught on his shoulder, forcing him to stop. He turned to see a young man looking back at him, a faint grin on his face. He’s probably younger than me, he thought with an internal groan, letting his dark eyes fall shut for a moment before meeting the stranger’s amber gaze, which was – could you believe – twinkling with amusement. How dare he? He had just opened his mouth to speak when said stranger started first, interrupting his train of thought.

“Lize, right? I’ve heard things about you.”

He bristled, feeling a spark of defiance before he shut it down. He liked being known, but how this man worded it made the attention sound negative. He painted his face a picture of calmness – or rather, emotionlessness – before inclining his head as nonchalantly as possible, though the motion still seemed rather stiff.

“That’s me. I’m afraid I don’t know who you are.”

The stranger’s smile did not vanish, but instead widened.

“I’m Xuqiyue. It’s a pleasure to meet you.”

How it was even a pleasure at all, Lize could not imagine. Even in his hometown, Lize was generally regarded as the stoic one: a nicer way of saying he was too blunt, too straightforward, but that was the way he was. He didn’t mind and his mother also didn’t mind too much, his books didn’t either, so who cares? He simply just nodded again at Xuqiyue, wondering what he was expected to say. The pleasure is all mine? That would be a lie. He didn’t enjoy lying. As the sunlight blossomed into speckles across the wooden floorboards underfoot, he wondered offhandedly how late he was. Maybe he could make it up later to whoever would be overseeing his job. He had many more days and months to do so, after all – with all the time in the world, it seemed to him. It took a few more moments before he had the compulsion to pull his mind back into his current situation with this... rather curious man, who was now squinting at him rather obviously: observing him, of all things.

“Can I help you?” Lize asked, crossing his arms at Xuqiyue, who was just a few centimetres shorter than him, but not enough that he could leer over him.

“Not today,” Xuqiyue shook his head. “Just wanted to say hi. Let’s be friends, yeah?”

Lize did not reply, instead seeming to freeze at the proposition. Friends... The closest thing he had to a friend on this stupid ship was Zhouli, and they were on a hiatus right now. Frankly, Lize wouldn’t mind having friends too much, especially since he was keenly aware that this journey was going to be incredibly long, excruciatingly long, if he didn’t have any distractions. So he bit his lip, nodded at Xuqiyue, and left.

“Ehh, so it’s like that?” Xuqiyue mused, glancing ahead past the ship’s mast instead of at Lize next to him. Standing by each other they created almost a perfect contrast: Lize stood straight out of habit, his dark eyes vigilant as he took in their surroundings, the breaking waves casting a reflection in his pupils. One of his hands held onto the railing while the other pushed his hair out of his eyes, intent on navigating. Xuqiyue on the other hand lounged carelessly by Lize, playing with his own fingers and sniffing at the salty tang of ocean air. Like a dog, Lize thought in the back of his head, though the accusation was fond, almost. He resisted the urge to ruffle the man’s hair: he was only three years younger than him, for God’s sake, even though sometimes he acted like a child. They were just so different. But being friends with Xuqiyue had led Lize to many other people: Zhongtian, Guanjiarong, Baiyun and more, all of whom had their own quirks, but found it easy to bond over talk of how the weather would be like and how the ship would fare, what pirates they’d have to fight off today, the best techniques to catch fish, and such seemingly simple-minded topics related



to their voyage. Xuqiyue was much more sociable than Lize was, but with his presence, Lize found it possible to engage. People even said “you’re the guy who Xuqiyue always sticks to, aren’t you?” to him. It had admittedly been easy becoming closer to the man, after all.

“Yes,” Lize replied with a resigned toss of his head as he rolled out the map they had been given. Or rather, the blank scroll. They were entering uncharted waters now. “Now you know why I was so...prickly back then, for lack of a better word.” They were discussing how exactly Lize had ended up on board the treasure ship. It had been a full four months since the voyage had begun, and Lize still wasn’t sure he was enjoying the whole ordeal, notwithstanding the decent acquaintances – or friends – that he had made. The daily work was harsh, and he couldn’t help but think about how his mother was doing. He hadn’t even gotten to properly say goodbye, not with the intention of leaving for years. To look on the bright side, he wasn’t getting seasick every other day, which was an improvement if he said so himself. In hindsight, he was infinitely glad that Xuqiyue hadn’t approached him earlier, when his pale skin had appeared constantly sallow and green from the ship’s inconsistent swaying.

“Don’t get me wrong, I forgave that incompetent Zhouli a long time ago,” Lize exhaled, running his fingers up the bridge of his sharp nose. “But I can’t help it, you know. Can’t help but be frustrated.”

When Xuqiyue didn’t respond, he looked up to find the younger man smiling at him with a tilted head, completely disregarding their task at hand. Lize rolled his eyes before he continued, painstakingly etching down the shape of a nearby island. When he finished, Xuqiyue caught his hand before he could start on the shoreline of a peninsula that was approaching on the horizon.

“What is it?” Lize’s voice was as cool as always, but his undertone was more exasperated than aggravated.

“Tell me about your mother, Lize.”

“Now why would I ever?”

“I’m curious!”

“...Right.”

“Please? I’ll give you some of my dinner, alright?”

“Fine,” Lize relented, moving his attention back onto the teal and the blue of the ocean roaring around them. “I’ll tell you about her when our shift ends here, alright? This requires my focus, and yours, if you want to hear about my mother.” Lize cracked the tiniest bit, the side of his mouth quirking up when Xuqiyue let out a loud and accusing yowl, complaining about his unfairness and sportsmanship. Yeah, right... What an idiot. Lize was just being smart, which Xuqiyue seemed incapable of doing at times. Lize laughed mentally at the thought, subconsciously reaching over to fix Xuqiyue’s sleeve. Oh well. He didn’t really mind sharing about his mother. She wasn’t dead or anything, nor gone, and she was a wonderful woman. She was quick-witted, grounded, big on manners and strict, but she loved nothing more than her own children and her late husband. She always wanted the best for them, he thought, suddenly feeling a wave of guilt before he squashed it down. Haa... he missed her. Much more than he’d like to admit to anyone, even himself. He was a grown man now.

“Now, Lize, your mother wouldn’t want you to sulk, would she?”

“S-sulk? When have I ever?” Lize retorted, glaring at Xuqiyue. Even though the man had never shied away from Lize’s stink eyes, he had the horrifying feeling that they were doing the opposite of their intended effect.

“All the time! Whenever I leave you for a while, you have such a lonely—” Xuqiyue broke off into an undignified squawk as Lize swatted at him, impatient. “Seriously,” he muttered under his breath as he stepped back, turning to begin to work on cleaning the starboard, only for Xuqiyue to accidentally knock over a set of brooms in his hurry to get to Lize. “I’m serious this time,” Xuqiyue coaxed soothingly as he was determined to break into Lize’s personal space, headfast. “Get on with it,” Lize responded, cocking his head as if daring Xuqiyue to speak.

“You look like you don’t want to be here sometimes,” Xuqiyue started, his voice steady without any hint of a taunt. For once, he seemed to be a little nervous: he wrung his hands together, though his eyes were still. “You always tell us it’s nothing at all, but you really want to go home, don’t you?” he paused for a moment, trying to find the words to put together of what he wanted to say. “But you know, your mom, she seems much more adaptable than you are,” he joked, ducking when Lize swung at him. “Just kidding, Lize. I just meant... I think your mother would want you to enjoy this.” Xuqiyue spread his arm, as if to indicate at everything around them: the sea foam swallowing up the hull of their ship, the masses of crew members in throngs, the strong mast flipping in the wind, and more than anything, the open sea. “It’s really not an opportunity you get every day, getting to go on such an important voyage for the emperor himself,” he laughed, a high, clear sound, his hands coming to clutch at the jade pendant around his chest which Lize knew belonged to the man’s late grandmother.

Lize couldn’t help but blink, surprised that Xuqiyue had become so incredibly perceptive...but maybe he always had been. Maybe that’s why he even approached Lize in the first place, even though it entailed the most awkward greeting in history. And now that Lize thought about it...he was right, too: upon hearing Xuqiyue’s words, his mother’s face drifted out of the haze of his thoughts and jabbed a stick at him. “Get yourself together, young man,” she chastised him in the recesses of his head, and he stifled a self-deprecating laugh in favor of looking up at the

cloudless evening sky. How pointless it had been for him to give away all of the precious moments and joy just to worry about something he couldn't control at all. Looking at Xuqiyue now, he wondered if that was why he seemed so carefree: that he knew how to push away things that were weighing him down and to live entirely in the moment. Lize regarded himself: they were such different people, so different that he forgot he could learn so much from the other.

"Don't say anything," Xuqiyue broke out, shaking his head. "Your blunt approach will definitely ruin the atmosphere." Lize opened his mouth to snap back an indignant remark, but right at that moment Xuqiyue's sharp eyes caught on the spire of a distant building. Lize whipped around as soon as Xuqiyue pointed, his earnestness almost – almost infectious. "No way...a coastal town? We're approaching civilization?!" Before Lize could protest, Xuqiyue was pulling him along to the front of the ship, tripping and stumbling over ropes and ledges. As they watched the land growing closer, Xuqiyue whispered in bated breath.

"Imagine...maybe that's our promised land where we'll find our own treasure."

Lize only smiled, nodding. Perhaps he had found *his* treasure of knowledge already.

# The Missing Emperor

*Good Hope School, Fu, Karina – 15*

‘Are these all?’

The old man shook his head and pointed the burnt end of the stick to the side, where a stack of documents were waiting to be burnt.

‘Augh! It isn’t enough that the whole ridiculous journey emptied the country’s vaults, it’s causing me burdens now!’

‘The boy mumbled while the other quietly threw a few more books into the flame.’

‘Hey, you! Were you on that fleet as well?’ The boy asked. The man did not answer, but the silence spoke for itself.

Nowadays, those voyages are no longer a national pride, but instead a sheer waste of energy that exploited the people.

‘Aha! So you were! Then tell me, what could those barbaric lands possibly have that bewitched the former Emperor to ruin his own country?’ The boy sneered, but again, there was no answer. The silent air was filled by the soft, drowsing crackling of the fire, which sometimes flared up when new books were tossed into it. It was only when the boy finally started to doze off, did the old man speak for the first time to him.

‘None of us had thought it would last this long. No, not at the beginning....Our goal was simple – to find *the* missing Emperor and bring him back.....’

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‘Your majesty, I express my deepest gratitude for your hospitality during the past two months. As much as we would hate to leave your wonderful country, I am afraid the time of our departure is drawing near.’ Zheng He said in his most sincere tone, he sounded almost apologetic; a tone the translator by his side failed to copy, but the king seemed too worried to care.

‘Sir Zheng...’ before the king could finish his sentence, he was interrupted by one of Zheng He’s men, who rushed into the chamber with two of the king’s own guards at his heels. The King frowned at the intruders.

‘My deepest apologies, your majesty. But I have brought urgent news for Sir Zheng.’ The man said, still panting as he kneeled on one knee.

The king waited for a translation before looking towards Zheng He for a reasonable excuse of his man breaking into the palace.

‘Your majesty, this is my most trusted subordinate —Wong Jing—hong. He does not mean to offend you, but important news must have come to us.’

Despite his annoyance, the king still smoothened his expression and waved an approving hand at them.

Then Wong Jing—hong immediately ran to Zheng He, who has already stood up at this point, and whispered in his ear. By the time the messenger had finished, Zheng He’s expression was dead serious. He stood up and bowed to the King again, ‘Your majesty, I do not mean to be rude but we must set off immediately.’

‘May I ask why?’

‘On our way here, we sent a team to persuade the pirate Chen Zu—yi to surrender. That team had just returned and brought back the news that he accepted our offer.’ Zheng He paused for a moment before continuing, ‘They said that he knows where our missing Emperor is.’

The Sumatran King sighed. ‘I have no intention to rain on your parade, but that news is most likely to be false. He is a cunning and ruthless pirate who has attacked and tricked our neighboring countries many times before. We have tried to pay our tribute to your Emperor before,’ Here he gave a nod to Zheng He as a gesture of respect, ‘but our ships were all robbed by him. This is the worry I was about to tell you before your messenger arrived.’

‘I am aware of your concerns. But your majesty needn’t worry, as we will capture him and bring him back to our capital for trial and execution.’ Zheng He answered.

‘I will await for your good news then.’ Despite saying so, the worry and doubt was still apparent in the king’s eyes.

Zheng He understood that, because Chen Zuyi had been rampant for years without being defeated. Somethings need to be proven by actions, not words.

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‘How do you know so many details?’ The boy interrupted.

‘I was the Captain’s right—hand man.’

‘Oh! I remember your name now; it is Wong—something—Hong, right?’

The man ignored him (much to the boy’s dismay), but instead continued, ‘It didn’t take us long to arrive at Jiougang, where he was waiting for us. The moment our fleet approached him, he lashed out at us.....’

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‘Attack!’ Chen Zuyi yelled at the top of his lungs as the Ming dynasty’s fleet approached his. His sonorous voice travelled far and fast on the sea, and was soon echoed by his troops who seemed to appear out of nowhere. The nineteen larger pirate ships encircled the Ming fleet and are gradually closed in, blocking all their escapes to the open seas. The smaller battleships sailed straight for the outermost ring of ships in the Ming fleet, each loaded with pirates. ‘Sir! At this rate, they will force us into the shallow waters! Permission to...’ Wong Jing-hong started but was broken off.

‘Not yet.’ Despite being just as anxious and worried as everyone else, Zheng He’ looked as calm as he could ever be. This is their first real fight, and the responsibility of defending the Ming dynasty’ honor lied heavily on their shoulders. It was a fight they can’t afford to lose.

Zheng He’s stern look seemed to have a calming effect on everyone else, the sailors exchanged glances and quickly scattered back to their places.

Most of the pirate battleships had already reached the outermost Ming ships. The pirates had their eyes on the ships that seemed to have a deeper draft, as they are more likely to carry more resources like food or treasures. No loss for the pirates either way. On each battleship, several pirates threw their grappling hooks to the side of the Ming ships and pulled them close, while the others leaped onto the other’s deck.

To their surprise, the deck was empty.

The pirates howled in laughter, reckoning that the cowardly Ming soldiers were hiding from them. As soon as they found the locked door leading down to the cabin, they started slashing and banging at it, already looking forward to their first blood.

At the sight of this, Zheng He finally nodded to the soldier at his side, who immediately lifted a horn to his mouth and blew it with all his might.

The blare of the horn changed the battle instantly.

The deck of the smaller Ming ships suddenly split from the middle and opened up, throwing the unguarded pirates down to the bottom of the ship, where sharp blades and nails awaited. They hardly made any sound before they died.

‘Bang!’ The first cannons were fired from the Ming ships as iron balls flew across the air towards the pirate ships, destroying everything in their way, Chen Zuyi’s eyes widened. The pirate, in his long years of raging on the ocean being unchecked on, seemed to have forgotten that there was always someone better than him out there, and that his ships were no longer the strongest nor had the farthest attack range.

As the ships from both sides sailed closer to one another, the battle intensified. The sea was filled with the sounds of cannons firing; the whipping of the grappling hooks flew across the air; the small thuds of arrows rained onto the decks; the cries of men were heard as they charged onto their enemies’ ships.

Zheng He leaped onto Chen Zuyi’s ship and challenged the pirate himself. Their swords clashed together and for a while, they were neck-to-neck. Both men seemed equally strong in technique and strength. But as time passed, Chen Zuyi’s attacks slowed down and could only just defend himself as his strength failed to keep up with his technique. Obviously the man had grown too proud of himself and left out his trainings, so it didn’t take long before Zheng He knocked the pirate to his knees and had a sword on his neck.

‘Where is he?’

‘wh—who?’

‘*The missing emperor! Where is he?*’

‘I lied! I lied! It was a trick!’

The sword dug into his neck, a line of blood trickled down from the shallow wound.

‘I don’t know! I really don’t know! Please don’t kill me!’

Zheng He would have done more if Wong Jing-hong had not ran to his side and held him back.

‘Captain! Didn’t you say we need to bring him back to our Emperor? We need him *alive!*’

Much to the pirate’s relief, Zheng He backed down. He wiped the blade on the pirate’s clothes and put it back to its sheath.

‘Thankfully he speaks Chinese, otherwise I suspect you will drag a translator off the boat.’ Wong Jing-hong joked as he tied up the pirate in ropes. The joke may be a bad one, but it appeared to calm Zheng He down by a little.

‘Watch over him.’ Zheng He said as he charged into battle.

With the leader captured, it wouldn’t take long to clear out the remaining pirates.

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'Ever since that battle, the Captain became close friends with –'

'That's all? I thought the man who troubled our dynasty for years would be better than that!' The boy complained.

'Power and wealth can corrupt a person.'

The boy didn't seem satisfied but didn't disagree either. 'What about that time in Java? I heard almost two hundred of you died there. And the Emperor didn't even—'

The pained expression on the older man's face stopped him, he realized he shouldn't rub his nose in others' sore point.

'I'm—I'm sorry, I didn't mean to...' He mumbled an apology. 'So what happened to the missing Emperor then? Did you find him?' Although he knew the answer as the missing Emperor never returned, he was too desperate to change the subject.

But to his great surprise, the man nodded slowly.

'It was on our third voyage. He was hiding in Kollam in India. No one knows how he got there.....'

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As soon as Zheng He marched off the ship with his troops behind him, they were greeted by the warm, welcoming cheers of the locals. But something felt odd to him. He dismissed that feeling and kept a straight face as he walked towards the ambassador sent by the King of Kollam at the end of the dock.

'Greetings, Sir Zheng. It is an honor to meet you. His majesty is waiting for your arrival in the palace.' The man said in fluent Chinese, which surprised Zheng He as Kollam is incredibly far from China. But there was no time to wonder where he had learnt it as he ordered most of his troops to collect resources to refill the fleet, leaving only a handful of the best soldiers and translator by his side. Just in case.

As they walked into the stone-built city, the ambassador began introducing the local history and specialties. There was no denying that he was a good tour guide and a diplomat, showing the glorious side of their country while inconspicuously praising China, but Zheng He wasn't listening to him. Instead, he was focused on the familiar chanting that became louder as they walked on. This was what struck him as odd at the dock: the enthusiastic cheer from the locals mixed with the calm chanting of monks.

'May I ask what are the monks doing?' Zheng He finally asked as they were walking by a line of those who were chanting in unison. Although Zheng He had the same religion as them, Buddhism, he could not understand the language.

'A wealthy family in this neighborhood had recently lost a son, and they were hiring to chant a spell called *Amitabha Pure Land Rebirth Mantra* in Buddhism. It is said to help the dead clear their karma and move on to where they belong. They need to walk around this neighborhood for forty-nine times to complete the ritual.'

Zheng He nodded in acknowledgement, when suddenly; he spotted a familiar face in the line, a face that belonged to Emperor Jianwen.

'Excuse me.' Zheng He hastily said before running towards the monks, leaving the ambassador and his own troops behind. The suspicious monk seemed to realize Zheng He was on to him, as he ran out of the line and dashed into a small alley.

'Hey, you! Stop right there!' Zheng He yelled as he chased the monk down the twisty alleys and streets, but the monk didn't even look back once, he just kept running.

The monk was obviously not up to such a strong exercise, so there were many times when he was almost within arm's reach of Zheng He, but he was all too familiar with the city that he could easily gain distance between them again with a simple turn. There were times when Zheng He feared he would lose sight of the monk in this maze-like city.

Thankfully, the monk seemed to have tripped on an uneven stone step and fell on the ground. This gave Zheng He enough time to catch up with him to pin him to the ground.

At this point, Wong Jing-hong, who had been at their heels the entire time, finally caught up with him? Still panting, he asked, 'What's wrong?'

'This is him, Emperor Jianwen.'

'What? Could you have been mistaken?'

'No! I have spent enough time around Ming Chengzu and his family to know how each and every one of them look like! There is no mistake!'

'Alright, alright. But at least give me something to prove so I can believe you.'

'Take off his left shoe! There should be a black birthmark shaped like an orchid at the bottom of his left foot.'

Wong Jing-hong hesitated before saying, 'I am sorry.' He took off the monk's left shoe and sock, and there it was, an orchid-like black spot the size of a coin. He was too stunned to talk.

'Then I guess we should, em, bring him back onto the ship? And maybe inform the King?' Wong Jing-hong muttered, trying not to look at the found Emperor's face that was filled with despair.

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‘So what happened to him then?’ The boy asked.  
‘We brought him back here, to his uncle, the Emperor at the time.’  
‘But we never heard the news.’  
‘Remember the time when the last Emperor suddenly called a lot of monks into the palace?’  
‘Yes, but what about it?’  
‘What better place to hide a leaf than in a forest?’  
The boy raised an eyebrow.  
‘But if you have found him, why did the voyages continue?’  
‘.....the former Emperor thought it could stabilize the imperial court and promote trade,’  
The boy smirked at this as even the man himself seemed to have difficulty in believing that, but the man continued,  
‘...and there is a chance for those who know will die on the seas, so he wouldn’t have to get his hands dirty and raise suspicion.’  
‘But if you knew he wanted to get rid of you, why did you agree to go on the voyages?’  
‘Part of it was due to my own selfishness. Once you got used to the adventures at sea, it is hard to settle down on solid ground again’  
‘Oh, whatever! It all sound too story-like, you must be faking me.’ The boy yawned. ‘I’ve had enough of story time, I just really need some sleep. Would you please finish the rest for me?’  
The man nodded.  
‘Thank you, eh...seriously, what is your real name?’  
Silence filled the air again. It was only when the boy was already half asleep, did he seemed to hear the man’s reply.  
‘My family used to call me Ma He.’

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Zheng He was wandering around Java with his friend, Wong Jing-hong, trying to carve every single view into his memory as this may very well be the last time they visit this place.  
‘Zheng He, I need to tell you something.’ Wong Jing-hong suddenly called his name.  
‘What’s wrong?’  
‘I won’t be leaving with you this time, I am staying here.’  
Zheng He was dumbfounded.  
‘I am getting old, Zheng He, we both are.’ His friend carried on, ‘We don’t have much time left to live for ourselves instead of the Emperor.’  
Zheng He turned towards his old friend, he wanted to deny but the glistening white streaks in his friend’s hair made him speechless.  
‘You of all should know that they will *silence* us at all cost if we go back. Starting a real family is all I ever wanted, but I will never get to if I return.’ Wong Jing-hong continued ‘Being free is all *you* ever wanted, but you will never get to be if you return, especially as Zheng He.’  
‘Hold up, are you saying that.....’  
‘The old Emperor is gone, and the new one never looks you in the face.’  
And there, Zheng He could see a sparkle of mischief in his friend’s eyes; it was a rare sight even in their younger days. And Zheng He couldn’t think of a reason to refuse.  
Perhaps this will be a brand new adventure.

# His Legacy

*Good Hope School, Hon, Rayna – 14*

As I watched the last boxes of silk and gold load up the boat, I let out a sigh of relief knowing that I'll be sailing again. The sea was my true home, one I never had since my family left me to fend for myself at the age of 12.

"Jake you coming?" I twisted my head to see Youngjia beckoning me to hurry on board before the ship departs. I stuffed the last of my food into my mouth and scrambled on board, hearing the sounds of family bid their loved ones goodbye. I wished I had that.

I watched the mainland shrink smaller and smaller as we journeyed forward, bits and fragments of our last trip came to me. We sailed all the way to Arabia. Can you believe that? It was a great trip the Arabians accepted our offerings of peace and our homeland made a new relationship. The emperor even crowned us the great explorers of the sea and sent us on a new mission. Leading us to another long journey of sailing and I loved every single part of it, well maybe not every part of it. Not when the captain asked me to sweep the deck or assign me to toilet duty. I swear the captain has it in for me sometimes, always asking me to do things or calling me aside to tell me some new information about sailing.

Captain Wu, one of the most formidable captains known. He's that kind of man that's really strict but you know he only has your best interests in mind. Everyone on the ship respects him and in my own weird way I do too. He taught me everything I knew about being a sailor now, I owe everything to him, literally

Captain, he has this odd treasure chest that he keeps with him all the time. No one really knows what's in it which was part of the reason why no one has dared touch it but I have never seen that chest 5 inches away from the captain.

"Captain called a meeting!"

"Captain called a meeting!"

"Captain called a meeting!"

Being torn away from my thoughts in bed, I shrugged on my coat and headed down to the common room for the meeting.

"The voyage this time held a special meaning," the captain was not one to beat around the bush, "I'm sure you've all heard about the legend of Harizonna," murmurs of agreement ran around the room.

The folklore of Harizonna was a well-known one. Legend has it that during the Warring States period a group of people escaped from the mainland and found Harizonna. Described as heaven on earth, Harizonna soon disappeared off the surface of the earth. Many have went on journeys attempting to find this "paradise" but almost none returned and those who do come back empty handed and a crazed mind. Despite this, it's every sailor's dream to succeed in finding it, mine too.

"The emperor sent us to find the city of Harizonna and we are not to disappoint."

"Dismissed"

Hushed chatters broke out in the room as everyone filed out to resume their duties, mine was to rest.

"Jake, you're on mapping duty", no worse words could have come out of the captain's mouth, I hated mapping, I would have taken toilet duty any day instead. Of course the captain knew this and called me out in front of everyone. I trudged to the map room, giving everyone who was laughing at my expense a somewhat murderous glare.

Days, weeks, months pass by like this, the usual duties on board or the sudden ones assigned by the captain to humour him, I suppose. There were the usual weird rumours spreading on the ship. One claimed that the captain was looking sick. Can you believe that? The captain? Sick?

And there were the occasional attacks from pirates or whatnot trying to steal from us. Nothing huge.

On the 68th day on the ship, I was fixing up some tweaks in the maintenance room, another tedious task that was assigned to yours truly by the captain when Zhunia and Binfang, two of my cabin mates, rushed in to the room and dragged me out, literally. What I could pick up from their gibberish like murmuring was "Captain's calling you...last words...quick" and all I thought about what other surprise the captain could throw at me again.

As we arrived the captain's quarters I immediately sensed something was wrong, there's this unruly feeling lodged into my gut as I twisted the doorknob open and I was greeted with a sight I imagined possible.

Captain Wu, the almighty all-powerful Captain Wu, laying down looking green and pale on the bed and I knew this was way more than whatever illness that have befallen him before. My feet seemed to be glued to the floor until I finally realized he was bidding me forward. Jiangsu, the first mate, shook my shoulders and I dragged my feet forward, kneeling in front of the man who I considered to be my mentor and somewhat of a fatherly figure of mine since I never had one.

"Jake," he stretched out a hand to reach for my shoulder, "I didn't know how to tell you." He was grasping my hand at this point. "Listen you are my son, my *erzi*. I'm sorry I never told you, I only thought of training you to

lead his ship...I give you my ship, my chest and my love. Be strong." He choked out, giving my hand one last squeeze as he breathed his last breath and journeyed far, far away from us.

All those tedious jobs, random session of learning, those were his ways of fathering me. All those times I thought he was making fun at me, no he was building me up to be a captain. And now that I understand that, I had no chance to appreciate it, after all he is gone.

Father? How is that possible, the abandoned orphan had someone who cared about him? Why didn't he tell me? Why didn't he come back for me? Why did he abandon me? Why did he take me under his wing, on his ship after all these years?

Captain? How is that possible, the wannabe crewmember having his dreams become a reality? Leading his own very crew?

And from that moment I swore I will lead it well.

But for countless nights and days, I have failed this crew by leading them to infinite traps and dead ends.

Moreover, months passed upon this incident and yet— *You are my son, you are my son.*

Why can't I get these words out of my head? Why can't I be the bloody captain that leads everyone to success like I should?

I can feel everyone's disappointment in me. Wasn't the captain's son supposed to be some great hero?

Worse of all, I could feel his blow of defeat on me. My father, I can sense his disappointment in me. Letting a deep sigh overcome me, I laid down in the captain's quarters, *his quarters*, trying to get my head over the looming issue of where Harrizona is. Waving my hands in front of me, a poor attempt to clear my thoughts, I dropped them to my side.

Ow. I felt something hard hit my left hand. Darn treasure chest...

I picked up the object and held it up close to my face for further inspection. It was a simple wooden box, surrounding the keyhole was two golden dragons, guarding it.

Feeling something engraved on the bottom of the chest, I flipped it upside down for more probing.

*The answers you seek are nearer than you think, the skeleton you pursue is closer than you expect.*

What. It would kill him to give me specifics, wouldn't it?

At this moment my mate, Youngjia, decided to come bursting in. It would kill him to knock for once.

"The weather just doesn't seem to get better these days been dark for ages...What you got there?"

I wordlessly passed the chest to him still indulging in thought.

He read the engraving aloud, "Blimey, what do you think that means?"

Shrug.

"The skeleton that could mean the key to this" he gestured to the box, completely disregarding my reluctance to talk, "closer than you expect, you'd think the captain might have given you something before and hid the key there?"

I jolted up at that. *The compass!* I immediately opened the drawer, rummaging through it finding the captain's gift to me, feeling pleased with myself that I didn't chuck the thing out to the sea years ago. When my hand came in contact with it, holding it up for Youngjia to look.

"He gave me this when I first took up mapping duty, said to treasure it and would find it to be the key to all my problems one day." I informed him of its origin.

His eyes lit up that, "He's totally hinting at you, open it up!"

Retrieving a screwdriver from my bedside table, I flipped the compass and unscrewed it. I always thought it as odd that the compass had screws behind.

As the last screw came unturned, I chucked the cover away, unable to contain my excitement.

Empty. There was nothing inside. I felt the disappointment taking over again.

"The cover!" Youngjia exclaimed.

My eyes lit up again, both of us racing to where I had chucked the cover to and stuck to the back of the cover was a skeleton key. Youngjia snatched the key out of my hand and raced back to the chest, the anticipation nearly killing him.

Just as he was about to turn the key, I hollered out, "Wait! We should bring it up to the deck to open it in front of everyone" He paused, "Okay."

"Go! GO! GO! Meeting time!"

"Captain called an emergency meeting!"

"Urgent! Get down to the meeting room"

"MEETING TIME! GO!"

In an unbelievable amount of time, Youngjia had rallied the crew onto the deck. They were all looking at me eagerly, eyes full of expectation of a breakthrough.



Holding up the chest I began, "Everyone remember this?" realisation ran through everyone's head "Well I just found the key to it prior moments ago and wanted to open it I front of everyone."

Twisting the key, I heard the lock pop open and the cover flip agape. Inside contained a rolled-up scroll which I held up for everyone to look at. Slowly but surely, I unrolled the scroll praying to all the gods that this will be my answer.

Blank.

It was blank.

Why would captain put a blank scroll in such a chest?

Letting out a cry frustration, I let the scroll slip out of my hands, letting it roll to one of the crew members' feet.

Xiaoen, I think his name was, picked up the scroll at his feet and help it up to the sky. And at that moment, at that very moment it was as if the ancestors were looking down at us, smiling fondly. The gloom in the sky split and a sudden lightning bolt was unleashed from the sky and hit the scroll.

As if magic had happened words started to appear on the scroll, lines and segments started to make an appearance. Soon, a whole map completed with instructions had materialized out of nothing.

It was that exact moment I finally believed in fengshui. I completely and sincerely apologize that I ever called fengshui rubbish, I take that back.

Picking up the scroll, I read what was written on it out for everyone to hear.

*To find the place where you seek,*

*Sail around the island that reeks.*

*Weave through the pillars of death*

*Then you shall find what you want—eth*

Discussion among crew members immediately erupted.

"Island that reeks, that's clearly, Lianyu"

"What in the world is want—eth?"

"Pillars of death that wouldn't be..."

"Krouhfunbeinrg" I finished off for him.

Collective gasps were heard.

Krouhfunbeinrg was the place that was notorious for sinking all the ships that passed. All sailors knew that if you treasured your life, never go to Krouhfunbeinrg. You might as well write your will and put it in a bottle if you're heading there.

Immediate protests were heard as I mulled over what we should do. Choice one, head back to the motherland and face the emperor's wrath. Or choice two sail all the crew towards death's door. As much as I didn't want to die, I didn't want to my first voyage to be a failure. A voice in my head added, *and as much as I'm mad at captain, I don't want to disappoint him either.*

Among the chaos heard on the deck, a voice broke out that quieted the others, "I don't believe Captain Wu would send us on a death mission."

Everyone immediately looked down as if disappointed in themselves for thinking such thoughts.

"Captain what do you think?"

All eyes laid on me, "It's going to be a dangerous task. Bu if you all would support me, we would go." I said tentatively.

Relief flooded my face as I heard shouts of agreement echo in my ear. I raised my hand and hollered, "Onwards to Lianyu!"

Lianyu took 1 month to arrive at, we were greeted by the stench of the island before the actual island. Everyone was rudely awakened by the foul essent of the isle in the break of dawn, Zhunia and Binfang, thankfully, took it upon themselves to hand out lemongrass-scented cotton buds to everyone in attempt to block out the smell.

For three-day and three-nights, everyone was tortured by the filled-with-rot island. Frankly our appearances would earned jeers and laughs from others now. Cotton filled nostrils and dark rings brimmed eyes.

It was safe to say that everyone was feeling much livelier when we left as to when we came.

The estimated time of arrival at Krouhfunbeinrg was in 1.5 months. During that time I tasked the crew with filling our ship with as much supplies as possible, not forgetting the sacrifices to the gods who were protecting us and checking, refining and repairing the ships defenses, sails and every other technicality. I even went as far as making everyone clean their own bunks up as preparation for the coming challenge.

As I crossed out another day till our arrival at Krouhfunbeinrg, I felt the atmosphere among the crew getting tense, even I myself found that my footsteps have quickened these days. Everyone was nervous.

Reading and re-reading the scroll over and over again as I awaited our arrival, arrangements have been made to ensure our safety in this Krouhfunbeinrg. I myself will be taking the wheel along with two assistants, a fair amount on

watching the sails and the condition on the sea, around a handful assisting wherever needed and everyone else on either immediate repair or whatever else that needed to be tended to.

My thoughts were interrupted by the news of arrival, I swallowed down the lump in my throat, squared my shoulders as I took on the burden of the captain and got ready to lead my ship through this mess.

The waves were huge and unforgiving, after each obstacle came another bigger and harder than ever. Krouhfunbeinrg was armed with sharp rocks and creatures of the wild. As I steered through the pillars of rocks, narrowly avoiding another, the crew was busied with other challenges.

There were flying fish, the sea was densely populated with flying fish. All of them as if carrying out a suicide mission, flying on the boat like there was no tomorrow. Some the deck flapping around, but some of them had flew through our sails, leaving gaping holes in their wake.

It was an odd sight to see, sailors known to be bold and fearless, screaming their voices out as they ducked out of the fish's way and slashed them alive or frantically mending the holes in the sail.

"Look out!" I snapped my head towards the direction they were pointing at, that wasn't there a while ago. A barrier of rocks, looking as lengthy as the great wall itself was stretched across the road ahead.

It was approaching rapidly and there was no time to go around it—the sails were on the verge of breaking. We either get to the other side or we go down.

As if all the praying had suddenly worked, I spotted a miniscule opening on the near left of the ship. It was narrow, really narrow. I wasn't even sure if our boat could fit through it but it was our only chance. I spun the wheel to a hard left, aiming for that channel.

I forgot to give a warning.

As the boat tilted to the left, almost all the crew lost their balance. But unnoticed by everyone, Jiangsu who was slashing away at the fish lost his balance completely and went overboard.

As we enter the pathway, there was a screaming sound coming from the water, the whole crew looked at where the sound came from.

Jiangsu was being eaten alive by those flying fish. Tearing him apart flesh by flesh. Like an offering to the gods, asking for a passageway.

A large screeching sound was emitted from the side of the ship scratching the rocks. We barely squeezed through.

I quickly grabbed the ropes, willing to risk anything to save Jiangsu. But the pathway was closing up as we travel passed it, stopping all hopes anyone had about saving him.

The screeching lasted for around a minute until we finally exited to tunnel and it was there. I caught a glimpse of Harrizona.

Everyone was silent, thinking of him.

But remembering what he told me about being a captain, I squared my chest up for the crew.

"Prepare the peace offerings" I shouted and cheers were returned.

# I Saw the Light

*Good Hope School, Ng, Karis – 14*

The sun beat down heavily; the calm water sparkled in the reflection. Seagulls flew freely above the ship and disappeared into specks as the Ming Treasure Fleet carried treasures and stories untold travelling to infinity and beyond, which in reality, was actually to India.

‘Splish–Splash–Splosh’, I quietly made my way across the deck, leaving a trail of soapy water behind. I stopped as I heard the roaring laughter grow louder. I twisted my head and saw seamen trotting along the deck, stepping on the boards that I’ve just cleaned. Just as I was about to pick up my pail and clean the deck again, a huge shadow casted on me, shading me from the blinding sun.

“Stand–by! All hands on deck!” that piercing voice rang in my ears. I looked up to see a silhouette standing above everyone on the observatory deck. Confidence radiated off her as she spoke with such authority, “Captain Lee speaking!” I sucked in a breath and stood still, knowing that father would be present, but still stood comfortably under the shade from the person on the observatory deck.

“Me hearties, look alive and stay alive...” Father’s booming voice echoed across the sea as he delivered the same speech he did yesterday and every day since we’ve boarded.

“My baobei”, father’s arm held snugly across the silhouette’s shoulders, “you are my pride, wear your family name proudly, and always know that my blessing is with you.” Father turned towards me and I immediately averted my gaze and snapped my eyes shut. “Look at me!” I forced my eyes open and peered at him, “Er–zi, why are you of such? Can’t you see how bright your sister shines? Fighting against pirates and leading sea–men with such power, why can’t you do that? How is it that two siblings, both born at the same time, sees the girl manlier than the boy? I tried giving you chances, mopping the deck, cleaning the galley and tidying my papers, but your strength has never shone through. Son, your candle is flickering, your time is ticking...” I swallowed back my tears and caught the smug look on my sister’s face as she sashayed away.

I ran back to my room, flinging myself across the deck and curled up like a ball on the hard plank of what they call bed. I scanned across my room – stacks of books piled to the ceiling, pen and paper scattered across the desk. It was so different to my sister’s, filled with weapons and armor, with the rusty smell of metal flowing through the air. I never liked my sister’s presence, or greatness, if that’s what it’s called; I never liked how she always looked down on me, just because she possessed greater strength than I did, relentlessly teasing my intellect. The belief that every man should be a fighter to be worthy is ridiculous. I scoffed, thinking, “My wisdom is my power.” No matter men or women, one without knowledge only blinded by strength is the biggest fool, and my sister was the fool I always took her for.

My father’s chamber was awfully messy, I was called upon to tidy my father’s room. I scowled at the request, such a degrading task for the son of the captain of the ship to take on, but thankful it wasn’t time to clear the lavatory. Why couldn’t my sister share my scout work? Why am I to bear all the dirty tasks? I stacked the papers on father’s desk aggressively with one hand, and flipped the page of my book on the table with my other hand. I felt my anger simmer down as I stared off to the distance, “Why’s everything so unfair...” a teardrop gently rolled down my cheek, soothing the burning sensation on my face. I closed my eyes and let out a shudder. ‘I’m not going to continue on like this.’ My mind was tugged in all directions, I had to be strong yet was I as weak as my father put me out to be? I didn’t need others’ validation, I knew myself well enough yet I still had doubts. My mind fogged up, I had to make up my mind.

I left the chambers, unbothered.

I’ve spent not days but years imagining how things would have played out if I were to be my father’s shining pearl, then my thirst for knowledge wouldn’t be the laughing stock of the ship. I picked up a stack of stained paper, a worn–out pen and started to map out all my thoughts, I thought I knew how everything would lay out to be. My mind was doing its magic, the pen glided across the paper, leaving trails of wonders behind. I was intoxicated in the glamor of erudition as the sun shone through the gap of the window.

I held a tight grip on my paper, walking out to the deck with my thoughts still running through my head. “Listen up,” my sister screeched, “we are going to stop by the nearest port and stock up, I want all hands on deck and those pesky scums from the other ship may also be at the port. I need everyone to be on their A–game, I know we certainly do not want a repeat of last year’s incident.” Murmurs flooded through the crowd, all voices agreed to my sister’s words, including mine.

The incident from last year was that the ship Zun[Respect] attempted to raid the treasures of our ship whilst we were stocking up on supplies. Luckily, my sister and I spotted them before they could enter the ship and steal our treasure. But that was not important because there was no such thing as luck. By observing the previous run–ins with the troublesome ship as named by my father’s stories about them when I was little, the ‘raid’ from Zun was predicted by me, though no one was concerned when I put out the thought, but then they certainly were when they saw Zun

attempting to raid the ship. The algorithm to predict the run-ins were simple, and I was the only one to know. I gripped the worn-out paper tighter.

"Land ahead," I focused my gaze onto the port, "Holy mackerel, Zun is here!" My sister said bitterly. A smirk crept up my face, my calculations were right.

"You, get everything we need. You! Help him with that, wait, you too!" My sister barked out orders and waved her finger. I rolled my eyes at her, craning my neck only to see the brightest smile on my father's face, fixated at my sister, beaming with pride. I huffed and turned back, "And you, my dear brother," my sister started, her words were dripping in sarcasm, "just stay away from trouble."

I held my remarks and headed out to do what I sought to do with the paper wrinkled under my tight grip.

I cautiously walked up to the ship of Zun, glancing back and forth to ensure that the coast was clear.

"Hey," I called out nervously, my voice was trembling.

"What do we have here," the Captain of Zun sneered, smoking his cigar. "The son of the Cap Lee, what brings you to our parts of the water?"

"I... came to... chat." I stuttered, my heart pounded a million miles per hour, urging my mind to come up with something.

The captain's expression softened, "Come on in. What you got son? Spill!"

"Why did you raid our ship last time?" I said while walked into Zun's deck.

"What? That's never what we did!" the Captain's eyes flew wide open and shook his head, "There must be something wrong, last time we encountered, your ship's rope to the dock wasn't secured tightly, my mates were trying to tie the rope tighter for ya'll. But I'm sorry if you originally wanted to lose your ship." The Captain shrugged, leaning against the rail.

"Oh..." was all that came out from my mouth, my heart sank like a stone, I was wrong. There had been false accusations and I was guilty as charged.

There was an eerie silence where clashing of waves was the only thing you could hear. I cleared my throat as I locked my eyes upon a certain something on the mapping table.

"Wait, I'll go get us some water." the Captain exclaimed while leaving me.

It was right there, my blood was pumping, I grabbed it and shoved it in my jacket.

The Captain came back with glasses of water and kindly smiled. My heart sank even deeper. I then heard the piercing siren ringing through the air, "Ba! He's here, with the traitors!" my sister ratted with a vicious sneer on her face.

Heavy stomps entered the ship and father yanked my arms, pulling me away. I struggled as I screamed, "It was all a lie, a misunderstanding!" My voice faded away as I was dragged on board back on our ship, capturing a final glimpse at the Captain of Zun, with serenity marked on his aged face.

"What were you thinking?" Father growled, my sister crossed her hands, stood back and watched the scene unfold. "Making friends with the enemies? Did you spill all the secrets of our ship, allying with the rotten scum? Have I taught you nothing, Er-zi?" I stood still, my expression never flickered, my mind was filled with thoughts, my eyes focused on the clouds. "You are the greatest failure I've ever had, the only red on my ledger!" My father spat out spitefully. I stood aside and snickered, unaltered, "All of that, all for you, yet for nothing."

My father spat angrily, "Basic respect, young man, am I as a dog if you don't respect me? RESPECT! Have you not read the Confucian books, and I thought you were smart!"

My blood was boiling, "Treat others as you wish others to treat you, how can I show respect, when you treat me like crap!" I hollered, "I did everything, even your degrading tasks – I do them accordingly! I have never complained when you obviously favored my sister, putting her on a pedestal while I stood 8-feet under," I gasped for air, "WHY DO YOU HATE ME SO MUCH!" not a single drop of tear was worth shedding on this man and not one fell.

I swayed as I walked towards my sister, who backed away with every step I took, I knew I was intimidating. A cold smile was planted on my face, "And to you, my dear sister, never thought you'd see this side of me, did you? You are wrong, like a lot of things. I have the brains, you have the brawns, we could have worked so well together, yet you've decided to cast me away in the shadows, abandoning me." I glared at her, "That's not what siblings are for, right? I've never asked for anything, I only ever wanted to be your equal!"

The sky rumbled, darkening drastically. I turned away from my family, facing the by-passing crew. It was going down.

The ship swayed on the choppy waves, throwing people from one side of the ship to another. Rain was pouring down like a waterfall, flooding everything on board. Orders were frantically being shouted out, "Raise the sails... Sam, take the wheel...Dump out the water idiot!" It's not that I could control weather, I'm no God, though some may think my plan was foiled when father caught me mingling. I assure you, all was well.

I reached into my jacket and took out the logbook of the ship of Zun. Every ship has their own logbook – the most important item in the eyes of any captain. In it is future plans of the ship, details to everything that happened on that day. If only father had listened, he would have known all the secrets to the ship of his sworn nemesis. I held the worn-out book in my hands, the image of the kind smile on the Captain of Zun blurred my vision, the book weighed like steel.

I shook off everything and steadily walked into the chaotic scene, crew members were holding onto the rails for dear life, my sister grabbed my father tightly and father attempted to steer the boat through the aggressive waves. “Need help?” I asked.

“Get away, you traitor!” “You brought this curse upon us by being with Zun!”

I said exasperatedly, “Well, good luck because the ship won’t last another storm, and currently, it has been through 2. You know what they say, third time’s the charm, and you’d better find a way to get out of this storm fast.” I tapped my wrist and walked across the ship without a hitch whilst possessions flung around the vessel.

My father and sister exchanged worrying glances as I sauntered to the mapping room. “You know it’s never too late to ask for help.”

My sister snapped, “I don’t need no help, I have the power to do anything! Scoot, you monster!”

‘Monster, monster...’ the word echoed louder and louder in my head by the minute. I shakily let out a breath and sat on a chair in the mapping room. The yelling could still be heard from the outside, the rain beat heavily onto the windows and the sky let out another frustrating grumble.

I squinted at a device – a pointer was swinging wildly, malfunctioning. I stared and toyed with the ancient mechanisms, visualizing how it was supposed to come together. I looked at it once again and the pointer steadied, the storm was clearing up in the south, yet we were heading east.

I took out the clumped up paper that I’ve written at the start of the day, going through my plans. Then I took out the logbook from Zun and skimmed through it. It read ‘fallout with Lee: he kicked me off Ming Treasure Fleet, he was threatened, he didn’t like that I was intellectually better. I’m going to get my own fleet and sail the great sea to fulfill my thirst for knowledge. I don’t want to be delivering treasures from one destination to another bided by the orders from the emperor, I want to be free’

I recited a familiar line, “I’ve got no strings to hold me down, to make me fret or to make me frown. I will not tolerate anymore of anyone’s doubt on my abilities, I must venture out.” I bit down on my lips and continued reading, ‘day 210, Lee despised me, he told everyone I was a monster, and I was betrayed.’

The captain of Zun was never a monster – monsters were only what we perceived them to be. I’m the monster, I’ve framed, I’ve stole, I’m unwanted, I’m no more than the monsters parents tell their children about at night. My head spun at the realisation.

Every wobbly step I took to the deck seemed to mock me. “HOLD IT!” I screamed.

“I said I don’t need your help brother!” my sister sneered while gritting her teeth.

I sighed, utterly defeated. “This will not end well for us. Though I hate to give you the satisfaction of me once again solving all your problems, I don’t wish to die in the storm because of your stubbornness.” I reasoned as salty tears mixed with rain washed down my face.

“I can do this!” my sister panted with determination.

The sky let out another defying growl, the ship shook cowardly, and the sails of the ship were either badly torn or lost at sea.

“Please listen,” I cried, my vision was fogging up from the tears and the roaring storm, “Clearly someone needs to be the bigger person here,” guilt was eating me up, “I am sorry if you feel like you need to prove yourself to the society, to battle against social norms. You are a strong woman like no other I’ve seen in the—”

“Stop—” my sister stuttered, her hair flying in all directions and soaked through, “you’re right,” she sobbed, clutching on the steering wheel hysterically, “help us.”

I gave my sister a weak smile, finally seeing her caring eyes that were lost to the crave for power.

“Head south, stat!” I yelled, rain dripping down my face.

The moon rose, I was again hidden in the dark, away from the soft glow of the moon. Everything was calm and silent. The last 24 hours were certainly like no other day I’ve experienced on board. Despite all turmoil, I had made my decision.

Father suddenly proclaimed, “Me hearties, look alive and stay alive! We’ve survived another night, and it couldn’t be done without my baobei’s bravery!” The crew mumbled praises, exhausted from the entire ordeal.

It was time.

I stood up, feeling the warm glow of the moon on me, “I’m done! I’m sick and tired. I’m not some treasure that you lock up and deliver until you might have use for. I mustn’t stay, it’s not right.”

My sister stood, shading me from the moonlight, “You can’t go, what about everything that we’ve been through?”

“Yes, those were memories and Reza, you are my flesh and bone. All these times, I only remember a shadow, living in the shade of your grandeur. I yearn for more Reza.” I gave her a sad smile.

Reza let down her tough demeanor and said softly, “Thank you and sorry Ezra.”

Tears welled up, why did it have to be this way. When things were starting to turn out for the better, I had to sail down another path.

At the crack of dawn, I left at the nearest port, stating bittersweetly to myself, “Look alive and stay alive Ezra.”

I gripped the mushy paper from yesterday and tucked it in the logbook.

I left and headed to the Ship of Zun and went onboard, to seek out knowledge untold.

The first ray of light hit me. I saw the light.

# Epic Memories – The Story of Ming Treasure Voyages

*Good Hope School, Yan, Natalie – 14*

My name is Zhangxian, and I was raised by my aunt in a small village in Eastern China when I was young in the Ming Dynasty. I was 14 years old at the time when I remembered just a few days after my birthday, there were posters around the alleys recruiting new sailors to go on voyages to give Ming treasures to other countries. I've always had the desire to go to sea and I like adventures so much, more than anything. I couldn't let the chance slipped away. Yes, I was only 14 at the time when I signed up.

On that day, the new and old sailors gathered at the small port. We put our bags in the ship. My heart already fluttered, squealing with indescribable feelings of joy. It was an intense feeling, but on the other hand, I felt a sense of sorrow in that I couldn't see my village, friends and my aunt anymore.

"Zhangxian! We will miss you!"

"Good luck"

"Don't drown!" screamed my friends.

"Zhang...Xian..." my old aunt who had been sick for a long time quietly uttered. We hugged and I could hear her sniffing and sobbing on my shoulders. There was silence. I felt bad for her for raising me for 14 years. How heartbreaking it was to say goodbye. We finally let go after a while.

"Aunt. I will come back. I promise."

My aunt nodded while wiping her tears.

"All aboard!" Shouted a man, probably the Captain. I took a deep breath, ready to venture out to the sea. Ready for my adventure, I looked back and saw everyone waving goodbye. I sighed – it's time to look to the future.

The ships were quite pretty I admit. They had many dragon carvings on the walls; the decks were coloured in hazelnut brown; they had large basements inside and a small yet exquisite kitchens. I smelled the scent of the sea, a salty smell. I wish I lived next to the sea.

The engines roared. The fleet of ships moved. While I was looking at the beautiful sun of dawn, the same man shouted again, calling us to gather in a circle.

I finally had a clear look at the man. He had a curly black beard, a bit disgusting as I spotted some breadcrumbs and liquid mixed within. He had a bad sunburn on his face especially on his nose. His eyes looked fierce. I couldn't figure whether he was bald or not as a part of his head was covered by his black laced-up hat. He looked muscular and bulky, with strong arms and strong legs. He let off a creepy smile with crooked, yellow teeth. He really looked like a pirate, but at least a good one at that.

"GOOD MORNING EVERYONE!" shouted the man.

"Good morning..." we said.

"You should all know what manners are right? You should always respond after what I say. I dislike people who are impolite. Anyways, I am Captain Wang and I will be the one leading you all. We've got seven voyages in total. We will first arrive in India, where we will give them our silk and some gold."

"Meanwhile on this ship, you will have to clean the deck during late afternoons. You will have three sessions for breakfast, lunch and dinner. There are also sessions in the afternoon which you can practice archery and using swords and canons. You will have to master at least one of these weapons so you can be equipped well to fight battles if there are pirates..."he shrugged.

"You can now go down to the basement and choose a bed. And come to the area next to kitchen to have breakfast."

We all swarmed into the basement. The environment wasn't as bad as I expected. The walls were still in hazelnut brown with carvings, but the window was in an oily stained colour with some black mold on the surface. The bed sheets were modest in an ivory white colour but with some stains too. Overall, the basement was quite nice. The stairs that connected to the upper deck was marvelous too. It was grand and truly impressive.

I chose a bed, next to a teenaged boy. I stared at him when he secretly put a small dagger into his sock.

"What are you looking at?" said the teen boy.

"Ehh" I couldn't get the word out. And I couldn't even stare through his eyes either.

"Are you wondering why I put away that thing?"

I nodded nervously.

"It's for urgent needs" he said coldly.

"Oh"

"What's your name?"

"Zhangxian, 14"

"Zhengming, 17"

I forgot to tell you how he looked – he was quite handsome, with coal black hair but who knows why he got some strands of blonde hair in between. He had ginger brown eyes and his skin colour was a bit tan, which seemed to have been exposed in the sun for many times; he had a solemn look; he was fit yet muscular. I had a feeling that if he wanted to be the Captain, then he would be a great rival of Captain Wang.

"Hey!" Zhengming interrupted the silence. "Let's go to get breakfast"

"Sure!"

There were already a few men serving breakfast. They gave me a bowl of congee with herbs on top, together with a pack of peanuts and a glass of water.

Zhengming and I went to the upper deck and ate. We sat at the barrels and looked at the sea while eating.

The food was not good. The congee was watery. After I finished eating, my tummy still grumbled a little.

"You hungry still?" Asked Zhengming.

"Ya", I expected him to give me some of his food. No kidding, I really expected him to give me food, though it was a selfish thought.

"You will get used to it" he said, "by the way, you cannot ask for more food."

I regurgitated the water in my mouth hard. I thought: you nasty Zhengmin.

I thought of going to the kitchen to steal some food to eat, but I gave in. I was afraid that I had to walk on the plank and get fed by the sharks or had my head chopped by the Captain.

And so for the whole morning, it was a free period where we washed ourselves, changed clothes, and did leisure stuff. It was a pretty dull morning and so I sat on the deck alone watching the seabirds fly. I spotted some dolphins too, glimmering and sparkling under the sun. Wait, sparkling? Oh, right. Those weren't dolphins, those were some other creatures — mermaids. I really did see some mermaids. They got a silvery and turquoise fin tail, with silvery hair too. Swimming and diving elegantly and serenely at the sea. The ocean was so beautiful I believed I fell in love with it. I desperately wanted to jump the deck now into the ocean.

"What are you looking at?" Asked Zhengming

I almost panicked as he suddenly popped out next to me.

"Mermaids." I replied in a sulky voice.

"You still angry with me? Then you really behave like a kid, throwing tantrums for this teeny-tiny issue. What I am saying is the truth you know. You must get used to these harsh conditions. If you cannot get used to them, then why do you still want to be a sailor? A sailor is supposed to endure harsh conditions."

I nodded in understanding.

"You said you just saw mermaids? But don't mermaids not exist?" He asked.

"I really saw them. See!"

He gasped, admiring the beauty of the mermaids.

"You don't believe in mythical creatures, right?" I asked.

"I tend not to believe in mythical creatures because that's my family beliefs."

"You have to believe that they really exist." I said. "Maybe you will see sirens, the kraken, merpeople later." I smirked.

"Why did you sign up to this voyage?" he asked again.

"I love the ocean." I replied in an enthusiastic tone. "And I love adventures."

"I love the ocean too. But another purpose was to earn money for my family, so I signed up to get money. My family is poor and my father needs medical treatment but we don't have..."

Lunch came. Nothing changed except that the nuts were replaced by an apple and two pieces of margarine. We then started the weapons practice.

The Captain taught us how to hold swords and bows and how to use the cannon. Everyone tried the weapons a few times and chose the weapons that they were good at.

Fun fact: I shot arrows to the ocean rather than the center of the wall. I couldn't even lift a cannon ball. I even dropped the sword while I was holding it. Great...

Meanwhile, Zhengming seemed to be good at every weapon. But with his size and strength, his best choice to show his potential was the sword.

"Zhengming. Help me." I couldn't choose.

He told me to do it again, but those flaws kept repeating when I was doing it.

"Mmm...swords are better for you. I mean if you chose a sword then you could practice with me, right?"

Therefore, I tugged along with Zhengming and signed up for sword practice.

Since then, I have been swinging swords, fighting duels, poking and attacking. Of course, I was still not as good as others. Anyway, I was the youngest among all sailors. Thankfully it made some sense that I wasn't as good as others.

After the practices, we had to rest for a while and did the cleaning chores. We had to wipe the floor, polish the weapons, and wash the clothes and kitchen tools. Chores, chores, chores...I think my fingers were callused.



At last we had dinner again, but with some dry noodles and water together with potatoes and beans. After all these we could get to sleep and wake up at 5 – an exhausting first day already.

The routines continued like it was continuing in a ceaseless way. With pain and moans, these made me feel stronger every day.

I think I lost count of the days but anyways we finally stepped on land. My legs wobbled a bit like soggy spaghetti when I got on land.

“Eh young lad? You are supposed to stay on the ship.” Said a sailor. “Only representatives and the Captains could leave the ship and give the treasure. We sailors have to stay in the boat and keep a good watch of the ship”

I was disappointed.

“TAKE THE SILK AND THE BAG OF GOLD NOW!” yelled the Captain.

Men rushed to the basements to carry the silk and gold. The silk were so delicate yet exquisite in dazzling colours.

All the sailors gathered at the side of the boats, tilting our heads. I spotted that the Indian king also gave Captain some drawings and saris with goods too.

“Twitch~” some sound we’re made behind me. It’s like there was someone creeping behind. I stood back, trying to convince myself it won’t be some scary animal. Wait it won’t be tiger right? I took my sword out for self-defense.

Murmuring could be heard behind the bushes at the port. Murmuring? Animals couldn’t do that. Only humans could.

The Captain and the representative took the goods back with a pleasing smile on their faces. Meanwhile I was still aware of the sound. I tugged Zhengming’s sleeves. I told him what had happened. Zhengming then also took his sword and told everyone to prepare.

Suddenly out in a burst, a swarm of bandits came on our boat with sharp swords. Ok, this was a robbery. Everyone took their swords and fought back the bandits. I was numb – this was too sudden and scary.

A bandit saw me and rushed at me. My hands were still nervously holding the sword and I couldn’t move. When he rushed to me, I closed my eyes real tight, biting my lips. Hopefully this was a nightmare, but no, a gust of wind swept through me and clinking of sounds of sword fighting were in my ears.

I opened my eyes. The Captain was having a sword fight with the bandits. Suddenly, I woke. Stupid Zhangxian. Just because of a bandit you were praying that it was a dream?!

Courage was inhaled. I plucked my sword and swung it and ran the whole sword through the same bandit’s stomach. Blood burst vigorously from his stomach and then he stomped down as a very dead corpse. I killed a bandit.

The captain just looked at me in shock. He didn’t say anything but pat me on my back and continued to go in the battlefield. Meanwhile I ran to the area to safeguard the people who were carrying the gold.

All of a sudden, a rope was tied on my neck and I almost choked to death. A bearded man used a rope to tie my neck and tugged me with the rope to tie me on a pillar of the ship. I tried to struggle and used my hands to untie the rope. However, his strong hands made my hands almost twist when he pulled the rope and tied my hands behind.

It was so painful that I kept screaming as if I literally was being punished in hell. I managed to scream the last time which Zhengming could hear me scream for help and the next thing I knew, my mouth was tied again.

The bearded bandit then lit a fire and put it next to me, and chased after the men who were taking the goods to the basements. I tried to struggle hard but my neck would break. I tried screaming but I couldn’t. My sword was laying somewhere beside me but I couldn’t get it. Tears swarmed in my eyes as I was feeling that my life was ending. Then hope appeared – Zhengming took his dagger from his sock and threw it to me and it landed on my feet. I tried to use my legs to push the dagger up my knees so I could put my neck

with the rope, moving forward and backward so the dagger in my knees could cut the rope. It seemed endless but at last I managed to cut all the ropes.

I took my bloody sword and the dagger and rushed down the cellars where I predicted the bandit was, searching for the gold. One of the men was stabbed to death and the others were hit to the point of unconsciousness. Anger rushed in me. I tried to form a quick plan. I decided to stab his back and push him out of the window. I jumped on his back and used my sword to stab his back. He wailed and wanted to catch me on his back. However, I was too fast and jumped around on his body, making it hard to catch me. As I moved, I kept stabbing my sword in his body and legs. I deduced that he couldn’t move anymore but unfortunately, he was still that strong. I couldn’t even push him. I then stood at the window, and when he moved to me, I quickly bounce-jumped to a side and made him crash the window. He really bumped through the window and finally, he drowned.

I checked the gold and goods in the cellars. Good, none of them were stolen I assumed.

I came back to the deck. Everyone was standing aside; the battle was finished.

That was the first battle that I fought in and it was one of the most vivid memories of my life. I realized I was grown up. Not fearful anymore but a brave teenage boy.

“Hey, here’s your dagger,” I approached Zhengming.

“Take it. It’s an award for your bravery and strength. I don’t need it”

Days and months passed, we arrived in Arabia and places around coastal Africa. We gave our goods to others, but who knew, other countries also gave their goods to us, like jewels and clothes. Our country China had made new relationships with many countries through these kind acts.

Of course, adventures are always part of voyages. I remember one day we headed into a rainstorm, where waves and currents kept bumping against the ship. My body jolted violently and I almost threw up. Everyone’s face was pale, white and green. Yet even though we were in desperate times, maybe everything tried to elude us, but thanks to our determination and team spirit, we all survived these hazardous scenes. I also remember we were attacked by some African pirates, where cannon balls were flying around and swords clinging, but still it was an epic battle where people became stronger and braver. Thank God I didn’t see any mythical deadly creatures.

Heartwarming laughter always filled up the ships, where we made new friends, drank rum, ate, goofed around before bedtime, and together watched and admired the ocean where we saw the sun rising, birds flying, or a rainbow forming on the horizon with puffy clouds in the sky. You won’t even have a chance to see that in the village. Here, it was so free. I really loved these voyages and we weaved many memories.

Time passed quickly, and now I am back on the land, 50 years of age already. I often sit and remember these memorable adventures, giving goods, build relationships, fighting battles...I touch the dagger every once in a while. Memories will fade one day many say, but I am sure this memory of adventures will forever stay in my mind, I guarantee it won’t fade away.

# The Miles in Between

*Good Hope School, Yim, Sunniva – 16*

His regret took root on the fourth week.

His arm muscles were sore from the endless scrubbing that even he was not to be bothered with as a farmer's son, and he developed a newfound appreciation for his mother who had a knack for keeping the interior of their hut immaculate. Ploughing and harvesting he could do, but he was unaccustomed to the foreign sensation of his knees constantly against the hard floorboards. His knees were sore from the burden of his body, and his calves ached from disuse – that was another downside to being confined to a ship. There were only so many places you could go, especially when you weren't summoned for.

The first day, still overfilled with the anticipation for the journey ahead and eager for any recognition from these mysterious men that had visited his humble shores, he had gladly taken on any task they had thrown him. He was handed a bucket with wet rags draped on the sides and asking what he was to do with them had only earned him a pointed look from the deck master. He quickly learned the simple rule – to know your place and not speak up unless being asked a question.

Though now he couldn't fathom how, that day, and in the few that had followed, he had truly enjoyed the process of staying low and busy, for it enabled him to explore every little nook and crook of the ship, and allowed him to eavesdrop on casual conversations of passers-by without feeling uninvited.

For days he remained invisible and unimportant, the eagerness in him dimming with every repeated swipe of his arm. He was tired of this endless cycle of cleaning and craved some semblance of excitement, though one could argue that this life was not so different from the one of early risings and gruesome farming he had left behind.

He had a purpose back then, though. He knew that his effort would pay in the form of food for his family, and it was he, the eldest son of a widowed family, who must work as diligently as he could. Each day he had worked, and there were always the little things he could look forward to. Like getting glimpses of Wong's girl who would pass by with a basket of food from the market every noon, consistent as clockwork. Or, bragging to his baby sister in hushed tones about how he had fended off starved beasts targeting their fields. Sometimes, if it was a long day, he could ask his little brother what he had learned at school, and would reassure himself that it was only made possible through him giving up his own chance at studying to take up their father's mantle, when he was called away to defend the honour of His Imperial Majesty. Back then, it was a sense of purpose that drove him on to tolerate the regularities and stomach the constantly nagging feeling that he was deprived of choices, trapped in this life by obligations and expectations like a bird in the mouth of a canary.

He saw his mother's pleading eyes when she handed him a bag of rice cakes. Refreshments for the trip, she had called them, as if he would only be gone for a few days. The night before, she had tried to reason against his leaving, but a quick sharpening of his tone had silenced her. *Don't keep me from a better life*, he had refrained himself from saying. He was considered a young man now, it often startled him to realise. It empowered him, if not just to give him the autonomy to choose to leave.

*Leave.* It was a spited word, reserved for cowards who abandon their families in hardship. No, he had to remind himself. He left an honourable man, for the captain had paid his full wages for a decade in advancement, before they departed. They paid in intricately carved gold adornments and finely woven silk, and who could say no to such a lucrative offer, except for the weak-minded and oversentimental bunch? He loved his family, but he needed to feed them more, with most able-bodied men conscripted and gone.

A rare chance, they had called this, when they called for young men to join them. They did not recruit often, for the last time was well over a decade, but now they needed to fill the decks of a few new vessels. Ships gifted by His Imperial Majesty, due to their success in shaping foreign relations. It was *mìngyìn*, he had recognised, a chance perhaps crafted by *Guanyin*, who had heard his faithful, albeit silent, prayers to be rid of his confinements and took pity on him. What little men left of his dingy village who had not yet been of age two years ago during the conscription had all left to join this magnificent army on their adventures.

Adventures, they were promised. These visitors had stayed for two weeks at the most lavish taverns there was within ten miles, visiting the market each day and paying for any purchase in gold or silver. They had claimed they were restocking on refreshments, and it was a blessing to their village who mostly traded in items of need. Each night they would attract a crowd at the respective taverns, and the usually frugal

innkeepers would bring out ale after ale for everyone, for the bill was cleared and paid for every morning. The most eloquent of these guests would be at the centre of all attention, telling the tales of all the extraordinary things they have seen, with the occasional exaggerated or inappropriate comment by a drunken sailor or captain.

Tales of faraway lands with strange people and peculiar beasts, and of strategically laid out battles and unexpected fights. There were people that particularly adored putting spices into their food, so much that they themselves reek of their spices, who rode on steady beasts that drank from their noses instead of their mouths. *Xiàng*, as they were called, had elongated canines that were always shown bare to ward them and their riders from troubles. Then there were the battles that small nations would have lost if not for the assistance of the fleet, and the spectacular festivals the royalties would hold in thanks.

Night after night he drunk on these tales, thankful for the reprieve they provided for they distracted him from the soreness of his muscle from the day of work, and occupied his mind lest he start dreading the day ahead. They spun out tales as smoothly as a spider would with her silk, and he'd spend hours merely listening, entranced by the images that filled his head. Then, when he would trudge down the small trek back home, his feet always felt lighter than they had been the night before.

When they had announced they were to leave, a mixture of unwillingness and yearning bloomed through his heart so unexpectedly that he jumped at its fierceness. Between one heartbeat and the next, he was ready to leave this place he had called home for all the years he had been.

But now, he could not help but wonder if it were all alcohol-induced fantasies, for in the past weeks he has seen nothing but the endless stretch of sky and sea, and all he would hear were the gentle splashing of waves and idle chatter of mundanities among the clatter of deck boys and serving girls he dared mingle with.

That was another thing he discovered, aside from the utter unimportance of his presence. Those who had basked in the admiration and luxuries provided by the villagers were only a handful among the throng of men and women this fleet was armed with. The decks and hallways were more often crowded with servants and to-be sailors such as he, than any of the faces he has come to recognise from nights of intent gazing from across the room that had seared their features to his memories.

The day he had left, a ship carried them to the fleet that merely appeared as a speck from the harbour, and he had gawked at the sheer size of the armada from up close. When he looked back, the clatter of shacks from his village had blurred into a patch of brown amidst the green of their hunting grounds. He saw his hometown from a view he hadn't before, for his family did not deal with waterstuff, and it was his first time at sea. From the distance, its miniature form seemed inconsequential, forgettable. It was only then had he realised why no more than a dozen of these ships had come to their village, for their shallow bay could fit no more.

Afterwards, he and a few others from his village were assigned to respective ships, and gone was the last of any linkage he had to home, his mother's cakes already devoured during short trip there. He was transferred to a moderate-sized ship in the middle of the fleet, its beat-up hull telling enough of its age.

He had wondered then why the men had come. They certainly didn't lack supplies, not any that could be provided by his village, nor by the many even smaller ones they later stopped by. It was first among the many other questions he would have of the inner-workings of this fleet, which remained unresolved as he saw a few ships deviate from the fleet now and then with trunks of treasures and return with heaps of mediocre garments that they certainly didn't bother using. (It wasn't until much later that he finally learned that the fleet was tasked with handing out portions of the riches they carried to famine-stricken villages, on behest of His Imperial Highness. Then, he'd finally discovered that the war had ended a year after the conscription, and why no men ever returned to his village.)

Sometimes, when left to his own devices, he would wonder if the easiness of giving and unwavering charm back at his distant village were all a ploy, to amass spiritually and literally hungry youths to join their fleet. But the moment the thought appears he'd scoff at its silliness – what use were he and a few others of, to a fully self-sufficient fleet filled to the brim with royal treasures?

What was he here for?

Days, weeks, and perhaps months dragged on, though it would be probable that it was just his impatient mind warping his perception of time. He had no idea where the fleet was travelling to, for he had never heard of places that required the long months of travelling they were going through to reach. Chattering with his usual crowd yielded nothing, for nobody ever told deck boys and servants anything beyond their duty.

He ceased to care if he were not delivered the exciting exploits he thought was promised and resolved that this was a pretty good life. He had provided for his family, who would be better off with the money than starving with him, he told his traitorous heart that missed the gentle caresses of his mother and the chime-like laugh of his sister. How fares his brother, who has now taken his place as the man of the house and must shoulder the burden that comes with? The very responsibilities he had loathed for years, thinking he would be glad to be rid of, but has now left a gnawing pit

in his heart that craves expectations. They were lacking in this life, for all he was expected to do were to keep the decks shiny.

Occasionally, he would be tempted to stop bothering with the decks. Mere moments after he has cleaned it the deck would be trampled on and his efforts gone instantly. But what were he to do, if not finish the one thing he was tasked with?

~

One morning, before the crack of dawn, restlessness overtook him and he ventured up from his quarters to the decks, tiptoeing so he won't wake his fellow deck boys. He did this often now, enjoying the rare silence and stillness of his surroundings, listening to the wind brush against the flaps of the ship. The quietness contrasted against the business that overtook the ship during the day, and served as a reminder for him that getting to be part of the hustle should not be taken for granted.

This time though, he found a lone figure already by the railings as he climbed up, the silhouette of a plump man stretched out by the faint illumination of the lanterns.

"What's your name, boy?"

"Zhang."

The man didn't bother introducing himself, for what fool on a ship would not know his captain?

His was a familiar figure on the decks, though finding him not amid his usual crowd of shipmates was rather unsettling.

"Deck boy, hm? I like my decks shiny."

He hadn't thought he was noticed by anyone, and the revelation elated him more than he would admit in the face of another man.

He wasn't sure what he was to say, if anything at all, so he let silence befall between them. His captain was a flushed man who always seemed to be under the influence of one wine or another, and he hadn't had much dealings with such men for his father were a pious and reserved men who despised drinking.

He averted his gaze downwards, unknowingly. He was about to return to his quarters, when his captain boomed a loud laugh. Gazing up, he discovered a piece of land on the very edge of the horizon.

"This never gets old," he announced, somewhat mischievously, as he signalled the nightwatch who scuttled to ring the bell that called everyone to the decks. Slowly but steadily, people flocked around and behind him, but his focus remained on the land that grew larger and larger.

What a strange piece of land it was! He has never seen trees quite like that, with a trunk so huge it looked as if the trees grew so closely that they had no choice but to merge. The leaves branched outwards horizontally, as if they were crawling away from the centre. As their fleet neared shore, he caught sight of people with skin as dark as the midnight sky.

The sight of all these things that existed beyond his imagination had sent his heart racing and howling, and he knew for a fact that he wouldn't mind the repeating days ever again, and would gladly trade in years of tedious work without bargain, if it meant he could experience the rush of adrenaline brought upon by unprecedented discovery.

# Letters to Xin

*Harrow International School Hong Kong, de Blank, Anjeli – 14*

**26 February 1406**

Dear Xin,

It is coming for me. Death. I can feel it.

It's strange to think I once was a handsome boy, innocent and content. Looking at me now, that seems an incredibly long time ago. I was young and foolish and made the biggest mistake of my life. I was wide-eyed, curious and alive until I stepped foot on this dreadful ship, the ship boasting with opportunity and a lifetime of pride and fame. They told us all about the adventures we would go on, the priceless treasures we would find and how we would come home heroes.

They lied.

We should be back in Nanjing in three months but I don't think I've ever felt so far away home. I try to think of you, my love. I remember the first time I laid eyes on you and the beautiful smile you had on your face. Leaving you behind for this life was a horrible decision and I regret it with all my heart.

My vision is blurred but I can sense the empty space where my pale arm used to lie. I attempt to wiggle the fingers. Nothing. I can hear the water splashing against the side of the boat, rocking me slowly side to side, placing me in a trance, helping me to forget all that I lost. The clink of the glasses and loud cheering are signaling that my friends are celebrating our glorious victory without me. Why don't they come down to see me grasping onto my last bit of life? The rhythmic tapping of their clunky feet on the ceiling above is gently putting me to sleep. My vision is starting to fade out. I will soon rest, facing the closed door that won't open anytime soon, on the hard makeshift hospital bed that many fallen soldiers before me died in, wistfully watching the world around me fall apart. I know you will never receive these letters I have written. You'll never know how sorry I am Xin. Or how much I love you. Goodbye...

\*\*\*\*\*

**11 July 1405**

Dear Xin,

Today is the day. I've tried so hard to prepare myself for this new chapter of my life but I don't think I'll ever be ready. Standing on the docks, looking out at the vast, blue sea, I can see the colossal ships heading towards us. I cannot wait to board and set sail. The sun is rising above the distant mountains, painting a beautiful picture in the sky. Its warmth spreading across my body as the scattered clouds slowly part ways to let the sun's golden rays through. I sit, my feet dangling off the side of the dock with the cold water splashing over my shins. The endless body of water before me is turning light blue as a mixture of orange and yellow dance on the surface, illuminating the colorful fish and coral, shimmering on the small ripples caused by the slight movements of my feet. I can see the ships' black silhouette as they sail past, slowly coming to a stop before me. My adventure begins.

**25 August 1405**

Dear Xin,

Before embarking on this journey to the unknown I was nervous, but being here has made me feel more alive than I have felt in a long time. Although the work is very challenging, the routine keeps me focused and strong. I finally feel like I have a purpose. All I worry is that when I come back you will have forgotten how it feels to be together and that our love will be lost far out at sea. Every part of me wishes to be reunited with you but I must continue to work hard to earn money for a happier future for us.

The day starts early at the crack of dawn as we set sail on a new and different adventure. I cannot wait to tell you all about my experiences. I have never seen so much beauty before Xin, I just wish you could be here to witness these sights with me. We've come across many new lands and discovered different cultures and people, all with their own unique traditions, some of which I find very strange, whilst others bring me immense joy and comfort. We've encountered an extraordinary settlement on the coast of India where they indulged us with delectable foods and small trinkets in exchange for gold we gifted to their leader. I remember the rich smells of spices and the mouth watering aromas of curry drifting around the air. The night was filled with drinking and dancing along to the loud music and cheerful faces and laughing carried along by the evening breeze. I almost forgot about all my concerns about you Xin. Almost.

**18 September 1405**

Dear Xin,

I am missing you more than ever. I almost lost my life last night and I was scared I would never make it back to you. We are alive, but barely. Something terrible happened.

A storm.

I awoke to the violent rocking of the boat. The rain battered down on the windows of the sleeping quarters as the men around me were slowly stirring. Each raindrop hit with such force it felt as if the windows would shatter. I could feel the ship trembling. I could smell the pungent zing in my nostrils. I could hear the wind howling. It was coming for us.

I looked out the window above my bed to witness the mountain of water towering over us. My heart was pounding rapidly as I ran upstairs to find many men scrambling to secure the ship as much as possible. The wind was no longer howling up here. It was shrieking. The rain was no longer just falling. It had a purpose. Hail was cascading down and clattering onto the floor like knives. I glanced at the few stars, isolated from each other by the deadly clouds bringing forth this remarkable monster of a storm until they disappeared completely from sight.

We tried our best to do the impossible job of protecting ourselves but it was hopeless. The sky was darkening and ominous dark clouds gathered overhead, moving swiftly, covering the moon, leaving us alone in the dark. The waves grew larger, angrier. They battered us from all sides and nothing could be done. I could see the smaller ships in our fleet sinking in the distance and I prayed we wouldn't have the same fate. Smashed glass pieces that were once beautiful trinkets and treasures were lying on the floor like a thousand tiny daggers, the lightning violently reflecting off them.

There was no escaping the storm.

The fleet has certainly depleted in size, many of the smaller boats struggled to stay upright. They were no match to the monstrous waves devouring them. Even after all our efforts, we were powerless against the wrath of the storm. We are unable to find countless treasures but luckily, our ship isn't ruined. I just feel so blessed that I am alive. However, as we continue on our journey, fear is starting to set in amongst the crew. We are entering pirate territory.

### **15 December 1405**

Dear Xin,

I miss you so much. The last few months have taken a lot out of me. My body feels weak, rebuilding the ships has made my hands rough and covered in blisters. The days are shorter and colder, the dark sets upon us earlier. Working in the pitch black and using only small candles to get work done is challenging. I wish I was back home with you, in the warmth of your loving arms, on steady ground, away from all this ghastly work. There has been no sign of pirates yet but I fear they will attack soon.

### **14 February 1406**

Dear Xin,

My worst fear came true, we were attacked by the pirates. We should've prepared ourselves, we knew they were coming. Last week, I was looking out the telescope when I saw them sailing past in the distance, their bloodthirsty eyes watching us in our disastrous state, just waiting for the right moment to attack when we were at our weakest. Word had been spread that we were carrying several treasures and many were out to get it, including the pirates, and now was their chance.

It was twelve minutes past midnight when the first cannonball struck our ship. One young boy screamed, his painful cry echoing through the whole ship. I was surrounded by panic and chaos as everyone rushed to see what was happening outside. The pirates were here, and they weren't leaving till they got every single piece of treasure on the ships.

The sounds of swords being unsheathed sent shivers down my spine as I clambered up to the deck. We were circled by a swarm of gruesome pirates with filthy beards and stained teeth. Their feet thundered on the hard deck as they closed in on us, and then the battle began.

The fight was long and excruciating. The clanking of swords was like a drum beating in my head. I picked my fight against an unpleasant pirate. Swerving, I managed to escape his deadly strikes and attacked. My small pocket knife, however, was no match to his polished sword. Back and forth, we charged at one another, each blow harder to recover from. My skin was cut, my arms were tired. I had given up. He was older, more experienced, but I was more agile and tactical. I managed to gather some strength to be able to get one last hit at him. But he saw me coming and pinned me down on the floor. He held the sword up to my throat as I uselessly tried to push it away, I could feel it pressing up against my skin. I thought that was it, that I was going to die. Yet, I thought of you and how I could never leave you behind in this world. The moon glistened on the silver sword as I quickly freed my arm, grabbed my knife from my pocket and pushed it into his torso, stabbing him. The pirate collapsed, his heavy body on top of mine. I pushed him off of me. He was dead. The fights around me slowly came to an end as the pirates were being defeated. The shouting and wailing were hushed, and silence fell upon us. We'd won.



We had defeated the pirates! I turned my back to the dead body of the pirate I had just killed and cheered. My crew mates joined in as we shouted and laughed, enjoying our brilliant victory. And then suddenly, I felt it. The blade, biting into my flesh. Blood spurted as my limb dropped to the floor.

I'd lost my arm, Xin.

It was sliced off by the pirate's sharp sword. The pirate I had "killed" came up behind me and ripped it away from the rest of my body. I let it be swept away from me. It was so absurd and naive of me to think I had actually killed him. Blood poured out of the stub all over the deck, it was leaking out of me, no-one could help. I felt a sharp pain spreading all through my body. It burned Xin, so much, I couldn't breathe. Losing all my senses, I collapsed onto the hard floor and everything around me looked distorted. I could hear the strange voices of my crew, they were screaming. I tried to reach out to them but they were so far away. The pain was coming from everywhere, I couldn't take it anymore. I closed my eyes with the image of the pirate in my mind. His dirty face up close to mine, his nauseating, hot breath forcefully blown onto my face, his laughter echoing through my head, the bloody sword spinning around in front of me. Then everything went black.

I awoke in a strange bed, my chest rising and falling quickly as I gasped for air. For a moment I had forgotten all about what had happened until I looked out of the corner of my left eye to see an empty space where my arm should've been. I didn't care that we had won, I didn't care how much treasure we saved. All I could think about was how I let you down. Now, I lie here in this bed, writing this letter. I'm so sorry. I never meant for anything to happen to me. The plan was always to make it back to you. For you to run into my arms while I stand on the dock, smelling the sweet smell of daisies from your favorite soap. For my pale and coarse hands to interlock with yours, pink and smooth, and for my fingers to run through your charcoal black hair as you rest your head on my shoulder. I'm frightened that this will no longer be possible. I won't be able to hold you tight or support you anymore. I don't know what else to say. What can I say?

I'm sorry.

Tears are cascading down my cheeks and falling onto these precious papers, smudging the heartfelt words I have written. My hand is unsteady, my fingers are cold and numb, writing is proving to be a challenge. I dream of the long walks in the park we used to take, watching the little kids playing with their kites, wondering if we would ever have kids of our own. I dream of the picnics we had underneath the star-filled sky, eating delicious foods you prepared for us. I dream of the strolls we took by the river and the wide smile you had on your face when I told you "I love you". I dream of our wedding in a couple of years. I was going to propose when I got back. I would watch you walk down the aisle and admire your beauty in a silk dress as you take my breath away. I love you, Xin. I always will, and I will keep fighting to come back to you. Always.

# Anna

*Harrow International School Hong Kong, Ho, Sophie – 15*

It was in Grandmama's little attic where she first found them hidden beneath all their glory: a pot of decent gold, some letters, and a roll of soft silk the colour of vintage pearls.

The girl didn't want to clean up the attic in the first place. It was dark, dirty, and infested with spiders and termites and mice and the nastiest creatures ever known to man. Why would Mom force her to clear the attic instead of anyone else? Though, she had to admit that a part of her wasn't even surprised. Mom had been acting ten times freakier than she usually was after Grandmama died from some kind of cancer some time ago. Honestly, what was the point? She died already. The girl knew there was no use worrying and mourning someone who would never walk on the face of the earth again. That was the cold, hard truth, and Mom needed to know it whether she liked it or not.

Plus, she didn't want to mourn for another hundred days. For God's sake, the funeral was done and over with. She didn't want to wear a piece of dull cloth that was basically like screaming in people's face, "Oh, look, my family member died, give me pity!" It was so embarrassing, especially at school where all her American friends would ask her what it was for. Of course, she wouldn't tell them it was a weird Chinese tradition that signified mourning. So, she did what any other sane being would do: she hid the cloth in her bag before school started, and put it on again before she went home.

It was *such* a smart idea. It was just too bad that Mom had to spoil it once again by catching her on the street without wearing a so-called "important" piece of cloth. Not only did she have to wear a white rag that didn't match her expensive, photo-worthy outfit, she now had to clean – to clean! – an attic that was a million years old. It made her absolutely furious.

Thankfully, those items that she found were a bit more interesting than the dust around her, so she decided to stick her nose around. Naturally, the girl grabbed the pot of gold first. She got over her initial disappointment at its lack of glamorous grandeur. After all, it would come in useful when she needed some cash. She then unrolled the roll of silk, but found it incredibly boring. She kicked it away, too lazy to roll it back. And all there was left, unfortunately, was the dull stack of letters.

It was trivial, she knew. Who would want to read some ancient scraps of garbage? But bear with her – there was literally nothing else to do up there. She had to find something to do. Thus, after screaming at a pile of cobwebs above her head, she settled in a corner and began to read.

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Dear Kaiser (kai ze 凯泽),

I cannot bear it any longer! I am meant to be sewing a dress for a customer, but the sun is peeking out behind the cloud, persuading me to write to you instead. It's only been ten days since you've left for the palace to fulfil your dreams of being promoted as an official, but to me it's been an eternity.

I'm afraid my curiosity has got the better of me, as I have never been out of the village before. What does the palace look like? How are the people treating you? Is it true that for the emperor gets a hundred dishes each meal just for himself?

And to be honest, you've made me quite jealous. You get to travel all around China and experience things I've never even heard of before – just because you're male. I'm sorry, but don't you think that's just terribly unfair? It may be my culture, but that's not the kind of culture I want to believe in.

Please reply. The whole village has quietened down from the buzz and chatter to a drone of serenity. I'm rather lonely. Lonely, that's all. Oh well, I'll see you soon. Goodbye!

From Anna (an na 安娜)  
July 1, 1405

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From: The Grand Secretaries  
To: Admiral Zheng He, Deputy Wang Jinghong

1. *In accordance to the reference, you will proceed and report to the Ministry of War to receive further assignment.*
2. *Your assignment consists of taking command of 27,000 troops to the Western Ocean on an expedition.*
3. *Your duties include preparing for the voyage and leading the fleet. Refer to the documents in the next package.*

*July 11, 1405*

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From: Admiral Zheng He  
To: Official Kaiser

Kaiser, hurry up. Hurry up and finish the documents for the voyage preparation and the crew recruit.

*August 15, 1405*

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Dearest Anna,

Please do accept my apologies for not writing back. It has been absolute chaos at the palace — not that I've been spending much time there. I have been assigned by Admiral Zheng He to accompany him on an expedition. But Anna, it's no ordinary expedition! It's at sea, and we're sailing on the most magnificent treasure fleet I've ever laid my eyes on. Luckily for me, I get to test out the ship before we truly set sail.

Breathtaking. It's breathtaking. It's a hundred thousand tonnes of ancient oak, fashioned into a body of warm wood and might, with masts that reach the heavens, lifting maroon sails in the air, holding everything together. I get to sit by the bow each day, watching the sun wake up and fall asleep to a soundless lullaby. I get to count the stars as my bedtime story and watch the bow stroke the waves with a regal dignity unlike anything I've seen before.

Anna, I know you're fuming right now. I'm sorry you cannot be here and experience everything with me, but as you know, society is one strange thing. Why women are perceived as pretty, polite girls whose sole purpose in life is to get married is beyond my understanding. That's why I love you. You keep me on my toes and remind me every day to go against what is wrong, even though everyone thinks it's right.

Also, you will not believe what I managed to do! There is a space in the fleet crew that requires a good cook, and I know someone (I mean you, Anna.) who would be perfect for the job. I do hope it will make you quite happy. See you in a while.

Sincerely,  
Kaiser

---

From: On Behalf of the Yongle Emperor  
To: Crew, Officers, and Admirals of the Fleet

*You have been invited to a ceremonial banquet to celebrate the fleet's maiden voyage tomorrow at the Grand Hall. On behalf of our country, China wishes you the best and we pray for a journey full of successes and a safe passage.*

*Autumn of 1405*

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From: Official Kaiser  
To: Admiral Zheng He

Sir, the ship is ready for departure.

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To: Fleet Registration

Anna Zhang and Kaiser Li:

Registered on Ship 1 – 7:17 am, October 26th, 1405.

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Dear Kaiser,

Thank you, thank you, thank you! I cannot thank you enough for recruiting me as a cook on the ship. The ship is so incredibly exciting, from the bustle of the sailors up on deck to the cheeky gossip down in the common crew. I spend my rest times just sitting by the railing, staring out into the horizon, wondering and dreaming and thinking about everything and nothing. I listen. I listen to the whispers of the wind, telling me that this is what I'm meant to do, who I'm meant to be.

Can you believe how many places we've been to in the past seven months? According to one of the maps, we've sailed to Champa, Java, Malacca, Aru, Semudera, Lambri, Ceylon, Quilon and now Calicut. I feel like I'm invincible, that I can conquer every problem that stands before me. I feel free. It's unlike anything I've ever felt before.

I'm afraid, though. What happens after this voyage? Do I need to return home just to sew and sew until my fingers are sewn together in frustration? Do I need to give my freedom back and be controlled by society again?

I don't want to go back. I want to stay here, Kaiser, with you, with the sea, and with the freedom that comes with it. Even if the storms strike us down and the dark clouds cover our view, I want this anyway.

Okay. That's enough. Let's meet by the boiler room at 8 o'clock.

Anna

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From: Admiral Zheng He

To: Officials and Officers

*At Cape Comorin, we will change direction and begin the return journey to China. Alert the captain and crew immediately.*

May 1405

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From: Admiral Zheng He

To: Kaiser

*Kaiser, I've been sent to Palembang to negotiate the pacification of Chen Zuyi. As you know, he happens to be the most vicious Chinese pirate dominating the Malaccan Strait. I have heard that he has plotted for attack. Prepare for battle.*

September 1405

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Dear Kaiser,

I think I am truly in love with you. Please tell me we can get married after we return –

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EMERGENCY... EMERGENCY... EMERGENCY ...

*PIRATES SPOTTED NORTHEAST OF SHIP. PREPARE WEAPONS AND SECURE THE DECK.  
CALLING ALL SAILORS, SOLDIERS AND OFFICERS.*

---

Dearest Anna,

There is going to be a war. By the time you receive this letter, I will be fighting with the other soldiers, and you will be safe and sound, as the rescue ship will come for the crew. I know this is very sudden, but bear with me – you need to understand. And I need to tell you now, just in case I don't make it.

This voyage had a purpose. To all you young, naive souls out there, it was not just to explore what was beyond our home. It was to display power to the kingdoms and trade ports nestled in the Indian Ocean. It was to show Chinese might to their world. And for me, and all the other officials, it was to take pride in our country.

I know you find our cultural identity is confusing. It has faults that anger you and force you to reject it, just like every other culture. Who wants to be proud of a culture that shuts down women yet raise up men? But Anna, I'm telling you, to just accept your identity. You are who you are, and no one can change that. You are born Chinese, and you will always be one, a child of the powerful nation that sailed the Indian Ocean.

I have snuck two items from the gift room for you to keep as a reminder of your first travels outside of the village. Use the gold as a light in the darkness, and to never dull your flame. Use the silk as a shield of protection and strength, and to never be afraid even when times are rough. And use the notes and letters I've collected just so you can share your story with our child, their children, and the next generation.

Remember, my dear. Remember that you have the power to inspire and to change not just yourself but the unjust things you see in your life. Use your heart, soul and mind to do what you love and love what you do. And I pray, I pray so hard, that you will find a heart that will open up to yours and adore you for who you are, and arms that hold you with love so deep it reaches infinity. I pray that you will find a mind that will help you dodge the obstacles in life, and eyes full of warmth and the feeling that you belong. But most of all, I pray for you, that you will be happy forever and ever, for you are your own person, and the most incredible person at that.

I love you, Anna.

With all the love that possibly exists in our universe,  
Kaiser  
September 17, 1405

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The girl closed the letter as a tear rolled down her cheek. She couldn't help but wonder what happened afterward. Did Kaiser survive the war? Did he reunite with Anna to raise the child that would begin their generation? Did they live the happy ending that they yearned so much for?

She took a deep breath.

Kaiser's wish had come true. The story was shared indeed, and it was shared with her. But could she really call herself the next generation of great-great-great-something-grandmother and grandfather when she didn't even accept her ethnicity, her identity?

She couldn't.

The girl reached into the pocket of her pants and tightened her fingers around the cloth inside. Gently, she pulled the white fabric out. It was just a cloth, after all. But its meaning was an entire different story. A story that she had to tell, starting with herself. And with a small smile, Anna tied it to her arm.

# The Ming Treasure Voyages

*Harrow International School Hong Kong, Matharu, Ambi – 14*

She used to tell me stories, ones about ghosts and ancient legends and pirates that sailed the world, but that was all before she left. People said she was delusional because she was chasing something she would never catch, but being a gullible child, I believed every word she said, and I don't regret it. Her name was Cece, Cece Ming, and she would walk around the campus, with her books in her hands, scrappy paper falling out of each end and pencil marks everywhere, looking like an utter mess. We went to university together, she majored in Ancient history, and I, Philosophy. She used to constantly 'remind' me to write down everything I'm thinking, that 'letting it out onto paper, is how a philosopher would handle everything,' but I've never been bothered with it. Unlike Cece, I have a Chinese name and an English one. Xi Shi is my Chinese one, but no one here in Manchester can pronounce it, so I go by Iris.

I tell myself every day that I have to hold on to every single memory I have of her, and not let a single one of them slip away. If I do, they she will actually be gone. She went missing in the middle of October last year, and coincidently, today it's been exactly a year since then. She left a box of her stuff here in my room, and advised me to keep it out of reach of mom. I've never had the courage to open it though, so it sits here, beside me until the day it can finally be opened. I don't know when that will be. I have a letter from her from the day she left, which I have been saving for today...I think?

*Iris,  
By the time you read this, I will have left.  
I need your help.  
Open the box next to you, but don't tell mom anything.  
Cece x*

I flip the paper over and skim the back of it. To my surprise, that's all she wrote. A small post-it, in a white envelope with my name on it. That's all she had to say to me. That was it! Although I'm exasperated at how that's what I've been waiting to open for the past year, I can't help but be curious as to where she is and why she's there. She wrote it as if it was a text message, as if last year, she predicted that I was going to be reading this, whilst sitting next to her box in the corner of my room. I reach over to the box, as if to open it, but as I get closer and closer, I feel a shiver run down my spine, forcing my hand back and away from Cece's box. Mom is still not home, so if I were to open it and she walked through the front door, would I be able to put it all back the way it was, before she came up and saw it all? I would give anything to see Cece. A rush of adrenaline runs through me, and I grab the box, whole heartedly ripping it open.

Papers, scrolls, sketches, broken compasses. It's just a box of her old junk.

Unenthused, I pick up a piece of paper in the box that catches the corner of my eye. It was burnt around the edges, and crumpled up as if it had been squashed into someone's pocket. It starts off with a name, then a date – 1403? It looks like a piece of someone's diary, but looking at the date, it must be a prank or something. As I read through the ancient looking text, I come to realise that due to how its written, it might actually be from 1403. I remember my professor mentioning something about 1403, and how it was a great historical and philosophical time, but its hidden somewhere at the back of my head, and I don't have the willpower to try and search for it now.

I've just labelled a little file, which I will hopefully put some important papers in, Cece's ones, ones that can lead me to her. So, as I rummage through this scrappy little box, labelled 'home,' all I find is more junk, or what looks like junk from my perspective. I just got a text from mom, too, and she said she won't be home till early tomorrow, so I decide to go back to campus with Cece's box. It's all starting to hit me, right in the face. Everything that has happened today is so overwhelming (in a sad way), making my head swirl and feel like there is a build-up of clouds waiting to burst and shower an abundance of tears. I should probably sleep on it, and hopefully tomorrow morning I'll have a clear enough head to understand everything inside it.

It's the next day now. I have purposely woken up earlier than usual, so I can do some more research into some of the papers in Cece's box. I find a sheet with a title "The Ming Voyages," and I search it up but only one result shows up. As anyone would, I click on it, but everything goes blank, so without thinking about it, I delete the page, in case it's some sort of virus. Instead, I decide to use Cece's research. I scan everything into my computer, and sort through it all

thoroughly. This way I can look closely at all the details on my screen. I figure that finding my sister is more important than going to my lecture this afternoon, so I go on reading throughout the whole day. Dates, numbers, locations, names. Zheng He's 7 Voyages across the so called 'Western Ocean.' After reading a considerable number of papers, I concluded that Cece was looking for something the pirates on the Ming Voyages left somewhere. The first of Zheng He's voyages set out on July 11<sup>th</sup>, 1405. They travelled around the Indian ocean and were comprised of 317 ships with 27 870 men aboard. They were Chinese pirates, but good pirates. Instead of stealing gold and jewels, they delivered them from the emperor to other countries to form new friendships. She specified that 7 voyages were planned, but only 6 succeeded, as the last fleet of ships couldn't get to their last location, which resulted in the emperor ordering the sailor-pirates to leave the gift somewhere hidden, for a future descendent to find.

It was all confusing to me at this point. Why would Cece care about this and leave to try and find a gift that was left by an old Chinese emperor in the 1400s? I think that's what she's doing. Something pops up on my screen, it looks like a conversation on Gmail, but I don't know who it's from. It just says 'unknown.' It's an address, or part of one:

*SO14AD*  
(*Southampton*)

As unsettling as it is, getting an email from an unknown source with an address on it, something is drawing me to it. I have the strongest gut feeling that Cece is there. From Manchester to Southampton should only take about 4 or 5 hours if I catch the quick train. Thinking about it, I would need to miss about a week of classes and lectures, so there's going to be a load of work to catch up on, but it'll be worth it. If I find her.

I get the first train from Manchester station to Southampton. Luckily, my train is going all the way there, so I have about 5 hours to kill. I'm having a look at places around the postcode that was emailed to me, but it seems that it's in the middle of nowhere. The closest thing I've found to the postcode is a little cafeteria, three miles away. I'm almost in Southampton now, and am feeling a chill rush down my spine as I get closer and closer. The moment I hop off the train, I jump in a cab and show the driver the postcode. I have absolutely no clue where I'm going, I only hope that I'll find Cece there. Part of me is eager to get out of the cab, and run towards the sketchy little shop I see outside the car window, however, the other part of me wants to tell the taxi driver to take me right back to the station, so I can hop on a train back home. Mum has messaged me far too many times, so I've told her I'm in my lecture and muted the conversation for now.

After paying the driver, I reluctantly step out of the car and walk towards the mysterious shop in front of me. I get closer and closer, and stand by the front door of the shop, half asleep and half awake. Something startles me. It's an old lady staring at me on the other side of the door. I jolt backwards, and she opens the door, initially with a confused face. But that confused face soon turns into a warm smile. As she leads me into the small shop, she points out all the ancient collectables she has. I can tell she's describing them and how she came to get them, but the words are blurred in my head. All I can think about is finding Cece. In the middle of her sentence, I abruptly say 'Cece.' She stops. 'Sorry ma'am, but you haven't by any chance seen a young girl, about my age, around this area, have you?' She stares at me for a second or two, and starts to shake her head calmly, but it gradually turns to a nervous nod. She points me towards a door on my right, and I feel anxious to open it. Then, without realising, I've already opened it.

There she is. I see her, sitting in front of me, surrounded by a ring of papers.

I shout 'Cece!'

She jumps up and runs towards me. I can't believe I've found her after all this time. As great as the moment is, seeing my big sister again, I suddenly pull away and slap her.

'How could you just leave me?' I shout.

But she doesn't answer, instead, tears start running down her face, and I go back in for a hug, apologising for snapping at her. She sits me down and talks to me about everything she's found, all the articles about the 7 voyages that were never published, all the treasures Zheng He offered. As Cece goes on, I look over at the old lady and roll my eyes, she



smiles and points back at Cece, but I can't figure out what she's getting at. After phasing out for a few moments, Cece tells me that we need to be leaving now, so as she gathers her papers, I walk over to the old shop lady, and ask her why she pointed back at Cece.

'You two are very special kids, you know?'

'Why?'

'Everything your sister is trying to tell you, it's true.'

I look at Cece, and by the time I turn back around to face the old lady, she's gone. As Cece and I walk to the front door, we find a note on it saying:

*What you seek to find is a treasure that was meant to be found by a descendent of the Ming family.  
Is that you?*

It's not as if the old lady is able to magically reply, but just for jokes, I write 'yes' on the paper left on the door. We step through the rustic looking door in its ill-fitting frame and we expect it to slam behind us. But there she is again, the old lady, holding the note, and this time, she looks suspiciously happy. She stares at us, wishes us good luck, and walks down towards us, handing us a little slip of paper, again with an address on it. A thought pops into my head – what if she was the unknown person that sent me the email? As if **she** wanted me to find my sister?

It's been a long day, so I'm planning to head to the nearest and cheapest motel I can find.

As a child, before he passed away, my father always used to tell me that all great philosophers and adventurers write down everything. All their adventures, all their thoughts, are logged in a diary so that maybe one day, when that philosopher is long gone, someone can learn from what they did, what they thought, and make new discoveries and write it all down. Unlike Mother, he also used to tell me that usually, the things that Cece would think, were right and if it ever came to it, to believe what she says, even if it contradicts what I think of the matter. And that's what I've done, my whole life, until there was a gap for a year where I didn't have a 'Cece' to rely on. I think about that as I walk, and realise I want to follow Cece because I believe in her, just like my father did. After hours of walking, we find an old scrappy box, hidden under some leaves, in the middle of nowhere.

You're not going to believe what we've found.

# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

*Harrow International School Shanghai, Shen, Brightly – 14*

The silent waves pushed towards golden bay, flipping and twisting the white shells and corals like a bored child fiddling its toy, the beach was empty with no one lying on the beach—chairs nor under the brightly colored umbrellas. Suddenly a shimmer of red and gold was revealed under the sand, glimmering in the afternoon sun. It was a bookmark. The waves pushed and pulled the golden bookmark, hiding and showing the red pea stone welded in it, making it turn and spin until it was finely out of the sea's wretch, lying still on the smooth sand.

Thud, thud, the damp sea wind blew away the distant calls of seagulls and cars driving by, but couldn't cover the sounds of footsteps stepping closer and closer. A clean delicate hand reached down to the bookmark...

As the waves and boats retract back to the sea and the days and nights rewind, we would peak where the red beans grow to unfold a story untold.

A rustle of footsteps past out from a mansion shattering the silence of the gloomy rain, a man in his 40s pasted up and down the room, his hands cluttered to a scroll behind his back, his face pale with distress "What to do! The emperor has given the order, every family has to give a young man to join the Ming treasure voyages and our only son is not an officer!" he muttered "Who will carry our family name if he's dead on half way? Even a fool knows going on this voyage is suiciding."

"How about the exam? There's one coming soon, as long as he passes and becomes an officer the emperor can't do anything." A woman, already covered in tears suddenly quivered, her eyes told that this was the last hope.

Their worried voices past out the window, into a girl's ear, her eyes like a pair of black pearls, hair smooth as silk, her little nose and smooth outline make her seem as if she always gave a soft warm smile, but now with her thin brows crossed with concern, her clean delicate hands had crunched in a fist, ignoring the crumpling book. She raised her hand ready to knock. However, moments later not a single knock ended on the door as her hands was hold down by her matchmaker "don't you worry May my dear, when I find you a rich man to marry, your brother won't need to go on that suicide mission, all you have to do is buy him a place as an officer, and have a chubby baby boy."

The round matchmaker smiled in pride revealing her golden teeth, yet soon her smile vanished, instead her foxlike eyes round with fear "What on earth, are you holding!" She snatched the crumpled book away from May and stared at it in disgust "A girl looking at papers and ink? Next I'd be expecting a dog spitting ivory! Only man spend their time on useless symbols on paper, we woman do much more important things, learning how to make fabric and needle work and taking after the family. Only these girls could get married."

May snatched the book back, her face red in fury "This is not only ink and paper! Can't you read the title 'Three hundred poems of Tang?'" Not waiting for the matchmakers response she thundered into the bookroom and slammed the door. Leaving the matchmaker in the soggy rainy air and steam puffing out of her ears.

"The weathers better then yesterday aren't it?" May smiled as she walked on the sunny street.

"Ya." The Matchmaker murmured in response, her eyes flashing around in alert, as though expecting the passersby to do a sudden charge at them "I still wonder what kind of a father would let his daughter touch books and pens then allow her to go in public at the age of marriage."

May giggled, her voice like the clear tingles of a stream, but stopped in a sudden, her eyes glowed as she stared at the small dusty pave. The matchmaker looked over her shoulder, the pave was small and dusty but was covered in a bright glimmer as the jewels it sold reflected the sunlight, yet what formed a huge contract to the splendor of jewels, was the shopkeeper. The old hag stared at them with dull bored eyes and gave a warp sneer, the matchmaker narrowed her thin eyes but May smiled back and asked "How much would that be?"

Her hands ignored the clear emerald bracelets and glittering golden rings, instead it ended on a pair of metal bookmarks each with a red pea stone welded in it. The old hag's sneer stiffed, she raised her brows and looked at May with query, but soon she smiled and finished exchange in speed, as though afraid that she regrets.

"You know that the bookmark is made of metal, do you?" The matchmaker asked in disbelieve. May nodded with a big grin as she slid the pair into her 'Three hundred poems of Tang' then clipped the book under her arm "the red bean stones remind me of a poem I've read, it's worth it." She said and turned ready to head back, not noticing a piece of golden glimmer fell out of her book.

"Hello? Is this yours?" an uncertain sound came from behind.

A hand was holding one of the red bean bookmarks. It was a young man. May recognized the uniform he was wearing. 'A scholar.' she thought, her sight moving to the patch on his shoulder and sleeve. 'a poor scholar.'

"Yes, its mine." May smiled, the young man's face flushed.

'an honest poor scholar.' Amused and interested, May thought. 'And a little handsome.'

"Wait, is that 'Three hundred poems of Tang'?" The young man stopped flushing and stared at May's book as if it was a gold brick.

"You've read this?" surprised, May asked in excitement.

"I've read through three times in a row!" He said in pride.

"Well, I'm on my fifth!" May grinned, passion shone in both of their eyes. "We should have a cup of tea some time, oh, and my name is..." the rest of her sentence was faded in the shouts of scholars, school was over, leaving May only the name and teahouse

"...June...South land tea..."

After that haste first meet, they met often. Discussing all kinds of literatures, from poems to jambic verses. As time dripped and dropped, friendship sprouted from their hearts, but not only did the friendship show its peek in their hearts, so did something else – love. Even so nothing changed, they still talked about the same tales and books, but a goal was stealthily, silently planted: June would go to the exam to become an officer in order to become rich and marry May.

Rain poured, concealing the crashes of the distance sea, thunder and lightning stroked making the wind weep in fear. The door of June and Mays rented bookroom banged open as June bumped in, his face white and pale, mixed with rain and tears. May, reading one of the pages in 'the collection of poems from Tang', the jewel red bean book mark placed in it, looked up, her heart fell ice cold when she met his eyes.

"Well?" she whispered in a shaky voice. Wishing that her guess was wrong.

"I failed the officer exam." June croaked back, "still, I could run a bookstore and get rich..."

Bang! May threw back her chair, her tears busted out her empty terrified eyes. Stunned by Mays overreaction, June tried to comfort her, but May just threw the book on to him and ran out of the door. June still frozen, stunned and miserable stood their placing the book in his pocket.

The next day May still came, she told him to make his own book store. But all she did now was burring herself with work.

A year past, the bookstore opened in success, and May seemed to have walked out the shadows of the failed exam.

Everything sang spring was coming, if you ignore the furious looks on May's father and matchmaker. After knowing the news about the store, the matchmaker left in reproach, and May's father came to bungle June and Mays bookstore. Yet when got there all he saw was a few shelves of books, sitting near was May, June and a few other scholars and children. So he stood there for a whole day, looking them talk and smile about different books. May's father left with a smile on his face too.

Not after long he acquiesce June and May to get married.

June, May and their family all lived in joy, and the news that May's brother had became an officer made things only better. Things should have last this way, until all of their hair turns white, until their shop became famous to all of the land of south, but when the news of the Ming voyages came back to their mind, all was too late. Before the last goodbyes, June got pulled away into the huge stomach of the boat, into the claws and jaws of the deep unknown sea. Leaving only the broken hearts of two young lovers, and the dripping tears sliding of the red bean stone bookmark.

A few days past, facing the deep blue sea, June sat on the deck of one of the ships, holding 'three hundred poems of tang' he gave a small grin, he founded this book in his pocket, and flipped to the page where the red bean bookmark lay. It was Wang Wei's 《相思》

红豆生南国，春来发几枝？

愿君多采撷，此物最相思。

Red beans grow in the land of south, how many new branches do they grow every spring?

I hope you can enjoy the collection of them, as they show the most sustenance love.

'So she knew all this time.' June smiled at the red bean bookmark. Slowly he moved his sight towards the sea it was blue and unfathomable yet calm, the same in his eyes when he saw a huge black hole of the canon spitting its fire tongue to their boat.

The wings of seagulls once young and bright that flew over the south sea sky had turned grey and dull, the clouds that once cried in sorrow had thinned and faded through time.

The south land teahouse bookstore, known by every scholar and child, had a special background, it was famous for not only the endless shelves of books and tea but the owner who knew every tale in every book she sold, she was an old

lady with a red bean bookmark in her hair. There was also a tale about the bookmark, that there once was a pair and that the lovers who had one each would be together forever.

“Is that true? The story of the bookmark.” Asked a group of children, eyes opened wide to see the bookmark on June’s white hair.

“Who knows.” June said, she looked the sky, it was blue and unfathomable yet calm, the same in her eyes.

After her death her bone ash was poured into the sea, so was the bookmark.

The bookmarks had separated so did their heart.

The waves brushed through the centuries, repeating its endless course, the branches of red bean fell and grew covering the scars time left. Where we go back to the present where the bookmark was brought back to land.

It was a girl who picked up the red bean stone bookmark, her eyes like a pair of black pearls was fixed on the bookmark with curiosity, her hair smooth as silk, her little nose and smooth outline make her seem as if she always gave a soft warm smile. Her thin brows raised in surprise, as her clean delicate hands clinched gently to the bookmark, she looked around but didn’t see the owner, so she shrugged and rubbed off the sand. Raising the bookmark under the sun she smiled as it shined then slipped it in her book and clipped it under her arms.

Following the girl’s steps, the café’s doorbell tingled, a glimmer of gold fell out of her book when she walked past a table with a young man reading his book, the same bookmark slipped in his book, but this time the sound of the bookmark was clear on the stone floor. The girl looked back in a hurry, just in time to see the young man handing her the bookmark

“Hello? I believe this is yours.” He said, this time without questioning.

# Reincarnation

*Harrow International School Shanghai, Xu, Annie – 13*

In the beginning, Pan Gu split the chaotic world in prehistoric times into Heaven and Earth. He sacrificed his body to create mountains, rivers, the moon and the Sun.

From that point on, the order of Heaven and Earth was created, all humans owned a soul where merits could be recorded, and this soul would reincarnate in the Underground City after each death. It was from nature that each soul had its own destiny recorded on the Sansheng rock by the Underground City. One should not and cannot change their destiny. If one did, then it would symbolize the contrary of natural law and the manifestation of heaven's will.

Everything was in order, systematically, until Yong Le 14 years, December, Ming.

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It's 2.30am, the sea waves shimmered under the silvery moonlight. The scene looked aesthetic, but... Si encountered the most tragic seasickness.

Si is a kind-hearted twenty year old young man. Although he is plain-looking, but he is hard-working, honest, and reliable. He loved his career and he does everything steadily and produces high-quality work. He is a sailor. He had a dream since he was young, and that is to have an adventurous job in relation with the sea. He loved everything about the sea, as if it was his destiny to do so...

All of his family told him that he is different since he was born. On one occasion, his mother brought him out to the markets and met a fortune-teller. The fortune-teller said: "The soul of this child contains a profound merit. He is the after life of a central figure in the past. However beware, he might have an inexorable doom at the age of twenty. I can say no more about the rest, the secret of God's design shall not be revealed."

Although he was already twenty, he never sensed any danger or felt that he had the soul of a central figure. He felt as ordinary as everyone else.

He couldn't stand the seasickness anymore, so he went outside to feel the sea breeze, which might give him a sense of relief.

Just then, enormous waves rose violently without any precautions. Dark clouds shrouded rapidly over the bright moonlight and a gale began to blow. This made the whole ship rock severely, which wakened the sailors. Lots of them began to panic in a hopeless tangle... including Si.

Suddenly, an immensely dark shadow appeared in the large gale with the size about twelve metres tall. It looked like a ferocious tiger with a pair of pointy wings.

Si knew immediately that this was one of the Four Ominous Beasts since the remote ages— Qiong Qi.

Qiong Qi did not give him the chance to consider more, it bit into his head, right into the skull, in an instant blood erupted out from the top of his neck.

He had no head.

Qiong Qi chewed his head in his mouth, it did not care about the rest of Si's scarlet body and flew away.

It came and went in a hurry, the sea turned back to its serene scene, the mild moonlight shone on the waves which gently lashed against the ship, sending up pearly sprays.

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Si woke up in the darkest place he could ever imagine as he heard two very different voices calling for him.

"Your Majesty..." a trembling voice filled with emptiness and void called torpidly.

"Your Majesty!" a ferocious voice filled with violence and brutality called relentlessly.

Although the two voices differentiates distinctly, they all sounded exceptionally polite, but spooky.

As Si opened his eyes, he could see two blurry humanlike figures, one white, one black. As his vision became clearer he could now apparently see two ghosts kneeling beside him.

The white one was smiling eerily, he was tall, thin and pale white, as if he was made out of paper. He had a protracted, lurid tongue dangling wildly down from his smiling mouth.

The black one looked fierce and tough, he was rotund and elephantine with a dark black face.

Si, being a man who loved reading bizarre and curious legends, understood that the two 'figures' in front of him were the Black and White Wu Chang. They were the ghosts responsible for guiding the souls of the newly dead to the Gate of Hell.

"Your Majesty...!" The ghosts bowed respectfully, "we have sent you to the Gate of Hell already. Ox Head Horse Face should be here any minute now!"

It was only then did Si realize that his body was transparent. He was at the entrance of a gate saying 'Gate of Hell' on it. It was caliginous all around, and from time to time there were ghostly cries echoing.

"Thank you..." said Si, frightened with his lips trembling, but still kept his manners, "however, what did you just

call...?”

“Your Majesty! We arrived late, please forgive us,” two voices interrupted as two manlike figures trotted towards him from the gate... except, one had the head of an ox, and one had the face of a horse. They were Ox head Horse face, who were responsible for guiding the souls to pass through the Underground City, to the Palace of Hell.

Without the chance of asking his queries, Ox head Horse face led Si into the Gate of Hell. They walked on a bluestone slab road, the road surface was very uneven. This was the legendary Huangquan Road, which is a lead road to the Palace of Hell. Ghosts on the Huangquan Road were either crying thrillingly or screeching eerily for human lives.

# The Harbour

*Harrow International School Shanghai, Zhu, Lisa – 14*

Under the mild, warm air, the sky has born black clouds since autumn came, the harbour became as grey as a newspaper picture until the morning sun decides to shine its blinding light over everything...

It was the very first thing to pierce the utter darkness which covered the harbour. The morning sun had just woken up, it rose like a flower opening in the spring time, gifting its warm petals to the world whilst slowly painting the pale, grey sky with a layer of burning red. The peeking sun illuminated a quivering path across the surface of the never-ending ocean. It bathed the ocean's meek waves as well as the delicate clouds in a flaming red. The blinding light rays of the sun reflected, it shone across the ocean. The blinding light made all the water droplets glisten, allowing them to shine, like diamonds hidden with beauty. The waves of the harbour play a melodic music day and night, they create a unique music that cannot be heard anywhere else. The ocean never gets tired, never misses a beat and through both brilliant days yet also the darkest nights, the percussion of the shore keeps on a lullaby for everyone to hear but also for everyone to admire.

Dozens of trees lined on either side of the harbour, their branches quiver, their leaves were brought down to earth by an invisible spiral of breeze. I watched as a single golden leaf pirouetted down, spinning through the air as it let itself be carried down. There was a slight shook, as if it could've been whisked away any second but it kept floating down. It floated past me and landed lightly on the ground, the flamboyant, vibrant colour standing out against the ambers and bronzes laying beneath it. The leaf seemed so delicate, as if any slight movement could cause a tear, or a wrinkle. However, this was a corpse of what was once summer on the docks, where the harbour was filled with bright green. Each leaf danced from branch to ground, they were each a colourful flag with the freedom to roam the skies. Crisp golden leaves lay like a blanket on the floor, birds shot from branch to branch as twigs snapped and the leaves crunched under the feet of sailors who made their way to their ships.

There was a calmness to the surrounding, as if the usual heat which hovered over every day was gone, fanned away by the light breeze which was filled with the aroma of the saltiness of the ocean. In my opinion, the wind has always been a fascinating topic. In coldness, it rouses me to wakefulness, alertness. In soft breezes, it is finer than silk, it caresses my skin with a gentle touch. Today, I find myself feeling the cooling breeze bringing warmth to me softly. I took another look around, the world surrounding me was painted with both a bright red and orange, the sun had risen further up into the sky, reaching all life, waking all up. Every single second is rich, whilst the sky became a new painting from moment to moment, it would be miniscule changes being made to the sky, a splash of red in a different region, another cloud being covered with a shade of orange.

Each passer-by is a person, all capable of laughter and joy. Yet, somehow, everyone that I saw was distracted, hurrying, eyes cast down onto the floor, all hurrying to their boats to start their days off, as if they had been beamed to this stunning paradise but didn't have the time to notice. I stared, at the people scattering by, racing to their ships, charging to get onto the ocean, hastening to start their day. This, this was what I saw every morning, how would today be any different? On days, I would wonder who would be the first to notice the beauty in which surrounds them, who would be the first to raise their heads and take in the surroundings, who would be the first to break the loop in which we all exist in...

Above the white tipped blue, the gulls own the sky, their wings beat, hugging the mild wind. These gulls would spread their wings and make their way across the ocean in search of a prey, they would glide against the wind, hover above the ocean surface. They would often approach the fishing fleets, who have just left the port, who have barely begun their haul, hoping to feast on a few fishes which the fishermen have caught, yet, to no avail. The gulls cry and make their inverted arcs, hungry, tenacious. The fisherman would try his best to wave them away without making them agitated. However, what is the ocean without the squawking of the gulls? The air would be an empty void, at the same time, everyone's ears would be grieving for the sound from these animals which roam the sky freely, these animals which own the sky above us.

Admiring far into the horizon, where the sun has left a trail of flaming red high up across the beautiful, blue canvas, which was the beautiful sky, I couldn't tell where the ocean ended nor where the sky began. The ocean seemed to integrate with the clear sky, they both seemed, endless. The water was clean and soft. Gentle. It could have fooled those who haven't been a victim of a sea storm with its façade. However, in my many, many years abroad, I can see past the disguise of the vast ocean, I understand the true colours of this majestic beauty, the true dangers that it holds. Every time we take to the seas, it was a gamble on our lives. We are all well aware of this, but no one has the ability to quit this addiction where we enter the unknown.

After a while of gazing into the horizon, I noticed in the corner of my eye, the rest of the crew slowly beginning to pile onto the enormous ship, hauling their cargo, stacking their merchandise into heaps. Yet, no one made any effort to take in the scenery, to experience the beauty before we set sail to the ends of the earth. I was the only one to stand at the head of the ship and observe the surroundings, no matter how long I've been part of the crew, this was something I would be doing every day, watching, as the sun made its way up the sky, as the ocean began to glimmer, as the gulls began to cry.

What would be brought to us on this journey? No one knows. I savour this moment that I am in, wondering what's to come whilst we explore what's beyond the horizon...



# The Admiral's Last Voyage

*Heep Yunn School, Cho, Shu Nga Keziah – 14*

He was going to die.

That was all he knew as he lay limply on the bed, his eyes glazed over, gazing at nothing in particular. Scarcely minutes ago every inch of his body had been ablaze with pain, and panic had consumed him as he fought frantically against the illness burning him alive.

Now he felt nothing but a sort of serene resignation. He was going to die, and he might as well die at peace.

The Xuande Emperor's voice rang in his ears. *One last voyage, San Bao. This will be an expedition no one in the world has ever seen the like of.*

The corners of San Bao's—or Zheng He's—pale lips turned up slightly in a faint smile. An expedition no one had ever seen the like of. The past few years had been just that, had they not?

For some people the world consisted of a worn-out village, a dusty hut, and a wife who could cook and sew. For some it consisted of sparkling mansions, glamorous young women in flowing robes, endless music and dancing. His was a boundless world of blue, of sun-dappled waves dancing beneath him, of myriads of stars that guided him and his crew through the palpable darkness of the night. His was a world of trunks overflowing with fragrant tea and lustrous silk, translucent porcelain and rich brocades woven with the finest gold thread in all of the Empire; things he and his crew would give to the rest of the world. It was a world of exotic, far-off lands, populated by dark-skinned men who gifted them in return with smooth ivory, vibrant feathers in every hue imaginable, gemstones that sparkled and shone in the sunlight, and a *qilin*.

Amidst excruciating spasms of pain, Zheng He laughed inwardly. What a queer animal they had been given by the envoys of Malindi once; a *qilin*. How he and his crew had stared in awe when that giant, towering beast had come into sight! He could almost see it now, the gracefully slender creature with a neck that stretched higher than the treetops, its elegant frame covered in a silky, spotted coat of fur the colour of golden hay.

His sailors and the court officials had marvelled over the quaint horns on the creature's head, as well. "They have brought us the legendary *qilin*, San Bao," one of the court officials in the palace had told him, excitement in his voice. "Its horns, its body—they are exactly as the early scholars described it. A good omen, sir; a good omen."

That was before the Yongle Emperor passed away. The Yongle Emperor, who had treated him as a friend, who had held him in high esteem as if he was a prized jewel.

He had always wondered where the Emperor had gone after death, the man who had trusted him so. Now he was about to find out.

As the Emperor passed away, so had this grand world of Zheng He's. He had watched, helpless, as the new Hongxi Emperor closed the empire's doors to the world. He had not seen the burning of the fleet, but he could see it in his mind's eye—the ships which had roamed a thousand miles on water, now utterly submerged in a sea of fire, the orange flames licking higher, higher.

Had he been devastated, then, since such glorious voyages had been brought to a halt? No, not exactly devastated; he was becoming too old for those trips anyway. It was only that during those five years in which he did not once set sail, in his dreams, he sometimes found himself and his crew roaming the seas again, striking awe into the hearts of nations. In his dreams, he sometimes heard the name *The Great Ming Empire* whispered in admiration throughout remote places, and he would glow inwardly knowing that it was because of him.

As it was the Hongxi Emperor had died, and he had been given one last mission to complete. One last chance to rule the waves.

*One last voyage*, the new Xuande Emperor had said to him, his resonant voice echoing through every corner of the hall. And although Zheng He's once-bright eyes had dimmed and his hair had turned a silvery grey and his great towering frame was not nearly as strong as it used to be, he soon found himself aboard the ship once more, the wind tousling his hair, the sailors at his command, the constellations his guide to the great unknown.

And, oh, what a journey it had been—three more years of sailing, of extending the glowing name of the Empire to faraway countries and barbarian regions, in much the same way as the sun extends its rays to even the murkiest of places. His fleet of one hundred ships had taken them further and further away from the Empire, sailing to the edge of the world, trunks of golden baubles and glittering jewels glinting in the warm sunlight all the way. They had visited flurries of distant lands, city after city swirling about them like seawater—Qui Nohn, Surabaya, Hormuz, Mogadishu. And now they were returning home.

Perhaps he had known death was approaching all along, during this particular trip. He had felt it in the mellow breeze that had suddenly become cold and biting, and in the way the soft sunlight seared his skin. He had felt it in every faltering step he took, in the strain of his failing limbs, in every frantic pulse of his heart, in the voice inside him imploring him to slow down, slow down. He had never heeded the voice, had never slowed down. He had moved like lightning, day and night. Perhaps that was his mistake, he thought, a trifle ruefully.

Could he possibly leave this world behind? To slip away quietly, to abandon the sea and the ship and his friends—all that he knew? The more imminent it became, the more inconceivable it was. He could feel the footsteps of his fate approaching, closer and closer. Zheng He's bloodshot eyes searched for the sky to no avail, meeting the blank ceiling instead. What was this queer ache deep inside of him?

He felt them all beginning to fade from his memory, the countless escapades he and his crew had shared. What persisted in reverberating through the vast hall of his mind were fragments; a wisp of a salty breeze across his cheeks, a brief blinding flash of gold as a piece of jewelry caught the light, the fleeting satisfaction glinting in the Emperor's eyes as he caught sight of the sparkling trinkets given to him as tribute.

“*San Bao?*”

Hundreds and thousands of days, all hazy through a misty veil of sea spray. Perhaps that was enough, after all, for him to hold on to as he embarked on his last journey—hopefully—into *Jannah*. Into paradise, where greater adventures awaited.

“*San Bao*. We have arrived at the port of Kozhikide.” The sailor's voice rang out, clear and crisp. Through his blurred vision he saw the silhouette of a young man standing against the rosy sunset glow spilling in from the doorway. “We shall soon be home again.”

Zheng He closed his eyes. To the young sailor, perhaps, they were on a return trip. But not for him. He felt as if he was floating on water, drifting, further and further away. For the first time in his life he did not know where he was headed towards, but he knew, somehow, that all was well.

He chuckled at the ceiling, too feeble to turn his head in the sailor's direction. “Home?” he murmured. “I have miles yet to travel on my own.”

The admiral was making his last voyage on smooth waters.

# The Sea's Song

*Heep Yunn School, Tsui, Yu Hei Iris – 14*

I believe that the sea can sing.

Sitting on the shore, I put my hand out into the water. The water tugs at my fingers, as if trying to pull me into the ocean's welcoming arms. The waves ripple, breaking the smooth surface of the ocean, crested with white foam that sparkles in the setting sun. The golden rays of light dance on them, caressing my cheeks gently.

I close my eyes, and everything recedes. The sea whispers, speaks in its haunting tongue; the ripples of the waves playing out its tune on its own silken strings. The notes rise and crash at my feet, and I am home.

~

"What do you think it is saying?" my father asked me once, when I was eight.

"I don't speak Ocean," I protested.

"One day you'll understand what it's saying."

"How do you know?" I asked without opening my eyes.

My father's hand ruffled my hair. "You were named after the great Mohamed, son," he said, "and you will discover Allah's greatest gift."

I can taste the salty sea spray on my tongue as the gulls swoop around me. "Tell me again about your last voyage," I said.

"Again?"

"It's my favorite story."

I could feel him heave a laugh, though there is something deeper, a reluctance to it.

"The day I went to Mecca was a fine summer day," he said. "The stars were my only guide, but they were enough – enough to guarantee a map in the skies, veiled by the clouds, wreathed by moonlight. Such beauty!"

"What did you do with that map?"

My father's smile waned. "With sheer power of memory I committed the map of the stars to paper. It will guide any seafarer who is of my blood. It tells of the routes of conquest – and even more. It guarantees victory in battle to whoever can read it. If that map is in your hand, if you are worthy enough to decipher its wisdom – there is no war you cannot win. You have no idea – the map of the stars has power none can withstand; all men would flee before the wielder's face, for his wrath would then become terrible to behold."

"Where is it?" I asked, entranced.

"Gone," said my father. "The new emperor of the Ming dynasty tried to take away my creation. He wanted conquest – he wanted to use it to conquer the lands beyond China. I told him that a wise warrior always avoids the battle but he didn't listen. So, to keep it out of their reach – I placed it in the protection of Tianfei."

"Where?" I said.

My father smiled. "The map tells of a treasure, a secret even deeper than the road to conquest written in the stars. A secret very few have ever come to possess," he said. He paused. "I destroyed the map."

"What?"

"Yes, son – I tore it into pieces – seven pieces. In that way, only a great seafarer of my blood will be able to find it, for it is protected by the power of the oceans. Scattered all over the seas, it awaits the day be put together again."

~

TWO YEARS LATER

He is gone.

I try to smell the salty sea air that is miles away, try to feel the tremor of the ocean waters that is world away, try to see the rays of golden sunshine dancing on the waves. I am Ma He. I am the son of Ma Hajji. I am ten years old.

I am a son with no father.

Hands bound, eyes darkened, I keep reliving those last, terrible moments of my father.

I remember the clash of the Mongol and Ming armies. The shouts, the cold rings of steel in the air, the blood flowing – the rising of the red sun.

I remember glimpsing my father as he shouted aloud, his face glowing in the light of the rising sun, the fading stars wheeling above him, crowning his brow.

I remember the cold Ming blade that went into him, the blood that spilled from his stomach to the floor.

I remember my cry of anguish to the heavens.

And I know, in that instant, that the moment will always be branded into my mind. I can't see the ocean waters. But I can hear them, whispering in my mind, a lament of torturing, a grief of no ends.

~

His name is Zhu Di. And I am his slave, named anew, by the name of Zheng He.

They told me what I was, why I was brought here. I remember the cold eyes of the Hongwu Emperor as he gazed down at me with hungry eyes – eyes that had no interest in me, only in the key I hold to obtaining my father's treasure.

They told me what my father was: a traitor and a fool. He refused to serve the Ming dynasty, hid from them his creation when it could have served so many great purposes. For that he must die. And there is a reason they left me alive – because I alone have the greatest potential to uncover my father's map.

I am a slave who gained my enemy's trust, became Zhu Di's confidant through a honeyed tongue. I repeated the respectful words, letting them flow like bitter cud from my mechanical lips, while underneath my heart seethed in fury.

I am a long way from the sea. Yet the waters still lash at my heart, the salty water against the wounds left behind my father's death. I can still hear the furious waves, sending blood throbbing through my veins, roaring in my ears, filling my mind with only one word discernible.

Revenge.

~

"Well, what do you think, my friend?" says Zhu Di, gesturing proudly to the magnificent structures that line the harbor.

My eyes rove over the great ships that bob gently on the seas, and they take my breath away. The oars are golden and the timber gleaming white, the sails as pale as the argent moon. They are larger than any ship I have ever seen; nine masts, what I would judge to be about a hundred and thirty meters long.

"You have done well, my liege," I say.

"What you see before you is only the tip of the iceberg," he says. "There're also troop transports, fuchuan warships, even more. This treasure ship, of course, is the best of them all – upon this boat you will be commander." He glances at me and a manic gleam seems to come to his eyes. "You will set foot upon the lands and the deeps untrodden, discover the towering mountains, green shores and the never-ending deserts wreathed in mists and shadows. You will be my hand, stretching out from China, to bring my rule to the world."

He steps closer to me, and I flinch as that hated breath caresses my face.

"You will find your father's greatest creation. Do you consent?" he whispers.

Unbidden, into my mind comes my father's last words to me, and I am transported back in time.

*I am holding my father's limp body in my arms, and from my father's lips comes his last desire.*

*"I will avenge you," I vowed. "Tell me how."*

*"Revenge," he sighed, "is that what you want?"*

*"More than anything," I said.*

*"To take your revenge you must go..." he said.*

*"Go where?" I hear my ten-year-old voice from far away, a wandering phantom inside my soul, as the ocean waves rage inside me.*

*"The seven pieces of the map," he gasped. "The greatest treasure in history that lies in the depths of the sea."*

*He seized my hand with a force too strong for a dying man. "Find it," he whispered.*

*His grip slackened. His eyes softened. And I saw a trace of the father who told me the tale of the seas, told me that I would one day understand its strange tongue.*

*"Ma He," he whispered. "You are my greatest creation."*

"Zheng He," says Zhu Di, drawing me back to the present. "Do you consent?"

*Seven pieces of the map, scattered over the seas...*

My father's dying wish.

I look into the eyes I loathe and answer, "I do."

~

They call me Zheng He. I am admiral, conqueror, and explorer. I am the hand of the emperor, roaming far to the corners of the world no one has seen. Yet the water of the seas does not satisfy my thirst – I thirst for blood.

I stand on the prow of my ship, journeying back to China. I refuse to call it *home*; home lies only on the seas.

Within the eyes of my crew I see the awe as they behold me, a seafarer with power in my hand and wisdom upon my brow, a lord of dignity and glory, eyes bright and keen as a dagger blade. I put my hand back in the water, feeling the tides turn.

Six pieces of the map are complete.

I can feel the ragged parchment beneath my armor. The first I found in Ceylon, the second in Java when we defeated the Majapahit king. The third was guarded by the Sinhalese until our troops defeated them. The fourth I extracted from Sekandar at Sumatra before his execution, the fifth from East Africa, the sixth from Malacca.

Six voyages, six pieces.

The waves have raged on my every voyage, rearing and leaping like a wild stallion: the white foam its streaming mane; the thunderous echoes of the waves are its pounding hooves striking the seabed, beating out a nightly rhythm that never ceases; the sea is my tireless steed that carries me, caught in the frenzy of my revenge –

One more to go.

“Sir?” calls a voice.

We’ve already arrived at the harbor. Looking down, I see a messenger.

“Sir, the emperor demands that you return to Nanjing immediately,” he says.

I am seized with a sudden fear. Has he found out?

“Why?” I ask.

“Haven’t you heard, sir?” The messenger’s face is drawn with sadness. “The Yongle Emperor is dead.”

~

They call me Zheng He.

I am no longer a seafarer. I fell before the prime of my glory. Why did my father tell me to wait, to seek the secret, before I killed Zhu Di? Why had I hesitated, why had I stayed my hand? I could have delivered the killing blow.

There’s a new emperor. I’m appointed defender of Nanjing, forbidden to return to the seas. I hear the sea’s song, mournful and frustrated, hammering against a locked door, unable to break the chain –

Of course. The chain of a slave. I was one when I came to the household of the son of the man who killed my father. I thought that when I was upon the seas, I was free. How ridiculous. Here I am, after the deaths of two emperors, serving a new one, but still – no matter how much I fight – I remained as a slave.

The Hongxi Emperor has made further treasure voyages forbidden. And here I stand, looking helplessly at the ocean I cannot reach, thirsting for revenge that is now impossible, now that Zhu Di is dead. I try to summon the ocean’s song in my heart, but it has gone silent.

~

“Zheng He?”

I turn at the approach of the new emperor. “Yes, my liege?”

“I would like you to return to the seas,” says the Xuande Emperor. “I wish to resurrect what my grandfather has done.”

The old hatred instantly returns.

“This is an order, Zheng He,” he says, perhaps seeing the momentary anger flash in my face. “Do you accept?”

I think of the six pieces of the map. My father’s last words to me. *Find it*. Dare I go beyond the horizon to seek for the seventh and last piece of the legendary map, although the one I swore to take revenge on is gone?

“I do,” I say, and am instantly reminded of the same words I said to Zhu Di, what seems like a lifetime ago.

~

This will be my last voyage. I can feel it as I set sail.

The legendary map will tell me how my revenge shall be taken.

I can feel it as I discover the last piece, at last, upon the great plains of Kenya. I trekked through the endless grasslands for over three days to find it at last, wedged in the hollow of a weather-beaten tree.

Panting with exhaustion, I slide down against the tree trunk. For a moment, I suppress the overwhelming triumph that fills my heart and threatens to make it explode. The joy, the ecstasy, the pure jubilation of it all! Allah, Tianfei, they have granted it all to me. I feel the urge to laugh, to run barefoot on the plains, suddenly dizzy with giddiness of victory.

From underneath my tunic, I draw out the other six pieces of the map and arrange them, like a puzzle. My heart throbs, pounding furiously, and I wait with bated breath as I put them all together.

When the final piece is in place, silvery lines begin to snake across the yellowed parchment. They crisscross and interweave, and I recognize my father’s handwriting. Stars, silvery stars, mapped out in great detail, fanning out to every corner of the map, and in the center of the parchment characters begin to ripple and float before my eyes.

*Forgiveness is Allah’s greatest gift.*

I’m dumbfounded. Five words... five words! All my life I’ve sought the completion of this map, and all it contains is five words! Five words, with completely no meaning! I sought revenge. I thought this map would tell me what to do, how to avenge my father upon the death of the ones I meant to take revenge on.

All is truly lost.

I dive for the pieces of the map, wring them into even smaller pieces, tearing them apart with a ferociousness I have never felt in all my life. The rage, the undying thirst, I curse my father's soft-heartedness –

My father. He seems like a lifetime away, and at that moment I yearn for him, to hear his gentle voice, to hear his laughter like music in my ears.

Suddenly I am eight years old again, sitting beside the sea, listening to its song.

"One day you'll understand what it's saying," my father said.

All my life I had been misguided. Staring at a goal far upon the horizon that had only ever been a mirage. Looking at death full in the face and trying to bring it upon the one person who had trusted me in my captivity, even though it was his people who had murdered my father.

Zhu Di.

He thought me a brother to him, true in heart. All my life I have detested him for spilling my father's blood. Now I have lost all those times I could have stood shoulder to shoulder with him, free from my thirst for vengeance.

I should have forgiven him long ago.

I throw myself on the ground and weep for all that I have lost, and my tears fall like rain upon stones.

~

The seas are smooth today. My ship glides peacefully on the waters. We are sailing home. Back to China.

I lie, delirious, in bed, and I know that I am on my deathbed. As the ship bobs up and down on smooth waters, I think I hear an old lullaby. Soothing me to sleep.

The sea is singing its song.

"Sir?" comes a voice.

A sailor comes into my cabin, he looks frightened. I know what a state I must look, a dying man of sixty-two, weakened by the seven voyages of my life.

I reach beneath my tunic and draw out a small bag. I hold it out to the sailor.

"There is little chance that I will survive the journey back," I say.

"Don't say that, sir," whispers the sailor. I look at the young face, and I know it well. This boy has served me well on my voyages, been most faithful. As he comes towards me I see in his gaze the haunted look that I experienced when I was ten years old.

"Do one thing for me," I say. "when I die, I wish for my body to return to the ocean. My blood shall become the waters of the sea. The sea has been my life – and my body shall be my last tribute."

The sailor is trembling, but I continue, holding out the bag which contains the last remnants of the map.

"When I die," I say, "throw this into the sea with my body."

The sailor takes it with shaking hands.

"What is it, sir?" he whispers.

I look at the sailor, smiling.

"A great treasure," I answer, "with a magnificent tale behind it. My father forged it with knowledge that came from his time on the seas. It could serve great purposes – but it must return to the sea, where it belongs."

The song of the sea fills my ears, lonely and haunting, but to me it is no longer that eerie, mysterious tongue. I can hear it, transporting me to the world beyond, one that even the greatest emperor cannot conquer.

"One day you will understand what it's saying," my father whispers.

I can hear it clearly now, it's the only thing my age-weakened mind can comprehend.

*Forgiveness is Allah's greatest gift.*

Before my eyes I can see the faces of my father, my brother and sisters, Zhu Di, growing ever closer.

I am named after Mohamed. I am my father's greatest creation.

They call me Zheng He.

# Myth and Legend

*Holy Family Canossian College, Cheung, Carrie – 15*

It is a great honour to be chosen for this voyage, they say. It is unprecedented, revolutionary. Anyone who goes will be making history.

Captain Zheng stands at the prow of the flagship, back ramrod-straight with pride, with a fleet of ships and the wind at his back as they set off, the sweet incense they burned in front of a statue of Tian Fei for safe travels clinging faintly to his robes. The crew buzzes with excitement as they set off, the younger men with grand fantasies of honour and glory, the more experienced sailors grateful for the chance to join a voyage of such magnitude. The sea is a fickle mistress, and every day they offer up worship to gods they don't completely believe in that the sky will be unclouded and the wind will be in their sails, that pirates will not attack.

At first, fortune seems to favour them, and the sacrifices they make to the gods seem to hold. The ships go steadily on their course. past Champa, Java, Ceylon and Calicut. Trading, navigating, sailing on calm waters. There is a brief skirmish with a pirate lord, but they still make it through, weary but still alive.

Then they reach the Indian Peninsula, and their luck runs out.

-----

"Harder to starboard!" Captain Zheng roars, trying to make his voice heard over the ear-splitting shriek coming from the monstrous creature towering over the ship.

"There's a monster," the fishermen had warned him, "It's been there for as long as anyone can remember, takes anyone who is fool enough to go near. You'd best to avoid that cursed place, captain."

But he'd ignored them, and now he is staring into pitch black eyes that seem old as time itself.

She had surfaced in front of the ships after they entered the peninsula, water rolling off her in curtains as she roared in challenge. The sailors quake with fear at the sight of her, and the ships creak and groan in protest, having seen battle against pirates just weeks before.

Waves of seawater cascade from her ivory limbs as she lashes out at the ships, each arm as tall and thick as the masts, and the crew are fighting to keep her tail from coiling around the ship and crushing them into matchsticks, jabbing at her coral red scales with long metal spears. Some of them pierce too deep, fountains of blood spurting out, and spear handles stick out of the writhing mass of scales. The mermaid shrieks even louder in a tongue they do not know, but it paralyses them all the same, some of the crew freezing just long enough that the waves she stirs up wash them overboard. The air is thick with desperate cries, and the copper tang of blood mixes with the salt of seaspray.

"Tell the cannons to open fire!" the captain shouts above the din. Someone gives the signal, and the other ships pelt her with cannonfire, the bowmen peppering arrows into her flesh. She struggles as weighted nets are thrown on her tail, trying to shake them off and further opening up the cuts bleeding out all over her body. Her movements grow slower, and finally she lets out an unbearably sad cry and falls beneath the waves, the seafoam stained red and the water churning black with blood.

The ships breathe a quiet sigh of relief. They tend to their wounded, count their dead. There is grief for lost friends, and tears are shed, but they move on, operating like clockwork, assessing the damage and salvaging whatever they can from the waves.

The ship's cabin boy sees a shimmering, pearlescent chest bobbing merrily among the debris and chunks of wood. The captain gives the order to haul it on board, and despite the draining battle, the crew buzzes faintly with excitement. A mermaid's treasure is a thing of legend, and they are eager to see what riches lie in the chest.

One of the sailors pushes the great lid open, and a pair of golden eyes blink up at the men surrounding it.

-----

"Mama," she burbles. Her voice rings like bells. Her tail flicks back and forth, the same ruby red as her mother's.

"We didn't know any better," the sailor says helplessly, clutching the chest. "What do we do with it?"

"Kill it," the captain says, but there is no conviction behind his words.

Murmurs spread amongst the crowd of sailors, and the little mermaid pokes her head out and stares at Captain Zheng, curious at the arrival of a new voice.

"We – we can't! She is a child, and we just killed her –" The first mate says helplessly.

"I know," the captain's voice catches.

He has his own memories of being taken to somewhere strange and foreign, forced to adapt to a new life. He looks down at big melting eyes filled with confusion. "Mama?" the mermaid asks, her odd voice coming out muffled as she chews on her fist, drool running down her chin.

"She's not here," the captain says briskly, unflappable composure falling back into place. "Someone find a tub and fill it with seawater. See that it is brought to my quarters – someone needs to keep an eye on the creature."

And protect it, he adds silently as he stalks away. Many of the crew had lost a friend in this fight, and there was always a chance they would take it out on the little creature currently lying innocently in a tub in his cabin.

-----

On paper, this never happens.

In a dry report, the fleet's losses are attributed entirely to the previous battle with the pirate lord's crew, most of his forces taken down and losing many to a valiant battle. Better the families of the dead believe their loved ones avenged by the execution of a bloodthirsty pirate than come for revenge on a blameless mermaid child. Her mother's actions were no fault of hers, and she should not have to suffer the consequences. None of the crew protest his decision, and a locked chest is among the wagonload of possessions Zheng He brings to his residence.

-----

"Why am I here?" the mermaid asks. It is their third journey now, and the crew's second journey with her. In a mere four years, she has grown from a toddler to a teenager at a dizzying pace.

"Your mother abandoned you," the captain says after a long pause. "We found you in the waves, alone."

She picks at the salt-soaked boards of the deck, hair falling into her eyes. "Alright," she says in a small voice, and turns back to whittling a wooden spear point the way the cabin boy taught her. The captain gives a disapproving glance. She does not need to learn about weapons and violence yet, and he reminds himself to chide the cabin boy for teaching her.



She is still too young for that, he thinks.

He gives her little trinkets from the pile of treasure the emperor grants him after each voyage. He has no wife to offer them to, and like human girls her age, the mermaid has a certain fondness for pretty things. It makes the captain laugh to see her act so coquettishly, admiring the shine of golden bangles and jewelled hairpins in the sun.

She should act her age, he thinks.

Because sometimes, it is hard for him to see the little creature he and the rest of the crew helped raise. Her skin is nut-brown from the sun, not her mother's sickly pale hue from decades underwater without surfacing, and it is traced with scars the mermaid has earned from tussles with crew members. She is still human sized, nowhere as large as her mother had been, but their tails are the same deep crimson, her teeth the same sharp gleam of ivory, and in his nightmares, all the captain sees is the blood of his men in the water, their screams echoing in his ears.

He feels that she has been growing up entirely too fast for him to catch up, and soon she will no longer be the innocent little child he knew, slurping up clams and babbling nonsense in her little wooden tub.

Her eyes still shine gold though, and the captain prays that it will be an age before they grow dark with cruelty.

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When they almost reach Calicut on their fourth voyage, it is to flee.

There is a fleet of pirate ships that has been gaining on them for days. The captain had hoped that they could outrun them, but their ships are no match for the swift pirates. Their own ships, though armed, are big and slow, and while they make for a very impressive sight when they reach foreign capitals, they are no match for these pirates' speed.

"We have to keep going," Zheng He says grimly.

"Why?" the mermaid asks.

"Because if we try to stand up to them, it will be a massacre." And it will be carnage, he thinks, another day of the stink of gunpowder and the iron tang of blood, of screams and more of his crew sinking into the cold, merciless embrace of the ocean. They will win, but at what cost?

The mermaid tilts her head, eyes flashing. "Are you sure?" she asks.

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The pirates surrender after the flagship is sunk, the anchor ripped off and planks torn off the hull. The surviving crew, wild-eyed and delirious, whimper and say a great sea creature came from the depths and descended it's fury upon them.

"Demon!" they shriek. "Monster, sea witch!"

Zheng He looks at the mermaid floating alongside the ship, her expression twisted with frustration as she tries to crack open a particularly stubborn clam. He tries to put together the pirates' words with the young mermaid currently growing cross-eyed as she stares down the clam and has to hide his laughter. He frets over a particularly nasty splinter in her arm and makes her bandage it.

"Don't worry," she says with a bright grin, "it was fun. Besides, family is supposed to protect each other."

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That night, the captain joins her by the railing and watches her tail swish lazily back and forth in the water. The moonlight is dimmed by wispy clouds drifting across the sky.

“I was taken away from my family too,” he ventures softly.

The mermaid nods and continues looking out to sea. He knows that if he doesn’t wish to talk further about it, she will not pry.

But she deserves to know. The captain takes a deep breath and quietly, he tells her about being ten years old, young and foolish, thinking that he was being clever, lying to a general about the location of a Mongol prince, about being taken prisoner and made a eunuch as punishment.

He doesn’t tell her about screaming for his older brother to save him as he is pressed down on an operating table. He doesn’t tell her he didn’t understand what was happening, why it hurts so *much*, until someone tells him that he would never be able to have children. He doesn’t tell her about countless nights waking up, begging for his mother and sisters. For all her strength, she is still young to the world, and she does not need to learn of such pain

“I took you in because it reminded me a little of myself,” he admits, “you were so young, and you had no one. It was only right.” After he finishes, there is a heavy pause.

“What was she like?” the mermaid asks, her voice tinged with longing. “My mother.”

The captain stares pointedly out to sea as he tells the mermaid about the mother she never knew. He doesn’t describe the monster he sees in his nightmares, but tries to tell her what he remembers of that day with sugar coated words, pointedly avoids her mother’s fangs, her desperate fury. He refuses to meet his daughter’s eyes, even when his voice trembles a little.

“It took us almost a full day to defeat her.” He finally looks at her, his gaze filled with remorse. “I heard her cry, when she fell. She must have loved you very much to protect you so fiercely.” His voice hitches. “I had to protect my crew. I’d only heard the rumours and I never knew she was protecting you – I never thought of trying to reason with her –”

His voice breaks and he braces himself for his daughter to hate him.

“I’m sorry.”

Dawn breaks over the horizon, and the sun breaks over the horizon in streaks of liquid metal, pooling in the troughs of the waves and glittering on the seafoam, and the mermaid silently places a hand on her father’s knee as guilty sobs wrack through his body.

“It’s okay,” she murmurs. “It’s okay.”

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On their fifth voyage, the mermaid stops aging, her young face smooth and unlined, but she grows bigger and bigger, until she has to be hauled onboard the ship. The crew starts calling her their guardian, and then their patron goddess, then one day they start calling her Tian Fei in place of the wooden idol they once prayed to.

She follows them from port to port, and the captain orders her to stay out of sight. “Better you stay hidden and safe,” he says wryly, and while she is a bit put out at having to stay away from her family for so long, the crew throw down exotic treats from every place they visit. Although the flaky pastries never taste quite as delicious when soggy with seawater, she appreciates the thought.

But for all the crew’s efforts, word spreads, as it often does among sailors, and soon every port whispers.

"She is a monster," the people whisper, "a monster a shining tail for her legs, dyed red with the blood of every monster she ever slain. She is a goddess of the deepest oceans, with golden eyes that can see into your soul and the seafoam in her wake is a bloody scarlet. I heard Zheng He made a deal with her, and that she would sink any ship in his way in exchange for any loot on board. They say she eats anyone from those ships as well."

The crew all scoff at the rumours, but are grateful for the dwindling amount of pirates they face. Zheng He's fleet has gained a reputation, and on their sixth voyage, there is no one who dares oppose them. The mermaid spends her time splashing alongside dolphins, admiring the tattoos and piercings of the newer sailors and learning rude ditties from the older crew members that she tries to shock her father with by singing them at the top of her lungs, bawdy lyrics booming out across the waves.

Zheng He looks to the heavens and prays for the gods to grant him patience, a wry smile twitching at the corner of his mouth. The mermaid sees it and grins, diving back into the waves to help corral a school of fish into the crew's waiting nets.

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"I'll be dying soon," the captain says, looking over the railing at the mermaid. It is his seventh voyage, and he can feel it in his bones. He has already adopted an heir to settle his affairs, and while his physicians have advised him against this voyage, he wants to die with his daughter by his side.

"If I go before this trip is finished, guard the ship," he continues. "I know you always have, but they're lost without you there."

"Of course I will," she scoffs, rolling her eyes. "I'll always protect my family."

They share an amused look, the old man and his daughter, almost bigger than the ship and forever frozen at the age of twenty-four.

"I love you," she says quietly. I'll miss you, she can't quite bring herself to say, but her father reaches out a wrinkled hand and she takes it gently with two of her fingers.

I love you too, he thinks, the unspoken reply hanging between them as they look out across the sunset, the waves turning a molten gold.

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Some legends say the day Captain Zheng died, the goddess of the sea, Tian Fei herself mourned his passing, her cries of anguish heard echoing across the water for miles. The crews on board the ships mourned for the good captain, the good friend. They comforted his grieving daughter, who finally allowed herself to break after putting on a brave smile for her dying father day after day until one morning, he didn't wake up.

She cries great heaving sobs night after night, her musical voice warped into something unrecognizable by sadness.

"Baba," she cries, "My baba."

But she is not a child anymore, and her father is not there to comfort her with quiet lullabies.

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We have forgotten her now. She is a creature of myth and legends of ages past, and our world is no place for a mermaid.

But the fishermen still whisper her tales. We call her by many names: Tian Fei, Mazu, Tian Hou. She is benevolent, she is cruel; she is the harsh, unfeeling storm, she is the gentle wind in the sails. She whispers warnings of typhoons, calms the winds long enough for them to sail a little further out for more fish.

And sometimes, the occasional mortal whispers back.

“They tell stories about you, you know,” a young girl remarks, leaning over the railing of the dock. It is the early hours of the morning, and hardly anyone notices the girl looking over a seemingly featureless expanse of water.

The mermaid circles the dock. “Is that so?” she hums, smirking with a maw full of teeth sharper than any sword.

“You are bigger than they said you were,” the girl says hesitantly. The mermaid laughs. She does not surface, for fear that the resulting waves will crash onto the docks, so her bell-like voice comes out muffled, and the girl cannot help but laugh with her.

“But I wonder,” the girl asks suddenly, “Why were you not angry with them? You lost your mother to them. You could have destroyed them all in a second, and no one could have blamed you.”

“I suppose I could have,” the mermaid shrugs, sending ripples fanning out across the water.

“Well, why didn’t you?”

The mermaid thinks of her family, her father, all of them young and terrified, but willing to try and amend for their mistakes by taking in a little mermaid child, and smiles to herself.

“Don’t trust every story you hear,” she says, her golden eyes gleaming with mirth.

# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

*Holy Family Canossian College, Soon, Sonja – 16*

“Chang! Chang!” I jolted awake. As I roused from my heavy slumber, the familiar scent of briny sea air filled my lungs. My body was sore from resting on a bed made out of planks. I’ve been on this very pirate fleet for around five years and counting, you would think I’m used to these harsh living conditions. Except that I’m not. “Chang, get up! We’re tasked to raid the nearby fishing village once night falls, remember? You’d better get ready before we reach land, unless you want to face Chen Zuyi himself,” hollered my friend Xiang. Chen controls the seas of Southeast Asia with his notorious pirate fleets, and is one of the most feared pirates ever to exist. Shrugging nonchalantly, I fought off my sleepiness and started to ready myself for the upcoming raid. Although I’m definitely not one to hesitate when ending an enemy’s life, I doubt I can ever massacre innocent villagers and destroy families without feeling an ounce of guilt. In fact, I myself am a victim of these pirates’ relentless attacks years ago. Both my parents were murdered in cold blood and I was held hostage by pirates, forced to join them in order to survive. Escaping is never an option. Every single pirate who has betrayed Chen faced brutal consequences if caught.

Standing on the crow’s nest, I stared unwaveringly as the sun fell behind the horizon. Above me, shades of orange and pink spreaded through the sky, only broken apart by long trails of tranquil clouds. At the far west, a spectacular shade of scarlet illuminated the reflection of every wave. Instead of being fascinated by the swirls of colours surrounding me, I only felt intense fear. In my eyes, the scarlet glow reminded me of the bloodshed of the innocent. As if on cue, a flock of black crows soared through the sky, as though foreshadowing inevitable deaths.

“Chang! It’s time.” Clutching tightly to our spears, Xiang and I crept silently down the pirate vessel and headed straight for the fishing village. As the soft glow of the brightly-lit huts faded in the distance, we made way to the town hall, where the village’s gold is kept. I was planning to knock the guard out cold by dealing a blow to the back of his head when a couple of unfamiliar faces emerged from the dark. Immediately blending into the shadows, I watched intently as the well-dressed men handed the guard bags full of gold coins and rolls of silk. This fishing village is relatively poverty-stricken. Who would be giving away gold to aid them? The Chinese officials? “Who’s there?” A voice unexpectedly called out. The soft crunch of footsteps slowly made way to our hiding spot. A fire torch was shined to our faces. “Filthy pirates,” the solemnly dressed man muttered under his breath. “Call our captain, he’ll decide how to deal with these incurable, good-for-nothing thieves.” Not long after, we found ourselves facing a man dressed like a Chinese military. “The name’s Zheng He, captain of Ming treasure voyages. What do you all have to say for yourselves?” Zheng fixed me with a piercing stare and I began stuttering uncontrollably how I was forced to become a pirate, along with the other young people. Once I was finished, Zheng let out an exasperated sigh and motioned us to follow. He led us to his massive vessel, where I saw the most glamorous ship before my eyes. Its’ hull was delicately carved with magnificent dragons and its’ sails painted wine red, unlike the bloodstained ones I usually encounter. I was still staring in awe when Zheng’s voice snapped me back to reality. “I’m taking you lot under my wing. You two are part of my treasure fleet now. You’ll be in charge of cleaning the decks. This is your chance to prove you’re better than that barbarian you call captain. Don’t blow it.” Xiang eyed our supposedly “new captain” suspiciously. Once we were out of earshot, he whispered “What if he’s planning to turn us in? We’d probably be executed!” “Do you prefer making a living out of killing? At least we’ll be put out of our misery. Besides, Zheng’s tone seemed sincere,” I replied reassuringly.

We were kept busy over the course of the next few weeks. Every day, we got up at dawn and scrubbed the decks. For the rest of the day, we helped preparing meals and mended sails. If we were lucky, we could even assist in the navigations. Life was definitely hectic, but I had never been happier. However, happiness never lasts.

I have always feared that the pirate fleet led by Chen Zuyi would be after us, no matter how many days, months, or even years has passed. After all, we left the entire crew behind and disappeared without a trace. Eventually, my worst nightmare came true. It was a midsummer’s day, and the air was heavy with the dampness of a coming storm. Nearly everyone were hiding out from the rain in the cabin, except Xiang, who was on duty to check out for incoming obstacles or enemies. All of the sudden, she rushed into the cabin and stammered in a panicked tone. “P...Pirates!! It’s Chen. I could recognize that ghastly flag from a mile away!” Before her sentence was even finished, Zheng started barking out orders. Soon, all 68 ships under his control had their cannons ready and were in formation. Through the mist, we could barely make out the enormous pirate fleet, all hanging black flags which were fluttering in the wind. Gradually advancing towards us. Although I strived to keep calm while retrieving barrels of gunpowder from the cargo hold, I could still feel my heart thumping against my chest. The trepidation of fighting against my former crewmates was too great. I had gone into battles with them too many times to underestimate them. And what if Xiang and I get

captured? It was my fault that we were caught by Zheng in the first place. I couldn't bear the thought of Xiang being killed by Chen because of my carelessness. These feelings of horror overwhelm me as I subconsciously curl my fingers into a fist and dig my nails into my palm. My thoughts were abruptly interrupted by the first booms of a cannon. I scurried to the main deck just in time to witness the shells fly well behind our ship, erupting into white columns of water kilometres away. In spite of the fact that they missed their target, it unmistakably marked the start of a gruelling battle.

The fighting lasted for two days and two nights. For forty eight hours straight, the firing of gunshots, fearless battle cries and screams of agony echoed in the wind. The rain splattered against our raw faces like solid matter, but the battle went on. The water seeped on deck was pale pink, a result of waves of seawater and the blood of my comrades. I hid inside an empty barrel, fearing I'd be seen. Towards the dawn, as I was close to drifting off due to extreme fatigue, I was awoken by a wave of cheering. I poked my head out of the barrel, and was instantly met by a terrorizing sight. Headless corpses were scattered across ships and limbs can be seen floating on the surface. Despite the horrendous scene before me, something caught my eye. It was Zheng, lifting up the head of Chen Zuyi. He was covered with bruises and wounds, but he managed to speak in a steady tone. "Chen Zuyi is beheaded by my very own cutlass. More than 5000 pirates have been killed. The rest have surrendered. The seas of Southeast Asia will be peaceful once more." Thousands of survivors erupted into cheers, as we celebrate the end of Chen's petrifying era.

The battle didn't merely signify the end of Chen's pirate fleet. It also marked the end of my past. Living in the shadows of fear and having countless sleepless nights, wondering if I would be recaptured. The day after Chen's death, the sun came out once more, casting slanted beams of sunlight through the dispersing clouds. Every new day comes with new hope. "Land! It's an island which is unmarked on our world map!" As everyone rushed to the side of the boat to get a closer look, I lingered back and smiled to myself. After all, when one door closes, another opens.

# Beyond the Mist

*Holy Family Canossian College, Yew, Elizabeth – 15*

“Dad, what’s this?” young Emlyn asked, holding up an old leather covered book she found in the basement. The young girl stared at her dad curiously, she had never seen a book like that before.

The spine of the book was barely hanging onto the pages themselves. The pages were yellow but there weren’t any creases, as if the owner handled it with extreme care. This book was nothing like her own books. A faint musky smell of the ocean lingered around it.

“Is this a storybook?” Emlyn asked impatiently. Her dad chuckled, “Something like that, my child. Do you want to listen to it?” The little girl cheered as she squeezed herself into her dad’s armchair, getting ready to listen to the stories written in that old, leather covered book.

‘January 14<sup>th</sup>. It’s been 4 weeks since the Yongle Emperor threatened to tear us down. We’re nearly out of food and water. The crew is getting weaker and weaker by the second. I –’

“Commander Zhang! The Yongle Emperor –”

Silencing the rest of his sentence, I rushed toward the ajar door while hastily draping a damp coat across my shoulders to shield myself from the harsh weather.

The walk to the deck was dreadful. Glancing at the pained emotions visible on the faces of the crew lining up beside the edge of the ship, my shoulders hunched since that was never a good sign.

Standing in the center of the deck, I suddenly found my boots extremely interesting.

“Commander ZhangJun of The Ming Elite, since you and The Ming Elite crew are guilty for not being able to fulfill the Emperor’s task of discovering the treasure, you are all charged with treason.” The officer announced, voice void of emotion.

My face shot up, furious eyes burning holes through the fragile piece of parchment. My heart dropped immediately. No, no no! All these people have wives and children to go back to, they cannot die!

Sharp wails and booming complaints pierced the freezing winter night.

“No! You can’t do this! Take me only but do not lay a finger on these innocent people!” my voice trembled with fear and anger.

I stared at the officer with all the courage I could muster at the moment and clenched my fist, waiting for my ultimate doom.

The officer chuckled darkly when an executor strided around me for a few seconds before slashing my back with the tip of his sword, the pain made me plummet down onto the wooden floor.

There were faint gasps when the executor lifted the sword, tiny droplets of fresh blood dripped silently onto the wet wood beside me.

My heart raced and my life flashed before my eyes.

How did I end up here? Only a few months ago, we were all happily celebrating the defeat of some stray, vicious pirates.

Halfway across the Indian Ocean, The Ming Elite encountered another group of pirates and before I could react, the other ship’s captain jumped onto The Ming Elite with a sword in his hand once he realized The Ming Elite carried cargoes of gold and silk.

“How ‘bout this? We take most of your gold and silk and we’ll let you go.” I let out a soft chuckle, “In your dreams, pirate!” Before drawing out my sword and pointing it straight at the pirate’s chest.

As soon as the sound of metal swords colliding pierced through the air, ruthless pirates dashed onto the ship, sailors scrambled onto the deck with weapons to defend themselves.

As more clashing of metal filled the air, the fight became even more deadly. Pirates were aimlessly stabbing the sailors. Whenever they successfully knocked out a sailor, they would cackle as if they had already won the fight. Sailors, on the other hand, were much more attentive to their surroundings as they were mostly skilled sword fighters. One sailor jumped onto a rope before swinging himself onto several pirates, knocking them overboard all at once.

In the middle of the ship, I was challenging the captain to yet another duel. So far, I have blocked most of the captain’s hits. Except for the one hit on my left shoulder, which was gushing blood at the moment. However, my attention did not waver.

My sole focus was on the motion of the blade. Clank! I blocked another one of the pirate’s hits. He was getting restless and started slashing his blade over and over against my frame, cutting open a few wounds.

Suddenly, I lost my balance and fell down, sword sliding out of my hand and out of sight.

I tried to roll to the side to avoid the hits of the enemy’s blade but my shoulder was pressed down with one of the pirate’s boot, immobilizing me.

The pirate cackled menacingly and lifted his sword as he prepared to end my life.

“Wait!”

Staring up at the sailors I’ve grown so fond of with sorrowful, curious eyes, I realized all of them had drawn their swords and were aiming at both the officer and the executor.

“G— give us 1 more week. A— and if we haven’t found the treasures the Yongle Emperor requested, we’ll all come to you without a fight.” One sailor proposed.

After a long and menacing pause, the executor retreated his sword under the officer’s command.

“1 week.” He repeated abruptly before travelling away.

I rose up with grateful tears in my eyes, ignoring the screeching pain and the blood slowly staining my loose shirt, and started bowing to all my crew, mumbling thankful words under my breath.

Several sailors rushed over towards me when suddenly, my world started spinning violently and I fell face first onto the pile of drying blood, the moldy planks knocking me unconscious.

We drifted west aimlessly for four days with barely enough supplies for the crew.

Hunching behind the helm, I was so determined to find the rumored mystical island to repay my crew that I had completely lost track of sleeping and eating.

“Commander Zhang! You have to rest.” One of my sailors begged.

I glared at him as if he had suddenly grown an extra head before turning back towards the direction the ship was sailing.

My eyes were red and twitching with all the sleepless nights trying to figure out where the blasted island lies.

“I must find the island. I must find the island...” I began murmuring to myself

All of a sudden, The Ming Elite travelled into a thick cloud of mist that appeared out of nowhere. We became alarmed since we couldn’t even see past our noses.



The Ming Elite glided blindly for some more time before the mist gradually cleared up.

Before The Ming Elite, an island surrounded by crystal clear water appeared. There were clouds hanging everywhere. They hung so low, the mountain peak seemed to be higher up in the sky than them. The clouds were like giant, shimmering pink and blue marshmallows, floating elegantly over the whole island.

As The Ming Elite drew closer, we began departing the vessel and step foot onto the mysterious island. Weapons in our hands, we stayed alert to their surroundings, not knowing if there were any natives occupying the land.

After a brief search along the edge of the forest, several sailors found out only tropical wildlife lived there. The trees and plants grew exotic fruits we had never seen before.

I have never seen water so clear or a sky so fresh and blue as I strolled along the seaside.

Looking around the island, I noticed something.

I realized I have been staring at the treasure we were searching for the entire time.

Unlimited natural resources were found here.

If the Yongle Emperor claimed that island as his own, he would become extremely rich.

But what would happen to the island?

Would the resources really be endless? Would the ocean and sky remain so clear if people started inhabiting island? Would the wildlife be safe from excessive hunting?

I realized if I report my findings to the emperor, this once breathtaking island would turn into another one of China's waste-filled islands.

But think of all the glory we would receive once we travel back to China! We would go down in history as warriors who served the Ming Dynasty well. And most importantly, we would not face any treason once we get back to China.

With saving the natural resources for the future generations to come in mind, my crew and I made the bold decision to protect that island by agreeing not to disclose the location of the island to the Yongle Emperor.

"What happened next?" Emlyn asked. Her dad shrugged slightly, "No one knows, but all we know is that he risked his entire life protecting something he knew would be important to future generations."

Turning to the last page of the book, a picture slipped out. It was a portrait of ZhangJun. He looked strikingly similar to Emlyn.

"Why does he look like me, dad?" Emlyn's eyes shone with curiosity.

"My child, ZhangJun was our ancestor. This," Her dad held up the book, "Was his journal, it has been passed down as a family heirloom for centuries. I want you to learn from him. Be brave and selfless. After all, that's why I named you Emlyn."

# The Inner Voyage

*International College Hong Kong, Ko, Marcus – 16*

“Smoking *this* again?!” The next punch connected with my jaw, enough force to send me soaring meters into a railing on the deck. The crew mockingly laughed at the events that transpired. With adrenaline numbing the injury, I slowly looked up from my uncomfortable position from the floor, to remind myself of my status and how pathetic I am.

The captain ordered, but also to show off his dominance to satisfy his ego. “Kid! I dare you to try that again! You should be grateful we kept *you* on this ship for this long! Since you’re so useless, you can be our stress reliever instead!” The sailors disperse, entertained by the show, some spat on me as contribution.

I rolled on my back to face upwards on the wooden floorboard of the ship’s deck. Appreciating the clear sky sprinkled with a few wandering clouds, acting as small blankets that covers the rays of the sun. I extended my right hand towards it subconsciously, as if reaching for a distant dream obstructed by many obstacles that I could not get pass, it infuriates me. Then again, I ain’t anything special. I am just a feeble and pitiful man bullied by his peers, chasing after some fantastical dream that I regret ever chasing.

I brought myself up, using my skeletal limbs as support. Only a very thin layer of skin separated the bone from the air around, barely any muscle left to thicken the layer. Which is the result from a lack of a full meal in the last week on the voyage, if you can even call half a bowl of rice a “meal”. Too weak to stand, I stumbled and fell back onto the railing. My sensitivity to pain increases every day, and the small fall, which would not even make a child react, already makes me tear up in excruciating pain.

“Hey, you alright?” Ah, the same voice every time. “Again? Damn it, those damn brutes need to learn we are all part of the same crew, am I right?” He picked me up and carried me off like a disabled old man. We were both silent as he lead me to the destination which I always arrive at. I can already feel his usual ulterior motive lingering in his face. “We are around two days away to Nanjing, so...” and with those words, the crutches that held me crumbled, as I fell through the cargo hold trap door on the deck. “... stay put like a good pet, wouldn’t you?” The trap door shuts as I curse him to damnation.

As I made impact with the floor below, a beast from the stockpile of cages felt my presence and roared deeply in response, a signal of intimidation. The creature was a gift from Mogadishu from what I heard, given by one of the many wealthy merchants scattered across the city. Its aggression gave me no fear, in fact I felt a relatability with the creature. Even a creature which speech and thoughts I can not comprehend, I felt the same desire I have within it, the desire to escape.

Unlike me however, it was tenacious, unable to accept the situation it found itself in. I no longer retaliate, finding it futile. My desire has been driven towards the deepest recesses of my consciousness. I reluctantly limped away from the beast, couldn't bare seeing myself in it any longer. Its yellow fur soon blending and fading into the creeping abyss as I headed towards the front of the cargo hold, to what I seek.

Within one of the countless boxes that littered the hold, only one I seek. A wooden crate containing a black substance I do not know the name of. A pack of matches and a small contraption contained within it. The contraption is a long hollow tube, and a small protrusion on the tube allows the substance to be inserted in, which I proceeded to do so. At the end of the tube, I placed a lit match in front. I place the tube in my mouth and inhaled, with a short pause to feel the smoke bouncing off my cheeks, I gave a great exhale followed by a trail of smoke that could reach the heavens.

The all too familiar euphoric sensation gradually overwhelmed me. I closed my eyes to allow the sensation to settle in faster, to fully escape the harsh reality all around me in every sense possible. All my mangled thoughts became singular, no longer confused or disorganised. All my physicals senses became null, everything focused on the colourful experience. The physical pain I suffered beforehand dissipated, along with my fears. I no longer fear my crewmates, the captain, no longer fear pain. Actually, I became indifferent towards fear itself, it was as if only a singular emotion exist in my subconscious, happiness.

When I allowed my senses to return, there I was again. The gigantic treasure ship, similar yet different to the one me and the crew were on. Decrepit and rotting, with its hull barely holding, surrounded by an unnaturally dark sea. As if the starless night sky was below in the water, an all-encompassing abyss that could swallow me in a blink of an eye. Yet, the ship illuminates my surroundings, like the moon in the sky. An untraceable, comforting sound emanating

from the ship, silencing the sea's roaring waves. On the deck, laid a field of grass, which felt indisputably more comfortable than the sturdy, rugged wooden floor of the ship's deck. Feathery and soft, I could lie on it forever if I wanted. Strange, I remembered this ship having seen better days the first time I was on board.

"Do you really have that much time wasting away in this wretched place?"

The voice... too familiar... Sitting straight up confirms my assumption of his identity. There he was sitting in front of me. His voice contained in a putrid exterior you could call a body. With my thoughts, I answered.

You again, you keep coming back and for what?

"Pathetic, I can't even pity you anymore... sitting in a cargo hold of some ship, rotting away like a corpse. Intaking some herbs... how much more pathetic can you get?"

You are right on one thing. I am pathetic. But I accept that I am pathetic, just leave me be. I can accept it if I can live in this paradise. You are not even obligated to pity me.

"*Live in this paradise...?* You ain't even living anymore. You're just a dead man walking. You call this *paradise*? This is just some mental space you conjured up, your brain tricking your senses into perceiving this space physically."

Shut it with your explanations, just get out of here and let me rest. In here, no one can touch or bother me.

"*A temporary measure, once you get back out there, you will be insulted and berated, assaulted and thrown around like a little toy.*"

I came on board the voyage to travel the harsh seas, discover new destinations, meet unique people and exotic wildlives, not to acquaint myself with a bunch of muscle-heads and some egotistical, arrogant brute who directs them all.

“Keep telling yourself that. Ever since you got on, you haven’t ever left the ship. Everytime we arrive on port, you were thrown into the hold. Once we left, then you could exit. Is that what you desire, to be a slave on board the voyage that you so willingly enter?”

What can I do? If I ever speak up, I will get beaten down again. It has always been like this, my family, my ‘friends’, everyone I know always try to obstruct me from anything. My dreams, my goals, desires....

Before I could finish my answer, the world became a blurred, and soon following that blur, faded into obscurity. *Reality* returned with its horrid and putridness overwhelming my vulnerable senses.

No.. stop, I’ve got to get out of here.

I stumbled towards the box, empty of any herbs. No, it can’t end like this. I analyze the piles of other boxes and found my target. Within the mountain of containers, its small label barely visible from a small opening within the mountain, the only indication I need. In a swift motion, I claimed the box and its contents, but not without toppling a stack of them, each of them tumbling downwards resonated so clearly, that the entire ship could hear it. No matter, I got what I wanted. With the same procedure and sensation stated previously, I re-entered the space where no one else could.

“Ah you returned, as I dreaded.”

For the love of the heavens, leave forever!

“Do you know why I am still here? It’s because part of you rejects the *you* that you’ve become. I’m your last thread of hope to bring you back from the never-ending abyss.”

I have told you, the world is against me. Everyone thinks I am just an annoyance, and my lifelong dream have been crushed eternally. There is nothing left for me, other than this space. Your efforts are futile, it is far too late for me to go back.

“You need to stop pitying yourself and playing victim. Look, you keep running away from your problems, they will eventually get worse. You ran away for too long, all this happened because you never took the initiative. You’re pathetic because you foregone the chance to be strong, and chose to remain and consider *yourself pathetic*. You kept clinging to some childhood fantasy, never looking at the bigger picture. The people and events that occur around you. You’re still an immature brat, the world isn’t made for you!”

I have no words to retort. He was right, everyone called me pathetic and I took that to heart and accepted it. I distanced myself from every person, they form assumptions of me as a scrawny, childish kid. Since I considered myself pathetic, everyone else agreed with what I wanted them to perceive, resulting in all the misfortunes I experienced. What kept me going was the dream to become part of the Ming Voyage my father was a part of, but that was never enough to begin with. The crew despised me, since the reason I am a part of this is cause of some childish dream. Everyone else probably joined due to more realistic, more dire circumstances. Impoverished families, lack of education and more. I was too stubborn and naive, and the crew despised that.

For the first time since coming here, I answered him not with thought, but with speech. But my voice felt so alien, I could not perceive nor comprehend what I said. But, what I could sense was a faint smile from him, as if having a melancholic understanding with my answer.

“So, you finally realised? Take the initiative, have humility, and maybe you would finally be understood. This is goodbye now... old friend.”

He turned his back on me. I unconsciously extended my hand as my last ditch effort to call him back but with a blink, he left no traces for me to scour. The ship I so dearly adored as “paradise” finally sailed its last journey. The ship’s hull crumbled, the foundations collapsing, and in mere seconds I was barely kept onboard by a few wooden struts, until those crumbled away. Then, I suddenly fell into the abyssal sea as the last remains of the ship vanished into it. As I landed into the waters, something was off. The impact gave me a shock of insurmountable pain, the sensation of the water, the immeasurable salty taste on my tongue, and how my mouth, eyes and ears felt clogged by pressure. They all felt too... real.

# The Extraordinary Adventure

*International School of Nanshan Shenzhen, Liu, Yisi Nicole – 16*

Part I – Storm “Abandon ship! The storm is killing us! Go to the other ship of the fleet!” Zheng said.

Sailors stood in the edge of the deck with one hand holding rigging and were ready to swing to the other ship. They turned around.

“Captain, come! There is nothing we can do! We should go! The ship is sinking! Go!” The sailors shouted.

“No” was the answer from Captain Zheng.

“But, captain ....” The other sailors said.

“There is one more thing left me to do. Find First Mate Yang, and he will be your new Captain! Now, you guys go!” Captain shouted and cut the bottom of rigging so that the sailors can reach the other ship as this abandoned ship tilted sideways.

“Captain! Don’t!” The sailors cried.

The abandoned ship was swallowed up by the ocean soon after the sailors reach the other ship. They looked at the direction where the ship disappeared and wish Captain can in a boat head toward them. But there was nothing. The ocean back to normal, and dark clouds left.

“Where is Captain!” First Mate Yang shouted loud and walked toward these sailors.

“Captain... Captain... Captain is dead! !” one sailor cried.

“What! No! That cannot be true! Then who will be the captain?” First Mate Yang said.

“You are our captain of Ming Treasure Fleet, Captain Yang. You must take it since it is Captain’ last word” One sailor answered.

“Ok, then I take it.” First Mate Yang said.

Under every crew’s gaze, Captain Yang walked proudly up to Quarterdeck and then he cleared his throat.

“As you may have heard that Captain Zheng is dead-----

“What? What? What?” people whispered.

“Silence!” Captain Yang ordered, “I will be your new captain and guide your way to home. However, I am the captain which was directly appointed by former captain, and so there are a few rules required all of you to follow. First, do not mention the old Captain Zheng because the dead are gone. Second, do not suggest me to find him because it wastes food and water supplies. Third, be obedience because you guys are not as knowledgeable as I am. That is all, and thanks

for your patient.” He said and arrogantly stood here to wait for a round of applause. He suddenly realizes that he forget to say something and he spook again.

“In addition, for all these rules, if you follow them perfectly, you will be safe and if you are not.... Sorry, I can hardly guarantee your lives since the natural mother is too merciless.” He added.

“Seriously? First Mate Yang? You are definitely out of mind. Looking for Captain Zheng should not be in the highest priority? He is dead for us! One young voyager said.

“Oh, come on, Zheng is the bottom of the ocean now! Mat— No Captain Yang is right here, and he is so brave and wise. We should certainly obey his order!” A one-eyed sailor augured.

Captain Yang walked downstairs slowly and went toward that young voyager. The young voyager stepped one afterward, but it is too late because Captain yang had already thrust his sword into his body right in the heart place. Captain Yang withdraw the sword, the blood gushed out from the young voyagers. Then he failed down.

“Pity, pity!” cried Captain yang and walked up to the quarterdeck , “My dear one-eyed sailor, please throw this little voyager into the sea. He so wanted to be with Zheng, then I gave you some help! Mercy!”

He turned around, and said: “ Any question besides that?”

“I guess that silence is your answer! Ok! Have a nice day to all of you. Right! The one-eyed sailor is now the first mate of the Fleet as the reward for his loyalty.

Part II – An Island Was Captain Zheng really dead? The answer was no. Then where he was? The reply is hard to tell.

After he let the sailors go, the water flooded reached the deck and so the ship had half in the water. In the last minute, he drove the ship away so that the whirlpool caused by this sinking ship wouldn’t drug the other ship to the bottom of the ocean. Right after that he quickly grabbed a block wood and then sunk into the ocean. A few minutes later when Treasure Fleet had already been very away, he was rose to the surface by the strong buoyancy of that block wood. Then he float on the ocean. Luckily, the ocean current took him to a small island.

When Captain Zheng woke up, he was in a hut and a little boy was playing with a parrot. “Aye, aye, aye.” The parrot said.

“You are awake! Captain Zheng!” he screamed and then he ran out the hut, “Captain Zheng is awake! Captain Zheng is awake! Guys!”

“Wait! Hey?!” Captain Zheng said. “Aye, Avast!” The parrot said.

Not a while, an old man with a peg leg came in and the little boy followed beside. In the boy’s hand, there is a grass – made a plate with food and bottle.



“Have some food first, Captain Zheng.” The old man said I must tell you that you have already one step in the hell when we first found you! Your face was just as white as a coconut juice! Unbelievable!”

Captain Zheng took the food as the boy gave to him. He was confused.

“I really appreciate for saving me, healing me and offering food. But I get to ask... who are you, where I am and how did you know my name?” Captain Zheng said with confusion.

“Ha – Ha – Ha!” laughed by the old man, “Oh, you don’t remember us, don’t you? Not a surprise at all, it is completely in my expectation. After all, we are just a bunch of villains live on an island!”

“By your meaning -----

“Aye! We used to be the pirates! Still miss the old day, ha!” The old man cried, “But the bloody storm in Java destroyed our ship, and only a few of us survive. We float in the ocean for several days, and we all thought that we would have died if we didn’t meet you and your Treasure Fleet! The moment when we met you and your ships, we believed that you were going to put us in prison for all the wickedness we did. But you did not! You gave us food, a boat, and some tools, and we are thankful for that. The natural mother didn’t have mercy on us, whereas you did!”

“I see... I remember that!” Captain Zheng said.

“Aye! We are hoping someday, the ocean current will bring you here so that we can return your favor. All of them are dead except for me and finally, you are here.” The old man cried, “Oh! Why you are not on your ships? Want to have a trip?”

“It is a long story.” Captain Zheng said.

“Tell me, we have plenty of time! I may help you.” The old man said.

“We met the terrible storm too, and one ship that I was on got into the whirlpool.” Captain Zheng said, “I endeavored to get the ship away from, but it just went closer and more importantly the other ships of the fleet were also dragged by the whirlpool. I had no choice but to let the other sailors go and drove the ship into the whirlpool so that the others can escape, Then you should know the rest of the story.”

“What about the Treasure Fleet? It cannot set sail without you!” The old said.

“No, first mate Yang will take my place and he is good a captain as well, I believe.”

“Ha – ha, I doubt it!” the old man said, “He is a skillful sailor just like you, but he is not a good captain! His evilness, wickedness and rudeness are like a pirate! Aye, a bloody pirate! His ambition of being captain is written on his face, and how can you be clever enough to let him be the captain?”

“No, you are wrong because his ambition and ability are the reason why I chose him to replace my position”

“What a fool!” the old man cried, “You can be considered as an experienced sailor, but you don’t know this small fact!

Ridiculous! Sailing in the ocean, what is the most important thing ?

“A good ship, I suppose?”

“Oh! Of course, no! It is about building a friendship! For god sake!” cried the old man, “Coldhearted ocean, but warm-hearted human. Be friends, and don’t wend! Only this can survive, only this the ocean is alive!”

“You would never know how much a pirate learn!” Captain Zheng said, “I need to catch up them before it is too late! If first mate Yang is the person that you describe, I would better set sail now! I am going to make a raft, can I borrow a block of wood?”

“Ha – ha – ha, no! As you need a ship! My boy!” the old man said.

Part III – The Captain The story backs to the Ming Treasure Fleet

“Captain Yang, we are soon arriving at Kuri, and from the sailor reported that it is worth to pull over and pay a visit!

“ First mate one-eyed sailor said.

“What a good word you use to describe the plunder! Very impressive.” Captain Yang said, “Now, setting topsails, conquering the land and preparing for robbing!”

“Yes! Captain Yang” was the answer.

With this wind, the Fleet moved more quickly and they are very close to Kuri.

“Make ready the guns!” Captain Yang ordered, “Count to three and fire!”

Not in a minute, Kuri was on fire and people ran to the port from all places. They are screaming, crying and wondering what is going on?

“Shoot these people, please, gentlemen.” Captain Yang said.

“But....they are civil-----”

“Shoot! Or I shoot you!” Captain Yang shouted.

The people who reached the port got killed and fell into the water. The people who nearly arrived at the port got killed too, and they lied on the port. The people who were going to run to the port stopped and the fire caught them. Their blood color the ocean into the red.

“Ok, finally, let’s start the Treasure voyage.” Captain Yang said, “Drop anchor and land!”

While the sailors that follow Captain Yang landed the Krui, there were a few of them who refuse to go robbery staying in the ships of Fleet. At the same time, another ship with Pirate Flag was near to the main ship of the Fleet.

“Did Captain Zheng stand in a pirate ship? One sailor of the main ship asked. “I believe so.” The other one answered.

“Captain Zheng!” The former sailor shouted. “Give a rope! Let me go on board, sailors!” Captain Zheng answered.

The sailors threw the rope over as the pirate ship got closer, and in the pirate ship, Captain Zheng was saying “bye” to the old man and his crew.

“I guess it is time to say goodbye.” The old man said in the pirate ship. “Yes, but we will see you again.” Captain Zheng replied. Captain Zheng hugged the old man, caught the rope and swung over to the main ship. “Captain!” the sailors said together. “Now, everything needs to be back on track.” Captain Zheng said.

# Compass of the Soul – The Diaries of Lv Shuntao

*International School of Nanshan Shenzhen, Qiu, Xuefei Sophia – 15*

## Preface

Upon visiting my grandmother who is now old and frail, whilst putting her affairs in order, I searched an old barn of her property. It was there where I made the most remarkable discovery, an old dusty book which turned out to be a diary and the true accounts of a sailor and his journey to India. It was written in traditional Chinese from the early 1400s. I tried to slowly translate this story and put effort in keeping the original feel of the language used at the time. However, I needed to put some parts in modern English for a better understanding.

## First entry — Spring, Early April 1408 “At the Docks”

At the Qingdao port, the vessel awaited me. My mind, full of adventure on the high seas I felt wary of the hard graft ahead. But I must, my sick mother relies upon my purse, should I return in one piece. We prepared for the best part of a week, ropes, chains, masts, spars, braces, sheets, and vangs as I am a rigging man. Yesterday the rumors were aplenty, saying a few mates were sick though I have seen nothing. I may one day curse seeing the post inviting crewman to sail to India. We had to clear the rats onboard as they were more in numbers than us. I awoke yesterday morn to see green eyes upon me at the end of my bunk. This tubs hull was not only musty but putrid from layers of sweat. We have not set sail and it seem like this accommodation was not up to the standard expressed in the post by a long chalk. My two fellow bunk mates were also down as they have always been landlubbers. Their first experience onboard has left them homesick, although we won't set sail until tomorrow. Although I am younger in years, they constantly hound me for information to make their passage easier. I have somehow grown fond of them both. I support them as much as I dare as if they were seen slacking by the first mate the punishment would not be a pleasant one.

## Second entry — Spring, Mid April, 1408 “Setting Sail”

My daily tasks are so monotonous and caused me frequent blisters which hurt like the devil himself. The creaking bones and aching back made me so uncomfortable I would have done anything to be on land. The physical appearance of most men was that of weight loss. Heavy eyes, a daily routine of sweat and exhaustion, putting ten years on a man in just a week. The few rats which were not evacuated when we left port, seemed to be the only ones gaining weight. But at least I am better off than most. As I climbed the rigging, my views were unobscured and spectacular. The birdlife was of great interest to me. As we passed islands with white sandy beaches, coconut palms and an array of birdlife. I am tempted to jump overboard, swim there, and retire.

The rumors have it that this ship is full of treasures that are mainly gold, and we are on an expedition to give gifts in return for support during conflicts. They called it the ‘Ming Treasure Voyages’, and our captain Captain Zheng is a very famous explorer. Others say we are to return with not yet seen before treasures from India. I did not care which was true except to say I hope the pirate rumors were invalid.

The food onboard begins to tell on my tired body, everything smells rancid and has an overbearing amount of salt for preservation. My grumbling stomach, as the food is so meagre, made me sometimes wonder if I would return as a skeleton. The rice is undercooked, and everything

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seemed to be in some form of a soup of which the liquid part was cold and exceptionally salty. How I hanker for some of my moms home cooked food. For many keeping food down has become an occupational hazard as the rough seas of—late are enough to give anyone indigestion and the feeling of nausea. Changing conditions from baking hot days to freezing nights are also playing havoc with my body. It is like having sunburn on the long days, and frostbites during the equally long nights. Getting used to doing our private business over the side of the ship was embarrassing but at least not as bad as the stench from the unwashed garments and body odors which I have never smelt the like of before.

From my perspective, I am relatively unaffected by the poor conditions we were faced with on board. I believe I am tolerant to most sicknesses and pursue my daily tasks with energy that I wouldn't make a good patient, unlike my bunkmates who visit the sick room every few days. I guess truth be told I am more of a realist than a dreamer. I forge ahead hoping to better my prospects. One day my life will be changed.

Today was not a pleasant one, we lost a valuable crew member who fell from the topsail as the captain tried to navigate the rough seas. He was straight overboard, a rather large man who would make a tasty dinner for the sharks. Our efforts to save him were in vain as Captain Zheng seemed not to care for the life of one able seaman. At one point, I really thought mutiny was inevitable. Although it seemed to be averted but my feeling was that the crew could turn any day as the atmosphere was tense. Apart from anything else, seeing Captain Zheng and his trusted officers living the high life whilst we suffer below deck was too much for any man to bear.

Third Entry — Summer, Mid June, 1408

“A storm within the ship”

My diary entries are getting scarce, this is mainly due to the monotony of life on board this ship. Apart from hitting some rough weather, I have one important aspect of this trip to tell which will never leave my soul. With the cargo being so valuable, at least if rumors are to be believed, two days ago my life changed and changed somewhat for the better. I had overheard a dozen or more rebellious crewmen plotting to steal the weapons stored above, taking over the ship and plundering the gold. Upon hearing this plot, I deliberated for some time as to whether to inform the captain and his officers or follow the crews. Pride and annoyance came about inside me before thinking and logic took over. I decided for the former, formulating the plan to join the upper deck and officers. Not so much by betraying my crew—mates, but more for my desire to better myself and to fulfill my future ambitions. My education would not go to waste.

Upon receiving my news, the captain sent officers around the armory finding two men hiding behind the wooden barrels. They were immediately arrested and spat out the whole plot fairly rapidly. All the ringleaders were named and rounded up. Undoubtedly with the proof of malice and intent, Captain Zheng would make an example of these ringleaders which would ensure no more rebellions would take place for the rest of this trip. After being soaked in dead men's blood, blindfolded and forced to walk the plank, a flurry of sharks appeared from nowhere to enjoy their dinner.

I was summoned to the captain's quarters. The captain was fearful for my safety should the crew members find out I had spilled the beans. I was immediately made a junior officer and had the protection of the other officers and the Captain himself. The Captain was surprised that I was a fully literate young man, so an opportunity to be in charge of navigation was given to me. It is a task and challenge I was looking forward to. My personal effects were immediately moved to the upper deck, a comfort I would enjoy for the rest of my life as my new cabin was only shared by one other officer who smelt quite sweet comparatively to my last bunkmates.

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My new occupation afforded me time for my beloved bird life and geography, however, the snarls from my old crewmates could be heard a distance away like a pack of hungry dogs waiting to kill.

My navigational skills were testing me. As we passed a small group of islands, I had informed the captain we were making good time and would arrive in India in the next two months. However, from the look on the Captain's face and the shape and size of the islands we have passed should have alerted me to the fact of my foolishness. I was swiftly informed by the captain that we were still 7 months from the destination. My face has not glowed so red. I understand that I still have a lot to learn, and thankfully, I have not sunk us yet.

Fourth Entry—Early Winter, Late October 1408

“Near Misses”

This has been the longest time since I have written a word, as I have just returned from 3 months in the sick bay. As I was checking our course and the relative position of the stars, I was set upon by at least 3 or 4 burly crew members. Their identities, although unknown, was revealed by their language and odours. I even have my suspicions that one of them was my former bunk mate. However, I dare not to believe it after all the guidance I have given him. It would be a bitter pill to swallow. I was soon found left alone laying on the ground. I was carried away by one of the officers and sent to the sick bay immediately. When the captain inquired about my attackers after I awoke, I decided to stay mute about my former bunk mate. I still had some bond with him even if only slight now.

During the sick days, I continued to study navigational techniques. Although others treated me well, looking after me during their leisure time, only Xiao He and I became close friends. He worked in the sick bay, therefore we spent many humorous nights chatting and sharing ambitions and past times. I was told that Xiao He was highly-educated but forced to go on this journey by his father for him to endure hardship, take responsibility, and become a real man. Xiao He and I shared a love of nature, so we discussed mountain walks, the wildlife, and the beauty of summer days near running water.

Being shy, Xiao He suffered with his emotions somewhat, a man with little confidence who would always ask or look towards others for help. Panicked easily as though that of an abused child, and a face of a beaten dog. Confidence shot to pieces, with sick expressions his mind like noodles of no logical path. I want to console him, nurture him, and yet slap him into life. Yet with me he was open to some extent. Plain and simple, forgetting his shyness to the point of him laughing and joking about very trivial matters.

Fifth Entry — Winter, Mid November, 1408 “New Friends”

The early mornings and late nights test us from the freezing conditions at sea. I regret not bringing enough provisions to keep me warm, but Xiao He had helped me with an extra blanket. With the wind rising we at least were making better time to our destination, it was now commonly thought we would arrive by January. As we crossed the choppy water, a vessel which was a mere pinprick appeared in the distance. As we came closer, it was evident three people were aboard. Upon more closer inspection one appeared to be a female, I thought at that time this spells trouble. After hauling them aboard they explained their plight, being former members of a pirate gang they had dared to escape and look for new found freedom. There were some who showed distrust of them, yet the Captain believed and offered them shelter. After consulting with all three of our new

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crew, my mind was turned from believing all pirates were no good to giving them some credibility at least. As the navigational officer, they enlightened me with some really useful information about the whereabouts of several pirate ships. We changed course after informing the captain, hopefully giving us safe passage for the rest of our voyage.

The ex-pirate Yu Xi had been spending more time with me recently. She amuses me with her tales which although seemed exaggerated, I am sure the cores are true. She is neither beautiful or ugly, but has a child-like appearance for one who is so experienced in life. I am drawn to her purely on a platonic basis, although I must admit time passes easily in her company.

Sixth Entry — Winter, January 1st, 1409

“Anticipating Arrival”

As the new year just turned six days travel to our destination, the talk onboard was how we will be greeted, when could we accomplish our goals, and would India become a friend rather than an enemy. I now knew the Captain’s plan was to offer gold in return for support in times of war. My own thinking was more about what we would find on this strange land. Although I had some knowledge, I was sure the full picture would be different. There was lots to prepare, wooden crates to be lifted and organized, the white flag raised as a sign of peace, and a full clean down of the ship and everything in its place as Captain Zheng was a stickler for neatness and order.

The captain organized for twelve of us to go ashore, firstly for fear of antagonizing the natives, and also to leave the ship crewed well enough to protect its cargo. I was keen to go ashore, and knowing that my friends would also accompany me, this adventure would be special. For the next six days, I am sure I will have sleepless nights.

Seventh Entry—Winter, January 7th, 1409 “The first leg”

I heard rumors and stories about this land we were going to. They called it “the Muslim Kingdom”, ruled by the Sultan and with Persian being the spoken language. We were met by local chiefs who undoubtedly knew our arrival, as we came in peace flying the white flag. The captain explained that he brought gifts to seek for alliances and wishing to meet the Sultan. A meeting was quickly arranged. So far so good. We were transported for seventeen hours before arriving to the Sultan’s palace. We felt vulnerable being far away from our ship, but at least we had no valuable cargo with us.

Introductions were made, the Captain set out his desire to make allegiances. Disaster struck us. The atmosphere turned very frosty. The Sultan demanded three times the amount which had been offered, and the captain appeared not to take it well. We couldn't give into this demand without jeopardizing future plans. He contemplated deeply before asking our opinions. Xiao He, being afraid to open his mouth, stuttered and fumbled to speak. The captain was looking irritated and about to explode. To take the attention away from Xiao He, I quickly asked the captain if I may be given the chance to communicate with the Sultan as I formulated a plan to resolve this situation. It was granted. I knew I would need my best negotiation skills. My plan was to offer the original amount of gold today, and pay four times the amount should we call upon their services in times of conflict. This would allow us to complete our journey and better negotiate with other countries. Out of the corner of my eye, I could see the captain looking distinctively nervous, although I knew I had his support or he would have stopped me a long time ago. Tension was mounting, both sides locked in a staring contest like two cockerels about to engage in battle. The Sultan asked for two hours to consider this matter with his council. We would undoubtedly sweat for a little longer.

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After a long three hours, we got the result we were looking for. I felt elation and wanted to climb the mast and bellow out "Winner!". But I composed myself and accepted a few congratulatory pats on the back. Yu Xi also confided in me, she has praised my quick thinking and negotiation skills making me even fonder of her. I am surprised that she even bothered to mention it. To sweeten the deal, we were given fresh food, crates of fruit, fresh drinking water, and enough supplies to support us until our next destination. The gold was left, the captain and the Sultan embraced, completing a satisfactory first leg of our journey. As we set sail from India on course for Arabia, the atmosphere for the first time since leaving port seemed somewhat jovial yet my heart was rather heavy. Yu Xi decided to adopt India as her new home, her seafaring days were over. I am saddened by this, as her company enriched me and her tales were enchanting. Now I think I said goodbye in such a cold manner, it is something I may one day regret.

## Epilogue

The diary eventually ends here. The story of this man remained unknown, and the reasons why the diary didn't continue is still a mystery today. However, it is proven by history that this ship of sailors led by Zheng He became one of the greatest explorers of the world who successfully made allegiances with India, Africa, Arabia, and a variety of other countries. An official name "Ming Treasure Voyages" was given to this special journey. Eventually, they won themselves a place in history, and were considered as rulers of the sea historically.



# The Time Traveller

*Island School, Bindal, Preksha – 14*

A flash of bright light cut off a perfect night's sleep as the scenery around me changed and I tore through the fabrics of time and space. I'm Daniel Wu, and I'm a time traveller.

I can't control it, it happens whenever it wants to. Multiple times I have been mid-conversation or in the middle of a meal when pure white bursts out of me and cuts me off, sending me to the French Revolution, where I had to help take down the King, or the Stone Age, in which I needed to defeat the beast that destroyed villagers' crops and took their children. It takes a while to figure out why I'm there, but once I figure out my task and fulfil it, I'm able to come home.

I got up and I felt my bed swaying as I listened to the sound of waves crashing nearby. I spied a window, so I rolled out of the bed and walked up to it, trying to keep my balance. All I saw was a sea for miles and miles. I looked down at the floor that was still swaying too much beneath my feet and struggled to keep down my dinner. I don't like the sea. The sun was setting right at that moment, and although I felt awfully sick, I had to marvel in the beauty of the sky. It was absolutely beautiful, like in a dream. Although I hated it, the ocean's waves completed the serene picture. The only thing ruining the moment was my stomach lurching again that sent me running to find a bathroom.

Once I felt better, I straightened myself up and started to take a look at my surroundings. I guessed I was in the past because there wasn't any technology lying around. The room was large, but a bunk bed took up most of the space so there wasn't much room left for anything else. A big cupboard, although in the corner, was the most eye-catching thing because it was the only thing that had any colour besides brown and white. I guessed that whoever owned this room wasn't the most interesting person in the world.

I decided to look through the cupboard. Everything inside was far too big for me, but I guessed that as long as I wore clothes that were the norm, maybe people wouldn't notice me much.

I pulled on my clothes the way I thought was correct and looked at my reflection in the window. I was wearing a shapeless and flowy robe that covered most of my throat and then tied at the back. It was airy and comfortable, and I wouldn't have minded taking it home. I began to walk away before I came back to empty my pockets. I stared at the small white cube in my hand a long time before shoving it into a pocket along with a very sharp knife and started walking up the stairs to explore the ship I was in.

As I turned a corner in an attempt to find a staircase to the deck, a hand reached out and grabbed me from my wrist and pulled me into a room. It was the kitchen, which was well-lit and smelled like wine and poultry. A boy looked up at me and handed me a sponge and a bucket, and then pointed at the floor. I sighed and got down on my knees and began to scrub before a pair of thick boots entered my vision. I look up in surprise.

"Is this your first time on board?" "Yeah,

how did you know?"

"Your robe is on backward." He deadpanned. "What?

No, it's not. The tie goes in the back, right?"

He gestured around the kitchen. "Do you see anyone wearing their robes the same way as you?" Oh.

“Well, I can’t change it now, can I? I’m already here.”

He grinned at me and crouched down. I noticed that he had his own sponge and bucket with him. “I’m Brendan. Who’re you?”

“My name’s Daniel.”

As we cleaned the kitchen floor, we remained mostly in silence, sometimes requesting to pass a sponge or more water to each other.

“So, this ship’s pretty big, huh?” I cringed.

“Yeah, it’s supposed to be used for trading. When’d you get on here? I thought they told everyone as soon as they got on.”

“Oh, I got on last time we docked. No one came to tell me anything.”

Brendan looked at me strangely. “You don’t know very much about this ship.”

I started sweating. Would he ask me who I am? Would he call the captain on me? Would he beat me up? “Ah. Well, you see, I didn’t exactly pay to be here.” *It’s the truth.*

“That’s not allowed. You could get executed in front of everyone.” Then Brendan leaned closer. “But don’t worry. I won’t tell anyone.”

After we were finally finished making the floor squeaky clean Brendan led me to the deck. The sea salt stung my nose and the crashing of the waves made me feel queasy again. “Did I ever tell you I don’t like the sea?” He ignored me, instead, he led me to a table where a map was held down by four stones. He pushed a finger onto what I was guessing was where we had come from.

“This is where we first came from. Great Ming.” He pointed to part of China. “That’s

China.” I corrected.

“What’s China? This is Great Ming. What are you talking about?” He didn’t seem to question a lot of things I said or did that were wrong.

He then moved his finger through the empty areas between land. “We stopped in different areas of China to pick up more people and then went to Malacca.” He pointed at where Malaysia would be. “We passed through the Straits of Malacca. Now we are on our way to Ceylon.” He pointed near India before continuing.

“You know, most people got off the ship at Malacca. You know why there are so few people on this ship now?” I looked around. Although the second in command had said there were around a hundred people, Brendan was right. It looked like there was almost no one around.

“Seas around Ceylon are pretty rough. The docks there used to be constantly full of ships. But then strange things started happening. First, small boats disappeared. It was understandable. Many people blamed it on bad luck and rough water. Then, slowly, more and more boats disappeared. Then bigger boats, until entire ships were disappearing with people on board. No one wanted to stop there.”

“Oh, my goodness. Why are we going there?” *I bet that’s why I’m here.*

“There was a rumour going around that there was an evil snake that lurked under the surface, waiting for its next victim. Multiple swore they had seen it, a thick rope of dark green swaying in the water.” Then he shrugged. “But obviously, that was just a rumour. A ship like this can’t get taken down simply by some big waves.”

“Heh. Yeah. Of course not.”

“Anyways, tell me about you. Why are you here? Why do you know nothing about anything?” He asked bluntly.

“Well, I, um, got on the ship here.” I pointed to the Philippines.

“We didn’t dock in the Philippines.” He sighed. “Fine. If you don’t want to tell me, don’t.” He began to walk away before I called him back.

“Okay. If you really want to know, I need to tell you in a quiet place. Somewhere no one will listen.” He smiled brightly at me before grabbing me by the wrist and dragging me back downstairs.

Once we were safely in what I guessed was a room for weapons because it was full of gunpowder and what I guessed were cannons, we both sat down. “Okay. I’m just going to say this quickly and get this over with. You’re not going to believe this. I’m taking a huge risk telling you this.” I took a deep breath. “I’m a time traveller. I’m only going to get back home after I fulfil my task. I think I know what it is, but I’m not completely sure yet.”

I watched in worry as Brendan remained silent, preferring to react through his eyebrows which were currently sky-high. “I think your eyebrows are trying to escape your head, Brendan.” I joked. He tried to look up at his eyebrows before relaxing them.

“You’re... a time traveller?”

“Uh-huh.”

Brendan stared at me a little longer and I stood there, waiting for him to do something. “I don’t understand.”

“Okay, I’m a person who can go through whatever time I want. I can go into the future or I can go into the past, but every time I do, there’s a task I have to fulfil. I sometimes have to save a group of people or defeat a monster. Things like that.”

Finally, after what felt like centuries, he spoke. “I think – I think I believe you.” He spoke slowly like he was still trying to come to terms with the fact that there was someone who could tell him all about the future in front of him.

Understandable.

“Oh, good.” I was relieved. “Most people would send me to an asylum.”

“So... a time traveller, huh? What time are you from? How’d you become one?” “I’m from the 21st century. It’s really different to what it is now.”

“Wow. That far off? Seven hundred years in the future!” He perked up in excitement. “Tell me everything about the future and I’ll tell you everything about now. You won’t stick out as much.” He got on his knees and started begging. “Please?” He dragged out his ‘please’ to a full five-second stretch.

“Well, it’s not very interesting.” “Says the one who lives in the future.”

I decided that I could trust Brendan because even if I couldn’t trust him it wouldn’t matter because I would be gone soon. So, we paused for me to change my clothes so that they were worn correctly, and we began walking around. After mostly me talking with Brendan cutting in from time to time to ask questions or point something out, I couldn’t think of anything else to talk about and we’d been around the entire ship already.

The ship was built like junk boats back in the future, with loads of masts and ropes all around, but to my surprise, most of the rooms contained weaponry rather than people, although there were still far more people on the ship than I’d expect ships from old times to be able to carry.

Finally, we flopped down on an empty barrel each and watched each other. A faint voice called out something that sounded like, “Land! There’s land!” and we both watched as crowds of people came up to the deck to look.

Instead of looking with them, Brendan and I remained sitting down, we were so tired. “You know, the future sounds really interesting.”

I began to respond. “Well—”

But I never got to answer, because at that moment the sky darkened, the sea got choppy, and people started screaming. From the depths of the ocean rose a fearsome monster, so huge it made the ship look like a toy, the people tiny figurines.

The monster was a humongous snake made of the same stuff as nightmares. Water poured off its probably bulletproof scales the same shade as a dull seafoam. Massive fangs dripping with deadly venom hid in its mouth, its angry white eyes glaring at everyone. Its body swung from side to side, its flat head moving around the ship like it was picking its first victim. Beneath the water I saw a huge body sitting on the ocean bed, chains forcing the body to stay down. I saw bones and skulls afloat in the water nearby, telling me what this snake-man does to people.

The snake-man screamed in anger seeing all of us encroaching upon his territory. The horrendous creature’s voice echoed around the ship and slammed into my ears at full speed, forcing me to the floor and cover my ears trying to stop the volume. I curled into a foetal position in pain. My head was light and about to explode when finally, finally, sweet relief came. His voice stopped and for a second all I felt was sweet bliss as the pain subsided.

Then the snake—man screamed again, but this time even louder when I thought it wasn't possible. All I could see was black spots. My ears rang, trying to block out as much sound as possible but it couldn't block the snake man's screaming. The snake—man was so loud it made my entire body hurt. I looked up and saw Brendan shaking on the floor in a puddle of tears.

I looked at the monster and I wondered, is it really worth it? And then I looked at Brendan on the floor. I thought about my life back home.

I looked back at Brendan. I sighed.

With much effort, I stood up on legs that felt like jelly. I slowly removed my hands from my ears, only to immediately get hit with the sound again.

I fell backwards and immediately covered my ears again.

The snake's white eyes turned and narrowed at me. It flicked its tongue out like it knew that it could just eat me right now. This was a bad idea. But I had to do it.

I turned to a person dressed differently to everyone else, whom I guessed was the captain. "Bring out the cannons!" Instantly, a massive group of people followed my instructions.

I felt my pockets for the small white cube and flipped it open. I stared at the green light and the switch next to it. I had gotten this as a thank you for saving the future human race. They gave it to me for future adventures. The people told me that it was a cube that could let out enough poison to destroy entire forests. I kept it with me at all times.

I looked up at the monster. I probably could put this on its back, and it would have no effect. No, I had to somehow get this inside the monster and then have enough time to get it back before I returned to my time. The snake threw back its huge head, preparing to unleash another feral scream and I noticed a scar on its throat. Someone must have fought this monster before us. If I could cut the scar open, I could put the cube inside.

I stared at the dark and choppy water. This is happening. My greatest fear. I was about to jump into deep water. I pulled out my knife, held my breath, and I jumped.

While I was underwater, I faintly heard the sound of a loud gun going off. Must be the cannons. I swam through the dark and murky water, trying to see where the snake was.

I finally found the snake, only to see it moving scarily fast in a way that made me feel uneasy. It must be fighting above the surface, the cannons bouncing off its scales like they were absolutely harmless. How could I get it to come down here so I could cut it open? I felt my lungs bursting, trying to get some air so I swam upwards as fast as I could and took a huge gulp of air and the snake's terrifying white eyes turned towards me.

*I guess that's how I do it.*

I immediately swam back down under water. I could cut it open now. The snake lashed wildly, trying to hit me underwater, but the water was too dark for it to see clearly either. The monster had the advantage

here, and we both knew it. It was stronger, bigger, and faster than me, and all I had on my side right now was a knife and a bomb I couldn't use yet.

But somehow, out of pure luck, I found a change in texture from slimy and smooth to dry and hard.

I lifted up my knife and stabbed as hard as I could until I felt like my wrist was about to break, but I kept going. My lungs were about to burst, I couldn't see anything, and the snake was screaming so loud I thought my ears were bleeding, but I didn't care.

After what felt like ages, I felt the cut split open. I fumbled with the switch on the cube and threw it in, leaving the knife and swimming away instead. I swam up to the surface as fast as I could and got as far away as I could to watch the cube kill the monster.

The snake gave one last feral scream before slamming into the water and turning over. The knife I had stuck in its throat glinted in the sunset and blinded those who stood in the wrong position. The snake shook violently and split open. We all watched as blood and guts all pure black seeped out and poured out into the ocean below. The snake's body slowly vaporized and all that was left in the water was my knife and the small white cube, which looked completely untouched. I swam towards the now black water cautiously, in case the snake was still alive.

I managed to make it to the cube and knife and people started cheering so loud it was almost deafening. I grabbed the cube and knife and turned to see everyone jumping around with huge smiles on their faces. I caught Brendan's eye, who quickly realised that I needed to go.

He smiled at me sadly and waved goodbye. I waved back at him, just in time for the white light to flash.

I opened my eyes, and I was in my apartment. I was still wearing the robe I stole, and I was still dripping wet.

I smiled to myself. I had saved another group of people, and I'd survived a giant sea mon

# Pirates

*Kellett School, Hammond, Molly – 15*

Shimmering silk lay around the deck in opulent mounds awash with color, in between them a smattering of crates were also arranged. They were bountiful chests, brimming with luxurious goods: gold, pearls, silver, and jewelry, that we were to give as gifts to the coastal civilisations that we encountered as we sailed around Asia. Our vessel was veteran; brine had warped the boards of the hull and the wood's coloring had transitioned to the foul green known by all seamen. Vibrant red sails fluttered above our main deck in the energetic breeze that swooped up from the seafront, bringing with it that salty essence which characterizes Zhuhai. Excited, it rushed and rustled between the masts and over the pools of silk. Hanging onto the main boom, I gazed back out towards our village and managed to catch a glimpse of the roof of my home. It would be a long time before I could lay eyes on it again.

Scattered across the hold and boardwalk below were a swarm of men, working together at a seemingly inhuman pace, shifting crates and other paraphernalia. Seven days had already passed loading the ship and now it was finally almost complete. Having already achieved my quota, I indulged myself in a lounge atop the bowsprit. Gazing down at emerald sea, immersing myself in its gentle motion, I drifted in and out of consciousness before surrendering to the blissful embrace of sleep. In my dreams I was already exploring the distance lands our adventure would take us. The whimsical figments of my imagination displayed delicious melodies and exotic tastes. Flying sea spray caressing my cheeks, as I stood against the foremast, basking in the friendly sun. I would be like a panther, strong and triumphant – no longer restricted by poverty. This was the adventure of a lifetime.

I was abruptly pulled from my tender slumber by the jarring yells and exclamations from the boardwalk. Still befuddled by the luscious cloud that is sleep but sensing something was wrong, not knowing quite what, I slithered down the bow spirit back towards the main deck. Cautiously, I wiggled my feet about before touching the flaky board beneath me and finally reverting back to a standing position. Curiously wondering what could have happened, I dashed to the edge of our boat before peering down at the chaos unfolding below. I was shocked to lay my eyes upon a group of imperial guards confronting the crew down below. Before I could fully comprehend the situation that was unfolding in front of me, I was jostled by the rush of the crew on board and the cacophony of shouting abusing my eardrums. The creaking of the boat loudly reverberated over the commotion of the sailors below and I tried to get my bearings. Suddenly, our boat lurched forward and the rush of the water beneath us roared mightily. The yells from the boardwalk escalated, becoming increasingly desperate and demanding. Briefly, I scanned the faces of my fellow crew members, it seemed only a few were as puzzled as I was. The rest, however, were working outstandingly hard, moving the remaining items from the deck to the hold and participating in the intricate dance of organising the ropes of our sails. Now we were picking up speed, our pursuers were falling behind, their yells blending into the background. The quieter they became, the more I realized that my voyage had just begun.

Shooting passionate rays of red and orange, the sun hung considerably lower in the sky than before I had gone to sleep. The sapphire blue sky at the peripheries of the horizon was creeping closer, slowly plunging us into a world of night. No more than an hour later were the lanterns set alight. Their flickering orange flames were like miniature suns, dappling our boat with a delicate light. By this point, the tension had subsided and the crew was finally beginning to settle down, some sitting on the deck, some heading to the hold, and others climbing up to the Captain's quarters. I myself settled into a small nook, stretching out then nestling in further as I watched the lanterns perform. Where their light could not extend, eerie shadows were drawn out over the aged wood. Their dance mirrored that of the lanterns, ebbing and flowing like the ocean below. In this image, I drifted off for the second time on my first adventure. My dreams were as merry as ever, brimming with tales of great explorers and my own voyage. However, dark clouds permeated these jubilant frames, my conscience was plagued by a question. Why were those men confronting us? Doggedly, I ran the question through my mind over and over and over again, there shouldn't have been a problem, our journey was commissioned by the empire! I tossed and turned the rest of the night, unable to rest easy.

The following morning I groggily awoke to the sun quietly peering over the horizon, shifting the sky's pigment to a tender blue, before heading down below the deck to grab some food. New to my taste buds, the dried meat and pickled vegetables tasted somewhat familiar but rather acidic – a world away from my mother's steamed crab and lotus roots. Yet, it was food and a small sacrifice for my chance on this exciting quest. I shovelled the food down as quickly as I could, to try and avoid tasting the bitterness for much longer, earning some sidelong glances from a few of the other crew members. After wiping my hands on my already discolored trousers I returned to the deck for want of

fresh air.

Atop the deck once again, I spotted a boy leaning against the side of the boat who looked about my age. His hair was stashed up in a top knot, more disheveled than everyone else, and he seemed to be entranced by the waves in the distance. Tentatively, I walked up and stood next to him. "I'm Hui" I stated, rather awkwardly. "Disung" he quietly replied, his gaze remaining fixed on the horizon. "Where are you from?" "Xi'an" he responded, still softly "I travelled for four months to get to Zhuhai with my uncle." "Woah. I'm just from Zhuhai. My whole family lives there." Later that day, Disung and I had to begin reorganising the goods in the hold, our hasty exit from the port meant that valuables were strewn across the hold. It was laborious work, the huge crates were especially heavy, after a few hours of sorting and shifting we were drenched in sweat and finally able to head back up for some fresh air.

Our relaxing break was interrupted by shouts from the Captain, "Everyone over here! Now!" Disung and I quickly sat up and hurried over to where the rest of the crew were gathering. The Captain was a plump little man, who was shorter than most of the crew but weigh more than half of us combined. His stature should not deceive you, however, his bellow was resonating, like the roar of a lion and could be heard for miles. He had summoned us for what seemed to be a sort of meeting. Although I was never the most attentive of people, I did try to stay focused on what he was saying. "We should be landing in Quang Ngai within the next day or so, this means that you lot are going to have to get the hold together and prepare for anything else you need before we get there. As we arrive I am going to need everyone on deck so listen out" he instructed, "That's it, get back to work!" Well, there goes our short break, I thought.

I spent the rest of the day completing menial tasks around the boat. First, I had to scrub the deck with another boy called Daquan, it was back-breaking work and the fierce sunlight scorched my neck, transforming it into a painful red streak. Afterwards, I was sent to move several crates, which I had only hours before neatly organised with Disung. The quartermaster forced us to continue our arduous work past sundown but I could at least sense the buzz of excitement from the crew, all impatient for seeing the shore tomorrow.

I was the last person to be released from work so when by the time I made it up to the deck it seemed as though the rest of the crew had already fallen into a deep sleep. It was the middle of the night, yet there was a murmur of voices from the Captain's quarters and the lanterns in that area were still alight. Curious, I quietly rose to my feet and snuck across the length of the deck, leading myself to a position just below the Captain's quarters, beside the stairs that led up to them. I tilted my head to the side trying to hear what they were saying, wondering what could have led to a mysterious midnight meeting. At first, I could only catch snippets of the conversation "...send them down", "...give us time", "...the treasure", but as I continued to listen in, my ears adjusted to their tone and I was able to hear much, much more. "Make sure you're armed", "Don't let the crew take down the goods", "Send the others down first". Something was definitely amiss, this was not the conversation of some kind-hearted men hoping to spread prosperity throughout the region. This was the conversation of a pirate.

Not sure what to do, I shook Disung awake. I couldn't say that we were the closest of friends but he was my best bet. Short of breath, I quickly told him everything that I had heard and seen. Surprisingly, he believed me. "I knew something was up" he whispered, "No one is that good a person." Although depressing, that seemed to summarise what I was thinking as well. Now in agreement that our ship was actually a pirate ship, we clambered down to the hold where no inquisitive ears could hear us.

"What should we do?" I asked, desperately hoping for an answer. "I really don't know" Disung replied. When I set off just a few days ago, this was not the battle that I imagined I would be fighting. Together we sat there for several hours, struggling to find a solution to our predicament. The creaking of

the boards above us didn't help our focus and the constant fear of being discovered remained. Every particularly loud thump or voice was like a tendril of ice, causing us both to freeze and taking several minutes to thaw. This staccato pace of discussion was painfully slow and awfully ineffective.

Then I had an idea.

The rest of the night flew by in a blur of excitement and activity. Disung and I worked together like a well-oiled machine, rearranging storage and collecting supplies. Tirelessly, we continued plotting all night long, determined in our pursuit. We knew that we could not let these men get away with this. While we were sorting out the logistics of



our plan, I imagined my mother's face as I returned back to Zhuhai with the treasure we had protected, the emperor would shower us with gifts and pleasantries, we would be the most famous sailors in the empire. At daybreak, we finally collapsed in our sleeping quarters, on edge for the day ahead.

After what seemed to me like five minutes, Daquan shook us both awake, "Guys, get up" he instructed, "We should be arriving in Quang Ngai in fifteen minutes!" Apprehensive, Disung and I sprung to our feet – it was almost time. Unaware of our plan, Daquan shot us confused, suspicious glances. I glanced at Disung on my right, using my eyes to request to include Daquan. He nodded then we whisked Daquan to the sequestered back of the boat. In hushed voices we explained our plan, hoping that he would believe us and that he wouldn't alert the Captain or his ring. After we had finished explaining, he remained silent for a few moments, seeming to contemplate what he had just heard. Disung and I stood motionless, awaiting a response, internally praying that he would join us. Finally, Daquan said "Okay."

The thud of our ship signified our landing at Quang Ngai. Our little trio joined with the rest of the crew on the main deck, setting our eyes on the crystal clear sea lapping at the golden sand below. In the distance, some small huts were visible. About half of us headed down to the beach, each person carrying a heavy crate. Glancing behind me, I saw that the Captain and his men were remaining on the ship. Perfect. The group of us that were sent off the ship trudged slowly up the beach, as soon as we were out of earshot from the Captain, I told everyone what was going on. "All of us are being used by the Captain to support his criminal exploits, we aren't giving gifts, the Captain is keeping the treasure for himself and his ring of men" I explained, "Don't look backwards now or he will get suspicious. You can check your crates, they're packed with sand." The others seemed to exchange wary glances, but after subtly checking their goods, there seemed to be quiet solidarity among us. "Now for my plan" I instructed, "As soon as we make it over this hill we can dump our crates. Then we can take back our ship."

Our band gathered together just over the hilltop, murmurs cascading around the circle. "I know you are all armed, and there are more of us than there are of them. We need to force them off the boat as quickly as we can, then we can deliver our goods to the village and continue our journey." Disung stated, his voice was captivating and every single man was paying their utmost attention. After some more explanations and a solidified plan, we began an apprehensive wait before our return to the boat, in order to convince the Captain that we had already visited the community of Quang Ngai.

I was the first up the boardwalk, "We delivered our crates to the village, Captain, in return they offered us some local delicacies including *cua ớt* which we thoroughly enjoyed." I felt the white hot pain in my cheek before I smashed down to the deck. "You didn't think to bring some for us" the Captain bellowed down to me. Although my vision was blurry, I could sense the tension of our crew growing behind me. "I'm sorry Captain, there just wasn't –" a kick to my stomach silenced my faux plea. That was it. Fiercely, I unsheathed my knife and took a swing at the Captain's leg, triggering the charge of our men behind us. Suddenly, commotion enveloped me, men were fighting across the whole deck whilst Disung and Daquan helped me to my feet. "Nice job" they joked as we went to join the fight.

My knife collided with the Captain's, our gleaming blades almost throwing sparks into the air. His swings were strong but he didn't possess my agility. With trained steps, I evaded his attacks, slowly forcing him to the edge of the boat. Every step backwards that he took, the more flustered he got and I could sense a fear slowly building up inside of him. Eventually, I forced him to the very edge of the boat, his face purple with frustration. Using my small blade, I twisted his knife out of his hand and put mine to his throat. At that

moment, I could feel the gazes of almost all the men on the board shift to the Captain and I. The clamour of the fight died down and suddenly everyone was frozen, it was surreal.

What happened next was a blur of events. I led the Captain down to the hold where some small cells were already erected, soon after his allies surrendered and they found themselves in the same place. Afterwards, the remaining crew split up, a few stayed on board to stand guard over our new prisoners and prepare to set sail again. The rest of us located the real treasure and headed off over to the village.

The walk only lasted ten minutes, even with our small party carrying over the crates. Although we were excited to meet the villagers, we were still highly agitated – Đại Việt had only recently been re-established after Ming occupation – some grudges were most likely held. Despite our worries, we were pleasantly surprised to find that these

villagers were very welcoming and kind. They accepted our gifts of gold and silk, whilst showering us with local delicacies and gifting us with meticulously crafted ceramics. Our exchange seemed to have peaked interest from villagers because they gathered around us, some small children staring in awe at the mounds of silk and gold in front of them. It was a heartwarming moment that remains ever clear in my memory.

However, we soon decided to leave. This was a struggling village full of hardworking people, they had to return to the markets or the forests or the river to provide for each other. So, our hearts still beating fast with excitement, we headed back to the ship, more ready than ever to continue on our journey. As the boat began to pull away from the shore I was proud to see the ecstatic faces of my crew full of determination to complete the voyage ahead and to do some good in the world. The coast slowly faded away as our crew settled in, our ship now three crates of precious metals and ten rolls of silk lighter. Confidently, I stood at the foremast, looking out into the distance, feeling the flying sea spray caressing my cheeks, basking in the friendly sun.

I am the Captain here and I *will* complete my adventure.

# Confucius at Sea

*Kellett School, Samtani, Divina – 16*

## 1. Part one: 仁 Jen – kindness, the fundamental of humanity

Every great story that takes place upon the high seas usually involves swashbuckling adventure and utter skulduggery, perhaps even a treasure chest or two. However, this story may prove, peculiar, as the story of Admiral Zheng He and his fleet is but a simple exploration into the concept of humanity.

Our whirlwind of a story sets out at the turn of the century, 1403.

The crew have eagerly boarded the docks, with farewells shining on their eyes, and heartfelt admirations from loved ones blazing on their cheeks. Or perhaps, it could be the unabating touch of the blessed sun on their skin. Nonetheless, the ropes are untied, the sails shiver in anticipation, and the anchor is hauled, a final companion welcomed aboard. Pensive, the newly instated, though greatly admired Captain Zheng He stands at the bridge of the ship as his fingers drum against the smoothened oak of the steering wheel. Quieter and quieter the demanding and deafening voices behind him crash against each other, waves writhing upon waves, crest crashing upon crest.

A few hours later, the captain opened his eyes to reveal an expanse of ethereal light glide across the mountains and hills of the ocean. Tendrils of incandescent lustre illuminated the contours of his face just as the first scream shattered the serene silence.

Deteriorating bodies bloat under the watchful eye of the rest of the crew; rubbed raw rashes growl angrily in the dark; and seafoam white froth bubbles at the gums. Disease had come for them, and on the first night too.

A couple hundred sailors crowded the lower deck of the ship and excessively poured out the doors, morbidly peering in to see the afflicted. Musty wood and sea salt wafted through the ship, until it reached the area of sickness where the air turned putrid.

Whispering turned to bickering as the future was contemplated by the surviving crew. Shrewd eyes and a flippant tongued man asked his colleagues two questions amidst the chaos as they awaited their captain.

“我们为什么不在它们感染我们之前把它们扔到船上？我们为什么要冒着痛苦，因为上帝注定了他们/Why don't we just throw them over board before they infect us? Why should we risk suffering because God has doomed them?”

A perturbed quiet fell upon the men as they endured the moans of the sick. Minutes trudgingly wore on while the thought of merciful murder settled in the stomachs of the men.

Leather boot clacked against flimsy wood boards, beckoning the Captain's imminent arrival.

Cleaving in two, the humble crew parted anxiously; bated breaths begging for guidance. Once Captain Zheng He examined the scene, his calm expression cracked by the lines that appeared on his forehead.

Determinedly rolling up his silk woven sleeves, his fingers nimbly pull apart the coarse fabric of the shipmates shirt, revealing swollen joints and coalescing bruises, forming a map of anguish.

He had already heard his crew's thoughts on the matter upon arrival.

Zheng He's fingers carefully clutched the sick man's hand as he formed a decision and murmured a quick prayer to Tianfei, the Chinese goddess of the sea.

Heaving the man's body into his arms, Captain Zheng He turns to his comrades.

“他们需要营养丰富的食物。把它们放在我的宿舍等待订单/They need nutrient rich food. Lay them in my quarters and await orders.”

Stumbling at the words, the young cook asked, “但先生，船长的宿舍是禁区/But sir, the captain's quarters are off limits. ”

As he regarded the rest of the uncertain crew, the captain replied, “为什么我的宿舍不受限制？与男人的生活相比，昂贵的布料无济于事。让这些病人在最黑暗的时候体验到舒适/Why should my quarters be off limit? Expensive cloth is nothing compared to a man's life. Let these sick men experience comfort during their darkest time. ”

Enraged, the man who had spoken up earlier, demanding death of the sick, questioned, “它们可能会冒险感染你和我们其他人/They could risk infecting you, and the rest of us too.”

Zheng He turned back to the sick men in his care and said, “保持朋友，而不是在危机期间成为敌人，是对我们人性的最终考验/To stay a friend, rather than turn into an enemy during a crisis is the ultimate test of our humanity.”

With his orders, the crew worked as one to move their sick friends from the howling underground of the ship's lower deck, to the lavish rooms of their captain.

Over the course of the few days while they sailed to a land we now know as Vietnam every one of the disease struck crew fully recovered. This would prove important in the days to come for the future of the Ming Treasure Voyages.

## 2. Part two : 禮 Li – order to life, actions create consequences

Two months later, Captain Zheng He has travelled to Brunei, Java, and Thailand. Laden with gifts from kind governments after presenting them with China's greatest gold, silver, porcelain, and silk, Zheng He had accoutered the Chen Zuyi pirates. After a strained peace agreement somewhere near Indonesia the ships had parted ways.

A while later, maps, compasses, and other navigational tools were strewn about the captain's desk as he furiously scribbled down recordings of past ports into an eroded leather bound book. Brush in hand, ink delicately wrapped in it's strands, he reached to write as the first mate stormed into the room.

The captain looked up as a droplet of ebony ink bloomed on the paper underneath. Flustered, the first mate, Wang Jinghong, scurried backwards, over his own feet, and back out the door, closing it during his retreat. A second later, two rapt knocks reverberated through the wood.

Zheng He allowed his entry, raising his eyebrows curiously at the blustering man.

After accepting and dismissing Jinghong's fervent apologies, Zheng He was finally able to ask the problem

“先生，投降的海盗刚刚袭击了宝藏舰队！Sir, the pirates that surrendered just attacked the Treasure Fleet!”

His eyebrows furrowed, the objects on his table precariously rattling as he strode over to the window. Spying the creeping sun on the horizon, he replied Jianhong.

“将这个词传播到兵船和福船。我们必须准备好洒血。帝国不会遭受这种叛国罪/Spread the word to the Troop transports and Fuchuan warships. We must prepare for blood to be spilt. The Empire will not stand such treason.”

Light languidly spilled across the sea and ships that prowled closer and closer. It were almost as if TianFei herself was blessing the day to come.

Masts raised, winds buffeting, palms locked on sword grips, men systematically working the ropes, the tension in the air was palpable. Out of nowhere, a rope was slung onto the main hull of the ship, imbedding itself into the wood. With the raise of his sword, the blade reverently glowing in the morning sun, the soldiers charged.

Surging like a tsunami, pirates flooded the deck. Hissing through gnashed teeth, they were vagrant rats, scattering into the chaos. Heads were cut off if they boarded. Fingers were hacked off if they went for the ropes. Hearts were shot through by arrows if they survived the previous. For a fragile second, the violence was satiated, their bodies going limp on the sharp end of a sword. But the pirates were nothing if not bloody determined. Hyena like, their movements erratic, drunken almost, for they abhorrently tripped up soldiers before plunging a steel dagger into their backs. They heinously spat globs of spittle into faces before knocking teeth out into a puddle of crimson waste on the deck. They carelessly used fallen bodies as shields before throwing said body onto their foes, who gasped for a breath that rankled with the taste of their crewmate's coppery blood. The ocean was washed as red as a setting sun while the battle wore on.

On the starboard side, the Captain was fighting off two malicious looking pirates who circled the captain with contempt. Adjusting his stance, Zheng He attacked. Glinting metal scraped his opponent's abdomen, drawing scarlet, just as the second pirate went down for a stab at his calf which he quickly parried, throwing the man off. Snarling, his first opponent kicked him from behind, to which he rolled over, catching a salty breath that stung his parched lips.

Bringing his sword up in defense, he twisted his blade behind the other man's, the tip reaching vital organs. Blood blossomed, death incriminating its victim. However, he still had one more to go. Leg wobbling, he defiantly pushed himself off the ground and into his last opponent's vision. He raised his sword to the left, then feigned a jab as he pressed his blade against the other man's, his blade honourably almost reaching its target. White light encompassed him in the space of eternity, but also a second, as his aggressor punctured his stomach with a smaller dagger. Clutching at his wound desperately, he could see the smaller details on the dagger's owner, who scornfully looked down upon him. Closing his eyes, for only a millisecond he promised himself. Zheng He's mind when blank.

Rushing sensations blasted straight to his stomach as the force behind the dagger went still. He blinked, vision clearing to see one of his crew standing over the pirate's body, grinning. It happened to be that his rescuer was also one of the previously sick. Holding out his hand, the sailor helped him stand while glaring at the captain's wound, distraught. Observing his rescuer's expression, Zheng He put a scarlet soaked hand on his shoulder.

“别担心这个。上帝明确地打算让我活着，因为他把你带回来拯救我。为此我感激不尽。”

/Don't worry about this. God clearly intends for me to live seeing as he brought you back to life to save me. And for that i am grateful.”

Shaking his head with a sad smile, the sailor disagreed, saying, “**我的生命对上帝无关紧要。不，你是那个拯救我和许多其他人免于死亡的人。我很高兴我有机会偿还债务。但是你拯救了自己，因为正是你的行为让我得以拯救你**/My life is inconsequential to God. No, you are the one who saved me and so many others from certain death. I am glad i had the opportunity to pay back the debt. But you saved yourself, for it was your actions that allowed the consequences for me to save you.”

Nodding gratefully, all the captain said was, “**也许你是对的**/perhaps you are right”.

Tearing off a piece of fabric and giving it to the captain to staunch the rivulets of blood streaming from his abdomen, he earnestly answered, “**我当然是对的。如果你第一天晚上没有照顾我们，我们谁也不会恢复得那么好，我们也不会赢得这场战斗**/Of course i am right. If you had not cared for us that first night, none of us would have recovered so well, and we would not be winning the battle.”

Looking back at the fight still raging on around them, Zheng He realised the sailor was right. Though blades were still piercing and bodies still fell like flies, the pirate numbers were drastically thinning. A smile growing on his lips, the Captain had never been more at peace.

Having dropped of the rest of the pirates, who had suffered a casualty of 5,000, at the nearest port for their executions, Captain Zheng He and his crew scrubbed the decks of remaining gore, and headed back out to sea.

### 3. Part three : **君子**Chun-tzu – at home with the world

It was a decade later and the esteemed Captain Zheng He and his crew had travelled to many new places, expressing diplomatic felicitations, including India, Sri Lanka, Arabia, and now Africa. Most times they were met with welcomings and presents, though occasionally they would encounter hostile soldiers upon docking. Fortunately, for them, Mombasa was not one of those places.

Birds danced, birthing abstract shapes in the sky, as Zheng He's crew and him explored the terrain of Mombasa, in what is now Kenya. 9,146 km is how far they were from his home in Nanjing. Although, far away from their homeland, the crew explored the foreign continent eagerly. The magnificent architecture was inspired by the swahili culture that seemed to entwine itself with the port city. Towering alabaster mosques grandly rose from the tops of buildings; its sight incandescent for ornate gold intricacies detailed the surface.

Meanwhile, colourful streets glowed with the soft luminescence of lanterns, while the tastes of the new country flirted with their senses. This exotic place was so different to anything they had ever known back home in contemporary China.

A few days before they had visited the radiant palace that reigned from the centre of the city. The palace being the city's nourishing heart, the streets were its veins, teeming with rivers of people. Nonetheless, when they had visited, carts brimming with cloth, beads, metal goods, silks, and porcelain, and their words dribbled diplomatic greetings and compliments. They walked back down the palace steps soon after, guiding their carts filled with gold and ivory.

Strolling through the streets that smelt of all sorts of spices, Zheng He had to pause, for his joints were inflaming to the point where he sucked in a stinging breath. Resting by a stall, he distracted himself with the draped with exhilarating coloured cloths, and curiously created jewellery, Captain Zheng He fancied the precise weaving of four bracelets, that were throned on a velvet cushion, for his sisters who long awaited his arrival. After buying them, and safely storing them in his breast pocket he set out to gather his men. It was time to return home.

Once his crew were all accounted for, they got to untying the aged ropes and dragging in the barnacle smothered anchor for what felt like the last time. Hearts heavy they climbed aboard, watching the ships that were new, unmarred, and anticipating adventure, pull up to port. With one last lingering look back, hoping to imprint the majestic though peculiar city into his mind for the rest of life, Captain Zheng He steered the ship into open waters.

They were just passing the coast of Indonesia when Captain Zheng He's lips tasted blood. A week later he succumbed to more shortness of breath, and his skin grew feverishly pale; the doctor on board sorrowfully agreed that death was on the horizon.

Surprisingly untroubled for a dying man, the Captain announced his arriving departure. The crew crowded on deck, bustling with uneasy energy, and he stood alone on the bridge. Agitated shouts broke out across the ship.

One sailor called out furiously, “**你不能死。我们差不多回家了** /you can't be dying. we're almost home”

“**我不认为你死的时候会选择** · 否则没人会 /i don't think you get to choose when you die, otherwise no one would”, said Captain Zheng, chuckling merrily,

Another voice cried out, “**但是谁会指导我们？** /but who will guide us?”

Zheng He prominently directed their gaze towards Wang Jianhong, his second in command, who had matured finely over the past few years. Upon noticing the Captain's meaning, Jianhong turned as red as 红包, the chinese packets they would get during Chinese New Year.

One last sullen voice begged, “**没有你我不能结束我们的旅程** /We can't end our journey without you.”

Eyes wrinkling, he responded softly, “**对抗不可避免的事情是没有智慧的，所以我不害怕，你也不应该** /there is no wisdom in fighting the inevitable, so i do not fear, and neither should you”

Voice steady as the ocean below their feet, Zheng He raised his chin and regaled them with past anecdotes of hardships, testimonies of their bravery, and lastly with his thankfulness of having been their captain.

Teary eyed and despairing, the crowd dispersed, leaving Captain Zheng He once again alone with his thoughts.

Shifting his thoughts to the gentle buoyancy of the waves as they hit the hull, he let himself be lulled into a state of peace. Exploring the depths of his spirituality, he heard Tianfei, the sea goddess, beckon him closer. Transcendent, he forgoed anything and everything that tethered him to the physical world, and simply, let go.

Attentively, they cut off a braid of his hair, and took off his pair of shoes, for they were to be taken back to Nanjing for his burial. Otherwise, they lovingly wrapped their Captain in white silks that clung to his hollow frame. A splattering of stars attended the burial from above, as the red whispers of a new morning seeped into the night sky. Even the ocean paid it's respects, its waves allayed, as it held its breath in memory of the Captain Zheng He.

They ceremoniously lowered him into the shimmering ocean that had embraced him in life and now death.

# The Ming Treasure Voyages

*Kiangsu Chekiang College Internation section, Ng, Jinghong Dylan – 14*

Lightning strikes. Thunder rumbles. Gales blow. Waves like mountains crash upon our tiny vessel, but somehow it manages to withstand. Some sailors pray to whatever god they worship, while others try to survive. Cowards run to the lifeboats only to be swallowed by a giant wave, The brave attempt to repair the bent mast, but none succeed in trying. During this struggle, what was I doing? I remembered exactly what I was doing as clear as day. I certainly didn't run to help repair the mast or escape through the lifeboats. I was trying not to drown as this huge tide attempted to pull me into the ocean. In these situations, nobody is here to help you. Other people have no time to rescue. They are also trying to survive, remember? Of course, it is an exception if you are a person of importance, such as our captain. If you are the saviour of this person of importance, you will be showered with praise and reward even if you died in the attempt. This chain of thought happened just as a huge wave crashed onto our ship, pulling me into the ocean. I had barely enough time to scream before I fell into the ocean, never to be seen again.

How did all this happen in the first place? I guess it happened long ago before I was even an adult or even a teenager. Let me tell you a bit about myself. My name is Wang and I was born in Lijiang. Wonderful place, really. Beautiful canals, wonderful scenery and air as fresh as you can get. My mother and father were both captains on a ship, sailing then and now to go on an expedition. They were away a lot, so when they drowned while attempting to save some valuable item, I was not sad. Don't expect me to be remorse. I was four when they died and I barely remember anything about them. Anyways I grew up as a curious boy with a constant dream of being a mariner. My grandma was really nice to me and always played as the pirate in our fantasies. I was happy in Lijiang. There was a catch, though. Lijiang was in the middle of nowhere, about 500 miles away from the nearest port. So this basically meant my dream of being a sailor was finished. Until the day I met this boy named Zheng He.

Zheng He was one of my neighbours. He was around the same age as me, maybe older. His hair was dark black and he was quite tall for his age. You couldn't call him ugly or handsome. He lived with his parents who were retired farmers. I rarely saw him outside, so I assume his parents don't let him go out much. Anyways, let me tell you how I met him. Or was it how he met me? On that day, when I was about eight, I decided I would construct a boat out of the wood planks and other supplies in our garage. We had a lot of sailing items since my parents were captains. Our garage is filled with parts from their ship, a gallon. Spare planks, broken lanterns and even a cannonball(though how it

got in there, I have no clue). But why did I want to build a boat? No, it wasn't because I wanted to play pirates. It was because I could sail to the port. In Lijiang, there are lots of canals. One of them leads to a river, which leads to the port. I was determined to follow this route to my dreams. So on that day, I took a few wooden planks and went to my secret hideout, right next to a canal, hidden from prying eyes. Unknown to me, my neighbour saw me creeping out and decided to follow me. So while I unrolled my parents' blueprints for a sailing boat, a voice behind me said, "Are you trying to build a boat?" I was really tempted to say "no sh\*\* Sherlock", but my grandma has forced me to get out of this habit of saying it to anyone who asks a question. Instead, I tried being polite by saying, "What was your first clue?" He ignored me and sat down next to me. We sat in silence for a long time. Then he said the words that changed our lives forever. "Let's build it together." Not very dramatic for words that change your fate, but nonetheless, it changed my life. Come to think of it, these words were the thing that put my future self into a lot of hassle. After he said these words, he told me his dream, which was extremely similar to mine, except he wanted to be a nice pirate. Don't know what a nice pirate is? Apparently, Zheng He's definition of a nice pirate is that instead of plundering enemy ships, they give gifts to enemy ships, creating bonds with more countries. Typical Zheng He. Instead of stealing gold, he gives gold. What a nice guy. After we talked about our dreams, we made an oath to make them come true. So from that day onwards, we would come here and build our ship.

For years and years, we constructed our ship. After 5 long years, our vessel was completed. It wasn't small. It had three small rooms, a sloop mast rig, a storage room and even a small lifeboat. It wasn't much, but it was a boat. The day had come for us to set sail. We had to put supplies on the boat, such as a water filter, salted cookies and a few other supplies. For me, the hardest part of the journey wasn't constructing the boat or loading the supplies. It was how I had to explain this to my grandmother. On the day we planned to leave, I tried not to cry. My grandmother, knowing something was wrong, gave me one of her *lian gao*, which she refers to as "only to be made on special events". Once she gave me this, I burst into tears. My grandma only hugged me and sent me to bed. The entire night, I did not sleep a wink. I thought about a lot of things, mostly my regrets. What would happen to my grandma? Thinking about this made me guilty, so I wrote a note to my grandma saying what I had done. After writing my note, I grabbed my bag, which seemed to feel slightly heavier than before and dashed stealthy to our rendezvous point. When I arrived, Zheng He was already there. "You ready?", he asked, sounding untroubled as if we were only going on a short vacation. Lucky him. He didn't really love his parents much. For me, this took a lot of guts. Let me just say that this process was a walk in a park for Zheng, while it was a climb out of hell for me. As we got on the ship, I saw the shadow of a person. This



made me scared as I thought it was soldiers sent to arrest us. That's absurd, I thought, What soldiers are up in this hour? As I slowly calmed myself down, the boat shuddered. It had started moving. "Well, this is it. This is where our dreams come closer into becoming reality." I thought aloud. "Yes, this is where all our adventures will start." And so, our adventure came to a start.

The journey out of Lijiang was smooth. No living soul saw us unless you called the shadow which I just saw a living soul. I kept seeing a shadow of a person tailing us. I told myself I was seeing things, but seeing the exact same shadow at the rendezvous point made me scared. Coincidence? I think not. When we reached the borders of Lijiang, it was already dawn. I think I looked unassured of my decision because Zheng He said, "My friend, this is the path we must take, figuratively and literally. We are not only doing this for our needs but also for our country's needs." Being honest, this was the most inspirational speech I have ever heard. After we crossed the border of Lijiang, we proceeded down to the port. This took two years and by the time we arrived in the port of Suzhou, I had already matured. I no longer wanted to be a sailor. Since the travel across China had already satisfied my dreams, I wanted to settle down, maybe even have kids. When I told this to Zheng he, he got angry. We argued for a long time. "After coming all this way, you give up now?" he asked. "Yes", I replied firmly, "The trip across China was fun, but now I want to settle down." With that, I left him.

In the next ten years, life was peaceful for me. I got a job as a fisherman, bought a house and settled down in it nicely. I had almost forgotten about Zheng He. Sometimes, I heard other fishermen talk about this great captain. When they told me his name, it sounded familiar. Apparently, he wants to be a good pirate. Again, that sounded extremely familiar. When I asked them to tell me more, they said they had told me all they knew. Apparently, he would be coming to our town in a few days, Everyone was talking about him, When I asked other people who he was, they told me the exact same things the fishermen told me. In the following days, people began to set up decorations to honour the coming of this man. The people treated the coming of this man like the coming of the emperor. Even though they barely knew who this person was, they still honoured him because he was a person of high rank. It just occurred to me that even though I had asked a lot of questions about this man, I still didn't know his name. I ran to ask one of the volunteers helping to decorate. "What's the guy's name?" The man, being extremely busy, just pointed to a big banner hung across the town hall. In bold colourful words, it read '歡迎鄭和'. Now, I guess the name of this man was quite obvious to you, but in fact, it was subtle to me. In my defence, I had not seen him for about ten years. Anyways, the

Chinese words translate to “Welcome Zheng he”. That name sounded really familiar now. But facial recognition occurs faster than name recognition.

The day has come where Zheng He would come to our port. On that day, slightly more information had been found about him, though none of them was personal. He was coming to the port to run some errands. It had also been also found out what the job of this captain was. Most people, including me, sounded familiar. He was apparently going to be a “nice” pirate. I was thoroughly confused by the concept of a “nice” captain. I was about to ask what it meant when it occurred to me that I knew the meaning of this word. I was starting to think of where I heard it from when there came a loud cheer from the harbour. I rushed to the sound when I saw the most startling and intimidating thing a person could see. It was a fleet of ships. I had seen fleets of ships lots of times in the ten years I lived here, but those were ants compared to this one. Ships as far as the eye could see, reaching towards the horizon. Ships bigger and sturdier than the surrounding ships. Ships with the brightest red and metallic gold only added to the effect. All of us locals looked at the ships in awe. I guess this guy was used to people being too astonished to cheer for him because captains of a high rank expect the locals to honour their coming. Out of all the ships, five of the most majestic vessels berthed. I was just told that this was a fleet consisting of 99 ships. I was obviously stunned by the numbers but the most astounding fact was that only a quarter of the entire fleet had come here. It was said that the total number of ships added up to 317, I was sure this information was wrong, but I would soon come to see. Just then I saw the captain disembark the ship. I saw the silhouette of his body against the sun so I could not make out his face. I ran to get a closer look at this man, but every other person in the harbour beat me to it. Everyone was trying to get a glimpse of this man, and it soon turned into a free for all. I gave up after a while and walked back home.

I took a short nap on my balcony hammock, which overlooked the harbour. A great view of the sea, I admit, After a while, I was woken up by a loud knocking. “Go away”, I groaned at the door drowsily. “Sir, sorry to disturb you”, the voice said officially, “But I am to pass this letter to you in order of Captain Zheng.” When he uttered the word ‘Zheng’, I was so shocked I flipped out of my hammock. I rushed to the door to collect my letter. I was thoroughly shocked by this. Why would such an important person seek me? I wanted to ask the man but he had already left. The answer, I hoped, would be in the letter. I tore the envelope open carefully. The letter consisted of a small paragraph, though it contained a lot of meaning. The letter read,

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Dear Wang,

It had been a long time since I last saw you. I have been trying very hard to make my dreams into reality. As you can see, I have done exactly that, though I am not satisfied. I wanted to sail the world with you, not alone. So it is my greatest wish that you come along this journey with me and explore the seas. If you accept my offer, meet me at the pier at midnight.

Yours,

Zheng He  
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Ok, this took me surprised. I remembered who this guy was. How could I forget? But the thing was, he wanted me to go on another journey with him. I thought long and hard for about a few seconds, then gave up because thinking was not one of my good points. I imagined the things that might happen on the journey, such as our boat sinking or who knows what else. But instead of making me doubt, it had the opposite effect on me. I wanted adventure. My hands were itching to hold a ship's steering wheel, my bare feet on the floorboard, my nose smelling the scent of sea, my eyes seeing the beauty of the ocean. It was decided. I would go.

I went out at midnight, carrying a bag with the necessary items. When I arrived, I saw my friend not on the pier, but below it. Zheng He was on a small rowboat. He gave me a friendly wave, whilst I nearly burst into tears over this emotional reunion. I remembered that he was a person of high rank, and I quickly did a curtsy. He just laughed and said, "Ai, Long time no see, my friend. No need to bow, get up. But less talk now. We must return to the ships. Our journey begins tomorrow at dawn." Zheng signalled to the two men on the pier, who I did not notice until now. Once we got on the ship, I tried to process the beauty of the ship. Everything was brand new, all the metal polished and huge white mast raised. Once we boarded, Zheng He ordered for all ships to set sail for Brunei, which was his first target. He told me to get some sleep. "I have a lot to talk with you about. Come to my quarters at luncheon and we will discuss matters." With that, he bid me goodnight.

The following day, I reported to Zheng He's cabin, where we dined over the amazing view of the ocean. Zheng told me of his goals. He was going to try making countries ally with China by giving them gifts, such as gold and silk. He hoped in return that the countries would do the same. I guess he was trying to protect future generations, as if China had a lot of allies, it would have fewer enemies. Zheng left me after lunch, telling me to explore the ship. Every part of the ship was as grand as the exterior of it, but one thing puzzled me. There were military items every battleship usually had. But if the mission of Zheng was to make peace, what was the point in the weapons? I would find out very soon.

As we passed through a small coastal town, Zheng He ordered for the ship to be slowed down. He shouted something else which I did not hear over the commotion on the ship. The crew hurried around the ship, preparing... weapons? The ships masts were hoisted, cannons loaded and the crew on the starboard with an assortment of weapons. What were they trying to do? The ship sailed near to the harbour of the town, where I saw a crowd of people, cowering in fear. It seems like my friend was showing off the military power of China. Making places fear you are also a good way of getting rid of your enemies.

I will stop writing here as it feels not fit to write all my adventures in a single journal. I shall hopefully finish writing my adventures and publish it for future generations to use.

Written by

Wang Jinghong

# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

*King George V School, Bhat, Shraavasti – 15*

*In this story, the perspective of 3 characters come together to detail the incidents that occur and explore the relationship between various characters.*

Syaoran

Being the son of the captain of the *Zhang* fleet meant I was born into a life of uncertainty; each day was a surprise as we painstakingly traversed vast bodies of water for months upon end without a clue, who was on the other side of the water. An encounter with rabid villagers or the occasional rogue soldiers was common, taking the lives of several of our crew including my mother, who remains missing to this day. Nevertheless, my father, *General Chang-ho* continues to voyage aimlessly under the orders of the emperor like a pawn. Having travelled from India to Arabia, there was nothing we hadn't seen. Recently, we were given orders to form an alliance with a local village chief and to recruit more men for our next voyage.

The day before, the crew had faced a malevolent storm that raged into the night. All the members were occupied in keeping the boat from falling apart. While one issue was fixed, another emerged. The wooden planks that lined the deck were damp, sagging with water; the sides of the ship were punctured by the debris of a junk boat along with the help of a fervent whale. While several of the masts were splintered and collapsed to make a gaping hole that peeked into the storage room. Hours had trickled by as the crew and soldiers laboriously pieced the ship together until dawn before they succumbed to the slumber of exhaustion.

I was jolted awake as *Wang Lei*, one of the soldiers, yanked my arm in desperation. As my eyelids craned open, I could see his eyes rounded in alarm, coloured with uncertainty. His face contorted in horror as he gazed towards the door. I could hear the fierce clanging of steel, grunts of exhaustion and muffled cries of our nurses, followed by the abrupt flare of gunpowder. The *Wokou* (Japanese pirates) had perfect timing! We scurried towards one of the storage room and crouched behind barrels of liquor our swords poised, ready to attack. Unfortunately, a gruesome scene had already unfolded beneath our eyes; a steel sword streaked with blood laid menacingly beside an unidentifiable limp body. Who laid motionless on a wooden crate, while grubby men with dented brass helmets and tattered robes streamed into the storage room lifting away crates of our gold and rolls of royal silk. I counted 10 pirates, if we were to show ourselves we would be begging for our deaths...

Cheng Ho

*Mrs Lin* hadn't been paying her loan for about 3 weeks now, I thumped my fist along the cluttered desk, which trembled innocently beneath my fist. A veiled woman stood out as she hurried across the street, bumping into passer-by's who eyed her suspiciously. Upon closer inspection, I recognized her hole-ridden slippers and brass band that was adorned around her index finger. She was attempting to run away again.

My feet crashed against the pavement, my breath uneven as I chased her along the cobblestone road. She had abandoned the obnoxious scarlet red veil, causing her hair to pirouette behind her like a cape. As I swerved frantically my shoulders brushed irritant bystanders, evoking several murmurs and grumbles of protest. She glanced back wary, her eyes wide, pupil dilated filled with desperation. But I wasn't going to be swayed again. I had mouths to feed, family to support, children to send to school, I couldn't let this pass.

The lady disappeared into the crowd, blending unsuspectingly. I shoved mercilessly through the mass of bodies, receiving glances of indignation. I scanned the crowd and crept towards her clasping my hands on her shoulder firmly. She turned instantly ... But. It wasn't her. I had lost her, again.

Sighing in despair, I turned my attention to the crowd that had formed along the coast, spreading about a mile or so. Villagers buzzed with anticipation as they spurted slivers of gossip amongst themselves. Behind the crowd lined the villages best, equipped with steel swords slung on their back, and sickles or kitchen knives clasped in their hands, waiting. Looking to see what this commotion was all about I slid through to catch a glimpse: in the distance was the vague silhouette of a ship. There was no sign of attack, but it was too soon to say. The clear echo of the gong permeated along the coast, eerily, as if in warning.

I faintly caught a discussion between a middle-aged woman and a young girl who naively questioned with wide eyes, "Could it be the supposedly friendly treasure fleet? I heard the last town they visited was Yashiri which is a few hours away at most!" The woman beside her rightfully laughed, incredulous, "Little girl. Are you asleep! Have you seen a ship on these waters leave without prowling our village? Most of the ships that have anchored on this dock were filled with ruthless *Wokou*, some of whom even set fire to our homes. You foolish girl!"

Foolish she was, it was hard to meet such people these days; in a world where everyone had begun to think about themselves.

As the royal ship came into view I was mesmerized by its, captivating presence: the delicate arch of the prow where a fair maiden posed elegantly, reaching out to the foamy sea, as the waves lazily slapped against the deck. The boat possessed a beauty that was rough around the edges but was nevertheless majestic. Despite the peeling paint, the crooked mast and the weather-worn sails she remained poised, unbothered.

The sun formed a vague glow around the ship and caused the tittering waves to twinkle incessantly beneath the boat as if it were on ice. Upon closer inspection, the sun revealed a gleaming sword and steel armour. I heard a muffled gasp from the scholar besides me and seized the telescope from his trembling fingers. The elder men behind me growled precariously and began raising their sickles and swords gently into the air, with their face contorted in anger. My chest tensed beneath my shirt in anticipation while my primeval instincts threatened to be loose. A white flag was shot into the air and swung in the air violently. The soldiers, at least what I had thought were soldiers waved nonchalantly. Amidst the commotion, the scholar's pupils lost focus, quivering erratically, while a shadow of confusion flickered across the visage of the men beside me.

Even If the young lady were to correct, should we accept their gifts? Who knows their true intentions. Even if they were to form an alliance who knows what they would do with us after.

Mrs Lin

Exactly three days ago, 30 or so men suspiciously arrived at the southern dock, waving a white flag and bearing gifts for the village chief, claiming to be part of the Ming treasure fleet. The situation sounded eerily similar to my experience as part of a fleet before I was separated from my family. But, more than a decade had passed, and from the villagers' description, the ship was nowhere close to the one I resided before. The chief was currently offering 100 yuan for servants in their accommodation. Upon hearing the offer, I immediately closed my box sized clothing stall in the market— I was run with debts to pay and a son to find. I couldn't pass up this opportunity. My regular chase with the *Mr Ho* was getting strenuous. My luck would soon run out.

For the first day, several villagers swarmed around the crew in curiosity and suspicion, after all this was a rare case. All the visitors we encountered before were only interest in raiding the village and causing distress. However, the night these men arrived, I heard the crew even entertained the villagers with traditional melodies and trot songs. Most of the villagers had warmed up to them but few remained wary due to the guard the captain kept up. The captain and a couple of soldiers regularly met up with the chief, privately. Not once during my time at their accommodation had I been able to catch a glimpse of them or overhear their conversation.

Syaoran

I leaned towards the carpenter's counter, asking for the towns insider, pressing few jewels I'd pocketed from the ship's storage into his palm. Although the shopkeeper's curiosity waned after I handed him the jewels, other locals stole glimpses at me, even glaring. Then turned their heads as I lifted mine, pretending I didn't see them. This unfavourable attention probably had to do with the thick plates of steel armour on my chest, the blood-speckled brass helmet I grasped in my hand and the pretentious jet black-maroon robe that danced behind me as I walked.

Glancing at the address he'd given me, I trudged towards a stilt house, buried into a corner. As I tugged at the uneven, bamboo door it squealed open as its rutted hinges brushed against steel. Rolls of parchment paper and record books lined the sides of the room, while a makeshift desk was placed to the left. *Mr Zhang*, who was also a moneylender faced the wall, scanning the shelf behind his desk when he asked, 'Young man, what brings you here?'

I discreetly slid a piece of paper with my mother's name across the desk. And dropped the bag of gold coins and jewels I had bagged from the ship on to the table. Initially, the moneylender eyed me warily, glancing at my attire.

But, once the moneylender glimpsed at the contents of the sack his eyes lit up and sparkled, the corners of his mouths twitched. I must have looked desperate and pitiful with my dishevelled hair and grubby appearance— he said he would fulfil my request so long as I helped collect money from a 'troublesome' customer.

Using the portrait *Mr Zhang* had given me as reference, I conducted my search: Not long after I was alerted of her location by a silk shopkeeper. The following afternoon, when the straw huts bamboo door was locked shut I stormed into the quaint house, slashing the brittle door open. Upon entering, I noticed 4 mattresses scattered around the one-room shelter. I tugged all the drawer's in sight and fumbled with the stale mattress'. Towers of clothing that peppered the room tumbled as I rummaged through their room, finding loops of money hidden behind nooks and crannies in the wall and in the hollows legs of the bamboo furniture.

I gazed at the now war-zone like shelter that appeared ransacked with upturned mattresses, ripped bedding and collapsed cupboards that were encircled by shattered glass and ceramic cutlery. Though I was soon to be ridden with guilt. It was too late to change my mind.

On my way out, I came face to face with a startled middle age woman; Her jaw dropped open as if to ask why I was here. Her serene eyebrows were furrowed, creating wrinkles in her face, while her pupils flickered in confusion erratically. Taking advantage of the element of surprise I twisted my body and ran haphazardly; tripping on my cape; blocking my ears, silently waiting for her to scream and chase me.

Mr. Zhang

Who was this boy? And how did he get his hands on such items? These were the questions that tormented me. More importantly, how could I get my hand on this?

I arrived at their accommodation and headed towards one of the burly, mammoth sized guards that stood at the entrance. Tapping his back, I learned to the side and whispered, “You wouldn’t want your wife and children to know how you got that money, would you?” – He was an old customer who owed me a favour in exchange for my confidentiality. Luckily as I predicted, the man vigorously opened the door, unquestioningly.

The chief had decorated the place like a museum; ornate tapestries hung across the walls with occasional large scenic paintings. Handwoven curtains, embroidered with cherry blossoms hung from the ceiling, blocking even the slightest ray of light. Wooden cushioned chairs with intricate carvings from dragons to flowers were scattered across the room along with 2 large Luohan beds that were placed facing each other. Centre stage was a staircase, which led to the crew’s dorms.

The only room on the ground floor was at the corner, blocked with ostentatious deep, emerald green doors. At the muffled sound of voices, I froze still. I leaned towards the wall with my ear against the ridges of bamboo, attempting to grasp what seemed like a conversation between the captain and a messenger. The wall had already been swaying, before I knew it I fell into the room on my stomach and positioned my legs, prepared to run.

Mrs Lin

Who was that boy? And why had he ransacked our home? Upon reaching home, exhausted after working at the lodge I opened the door to a flustered *Ms Yang*, whose eyes brimmed with tears, escaping into droplets, streaking her cheeks. Her lower lips trembled as she explained what happened, reducing her voice to a faint mumble. While *Mrs Song* wailed distraughtly.

We were done for; all our money was stolen and our home close to ashes.

I was walking solemnly under the candlelit lamps, along the Shinzo market, attempting to collect my thoughts, deciding my next steps. Before I saw a soldier, beside the community notice board. Which was already surrounded by a fairly large crowd. As I peered closer, I noticed it was a recruitment offer:

*Do you want to work directly for the Emperor? Be a real-life pirate? Well, this job is for you. Not only will be compensated greatly, but you will also be provided with free stay and food. And become a part of the emperors very own treasure fleet where you can explore the world and help your emperor form alliances with other nations. We also have a position for cooks, medical staff & maintenance.*

I had previously worked aboard a ship as a nurse and had experience dealing with all sorts of wounds. I was delighted at the thought of joining the crew. I would be able to kill two birds with one stone; find my son and restore my livelihood. Given my current state I didn’t have much of an option so before I decided otherwise, I hurriedly approached the soldiers as his boots began to turn away and slipped my name into the box.

Syaoran

*Mr Zhang* was running as he pushed crates of fruit along the street behind him, while roars of indignation spur behind him. His head was craned backwards as he was running, recklessly. His eyes widened in relief as he met my gaze. As he staggered towards me, he placed his hand on my shoulder, tugging me into a bookstore until the grunts and heavy thud of boots fell into a whisper.

Gripping my forearms, he shook me, his fingers tips digging desperately into my skin. He was heaving, his breath staggered and uneven when spouted, ‘Your mother is here in the village’

The disbelief must have shown on my face, as he began describing what happened:

*“I heard the chief and a messenger talking privately;*

*The chief asked, “Did you locate Syaoran’s mother?”*

*The messenger replied quietly saying, they had narrowed it down to a few villages neighbouring villages including this one. But, would need a few days at pinpoint her exact location.*

*In response, the chief grumbled, “I’d hoped we would find her this time around. But I guess I will have to wait. The emperor has already assigned our next destination”*

*The chief had requested the messenger to refrain from telling anyone else, including you. That was all I heard before I fell into the room and was chased by their guards.”*

Why didn't he tell me? Did he think it would distract me? That I would use it as an excuse to stay? I had no intention of following his footsteps as captain. I was going to stay.

Mrs Li

At dawn, clutching a rice sack stuffed with my belongings I stood at the dock, below the monstrous ship. A line of new employees stood at the dock, reporting to a crew member. Soldiers stormed the deck, roping in the anchor and loading crates of supplies in preparation.

My stay at the village didn't last for long, as I'd anticipated. After my escape from the *Wokou* two years ago, I have constantly been leaping from one village to another, away from their men. But this time I was leaving out of my own will.

Was my husband still part of the fleet? Or my son even alive? Was I behaving too rashly? Nevertheless, at that moment, I took a leap of faith and hoped for the best, knowing I would regret otherwise.

Syaoran

Knowing my long-lost mother was close by I had to stay. Additionally, I had other pursuits, which wouldn't be possible as part of the crew.

I rushed towards the lodge, past the oblivious guards, into my room that I shared with two other members of the crew. The room was now spotless after the others had packed in preparation to leave. I changed into the clothes I'd grabbed at the local market. Then, clutching my pack and my spare stash of money, in the break of daylight, I fled to the streets. The coarse fabric bristled against my skin creating rashes. While rocks splintered through my thin, yarn sandals, creating blisters on the soles of my feet. As I ventured farther away from the city, past the village boundary, the screams of vendors and murmurs of daily chatter faded to the sound of my feet shuffling against gravel. Amidst the towering hills in the valley, my voice echoed as I vowed to return with my mother, with only the shrieking birds and animals as witness.



# A Voyage

*Korean International School, Bertrand, Max Albert Pierre – 14*

A little while ago, we were travelling. Travelling to give gifts of gold or silk among the people who wander the seas. So we started small. Small as in the China Sea. We went around in an average size boat, could fit about twenty crew members, but with all the riches within this boat, the maximum was six.

I, Captain Ray Park recruited our crew just over a year ago, who came from families of riches. First, we enlisted Zhu Ming, in our army of adventurers, she came from the Family of rulers in China, more commonly known as the Ming Dynasty. Then we had Wei Tao, from a governor to adventurer. Then we had Liang Son, a poor farmer, who made his life a fantasy when he created his restaurant. Huang Yao who had been born into a wealthy family, who worked for the government and managed their army. And lastly, we had Mo Fa, he wasn't rich in any way, he didn't have everything he wanted out of life but he would help us, as over a month ago, we discovered his powers. This sorcery was unseen before. Mo Fa could move things with his mind, could protect us in desperate times. He was our most needed asset. Always reliable.

On the first day of our travels, the 3 of March 1643 we left from the Zhan Jiang Port to be kind and helpful to adventurers, pirates, and army alike. Our goal was to charitably donate gold, silks and riches to these people. And we were going to succeed. As a crew, we were determined. And we were guaranteed to find someone who wants all these treasures.

After a few days, we found or the first ship was a Vietnamese army ship. A colossal achievement in the world of engineering. Of course, they stopped us. Their leader's name, Dave. He was a kind soul, possessed a gigantic beard, he was quite short, as his squeaky resembled that. Nevertheless, there was an immense contrast between his dark sombre clothing and his positive attitude. His enormous crew welcomed us aboard with frowns, depression and guns. Indeed, silence speaks on many levels.

"What brings you upon these seas?" Dave yelled after a few minutes of quiet.

I replied as quickly as i could, "We are bearing gifts, the Ming dynasty sent us the friendly with neighbouring life on the water and the wanderers of the sea!"

"What are your names, sailors? I'm Dave!" Screeched Dave.

We bowed down individually saying our names and showing the gold we possessed.

"Enough," the captain acknowledged "prepare the banquet, as tonight we feast!"

And so Dave left, back to his study.

During that day after we helped with all the chores, but, we had something to look forward to, food. After a long day Hung Yao, Liang Son, Mo Fa, Wei Tao, Zhu Ming and I were exhausted. The Feast was wonderful, it had all sorts of food from Vietnam including pho, Banh Xeo, Goi Cuon and other specialities, plus, they made Peking duck just for us.

We gave away gold, silver and many beautiful pearls. As we departed, the sun was burning, our crew was feeling overfed and under the weather. We were, however very grateful to have started their mission as helpers or the sailing community and neighbouring countries.

A few days passed, the crew was feeling a lot better, but we still couldn't find any ships. So we kept our heads up high as we search for a few more days until.

A Ship.

A Pirate Ship.

It looked devastating like it would ruin anything in its path, the sails were black, their masts tainted. Could run through armies. We cowered away, left as fast as we could. No trace that we had been there could have been found, or everything we were trying to do could have been over. Our lives. The silver, gold, pearls. The riches in General.

The pirates had seen us, we had been spotted. The chase was on, but they were fast, too fast, there was no possible way we could have out-spined them. But we didn't give up, that wasn't what we came here to do. If we were caught we

would have failed. Everyone was now awake, except Mo Fa. They were now finally on us, they fired their cannons and lept onto our ship, destroying everything they could find. The first pirate on ship fired a deadly arrow from point-blank range into our fallen sleeping angel's head never to be woken again. But right when we had lost all glimmer of hope, Dave arrived. With an army, there was no way they could let us down. But as they brutally ended each and every one of our crew member's lives. I watched, I was left alive to see he had betrayed us. Told them where we were, what to do. I'm now hiding in this time of urgency all the pain I'm feeling was incomprehensible. And then.

Darkness.

# My new life being a Pirate

*Korean International School, Chae, Rachel – 15*

It is a quiet, restful night. The children gathered to listen to the story of captain Goldbeard. They settled down in a small tent, ready to listen to the story they loved the most. “So, I think everyone is here now. I’ll start my Ming voyage story.”

I was a normal boy in the Island Plando. It was an extremely poor island with lack of needs. One day, a huge boat arrived on our island. The captain Hornigold and the sailors of the pirate came off the boat. They asked our islander if we needed any supplement. And if yes, they would want to stay for a night. By getting the supplement from them, our leader agreed to pay them back by letting them stay for a night. At night, I went to the ship of the pirates to steal their food and gold. I heard that they keep their treasure in the captain’s room, and I planned to steal them when he was asleep. But when I went into the room, there was nothing but some food for the sailors. I thought the captain Hornigold hid his treasure somewhere else, but there was nothing left. I realized that they gave us all they got, only except what they needed. I woke up the captain Hornigold and said “I’m very sorry captain. I was jealous of what you’ve got. I tried to steal all your money and treasure. Can you please receive my apology and appoint me as your sailor?” However the captain responded was unexpected. He asked me what is the advantage for him if he hires me. I was very messed up. I replied to him “I don’t know what am I good at or what I can help you, but I promise that I will only obey you.” After the conversation, he decided to take me on the next journey.

The next day, our ship made a voyage towards the Sparrow Ocean. It was the most known ocean among the pirates. They fought every minute, and the wave never stopped. I was tremendously terrified, but I believed in my captain, so I went to the Sparrow Ocean with him. On the way there, I learnt some daily life of the pirates. I mopped the floor, handle the wood, spread the sail and worked as an assistant. As I was the newbie pirate, the senior sailors nagged at me. But I never gave up and tried my best to overcome with the tasks they gave me. After these tough work, I could see the dolphins swimming over the sea in the sunset. It was like a numberless rainbow on the sea, heading towards the ocean with us.

After few months, we finally arrived at the Sparrow Ocean. The Sparrow Ocean I heard from others were bloody, with smell of ammunition, and can hear the never ending screams of the pirates. However, the Sparrow Ocean that I saw was superior. The ocean was blue and clear that I could even see under the ocean. There were lots of sea creatures living there and it was very peaceful. The scenery was amazing, that I could never forget it. Captain Hornigold told me that this is the biggest treasure he earned. As Captain Hornigold was old, he wanted me to be the owner of the ocean. I fought with the pirates who tried to harm the ocean and gave some treasure to the people in need as I learnt from respectful Captain Hornigold.

“This is the story how I became captain Goldbeard. I can never forget about my only captain Captain Hornigold and the present he gave me. I believe someday I could let you to own this Ocean Sparrow.”

# Ming Treasures

*Korean International School, Chan, Ryan – 15*

The sunlight shines upon me. The captain is calling my name. I woke up. This is how my everyday crew life starts. I started off eating fish for breakfast. Fish is the main source of food for our crew because the sea is just right next to us. I am only a young boy, so my work on this ship is not as hard. My main job on the ship is mainly cooking and cleaning. In some days, I also need to fish. Our ship is now sailing to Africa. I have never gone to Africa before so this is my first time going. Our aim to Africa is to give away the gold and silk we have. We are the opposite of pirates. We give away goods and money instead of stealing or fighting for it. Me and the ship crews then start to sail to Africa. The captain said it will take around one month to arrive in Africa.

For the first week, I was doing the same stuff over and over again. I cook breakfast, lunch, and dinner for all of the ship crews. I clean the floor every day twice. In the evening, I get to relax and play games with some of my friends that are also on my ship. Suddenly, my captain shouted “John, come over here!”, my name is John. I was so scared. I thought I did something wrong. My heart beat like the thunder as I was walking towards my captain. He said, “You are not in trouble, I just want you to try to be the watcher for this ship.” A watcher is a person that needs to be on duty on the highest point of the ship, watching out for any enemies or dangers. I was so delighted. I have never been the watcher for this ship, so that was a whole new experience for me.

The second day, I started my new job full of excitement. I was informed to be in this duty until we get to Africa. Everything went smoothly for the first few days until my captain said I need to pay attention for upcoming rocks. We arrived at the place which has a lot of rocks in the sea. I am the one who is in charge to look out for the upcoming rocks and need to inform the captain to spin the wheel. I was very stressed. The ship will crash if I didn't tell the captain in time. It was really hard and sad for me to see my friends playing down on the ship while I'm up on the tower on duty, but this is my duty. While I was watching my friends playing, I suddenly saw a big rock in front of our ship. I immediately rung the bell. My captain turned the ship just right in time. I was very lucky and I would pay all my attention when I'm on duty.

It was a peaceful day. I was on duty. I was paying all my attention to the sea. Suddenly, I saw a pirate ship coming straight towards us. I froze as it was my first time see a pirate ship in my life. It was enormous and have a lot of weapons. Although we are not pirates, we still have weapons to defend ourselves. I ran the bell to informed the captain. The captain shouted “Incoming!”. Some crews set up the cannons, some crews ready their guns and bows, some ready to take over the pirate ship. I was given a sniper as I'm on the highest spot on the ship. It was my first time handling a gun so I was very scared to shoot. Our ship and the pirate ship met and we started firing guns and cannons. Some crews jumped over to the pirate's ship and attack with swords.

I saw a crew got trapped by the pirates. I was scared to shoot but my crew was in trouble. I aimed at the pirate's head and shoot. Boom! The pirate went down and the crew is free. I got more confidence in shooting. I went to help my crews. Boom! Boom! Boom! The Pirates went down. We went from losing to winning. Our confident pumped and we all jumped to the pirate ship and fight all the pirates. We won! There was plenty of gold and silk on the ship. We took it and decided to give it away to the countries that we will be visiting in the future. It was a great victory for us and also the first victory for me. At night, we all gathered around and celebrate. The captain says I did a great job, I was delighted and proud. That day will definitely be an unforgettable day for me.

Weeks after the victory, I was on duty as usual. I saw some land in front and I assumed its Africa. I checked the map and confirmed that the land was Africa. I rang the bell and yelled “We are here! We are in Africa!” We all hurrayed and cheered. We arrived in Africa, it has been more than a month from the last time I stand on a land. We met the leader of Africa and we gave gold and silk to the locals. They invited us to the feast at

night and of course, we accepted it. They prepared a lot of food and wine for us. We tried some of the traditional food. Our captain told us that we are going to stay one week in Africa.

One week past as fast as lighting. It's time for us to say goodbye to Africa and start our journey to a new country. Before we leave, the leader in Africa gave some local goods and food for us to bring it on our ship. We thanked all the people in Africa and say goodbye to them. It was a truly interesting and unforgettable journey for us, I would definitely not forget the journey in the sea. I learned a lot of new skills and had a good time in Africa.

We sailed out to the calm sea in the gorgeous sunset, wondering what new adventure we are going to face in the future.

# Adventure Voyages

*Korean International School, Ho Ha, Tae – 15*

## Chapter 1.

Wang, a boy who is interested in Chinese History. He is currently studying about ‘Zheng He down the Western ocean’. Wang wanted to experience Admiral Zheng He’s great voyages. This was one of the Great Ming Empire’s biggest seven maritime expedition project. Wang always talk about Zheng He and it became his hero. Wang wanted to become a historian to investigate and study more about ancient China. However, Wang’s parents wanted him to become an ambitious pilot. They were concerning that being a historian will earn less money that might affect Wang’s livelihood.

One day, Wang was watching television in a warm cozy room. He heard footsteps coming toward him. When he turns around, he sees his father with Wang’s suitcase.

“Son, we are going to your grandparents’ house to celebrate Christmas!” said his father.

“Wait, today is Christmas? But, it’s 23th of December! And I thought we don’t celebrate Christmas!” He gasp while his eyes open wide as Tarsier.

“Calm Down boy, it’s just a joke!” Father laughed.

“But this year, we are going celebrate Christmas. Now, start pack your clothes and ready to sleep. It’s very late right now.” Father said. He drops Wang’s suitcase.

“Also, don’t forget to eat your vitamin pills!” As his father finishes talking, he walks out and slammed the door.

Wang realise that his father looks very odd today. It’s his family first time celebrating Christmas. Wang got distracted by packing his suitcase. After that, he ate the pill, turn off the light and ran to his comfy bed. As he lies on the bed, he immediately falls asleep. Wang got woken up by a man screaming. When he open his eyes, he saw several men were wearing traditional clothes with a leather helmets, and holding a sword toward him. They are soldiers. Wang was confused. Later, he realised that he was lying inside the barrier full of golds.

## Chapter 2.

One of the soldier shouted, “How did you get up to here you filthy boy? Do you even know stealing golds is a strict crime?”

“Yes... I know sir! But, first can you tell me where am I right now?” Wang said. As his body shivers he was clearly got scared.

Suddenly, a man wearing fashionable and heroic clothes walks up to him. Wang was confused.

He stands in front of him.

“Greetings, young man.” As he said with his deep tone.

“I am the leader of this treasure voyages, admiral Zheng He.”

## Chapter 3.

After Wang heard the man’s name, he was shock. He couldn’t able to close his mouth. Wang thinks he is dreaming right now. He start to slaps his face several times and tried pinching his arm to wake up. Then he quickly concluded: this is not a dream.

Zheng He was confused too as Wang was self-harming.

“Give this young man our sailor uniform.” said Zheng He.

As he walks toward Wang and said, “You will be part of my advisors of this journey to bring glory for our Great Ming Empire!”

Wang quickly agreed and promoted becoming his youngest advisor.

The soldier guided Wang to his room. The room was small with a bed, small table and a box for personal belongings. It was better than other normal sailors’. While Wang was changing his clothes, he thought this is all a set up. He opens the window and only seeing pale blue ocean. He comes out from his room and went up to the ship deck. Suddenly, he heard a crew shouting out loud.

“Land! Land! 5000 li (chinese measurement) !”

Admiral Zheng He came out from his room with his bright face and shouted, “Prepare to trade! Take the barrels of silks and gold off the ships!”

Wang wanted to know the nation that they are trading with. He sneakily as a mouse, sneaked into the Admiral's office and steal one of map. Wang found out that they are in Palembang. In modern day, it is a province in Indonesia.

#### Chapter 4.

Wang heard Zheng He's voice coming towards him. He quickly hid the map and escaped the office. The crewmen were loading the barrels down to the land. Wang walk down the ship. He saw hundred of civilians were waving and giving a warm welcome. In the crowded people, he saw a conspicuous person walking toward the ships. He was wearing luxurious and fashionable dresses with the bodyguards surrounding him. Wang looked closely at the man; he start to feel ominous premonition; he feels some negative power from that man. Also, he saw thousands of troops marching towards the ships. Wang's face turn pale white and ran back to the ship.

Wang rush to the office. When he arrived, Zheng He was having a meeting with his advisors.

"Admiral Zheng He!" He cried as his breathe keep coming out.

Advisors and Zheng He were confused.

"What's the matter young man?" Said Zheng He. With his totally confused expression.

"It's... It's..." Wang couldn't able stop breathing when he tries to speak. Other advisors were upset due to Wang's disrespectfully interrupting their meeting.

After few minutes later, Wang finally stopped breathing and shout: " Sir, it's CHEN ZUYI !"

#### Chapter 5.

When Admiral Zheng He heard the name, he immediately order all crewmen retreat back to the ships.

"ALL MEN BACK TO THE SHIP ! PREPARE FOR BATTLE!" He shouted.

Everyone were grabbing weapons and standing for battle position. The cannonballs were taken out form the storage. The ships sails back into the water and prepare to fight against Chen Zuyi pirate gangs .

#### Chapter 6.

Chen's pirate ships were gathered around Zheng's ships. The pirates began to firing their cannon toward the ship. One of Zheng He's ship were completely sunk. The bodies were floating and some golds were stolen by Chen's Pirates. Zheng's troops began to pull their bows to aim at the pirates. As they release, the rain of arrows flew toward the pirates.

Meanwhile, Wang was hiding Zheng He's office avoiding arrows and cannon balls. He was shivering and kept talking to himself.

"Death is approaching! This is a real life hell!" He cried.

Zheng He was busying commanding the battle. His aim was to capture Chen Zuyi and take him back to the court to take punishments. The hundreds of arrows and cannon ball rains from the sky and one of the pirate ship got close to the commander ship. They threw the hooks attempting to climb to the ship. The crewmen and the pirates had a brutal sword fights. Wang saw bloods splattering the deck; he saw one of the man's head was chopped off. Zheng He's commanding office got invaded by the pirates. Therefore they had to run up to the deck to fight. Wang followed Zheng He's lead, because he didn't want to die.

Zheng He prepared a small boat for Wang and told him to call for an reinforcement from another Zheng's ship. And told Wang to stay there and never come back to him. Wang ws rolling his boat to another ship. This was caught by Chen Zuyi's pirate.

"Sir! There is a small boat heading toward Zheng He's reinforcement ship!" A pirate said with his raspy voice.

"Let him taste my bloody cannon, KILL IT!" Chen shouted.

As soon as Chen's order was given, the cannonball fire toward Wang. The moment when the cannonball was in front of Wang's face, he woke up...

#### Chapter 7.

Wang was sweating all over his body and his eyes turned red. He realise it's his room. He checked his clock, it's Five minute past seven. When he went downstairs, he saw his father drinking a warm cup of coffee.

"Hello there son! How was your Christmas present that I gave you?" He said while smirking at Wang.

"What present?" Said Wang with his annoyed tone.

His father ignored him and continued to drink his coffee. Meanwhile, Wang was trying to think – was that a dream? But everything looks perfectly realistic... He went back to his room and saw something on his bed. There was a map that Wang have stolen from Zheng He. He wanted to know the result of the battle. He open his book and starting to flipping over them like crazy! Wang found the page where the answer will solve his curiosity – Zheng He won the battle.

This is the new tales of the Ming treasure voyages.

Chapter 8.

“Wow! Grandpa, did you made up this story? Said the little girl.

Grandpa smiles at his granddaughter due to her cuteness.

“This is a true story my dear...” grandpa said.

“How do you know that?” said the little girl with her questioning expression.

“My dear, because Wang is your father! I gave him that present!” Grandpa laughed.



# Detur Pons Mundo

*Korean International School, Je, Ming Sung Andy – 15*

## Chapter 1: To Africa

The ship is sailing towards the west; its ambition is to find lands, unexplored countries where the mighty Ming does not show its presence. The man up on the deck is Zhenghe, a politician, explorer and a diplomat who holds the authority of an army of 1500 tonne ships. From a Semu (caste in Ming dynasty who came from Central or West Asia), he became one of the most trustworthy servants of the Yongle Emperor. From trust of the emperor, He is missioned to conduct expeditions to establish political relationships.

This is the 7th expedition for Zhenghe; he is now a veteran on voyages. Looking at the endless sea, he turns around and views an army of boats following him, a total of 62 ships with 27,800 soldiers are behind him waiting for his command. He endeavours to hit Africa; a land that is known to be further away from the Arabian Peninsula which was never explored before. Unlike other expeditions, Zhenghe knew that the way to Africa would be harsh and unexpected. He calls Xiao Ming, his private assistant to the deck.

"Xiao Ming, how much time does it take to arrive? It has already been 15 days since we left Calicut."

"I am not sure captain, the Indians told us that it would take few weeks to get to the coast of Africa." Said Xiao Ming.

"Follow up with any new updates, get ready for supper; the sun is dropping"

"Yes Captain"

The chefs made the kitchen boisterous, soldiers rolled barrels of Kechiap to the kitchen, crew members tidied the deck and floors. Smoke arose from the kitchen; dinner was made, the scent of cooking rice gave an exceptionally pleasant aroma. It was time to serve those foods to the drooling sailors. The order of serving the food on this ship is pretty much like other ships; the captain gets his food first, soldiers the next, crew members after, and leftover goes to the slaves and cut workers. Zhenghe's meal is always completed in his room, served with lavish, fresh food that cannot be imagined to be served on the sea. Today, like any other days he was served with unspoiled delicacies, however, he did not finish it.

"Why are you not finishing your dinner captain? Is it not to your appetite? I will tell the chefs if so." Xiao Ming asked in curiosity.

"It is not the food Xiao Ming," replied the man in anxiousness, "I checked the stars last night, the Arabians told me I have to see four stars facing North at this point, but I saw it on the South. We have to alter our direction now."

"I will tell the sailors to change the direction right now; it is all from my mistake, I have no words to confess."

"I am very sure you will. How is everyone doing on this voyage, report any casualties or lacks we have."

"2 slaves and one soldier died from tiredness this week sir, crew members and soldiers are also reported with scurvies and rashes, we also lack fresh food, there are only processed food from mainland now."

"What happened to all the food? It has only been two weeks from India! We still have a few days to get to Africa, also, how did you deal with the bodies?"

"The slaves were thrown to the ocean, and the soldier was wrapped and placed in the coffin."

"Pay full respect to the soldier, and spare some of my fresh consumables to soldiers with scurvies and rashes, give them some rest too."

"As you wish." Xiao Ming concluded.

Oil lamps are running out, lights are getting dimmer, and ships are now getting ready to spend its night. Soldiers are preparing to get their rest on double deckers, crew members on the bed, and rest on anywhere they can get space. Lights slowly fade out and when the others are relaxing, night duty gets on work.

"I oughta tell you this," whispered one of the night shift workers to another. "I've heard that people are dying because they cannot eat on the other ships."

"That cannot be true, I thought we had plenty of food in all ships." replied the other.

"Well, they say it is taking longer than what we have expected, I've also seen fellas with scurvies and all those rashes, ugh!"

"Yeah, I've seen those people too, hope they get better. Have you also seen the body of the slaves, I mean the scut workers, 2 of them died just from our ship, I guess the rumour is correct!"

"Yeah yeah, but you see, no one cares about them, I guess they are plenty of those lower classes dying."

“I see, I don't even know how they got to this ship.”

“Wait, I hear footsteps, let's get back on duty.” ends the worker.

Like any other days, the sun rose, and the blazing sunlight woke up the ship, everyone is working hard to get to the destination, food is running out and everyone knew that the only way to counter this crisis is arriving at any port in Africa. Sailors invested the whole afternoon altering the past mainsail and it is now manoeuvring without any blemishes. Zhenghe is at the forecast deck with his telescope, then he catches a flat green line in his sight, a land that possibly is Africa that they have craved for. Zhenghe in excitement shouts out

“Day 16, we are in Africa crew members, command the fleet to approach to the land in front of us at full velocity.”

## **Chapter 2: Brief Moments in Mogadishu and Malindi**

When Zhenghe's ship was about to approach, diminutive vessels surrounded. Then after a minute or so, four packs of African soldiers appeared. Zhenghe, covered with bodyguards, then arrived. The African soldiers performed actions, moving hands around their body, then soon made gestures that seemed as greetings. The captain of the Chinese vessel then bowed to the soldiers and moved to the port.

“Get the gold and all the valuables ready, time to impress the king of this country,” ordered Zhenghe. “Time to show what Ming has got.”

As soon as Zhenghe commanded, colossal amounts of precious stones, marbles, and elegant silk and respectable specialities filled the harbour. Wagons to deliver all these bribes arrived, Zhenghe was escorted forthwith, both his soldiers and African guards circling for a brief walk to the King's accommodation.

The palace that Zhenghe and the soldiers arrived was fascinating, adorned with gold and precious material, the place seemed sacred and stunning. The waiting man soon was allowed to go into the palace. The King was covered with all kinds of refined jewellery and accessories. When the visitor was still astonished by the outstanding beauty, the King stood up. A gentle smile upon the King's face relieved Zhenghe's anxiousness from the fear of rejection. The African man looked around the captain of the ship, circled him for a few laps in curiosity, then sat back on his throne.

“I, as the servant of the great Yingzong emperor of everlasting Ming Dynasty would like to present you our treasures specially ordered by our majesty,” said Zhenghe breaking the silence.

In a short time after Zhenghe finishing his last word, a whole mountain of stunning presents invaded the King's room. A slight smile spread on the receiver's face; he seemed to be impressed by what the Chinese explorer has added to his collection. The King then spoke

“Welcome to Mogadishu”

“Thank you” replied Zhenghe in fascination due to the ability of the King to speak Chinese.

“I hope you to visit Malindi too, I have a present to your emperor there.”

“I would also appreciate your consideration if you spare some of this country's food. We lack food to maintain our journey.

“As you wish traveller,” answered the greeter.

After the discussion, Zhenghe's vessel travelled to Malindi, gifted a giraffe and a zebra for the Yingzong emperor, and safely came back to Fuzhou, the territory of Ming dynasty at the year 1433.

# Emperor's Plan

*Korean International School, Jin, Tina – 16*

One day, the Emperor gathered us in his palace and said : 'I need 30000 people right now, to go on an adventure.' so the adventure begins. 1000 crew died on the way. Not enough food, drinks. There were rats, flies – very dirty and bad environment. Someone died because of diseases. 2 captains, 10 vice captains. People were divided into different teams – cooking team, cleaning team, soldiers, service team??? I am one of the members in the cooking team: there is a rule that we will steal the captain's food. Don't question, don't tell because if the captain knows they will kill us and throw us into the sea!!!! My friend is in the cleaning team – he told me that they don't actually clean, they just pretend that they have cleaned the rooms, all teammates are super super lazy but the cooking team was even lazier.

We had a lot of adventures during the trip. The most unforgettable one should be the fight between us and the happy island people. It was a scary night with strong winds and heavy rain. We landed on the happy island..... At first, we thought the people were very nice, you know what? They gave us food and drinks, and even held a party to welcome us. I remember a little girl told me: 'Hey! My name is Claire. Welcome to happy island! We are so happy to have you as our guests.' I smiled at her, and she hugged me, so we became friends. Everything seems pretty normal and peaceful until the night comes.....I heard a weird screaming from the captain's room – 'AHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!' he screamed loudly. 'YOU GET OUT OF MY ROOM!!' with voice cracks. There was another voice laughing and said 'NO!! GIVE ME ALL YOUR GOLD! AHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA!'. And I woke my friend up – 'Hey!! Stop sleeping! The captain screamed and he seems to be in danger!'. Unfortunately, my friend ignored me and keep sleeping. I am extremely angry and I slapped him, punched him, yelled at him – 'WAKE UP!!!!!!!!!!!!!!'. He finally woke up and yelled at me 'What's wrong with you? The captain.....WHAT?'. He and I rushed to the captain's room and we saw the door was opened but captain was not in the room! We are super frustrated so we woke all the members up and search for the captain. My friend and I entered the Happy forest, which is the biggest forest in the island, someone told me the forest have a scary creature that will eat human.....We went there and my friend said 'Don't go in!'. Originally, I wanna leave but I heard a voice screaming : 'HELP! HELP! HELP!'. My friend looked at me, with his body shaking and face turning pale 'Oh no!! That sounds like captain, should we go and see?', I nodded and we went in the forest. We followed that voice and we saw OUR CAPTAIN yelling at us!! The sheik of the island stared at us angrily 'What on earth are you two doing? IT IS NONE OF YOUR BUSINESS!'. We are frightened and don't know what can we do. And suddenly – 'BANG!' the sheik was shooted, falled down and died!! We are shocked and have no idea what's going on – 'He is dead! My friend! Don't stay there! It is dangerous! Come and follow me – I will show you the way to escape!! COME! NOW!' It's Claire! She comes and rescue us!!!!!! We followed her quickly and she showed us the way to get on the boat 'Don't come back again or else you guys would be in danger again! Leave the island now!!' She told me. 'But what about you?' I asked. She smiled and said 'You need not to worry me. I will be fine! Go! Have a safe trip!' She waved at us and gave us a big smile. I will remember this moment forever – a young beautiful girl who save our life, she is a HERO. When we started our journey, the emperor gave us a loads of gold and told us 'If you meet some nice people, give them some!'. So we took all his gold and started the adventure. Sometimes when we meet some really good people, we will send them our gold. And don't you know who received the biggest amount of gold? It is the PEOPLE OF SAD ISLAND.....They are the nicest people I have ever seen in the world. We landed on the island. They danced to welcome us. They gave us BBQ fish and it's very tasty. We stayed on the island for 1 month because we lack of food and drinks. The emperor on the island know our bad condition and then he said : 'no worry guys! I will take care of you until you guys have enough resources. If you don't mind, just take some food from here! You guys must have travelled a long way to come to the sad island! Take some good rest.'

And then, we stayed there for 1 month. The emperor organized different activities for us to better understand the island's culture and history. For example, the funniest game on the island is playing a ball called sadball. The emperor told us : 'we invented this game 100 years ago, just make a blind guess, do you know why there's such a game? What is it for?' and captain said: 'For..... entertainment?' the emperor answered: 'what a good guess! But it's wrong.' one of the teammates in cooking team raised up his hand

and shouted : 'I KNOW! ITS FOR celebration!' the emperor laughed: 'HAHA, this young little boy is so energetic, but again, it's wrong.' The emperor continued : 'i think its time for me to tell you the truth. It is for medical use! When people get sick, they will feel painful so when they play the sadball, they can release their negative energy and the

sadball will absorb all those negative energy and the patient will recover! Don't you feel its magical? perhaps , some of you may not believe me but dop give it a try and you can find its magic.” We are amused and actually believed his crap. And then, all of us are eager to give it a try. So we form groups and play the sadball. It is great to know that the island have such a special culture. At first, we all think that the people in sad island are sad therefore they are named sad island. But it seems it's situation is the opposite! They named sad island because they have the magic to absorb all the negative energy from people and give them happiness! What a wonderful island!

We had wonderful and lovely memories on the sad island. I am sure will remember it forever. Our captain said we had a great memories there and the emperor treated us really well so when we left, he told the emperor ‘Thank you your majesty for your warm welcome and care for us in these days, we will certainly remember how well you treated us. All of us have a good rest here and we won't forget it. This is the present from our emperor to your island. We wish you and your people good health and all the best to you guys.’ Our captain then sent them a large amount of gold to thank you for their care to us.

I learnt that adventure is never easy but as long as we have the determination to overcome the difficulties and walk out from our comfort zone , we can do it. And miracle happens everyday.

# Tales of Buju on the Ming Treasure Voyages

*Korean International School, Leung, Jade – 16*

“Hey, you! Come over here and clean up this mess.” Jack, the captain shouted. I took my broom and swept the floor swiftly as I didn’t want to get scolded again. I always wanted to part of the pirates because I admire their bravery and it seems adventurous. Even though I am not a pirate, but being on the same ship, traveling and working for them is my dream.

It was the afternoon when the fight started. I was sweeping the floor as usual and all of a sudden, there was an explosion sound on the other ships which were on the left side. It was a bomb attack. I rushed to the end of the ship to see what was happening. There were people on small boats trying to intrude our ship. In the meantime, they grabbed their weapons and loaded up the guns and all I have was my broom and a small knife. I didn’t know what to do but to stand with them. “ Don’t worry, kid. We’re going to get through this.” One of the pirates said.

Awhile later, the intruders finally came up and began fighting with the pirates. I stood behind the door because I was afraid to go out. Suddenly, there was a man in a black mask rushed in with a knife in his hand. I took my broom and smacked his head from behind. He fell down and his head was bleeding. I felt like I am one of them now so I took the knife from his hand and ran out. At last, some of the intruders were killed and some escaped into the water. None of our properties were stolen but there was some damage to the ship.

While I was cleaning up the mess, one of the pirates called me in. The pirates were having a meeting and they wanted me to join them. When I heard the news, I was shocked. I am officially part of them now. I am the youngest pirate on the ship.

A few days later, we arrived at our final destination. The place we were heading is called Buju. We decided to stay on this island for a week to enjoy the paradise. We got off the ship as soon as we arrived and gave some of our wonderful presents to their Emperor. Meeting the emperor of Buju was one of the greatest things I’ve ever done on this trip. We had a lot of fun and learned so much of their culture and made some new friends there. One of the best things in Buju was the stars at night. When it was getting dark, the sky would become like a galaxy. I have never seen so many stars at night in my life. It was stunning and I will never forget that.

As time passed, it was finally the time for us to say goodbye. We left and sailed back to China. When we were on our way back, we were all celebrating and dancing around. As soon as we arrived in China, I said goodbye to all of them and went ack home. I had the best time of my life and I wish to go on this adventurous trip again.

# A Tale of the Ming Treasure Voyage

*Korean International School, Soong, Hiu Lam Chloe – 15*

Arjun Acharya pressed his ear to the door and listened quietly to the anxious voices of his parents. He clenched his jaw as the sound of his parents' voices dimmed down to the sound of a whisper. Pushing himself off the door, he quickly slipped into his room and pressed his ear to the wall. He smirked, thanking God that the walls of the small house in Calicut were thin enough to hear everything.

“We cannot just send him away!”

He heard his father sigh, “It’s too late. I have already volunteered him to go. He’s too comfortable here. We have to push him out of the comfort of home; I refuse to let him laze around the way he does.”

Arjun furrowed his eyebrows at the conversation. Were they talking about him? He shuffled forward quickly in an attempt to hear the conversation more clearly. However, the lack of sound from the other side of the wall confused him. Have they stopped talking or have they moved elsewhere?

“What are you doing, boy?”

He cursed under his breath and turned to the doorway to see his father standing there with a frown on his face. Arjun leaned his back on the wall, looking at his father in the eye and said, “Nothing, dad.” The frown on his father’s face deepened as he strode forward elegantly until his feet were right in front of him.

His father, Jai Acharya, was an intelligent and hugely successful man. He was a tall man with good luck built into him like the jewels drilled into the king’s crown. He was the jack-of-all-trades, hugely successful in anything he does and never fails in taking what he can’t do, in stride. The most vital part of it all was that Jai knew it.

However, the look on his father’s face didn’t match the face of a man who prides himself in pushing past every obstacle. Instead, it was the face of a man who had given up all hope. Jai fell onto his knees, gripping Arjun by his shoulders. “You will do great things, my son. I have taught you everything I could. I have taught you to keep a levelheaded mind. I have taught you to have a protective heart. I have taught you to have an honest soul. Remember these words, Arjun. They shall be the only thing that may keep you from harm’s way once you leave the safety I’ve provided for you.” Jai whispered into his son’s ears as if he didn’t want anyone else to hear.

Arjun furrowed his eyebrows in confusion, “What are you talking about, dad? I’m fourteen. What harm am I going to be getting into?”

Jai sighed in defeat, “You will understand soon. Have patience”.

Patience. That word rang through Arjun’s head as he was pushed onto the massive ship. His mind hadn’t been able to process the events that had led him to be a part of the Chinese voyage. Nonetheless, here he was. He turned around, searching the crowd for his parents that had sent him away as a gift to the Chinese. His anger had now turned into fear as he was pushed further into the ship.

“Level-headed mind. Protective heart. Honest soul.” Arjun whispered to himself as he felt the ship push itself away from the docks. He felt a hand on his shoulder as a deep voice gave out what he supposed was Chinese.

“Li Min.” The soldier said monotonously. Arjun turned around to see a man with armour made of what seemed to be copper, staring at him with impatience. The soldier turned around and started to walk away. Arjun didn’t understand what had just been said, but he quickly followed the man.

Soon, they made it to a broad set of red doors with tints of gold on the detailed lotus design. The soldier stopped right in front of the door and turned around to face him, at least that was what Arjun thought he was trying to do.

“Zheng He.” The soldier said with pride hinted in his voice.

Arjun stared at him with wide eyes. “What?”

The soldier repeated himself although this time; there was a slight hint of annoyance laced in his voice. “Zheng He.”

Arjun stared at the soldier for a split second before he spluttered out, “Jeng Huh?”

The soldier finally looked down at Arjun before nodding his head. The soldier turned around and knocked on the door with what seemed to be some sort of password. As soon, as the soldier’s fist lifted itself from the door, the massive piece of wood slowly slid open to a small room with a desk in the middle. The soldier moved aside and beckoned Arjun to step forward.

He cautiously stepped into what seemed to be the strategy room. From the letters that scattered all over the desk to a huge map of the world that covered the entire left wall. The place gave an aura of importance or perhaps, it was the person standing behind the desk that gave off that impressive aura.

The man was wearing armour. Unlike the soldier that had led him here, the armour had gold laced all over the armour. Arjun who had no idea who the soldier in front of him was, decided to be safe and say, “Jeng Huh.”

Arjun then realized, he had no idea what the two words meant and he silently prayed he hadn’t said anything terrible. The man in front of him stared apprehensively as if he didn’t know what to do with him. Arjun quickly got down on his knees and pressed his forehead to the ground in front of him. The fear of being trapped in a place that he didn’t know had started to kick in and was taking over his control.

Levelheaded mind. Arjun scolded himself quickly for forgetting the rule so rapidly. Suddenly, he was pulled up onto his feet and dragged off. As the doors closed in front of his face, he managed to catch a glimpse of the man in gold smirking. What was going on?

That was then the phrase that was repeated in his head for the next few months. They hadn’t thrown him in a cell, but instead a tiny room with a small bed and a desk that was less than a meter apart. In the next few days, he had also come to realise he was now Zheng He’s personal assistant of sorts. Even though there were days where Zheng would get frustrated with Arjun’s lack of understanding of the Chinese language, most of it was smooth sailing. At least, that was what Arjun had told himself.

The short voyage from India was nearly coming to an end as they finally arrived at Sumatra. As Zheng led his men off the boat onto land, Arjun decided between himself that he was going to stick to Zheng and Li like the glue sticking the smaller boats together. As they rushed forward in quick strides towards the city.

The first thing Arjun noticed were the villagers, working hard in the fields. The plantations were long and narrow, stretching over miles and miles of land until it faded off into the distance. The clear, blue water of the never-ending river flowed into the sea, as children played near the riverbanks. The tall trees that hovered over them were giving people shade as they walked along the path towards the centre of the city. The blue sky that was reflections of the sea made Arjun feel warm inside, feeling that today, the trade was going to be a good one.

When they arrived at what appeared to be the king’s home, the soldiers had stopped right as Zheng took his first steps onto the king’s stairs. Arjun realized this and started to pull back, but Li grabbed him by the collar of his shirt and dragged him up the stairs behind Zheng. Li swiftly took a spear and forced it into Arjun’s hand and said, “Na.”

Arjun, who had started to learn the meanings behind certain sounds that the Chinese made, realized that Li was trying to force him to take the weapon. Arjun immediately started to protest but a glare from Li stopped all sounds coming out from his mouth. They walked through the door to face the intense glare of the Sumatran King.

Discussions began between the Sumatran King and Zheng, with some inputs from other people in the room. During this time, Arjun had kept his head down. He had been trying to press down the anxiety of being in the room by gripping onto the spear as tightly as he could.

Unexpectedly, shouting and yelling started and the once tidy room turned into a pigsty. Spears were being tossed around and Arjun quickly rushed to the nearest wall as panic started to settle in yet again. He observed the room, finding Zheng and the king going at each other while Li was fighting another soldier. Looking with more detail, he found that Li was losing. The way Li was stepping and the way the other soldier was ferociously pushing Li back, Arjun knew that he had to help in some way.

Rushing towards them, he used the butt of his spear and hit the soldier in the back of his head. The soldier stumbled forward, tripping over Li, before turning around and growling at them. Protective heart. Arjun steadied himself as the other soldier took a step forward. Arjun watched as the other soldier throw Li's spear to the other side of the room, before taking a jab at him. He dodged the attempt and jabbed back at the soldier.

Dodge. Move back. Jab. Repeat. Dodge. Move back. Jab. Again.

Arjun didn't know how much longer he could repeat the same steps without the other soldier realizing it. Arjun also realized that Li had left him alone to fight the soldier in front of him. Arjun instantaneously decided to jab as many times as he could before butting his enemy with the blunt side of the spear.

A loud yell of "TING!" gave Arjun a fright. Expeditiously pointing his spear at his enemy, he came to realize that it was Zheng in front of him. Arjun heaved in a sigh, and lowered the weapon hastily. Zheng said a few final words before turning on his heel with a wave towards Arjun, telling him to follow.

Keeping his head low, Arjun stepped in time as the admiral pushed open the doors. Quickly boarding the ship, he watched as soldiers began to take off their armour while servants rushed to pick them up. Whilst this was happening, food and water was being brought up as soldiers dropped to the ground in fatigue and weariness.

Orders were sent out as they left the docks, the huge fleet following behind them as they elegantly floated away from the island. Sumatra wasn't a very nice place to visit, Arjun decided. He carefully stepped over the soldiers who decided to lie down on top of the deck as a swift moment of tranquil was brought upon them.

Stepping into his room, he grabbed a piece of paper and dipped the brush into the ink.

Dear Father,

I have no clue how I'm going to get this to you, but today was probably the scariest day of my life. A fight had broken out while we were in the king's throne room in Sumatra. I had to fight someone today. I knocked him unconscious but I feel extremely guilty over it.

I want to go home dad. I'm not meant to be a sailor or a soldier. I don't want to be Zheng's personal assistant or Li's training buddy. I want to go home and hang out with my friends.

Dad, I don't even know when I get to leave. No one knows how long this voyage is going to take. I haven't seen you in months now, and I don't know how much longer until this voyage ends.

Sincerely,  
Your son,  
Arjun.

P.S Tell mom I miss her to.

Arjun folded up the piece of paper before throwing it onto the pile of other folded letters that will probably never be sent. He sighed, resting his head on the palm of his hand. Perhaps, today wasn't the best of days.



Another few months had passed and no other confrontations had happened like the ones in Sumatra. The people of Arabia and Thailand were welcoming and happy, which slowly started to reflect on Arjun. He had started to realize the joys of travelling the world and giving to other countries. He had started to build relationships with Li and Zheng, who had surprisingly given him a bit of their precious time.

He started to feel comfortable at sea. The new environment though, was always threatening as he never knew who to put his trust in completely. Nevertheless, the amenity of the sun setting over the horizon every day had given Arjun the feeling of the warmth at home. The smell of the ocean breeze now felt like taking in a new breath of fresh air that could never be found in the busyness of Calicut.

Honest soul. "I don't know what to feel Li. I feel safe, but I feel safer in Calicut. I feel less fear then I did a few months ago though." Arjun turned his head back to face Li who was standing behind him. Together, they watched the mountains move further into the distance.

Li answered back quietly, "Ni kai xin ma?"

Arjun smiled contentedly, "Yeah Li, I'm happy."

# The New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

*Korean International School, Wong, Aimee – 15*

The grey walls of the Meridian Gate loomed before Yong Zhi, him feeling as distant from the definition of his name as possible. Named by his father, Yong meant bravery, and Zhi meant smart or wit, which was definitely not what Yong Zhi felt at that moment.

In a crowd of many other people hoping to be chosen to join Emperor Yongle's Treasure Fleet led by Admiral Zheng He, he had never felt smaller in his life. There were men young and old, coming from far and wide, of various shapes and sizes, but they all had one thing in common— they were enrobed in exquisitely made robes only to be afforded by the most elite. Except for Yong Zhi, who was wearing the most presentable robe he had, which was a light gray with no colour or pattern, and unlike the others, he also didn't have the hat, only a simple ribbon holding his hair in place in a bun, easily showing his young and inexperienced age at 18.

It was the day where the admiral himself would individually interview and pick people to join his fleet for the voyages, and Yong Zhi had decided to try his luck. He wasn't confident at all, as a commoner, with his best asset being his sharp tongue that did not hesitate to throw a sharp comment or retaliate to any thrown his way. Other than that, he really didn't have anything. Yong Zhi was only of average height, had mediocre fighting skills, and had very low cardiovascular endurance that would probably last his five minutes on the battlefield until he was either killed or was able to rest. The people interested had been told to meet at the 7th hour of the day, right before noon in front of the entrance to the palace, the Meridian Gate. Suddenly, a loud bell rang, the initial sound crisp and clear to all the people gathered. It was now the 7th hour, and soon they would be led in.

The metal gates swung open, revealing 2 soldiers dressed in full attire on each side, and in the middle of the gates stood a tall figure, face obscured, clothed in indigo robes, a bear embroidered on his chest, a silver belt loosely hanging around his waist, and a black hat sitting on his head.

"I am Zhou Yi Xiang, second commander of the Treasure Fleet. I am here in place of Admiral Zheng to lead you into the palace grounds, where the interview will take place. Please follow behind me so you won't get left behind."

The crowd followed behind him, marvelling at the colourful structures adorning the outer gardens, the animals carved into the tall beams of pavilions and halls, the vibrant colours of the flowers in the gardens. It was exactly what you would think as being royalty's residence. Yong Zhi started feeling the butterflies building up in his stomach, feeling more and more uneasy every step closer to their destination. They came to a stop in front of one of the many luxuriously decorated halls, Commander Zhou leading the interviewees into the hall. 'Ooh's and 'Aah's could be heard from all around, people gaping at the sheer size of the hall.

"Can all of you please form rows of 10, 1 row behind another, and any odd ones out at the back please." Yong Zhi felt the bodies around him move in a flurry, trying to form neat rows of ten as fast as they could. Just by a simple estimate after scanning over the crowd, there had to be at least 16 rows of people, barely filling even a quarter of the room. Two simply dressed guards quickly scanned over the group, and began leading the first two rows into something that seemed like a smaller room, off the side of the main hall. Yong Zhi began to mentally prepare himself, as his row was now at the front. He could hear his heart pounding in his ears, yet his mind went blank from fearful anticipation. The guards were now heading his way, and they motioned for his row and the row behind to follow behind them, but to the opposite direction of where the other people had gone.

After briefly looking around, Yong Zhi noticed that something was missing, but he couldn't pinpoint what exactly it was. They entered a smaller that was almost identical to the previous one, just smaller and adorned with less bright hues of red and blue, specks of green and gold scattered in between. It was then that Yong Zhi noticed that

Commander Zhou was standing in all his glory (so that's what was missing), face now fully visible. Yong Zhi gasped quietly as he took in the situation he had at hand. He was actually trying out to possibly join the army, well not exactly the army but close enough.

His train of thought was abruptly cut off by Commander Zhou, "I will be evaluating you for the first round of interviews, one-on-one, in the order you are currently lined up in. Please wait patiently for your turn." After the final word, he turned on his heel and opened the door to yet another room, this time much smaller and simplistic than the other rooms. The guard ushered for the first in Yong Zhi's row to go inside the room, and swiftly closed the door behind him.

After zoning out for a few minutes, Yong Zhi was ushered into the room. He quickly bowed towards Commander Zhou and stood in front of him, hoping for the best. He could now take a clear look at the commander's face, and saw a much younger and youthful face looking at him. There were visible signs of faded scars, most likely from strenuous training over long periods of time. There were dark bags under his eyes, sullen and evidently tired from a clear lack of rest.

"What is your name?"

Yong Zhi was pulled out of his reverie by the question. "My name is Yong Zhi, Commander Zhou."

"Age?"

"18 years old, commander."

"Do you have any prior experience with physical combat?"

"No, Commander Zhou."

"Then why do you want to join the Treasure Fleet?"

"With all due respect, I want to prove my worth to both my family, and my peers who have shunned me for being weak and scrawny, by representing our country in this plan to give, rather than receive as is custom on the seas. I find this to be a good and rewarding cause, as we may also encounter dangerous people that we either defeat or die trying to."

"Very well, please go wait back in the main hall, while we finish screening the rest of the potential members of the fleet and announce the results afterwards. It was nice meeting you, Yong Zhi."

"You too, Commander Zhou."

Yong Zhi walks out of the room, feeling a heavy weight lifted off his shoulders. He returned to the main hall, picking a place to sit and rest against. 'A little nap wouldn't hurt,' thought Yong Zhi as he closed his eyes.

He woke up to a hand shaking him awake. He looked up to see who it was, and to his shock, it was Commander Zhou. "Wake up Yong Zhi. You're the only one that has made it through and into the fleet out of this group."

"Wait, what? I'm the only one that got in the fleet, but why?"

"I'll explain to you in my personal quarters. I also hope you don't have any important things at your residence, as starting from today you will be staying with me in my quarters as my personal assistant, until the end of the entire Fleet is over and done with. Clothes shall not be of any concern, as you will be measured by the royal tailor once we get there, and they will be made as soon as possible."

Yong Zhi was at a loss for words, and nodded his head. The rest of his day after getting the brief explanation from Commander Zhou, experiencing the detailed measuring the tailor used, settling in to his new quarters, was just spent on getting used to his new life. His daily schedule for the next 3 months before the fleet set sail, was to accompany Commander Zhou and monitor his day-to-day tasks to assist him in the future, then have combat training every other day, personally mentored by the commander, and to clearly log all of the members of the crew on the various ships of the complete fleet. Even after just one day of the strict orders, Yong Zhi could feel himself quickly adjusting to what would now be his life.

Yong Zhi could only sigh in content. This was better than anything he could have achieved in his hometown. He was now a relatively high ranking member of the court, and in charge of drafting diplomatic messages in place of the commander, meaning he had various opportunities to expand his horizons, both before, and during the voyages of the Ming Treasure Fleet. He really couldn't ask for anything more, could he?

# The Journey

*Korean International School, Yun, Lok Yin – 16*

Zhang never had a past. At a young age he ran away from his plagued and trouble-stricken village. Much of his life was drifting from place to place, running errands and carrying out odd jobs. It was a tough life, food was scarce, and the winters were cold. No friends, family, past or future. It wasn't until, by sheer coincidence, that he reached the port town of Wongzhou. The local marina was an obscure scene. Usually it would smell of fishes from morning catches. But today there were no aggressive fishmongers selling fishes. In place of those were an armada of a fifty or so vessels. Crates and barrels of supplies were loaded. *We are at war*, he thought, *God bless those poor bastards*.

All of a sudden, he spotted something intriguing. One of the crates that was being hoisted onboard a grand warship slipped free of its pulley. A thunderous bang followed, as the box exploded. Wood splinters flew everywhere. In the heap of debris, there was something out of place. Although shattered, Zhang could make out what was the cargo. The crate used to house a large, decorated porcelain vase. *Huh*, he thought, *why would a warship go to war carrying such fragile and precious item?*

Zhang approached a uniformed ensign taking a break. 'What's with the navy and treasure? Captured some contrabands?' He asked.

The ensign looked puzzled, but then replied. 'Why, you never heard of the treasure voyages? Have you been in a coma until just now?'

'Wha.....' In a flash, he remembered. Wherever he went, there were talks, rumors about the so-called treasure voyages. Sending priceless gifts to other kingdoms, greeting locals, and other inconceivable events. *Propagandas, myths*, he thought. It was simply impossible. 'Oh, they are real?'

'Of course! In fact, we are short on men. We could use a good man like you. I promise that there will fame, fortune and plenty of stories to tell your kids.'

*Fame, fortune*. The words echoed inside Zhang's brain. It was perhaps a start to a new life. Without hesitation, he agreed.

Fast forward six months, Zhang was working as a lookout in the open sea. He was the eyes of the fleet, which now consists of nearly 200 ships, and commanded by the venerable Admiral Zheng He. His name was renowned in the whole Ming Empire. A legend, respected by the Emperor himself and worshipped by his own men. However, Zhang's task was arguably more important than his. He had to eye the surroundings for any traces of civilization. But all he saw was a canvas of different shades of blue, and most of the time he was sick as a parrot.

However, it wasn't all gloom. For the past few months the fleet had contacted civilizations, from isolated tribes to massive kingdoms. Wherever it went, Zhang saw sights that he never thought was possible. Wild beasts, majestic creatures, animals with brilliant colors. It was simply incredible. One time, he had the opportunity to set foot on land. He visited the local bazaar, a site of spectacular sight and sound. Exotic spices, fruits, and textiles. Everything was otherworldly.

Zhang continued to eye the sea. Trouble was brewing on the horizon. A flotilla of 200 boats emerged and was sailing towards the fleet. It wasn't a hallucination. There was pandemonium on the deck. The crew were preparing the cannons and taking aim. *Uh oh. Pirates*.

*BOOM! BOOM!* Cannons fired and recoiled rocked the ship. But the shots were futile. The guns were wildly inaccurate and the canoes the pirates are on were tiny in size. Moments later, the frigate was boarded by the barbarians. Zhang abandoned his mast position and brandished a sabre. On the deck was a dark colored man armed with a spear. Zhang was face to face with that thuggish scum. *SLASH!* After a brief skirmish, one down. Along with the help from other sailors, the boarding party was massacred. Though the party was wiped out, everyone knew they were the red herring. The ship was not carrying anything valuable, hence worthless.

The frigate was on fire.

Flame spread quickly on the wooden warship, turning it into a fiery monstrosity. The weakened structure collapsed, and several seamen disappeared beneath it. As the inferno toppled over, Zhang jumped and held onto a piece of floating debris. There he clung for dear life.

# Don Joey, Winnie the Giraffe and Me

*Munsang College, Lau, Yui – 15*

I was on the deck of the ship staring at the blue, crystal clear sea when I heard Commander Hatong call me. “Come here, that guy on the deck.” he said. I didn’t blame him for not knowing my name. Literally no one on board knew who I am—I was nothing short of a servant. While I was wondering why he was calling me after I finished cleaning all those tables, chairs, floors, windows and toilets, Hatong answered the question in my heart by saying, “You seem free, don’t you? Take this crown band to Official Zheng. He is on the second floor.” He pointed at a box on the floor. “You mean...Official Zheng He?” I was so nervous that my volume went straight down. “Yes, are you nervous? Never talked with him before? He is kind, and he is definitely not going to kill you. I am busy right now, so go find him, immediately.” Hatong ordered. I thought he wasn’t telling the truth, but I also knew I could get killed if I disobeyed any orders, especially orders from someone with such a high position like Hatong.

I picked up the box and went down to the second floor, trying to search for Official Zheng. “If I am recalling my memories correctly, Official Zheng is usually inside that room...” and that was when I bumped into a fierce-looking, beardy man. “Oh sorry...” I apologized as he turned to me. “What are you doing here, you servant?” he said. “Commander Hatong told me to deliver this....crown....band....” I muttered. “Okay, you do that, I don’t have time for these insignificant stuffs anyway.” He turned, and stormed off. I knocked on the door, and heard a voice saying, “Come in.” I pushed the door softly and entered the room.

I saw Official Zheng sitting on a chair, with Ma Huan, the translator on his left, and a strong man, which should be his bodyguard, on his right. I bowed down immediately as I entered. “At your ease, young man.” Official Zheng said. I stood up, head facing the ground, “Commander Hatong told me to deliver this....crown band....to you.” I held the box up high. “Oh, does Hatong not even know how to do this himself?” Official Zheng said, looking at me, “Young man, that’s your chance. I don’t usually bother doing these things, so if you can help me and do well, you may be the next Hatong.” I was so tempted and was about to reply, but the bodyguard spoke first, “Official Zheng, that’s against the rules!” Official Zheng stared at him, “My words ARE the rules, Hu Jun. Hatong can’t even fulfill his responsibility, why can’t I find someone to replace him?” Hu Jun winked at Ma Huan, but he was never supportive, “Oh, hell yes, Official Zheng. We all see how irresponsible Hatong is, there’s nothing wrong with finding a replacement....at least temporarily.” Official Zheng nodded as I heard the door banged behind me. It was the beardy man. He seemed surprised that I was still there, but soon ignored me and said, “Official Zheng, we have arrived Chiem Thanh!” “Okay, Wang Heng, we are coming. Next time, don’t bang the door unless it is emergency.” Official Zheng stood up, then said to me, “Young man, follow me.” Wang Heng seemed doubtful, “Official Zheng, he...” “He will present the crown band.” Official Zheng said, “He replaced Hatong.” “Oh.” Wang Heng glared at me for a moment, but soon turned and left me behind following.

I followed Official Zheng, Ma Huan and the Commanders to the bow of the ship. “Are we leaving the ship?” I asked quietly. “Yes, you’ll be responsible to deliver the crown band to the Chiem Thanh emperor, so follow us down the ship and meet with him.” Wang Heng replied. My heart started beating harder and harder, although he was not as great as the Ming Emperor, but he’s still an emperor—enough for me to get nervous. We left the ship and reached the land in Chiem Thanh, then after some walking, we reached the palace. “Emperor, the representative of the Ming Kingdom has arrived.” the palace guard reported. “Oh really? Let them in.” The guard opened the door, and the five of us went in. I was planning to curtsy to the king, but as I saw none of the others bow down, I remained standing with the head slightly facing downwards to show respect. “We are coming to present a treasure of the Ming Kingdom, the crown band...” Official Zheng said as he looked at me. I held the box up and stepped a few steps forward, not too close but near enough for the king’s retinue to get the box. “Oh, what a beautiful crown band. Where is it from?” the king stared at me. No one seemed to be answering, so nervous, I started to talk, “It was....a royal treasure....the Ming emperor thinks it’ll suit you...” I saw the emperor smiling and some heads nodding, I thought I shouldn’t have said anything wrong, so I was finally relieved. “Are you planning to stay for a night or two?” the emperor asked. “Official Zheng, we still have to fight Sukan the fake king in Sumatera!” Hu Jun shouted. “A night won’t hurt much, Hu Jun. It’s getting late soon.” Official Zheng said. “That’s settled then! I will prepare the rooms for you!” the emperor sounded happy. We slept in Chiem Thanh for a night, then returned to the ship and left for Sumatera.

“Well done, young man.” Official Zheng said to me on the ship, “You had manners; you knew how to deal with pressure...which made you enough to replace Hatong. What’s your name?” Just as I was going to reply, Hatong banged

the door and came in. He bowed down and said, "It's my fault, Official Zheng, It's my fault! Please don't replace me....with a servant!" He looked at me and said. "Even a servant can do better than you. Who should be the one reflecting?" Wang Heng murmured. Hatong stared at him, then turned to Hu Jun, trying to ask for help. "Sorry bruh, but that's the truth. No disagreement for me." Hu Jun said. Hatong turned to Ma Huan, but he shouldn't have expected something better than this from the translator, "Official Zheng, Hatong was doing terribly. It's reasonable to get him be replaced." "Can you hear what they said, Hatong? YOU ARE NO LONGER A COMMANDER. I'll find a position for you...no freeriders allowed here. Now get out!" Official Zheng shouted. Feeling hopeless without support, Hatong left the room, staring fiercely at me on his way out. "Now, about you, young man." Official Zheng said, "Now you are the commander, so how should we call you?" "You may call me Hetong." I said, "My family name is Zhang—Zhang Hetong is the full name." "Hetong replaced Hatong," Commander Zheng laughed, "What a joke." Just as Official Zheng finished his sentence, Wang Heng realized something, "Official Zheng, do we need some weapons to fight Sukan? I may take them from the storage room." "Okay, tell the servants to help." Official Zheng said, "and bring Hetong with you. He need to get used to being a commander." "Okay. Come with me, Hetong." I followed Wang Heng and left for the storage room.

"A commander is different from a servant. You can make orders to anyone with a lower position—everyone except Official Zheng, the commanders and the translator. But you still need to be loyal to Official Zheng and keep your manners. Also, don't be too harsh to servants. Make them willing to work for you." Wang Heng explained. "Understood." I said. "Good, you are a quick learner, aren't you? I'm sure you will do this well." Wang Heng showed me how to gather servants for helping, and how to ensure they work well appropriately. After we finished preparing for the weapons, Wang Heng went to the Captain's room to confirm our position. "The captain said we are arriving, so we better get prepared. You know how to fight, don't you?" Wang asked. "I know how to use a sword, and I learnt some basics of fighting from a monk. But I'm not used to shoot with a gun." I replied. "I may teach you. It's not hard at all." Wang Heng gave me a brief lesson of gun shooting and I learnt the knack of having high accuracy, before we were told that Sumatera was right in front of us.

The Commanders left the boat last, so the troops were already facing each other when I arrived the frontline. "That's Don Joey. He's the best military general of Sukan the fake king." Wang Heng explained, "If we can catch him alive, it'll be a big bonus to our military power, given that he's willing to work for the Ming Kingdom." I nodded as the war started with some drum noises and shouts. I used my gun to kill many enemies—Wang Heng's tips worked—but I soon find my gun out of bullets, so I used a sword instead. The soldiers of Sukan were very vulnerable, so our army made a great success. Soon, there were only a few soldiers of Sukan—and their commander, Don Joey—left. Our soldiers attempted to beat Don Joey, but in vain—all were killed by the strong but cruel man. Wang Heng and Hu Jun rushed to fight with Don Joey, but couldn't take an advantage of him though we were greater in number and entered a stalemate. Suddenly, Don Joey grabbed a sword on the ground and quickly pointed it towards Wang Heng. I knew if I did nothing, Don Joey would kill Wang Heng, then Hu Jun, me, and other soldiers might die also—we might eventually lose. To save him, I pick up an unused gun on the ground and targeted at his belly. At the crucial moment, I remembered Wang Heng said that it was best to catch him alive, so I shot his arm instead. The shot worked and Don Joey dropped his sword which nearly sliced Wang Heng. Hu Jun immediately picked up the sword and pointed it towards Don Joey's neck. "Don't kill him, Hu Jun." Wang Heng stood up and said, "He could work for us—he is a great military general, and a great fighter." "Fine," Hu Jun said, "Let's bring him back to our camp."

In the camp, I met Hu Jun, Wang Heng and Don Joey. "Great shot," Hu Jun said, "Don't think I didn't realize that was you." "That's not my own effort. Wang Heng taught me to shoot." I said. "You are humble, too humble maybe. You deserve some compliment, and a higher position." I smiled and replied, "You too. You fought bravely." We both laughed. "Sukan the fake king surrendered after the big loss. We won!" Wang Heng said. All of us celebrated, except Don Joey. "So, what about him?" Hu Jun pointed at Don Joey. "He fainted for quite awhile, but he seems okay. He knows some Chinese, and I think I can convince him to work for Ming." Wang Heng said, "If I can't, Ma Huan can." "Oh, that obsequious bastard." Hu Jun said. "Don't say that, he knew how to get us killed by Official Zheng." Wang Heng whispered, "and certainly we don't know as much as him, especially in language. He may be a bastard, but we need to respect him." "I am already respecting him by not saying that out loud in front of him." Hu Jun said, "We need to leave soon, carry that guy on board." Wang Heng called a few servants to get Don Joey on board, and the three of us returned to the boat.

"The next stop is Malindi." Hu Jun said, "According to Official Zheng, we need to find the god beast 'Qi-Lin' there..." "Oh God, are god beasts even real? The King believed that?" Wang Heng complained. "Yes by the information I've got..." Hu Jun sighed. "At least we beat the fake king Sukan, or else this is a meaningless trip again."



Wang Heng said, “A Qi-Lin in Malindi? Do you believe it?” “It’s no use complaining.” I said, “Hu Jun, did Official Zheng said there’s anything we need to prepare?” “Nothing! And that’s the point! Why am I supposed to be here seeing a god beast that may not even exist without doing something more meaningful?” “Stop complaining, calm down.” Ma Huan entered, “We are arriving Malindi.” “Ma Huan, don’t tell me you believe in god beasts.” “No, but we have to believe, don’t we?” Ma Huan said, “At least in front of Official Zheng, we have to act as if we believe that there will be Qi-Lins.” For a moment, all of us sighed and the room went silent.

Soon we arrived at Malindi and landed to search for Qi-Lins. I searched dedicatedly at first, but Wang Heng found me and said, “Hetong, there won’t be Qi-Lins. Don’t waste your energy—you are no longer a servant.” I turned and saw Hatong searching for Qi-Lins with hard effort. I felt pity for it, but I guess that’s life. One second it gives you sweets, another second you get sour. The only way to combat sour is to get prepared, and have faith. I decided to keep searching. I might not succeed, but with hope, we would have a high chance to get things done. I suddenly found that Don Joey was going somewhere furtively and kept looking at his surroundings, as if he didn’t want others to discover him. I said to Hu Jun, “Don Joey seems strange. He is going somewhere secretly. What should we do?” “You follow him. He has always been strange,” Hu Jun said.

I quietly followed him and we arrived at a plain with many deer-like creatures, with a long neck and spots all over its body, eating grass. “It really looks like a Qi-Lin!” I thought. When I looked down again, I saw Don Joey taking out his sword, sprinting towards the creatures trying to kill them! “Stop! Don Joey, what are you doing!” “I need to kill the Qi-Lins!” “Why?” “Because...You conquered my country, destroyed my home, killed my friends....I won’t let you get the god beasts and gain good luck!” He ran towards the Qi-Lins. Without further warning, I shot two bullets at his legs and he fell down. However, he was too strong and stood back up. Suddenly, a few black-skinned people ran out and pointed at Don Joey. They were the indigenous people who protected the Qi-Lins (they called them ‘giraffes’ in their language). After a round of fighting, Don Joey fell on the ground again.

Just as I was going to leave and find my friends, Ma Huan, Hu Jun and Wang Heng arrived and saw the Qi-Lins as well as the indigenous people. Ma Huan spoke with the indigenous people and knew about the giraffes as well as what happened to Don Joey. The indigenous people knew about Ming and promised to give us a giraffe as a present. Also, the indigenous people said they were going to kill Don Joey as he tried to attack the giraffes. “How should we call the gi...giraffe?” asked Wang Heng. I heard the giraffes emitting a ‘wi-ni’ sound and suggested, “Let’s call it ‘Winnie the Giraffe’.” They all said it was a good idea and decided to call it ‘Winnie the Giraffe’. We carried the giraffe on board. Official Zheng was delighted to see ‘Winnie the Giraffe’ as he thought it was a Qi-Lin as described in tales, while me and my friends believed it wasn’t on our own. We accomplished all our missions and decided to call the trip an end.

I was on the deck of the ship staring at the blue, crystal clear sea when I heard Hatong call me. “Commander Zheng, we are arriving at Ming.” he said. “Okay, I’ll be coming.” I replied. The journey to the west came to an end, but my life as an official has just started.

# I Come. I See. I Do Not Conquer but Connect

*Munsang College, Ng, Jerry – 15*

11<sup>th</sup> July 1408

Cloudy

This morning, the Emperor summoned me to the Grand Palace for a briefing. I was quite sure that he would order me to navigate uncharted waters and explore the unknowns. I was ready to be at his beck and call. No countries are allies of China and even some Northern tribes are hostile to us. We must break the impasse by securing resources in a mass of Virgin Land.

When I saw him, he looked joyful, though with a streak of pensiveness.

“Guess what! I have thought of a brilliant way to gain the support from neighbouring countries. We could make an enormous fleet and you could lead your people to set sail,” he exclaimed.

“What?! Your Majesty, what have you said? In the past, no one was allowed to set sail. Are you sure to break the rules set by the ancestors?” I asked. Breaking any rules set by past emperors could set a dangerous precedent, upset the equilibrium and throw us into a flat spin.

“Never mind. Everything has to change.” I could hear a subtle sign of discontent.

In order to please him and free myself from trouble, I decided to accept the challenge. Now I am still feeling worried as the world is an unknown and anything can be hazardous and take my life. What can I do? I cannot pay lip service to the Emperor. I have to bring myself to the unenviable task, a mammoth one actually.

13<sup>th</sup> October 1408

Sunny

That day has finally come. A few months ago, enormous boats of with trappings of regality were pieced together. They were moored to the harbour and we are now going to set off. At that moment, instead of feeling afraid, I was nervous and sweated a lot. When I walked on the kerbside, some waved to me and shouted, “It is an honour to be appointed by the Emperor to explore the whole world. Break a leg!” I didn't respond to it, but I mumbled to myself, “You would not say that if you see the dangers that loom on the horizons.”

The Emperor was not there since the harbour is far from the capital, so instead the chief executive of the province came. He brought a letter and boxes containing heavy stuff from the Emperor to me.

He read it raucously, “*Message from the Emperor*. Please bring these boxes of goods and silks to the Emperors of other countries that are willing to cooperate with us. Wish all of you a resounding success

After that, all the sailors got onto the deck and those precious boxes were carefully carried onto the ships. When I was walking to the fleet, the chief executive waved to me. I then walked to him.

*“From the Emperor:* You should only open this bag only when you are in emergency.” The chief executive whispered to me and put a small leather bag into my palm which had already been wetted in sweat.

“Wish you all the best!” He added.

Now, when I look closely at the bag, it is an embellished one. On the bag there is a Chinese character ‘*Ming*’ sewn on it and the bag is sealed with a golden thread. Out of curiosity, I had the urge to open it immediately to see what was inside the bag. However, I should listen to what the Emperor said. I have to toe every line he has dictated to me.

*Bon Voyage!* I have to give myself a pat on the back.

28<sup>th</sup> October 1408

Sunny

Urgh... The voyage is sickening. I have thrown up several times a day. Now I am knackered. I have been sucked out of all the nutrients that could have otherwise propped me up.

Anyway, today, our ship has sailed to the land after 15 days in the ocean, with everyone reeling from seasickness. When a sailor observed what was ahead of us with a telescope, he was suddenly on cloud nine. “Yes! At long last, we are saved from non-stop puke! I have seen land!”

At around noon, we set foot on the soil. All of us were excited about that. The place where we landed was a barren rock with sand covering everywhere. Vegetation was few and far between. We were all b e m u s e d by the new environment. Some of them were hopping like a grasshopper until they carelessly tripped by pebbles while some of them were touching the fine sand on the land surface.

After we had explored the coastal areas, we headed for some inner areas, when we started to walk deep inwards, we saw many striking creatures, such as a crawling thing like a crayfish but with a curved, pointed tail. We were all enjoying nature there for the whole afternoon.

At night time, we decided to make a tent at places with shrubs where there will be fodder for the campfire. When we started to eat the food we brought from China, we saw red, glittering eyes from the bushes. They were some kind of dogs, but with sharp fangs. They were likely to attack us as they looked as if we were enemies. They first growled at us and then they started to approach us so we quickly grabbed our knives. The horde of ‘large dogs’ then dashed to us and some of the sailor were being bitten and injured at their ankles. As some of the sailors were athletic, they were able to protect us while keeping the ‘dogs’ away. At last, no serious injuries were reported.

I then had come to terms with the grave risks in this voyage: It was very likely for your fingers to be burned, literally.

1<sup>st</sup> November 1408

Shower

After days of tiring walks across the land of sand, we arrived at a densely populated place, where locals called this city “Kuzubai”. The locals were not very kind at the start, but after they knew that we were from China, they became friendly to us. They probably knew about the great power of China since the Tang Dynasty. I am proud to know that our country is known by people far away!

Welcomed by the locals, we further asked about where the Emperor of this place lived. They pointed to the building which is conical in shape to us. Before we set off, they brought home to the cardinal importance to choose our words carefully with the presence of the Emperor. It was the last thing one wanted to see when the Emperor’s feather was ruffled.

When we arrived at the palace, the Emperor was inside a room. When he saw us, he instructed some guards to check whether we were hostile to the king. Knowing that we were representing China, he quickly walked out and said, “All of you must be very tired after such a long journey, please come in and take a rest.”

The beach we landed on and the palace were polars apart: There were green patches with pink and yellow flowers with bees and butterflies flitting everywhere. All of us were absorbed in this scene of ethereality.

At dawn, I decided to have a meeting with the Emperor.

“Why are you coming to us?” asked the Emperor inquisitively.

“We China would do to invite you and your people to fight the tribes that are hostile to us,” I stated.

“Undoubtedly, China is a strong country throughout the world history. What is the purpose of this cooperation?” asked the Emperor sceptically.

I knew why he took what our offer with a pinch of salt. He was afraid that China would use this opportunity to invade his countr

“No worries! To show our sincerity, we prepared some little gifts that you may find useful,” I said while asking my colleagues to move several boxes in.

When the boxes of goods and silks were opened, the Emperor was beaming with delight.

“There should be an opportunity for us to cooperate,” he added immediately.

**17<sup>th</sup> November 1408**

**Rainy and freezing**

Today, after being in “Kuzubai” for about half a month, we decided to head back to China as the food storage started to become unable for us to sustain for a month. (Originally we planned to go further inland...) We followed the same route and got to our fleet as soon as possible.

As soon as we sailed away from the land, someone bellowed, “Stop or you will be shot.” All of us were in panic. One of us shouted, “I don't want to die here, I must go back to meet my wife!” Then, we saw a hook holding on the wooden plank of our ship. Some people who looked cruel got onto our ship. When we thought how to deal with this situation, a gargantuan man stood was looming right there.

“I know that you have gold bars. Where are they?” “No... I won't tell you...” one of the sailors trembled.

“You will be learning the lesson of refusal!”

People then rushed onto the deck. The fight started. Although we resisted hard and we had more advanced weapons than theirs, we couldn't steal a march on them. Our size of manpower paled in comparison with theirs! With more and more people injured, being the leader of the whole team, I had to think of a way to save our lives....

Suddenly, a flash of memory came up to my mind: The chief executive had given me the leather bag and reminded me to open it only in emergency. I then quickly tore the bag open and inside the bag there was a pack of grey powder. That is a pack of lime powder! It was useful in dealing with enemies as lime powder itself, when mixed with water, generates heat and causes skin burn. I immediately spilt the powder onto the pirates' faces and told the sailors to use a wooden bowl to spill water on their faces. They thought that the powder we spilled was magic powder that hurt them as they didn't know about this use of lime powder. They were afraid and ran away immediately.

This day is an exhausting day and I didn't expect the journey to be this dangerous. Today, I was so afraid that I was going to jump to the sea to escape, but luckily it turned out to be safe.

**8<sup>th</sup> December 1409**

### **Thunderstorm**

The weather was inclement yesterday. The sky were covered in thick layers of clouds and it was bucketing down from dawn to dusk. We faced the gravest danger since the start.

The weather worsened in the afternoon. There were claps of thunders sending tremors on the sea and waves were raging, tossing our boats vigorously. The glass wine bottles that we brought abroad fell and broke into fragments and the wine spilled everywhere.

“Wait, have all of you just heard of some unusual sound? It seems like that something is going to happen...”

“FLUSH, SWOOSH!” the sound now is so obvious that all of us can hear now. As soon as we had heard the sound, our face turned white. We knew that we were really in deep trouble.

Some sailor quickly ran down the deck to see what had happened.

“Hey! Help! Fetch me things to plug the holes!” he was swept aside by the incoming waves.

Not wanting our journey to end up tragically here, all of us were determined to plug those holes. However, all of our boxes of goods had been used. How could we get things to repair the ship?

The waves continued to batter us and our boat finally could not withstand the force of the nature. Finally, it tilted and all of us fell into the stormy sea.

That's what all I remembered yesterday. When I was conscious again, I found myself in a wooden hut along the coast. When I asked the locals there, they told me that in the morning I lay in a swoon on the beach, so they decided to bring me home.

Thanks God that I am still alive now. The most amazing thing is: When I asked where the place is, they told me that this place is Haikou, the southern part of China. It was a close shave, but I lost all my properties. Worrying about my colleagues, I decided to travel back to the capital and look for them along my path.

5<sup>th</sup>  
Sunny

February

1410

Yeah! I have made it. I was back to the capital this morning. The most important thing was that most of the colleagues survived in that disaster. Still, it is sad to say that some could not make it.

After the Emperor heard that I was back, he immediately asked me to have a meeting with him. I first reported to him about how we invited the Emperor of Kuzubai to be the ally. He nodded with a grin.

Next, the most difficult things came: I had to report on the disaster.

“Your... Your Majesty, I am very sorry to tell you that a little... Yes, a little accident happened when we were back...” I hesitated.

The Emperor  
frowned.

“Our ships sank when we were back and some of us are missing.” I rattled off the words with fear.

“How dare you! You should and you must be responsible for the losses!” He shouted. “You, as the leader of the whole journey, misbehaved and caused loss of money and even lives...” I shut my eyes and was ready to accept the punishment.

“See how I scare you? You shouldn't be as timid as a mouse if you want to succeed!”

Phew! it was a dramatic day. The Emperor actually wanted to praise me as I helped the country to make allies. After I was home, I sat down quietly and thought deeply about this voyage. Next time, the ship should be immune to the inclemency of the weather so the tragic catastrophe wouldn't have happened again.

*I am finally brought round to the tenets of truth: Our country needs pillars of strengths that accrue from modern weapons, but what is topping the list is soft power that best manifests itself in camaraderie with other countries. Comradeship, with all parties on an equal footing, is always preferable to a mindset to twist others around the little fingers.*

# A New Tale for Ming Treasure Voyages

*Munsang College, Yeung, Fai Yan – 15*

“Hey look! Java is getting closer and closer to us!” shouted Chen.

Eyes galore were immediately riveted on the large piece of land in front of them filled with trees, wooden houses and volcanoes.

All sailors were thrown on the edge of their seat before rousing themselves to the uplifting discovery.

When they arrived at the port, the King of Madjapahit stepped forward and welcomed the fleet warmly with a handshake. Zheng He said, ‘We are the representatives from Ming China. We are here because Emperor Youngle would like to establish a friendly diplomatic relationship with Madjapahit.’ The King of Madjapahit replied, ‘It is our honour to be given a great opportunity to build a relationship with Emperor Youngle.’

The King of Madjapahit then ordered some of his servants to lead one of the Chinese crews to the palace of Madjapahit.

On the way to the palace, exotic scent and scenery were transfixing the crew. They were so electrified that they had never experienced foreign things like this in their whole life. These were totally new and different to them. On the street there were dancers putting on the traditional Madjapahit dance, singing local songs and storytellers telling the old myths to the children who gathered and squatted on the ground.

After passing through the main street, they started to enter a forest before gaining access to the palace. The large team with huge luggage had drawn so much villagers’ rapt attention. Inside the wooden boxes that the team carried, there were precious stones, some rare animal species and also iron. The team was so worried that the treasures inside the wooden boxes would be stolen. That, if it did happen, would let Emperor Youngle down. The most worrisome thing was: They might be given death penalty by the Emperor if they failed to complete their ‘mission’.

After a whole-day journey, the fleet were extremely exhausted. They stopped in front of a hostel and someone in the crowd suggested, “Let’s take a rest here tonight”. There were a total of fifty people in the fleet and twenty rooms were occupied by the fleet that night.

On the next day when they departed from the hostel and were ready to resume the journey to the palace, some saw three men whose bodies were thoroughly covered in a black cloth behind the fleet. At first they didn’t pay much attention to those men, reckoning they were just some foreign tourists. However, after approximately half an hour, the fleet discovered that those men were still behind them, and they immediately noticed that those strange men were stalking them!

The atmosphere suddenly became tense and silence descended on the pathway.

Though they had not spoken to each other, they all knew that they had to concentrate and cooperate, or else the treasures would be looted.

A few minutes later, the fleet realized that more and more men were joining the three men and some of them were even holding knives and hammers.

As the fleet expected, the gang of total ten men suddenly rushed to the fleet, stabbing some crew members with knives, hammers and shooting them with arrows. Chen immediately lay down on the ground



playing dead and, at the same time, he peeked to see whether the gang of robbers had already approached the wooden boxes and taken all the treasures inside away.

He then saw a robber walking towards one of the wooden boxes, and his eyes were gleaming with avarice. "How greedy this man is..." thought Chen.

When the robber took out a piece of iron from one of the wooden boxes, Chen grabbed a knife dropped by the robber around him and threw the knife towards the back of the robber.

The robber fell into the wooden box immediately. Blood kept running out from the back of his body.

The rest of the gang was horrified and quickly rushed back to where they hid themselves.

Only twenty members survived from the robbery and massacre.

The twenty members survived joined the other crew, and they took the wooden boxes along. The whole team headed towards the palace.

They finally got to see the King of Madjapahit. The crew paid tribute to the King with the treasures inside wooden boxes. When the King was ready to open the last box, Chen suddenly remembered he had not taken the corpse of the robber out.

However, the King of Madjapahit already unlocked the cover and lifted the cover up...

# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

*Po Leung Kuk Choi Kai Yau School, Lam, Haidee – 14*

“You don’t look like a Scholar.” Someone quietly interrupted my train of thought as my head whipped around to face a boy of my own age. His hair was cleanly cut, but his mouth was downturned in disapproval and his eyes were accusing. I rearranged my expression so I didn’t appear surprised, even though I was.

“I work for the crew,” I replied briskly, wrapping the cloak around me tightly. “What about you?”

The boy snickered, finding the idea outrageous. “Work for the crew? Any crew member would at least require some muscle, but you don’t have any. Besides, you’re a girl, and girls don’t do manly jobs.”

My temper flared up as I recalled the miles that I had sprinted to be on this ship. To escape from my arranged marriage and my filthy husband. “Just because I’m a girl doesn’t mean I can’t do such jobs. Besides, you don’t look so muscular yourself.”

The boy sighed, giving in to my retort. “You’d better get off before they catch you. The crew will be arriving.”

I couldn’t go back, back to my family who had traditional beliefs and forced arranged marriages upon their daughters. Instantly, my irritation for the boy vanished, leaving me trembling and exhausted. “I need to stay here. I can’t go back.” The thought of my relatives’ fake smiles as I stood in my blood red gown left me quaking in fear for what would happen if I chose to return home.

The boy pursed his lips slightly before crossing his arms. “What’s your name?”

“Jia,” I sighed. “What’s yours?”

“Kit,” He snapped. “Now follow me, and don’t attract any attention.”

I followed him with unsteady footsteps until we reached his room. He rotated his head twice before closing the door with an audible thud.

“Where are we right now?” I questioned, taking in my surroundings. Rickety oak lined the walls and floors, dimming the room to a comforting gloom. A scratchy handwoven mat was hastily placed against the bed frame while a roll out mat leaned against the closet on my right. A tabletop on my left was scattered with papers and diagrams, the reed yellow colour contrasting against the dark chocolate colour of the tabletop.

“You’re currently on Zheng He’s treasure fleet of his 3<sup>rd</sup> voyage.” He paused before flitting his eyes to the black cloak shrouding my figure. “People can’t know that you’re here. You have to remain hidden.”

“What about you?” I asked, fidgeting with my cloak. “Are you supposed to be here?”

“I work for the crew,” he snapped. “I need to be here.”

“Where are we going?” I asked, suddenly feeling meek.

“The crew is headed to Champa. However, we will be making stops at Siam, Malacca, Semudera, and Ceylon.” His eyes flickered towards the door, his expression cautious and guarded. “If someone comes in, hide in the closet. If they ask you of your whereabouts, tell them that you’re Kit’s maiden.”

“I refuse to be anyone’s maiden.” I shuddered at the thought of serving my future husband. “I belong to myself and no one else.”

“Fine,” Kit snapped, his tone icy. “If you are so adamant about being independent, then stay cooped up in this little room so no one will see you.” He then stormed out of the room as the door slammed shut.

Tentatively, my fingers reached for the handle. I hated staying indoors, much less in Kit's tiny and damp room. Tightening the cloak around me, I stepped out into the light, continuing my descent down the hallway.

"Excuse me, but who are you?" A man questioned, his tone inquisitive rather than threatening. I was a runaway, a girl who had secretly slipped onto this ship. Turning on my heel, I sprinted back to Kit's room, cushioning my footsteps with my leather shoes to not alert any other crew members.

"Wait! Stop!" His laboured breath followed behind me as his clumsy footsteps lumbered across the wooden planks. Then, his scrabbling fingers caught the hem of my cloak as he yanked it away, revealing my true identity.

"You don't belong here," He stroked his peppered beard, the lines of his mouth twisted downwards to form a sneer. "Who are you?"

"Give me back my cloak," I pleaded. "I won't disturb you any more."

"I asked you for your name," The man demanded, his black eyes scrutinizing.

"Jia," I whispered, my eyes still wide. "Can I have my cloak back, please?"

"Why are you here?" He continued, his grimy nails digging into the soft black fabric of my cloak.

"I'm—" I stuttered, my mind reeling.

"She's my maiden," Kit interrupted, grasping my wrist tightly. "She was just wandering around, Wei."

"Pwah!" Wei spat. "Who wears a black cloak unless she doesn't want to be seen? I thought you learned from your past mistakes, Kit."

Kit instantly stiffened, his lips thinning. "She is my maid. Drop it, Wei."

Wei shrugged, but not before leaving a backhanded comment. "Well, don't blame me if she gets stranded on an island or gets locked along with the others. Here's your cloak, Jia." My tentative fingers reached for the cloak before fastening it around my neck. "Thanks," I muttered, my eyes trained to the ground.

As Wei departed, Kit instantly hauled me to his room, his eyes black and burning with undeniable anger. "Can I not leave you for a few minutes without stirring up trouble?"

"Staying cooped up in your room isn't fun either," I retorted. "Since I'm now your 'maid', I should be able to walk around freely."

"That also means taking care of my basic needs," Kit smirked. "Help me wash those clothes over there. I need to wear them by tomorrow."

"I still get to stay here, right?" I questioned, wrapping my arms around myself, suddenly feeling self-conscious.

"As long as you don't get into that much trouble again, you should be fine." Kit finished. "I wouldn't mind having someone to help me out."

The days flew by, and I learnt new skills. How to tie knots, how to use the constellations in replacement of a compass, but most of all, how to slip by unnoticed. Still, a question remained unanswered in my mind.

“What did Wei mean by learning from your past mistakes, Kit?” I questioned out of the blue, using a needle to stitch back the frayed edges of my cloak together.

“On my last expedition, a young boy with huge aspirations to be a general followed me into my room. He managed to stay hidden for a month but got caught by one of the sailors,” Kit replied, his voice as bitter as the curd. “I never saw him again.”

“Oh,” I mumbled. “So are we headed towards Ceylon?”

“Yes, General Zheng will be making amends with King Alekeshvera there.” He stated. “Then, we will be heading towards Champa if everything goes smoothly.”

In the middle of the night, I jolted awake to cannon shots and clanging metal. Instinctively, I wrapped the black cloak around myself and scurried out of the room, hearing the dissonant clash of metal amplify as I scampered out of the hallways.

I had no idea what had happened, but whatever amendments Zheng He attempted had resulted in conflict and war between the Sinhalese. Hundreds of Sinhalese soldiers surrounded the fleets, their swords, spears and shields gleaming menacingly under the full moon.

I wasn't a fighter, but my eyes darted around with acute alert and attention as I searched for Kit. I did find him, cornered at the ballast, his sword gleaming under the full moon. He brought it down against his opponent's spear, resulting in another dissonant clang. His opponent drew back his spear and sent his shield crashing right towards Kit's face. The sudden momentum knocked Kit off his feet, leaving him in a fetal position.

With mustering grace, I leapt onto the ballast, my shoes cushioning a majority of the impact. As Kit stood up, one of his eyes were swollen shut and blood dribbled out of his nose. He managed to parry another of his opponent's attacks, but his movements were becoming slower and less coordinated.

With a slash, his opponent had left a gash and pouring wound on his right shoulder blade. Kit cried out in pain, his sword clattering to the ground. Spear raised, his opponent prepared to deliver the blow towards his heart.

I contemplated my options quickly, before settling for one. Kit was my friend, and he had saved me on two occasions. This time, I would help him, even if I would get injured along the way.

I bunched up my cloak and smothered his opponent, briefly distracting him. As he yanked off the cloak, I dragged Kit out of the way, just in time to dodge his glinting spear. Fortunately, the spear grazed my skin but didn't do much damage otherwise. As Kit leaned against the edge of the ship, breathing heavily, I knew that we couldn't defeat him by force. Perhaps luring him overboard would work.

Wait. That was it. “I'll lure him over here. You shove him off the ship once I dodge his attack.” This wasn't the best idea, but Kit nodded, trusting my strategy. Multiple menacing slashes interrupted my strategic thinking and caused me to whip my head towards the noise. The opponent had shredded my cloak into strips of black fabric, making it no longer wearable. Ignoring the sudden clench in my heart, I perched myself on the edge of the ship, hoping that my reflexes would be able to dodge his impending blow.

My eyes momentarily widened as he brought the spear down on me. Then, the two of us were tumbling downwards, scrambling to get a hold of the ship.

Kit caught my flailing arm just in time, grunting in exhaustion as he hauled me up. A splash followed soon as my feet touched the ballast. Then, the Sinhalese generals yelled a few commands, and the army began to retreat. We were safe, at least for now.

“Jia? Kit?” Wei shouted, his lumbering footsteps getting closer as he waved a torch in the air. Behind him, a few more members of the crew followed, their torches raised as they stared us inquisitively.

“You two sure are lucky,” He grinned, revealing his yellowed teeth. “General Zheng managed to hold the King and other important members of Ceylon captive, forcing their armies to retreat.”

Behind him, suspicious whispers and accusations filled the air, all directed to the one girl on this ship: Me. Still, I held my head high, gathering the remnants of my cloak in my palms as I steadied my gaze on the members of the crew.

“Where are we headed now?” Kit asked, sheathing his sword back to the side of his waist. He was still bleeding, but with proper bandaging, he would be alright.

“Nanjing,” Wei grinned, slapping Kit on the back. “Your hometown, Kit.”

“Who are you?” One of the crew members questioned, his eyes narrowing at my ashen state. I knew I looked hideous, with a bloody gash, tattered clothes and greasy hair. Still, I felt proud and brave, for what I had just done.

“I’m Jia,” I replied, my voice steady and confident.

# A Captain's Guide to Survival

*Sha Tin College, Chan, Karina – 14*

The captain stood at the bow of his ship. The deep blue sea surrounded him, the vessel a mere pinprick of brown wood against the vastness of the ocean. Looking around him, he saw naught but the sky and the sea, not even a hint of land revealed itself. For most, it would be a mighty sight to behold. He and his small crew had been sailing for weeks. Led by their master, the mighty Zheng He— admiral of the Ming treasure fleets— the captain's ship was one of many sent on a mission to find peace and friendship in the world around China.

They were returning from a place called Africa, a land of grassy plains and little rain. It was already an honor to serve the Emperor Yongle, but what the captain thought was even better was the ability to explore, to feel the awe of being impressed by something new. The captain loved the adventure— the glory of doing so was just a side bonus. The fleets before his had brought back fantastical treasures nobody had ever seen before: a strange plant root which was hairy and looked almost human-like, rumored to bring longevity; colorful silks that were soft and smooth to the touch; a variety of herbs and spices that the captain was certain would work well in certain Chinese dishes.

Joining the collection was something the captain had brought back from Africa— an absurdly long-necked creature from far away that could only be a descendant of the mythical *qilin*. There had been so much to see in Africa— there were lions, black and white striped horses called 'zebras', large and awkward looking birds with feathery bodies and naked necks. Even the chief of the tribe he had stumbled upon wore the pelt of something furry and had a scary looking painted mask to match. The captain had given himself a bit of a fright upon meeting the chief— he had mistaken the foreign man for an animal. Thankfully, the chief had only been amused and not offended.

A particularly harsh rock of the ship brought the captain back to his senses, swaying on his feet. The boat was shrouded in mist and he couldn't see much farther beyond his hands. Was it his eyesight? He rubbed his eyes, but nothing happened, and his sight remained blurry. Dark clouds formed in the sky, and rain began to fall. There was a dark shape looming in the distance. What was it? His eyes widened at the sight before him. No, it wasn't a new land they had discovered, or friendly strangers hoping to make contact. What drifted before him was worse, far worse than he'd ever imagined. It was a *pirate ship*.

The pirate ship was much larger than their small junk boat. Ragged sails fluttered menacingly in the wind, cannons meant for mass destruction peeking out from numerous gunports hidden in the pitch black hull. A terrifying monster as scary as the the pirates themselves glared at the captain, sitting in the position of the figurehead. An ugly snarl was painted on its face, seemingly ripping the *thing's* face in half. It was quite fitting, really. The pirates were known for terrorising the oceans, stealing from helpless merchants and fishermen, murdering and pillaging wherever they went. Truth be told, the only reason the captain had been promoted was because all the former captains of the ship had been killed by pirates, and he was the only one with the skill set— or the foolhardiness— to take on the role of captain.

"Captain! What should we do?"

The captain froze, mind whirring, thinking of possible solutions. He'd only been promoted for a month, he wasn't used to having his crew, his former equals, asking him for advice. He wasn't used to having the responsibility of so many people putting their lives in his hands. He had to grin and bear it, all the same. "Listen up!" He bellowed, making himself heard over the din of the panic. His idea was crazy, but there was a small possibility that it could be crazy enough to be unexpected to the pirates. "Cannons out, men! Once we get close, we can knock all their weapons out, and they'll be defenceless!"

"Are you sure it's going to work, Captain?" A voice yelled towards him, rising over the chaos. It was his first mate, who looked rather dubious about the whole idea. The first mate was old but wise, as the saying went, 'with age comes wisdom'. However, his ideas were a bit more on the traditional side, like speeding up the ship, and only shooting if necessary.

The captain shrugged. “You’ll just have to trust me!”

The first mate nodded. “You heard the captain! Prepare the cannons!” The captain was thankful for the first mate— not just for trusting him, but also being there for him when he was just a young boy wary of the world out there. Everybody instantly got to work, heaving and shouting, untying knots here and tying more there. The pirates were getting closer and closer, almost close enough to touch.

“NOW!”

At the captain’s command, cannonballs shot out of their side of the ship, blasting into the pirate’s. The force of the hit sent the pirate ship careening, sections of their ship set ablaze. The pirates scrambled around the deck, trying to put out the multiple fires and keep their ship afloat. The captain cheered to himself. His plan had worked!

“Alright, men, full speed ahead!” The captain roared.

“Aye, Captain!” Mere seconds later, their massive sails were up, billowing in the sudden strong wind. The men began to paddle, oars pushing through the water. The ship glided through the water, easily evading the pirates. The crew cheered as they sailed away from the criminal ship. However, the captain had bad news— he had given away his compass to one of the tribal leaders of Africa, who had been so amazed by the device that he had offered them the *qilin* creature in return for the gift. The captain had never seen the area they were in; to sail back into the fog and familiar waters would be suicide. They were lost. Quickly, the captain prayed to Mazu, goddess of the sea. Time and time again, she had protected the fleets, surely she would be with him and his crew too?

“Captain, what’s happening?” A frightened voice cried.

The captain yelped as the water below them started to bubble and boil, frothing and coughing up mist. He squinted at the strange sight. Was a deep sea monster here to gobble them up for tea? Something pearly white exploded out of the mists, and the captain let out a shout as liquid splashed onto his face.

“Be at peace, men.”

The captain blinked in shock, then blinked again. Similarly, the men on his ship stood staring at the sight.

There was a dragon in front of them, rising out of the water. The captain took a double take. A dragon? He stepped and looked again, and almost fell over. The creature before him was no dragon— it may have had the head of one, but it had the body and rear of a horse. It was truly magnificent, covered with glistening white scales that shone in the midday sun, almost blinding the captain and his crew. Its pearly black eyes gleamed with wisdom and intelligence, with a hint of curiosity, as if it were trying to read his mind. Its scaly tail swished from side to side impatiently as it pawed at the water with large hooves. The captain gasped. Before him stood no ordinary dragon horse— it was the famous immortal *bailongma*, that only appeared in the company of gods and goddesses such as Nuwa, who saved the world from destruction. The captain only had one question. What would the immortal creature want to do with him?

Perhaps the answer lay in the creature’s companion. If the captain thought the *bailongma* standing in front of him was the most magnificent, beautiful thing he had ever seen, he was wrong. A woman stood beside the dragon horse, a woman who looked both young and old at the same time. She was huge, almost twice the size of the ship, and the captain had to tilt his head up to look at her. Water swirled around her legs, mist drifting around her long sea blue robes. She wore a necklace of beads that looped around her pale neck like a snake, glowing faintly blue. They glowed faintly, like a lamplight in the night. Her glossy black hair was streaked with grey, tied back in a neat bun behind a crown and veil.

The captain knew who she was— how could he not? She was Mazu, goddess of the seas, protector of seafarers, after all. He remembered the stories the first mate had told him as a child— “Mazu is the goddess

of the sea, she will protect you no matter what.” He remembered doubting the old man, wondering how a mere fisherman’s tale could help him with his fears. “When you are scared, remember her bravery.”

According to legend, the goddess had began life in the Song Dynasty as a civilian, a young woman named Lin Moniang. She had the ability to predict storms, and she often used that power for good. One day, her father and brother were out at sea, when a storm struck. Knowing that they were in danger, Moniang set out during the storm to rescue her family members, but had been killed in the process. According to myth, she had risen to heaven and become a goddess, because of her courageous deed. To make up for how she’d been unable to protect her father and brother, she became the protector of all seafarers, ensuring that they made it home safely.

The captain bowed at the woman’s feet, his crew following suit. “Lady Mazu,” he mumbled hopefully, “have you come to our aid?” He heard the crew whispering amongst themselves, in awe in the presence of the goddess before them. The dragon horse snorted at them, and the captain jumped. It wasn’t every day that one was faced with a *longma* with a bad temper.

“Be at peace, my children. I will lead you home.” The goddess’s voice was warm, soothing. It sounded like help, like rescue, like *home*.

The captain lifted his head off the floor. “You can?”

Mazu laughed, a glorious sound. “Of course! What do you think *bailongma* is here for?” The dragon horse let out a loud cry that was more roar than whinny. “He has the strength to pull your ship back to Fujian.” The creature gnashed its pearly white teeth, and the captain quaked in his boots.

The captain nodded, bowing again. “My men and I thank you for your help, Lady Mazu.”

She smiled, a glimmer of sadness in her eyes. “There is no need to thank me, young sailor. I do this for the father and the brother I lost.” She disappeared in a swirl of mist, leaving nothing but the smell of sea salt. To the amazement of the men, the fog in the distance had cleared, the light rain stopping completely. The sun shone down on them once more.

*Bailongma* knickered, a harsh and loud sound. The creature sounded annoyed, as if it were used to shuttling lost sailors back home from the sea.

The captain laughed. “Thank you, *bailongma*.” The dragon horse lifted its head and roared to the heavens, so loudly the ship trembled on the sea. The creature dived into the water, and the sailors began their long journey home.

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A young boy trotted after his father, a look of childish annoyance on his face. “Papa, why must we pray to Mazu every time we leave?” He asked. His father was a sailor, a man who loved the sea. The boy, on the other hand, preferred the land.

His father stepped into the temple, placing a small statuette of a white horse in front of the statue of the goddess, who stared down at them with a small smile on her face. “She is the goddess of the sea, protector of seafarers such as ourselves. When we are lost, she will bring us home.”

The boy looked at his father suspiciously. “How can you be sure?”

His father laughed. “You wouldn’t believe me if I told you.”



# Searching for the Unknown

*St Margaret's Co-Educational English Primary & Secondary School, Ho, Sam – 15*

When the palace officials came to our little village in the middle of nowhere, I initially gave it no thought. Officials come and go like the wind; taxes are collected, and wrongdoers are hauled away. It's the way it is and the way it has been for as long as I care to remember.

"Come now and sign up! This will be a once-in-a-lifetime chance to serve your emperor and country!"

Many were skeptical. "I'm not interested, sorry. I refuse to risk my neck on the battlefield for a pittance of a wage. I refuse to be an expendable pawn for the honour and glory of some general who's in over his own head. Why should I go fight another man's war?"

"Rest assured, we are not conscripting recruits for the war. We promise to pay you very high wages, 70 pieces a month."

70 whole gold pieces? That's more than what my family's farm makes in one year! I don't care what I'll be doing, as long my life is not at risk. I immediately went up to the officials to sign up. Upon receiving me, they announced, "Brilliant, we have another loyal subject for the glory of the emperor. Those who are still interested, you can still sign up now!"

"Actually, what kind of job are we signing up for, if it's not for a war? We don't want to be signing up to be a slave, especially without knowing about it, do we?" A voice piped up from somewhere in the crowd. A few snickered. With a glare from the officials, they quieted down.

"This will be an expedition to other places beyond our country. That means you will be serving as a crewman on a ship."

What! I had expected this to be a short leave, maybe for a few months and that's it. It could have been a simple construction project for the emperor's palace. However a boat trip! A huge voyage? There's no hope for me to be back within any conceivably short amount of time. I just wanted an opportunity to support my family, is that so much to ask for?

I was about to open my mouth, to ask if it was too late to pull away. But before I could make a noise, the official looked up towards the sky. "Heavens above! The Sun is about to set, so we must be on our way soon to the base camp!" They shoved me away, seemingly forgetting my loyalty. I ran back home amidst the clamouring crowd, heading for my home and my family who were expecting my safe return.

I quickly packed what few pieces of clothing I had. As I was about to step through the doorway, my family was there waiting for me. They gave me their blessings and spoke of their wishes for my safe return, their wishes for me to come back in one piece. I wanted to tell them that I didn't even want to join a voyage such as this. Yet my pride was forcing me to go— I could not bear to tell them the truth. I could just smile and give each of them a hug. I walked with the fading dusk behind my back, towards that horse and cart that would surely be my doom.

The ride in the cart was quite uneventful, aside the occasional bump. Sitting alongside me were unfamiliar faces, surely all recruits from the other villages. We gave each other an understanding nod, before returning to our solitude, pondering exactly what we had signed up for.

We rode until the cart came to a sudden stop, and we jolted forward. The smell of salt was in the air. We threw back the tattered flap of cloth covering the cart. In the distance, we saw flames, like will-o'-wisp floating mysteriously in the air. As we drew closer, we saw the flames were lighting up something huge and wooden. There were flames moving, floating in the air, casting an eerie light on the scene. The official told us to disembark and we hauled ourselves out of the cart.

There was another official waiting for us. He marshalled us towards what appeared to be a gangplank, leading up to seemingly nowhere. We looked up in awe.

It was a massive titan of a ship. There were workers grunting, pushing barrels up the ship. Another threw bundles of wood on board. Yet more workers stood in a line, passing up metallic balls, the size of my head, one by one. It reminded me of the villagers back at my home when a fire broke out, passing buckets filled with water to quell the flames.

I sighed at my thoughts. What was I doing, thinking back to my village? My new home for now, at least for the next few years, would be this floating fortress of a vessel.

I was quickly registered before being herded on board with my new comrades. I was assigned to move the cargo into the holds that filled the hull of the ship. All the constant physical exertion quickly tired me out. I was shown the crew bed quarters afterwards when the job was finished, and I passed out soon on my bed.

I was awoken the next morning by the smell of burning joss sticks. I climbed above deck to see an important-looking man clad in armor. He was holding lit joss sticks in his hands, bowing to an ornate statue of a goddess. A sailor walked up to me, "What's with that expression on your face? Don't you recognize who that is?" I replied nonchalantly, "Yeah, Mazu, the goddess of sailors. What about it?" He replied with a raucous laughter. "Are you kidding me? You don't know the man? Are you from some backwater village?" I ignored his last comment, and simply shook my head. He pointed to the man, "That's Admiral Zheng He. He is one of the nation's most decorated admirals, and he has been on a number of voyages to foreign countries. If you don't know his name, it's best for you to keep your head down to avoid trouble." With that, he waved his hand and walked away.

Believe me, I would most definitely keep my head down. I'll try to ride this through, and go back home a few hundred pieces richer. I'll just return to my fields, my farming, my life, and live out the rest of my days a wealthy man.

The deck shook beneath my feet, as the Admiral yelled for the anchor to be pulled away. People on the small harbour that the ship was docked to just a moment ago waved us goodbye. Well, goodbye to you, my home. My land.

The next few months were nothing special. Gossip had it that this was a treasure voyage to otherworldly locations. Beneath our deck, apparently, were treasures from the royal palace. But, more importantly, there were handwritten letters by the emperor addressed to foreign kings as well. What could our emperor ever want with these distant lords?

Personally, I couldn't care less. That kind of diplomacy is only suited for the court. We peasants are only suitable for grunt work. If I have to, I'll just move the treasure. Whether I move sheaves of wheat or chests of treasure, it's all the same. The only difference is that this cargo is probably worth more than everything in my village combined.

Each day was pretty much identical. I was woken up in the early morning to help manage the amount of rations that would be given to each crewmember every day. After meals, I was trained in some basic combat skills. I was told there are pirates that prowl the area, so we had to learn how to engage in ship-to-ship combat. The metallic spheres I saw from earlier were apparently "cannonballs" to be put in metallic tube, named "cannons". We would put gunpowder in the barrel, and the cannonballs would fly out to destroy our enemies. I hoped it wouldn't come to this, what does a peasant like me have with such contraptions and such magic.

I did become acquainted with my fellow crewmembers. We would all be assigned below decks to row the mighty boat if weather conditions were not favourable. So we have plenty of time to chat and become familiar with each other.

Aside from discussing about what happened that day on the ship, or complain about the harsh higher-ups, the thing they would talk about the most was about their villages.

They would talk about their daily life in the fields, their family, or their agricultural lives. As the ship sailed away from the safe port we knew and loved, the waves only served as a painful reminder for me of how I'm sailing away from home, into a dark sea filled with unknowns.

Day after day, it was the same. Zheng He, that great admiral, would pop up his head now and then, to make some announcement before retiring to his cabin. Yet one day, underneath a spotless azure sky and burning orange orb, everything changed.

"Men, we've reached land. About 2 hours from now, we will arrive on the island of Ceylon. Please, prepare yourselves, and be ready to move our cargo offshore.

I don't know if I was happier about a break from the monotony or just to touch dry land again. I can't say I walked with a bounce in my step, but I did feel somewhat relieved.

The next two hours came and went in a blur. All I can definitely remember was moving the ornate Mazu statue on to the deck. Weaving in and out of people rushing about, each with their own load to be offloaded onshore. Frankly speaking, it was a mess. Each crew member flittered about. Heavy cargo slammed into each other, and their couriers would exchange curses as they strained under the loads.

The ship slowly decelerated to a halt. The anchor was successfully dropped to the seabed. Some burly-looking sailors threw thick coils of rope onshore. Planks were lowered, eventually crashing with a thud. We had officially reached dry land.

We crewmen slowly slid the cargo we had onshore. Piles upon piles of treasure slowly stacked up on the pier that seemed woefully underprepared for the sheer mountain of gold and jewellery.

An interpreter, who could speak the local language, disembarked with us. He exchanged a few words of what seemed like gibberish to my ears. The local villager pointed off to somewhere inland. The interpreter nodded, and came up to Zheng He. "Sir," he bowed, "The locals have informed us the palace of the Ceylon King is in this direction."

We moved towards the royal residence through the city centre, almost like a makeshift parade. The villagers moved aside to make space for us. They stared at us with wide eyes, wondering what this mass of foreigners were doing in their homes.

Soon enough, the envoy arrived at a white granite building which dwarfed the surrounding houses. It loomed above the rows upon rows of small wooden huts, like a bird of prey perched high above, surveying its territory.

The palace stood in the middle, a white lion presiding over its court. Equally as majestic were the red wooden doors opening up into the courtyard. A guardsman standing next to the entrance signalled for us to enter. Zheng He gave him a smile, and walked through the door. The parade moved slowly through the door after him.

Inside the courtyard were exotic-looking plants. Trees shaped like umbrellas had furry round brown fruits hanging from them. Flowers bloomed in rows which were surrounded by trees. These plants were in shades I did not know were real. Spotted cats, which looked like lions without manes, prowled the garden. One of the felines walked up to an entourage member and bared its fangs. He instinctively jumped away.

The doors to the palace opened up. The interior of the palace was filled with a sweet scent that was the epitome of exoticness. Spices unknown to me burned in the air, releasing a visible trail of smoke the air. The smell of burning incense wafted from the windows, filling our nostrils. The interior gleamed, with gold leaves covering the coving and pillars. Statues lined the walkway leading up to the throne.

Zheng He gestured for us to stay put. He walked up to the king and bowed.

“Esteemed emperor, we are delegates from the Ming emperor. We bring to you wishes for great prosperity and wealth for your nation. We here have a letter addressed to you by the Ming emperor.”

An official ran up to Zheng He, bearing the said letter. The interpreter gave him the letter before whispering a few words in his ear.

“We accept your invitation,” announced the emperor. Zheng He had a hint of a smile under his professional façade.

Zheng He clapped his hands, and we pushed loads of treasure into his palace, including of course the marble Mazu statue.

“This here is a statue of Mazu, who grants a safe journey on the seas. We hope all sailors, your nation’s and mine, will experience peace so our nation can prosper together.”

The rest of our time in Ceylon showed us wonders of the type I never knew possible. Zheng He didn’t seem fazed by these marvels of colour, scent, and luxury. He moved effortlessly from dignitary to meeting to palace, a slight smile painted on his face. Upon seeing a shrine of the most ornate design, one of Zheng He’s most trusted advisors turned to the Admiral and asked, “What can possibly beat this beauty and splendor. What are your plans sir? Is our voyage complete

Zheng He smiled wryly, “We will be continuing our voyage westwards on to another continent. It is named Africa in our books and holds wonders and beasts that dwarf even those of Ceylon.”

Sigh. How long will it be before I can return home?

# Adventure to Southeast Asia

*St. Joseph's College, Au, Yi Lok Elliott – 16*

Seeing the sunset on the ship in the middle of the sea, the seawater reflects the sunshine, changing from dark blue to golden yellow. The view is magnificent and I have a different feeling when I am watching it. It is totally different from the sunset I have seen on land.

I am Shing Chan, a sailor of the Chenggong ship, the largest ship in the Treasure Fleet, led by Captain Zheng He. I have been living in a small village in the Fujian Province. My home is near the sea. My brothers and I always went to the seashore to play when we were young. We love sea very much, and want to know the end of the sea. However, due to the order of the Emperor, we cannot sail in order to prevent traitor from bringing pirates to mug the city. Until the Ming government allows our Captain Zheng He to organise a fleet to explore the world outside our familiar homeland, I have got a chance to become one of the sailors of the Treasure Fleet.

I don't know how long the journey will be, but I am so euphoric as I can travel to other countries and I am sure that I can come up with different interesting stuff and people. However, before exploring the world, it is a hard time to be a sailor on board. It is the first time for me to leave the land and live in the sea for so long. I have vomited for several times since I have boarded the ship. There is no fresh food to eat. We have to wait until we have arrived our first destination and trade with the local merchants there. A lot of my colleagues passed away due to a lack of nutrition. Every day, we have to wake up early in the morning before sunrise and start to work. We adjust the flag to ensure the ship can move forward with the help of the wind. We have to measure how far we have travelled. We have to sail with the help of the existing map in the correct direction. We have to draw a new map with the location of new places we have found. I am so exhausted after working from til to night on the ship. In the first week on board, I find that being a crew of the ship is fun and is a honour, exploring the unknown world with courage and determination. But soon, we cannot see any islands in the sea, and we haven't seen anything in the sea but only some marine animals and birds on the sky. Every day is the same day to me, doing the same work at the same time. I start to find that my job is quite monotonous and I regret. I start to miss home. I miss my parents and my brothers. However, it is too late for me to give up and it is impossible to leave the ship in the sea right now. I only hope we can arrive our destination as soon as possible.

By the end of the night, we have come up with a big disaster. A typhoon is coming straight to our fleet. The sea is not calm as before. The water changes into a dragon and keeps attacking our fleet, to destroy us and eat us into the deepest of the sea. Rain and wind is all hitting our ships. Everyone, include Captain, was in a panic. But soon Captain Zheng has calmed down and gives order to us in order to get out from this dilemma. We are trying to lower the lost as possible. Most of the crew vomit as they feel headache in this roaring sea. Some are not managed to get their balance when they are working and fall into the sea. Luckily, Captain sends me to check whether there is water getting inside the ship so I stay inside the ship in most of the time.

In the next morning, the sea is calm again. However, one ship was sunk in last night. There are only six remaining ships. Everyone on the ship was sad as we have lost a lot of our crew members. After 3 days later, we have arrived our destination, the Indonesia. It is a sunny day. I have not seen any land for a couple of months. It is better to stay on land than in the sea. After we have got off the ship, the first thing we do is to meet the King of this country. I follow Captain Zheng and his guards to an enormous, magnificent palace. "Wow, this place is so big," I say. "Haha, the area of this palace is only one-tenth compared to the forbidden city in Beijing." Captain answers. Soon, with the guide of the servants, we have met the King. With the help of translator, Captain can talk with the King without barrier. Captain has given the King some gold, in exchange, we have got stuff which can be only found in Indonesia. Later, we have traded with local merchants for food and clean water for the remaining journey. After staying on land for a week, we have to sail towards the next destination again.

After a few hours, we have found out another fleet following us, about four ships. I use the microscope to observe the fleet. The fleet is hanging with a black flag with skull on it. It's the pirates! I inform Captain

Zheng immediately and Captain orders everyone to prepare for battle. The crew are moving the cannon and carry black powder on the deck. We get our swords, bring our shields. It is impossible for us to escape from pirates as their ships are small and are sailing at a fast speed. To get closer to us is only a matter of time. The pirates are getting near to us. Everyone is waiting for the order of Captain. Captain Zheng keeps telling us to wait and keep calm. When the pirate fleet is next to us, “ Fire!”, Captain ordered. We lit the cannon to shoot shells out. Our equipment is far more advance than the pirates’, and we have more number of ships than them. They cannot our opponents. Most of the pirate ships have been destroyed. However, some pirates survive in the shell attack and are managed to jump into our ships and have a fight with our crew. Within ten minutes, all the pirates on our ships are killed and we have caught the pirate leader.

We continue our journey and keep exploring the world.

# Where the Desert Meets the Sea

*St. Joseph's College, Wong, Sean – 16*

*“The moon illuminates the seas,  
To reveal your future;  
The dark clouds shall leave.  
No evil will come.”*

The Oracle of Mat–Su, Fortune 16 of 60.

The monsoon descended.

Silver bolts hurtled downwards from the blackened sky to strike the sea. Electrified waves roared in fury, gales whipping claw-like peaks that reached skywards.

Between the sky and sea lay a majestic vessel, a junk far from home. However grand it must have seemed to the mortals inhabiting it, it was puny before nature – as the forces of the sea crushed the ship, hundreds tried to claw their way to safety, but most soon sank beneath the waves, their souls consumed by the emotionless void.

The mortals dragged to the depths with them their failed Goddess. Centuries after her last worshippers were consumed by time, the Goddess lay dormant and still.

★★★

2018, Kenya

“Ngendo! Ngendo!”

Grandma was calling. Ngendo pretended not to hear. She didn’t quite remember why she was running away: was it some quarrel? Was it some sort of playful breakout? It didn’t matter. Ngendo’s bare soles danced across the soft, warm sand of the beach to leave imprints the shape of palm leaves. She felt the grains of sand between her toes and the oceanic breeze’s saline scent against her face. All across the beach, the turquoise sea dissolved against the golden sand with clockwork regularity.

“Ngendo!”

The voice was growing closer. The girl sped up and sprinted ever quicker, adrenaline coursing through her body. Her neatly braided dreadlocks, which were tangled up in an immodest mess of knots, kept falling over her eyes, but Ngendo did not mind, nor did she care; she only wanted to burrow her way into the small, isolated cove at the end of the beach and disappear from sight.

The cove was her private corner. When Mother was still around, she regaled her with stories about the past, all with one recurring motif: how adventurers came to Kenya in search of liberty. These adventurers brought with them stories and traditions—one of them being the tale of Aladdin, a Chinese prince who found a cave of treasures in Arabia. Ngendo didn’t have a cave, but she did have a cove. Therein lay her treasures: shards of emerald green coke bottles, bracelets without jewels, yolkish seashells. Each of the treasures had washed up on the cove’s wet sand to meet their new owner.

Something new had arrived in the cove. Moving closer, Ngendo saw a chunk of grey, dull rock covered in a sad mess of seaweed and salt. Ngendo submerged the rock in seawater to rub off the grime and dirt, revealing a distinct humanoid outline. More scrubbing unveiled a pair of cherry lips. As Ngendo caressed the lips, a soft glow emanated from the statuette. A gust of wind thundered through the cove, and a fork of white flame crashed into the sea. Ngendo’s reflexes kicked in—she raised her hands to protect her face, her skin turned chalky white and her nails dug into her palms, turning a wounded blood red.

A soft ray of warm light shone upon the cowering child. Soft hands touched Ngendo’s thin arms to calm the blood racing through her veins. In the chaos of the moment, Ngendo hadn’t realized that she was crying, but that didn’t matter – drops of tears were delicately brushed off her eyes like raindrops sliding off umbrellas. Ngendo opened her eyes and focused on the face before her. Anxiously, she coughed out three timid words, “Wh...who are you?”

“Fear not my child,” said the tall figure standing before Ngendo. A motherly smile, a flowing jade-hued robe and a torch in her hand. “Child, I am the silent one, I am the Heavenly mother, I am Mat–Su. I have been summoned to the mortal world.”

“Who?”

A few awkward seconds passed. The figure bit her lip and frowned. "Mat-Su." she motioned towards the sea, "Protector of sailors, fishermen, and merchants across the world's oceans. The guardian of your people – the subject of your childhood stories."

"Doesn't ring a bell."

Mat-Su was in disbelief, though why that was Ngendo could not tell. Her frown faded like a receding tide, replaced by a tsunami of emotions. Doubt, anger, fear and finally dread.

Mat-Su contemplated her words. "Where's the fleet?", she demanded, a stern demeanor clouding her visage. She stared the child dead in the eye. "What year is this? What do you call this barbarian realm of yours?" Thunder rumbled in the distance, the clouds circling the cove like crows and the tumultuous waves braying eagerly, like warriors sharpening their axes in anticipation of conflict.

"I...I swear I don't know!" Ngendo cried, dried tears bursting out like a flood from a dam as Mat-Su grew ever more livid. Suddenly, Mat-su's vision began to fade...

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1430, the Swahili Coast

The monsoon descended.

The crew of the treasure junk Qinghe had journeyed long and far. For decades, the crew had been part of Admiral Zheng He's armada, hopping port to port from China to Arabia, where kings and sultans would gift them with a multitude of treasures and murals for the Celestial Emperor's purview which were all stored within the Qinghe's vaults. However, the further west they sailed, the more alien the localities got and the less their maps could help them. Eventually, the Qinghe lost sight of Admiral Zheng's fleet and drifted away in one of the Indian Ocean's nasty fits.

The tributes to the Emperor still glowed like earthborn stars, but the ship's crew had grown dull and gray. The hairpins that tied together the sailor's buns grew loose as another strand of hair fell off. So much time had passed that home was now a distant memory. When another friend passed, the surviving crew grew acutely aware of their own mortality. Now the myriad forces of nature had finally gathered for a knock-out blow.

The Qinghe's interior had been a prideful show of China's wealth. Now, the junk's lavishness mocked her crew, who had been so obnoxious as to think they could traverse the seas with impertinence. A gale tore through the sails as if they were paper, the ripping of cloth painfully audible. Brackish, pungent seawater poured in, straining the floorboards, which creaked with pain. The might of the sea proved to be too much a match for the ornate colossus as the Qinghe began to fall apart.

The captain of this ancient vessel was just as aged as his ship. His eyes sank into his sockets, the skin upon his fingers hung loose like a candy wrapper while arthritis plagued his joints. But the captain had a will of iron. Unsheathing his sword, he lodged his blade in the planks and knelt in reverence to a statuette—a stone-crafted lady with a flowing gown of a jade and a flame that danced upon her palm.

"Save us, Mat-Su," croaked the captain. He pressed his head to the floor in a pious kow-tow, "save us from heaven's wra—"

The Qinghe let out a great moan. The wind sliced away at the decks and plucked sailors into the grey sky as if ragdolls. Even as the junk was disassembled plank by plank, the captain quietly whispered to the Heavenly Mother.

Another wave came, knocking down the statuette. With haunting clarity, the captain realized the Goddess had abandoned him. He spared a thought for his wife and his children, whom he had abandoned for an exciting life at sea. He spared a thought for his crew and his ship – the nation's pride. He spared a thought for home. Then he left the final seconds of his life for Mat-Su, cursing her: the uncaring, incompetent Goddess Mat-Su, indifferent to his plight and predicament.

With that, the Qinghe gave a final roar of defiance as it dived into the roaring currents, the hull finally cracking under the force of the impact. The broken body of the vessel sank beneath the waves, and with it, the failed Goddess plunged into the seabed, the centerpiece of the graveyard housing her devout followers.

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Mat-Su snapped out of her trance. She stumbled to the edge of the cove, steadying herself with a hand to the wall. Her chest hurt, and her hair was drenched in seawater. A putrid scent emanated from her body. Her throat valiantly held back the surge of warm fluids from her abdomen, which left her mouth anyway in the form of slimy green bile. A coughing fit later, she reoriented herself and staggered forwards.

Surprisingly enough, the young girl – "Ngendo"? – was still too petrified to move a muscle. Perhaps she should force some information from the girl? *No*, she reminded herself: *I am a benevolent Goddess.*



Another cough wracked Mat-Su exhausted body. “My apologies for the outburst, child.” It took some convincing to show that Mat-Su wasn’t a threat, and quite a bit more to get Ngendo talking. The girl didn’t know of any “Ming Empire” or her grand “Treasure Junks”, but that could be chalked down to her ignorance. Mat-Su was far away from home in the realm of Kenya, a distant land that the treasure junks Admiral Zheng He had ordered to be surveyed and charted. The Admiral had said that it was a tribal land populated by savages, but the truth was rather different: the natives dwelt in small mud huts, tending to their fields much like the Chinese peasantry. The only thing that alerted her to her displacement from home was the dark-skinned, large-eyed features of the natives.

“Do I scare you?” Mat-Su asked.

Ngendo nodded hesitantly. Wordlessly, Mat-Su smiled warmly and caressed the young girl’s hair. A sense of fumbling awkwardness pervaded between the two, but Ngendo composed herself and looked up at the kind stranger.

“Tell me,” continued Mat-Su, “have you ever seen people like me? Foreigners, Chinese?”

“Some. They look like you but dress differently. I saw them gathered around a huge ship, as if... fixing it. When Mother was still alive, we sold them fruits. They called the ship a 'treasure junk'...”

Mat-Su’s eyes lit up at once. “Ngendo, I need to meet these people—they are my countrymen and they need me. They prayed for me to save them in their darkest hour.”

Cajoling and urging paid dividends for Mat-Su. “They’re to the North, a two hours’ trek from here. We follow the vultures along the seashore. The ship is where the desert meets the sea.”

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The duo made their way across the Kenyan coast. When the vultures circled above, they followed. When the vultures left, they stumbled forward through simple intuition. After an endless march, they finally arrived where desert met the sea, where the sun’s harsh rays bounced off the glittering sand for miles. The desolate coastline had but one feature: a treasure junk lodged in the Kenyan shore.

Surrounding the ship was a crowd of archaeologists and guards, who circled the vessel like bees to honey. Mat-Su gasped – *home*. She saw the majestic sails of the Qinghe. The faded carvings. The pagoda-like captain’s quarters. Home, where her pious countrymen lay waiting for her, industrious sailors tending to their treasures. The stroll downhill became a jog, and the jog became a sprint. Ngendo struggled to catch up as Mat-Su jumped from rock to rock until she landed before the junk. Her eyes became increasingly blurred by emotions with each step she took.

A pair of baton-wielding blue berets stepped in to stop the intrusion as a crowd of dirt-stained workers began to gather around her. The pious had come to worship, Mat-Su figured. Ngendo was right – they were dressed oddly. She didn’t expect dockworkers to be clad with any sophistication, but the sartorial *gaucherie* on display was alien and visually irritating. As Ngendo reached Mat-Su’s side, the Goddess noticed that the guards had abandoned ornate armor for simple pieces of cloth, and that there was neither a robe nor a sword in sight.

“This is an archeological site under the jurisdiction of the People’s Republic of China. What are you doing here?” Mat-Su turned to see a red-faced worker in rugged overalls. Did this mortal not recognize his Goddess? His protector from the storms? She who brought them to this far-off land?

“My countrymen – do you not recognize me?” she cried, “I am the silent one, I am the Heavenly mother, I am Mat-su, patron of sailors. You have summoned me to the mortal realm, and I shall hear your prayers!”

The dumbfounded crowd fell silent. Panic dawned on the Goddess. *These are not my followers! They are slave traders! My followers must be in the junk!* Enraged, Mat-Su’s motherly appearance was no more. The sky darkened; she roared as she let loose winds and storms to strike the blasphemers. Bright streaks of lightning struck the ground, flinging workers and guards around the beach like ragdolls. Mat-Su hoisted Ngendo, paralysed with fear, into her arms and raced towards the junk’s interior to rescue her people.

The junk was eerily quiet. In bygone days, there would’ve been incessant, raucous chattering. Now, the only lights were specks of sunlight that peered in through holes in the wooden deck.

Ngendo, recovering from the shock, broke the silence. “The... cabin looks... empty...”

That much was clear to Mat-su.

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A grand vault lay just below the deck. In the heyday of the treasure voyages, Mat-Su would see hundreds of coolies in the cramped spaces, gardeners tending to flora and fauna, artisans cleaning sculptures with great care. She would have breathed in a thousand mixing spices from the ports of India and Arabia, heard a hundred dialects and tongues from across the great seas and seen books of history and science.

Mat-Su summoned a flame to dance upon her palm and illuminate the room. Ngendo heard a sharp intake of breath from Mat-Su. This was no treasure junk—it was a graveyard. Skeletons of animals and men lay scattered across the confines of the junk, their flesh long since rotten away, consumed by the corroding strengths of nature. Death clung to these walls. These sailors who venerated Mat-su, who once prayed to her daily for their safety, were now bones, collateral of the much more archaeologically-valued ship. Mat-Su felt Ngendo tug her robe. The girl had buried her head in Mat-Su's robes to avoid looking at the centuries-old corpses. Mat-Su covered the young girl's eyes as they made their way through the junk. Mat-Su picked up a bone: a sailor's finger, dry and coarse. Grains of granite-like powder flaked off upon contact, until the bone disintegrated into a pile of simple dust, slipping through her fingers like sand through an hourglass.

It made sense now. Her worshippers were no more, as they had been for centuries. The Ming Empire was no more—it had perished as all empires do. The Ming treasure voyages were ages past. Left behind, the lonely Goddess no longer had anyone to protect.

Mat-Su fell to her knees. Her already shaky willpower finally went out for good. She let the flame in her palm fall to the wooden surface. It came into contact and combusted the powder-like remains of the skeletal finger, imbuing it with life. The finger began to reassemble.

"What —" Ngendo, who noticed the flame first, was wholly unprepared for this morbid spectacle. Mat-Su turned to look. She summoned her powers, to use all her arcane knowledge —

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Time stopped and began to reverse.

The treasure junk's broken floorboards were restored to fine oaken planks. Torches lined the walls again, illuminating delicate ornaments, their amber hue passing through stained glass to create a rainbow of hues throughout the junk.

"This was how the Qinghe looked like when Admiral Zheng first gave her to me."

Mat-Su turned to see an aged man stroking his snow-white beard. He was clad in silken robes and a mandarin's cap, while a bejeweled sword hung to his waist. Clenching that sword was a skeletal hand.

"Are you..." the goddess began.

"'Were you' would certainly be more accurate. But yes. I was."

Mat-Su hung her head. She let out a shaky sigh — the tears were returning. "I failed you, captain, and the entire crew of the Qinghe. The faith you had in me to bring you home was misplaced..."

"Be that as it may —", the captain placed his skeletal hand upon Mat-Su's shoulder, "—I've long since made my way home myself: heaven, to meet my ancestors. Admiral Zheng asked me to greet you when you make your way back someday. I don't blame you anymore, Mat-Su — it was but a small mistake. The Admiral invites you to join the rest of the fleet in the other world. The crew, their families, the Emperor himself — they're all there on the other side." The captain, smiling, motioned to a small statuette, "and you can be too."

The statuette was elegantly constructed. It was a young lady in flowing robes, her lips illuminated by red coral, her robes a soothing jade, her fair hair braided with a string of black pearls. Mat-Su drew close to touch the statuette. She knew what this was — forgiveness.

"No", Mat-Su whispered.

"What?"

"No. I don't want forgiveness. I want redemption. I have failed in my duty to bring my people home. I will join you only when I've done my part."

"I — we understand," The captain withdrew his skeletal hand. "I'll see you in due course."

The torches faded, and with them the splendor and the captain, his skeletal hand crumbling into grains of fine, ground bone.

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"Mat-Su, I want to go home."

Mat-Su turned to find Ngendo by her side. She knelt down to embrace the child. With a snap of her fingers, Mat-Su's flowing hair was knit into dreadlocks, her jade robe became a dazzling Kenyan dress and a beaded necklace wrapped around her neck. *She looks like Mother*, Ngendo mused.

"I'll get you home. I promise. I'll get you all home."

# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

*St. Joseph's College, Yip, Hei – 13*

"I lift my drink and sing a song, for who knows if life is short or long? Man's life is but the morning dew, past days many, future ones few."

It was 1422 when I was 18 years old. I studied under the Gong'an School of letters where I majored in music theory and poetry. "Books are full of a dull text, only when you hear the melody, your heart resonates." I thought.

In my study period, I met a Japanese student named Saito Asuka, who travelled from a far country to search for the same vision. He said, "There must be emotional power between people, and music is the medium for conveying good things." We studied music together, wrote lyrics and created music. As there's no banquet without an end, we spent eight years in college until Asuka returned to Japan.

At the beginning, we wrote letter to each another. But gradually, the amount reduced. In his last letter in early 1430, he wrote: "I have been recruited into the army and have been training all day. All we once knew is beaten by a broken dream. This is not the world I had in mind!" The same fate was added to me one year later.

Japan conquerors had always had the dream of conquering China. As the fierce Japanese army first encountered the Ming's forces, they defeated 5,000 Chinese soldiers. Soon, with Ming's greater military participation of 45,000, our army succeeded in driving the Japanese to the south.

Soon, a treaty would be signed, and I was included in the Zhenghe's treasure fleet as a poet and musician. With a broken smile and tired eyes, I could almost go through my friend's same longing heart as before.

On the afternoon of September 12th, 1432, the treaty was all set to go. Zhenghe and his fellow government officials, whom I had never had the privilege to meet, had left the fleet and set feet on the designated island with cargos of gold and silk to give away as gifts. Some people seemed to get all sunshine, and some all shadow. For me, I was preparing to hit the sack when a distant explosion appeared out of nowhere.

Soon, outbursts came nearer and nearer, and those staying on board were left in a state of shock. One by one, sound waves rocked the vulnerable cabin. Shortly, a platoon leader rushed back to the ship and announced, "The ...the treaty... treaty has been broken by the Japanese. We are now in war status on the frontline. All remaining battalions prepare yourselves and fight for our country!"

Just when I was losing my bearings, the leader turned his face to me and said, "Make yourself useful on the field. Music and poems are not going to save your puny life right now!"

Belt buckled, breastplate installed, helmet put on, I sped to the war zone with my companions, a suicide squad.

Once arrived, I jumped into the pit. Above my head, the bullets from matchlock firearms were smashing into pieces of dirt. Huge stones collapsed, and the dead corpses were flying in air. Ahead, gunpowder from the enemy was roaring; Behind, explosions from the Allies made up the hustle and bustle.

I had already scared out of my wits. My blood ran cold, my feet were sore. My mouth was dry and bitter as well, which was a mixture of sweat and blood on the face. The air was full of gunpowder and rancid smell. "Where am I? Why am I here?"

"Japanese dogs go to hell!" A Ming soldier threw away his matchlock, climbed up the pit, and ignited a Huolongjing cannon. "Bang!" My ears were ringing, head spinning. In a blink, the bronze metal parts of a cannon burst open, disintegrating the soldier. A Japanese soldier had fired a rocket into the cannon just before the cannon could shoot its own. The single Japanese rocket artillery trooper killed fifty soldiers that day.

The bloody sunset had faded. On the vast expanse of muddy zone, both sides stared at each other like tigers, and neither would retreat from the battlefield first. In the pit, there were bodies and letters of wives and children. I had no retreat, no reinforcements, only the moon hung up lonely in the rainy night.

I couldn't move, or I would be blasted into pieces by the Japanese rocket trooper at any time. Drops of red liquid flowed down my face. Everything around seemed to have swallowed me up.

"We are all so much together, but we are all dying of loneliness." Sighing for my fiancée and parents back in Shuntian, I had to live and fight for another day.

I spit a mouthful of bubbly blood on the floor, and stretched my paralyzed right hand into the pocket. I took out a green bamboo flute, put the mouthpiece on my lips, took a deep breath, and finally I twitched and blew the tune "Short Song Style".

The soft prelude lingered dreamily among the full-toned chords and scampered over the high bits. The notes drifted through the dark pit, across the shadow-covered jungle, into the ears of the distant Japanese rocket trooper. As the harmonica came to a stop, my heart was immediately tightened.

Suddenly, a melodious Shamisen stringed music, mixed with the gentle breeze, gently dawdled into my ears. Lending an ear, the same "Short Song Style" seemed to be far away, intangible, yet close. I shed the most sincere tears, letting the string of notes slid gently across my heart.

"Bright is the moon's sparkle; Will there be a time it can be grasped? Thoughts of you from deep inside, never settle never cease."

A figure came to me from the darkness of the distance. He was wearing a silver cuirass, and kabuto helm showed his symbol. He carried a Shamisen with his left hand and held a Shamisen with his right. Gradually, the face portrayed a clear outline. Without the faceplate, I saw the man turned out to be Asuka.

Under the dazzling stars, on the ferocious battlefield, the hands of the two enemies were tightly held together. Asuka's eyes were full of torture from memories, yet he still believed in the power of music. We talked about our family, mourned the homeland, and faces of the loved ones that we might never be able to see again.

He wiped the tears with his sleeves. "My friend, I am going to help you get back to your fleet, stay strong!" Then I threw my arms around his neck and limped the way back.

Back in base camp, all soldiers showed their unsettling emotions at me, and horrifying unpleasant looks at Asuka. I tried to get back on my fee, stood firmly and delivered a speech,

"The flowers seem close when you see from the high pavilion, but they will wound a traveler's heart. Why? There are much suffering in hundreds and thousands places. The colours of spring will not stop coming between heaven and earth. The floating clouds are also ever changing from ancient times to today.

However, are borders which our leaders have drawn on the map powerful enough to build the borders of prejudice into our minds, alienating us from each other?

The answer is a yes, as long as we make the change ourselves, stop the fight, care about the power we have towards others, and teach our next generation without bias.

Why don't we start at this very moment, making this world a better place by creating peace and compassion? My friend Asuka here has dispelled the dust of evil and hate from his heart, making his choice to show his compassion.

By this way can you only be able to look at our children's eyes with the feeling of pride for the world we have built for them."

After simple medical treatment, I accompanied Asuka to the Japanese tent on the opposite side. While the reactions and expressions inside the tent were more or less the same, I delivered the same speech and urged a truce for both sides. "I have done all I can to help." I thought. The remaining will be left for the fate to decide.

On the next day, a peace treaty was signed by both sides. It lasted for a peace for four years.

"You have won for yourself a place in history as some of the first great explorers." said Asuka.

It was not the fleet, the battlefield, or the exhaustion that I had explored, but as I believed, the true value of mankind.

"The moon outshines the sparse stars; the crows fly to the south. Circling the tree three times; on what branch can they find rest?"

# Home at Sea

*St. Mary's Canossian College, Leung, Staphanie – 14*

## Chapter 1

In the middle of the sea, there was a ship which some people were happy to see it but some were afraid. It was the legendary, enormous and destructive 'Conqueror' and the captain of the Conqueror is me. I was honored by the emperor as one of the seven voyages by the Ming Treasure Fleet. The mission entrusted on me is simple, to give a way cargoes of gold and silk and other precious items to peaceful people and kill all the nasty pirates and hostile armies. Every day is just like any other day but ever since today, unusual things happened...

This morning, I woke up as usual but I felt like something is wrong. I quickly got changed and rushed to the front of the ship finding the thing that is annoying me, the thing that made me feel wrong. Suddenly, I noticed a black dot coming closer and closer, becoming larger and larger.

"Is that a ship?" I asked.

"No...Wait! It is, and it is no ordinary ship, but a pirate ship!" my vice-captain Lee Tong Cheng replied quickly.

"Everyone back to your position! This is no training but a real battle!" I yelled.

"Follow me," I whispered to Lee.

Lee followed me to the conference room. I quickly scan through the maps and took out the right one. I stared at the map, thinking for a perfect solution.

"Can you think of anything?" Lee asked

I shook my head. I realised that there was a rock bay nearby which we could defeat the pirates as they wouldn't realise the hidden rock under the water. However, we did not have enough time and the speed to go there...

"Neither do I...the weather isn't too bad today." Lee said, looking out of the window.

"Hmm...the weather....the weather? This is it! This is the solution, thanks Lee!" I exclaimed happily and hugged him.

I rushed to check the wind direction. This is it, the moment of truth. The wind direction meter turned and turned and it stopped right at Southwest, just perfectly the direction we are heading which can work as a booster.

"Next stop, we are heading to the Skull Bay at Southwest direction." I yelled

My crews started to feel confused and not sure what to do.

One of them yelled, "Captain, the Skull Bay is also called as Deadly Bay. I heard that some rumors said no one ever came out of the bay alive."

"We are all in the same battle right now if we win, we survive. But if we lost, we die. You say that no one ever came out alive? So why don't we be the first ones? Now who's with me?" I yelled

"I am!" everyone of them yelled dauntlessly

"Now everyone, let's get already. Cause we have some pirates to defect," I said confidently.

## Chapter 2

When we arrived at the Skull Bay and it is way much scary than I imagined. The rocks look so creepy as some of them look like human skeleton and when the wind hollows, there are sounds of people crying and the wind hitting you as painful as knives. All of my crew members were scared by the spooky atmosphere. I immediately check if the pirates followed us and they did! My plan is half away from victory.

"When you hear my commands, shoot them. But don't let them go too near since they are good at near fighting and they will take the advantage. Understand?" I asked

"Understood, captain!" my crews replied, full of confidence and fearless. That's why I really love my crew and I don't want them to get into danger. I took out my binoculars and monitor every single movement of the pirate ship. Just a little bit closer, a little bit closer...

"Now shoot!" I yelled

My crews start shooting with guns and cannons at the pirate ship. It worked perfectly as a worm on the fishing hook and pirates started to chase us blindly.

"Move towards the Bay now and beware of the rocks under the water!" I yelled

Our conqueror moves quickly towards the Skull Bay and the pirate's ship is also blindly followed us.

Suddenly they changed direction.

"Captain, they are planning to use the short cut!" Lee said anxiously,

“Don’t worry Lee, that’s exactly what I want.” I whispered with an evil looking grin on my face. Lee seemed to understand and smiled back.

Boom! The pirate ship crashed on to the rocks under the water. Unexpected waves caused by the crash hit our conqueror and it shook hard.

“Hang on tight!” I yelled

Our ship shook so hard that the ship bumped onto one of the rocks. I held on the rudder and tried my best to make the ship balance again. As the ship bumped on the rock, the some of the crews can’t maintain their balance and bumped onto the left side of the hull. The ship tilted too much to the left side.

“Don’t stay at the left side! Run to the right side!” I yelled and we landed at the Skull Bay.

Luckily no big and deadly problems were caused by the crash and successfully survived. Looking back at the sinking pirate ship, we all cheered and hugged one another, celebrating our victory...

### Chapter 3

Some suspicious fog appeared while we are letting our precautions down. I felt very dizzy and a voice approached me

“Brother! I missed you a lot!” the voice said and I was hugged by someone. I took a closer look of the person and I realized that the owner of the voice is my sister!

“What...What are you doing here? Aren’t you home taking care of father and mother?” my sister giggled and pointed backwards.

“It has been a long time since we last met, my son.” a voice said

The voice is so familiar that it seems like I just heard it before...

“Father?” I asked

“I am also here my dear,” another voice says.

My father and mother appeared from the shadow. I am so surprised and happy that I burst into tears. We hugged each other and I showed them around, introducing them to my crews. I showed them my very own room and also the deck. My mother and my sister cooked the most delicious dinner and it is exactly the same taste as before. For once, after I have been sailing on the sea for so long, I finally had a warm feeling of home. The happiest thing was that they finally understood why I had left home and sailed on the sea as they were also astonished by the beauty and the power of the sea. The sea...the sea? But aren’t I at the Skull Bay? I realized that something fishy was going on...

“Can you help me to massage a bit, my dear sister?” I asked, trying to figure out what is wrong.

“Of course my brother! I will be delighted to help you to the best of my ability!” my sister answered cheerfully.

She is not my true sister, I am sure about that. I know her like the back of my hand. She would never say something like that, never! She would usually just ask me to do it myself. The ‘sister’ standing in front of me, talking to me is just the sister I wanted her to be, my expectation but never the reality. My family never understood me! They just couldn’t ever understand the beauty and power of the sea! They even scolded me for promising to complete this mission! I finally understand what is happening. All of the things I am seeing right now are just illusions, my expectation but not the reality. Somehow, the suspicious fog can create illusion basing on the world you wish it to be, the world base on your expectations.

But then came another question... How do I suppose to get rid of the illusions? I tried several ways like kept on telling myself that this is fake in a brain-washing way, using a pin to pin myself and trying to sleep.

However, none of them work! I started to panic and my I can’t brainstorm anymore solutions. I stared at the sea trying to keep calm to brainstorm ideas. The fog makes me feel sick, the fog! If I did not breathe then I wouldn’t have anymore illusion! I held my breath as hard as I can. I started to feel lack of oxygen supply but I keep on telling myself that I am almost there, I am almost there...

### Chapter 4

I am finally back to reality, I breathed hardly as I have never breath before. I saw my crew all unconscious or I should say day-dreaming. I spotted Lee immediately and woke him up from his illusions.

“What’s happening? Where am I?” Lee asked and squeezed my cheeks

“Are you crazy? Don’t you dare to do it one more time.” I said angrily

“It is you, the true captain Leung!” he said and hugged me.

“You have no idea what you did in my dreams.” He laughed and said

“Let’s wake the crews up, leave this creepy place and we can leave the chatting later, cool?” I asked

Lee nodded his head and we started to wake the others up.

After being exhausted of waking the crews up and sailing away from the bay, Lee and I finally got time the talk.

"Do you actually know what is happening?" Lee asked curiously,

"Yes, the fog can create illusion basing on the world you wish it to be, the world base on your expectations." I replied

"I don't think that I want to experience something like that again." Lee said with a smile on his face.

"Like what?" I asked

"Do you know how terrifying are you when you are being too nice to me?" Lee asked

I shook my head.

"For example, hugging me for no reason, cooking a meal for me and tying shoe laces for me?" Lee said with a confused look.

"If I am ever going to do that." I said with a laugh. We both chat and laughed about the special things we encountered in the illusion.

## Chapter 5

The next day, I received a letter by the pigeon post. Once I read through the letter, I immediately called Lee to the conference room and showed him the letter.

"How could something like this be true?" Lee asked disappointingly,

"I knew that someday they would do this but I just didn't expect it to arrive so quickly." I replied

"Even if he is the emperor, he can't just start this mission and stop it all of a sudden so irresponsibility!" Lee said

"I understands that you are feeling really bad at the moment and can't accept this undeniable truth, so take your time and we can find the solution together," I said unusually calm perhaps it is because I know that I am the biggest one in charge here and I need to care and take up the responsibility if the emperor don't.

"Let's tell the crews. They deserve to know this." I said, holding up the letter.

Lee nodded and went out.

"My crews of the conqueror," I yelled "the emperor somehow wants to remove the mission and asked us to return to Ming. If we do not obey this order, the navy will be sent to capture us, dead or alive."

"That's very irresponsible to do so. How could he?" one of my crew said,

"Yeah, he thought that he is the emperor so he can rule over everything. It is time to show him that he is not everything and the fact that we will also be pissed off" another crew said,

Lee looked at me, his eyes are no longer lost but full confidence. I smiled back.

"So how about this time we show them who we are and how powerful we can be, but not some puppets that he can play with and throw it away whenever he wanted to. But first let me warn you all that we may be killed and will not have an easy life even if we survive. I give you all one night time to think about your decision and you will all tell me the answer tomorrow morning." That night, I couldn't sleep much since I have a lot to think, the consequences, the solution, my crews and the letter. I have never been so nervous before. I always act like I don't really care but deep down in my heart, I don't want this journey to end so fast. If only, if only... That was the longest night I had ever had.

## Chapter 6

The next morning, the time has come to make our decision. I looked at my crews and I was astonished by them. They are nothing like what I expected, they all look so smart and with trust and hope in their eyes but not dull and with lost eyes.

"We choose to go where ever the captain wanted to go, we aren't afraid of death but we are afraid of losing our home, the conqueror." The representative of the crews said.

This is the true warm feeling of home. I was never, ever so glad and relieved. I looked at Lee and said.

"This is the moment for them to realize how powerful and destructive as we are the conquerors. Now who is with me?"

"Me, captain!" all of the crews yelled.

Tears ran off my face. They are not tears of sorrows but tears filled with happiness and warmth.

The following few days, we have been busily preparing ourselves for the battle with the navy. Lee and I had been discussing in the conference room and the crews were checking military weapons. The days passed in a blink of an eye and the day has arrived...

## Chapter 7

The navy arrived. There were way much more ships and military forces than we could imagine. In my heart I know that it is a must for us to lose but I don't why that I still think that this is a battle worth fighting for. We started shooting guns and cannons at them. At first, our plan worked perfectly. We destroyed two-third of their military forces by using arrows lighted with fire. I was pretty amazed by the strategies Lee and I came up with. The captain of the navy seemed to be a bit afraid of us and started to take this more seriously but that was also when we started running out of weapons.

"Move to the Southwest direction, hold on tight!" I yelled.

The navy were so fast that they surrounded us. That was it. Time to end the journey. I kneeled down and helped Lee to tie his shoe laces.

"I guess sometimes dreams do come true, right?" I asked and hugged him.

I didn't expect his answers since we both knew it in our hearts. I walked down to my crews. I tidied every single one of their uniform and give them a hug.

"It has been an honor to be your captain, I would never have solve all the difficulties if you aren't here to help and being my motivation. You are all wonderful crews and I don't know what good deeds I did to have a chance to meet you all. Remember that the conqueror will always be your home, always..." My tear are rolling in my eyes. "Now, let take plan D. Conqueror forever!" I yelled.

"Conqueror forever!" all of us yelled,

All of us took out a burning log and we dropped it onto the ship. We all knew that we are dying but we were not afraid, because we have love, faith and hope. We had no regrets since we had done everything we wanted, we did our best and we found another place which we could call 'home'...



# New tales of Ming treasure voyages

*St. Mary's Canossian College, Leung, Yana – 14*

It was as if the death god was hovering over us, suffocating us.

There were four in our room, including me.

There was fragile-looking Hua, there was petite XingYun, and there was Mei who sitting on the floor of the small toilet, face pale and gaunt.

I kept my eyes trained on a spot on the brown wooden walls as I contemplated the sad fate we were heading to, wasn't there anything we could do to save ourselves?

"How long till we reach Champa?" Mei croaked, her voice scratchy and unpleasant.

"Two more days, but that's if the sea stays calm." I replied, eliciting a tired groan from Mei.

"I absolutely despise seasickness. I think I'm going to die. Surely it is abnormal to be puking so much!" Mei cried helplessly.

"Perhaps death will be better. I'd do anything to go home. I miss Fei, being apart from him makes the colours in this world dim." XingYun sighed, not feeling an ounce of sympathy for Mei. I supposed she couldn't when she herself was drowning in the misery of being separated from her lover.

"How cruel, we must not speak of life and death so lightly. Besides, this is our duty to Ming China, we should be proud to be chosen." Hua piped in, her head still bowed as she stitched. I caught a glimpse of her embroidery design – a bird soaring in the blue sky and the spark of hope rekindled.

"Duty this, duty that, that's all noble people know. Hua, don't you want to be free from such restraints? Don't you have your own desires? Our fate isn't set in stone yet!" I said.

"Our fate has been set the moment we stepped onto this ship, it's too late for anything. We are the representatives of Chinese women and we will bring glory to them. Dreams and desires do not matter anymore, we are only the gifts that will be presented to other countries and places." Hua's voice trembled as she spoke, "We are nothing without our pretty faces, so be honoured to be given such a role."

The toilet door slammed as nausea hit Mei again.

I was shook awake by the loud roar of rain and the stampeding just outside our room. I turned on the lights and nearly fell down as the floor tilted to one side.

"YueXin, what's going on?" Apparently, XingYun had fallen off her bed as the ship shook and tilted from left to right.

I opened the door and observed the situation. Then, I closed it hurriedly as I made eye contact with one of the panicking sailors.

"A storm. The waves are getting very violent." I couldn't help but think that something was going to happen. Something bad.

XingYun was shaking as she sat down on her bed. "We'll be fine, I'm not called XingYun without a reason. The storm will pass."

The storm did not pass like she thought it would. Instead, the roaring of wind and rain became louder and louder and water had started to seep into our room.

Suddenly, the door to our room slammed open and in ran two bulky sailors.

“What is the meaning of this?” Hua, who had also been awoken, demanded in a tight voice.

“The storm ain’t gonna stop unless we give Tianfei something.” The two sailors grabbed the Xing Yun who was standing the closest to them and shoved her out of the door, ignoring the weak protests from the other two.

They were going to kill her.

I was about to protest but I realised that I would only make the situation worse. I did not want to become a sacrifice. Hua wisely kept her mouth shut but I could see the tears pooling in her eyes.

Xing Yun’s screams of help were blood—curling and yet, it blended perfectly with the low mumbles of prayers to the patron goddess from the sailors. I covered my ears and tried to shut out the horrid noises.

Soon, the howling wind and rain soon stopped and we could hear the sailors cheering in relief.

There was no mention of XingYun again.

A few days later, the ship was nearing Java. Hua and I, both dressed in an ridiculously extravagant dress, Hua had insisted, decided to leave our tiny room and take in some fresh air on the deck.

“You should go ahead first, I need to retrieve my coat from the room.” Hua smiled at me, though her eyes were on a pile of sailor wear that had been piled up in a corner.

“I can go with you, I don’t mind.” I offered.

“No, no, I know how long you have been waiting for this. Go ahead and enjoy the view on the deck first. It’s almost sunrise and you wouldn’t want to miss it.” Hua ignored my protests and pushed me onto the deck.

Once again, the sight of the upper deck of the ship had made me stop in my tracks.

The ship was enormous, the biggest ship I’ve ever seen, and it was magnificent! Its three sails stood proud and billowed in the gentle wind. The rising sun turned the sails into a golden yellow and the shadows of the towering masts coloured the wooden deck in different shades.

“Come on, we’d better not stand in the middle of everything.” Hua appeared, giggling at my awestruck face.

“Look, YueXin, isn’t this beautiful?” Hua sighed quietly. I leaned on the ship’s railing with Hua and looked at the sky that was painted red and orange. Cylinders of light moved across the turquoise sea and the seawater seemed to glitter under the light.

The silence was broken by the booming voice of the navigator. “We will be arriving Java in 15 minutes, please get ready to disembark and unload the gifts.”

At the word ‘gift’, both Hua and I stiffened and glanced at each other, fearing the worst. Quietly, we shuffled back into our room and shut the door.

“Do you think one of us will be the tribute to Java?” I asked, nerves tangled all together.

Hua said nothing but picked up her embroidery work and started stitching again, though I could see her hands trembling slightly.

“Where is Mei?” Hua asked nonchalantly.

“Isn’t she still sleeping? Let me check...” I ran over to Mei’s bed and threw her sheets on the floor, but, Mei wasn’t there.

I rushed to the toilet and pushed its door open, but in Mei’s place was only the pungent smell of vomit.

Mei had disappeared.

A few days passed and soon, the ship was starting its sail again. However, Mei was still missing.

“Hua, I’m suffocating in here. I’m going out to have some fresh air.” I opened the door and immediately, slammed into something hard and bulky.

“Going somewhere?” A voiced asked. I looked up and blanched at the sight of the man’s scarred and hairy face.

“I... I...” I was frozen with fear.

“We were just going to take in some fresh air from the deck. Would you mind moving out of our way?” Luckily, Hua came to my rescue.

The man sneered at us and said, “And why would I do that? I ain’t stupid. Nobody’s escaping on my watch. Mei just got lucky.” Then, I was pushed roughly back into my room and the door slammed shut.

Realisation struck like lightning.

“She escaped. Mei escaped! I can’t believe she abandoned us like that!”

I looked at Hua for her reaction but I could see nothing but a tiny hint of guilt and relief. “Hua, what’s going on?” I asked, my suspicions confirmed as she lowered her eyes to the floor.

“Hua, you knew? And you didn’t tell me?” I demanded, making Hua flinch at my harsh voice.

“She was going to die of seasickness, I had to help her escape!” Hua replied, gesturing for me to lower my voice.

I stomped towards her and grabbed both her shoulders tightly. “We could have all escaped, now we won’t have the chance to do that!”

Hua argued, “No, we wouldn’t have. Mei only escaped because we provided the distraction. I told you to wear that ridiculous dress with me so everyone would be too busy looking at us to realise that Mei had slipped into the ranks of the sailors.”

“I want to escape too, but I have my family to think of as well. This position as a gift to foreigners is not given to anybody and if we don’t behave or please the foreign kings, we will be punished for disobedience to our king. Our families could also be dragged into this mess, and I have five sisters and seven brothers... I cannot afford to fail this mission.” Hua was dabbing at her eyes with her handkerchief and I felt awful for yelling at her.

“I’m sorry for yelling at you.” I said.

After a short while, Hua responded.

“I apologise for not informing you as well.”

We both knew arguing wouldn’t get us anywhere.

The days passed peacefully as the treasure fleet sailed to Malacca, Aru, Semudera, Lambri and finally reached Ceylon.

“Hua, I have this bad feeling ...” Before I could finish my sentence, the door was slammed open and a rough voice sounded, “Hua, YueXin, get ready to present yourselves to the local king Vira Alakesvara. You have five minutes to dress and pack things up, get on with it.”

Then, the door slammed shut again. We glanced at each other, our hearts filled with dread. Silently, we moved about the room and packed up our belongings.

“The King of Gampola will see you now.”

“Your Majesty, it is an honour to be allowed into your homeland. We are the ambassadors of China and we are hoping to establish a friendship between our two countries. To show our sincerity, we have prepared some gifts for you!” Admiral Zheng He straightened from his bow and waved his men who were carrying cargoes of gold and silk over.

“Your Majesty, we also offer you one of the most beautiful creatures in our land. Hua has the fairest skin in our land, with hair as black as midnight and a voice as sweet as a nightingale. YueXin has the most alluring eyes you’ll ever find and can dance to any music provided. Please pick whom you wish to acquire.” Then, the men behind us pushed us upfront and all eyes were on us.

I stifled my anger with a deep breath. What were we, animals? Creature this and creature that, and who gave him the permission to ‘acquire’ us? We aren’t objects for sale!

The king’s face seemed to light up as he looked at us from head to toe. I couldn’t help but fidget under his unnerving gaze.

“That one is very pleasing to the eye. Come here. Yes, you. Stand in front of me.” The king ordered. Hua looked at me, confused, before walking towards the King and curtsied.

“Hua, was it? Come closer, good.”

Hua stood just two feet away from the king and suddenly, with frightening speed and force, the king closed the gap between them, grabbed Hua’s neck and dangled her in the air.

“You think that you can trick me into believing with all these gifts and whatnot? I’ll show you what I think of you...” The king threw Hua at the wall and a loud crack followed by a scream was heard.

“Let me go! I have to get to Hua!” I struggled to leave the men’s grasp but it was futile. Didn’t they care that Hua was bleeding out right in front of them?

“Your majesty, what is the meaning of this?” Admiral Zheng He stepped up angrily.

“I know how things work. You’re going to trick me into receiving all these gifts so I will have to repay you later on. I’m not going to pay any tribute to your King so you can leave now or I’ll kill you all. Gampola doesn’t need allies, we are strong and independent! You are insulting our strength.” The king snarled and ordered his guards to ‘escort’ us back to our ship.

“You two, take her back to the ship. Go quickly!” Admiral Zheng He commanded.

“And the rest of you, let us show what a wrong choice it was to disrespect our king.” The men cheered and readied their weapons to face the Gampola. Soon, the room was filled with the stench of blood and screams of murder.

“Hey, we are trying to protect you. Your friend is likely already dead. If you rush into the battlefield now, you’ll be dead in less than a second.” One of the men of Admiral Zheng He tugged at my wrist harshly and tears rolled down my face as the gruesome scene replayed in my head over and over again.

Defeated, I stopped struggling, the men picked me up and rushed back to the ship. I lost consciousness soon after.

I woke to the sound of soft humming. Then, I sat up abruptly as I realised my bed was not swaying from side to side.

“Dearie, you’re finally awake. They thought you wouldn’t wake up.” A voice said. I turned and saw an unfamiliar face staring back at me.

“Who are you? Where am I?” I asked.

“Why, you don’t know who I am? I am Xiwangmu, the highest goddess of immortality. As for where you are, you are in the Kunlun Mountains, simply put, in heaven.” She replied.

“What? I don’t remember dying? I was escaping...” I trailed off, my memory was blurry.

“My child, after you lost consciousness, you were hit by an arrow that was shot by the Gampola guards. The men guarding you fled and you bled to death. I’m very sorry.” Xiwangmu said, taking my hands in her wrinkled ones.

“I...died? But why are you here, and where is Hua?” I asked, if I had died, then Hua should be around too.

“Hmm... so many questions, but the real question is, why are you here?” She smiled knowingly.

“Because... I am dead?” I stared blankly at her, I was confused to no end.

“Let me put it this way, what do you want most in life?” She asked.

I thought hard at that. As a woman, we had little choice in life. Our destiny was always to find a husband, preferably a rich one, and have children, preferably a male.  
I’ve never really thought of what I wanted...

“Well, if I were still alive, I’d wish for freedom and that women aren’t treated as lowly creatures by the men...” I blushed after saying such a ridiculous wish.

“Hmm... Perhaps I shall transfer your spirit over to Kuan Yin, she is the Bodhisattva of compassion and mercy. Maybe you will find your purpose as her aid...” With a sweep of her arm, I blacked out for a second and when I opened my eyes, I was standing in front of a huge palace.

I sighed wearily, what was going on? Why did I meet Xiwangmu? I had so many questions swirling in my head that I didn’t hear the soft pitter-patter of footsteps.

“YueXin? I can’t believe it’s you!” At that familiar voice, I looked up and saw Hua in a white robe.

“Hua? Do you know what’s going on?” I asked as I gave her a hug.

“Kuan Yin will explain everything. Come, I’ll take you to her.” Hua said.

Hua led me through a maze of hallways and we soon arrived inside a large room that was decorated with a lot of statues.

“Hello, YueXin. I am Kuan Yin. I’m guessing you have a lot of questions for me.” A figure sitting on a cloud in the middle the room said.

I was about to open my mouth to speak but Kuan Yin raised her hand with her palm facing me.

“You are here because I have a shortage of spirits to help me protect people who ask me for help. I believe after your voyage on the Ming treasure fleet, you have seen how helpless the women are and will be willing

to assist me in protecting and guiding them. From now on, you, along with Hua, will be the spirits of protection for women and can go down to the mortal realm in the form of a bird.”  
Kuan Yin smiled sagely and disappeared in a puff of smoke.

“We have a lot of work to do. Let’s go!” Hua said. I snapped out of my daze and followed her quickly. It seemed that this would be the new chapter of my life.

Mei slid down a tree trunk tiredly and her empty stomach growled in protest. She had been scavenging for food in the forest of Java and living in a small cave hole since she escaped from the treasure fleet one month ago. She was terribly lost.

"Chirp." Mei looked up at a tree branch and saw the prettiest bird she had ever seen. Another bird landed on her shoulder and dropped a small branch of berries in her hands.

"Thank you..." Mei said. The two birds seemed to smile, but that could be her imagination. She was starving! Then, the bird on her shoulder started pulling on her sleeve with its beak.

"Alright, alright, I'm getting up. Where are you taking me?" She asked as the bird pulled her towards her right. She didn't protest much as she didn't have any idea where she was anyway.

Mei followed the birds through the forest and soon she was standing at an open field with small houses perched on slopes a mile away.

"Chirp, chirp." Both birds called out and left with the gentle breeze of wind.

"Wait, I haven't thanked you guys yet! Huh? What's this?" Mei caught the tiny piece of paper that was floating down from the sky and it read:

"Good luck, Mei!"

# The Final Voyage

*St. Paul's Co-educational College, Lam, Justin – 15*

The Xuande Emperor reclined in his gilded throne. He scanned the report in his hand before signing it. He paused, putting down his writing brush and taking a sip of tea.

The calm was broken by the the palace doors swinging open. A tall, broad-shouldered man stormed in, his black robes whipping around his imposing form. Admiral Zheng He. He was something of a legend in the palace, renowned for the six voyages he'd embarked upon many years ago. That, and the formidable military prowess he'd displayed during the Siege of Nanjing.

Right now, though, the Emperor was not inclined to appreciate those achievements.

"What is the meaning of this?" he asked angrily. "I *specifically* gave instructions not to let anyone in."

The guard bowed frantically. "Your Majesty, we tried to stop Admiral Zheng from entering, but he insisted on seeing you."

Admiral Zheng bowed as well. "Your Majesty, I would like to discuss a matter of great importance with you."

The Emperor sighed, rubbing his temples. He took a moment to compose himself. "Very well. You may stand. What do you want?"

The admiral drew himself to his full height, fixing the Emperor with steely eyes. "I heard you were going to cancel all further expeditions to the Western Seas?"

The Emperor didn't say anything, merely nodded. He'd expected the admiral to argue with him over his decision. He would be more surprised if Zheng He *hadn't* spoken to him about it. The man was as much a creature of the sea as one of land.

"Your Majesty, with all due respect, this is the wrong course of action!" Zheng He said. "The voyages have opened our eyes to wonders beyond our imagination. Each time, we have discovered radical new things about the world. If we lock ourselves away, our progress will stagnate."

"The voyages violate the principles laid down by our dynasty's founding emperor," Xuande explained, knowing that it wouldn't placate him. "Every day, I receive complaints that the expeditions violate Confucian principles. What would you have me do?"

Admiral Zheng looked up at him, his mouth set in a determined line. "Allow me to go on a seventh voyage. If I succeed, continue these explorations. If I fail, end them. This is all I beg of you."

The Emperor exhaled. He'd been expecting heavier demands. He considered the options he had. He could refuse Zheng He's request, of course, but that would make the ongoing conflict between the scholars and the eunuchs even worse. No. Better to allow him to go on his journey and decide what to do later.

The Emperor finally spoke. "I will grant you permission. Do not fail."

~

The ship's prow cut through the waters, its flag flying proudly on its mast. A stinging spray of sea-foam splattered the deck. Zheng He breathed in the smell of brine, gazing at the miles and miles of open sea. He'd finally returned to the ocean.

"Sir," His third-in-command Lieutenant Tang Guan said, trying to catch his attention.

Zheng He turned towards him, eyebrows raised in a question.

“A dozen more sailors have fallen ill,” Tang Guan said, his forehead creased in concern.

“Again?” Zheng He asked in surprise. “That’s the second time in three days!”

He suspected there was something going on behind the scenes. His sailors were handpicked from the Royal Navy. They were the elite of the elite. They didn’t just fall ill without warning. Tang Guan evidently agreed.

“Sir, I suspect foul play here,” he whispered, lowering his voice so no one nearby could hear, “I think someone poisoned them.”

Zheng He nodded meditatively, hiding a surge of panic that rose up in him. If someone was sabotaging the expedition, it would be nigh-impossible to stop. Out at sea, there was no way to escape if anything happened. But why? Why would anyone try to sabotage the voyage?

The answer came to him in a flash. If the scholar-bureaucrat faction really wanted to stop further voyages from happening, the best way to go about it was to make sure this one ended in disaster. He gritted his teeth.

*Not if I have anything to say about it.*

“I want you to take a dozen of your most trusted soldiers,” he said to Tang Guan. “Tell them to guard our food and water supply on a strict rota and let no one in. If you capture anyone, bring them to me.”

Tang Guan nodded and retreated. Zheng He turned back towards the sea, trying to calm himself down. It didn’t quite work. His emotions were still in turmoil. It was very clear how much was at stake here. If everyone on board was poisoned, it wouldn’t just spell the end of further maritime expeditions. It would also mean their death.

~

Zheng He rushed into Tang Guan’s room. The lieutenant was currently lying in bed, his face pasty-white.

“How is he?” Zheng He asked.

The doctor frowned. “He’s not doing very well. The illness has symptoms I’ve never seen before. I can only lessen his pain with medicine and let him recover on his own.”

Zheng He gestured for the doctor to leave, watching him walk out of the door. He waited for a few more moments before leaning in close to Tang Guan.

“Do you know how you got poisoned?” he asked with his voice lowered.

When the lieutenant spoke, his voice was weak. “I think it must have been in the food or water. Whoever did this was targeting me specifically.”

Zheng He nodded, but inwardly he was going over the possibilities. The food storage room was under heavy guard. No one should have been able to enter. Whoever was responsible for the poisonings must have been a high-ranking official, to be capable of entering the room without being stopped. It couldn’t have been Tang Guan or himself. And that left...

“The executive officer entered the food supply room yesterday. He said he wanted to check how many days of food and water we still had left,” Tang said, confirming his suspicions.



Wang Jinghong. One of his most trusted officers and the second-in-command of the ship. Could he really have been the one behind the incidents? Zheng He couldn't imagine why he'd want to do that.

He turned to Tang Guan. "I want you to keep this quiet," Zheng He murmured. "We need to tread carefully if we are to stop this. I can't confront him without direct evidence."

The lieutenant nodded feebly. "I will."

With that said, Zheng He turned and strode out of the room. He had things to plan ahead for. He went up the stairs and up to the deck. The wooden boards creaked beneath his feet as he went over to the helmsman, who was at the ship's wheel, guiding its progress through the seas.

"Set course for the nearest land," he said, "If anyone asks, tell them we're stopping to get additional food and water supplies."

The helmsman nodded and turned back to the wheel. Zheng He returned to his cabin, deep in thought. What would Wang Jinghong do next? How could he be caught in the act?

~

A figure slipped through the door, head craning around, as if searching for something. Spotting an urn filled with water, he headed for it, and –

Zheng He caught his wrist, stepping out from behind the door. "Looking for something?" he asked, menacingly. Soldiers walked out from their hiding places, their spears pointed at the man.

Wang Jinghong looked around in confusion. "How... Why..."

"It's simple, really," the admiral said, glaring at his second-in-command. "I knew you'd try to sneak in and try to poison someone else again, so I set a trap for you, and you fell right for it. What do you have to say for yourself?"

A mix of emotions flashed across Wang Jinghong's face, before they were replaced by calm. "Who told you that I was going to poison someone?" he asked.

Zheng He shook his head, exasperated. "Does it really matter? If you want to know, it was Tang Guan who told me you'd entered the storage room yesterday. Other soldiers confirmed this."

The executive officer didn't seem to be perturbed. "Yes, I went here yesterday. But that was to investigate the cause of the sailors falling sick! I was trying to find out if our supplies were contaminated by disease!"

"Stop trying to talk your way out of this," Zheng He sighed. "You aren't convincing anyone."

"But it's true!" Wang Jinghong exclaimed. A shadow passed over his face as he looked down at the floor. There was a long moment of silence, after which he abruptly lifted his head. "I... I received an anonymous tip-off today."

Zheng He's eyebrows drew together. Wang Jinghong didn't seem to be lying. He knew the man well, and he wasn't a very good actor. If so, what was this all about?

"Someone wrote me a note, telling me to come to the storage room. They said they had overheard a few soldiers conspiring to poison our water. That's why I came here." The executive officer's eyes were wide with shock and anger. "Someone set me up."

Zheng He growled in frustration, pacing around the room. He desperately wanted to believe his second-in-command, wanted to believe that his friend hadn't betrayed him. But he couldn't be certain of anything.

*There is a way to ascertain Wang Jinghong's story,* he realized. He turned back to the man.

"Where is the note?" he asked. "Can you show me?"

Wang Jinghong pulled out a scrap of paper. Zheng He took it and read it quickly.

*"Have overheard soldiers plotting to poison water. I cannot stop them. Please hurry."*

It appeared to be authentic, at least as far as Zheng He could tell. The handwriting wasn't Wang Jinghong's, and even if he were to try to disguise his penmanship, Zheng He would have seen through it. He knew him too well to not know.

Who wrote this letter? It must have been someone high-ranking as well. He doubted normal soldiers would have access to ink and paper, let alone this kind of high-quality mulberry paper.

He recalled something. His fists clenched, almost imperceptibly. "Executive Officer Wang," he said, forcing himself to remain calm, "What did you tell the guards when you entered the storage room yesterday?"

Wang Jinghong looked perplexed, but he answered readily. "I told them the truth, that I was there to see if the food and water was contaminated. Why?"

Zheng He's nails dug into his skin, causing blood to well up around his nails. He'd been played for a fool. He still remembered what Lieutenant Tang had said, that Wang Jinghong had wanted to check how many days of food and water were left.

He knew why the lieutenant had said that, of course. The act of checking was patently unnecessary, as the ship had clear records of its food consumption. The excuse was obviously a lie, and Tang Guan *knew* that it would be obvious to him. All the better to make Zheng He believe that Wang Jinghong was trying to hide something from the rest of the crew.

He headed up the stairs to the cabins, gesturing for the soldiers to follow him as he rushed frantically to Tang Guan's room. The man had no reason to suspect that Zheng He had found out. He would still be there in bed.

Zheng He barged into the room with a bang, standing aside and allowing the soldiers to file into the room. The lamps were already lit. Tang Guan had evidently been waiting for him. A trace of a smile hung on the lieutenant's face as he stood in the center of the room. He didn't seem to be bothered by the spears pointed at him.

"It seems you've discovered my ploy," Tang Guan said, his tone mocking. "A pity. I was hoping you'd execute Wang Jinghong before you found out. Perhaps I underestimated you."

*He isn't even denying what he's done,* Zheng He noted with fury as he stood before the despicable scumbag.

"It's over, Tang Guan," Zheng He said. "My soldiers have surrounded the room. There will be no escape."

"Who said anything about escaping?" Tang Guan asked, a crafty glint in his eyes.

*He's trying to pull something,* Zheng He realized.

But what was it? There was no way the lieutenant could fight his way out of the situation, especially against a squadron of well-trained warriors. Unless...

Zheng He whirled around, bolting for the door. He was stopped by a spear levelled directly at his face. All around him, the other soldiers did likewise. Zheng He had been outmaneuvered.

Tang Guan made a tsking noise in the back of his throat. “You’re too overconfident, Admiral. That always has been your greatest flaw, you know. Did you *really* think it’d be that easy?”

Zheng He gritted his teeth and said nothing. He simply fixed the traitorous lieutenant with a furious glower. If glares could burn people, Tang Guan would have been dust drifting on the wind by now.

“How did you secure their loyalty?” Zheng He asked. “Threats? Blackmail?”

“Nothing so crass,” Tang Guan replied, amusement showing in his voice. “I simply offered to make them rich beyond their dreams if they cooperated.”

“So you bribed them,” Zheng He summed up.

“Let’s not be so uncivilized, shall we?” Tang Guan smiled. “I dislike the word *bribe*. It’s so... lacking in nuance.”

“He won’t pay you!” Zheng He said, desperately. “Once he doesn’t need your services, he’ll dispose of you! Don’t help him!”

The soldiers didn’t move or say anything.

“You’re no great judge of character, Admiral,” Tang Guan said, shaking his head. “I’ll follow through on my promises, if only because it’ll be inconvenient for any soldiers to slip through the net and report me to the Emperor. Besides, they’ll be helpful in the future.”

“Whatever he paid you, I’ll pay double!” Zheng He said. He was grasping at straws here. “The Emperor will pardon you if you help me!”

“You *can’t* pay double,” Tang Guan said. “You see, you don’t have the money.”

“You’re a monster,” Zheng He spat.

Tang Guan ignored him. “Take him to the deck,” he ordered. “Let’s arrange for a little accident.”

Zheng He was shoved roughly up to the deck. A few moments later, other soldiers arrived, carrying a beaten and bloody Wang Jinghong with them. A wave crashed over the deck, drenching the two prisoners and a few soldiers. Zheng He shook the water out of his face.

“Why did you betray us?” Zheng He asked. “Why bend to the will of the scholar–bureaucrat faction?”

“Did you forget?” Tang Guan hissed, his features uncharacteristically contorted by rage. “My father was executed by the Yongle Emperor because he opposed the maritime voyages. All because of people like *you*.”

Zheng He sighed and bowed his head. Once upon a time he’d been a rash fool, eager to fight against his political enemies by all means. He’d leveraged the Yongle Emperor’s favor to persecute them.

*How the times have changed. The sins of the past always catch up with us.*

“I’m sorry for what I’ve done,” he said. “But your quarrel is with me. Let Wang Jinghong go.”

“And what? Let him blab to the Emperor about what happened today?” Tang Guan asked. “I can’t let that happen.”

Without warning, Wang Jinghong began laughing. Zheng He was suddenly aware that he’d been silent the whole time. Both men looked at him, bewildered.

Zheng He realized that while the two of them had been speaking, reinforcements had arrived. Soldiers were marching onto the deck, surrounding the group of traitors.

“You didn’t bribe all the men on board,” Wang Jinghong said, still laughing. “Some were too loyal to be turned like this. I managed to contact them before I got caught.” The officer grinned, showing bloodstained teeth. “Your move.”

The two sides began clashing, the reinforcements pushing in and trying to reach Zheng He and Wang Jinghong. Screams punctuated the night as men from both sides fell in pools of blood.

Tang Guan wheeled around, staring at the scene, his right hand clenched around his sword. He seemed to be considering his course of action. Then he turned back to the two prisoners.

“There is another way to stop further voyages from happening,” he said, “And another way to exact my revenge.”

The lieutenant drew his sword, the metal reflecting the faint, flickering lights from the lamps.

“If the great Admiral Zheng He dies on the voyage, no matter the circumstances, the Emperor will cancel all further trips to the Western seas, for a very good reason,” Tang Guan said, a cruel gleam in his eyes. “No one else is actually up to the task.”

Wang Jinghong’s eyes widened in shock as he understood Tang Guan’s meaning.

“So, you see, I think my previous plan was too overcomplicated,” Tang Guan said, a smile growing on his face. “I think Zheng He’s death will suffice.”

He charged. Zheng He tried to dodge, but his movement was hampered by the soldier that held him by his shoulders. He moved too late, allowing Tang Guan to strike a glancing blow on his left shoulder. A spatter of blood smeared the deck.

Zheng He stumbled backwards, clutching his injured shoulder. Tang Guan lunged again, and this time, he was too slow to get out of the way. The blade impaled him through his chest, and he collapsed.

When Tang Guan withdrew his sword, Zheng He clamped his arms around the man’s legs. Tang Guan struggled to free himself from the iron grip, but Zheng He could feel his strength waning. With a final leap, he launched himself off the deck, carrying Tang Guan with him.

As the two men hit the frigid water, a crimson cloud billowing around them, Zheng He’s thoughts were on his failed promise to the Emperor.

# The Tale of Two Stones

*St. Paul's Convent School, Cheung, Margaret – 16*

The sound of the sea roused him.

He was alone, the only survivor to have escape death and lived to tell the tale.

Or at least, he was supposed to. Now a wasted man, he could only wander around in the island, spending his days staring out at sea, once the territory he ruled over, now his captor, lamenting his fate, and telling his story to the waves as they brush against the fine, golden sand.

Today was another of those days. He sat on the beach, facing the sea, and began once more recounting his tale.

The tale of a treasure and a voyage.

It all began with a memory...

*“Zheng He, wait a moment.”*

*As he was leaving the imperial court, the eunuch turned back to the emperor, who had called his name, and saw, astonished, a young girl being led towards him.*

*“Bring her with you.” Yongle Emperor commanded.*

Zheng He blinked, jolting himself out of the recollection. At the same time, an official had been hurrying towards him, holding a scroll of parchment. “Sir, we’ve a problem.” The man reported, whilst unravelling it slowly.

“What is it?” Zheng asked, seeing the clearly troubled expression. The other hesitated, before saying in a low voice, “The Mongols are catching up to us.” He revealed the map and pointed. “We have news of troops arriving there. If we stay any longer...” The unspoken threat hung in the air, and Zheng immediately caught the underlying meaning. “Understood. Thank you, Li.”

“I recommend you not to set sail immediately, Zheng He.” A voice came from behind them. Both men turned, and found a young girl standing on the bowsprit, perched dangerously on the flimsy bit of wood above the waters lapping at the ship. Despite being at port, falling and hitting the rocks below would mean instant death, even in shallow waters. The eunuch frowned instantly, and she continued, “Mistress Mazu is angry. We must wait until the sun rises again.” Having delivered her message, she walked down the bowsprit casually as if on the street, and disappeared down the crew’s quarters.

“W—who was that?” Li asked, almost murmuring, as if he was frightened of the thirteen year-old sent to them by the emperor.

“A guardian.” Zheng replied shortly. He stared at the crew’s quarters, then turned back to Li. “Inform no one of this new development. Tell the crew we will set sail at first light tomorrow. In the meantime, we rest.”

“Yes, sir!”

That night, Zheng He had a dream. Within it, he was standing in front of an altar, where two stones lay on the marble; a jade and an unknown black stone.

“You must choose one,” A voice told him, which came seemingly from nowhere. “However, choosing either would bring doom and death. Choose both, and you will meet an unexpected end, which would bring either riches or nothing to you.”

“Which should I pick?” Zheng asked, stunned by the sudden decision forced upon him.

“That is entirely up to you.”

The man frowned at that, but didn’t question any further. Instead, he looked at both of them, and marvelled silently at their beauty; the jade surpassed that of any stone he had seen in the palace, and the ebony possessed an ethereal and mysterious air.

“I – I choose – ”

*Gong. Gong.*

The sound of the morning gong ripped through the air, shattering the silence and rousing the sailors for another day of their expedition. Zheng He usually wake early, being the captain of the ships. However, today, troubled by his dreams, he had remained in bed longer, pondering about its meaning, before getting up to start his duties for the day.

As he commanded his men to set sail, one question kept him half-distracted. *What did he choose in the end?* Being a knowledgeable man, he knew that the jade represented the Confucian virtues of courage, wisdom, and also wealth to come.

"Zheng He." The mention of his name made him turn automatically towards the men busy at their stations, as if he was being chided for neglecting his duties. Then, realising he was no longer at the palace, the captain turned, and found the young girl once again standing there.

"What are you doing here?" Annoyed at her constant materializations and her sudden warnings that would throw him off guard, he was prepared to tell her off when she spoke again.

"I've come to find you. Have you had a dream yesterday night?"

Her sudden words took him by surprise. He stared at her, whose large and mysterious eyes reflected the stunned expression on his face, and was tongue-tied. As if reading his thoughts, she continued, "The Goddess is omniscient. She knows everything and told me of your dream. Would you tell me the details?"

And so Zheng recounted his vivid dream, albeit reluctant to reveal too much. However, she only listened attentively, and was silent until he was finished. At last, she spoke slowly, as if picking her words carefully. "The stones each represent something dear to you, yet both are at war with each other, so you must make a choice. However, dangers seem to lie in your path." Pausing, the girl hesitated, then murmured, "An encounter with the brown men will set the events in motion."

"I'm sorry?" The captain was confused at the sudden prophecy, but as he was about to enquire further, the ship's mate called, "Land ahead!"

"We'll talk later." Zheng turned and headed back towards the front of ship, preparing to give orders to dock and send ambassadors ahead. As the man gave commands, she watched on silently, before murmuring to herself, "May the goddess guide you always."

"Welcome, travellers from afar. Please, make yourselves at home." The Zamorin, monarch of the kingdom of Kozhikode, greeted in a friendly tone as Zheng He, along with his officers, walked into his palace to pay their respects.

"Thank you kindly, Your Majesty." The ambassadors bowed, showing their respect. The captain approached, holding a pile of expensive fabric. He offered this to the king, who clapped in delight at the sight of such exotic goods. "Please accept this as a token of gratitude for allowing us to stay."

"But naturally." The king rubbed his hands together, eyes gleaming at the riches laid before him. As a brown hand stretched out to touch the gold, almost in a trance, an advisor appeared at the Zamorin's side suddenly, whispering something into his ear. Immediately, the greed in his eyes disappeared, and he straightened, addressing the audience of men in his court.

"I heard that you people possess peculiar healing abilities. Is that true?"

As the interpreter relayed the message back, Zheng was extremely puzzled, but before he could say anything, the little girl who was supposedly left on ship suddenly materialized, and answered, in perfect Malayalam, no less, "Yes, Your Majesty."

Whirling around, Zheng was startled at her sudden appearance. Indeed, he wasn't the only one; the men brought along whispered amongst themselves as well, and members of the Zamorin's court also had uneasy glances. However, the king himself remained unfazed; rather, a grin had spread on his mouth.

“Who is this?”

“A priestess for the goddess of the sea.”

“Will she be able to heal my sick daughter?”

“That depends on the will of my goddess.”

For a moment, the two said nothing, merely looking at each other; the Zamorin sizing her up, and the girl returning it with an almost blank stare. Then, the king threw his head back and laughed.

“Such bravery! Very well, bring her to the back. Along with the captain,” He pointed at the admiral, who looked confused as the whole conversation was but a myriad of sounds and strange words being exchanged. Nevertheless, he understood the simple gesture, and followed a guard to the back of the palace, where stairs led to higher floors.

“This is my daughter, who is suffering from some unknown disease.” The pair was led into a chamber which smelled heavily of incense. There was a bed within, veiled with thick red curtains. The Zamorin continued sombrely, “Medicine—men had come far and wide, but none could help her. If you could spare your powers...”

Without waiting for him to finish, the young girl had already approached the bed and pulled away the curtains, revealing a young woman in deep sleep. She had long, flowing dark hair laid out on the pillow, and eyelashes that brushed against her dark skin as her chest rose and fell with each breath. The priestess examined her for some moments, before withdrawing and turning to Zheng He.

“Do you have any medicine with you now?” She asked in Chinese, as the king and his advisor looked on keenly.

“Some grinded herbs, but why – ”

“Give them to me, please.”

Unwillingly, the admiral reached into his bag and took out a silk pouch, which he gave her. Taking it, the priestess asked for some water, into which she poured the herbs and told the servants to heat. “After she drinks this, she will be healed.”

The Zamorin was sceptical, but nonetheless handed the concoction to the doctor standing next to the patient’s bed, who reassured him that it would be checked for poison and any other dangerous substances. And so, with the royal physician’s reassurance, the king left with his visitors and advisors back into court.

Before long, it was night again. The king had welcomed his men joyously into the palace and proposed for them to stay a night as a token of thanks, for which the crew was grateful. Zheng He, being the admiral, was of course equally grateful, and thanked the king for providing accommodation for his men as well as for himself.

As he was about to go to bed, there was a knock at his door. He walked to the door hesitantly, before throwing it open and gaped.

To his astonishment, there stood the young princess of Kozhikode at his doorway, holding something. As soon as she saw him, the girl thrust the package in her arms towards the man, then mumbled something along the lines of thanks and bowed, expressing her gratitude. Afterwards, as he was about to tell her there was no such need, a warning flashed in her large brown eyes, and she uttered something sounding similar to “Yud-ham”.

At that, he was greatly confused. What did she meant? Sensing his puzzlement, the princess repeated the word again and again, until finally she gave a sound of frustration and pointed at his sword lying by his bedside, and mimicked the action of fighting.

Suddenly, he understood. “Is it...war?” He tried to imitate her actions, which she nodded at. Zheng tried again, shaping a crown in his hands to symbolise the king her father, which she reaffirmed.

*The king is going to kill us.* He realised the important message behind her actions, and just as he was about to ask for advice, there came another knock on the door again, which swung open to reveal the little priestess.

“Little girl,” Zheng sighed in exasperation and annoyance. “Do refrain from going into others’ businesses too much. It’s very rude.”

“There is no need to ‘go into others’ businesses’,” She replied. “The goddess had told me about everything.” Ignoring him, she turned immediately to the young princess, with whom she exchanged a few rapid words.

“The Zamorin plans to attack us during our sleep,” She interpreted. “The princess says to flee immediately, and to take our ships and escape. We must head back to China this instant, for when dawn comes, the Indian ships will easily overtake us.” The princess spoke again, and she continued, “Her sickness was a plot to lure us into our deaths. She came here to warn you because you had saved her life. The gift is a precious stone to protect you.” She pointed at the wrapped bundle in his hands.

His blood ran cold at the mention of a precious stone, and Zheng slowly unwrapped it, revealing a stone black as midnight.

As if reading his thoughts, the priestess muttered, “I feared as much. This is obsidian, which is supposed to protect the wearer according to Indian tradition. It is the exact same stone as that in your dream, am I correct?”

“Yes. But – ”

“There is no time.” Suddenly, the girl’s tone changed, and her expression hardened to that of new determination. “We must set sail tonight and pray for the goddess’ guidance. Wake Li, who will bring the ships to port while you keep the situation and your men under control. We need only three ships.”

“But the treasure fleet – ”

“There’s no time.” She repeated firmly. “Hurry, now.” After that, she walked out and disappeared into the dark corridors. Uncertainty gripped his mind, but a quick glance at the princess, who shot him a reassuring smile, calmed him, and Zheng moved quickly, but not before thanking her.

The woman’s smile, if possible, widened, though was twinged with a note of bitter-sweetness, which caused a familiar stir in his chest. Forcing it down, the admiral spared her one last glance, before hurrying to wake his men.



The next few days were a blur. As Zheng commanded the ships, his mind went back to the princess, then to his prophetic dream, then to the obsidian in his cabin, and finally to the disappearance of the priestess.

Where on earth was she? That night, he had gotten his entire crew on board, and waited until the first streaks of light started to appear before realizing the girl wasn't coming along, and with a pained heart, ordered his crew to set sail. While he didn't wanted to, Li, his faithful advisor, had urged him on, persuading him that the life of a girl wasn't worth the thousands aboard his ships. Thus, he had left Kozhikode with a heavy heart.

*An encounter with the brown men will set the events in motion.*

Her words after hearing of his dream echoed through his mind as he was glancing out to the horizon, and suddenly he understood. The encounter with the Zamorin and his daughter had brought the obsidian to him, which represented one of the choices in his dream.

But what of the jade?

Zheng suddenly had an ominous feeling about what was about to happen.

And it turned out to be correct. The minute he docked his ships at Nanjing, there came an order to arrest him immediately. Zheng had demanded an explanation, which was given to him only after an unfair trial was forced upon him.

Apparently, 'evidence' of an affair between him and his mistress, the Princess Dachang, had leaked out. She had accused him of forcing himself upon her, despite the immense trust placed upon him by the emperor, and an apparent 'letter' was read out in court as well, largely humiliating the eunuch, who was sentenced to death.

Zheng could only laugh hollowly at the entire situation, for what could he do? While it was true that he did *not* have an affair with Princess Dachang, a search of his belongings could possibly reveal his relationship with *her*, whom he could not put at risk. Thus, he could only keep his silence, and await his fate without struggle.

Fate apparently had other plans; however, when that night, a key turning at the door of his cell roused him. He opened his eyes groggily, prepared to look at the stern faces of the guards, when instead he saw *her* trying to let him out.

"Feiyan – ! What on earth are you doing here?"

"Shh!" She hushed him and glanced around, fearful of any incoming guards. As soon as the coast was clear, she opened the door in one swift motion, and started working on the shackles around his feet.

"But...why?"

"I cannot let you die on behalf of another woman," She replied fiercely, and tossed the heavy manacles back into the dreary cell. "The emperor wanted you gone, and therefore made up this nonsense about an affair with the princess. But I won't let you die, so I had come to rescue you. This way!"

As soon as his limbs were free of their confines, Feiyan pocketed the key and grabbed his hand, running out of the prison and out to the port of the palace. The moment they arrive, she started untying a small sailboat tied to a post, hands flying over the knots while Zheng stood paralyzed in shock, until he caught sight of something dangling from her sleeve.

“Feiyan...is that...?”

“Oh, this?” She looked up temporarily to answer his question, and fingered the piece of jade hanging from her sleeve. “It was a token to protect me. I have enough protection as it is, however, so I decided to give it to you. You’ll need it for your journey.”

The once-admiral received it silently, remembering the choice he was forced to make between the two stones and hesitated, but still pocketed it. “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome. Quick! Get into the boat. I have ordered maidservants to stock it with supplies, so you should be safe for a while until you reach land.” Feiyan paused, before adding, “Contact me at once after you are safe. When the time is right, we will meet again.” At that, she clasped his hand desperately. “Hurry, before it’s too late!”

That was the last Zheng saw of her, or anyone, for that matter. Despite him being an excellent sailor, the flimsy fishing boat couldn’t hold against the fury of nature, and a storm rocked the boat, before a wave that night swallowed it whole and the man could see no more.

And thus was his tale of voyage and treasure. Zheng He stared out to sea, wondering about the fate of the two women he had met on his travels, which he had already forgotten.

Alas, everything began with a memory...

# Forward, Take On

*St. Paul's Convent School, Cheung, Ka Yu – 16*

The world beyond the safe zone has always intrigued me. I can imagine numerous lands which I cannot count even with all my fingers and toes combined; even more people to meet and friends to make.

“Curiosity kills the cat,” they say.

One will easily fall into the trap of a seemingly brighter, livelier unknown, and end up losing what one already has in possession. Family, wealth, name all you can. Because grass is always greener on the other side. Because you should be grateful for what you have; asking for any more would be considered discourteous.

I knew the adults were only talking big like this so nobody will die trying again, but what else was I supposed to think if all I had left was nothing but to be seen as a burden? Would anyone in this village come for me if I tried leaving? Or would they celebrate because they no longer had to deal with me?

“Brat! Dinner is ready are you coming or not?” Mrs. Chiu slammed open the door and barged in my room with a scowl. Dust bunnies flew, several worn-out books threatened to fall off the near-empty shelf. I did not remember when the last time I had seen her act was, in any way, pleasant to me; or rather, anyone at all. I remained sitting in the moldy corner of the room in hopes that she would be fed up and leave. I was only going to get bashed for being a “curse” and wasting their food anyway so there was no point for me to be there.

“God, are you even listening? You’re just like your parents. If only they listened maybe they would still be here and I don’t have to feed a useless good-for-nothing like you! Do you know how much of a burden you are? Our family’s money used to buy food for your filthy mouth could’ve been used to send all of my sons to school. I would’ve gotten rid of you a long time ago if not for the rubbish laws.”

She strode in front of me, looking down on me with a face full of disgust. “No one wants you here. I am going to leave you out to die on the street once you turn sixteen so I don’t have to see your sorry face again in my life,” she jabbed me on my forehead and left huffing.

She was right.

No one wanted me here.

No one in their right mind would ever want something that belonged in hell.

I did not eat dinner that night. The cold December wind howled and looked for prey to satiate its uncontrollable hunger while I laid beneath the thin, roughly knitted piece of cloth I called a blanket which hardly protected me from the cold. Darkness enveloped me as I descended into a dreamless slumber.

You can say it was my escape, a place more welcoming, a place where I can just unreservedly exist. Sometimes, I wondered if I could one day sleep and never have to wake up again.

The waves seemed especially energetic today. It must feel so delightful to be able to flow boundlessly. There were only lone fishermen on their long wooden sampans in shallow waters, casting nets and occasionally singing familiar tunes I could barely hear on the shore. They always brought back warm memories.

Father used to sing it when he went fishing as I stared in awe. Fish came into his net more often like that somehow, he told me it was the gods rewarding him for his singing. It sounded silly but of course, I

believed him.

Faint noise of the crowd came from the busier part of town, interrupting the tranquil atmosphere by the sea. I heard that a small fleet of boats docked, people rumoured that they were a small fraction of the emperor's magnificent treasure fleet. Ha, as if the heavenly emperor would even bat an eyelid at this insignificant little fishing village.

"Hello, the person over there? Hello!" Startled, I turned towards the unknown voice. A boy wearing beige hemp clothing which covered his knees was running towards me. Who was he? And why was he talking to me? What? I stepped back from the strange boy.

"Oh, please tell me you are a person, not a ghost!" He stopped metres in front of me and covered his eyes. I could tell he was peeking at me through the gaps between his fingers, it was quite a comical scene.

"Of course I am a person! Who are you? People usually don't stroll so far from town..."

"Really?" He hesitantly uncovered his eyes, "Um, my name is Yu and I am lost." A nervous laugh. "I came from the large group of boats that came today, they're like really really cool and— oh, I didn't mean to stray from the topic. Can you tell me how to get back to the pier and what's your name?"

"You want to know...who I am?" Was I hearing him correctly?

Yu nodded with enthusiasm.

"I am Zi Yuen, I live here." I attempted to give a smile, albeit a crooked one; I could only hope it did not come off as unfriendly.

Yu eagerly rambled away as I led him back to the pier. He came from a family of boat makers, his father was one of the many workers who helped make the massive fleet. His mother surprisingly was also knowledgeable in the area. While his family was not crucial members of the crew, the success of the voyage no doubt depended on the durability of the ships. "As long as there are people to repair the ship, it can be used forever," Yu quoted from his father with a rather smug grin. He must be proud of his father.

The market was packed. Besides the usual customers who analysed prices of goods non-stop and shopkeepers yelling about how their fish was the "freshest and liveliest, caught just this morning", a large crowd gathered around the coast, eyeing and pointing at the impressive fleet. They were only causing a ruckus in my opinion. Burly workers were loading cargo onto one of the medium-sized ships; I scoffed, how come "treasure fleets" were not fully prepared before they left the capital?

"Aiyah, how come you can forget cargo that the emperor specifically ordered to be brought on the ships?" A middle-aged official in silky red clothing with a black wushamao scolded a younger man as the two hurried along. "How do I explain to Master Zheng if we left these here, huh? Consider yourself lucky we haven't sailed off the continent yet!"

A sharp voice caught my attention, shivers went down my spine. "Hey! What are you doing here?" Mrs. Chiu was here. I froze. "Why are you going near the sea again? After all I've done for you, provided for you, you choose to curse me and my family?" I could feel people's gazes burn holes through my body. Of all places, she chose to make a scene here? "This is why your parents died. Because you are a curse. Go home with me, now." She spat and reached for my arm.

I recoiled from the wrathful contact.

No, I would not surrender any longer.

Yu pulled me away and started running for the docks. I did not know where I had gained the sudden confidence from, or if I followed Yu out of sheer spite with wild abandonment. Faces in the crowd were

blurry but at the same time, my vision seemed to become sharp like a hawk's. Colours mixed and burst in an iridescent kaleidoscope. It was as if life itself accelerated before my eyes.

Mrs. Chiu's menacing voice blended into the background as Yu and I hid, panting behind stacks of cargo.

"I think we managed to lose that crazy woman," Yu peeped at the crowd, "What are you gonna do now?"

The realisation struck me, "She is so going to kill me if I go back." This has been a double-edged sword since the start, I was doomed no matter what I chose to do. I trembled. "Can you possibly..." What was I thinking? "Take me with you?" Was I crazy when I thought of this?

"You what?" Yu's father was beyond bewildered upon hearing my plea.

"I swear I won't get into any trouble, I will do anything you ask of! Oh please, please bring me with you!" I was on the verge of breaking down as I spoke.

What if they think I would be a burden to them?

Yu's mother went up to her husband and whispered something indecipherable to Yu and I. Sounds of waves splashing on the side of the boat filled the cabin. Every second seemed to pass at a snail's pace while my heart raced. I could not bear to look at the couple further in fear of getting rejected.

No, please don't leave me alone.

Please don't leave me alone.

"Now that's more like it! Ah, I almost forgot, my dad told me to teach you so of the stuff that we do and show you around so you won't get lost. But I don't really want to today because it's getting near night anyway."

"Good. Let's just call it a day then!" I was tired anyway, both mentally and physically.

It totally was not because we were trying to slack off or anything.

I could not sleep despite the relaxing rocking from the waves. Night had fallen upon the fleet when we reunited with the rest. The majority of the crew seemed to be sound asleep, retreating into a private little world that solely belonged to themselves. Some were put on night duty, making sure nothing was in the wrong place or if we were ambushed by pirates or enemies alike.

The smell of salt that was brought to my face was even stronger as I went out of the cabin, I could have sworn I felt it crystallise on my skin. The view in front of me was nothing less of a revelation.

Hundreds of ships of all sizes lined up in the middle of the ocean with no land in sight. Lit oil paper lanterns adorned the sides of the ships which outlined them in the dark. I was greeted by the same flickering light no matter which direction I turned as if I was in a never-ending garden of fireflies. Their glow faintly reflected on the saltwater, glimmering along the movement of the waves. The lights were also like stars that fell from the heavens. Being surrounded by them made me feel like I was in a magical tale parents tell their young children who threw a tantrum when the subject of sleep was brought up.

It was beyond fascinating, I had never seen so many set sail together ever in my entire life. In addition, these were huge boats. I had to make sure this was not just another wild dream of mine.

It felt like there was a new sense of direction. Lights were guiding me towards it, even though I had no idea where or what was I even heading to.

I knew faintly but didn't at the same time, as if navigating through a maze with nothing but pure instinct.

The square sails were up, steady and unwavering. Would it be too much for me to ask for the same?

I let out a sigh of relief as I watched all sorts of treasures from our travels getting unloaded, my favourite had to be that humongous deer with a long neck the locals called a giraffe; I briefly wondered what the emperor would call it. All there was left to do was to transport these back to Beijing, it was not part of my job, so I decided to give myself some time to feel the solid ground under my feet again instead of a tilting deck.

"Zi Yuen, Zi yuen! Something's not good!" Yu came running and panting before I could give myself the luxury of loosening up.

"What happened this time?"

"I heard that the crowned prince wants to shut down the voyages, and you know the current emperor doesn't have much time left. To make things worse, he also plans to destroy all long-distance sailing boats," Yu dreaded.

"Let's be outlaws then," for whatever reason, determination filled my whole being. "We still have much to see and much to do, the world's so big after all. We'll need our own ship then, huh."

Yu laughed in disbelief, "Sure, let's start with the planks."

There was never a set rule to count how much you valued or what you deserved, but rather if you deserved what you have whether it was honour, wealth or fame. Maybe being true to yourself was enough.

Maybe the cat was not killed by its curiosity and landed on a soft cushion.

# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyage

*St. Paul's Convent School, Leung, King Sze Casey – 15*

Ever since the *haijin* imposed on the ports a few decades ago, nobody could travel to foreign countries, and those dreaming of a life of glorious maritime explorations were forced to quell their wanderlust, contenting themselves with the monotonous cycle of farming and fishing. The elders, upon one too many drinks, would speak in hushed voices the fascinating and curious lives of the outsiders, who lived in the foreign states and had darker skin than us and led very different lives, who were kind and hospitable and traded funny spices for our silk.

“That’s how your great-uncle disappeared, I presume,” my grandfather once revealed during New Year’s Eve, as we were staying up for the *shousui* gathering. “Got smitten by one of the outsiders’ ladies, didn’t come back. Stayed there, raised his family, with zero regard of his parents back in Ming who raised him painstakingly. You’d think he would at least write back, but no, he never sent us a letter. Your great-grandmother was worried sick. I’m ashamed to have such an unfilial man as my brother.” He sipped his cup of wine and glanced at me. “You look like your great-uncle,” he rumbled. “You resemble him greatly. Your personalities were similar as well.”

Having grown up listening to stories of maritime adventures, I had always craved the freedom of the seas. When I started working at the docks, I was thrilled to discover that one of the ships made secret biennial trips to the foreign states in the South Sea. I immediately joined their crew, hoping I would embark on my own little adventure on the sea. But I was soon disappointed: the ship had a ‘restraining order’ put on by the provincial government, after too many times of getting caught by the patrolling marines. In the words of the captain: “The officials told us that had we been better at hiding our trading goods, they would’ve turned a blind eye provided that we shared the profits with them; but since we were found out by the marines, they had to carry out the orders of the government ministers.”

So we were completely over the moon when we found out that Admiral Zhang was searching for ships that would accompany his fleet and traverse the seas to where he had to conduct court business. We were to travel to where the foreign Muslims dwelled; the nature of the trip was not disclosed to us, yet we rejoiced at the opportunity to exchange the uninteresting fishing port for an adrenaline-pumping expedition.

~\*~

I was patrolling the deck when Zhang Xie yelled at me to get downstairs. “The admiral wants to see you.”

“Alright. Why though?”

“I dunno.” He patted me on the back. “The naval officers just told me to get you, they didn’t tell me why.”

An uneasy feeling settled in my stomach as I approached the admiral’s room. What was it? Was the food bad? Were we sailing too slowly? Did he – heaven forbid – find a rat and wish to complain?

The fantasies of gaining riches and glory was quickly ripped apart: the hired fishing vessels were forbidden to mention their travels to anyone. From the gossip among the other hired sailors, we learned that the imperial fleet was attacked by *Wokou* near Quanzhou, and although Admiral Zheng was safe, and their goods unharmed, their fleet was badly battered, the sailors severely wounded. Had the admiral returned to the capital, he would be immediately labelled a weakling and the mission a failure by ministers, and all naval exchanges by the central government would be halted. He was reluctant to give up all he had accomplished, for he knew that going back would mean being stripped of his title as Admiral, and he would have to return to being a lowly eunuch; and after a heated argument with Vice Admiral Wang Jinghong, his second-in-command, he visited the fishing ports in Guangdong, recruiting seamen who would not be averse to a years-long trip to the southern foreign states. He was determined to continue his court-ordained exploration and preserve his status.

The admiral was rather decent. He was quite apologetic about the secrecy ordeal, and paid us an extremely profitable amount for joining his crew. He had also gone on each hired ship, insisting on getting to know each sailor personally so that he could properly thank us. When he was making a speech on our ship, he had caught a glimpse of the large box labelled ‘SILK FOR TRADE’ that we had neglected to hide; he simply raised an eyebrow, turned the other way and resumed his speech.

Yet the other ships had not informed us that as part of the ‘get to know my crew better’ plan, the admiral would sleep over at each individual ship; and when he had announced that he would be taking his

repose on our ship, we had been whipped into a frenzy, for our humble vessel was indistinguishable from a rubbish dump – not exactly ideal sleeping conditions for the highly-ranked admiral. The captain's room was hurriedly vacated, and the men were ordered not to drink to appear more of a proper crew and less of a drunkards' commune. We had performed our assigned tasks with an unprecedented enthusiasm, as if to reassure the admiral that we were completely unfazed by the unexpected turn of events.

It was concerning how disorganized we were. Within the two *shichen* the admiral and his company boarded our ship, we had managed to burn the feast prepared for them, made crude and unseemingly references without realizing the admiral's company was standing nearby, and had addressed Admiral Zheng without the correct titles, more than once. The admiral had been lenient with us and tolerated our misconduct, but I had witnessed, on more than one occasion, Vice Admiral Wang giving us the stink eye.

As I descended the deck towards the captain's – now Admiral Zheng's – room, I pondered over the reason why I had been called. I was not an important figure in the running of this ship, and I was not in charge of anything in particular. The only contact I had had with the admiral's company was when I was pouring them a measure of wine; I had caught the admiral's gaze as I offered a wine cup to him. His brows had furrowed slightly before quickly smoothing out. Perhaps he had deemed the wine I served to be too cheap and was now summoning me to reprimand me about it.

I reached the room and knocked on the door. A soft "Come in" floated up from behind the door.

I shut the door and surveyed the room. The admiral, seated at the wooden desk, was the model of grace and elegance of the court, a stark contrast to the roughly hewn cabin. He was accompanied by Vice Admiral Wang, who stood behind him.

"Chen Xiaojia," the admiral's voice had a curious lilt, perhaps influenced by his native *Dian* dialect. "Aged nineteen, has been working on this ship for 5 years. Tell me, child, where do you hail from?"

"A small village in Guangdong, Admiral. About 200 *li* from the Guangzhou ports."

"How very... interesting." He gestured towards the Vice Admiral, who presented him with a scroll. Admiral Zheng unrolled the scroll and inclined his head slightly. "Come closer, child. Do you recognize this person?"

I bent over to inspect the scroll. It was a portrait of an elderly man. His visage showed Chinese features, yet his skin was darker. His unkempt hair framed his lined face. His eyes, however, stood out the most: coldness and cruelty shone out of them. His gaze struck an unrecognizable fear in my chest, even though I had no idea who he was. This was definitely an old man I would not want to cross.

"He looks Chinese, but his skin is darker than the average Chinese man. Is he a *huayi* living in the southern states? They receive more sunlight there; his skin would turn darker as a result."

The admiral nodded in approval. "A reasonable guess, but you have still not identified this individual. Perhaps you would be more familiar with his name; would the name Chen Zuyi ring a bell?"

My blood ran cold. Chen Zuyi was a bit of a legend among the men at the docks, his name only to be spoken in hushed whispers, as if they feared he would someone hear them and unleash his wrath on them. A pirate of the southern states, he was originally a sailor from Guangzhou – from our dock, even – who went rogue during a trading journey to the south. He had mutinied, along with a few of his crewmates, and murdered the captain, throwing the first mate overboard. After claiming the ship for himself, the pirate had raided ports and cities, killing its residents and robbing their wealth. On more than one occasion he had set fire to entire cities; a rumour spoke of the pirate setting fire to a palace while staring directly in the eyes of the monarch, watching him completely break down before ordering his men to throw the sobbing king into the fire. The *huayi* had written to the central government, begging them to stop the pirate from wreaking havoc onto their cities and ports. There was quite the commotion in the Ming capital; ministers were furious that Chen Zuyi would inflict such terrors on his fellow Chinese, and ordered the navy to bring the pirate back, preferably alive, so justice could be executed on Chinese soil, "bringing an end to this degenerate who had stained the noble reputation of the great Ming".

That was four decades ago. Since the navy had returned empty-handed, most people had assumed that Chen Zuyi had received his retribution at the hands of the navy. His name was not as widely spread among the public as it was previously; I had only learned of this person when I started working at the docks. We had believed that the infamous pirate had died, yet somehow the person in the portrait was Chen Zuyi.

"How... what? But I thought he'd died; wasn't he killed by the navy?"

The vice admiral's face was grim. "Quite the contrary. He had defeated our navy, and slaughtered the majority of our fighters. The ships that returned to Quanzhou barely escaped the jaws of death. The death toll of the mission was unprecedented, and the risks were considered too high for us to send another



fleet after Chen. Have you noticed how few ships had returned? The rest had perished in the battle with Chen; they were forced to cover it up by ‘promoting’ the deceased officers to ambassadors to the southern states, insisting that was the reason they had not returned. Had the public realized the actual fate of those officers, there would have been an uproar.”

“Chen had been mostly keeping to himself in the past four decades,” Admiral Zheng continued, “but we have received reports that he is resuming his raids on cities. We have been ordered to bring back the pirate, to put an end to his despotic rule of the southern ports. However, there are other issues we need to address. Here is a portrait of Chen Zuyi in his youth; it was painted when the navy captured him, before he escaped their ship and launched an attack on the fleet.”

I took the portrait gingerly and examined it carefully. Chen Zuyi looked younger and paler, although his gaze kept the same intensity. There was something familiar about his face, as if I had seen it somewhere before.

“Now, Chen Xiaojia, turn around. What do you see?”

I followed the admiral’s instructions and faced a mirror.

“There’s a mirror, Admiral. And, well, my face’s in it, and—”

Wait.

I glanced at my reflection. Then at the portrait in my hand. Then at my reflection. Then at the portrait again.

“Chen Xiaojia, don’t you think you resemble Chen Zuyi greatly? How peculiar... and when the navy had inquired of his hometown, did you know he gave the same answer as you did? A small village in Guangdong, about 200 *li* from the Guangzhou ports. And you share the same last name as well... how very peculiar...”

Terrified, I turned around to defend myself, and met the blade of the vice admiral. “I don’t know him, Admiral! I don’t know who Chen Zuyi is... I know his name but I don’t know him—”

“Silence!” the vice admiral barked, his eyes flaming. “Keep your excuses to yourself; I don’t want to hear them.”

“Answer me truthfully, Chen Xiaojia.” the admiral stood up and walked towards us. “Are you affiliated with Chen Zuyi in any way?”

“No! I’m not! I’ve never heard of this person until I started working at the docks! Nobody in my family had mentioned a Chen Zuyi before! I—”

A memory flashed through my brain. The *shousui* gathering. Grandfather grumbling about his brother who never returned home. Him looking at me and saying “You look like your great-uncle.”

“It’s my great-uncle! My grandfather said he had left home to live in the southern states four decades ago and had not written back ever since. It’s him! I know it’s him!”

“You’re doing a great job of convincing us that you’re innocent, kid,” the vice admiral snarled.

“Jinghong,” the admiral said softly. I could not glean an inkling of his thoughts through his guarded face.

Admiral Zheng and Vice Admiral Wang had a silent conversation with their eyes before Admiral Zheng turned to me. “Chen Xiaojia, I do not think you are innocent. However, we currently have too little evidence to convict you of anything. You shall remain on this ship until we reach our destination, then you will leave our crew. Have a nice day.” Then, he exited the room, followed by the vice admiral, leaving me to my jumbled thoughts.

# New Tales of Ming Treasure Voyage

*St. Paul's Convent School, Tan, Kai Shuang – 16*

“Load up! They leave soon!”

Cries echoed, as men carried chests of treasure onto the ship. The proud sails were red, for good luck. The weather was bright, yet windy enough for a good course.

The wind tugged on Yi Ping's hair, as he stared at the horizon. He will grow sick of it in the next few years. Hua Ping cooed, fluffing her feathers.

“Take care, old friend.”

Yi Ping plastered on his best grin. “You won't even know I'm gone.”

“That is a lie.”

“You'll hear from me swiftly, and will be annoyed at me as if I were with you.”

“I trust you to write the most annoying letters.”

“Don't worry, really. That friend I told you about, he'll be with me. I met him during my first few voyages. He is a good friend. We've been together ever since then, and never separated. It will be great, with him.”

“Yi Ping! Everyone is almost ready now. Hurry!” Someone bellowed.

Yi Ping laughed. “That's my cue.”

Zi Yan didn't hide a smile. “You better get going. Time and tide wait for no man.” Zi Yan clasped Yi Ping's shoulder.

Yi Ping gripped Yan's arm. “I'll be back soon.”

“Please don't, this course will last for a few years.”

“Then please contain your longing for my brilliant personality.”

Zi Yan flashed him a sad smile.

With one more wave, Yi Ping hailed two crewmen to carry his chests up, then took Hua Ping's cage himself.

“See you soon, *Sire!*” Yi Ping yelled again.

Zi Yan gave one last wave before turning around. Yi Ping finally boarded the *Ming Yan*.

No one noticed a figure that darted onto the ship, quickly and swiftly.

★

Rui Qing was nobody.

Her aunt was keen on reminding her.

“Eat that up quickly, Jia Qing! I'll feed that to the dogs if you don't hurry, you brat!” Her aunt shouted.

“That's not my name.” Rui Qing replied gloomily, eying the bowl of stale leftovers.

“Well you're lucky to have me, you cursed child. I'll call you whatever I want,” Her aunt replied, snarky. “Your parents couldn't even name you properly.”

Something sharp pierced her; and in her, something bled. She gritted her teeth, slammed the bowl against the table and stormed out.

“So rude! Ungrateful even!” Her aunt admonished. “You are no lady!”

“That doesn't bother me!” Rui Qing screamed back, slamming the out door.

“Don't go out in your rags!”

Rui Qing was already gone. She was on the streets, ignoring the whisperings and stares of the passer-by. The sound of a commotion reached her ears, she followed the noise. She inched closer to the crowd, trying to work out the cacophony. She looked around, and saw it.

The magnificent beast of a ship floated proudly near port. Shouting men ran around, carrying goods and loading them on. Mesmerized, she joined the crowd, admiring the ship.

What would it feel like..

To leave?

To be... free?

The thought seized her. She thought of her aunt who never liked her; the room that never felt like her room, the home that never felt like home; her parents, whose faces are blurry in her mind, who never came back, who loved her enough to leave her...

She forced and wove her way through the crowd, undoing her hair and making it manlier. She looked at herself: ratty, enough to pass off as a male. She got to the first line of the crowd and mimicked the men at work –hurried footsteps, busy.

"All aboard! She is going to leave!"

Rui Qing ignored the thumping in her chest and darted up the board, quickly and swiftly. The board was retracted; the rope was flung back, the sails were adjusted and the ship came to life.

The crowd cheered as the boat left port. Rui Qing, in her hiding place, stared at the disappearing port as the wind pushed them away from shore. Picked up by the wind, she was freed.

★

"As I was saying—"

"What lovely weather we have! Those weathermen weren't helpful." Yi Ping leaned on Tian Jie, smiling.

Tian Jie tutted him immediately, "Don't say things like that, you'll jinx us."

"You're no fun, Jie, where is your bravery?" frowning, Yi Ping shoved him playfully.

Tian Jie yelped as he almost got pushed off the railing. "Watch it, stop trying to kill me!"

"Oi, Ping! Stop fooling around, come help us!" A voice called out, impatient.

"Watch it, Lei Ning, that's Captain Yi Ping to you!"

"Go, puppy," Tian Jie shoved him. Yi Ping stuck his tongue out in retaliation.

The sound of retching then caught Tian Jie's attention. He turned and found himself staring at the scrawniest boy with a sickly colouring, wiping his mouth.

"You alright?"

The boy's head whipped up lightning-quick, expression fearful. "No— Yes! Yes! I'm fine!"

"Doubt so, you better see Guo Yang; he has remedies for motion sickness." Tian Jie herded him, putting his arm around the boy's shoulder. The boy flinched.

"Oh! Sorry, are you—"

"No! Uh, It's nothing! I'm alright!" the boy's voice went high before going back to normal.

"My apologies, this must be your first voyage. You're quite tense," Tian Jie couldn't help smiling. "You remind me of—Oh, mind the steps— the time I met Ping...I have no manners, your name?"

The boy, hesitantly, replied, "Rui...He."

"Welcome to— Guo Yang! This is Rui He and he's quite poorly; whip something up for him, if you'd please."

"How unfortunate, wait," Guo Yang was a pleasant young man who worked in the infirmary with two beds, filled with jars of unidentified dried herbs.

"Sit and rest, Rui He," Tian Jie grinned. "I have to tend to our Captain."

"As you always do," Guo Yang returned, wearing a mischievous grin.

Tian Jie rolled his eyes and went back up.

★

"We sail for the West," Tian Jie pointed at the map with his chopsticks. "We are currently here," pointing to another point. "We'll move like this—" moving up, "—To Western shore. There, we make friends with foreign dignitaries, exchange goods and be nice. That means no stabbing anyone."

Lei Ning harrumphed.

"And that also means no making fun of anyone. I'm looking at you two," Tian Jie continued.

The twins only grinned and shrugged.

"And please, don't make us look bad."

"I do no such thing. And that's Captain Yi Ping to you," Yi Ping crossed his arms, pouting.

"That's right, *Captain Yi Ping*, our highest ranking officer, don't mess this up," Tian Jie shot him a look.

Yi Ping blushed. "I'll do my best."

"Can I visit the local marketplaces to study the medicine and remedies? To further my collection," Guo Yang immediately asked.

"I'll jot that—"

"We should also get some books. Might be useful in the future," Yu Fen chimed in.

"Got it—"

"Let's explore the marketplace together, for trinkets for Zi Yan!" Yi Ping shot up.

"That's Sire to you, and fine, we can go," Tian Jie narrowed his eyes.

"He doesn't mind, we're great friends."

"We will be properly ashore?" Rui He piped up, curious.

"We will, is there anything you want to do?" Tian Jie smiled encouragingly.

★

Rui Qing's heart thumped furiously. She was free. Free to roam, to anywhere she fancied. Free.

"I..." She started. "I...uh...want to go where you go," she finished lamely.

"That's fair; this is, after all, a foreign land. Stay in groups, everyone!" Tian Jie nodded. "Heng Qi, you want anything?"

The muscular man next to Guo Yang shook his head.

"Good! For now, meeting ends here. Good night!"

Everyone then evacuated the dining room, in favour of conversing, smoking, and gambling up on the deck. Ruo Qing followed, but felt hands on her shoulders. The twins grinned at her.

"Hello, I never introduced myself, I'm Ye Nan," the taller boy started.

"I'm You Peng, you're new?" the other boy inquired.

"Uh, yes, this is my first. I'm not too sure how this works." Her voice grew smaller the minute. "I forgot! I'm—"

"We know that," Ye Nan patted her, leading her deeper into the corridor.

"And we are going to show you all the fun things, all the hiding places here," You Peng grinned.

★

Weeks passed in bliss never experienced. You Peng and Ye Nan were great friends and together they explored everywhere. They lay underneath the stars, singing songs, learning knots and foreign languages. In the faint illumination of the stars, she swam in a state of unprecedented warmth.

She also got to know the crew. The banter between Yi Ping and Tian Jie; the intense herbal smell Guo Yang has; Yu Fen's animated tales and stories; Heng Qi's strong silent presence; Lei Ning's wickedly sharp wit. These details grew on her; she clung onto the familiarity and the newfound belonging.

Thinking of her parents, something wistful grew in her. Her omnipresent frustration gave way to a watery sadness that sloshed around in her. Thinking of her aunt who despised her and her parents, her heart hardened at once.

Nothing stopped the liquid melancholy from spilling out her eyes, sliding down, cold against her skin, colder in the wind.

"Homesick?"

She turned around, wiping her tears. Boys don't cry.

It was Yu Fen, looking concerned. "It's normal, for your first voyage. There's no shame in that."

He joined her against the sides of the ship, in the biting wind. "When I first sailed, I cried every night, thinking of my family. It took me too long to realize, while carried away by loss, I didn't notice my gain. I left my family; I have also gained another..."

"I don't come from a happy family," Rui Qing admitted.

Yu Fen put an arm around her, "Sorry you didn't have a childhood you deserved, but forget about that life. You have a new life, a new family, us!"

Rui Qing wiped the last of her tears and nodded.

"The past can no longer hurt you; we are men of the present time."

Rui Qing glanced at Yu Fen gratefully, "Let's go back in, the wind is rising."

True enough, the sea rumbled; waves crashed into each other, growing restless. They fought, and bled, dotting the black night with white.

★

Morning, an uneasy air penetrated the atmosphere.

"Fix those sails," Tian Jie barked at the crew.

"Quit the paranoia, Jie, let them breathe," Yi Ping yawned.

"No," Tian Jie hissed, "It's getting cold; don't you see those clouds? Get to work, *Captain*, secure the office and man the wheel."

Finally realizing the severity of the current state, Yi Ping complied immediately. Soon, the crew members were running around the deck, trying to be in several places at once.

Time moved slowly, everyone was cotton-limbed, in slow motion; but time moved quickly, the angry clouds sped towards them, full force, top acceleration. It was surreal, horrendous; their reality.

★

Bullet-like raindrops came with the storm. It fell from the grey, darkening skies, onto the ship, the floorboards, making loud resounding echoes. The wind pushed them around; toying lazily. The waves were hungry for destruction, shoving the *Ming Yan* back, forth; silver blood spilling.

Soaked inside out, Rui Qing couldn't see properly in this storm. She could only hear the shrieking wind, and distorted barking from Tian Jie. Fear and anxiety gnawed on her.

The ship was shaking and quaking, rocking roughly. Everyone clung onto the ship, as Tian Jie and Yi Ping tried to steer the ship, maintain their course, but the winds were working against them.

The storm was gaining strength; the crew of *Ming Yan* were growing weaker as they persisted. Rui Qing wondered if this is the end.

“Adjust your sails!” Tian Jie cried. “We’re getting off course! She will hold, faith!”

You Peng yanked the rope, knocking into Rui Qing, sending her sideways, over the railings.

The rope slipped out of her grip, like an eel.

With a shout, she plummeted, straight down.

She only registered a cold splash and loud silence.

The winds laughed, howling.

★

“Oh no! What have you—”

“Jump in! What are you waiting for!”

★

“Get him to Guo Yang, hurry!”

“Run!”

★

“What happened?”

“Fell into water!”

“Get the blankets, Peng, quickly! We need to— Oh heavens!”

“What are you— oh God.”

“Stop ogling—Don’t ogle hi— her, get clothes too! Now!”

★

Rui Qing first registered the cocooning warmth; then slowly, she opened her eyes. She couldn’t remember. Memories were hazy glitches of sensations and feelings.

“How are you?”

She jumped in her bed and turned to the voice.

Guo Yang, her brain supplied.

“You fell... the sea...in bed since...fished out...Hypothermia, nasty...alright?”

She fell...

In the sea...

The cycle of events struck her and all the missing gaps were filled.

...Does that mean...?

“Rui He?”

She opened her mouth to speak.

“Do you know...?” Her voice cracked.

He looked away, blushing, nodded.

“The captain... would like to see you.”

“So we shall,” Rui Qing ignored the dread in her stomach that threatened to consume her. She slipped out of bed, trying to steady herself. Guo Yang immediately held her up.

“Sit, I’ll find you some slippers.”

The dread only grew as she sat back onto the bed, wishing she hadn’t woken at all.

★

It didn’t take Guo Yang too long to find slippers; it didn’t take them too much time to reach the dining room.

When she entered with Guo Yang, the merriment ceased; all excitement died.

She was seated on one side of the circular table, while everyone was clustered on the other side, with Captain Yi Ping in the middle: eyes slanted, his gaze piercing.

She felt small. Fear ate her alive. Clutching her hands underneath the table, she refused to let her face betray her.

“You lied to us,” Yi Ping started, voice hard like steel. “Tell the truth, who are you?”

All eyes were on her. The twins’ gazes were questioning, unbelieving; Heng Qi was visibly shaken; Guo Yang refused to meet her eyes; Yu Fen looked pained; Lei Ning had a stormy, unreadable look; Tian Jie’s mouth was pressed in a troubled line.

She looked at her hands, breathed deeply.

"First...I'm called Rui Qing...and I'm no spy, if that's what you are asking. I was fed up with my life, and I wanted to change it. I ran away, on a whim, and ended up here. I wanted to be free, and so I found you lot...a place to belong, a home. But at the end of the day, I am just a girl, I'm nobody... Do what you will, I am already satisfied."

The table was silent.

Yi Ping started, "I sympathize, but I will have to—"

"I'll personally fight you if you report her," Lei Ning stood up with a clatter.

Yi Ping made a hysterical noise. "Then what am I going to do?! We all might get executed for condoning this—"

"This is not the matter of a stowaway, but whether you would hand out a crew member to the court, for the sake of rules. She is one of us, you cannot deny that. I remember being just like her: running from my past, and I found you, while roaming the seas. How glad I felt then, when I realized there was indeed a place for me...Are we going to betray her... like this?" Anger seeped into his tone.

"But she deceived us, betrayed us first," Yi Ping replied, bitter.

There was silence again.

"I sold your coat that time," Ye Nan started. "You didn't report me."

"Minor issue."

"You took the blame when I lost that trunk from South-East," Yu Fen added.

"You are my responsibility."

"And she is yours too," Lei Ning continued. "She is a part of us."

Yi Ping slumped in his chair. "Tian Jie, I now can only depend on you to be sensible and—"

"No, you can't."

"What?"

Tian Jie looked firmly into Yi Ping's eyes, "Because I was too, a stowaway before. Remember? You vouched for me..."

Yi Ping looked away. "Thought you forgot about it."

"How can I forget? I would not forget such a thing: you changed my life. You saved me... I was foolish for not speaking up first, but don't do it, Ping. She will definitely die if you report her. As Lei Ning said," Tian Jie turned to look at her, eyes reminiscing.

"She is our responsibility. We cannot turn her away. You've broken the rules before, does it matter if you break it again?"

Yi Ping looked devastated. Silence descended upon them again.

Rui Qing's dread was now replaced by a small flickering hope.

Considering, Yi Ping started again, "I'll report the storm and injuries; I'll leave out the stowaway part. But how...?"

"Say you picked 'him' up, thinking 'he' would be good help," Yu Fen suggested.

"Or you miscalculated the numbers," You Peng grinned. "Twins."

"You have the power to do it, you know?" Tian Jie squeezed Yi Ping's hand. "You are captain, after all. You could also pull favours from your good friend."

Yi Ping scrunched his face up.

"I'll do what I can." He finally said, "I'll write to Zi Yan about it. He'll get over it; he has a few years to stomach that. We'll all be fine." He announced firmly. "Rui Qing, you'll be fine too."

Tian Jie grinned. The twins whooped. Lei Ning joined them, jumping around the room. Yu Fen smiled at her. Heng Qi pat her shoulder. Guo Yang apologized about his disrespect; blushing, Rui Qing waved it off with an awkward smile. Yi Ping groaned about the extra paperwork, only to be shoved by various crew members.

Mirth returned to the dining room, filling the room once more. Amidst the loud joy, surrounded by a family to call hers, her heart was warmed. Joy was not in the freedom she sought.

Outside, the gentle wind hummed a happy note.

# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

*West Island School, Mak, Clovis – 14*

Li Zhong woke up to the sound of crashing waves smashing into his warship. He was the commander of one of the many warships in Admiral Zheng He's armada. The massive fleet had left the city of Nanjing 2 months ago, carrying gold, silk, and other treasures to be gifted to foreign countries as a show of wealth and power. Li Zhong joined his second-in-command Yang Han on the starboard side of the deck, watching as the mighty waves continued to pummel the wooden sides of the ship. Their mission was to protect the huge treasure boats at all costs; Those ships were gigantic – each one over one hundred metres long and fifty metres wide; However their precious cargo was to be defended by smaller but more maneuverable warships like the one Li Zhong commanded. The journey so far was peaceful and nothing was out of the ordinary, except for one sighting of a pirate fleet, but the treasure fleet continued on past the pirates, as if they were invisible. Everyone was prepared for a long and exciting journey, hungry for adventure.

Ahead of them, the fleet started turning left towards the coastline, signaling a visit to the local region. The fleet had already stopped at 3 destinations before this, each time with servants and soldiers bringing some of the goods ashore to gift and trade. All 3 times the servants came back with valuable objects and materials, with one country even sending a diplomatic envoy to sail with the Chinese. Yang Han yawned, and said: "This may turn out to be more boring than I expected. I'm starting to wish for somebody to attack our ships so we can actually do something". Li Zhong laughed and replied: "It's better to be bored and safe than to be lying at the bottom of the ocean with your body split open by a cannonball!" Yang Han groaned in reply. A sailor walked up to Li Zhong and bowed deeply, before standing up straight and reporting: "The admiral wishes for Commander Li to join him on his ship." Li Zhong acknowledged him, and called for a smaller vessel to bring him to the treasure ship which Zheng He commanded.

As Li Zhong strode into one of the large rooms used for meetings between the admiral and other officers, he was surprised to see that there was only one other officer in the room apart from Zheng He. Usually when the admiral called a meeting most officers would be summoned; This would be a special case. Commander Huang Yitian sat at the back of the room, with an empty seat next to him, and Zheng He sat with his back facing the door, looking down at a map. Li Zhong walked a couple steps past the admiral, bowed, and sat down next to Huang Yitian. Zheng He looked up from his map, and announced: "In 3 days we will be arriving on the western coast of Ceylon. You two will accompany me to bring our gifts to the Alagakkonara family there." Li and Huang both bowed and agreed. Li Zhong went back to his ship, and notified Yang that he would be in charge of his ship in his absence. Yang Han asked: "Why do you think the admiral would personally go to bring gifts and also bring two high ranking officers with him? Does he expect a large opposition or someone very important like the royal family?" Li replied: "We will be meeting this Aqa-Aka-Ala something family, which is a powerful feudal family there. They have several family members and relatives in important positions in the country. Maybe the admiral just wishes to be more careful dealing with such powerful people." Yang muttered "Hmm...", and then both men stood silently, watching the tall mountains ahead slowly approach for a couple of minutes, before returning to their rooms.

Soon the announcement was made for the fleet to arrive at the nearest port; Li and Huang were busy making preparations for their trip, as Zheng He organised a select amount of goods to be brought as gifts. By the time all the servants and guards had brought everything ashore, the three officers were already waiting in a nearby pavilion, discussing the details of their trip. After half an hour Zheng He announced: "Let us go now.", and with that, the caravan of soldiers, servants, and carts of gifts started moving forward slowly towards the Alagakkonara residence. As they marched closer and closer towards the centre of the port city, their surroundings slowly became more and more luxurious. Near the coast, most houses were only small huts, with little decoration, but as they advanced inland, houses soon became large, carefully designed and decorated buildings, some even having spectacular gardens and water fountains. Not long after they saw their destination; a massive grand residence with several courtyards around 3 main buildings. In front of them was a line of polished stone steps, that led up to the courtyard of the largest and grandest building. The gates above the stairs opened, and two servants appeared, beckoning them into the courtyard.

The courtyard was a beautiful area with hundreds of different types of grass, trees, and flowers, and in the center was a tall metal statue of a general on a horse. The servants led them into the guest room of the main building, and told them to sit and wait. Huang Yi Tian muttered underneath his breath: "What a nice way to greet important guests...". Li Zhong looked at him meaningfully and shook his head. The admiral, however, merely sat there patiently, without any sign of emotion on his face. After half an hour of waiting, the door opened once again and a man walked into the room, flanked by 6 servants. He had a dark bushy beard, intense brown eyes and wore a large colourful piece of fabric around his waist, with a large bulky looking jacket on his upper body. He looked at the Chinese officers distastefully, and asked: "What do you want? We are very busy and have important businesses to attend to." Now even the admiral looked surprised at this show of disrespect. He replied: "We are here to send gifts from our emperor, to show the might and power of China.". The man's eyebrows shot up, and he angrily proclaimed: "I am a government minister, part of the Alagakkonara family, and you suggest that we need your gifts from your country? How dare you! Guards, please send our guests out!". Two doors opened from each side of the room and armed guards flooded in. They pointed their spears and crossbows at the Chinese envoy and slowly pushed them back towards the door. Li Zhong and Huang Yi Tian jumped out of their seats in fury and demanded the guards treat their admiral politely, but the guards ignored them and kept pushing everyone out. The Chinese soldiers outside the room heard the commotion, drew their weapons and charged in, forming a protective circle around Zheng He and the two officers. Now they were at a stalemate, soldiers and guards facing off, with their commanders watching behind them. Zheng He looked around the room one more time, with his gaze finally settling on the minister's face. He maintained that stare until the man looked uncomfortable, before ordering his men to leave and return to the fleet, saying: "It seems like we are unwelcome here."

On the way back, Li Zhong and Huang Yi Tian were noisily cursing the minister and his family until Admiral Zheng turned around and ordered them to stop talking. The gifts of precious goods remained untouched, and from then on everyone remained silent until they returned to their own ships. Yang Han rushed up to Li, and asked, "How did it go?" Li replied: "That little rat rejected our gifts, and threw us out. His guards even followed us out until we could no longer see that stupid mansion of theirs." Yang Han looked shocked, and asked: "Is the admiral furious now? He must be, right?" Li answered: "You know the admiral, he always seems to be calm. On the way back he seemed to be deep in thought, so I think he's probably thinking of a way to get back at that family for treating our nation with such disrespect. He needs to let those people know the strength of our empire! One day the admiral will get back at that minister!"

After several more months of travelling, Admiral Zheng announced that the armada would turn around and return to China. As the massive fleet slowly backtracked their route, what were once stranger lands and sights became familiar stops, with crew, officers, and servants each having their own special memories and experiences as they passed. As they no longer stopped at each of the destinations, their journey back was much quicker than the first part of the treasure voyage. However as they got close to their homeland, the fleet came across an unwelcome sight. A small line of cargo ships were ablaze, with sailors frantically jumping into the chilly ocean to escape the columns of fire. Commander Li's Brave Dragon, Commander Huang's Bright Phoenix and several other warships were sent to investigate. The rest of the treasure armada was ordered to stay out of sight and hidden. As they got closer to the scene of disaster they could see dozens of smaller ships surrounding the burning cargo ships. Through the smoke, dark figures climbed on and off the cargo ships, bringing loads of expensive goods, weapons, and stockpiled food with them. Further in the distance, much larger ships could be seen, all of them bristling with cannons. At once, the officers knew this was the doing of a pirate fleet. Huang Yi Tian returned to the treasure fleet and reported to the Admiral that it was the same pirate fleet they had spotted not long after leaving Nanjing. The admiral ordered the fleet to make a stop, and brought several officers with him to the nearest islands to search for information about the pirate fleet; Meanwhile, Commander Li was ordered to watch the pirates for any sign of attack, and not to let them escape.

After two hours Zheng He returned to the fleet and called a meeting between his military officers. He announced: "Local fisherman have provided me information: These are pirates led by Chen Zu Yi, and they have controlled this area for several years. We are to destroy this pirate fleet, and bring their commanders back to China to answer for their crimes." He then began to explain their battle strategy, and ordered all the warship crews to battle stations. Then they became to patiently wait until dusk. Chen's pirate fleet had been anxiously moving in a loose line within sight of Li Zhong's warships. Yet as time passed, and the Chinese ships showed no sign of allowing them to leave, they became increasingly aggressive. The pirate fleet started moving closer and closer to Li Zhong's line of ships, and looked ready to attack at any time.



Admiral Zheng made careful note of their movement and as the pirate ships started pushing the Commander's warships closer and closer to the coastline, ordered Li Zhong to engage.

Back on the Brave Dragon, the Admiral's battle plan and order had been received by Li Zhong. Li shouted out to his crew: "Gunners, open fire on the pirate fleet. Deputy Yang, signal the other warships in our line to attack the pirates as well. Helmsman, line us up parallel to the coast to allow more cannons to be effectively fired." As the sudden volley of cannonballs were flung across the sea towards Chen Zu Yi's pirate fleet, the pirates fired back, sending wave upon wave of deadly projectiles back at the Chinese fleet. The marksmanship of Chinese gunners were superior to the pirate gunners, and the result showed; Within minutes two pirate ships were shattered apart by the brutal force of the Chinese cannons, pirates from both ships frantically swimming towards the remainder of their fleet. However, only a small portion of the warships escorting the Chinese treasure ships were sent out as an initial scouting; The majority remained with the treasure ships, directly under Admiral Zheng's command. Unfortunately for the Chinese, this meant that Li Zhong's ships were outnumbered greatly by the pirate fleet; Their marksmanship, weapons and armour were superior, but the pirate fleet still had the advantage. Several Chinese warships were now on fire, and had to retreat closer and closer to the coast. However, the pirate ships did not know about the remainder of the warships; Zheng He had made sure of that, keeping the rest of his armada out of sight. But on the other hand, Zheng He had sent out a small patrol boat, barely in sight of the pirates, to monitor the battle. Therefore the admiral knew exactly what was happening, and had devised a plan to defeat and capture the pirates. After half an hour of close observation, Zheng ordered most of the remaining warships to take down the Chinese flag, most of the cannons to be temporarily stowed away, and for all of the soldiers to remain below deck, unseen. He left a small amount of warships to guard the treasure ships, and led his line of disguised warships out towards the raging battle.

The pirate fleet and the initial Chinese warships were still furiously fighting against each other with all their might. The appearance of Zheng He's large, unknown fleet surprised the pirates, who debated if the new arrivals were friend or foe. Suddenly the ships under Zheng He's command started firing at the ships under Li Zhong's command. Yang Han ran up to Li Zhong and frantically asked: "Aren't those our ships? Why are they firing on us? We need to signal them!" Li Zhong calmly answered: "Yes, this is all within our plan. Order our line of ships to start firing at the Admiral's ships. Make sure they shoot between the ships though, and don't actually hit them. Make it look real." Yang nodded with understanding, and sped off to inform the gunners. Meanwhile, the pirates were delighted at the sudden arrival of an ally, and continued the battle with a great cheer. Something they didn't notice, was the fact that both the enemy ships and their new allies ships were spaced quite far apart. Unusually far apart, if they had thought about it for a minute or two. This, of course was to ensure that the Chinese gunners on both sides did not actually damage their own ships; However the pirates, caught up in the excitement and desperation of the battle, were clueless. Soon Zheng He's line of ships were spread out in a loose semicircle around the pirate ships; The Chinese ships had succeeded in surrounding the pirates between them. That was when Admiral Zheng ordered his fleet to raise the Chinese flag, deploy all cannons, and for his soldiers to prepare to board the pirate ships. The pirates, realising they had been tricked, quickly targeted Zheng He's line of ships while continuing to battle Li Zhong's ships on the other side. After a short while though, it was obvious the Chinese pincer movement would crush them, and white flags were raised on all the pirate ships.

In the aftermath, Chinese soldiers boarded the pirate flagship, captured Chen Zu Yi and his lieutenants, before the entire treasure fleet set off on the last part of their journey back to China. 2 years after they departed, the fleet returned to Nanjing. The Emperor rewarded the Chinese officers and crew that fought against the pirates, and also ordered gifts to be sent to friendly foreign countries that had sent envoys back with the treasure fleet. Eventually, Admiral Zheng would be sent out six more times, with each voyage solidifying China's rule of the seas, making Ming Dynasty China the dominant naval power of its time.

# The Hunt for Food

*Yew Chung International School, Cheng, Serena – 15*

Dust and dirt were all over. It was on the ground. It floated in the air. The walls were covered by smudges of dirt and grease. Even the ceiling had spots of stains of I don't know what. Some think it's disgusting, but to survive, getting a little bit of dirt on ourselves wasn't a big deal. The sound of heavy pounding, moving materials and lumber ricocheted throughout the cavernous room, as more dust poured into the entryway of the wooden building.

"Hey! Over here! I smell something." Standing behind a huge linen bag, I told Brother and Sister on the far left. They quietly tiptoed over, moving their heads side to side; cautiously making sure no one else was around.

"Smells a bit... Sweet, yet a bit sour. Let's see what it is." I said as I tried cutting a slit in the side of the linen bag. Brother and Sister crowded besides me sniffing the bag. As I sliced downwards, light green, wrinkly oval shapes started spilling out of the linen bag.

"Dates!" Sister exclaimed.

Brother snatched a handful of dates and gobbled mouthfuls within a matter of seconds. Even Sister, who was usually polite and gentle grabbed handfuls and swallowed them immediately. I did the same, forcing in more fruits than my mouth can handle and devoured them without chewing. Survival for lowly beings like us had always been difficult. We haven't eaten in days, and no one knew when we will find food next, therefore we must eat as much as we can when we find it.

Suddenly, the door slid even wider open with a high-pitched screech.

More bright light entered the room; both Brother and Sister leapt from the bag and scurried to a dark corner; I scurried after them, but I turned around and saw two men sauntering in. They were each carrying linen bags that swayed as they walked. Carrying more food? I thought, then I hesitated, stopped and hid behind the bag of dates.

"Do we have enough food for our long journey?" asked a man wearing loose knee-high pants and long sleeved shirt over the waist. His shirt and pants were made of cotton which looked worn out from years of use. The collar of the shirt was tight on his neck, the edge of his shirt had two strings on the side which tied a knot at the bottom, holding the shirt together. His sandals made of fibre skillfully knitted together, each closely hung onto each other.

"Well, yes, we must have! We have saved so much food, these storehouses aren't even enough. In fact, all twenty quays are full. The Lord Admiral, Zheng He, has been buying food from all over the country!" Another man with similar cotton clothes and sandals besides him replied, but this time instead of long sleeves, his were rolled up. "This is his third journey, after all. We have learned from the previous two journeys to the Southern Seas."

Journey? What journey? Is it a journey for treasures? Journey for... *food*? Perhaps that's why there's nothing to eat where we lived! Although the fields were harvested, food was not stored in the village storehouses. If we followed these two men, we might be able to find things to eat! Waving my head towards Brother and Sister, I urged them to come over. We hid behind the sackcloth, quickly but quietly still eating the dates we found. The man with long sleeves took steps further into the storehouse. The other took a broom by the door and walked in after. He started sweeping.

"Hurry! Grab as much as you can!" I nervously whispered to Brother and Sister.

As the man with a broom walked closer to where we were, continuing sweeping, we felt dust fly up our noses. We stuffed our mouths full, filling our tiny hands grip—fulls of dates.

The man was near, he'd almost see us.

"Let's go now!" Brother and Sister nodded their heads and we crawled on the ground, not to be seen. We passed by a few bags, each with a different smell. One had a sweet aroma accompanied with slight bitterness. It's smell made by nose twitch. The next bag had a salty but fermenting smell. My stomach growled, I must come back! We held onto our food tightly, not willing to lose any. While we were crawling, one of the bags fell open. Unfortunately, it was not properly sealed; dried plums tumbled out of the bag like rocks falling off a hill during a mudslide. Plums pummeled Brother and covered him.

"Hey! Get out of here you filthy thieves!" Yelled the man angrily as he swung his broom at us. Brother clawed his way out of the mountain of plums and rushed straight towards the door. Sister and I dodged the broom and dashed towards the dark corner, turned and ran towards the door, and joined Brother. The other man tried to catch us while we were heading out of the storehouse, but failed to as we were too fast.

"Dirty creatures!" screamed one of the men. We kept running, held tight to our dates and didn't look back.

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"That... That was very close. Let's never do that again! I was so scared!" cried Sister. She held the dates extremely tight. The dates were squished, some of their skin flaked off.

"Why?" I asked, "We got away with lots of food, and now we know that entire building is full with more food! We must go back, again and again!" I declared as the three of us hid in the gutter of the next building.

"We cannot go back to the village. There is no food there! How do we survive? There's no one to provide for us, and there's no method we can create food on our own. To survive, we need to search for food and take them when we have the chance. We'd be lucky if we did find any at all." Brother agreed.

"We're stealing! Doing bad things! We will be punished in our next life! I don't want to do this anymore!" Sobbed Sister as tears rolled down her cheeks.

"Look, Sister, if we don't keep on doing this, how do we live?" Brother stared at Sister as her face became sour.

I watched as the two of them kept bickering with each other. Bitter sadness filled my heart. Only months ago our lives were full of solitude and bliss. We lived in a village near the countryside. There was always food to be had, whether from ripe fruit that fell to the ground, or in the village storeroom where the harvest was collected. Our village was small, and everyone knew each other. A small river ran between our home and the storeroom. Everytime we became hungry, we would cross the river, jumping on rocks to get to the other side. But a few months ago, the men started to leave in groups of twos and threes. They walked and laughed up the road, saying they had a great opportunity. We paid no attention as there was still plenty of food. However, after the last harvest was collected, much of the storeroom were loaded into carts, and the rest of the men pushed it up the same road. We became hungry, our parents left looking for food, and did not come back. As the eldest, I felt no choice, but to guide Brother and Sister up the road where I last saw the carts of food. We scavenged for days, sometimes almost getting squished by hooves of horses and wheels of carts. Although Brother and Sister were afraid, I kept them moving up the road. Finally we came to the end, and found ourselves facing a massive building we had just snuck into. Hungry, yet excited, we found food! Mountains of food! This was where our village harvest were taken. We're saved!

The tension between them became more and more intense, until I felt I had to say something.

“We are not stealing. We are just trying to live; it’s not like they are short of the little things we’re taking.” I told Sister, “Plus, that man is just ridiculous! He called us filthy! Can you believe that? Us filthy? We wash everyday!” A slight smile appeared on Sister’s face.

Brother sat down, staring at the ground intently. Suddenly he shot up and a candle seemed to light up in him. “Hey, remember our cousins at the next village Xiao Mei, Ya Ya and the others? I know they were starving like us. There’s so much food in that one building, there would be enough for us and our cousins! Xiao Mei and Ya Ya can bring their families here. How can these men take all the food from the countryside and hide it in this one building?” He spoke fervently.

Looking at Sister, “Sister, with more of us, we would not need to be afraid.” At that, she nodded her head.

“Brother, you know the way back. Straight on the road we came. Get our cousins, Sister and I will explore this area to make sure there are no dangers. Be careful, see you soon.” I said to Brother as he nodded his head, turned around, walked to the end of the gutter and sprung up.

Feeling brave, I bounded onto the top of the gutter and ventured to the edge of the dock.

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There was water as far as I can see. Straining my neck forward, I looked further up into the cloudy mist; there were mountains on the other side. The side of the mountain had some trees, although most of it was already cut bare. Docks, and even more docks were on the left. I turned my entire body around to face the right. Even more docks continued on the right. How many docks were there? As many as I had fingers and toes! There were massive structures being built upon each dock, with curved bows and a flat deck, nine majestic beams extraordinarily tall that soared straight towards the sky, I cannot see the ends. The beams were more than 40 men high! Ah, those must be formed from the tall trees cut down on the mountain side! Some had fabric attached to them that fluttered in the wind. Leaning against the curved bows were wooden logs at an acute angle, holding up the structures, so they would not tip over. At the front of them were four menacing dragon eyes. Two at the front and two on the lower sides. I was astonished by the enormity. Some of them had three or four stories built upon the flat decks, the body was two hundred men long, each were even longer than the buildings combined behind me! Holding my breath, I sighed in disbelief.

Sister joined me and gazed at the constructions dumbfounded. “What are those things?”, asked Sister while she peered at the massive structures. My eyes followed the horizon line behind the wooden bows and saw the expanse of water. Many such structures that were on the docks, were already on the water! They floated, and I can see thousands of men on the decks running to and fro.

“I think they’re called... ships!”

Many men surrounded one of the ships on a dock. They were excited. Slanted platforms were slid under the wooden bow on one side. With loud yells, men hammered away the logs supporting the vessel, and with a loud splash it dropped into water; one side even submerged a bit before resurfacing. Men cheered and the ship was secured, then a plank was laid from the dock to it, creating a bridge.

On the dock next to us, lines of men, burdened with sacks upon their backs struggled onto the large curved ships. Some of the men stumbled under the weight of their sacks.

“Look, aren’t those men from our village?” Proclaimed Sister. Watching the direction she looked at, I saw familiar men dragging sacks. They were the ones who used to work at the fields – this is where the village men went to!

Another line of men pushed carts. There were more sacks in their carts, as well as wooden boxes. They had ornamental carvings covered with pearl. The carvings were of lotus flowers and scenes of country life by a river. Bronze surrounded the edges of the box, with a lock in the middle. Some of the wooden boxes were placed on two parallel bamboo poles as they swayed in time, carried by several men. One of the men tripped, a wooden box fell with a thud and the lid flew open. A guard stormed over to the men, yelling and kicking them. The men kept apologizing, kneeled down and picked up the.....

“Gold! Silver! Jade! And even silk!” I cried in wonderment. The wooden boxes contained all sorts of treasures and precious goods. Quickly the box was sealed, the men continued towards the large curved ships. Such treasures in one box, yet the vessel was filled with one box after another. Indeed, a treasure ship.

My stomach growled. After all, our meal was interrupted by the two men. We’ve both finished the dates when we were at the gutter. Sneaking back to the storeroom, the two men had moved to the other side, sweeping. Sister and I found a sack with ham. We enjoyed as much ham as we liked, until we were full. Yet, the smell of something fermented lured me towards it. Slitting open the sack, eyeballs glared at me with fins and scales sticking out of the bag. Fish! That was the source of the salty and fermented smell! We took the dried fish out and ate their flesh, leaving bones on the ground.

As we ate, a line of men opened the door with a loud bang and marched in. They confronted the two men sweeping on the other side of the storeroom. Luckily we were already eating at the dark corner, therefore no one spotted us.

“Wei! Stop sweeping and help us! We will be leaving soon and we need to bring these cargo to the ship!” said the leader of the group.

“When will we be leaving?” Asked the sweeping men.

“Soon! As soon as one week! So hurry!”

“Why are we leaving so soon?”

“The Ming princess is coming, accompanied by five hundred retainers As soon as she arrives we will depart.”

“Why are we even going on this trip? Is it really worth all this effort just to escort some gifts and the princess to the barbarian king beyond the South Seas?”

“The Emperor likes to shows off, he wants to establish his dominance and power over the world. We are the Middle Kingdom, after all. We Mings are to bring brightness to the world, don’t you know? Besides, the barbarian king sent a delegation, asking for a princess to be his wife.”

“Bah!” one of the men standing at the back said, “This is all a charade! The emperor wants to find his nephew who fled beyond the seas!”

“Hush! Do not speak of that! You will get yourself executed for speaking treason! I was at the final battle of Nanjing. The charred corpse of the young emperor was presented to Emperor Zhu Di.” Whispered the leader.

“Not right! Not right! The second emperor dressed up as a Buddhist monk and escaped! Haven’t you heard?” Said another man in the middle.

“We will stop speaking of this. Our Lord Admiral led Emperor Zhu Di’s forces at Zheng Cun Ba outside Beijing and defeated the young emperor’s forces. That is why he was given the name Zheng He by the emperor himself! The Lord Admiral is a righteous man who does not eat pork and prays five times a day. I will not tolerate anyone speaking poorly of our Lord Admiral or emperor.” Said the leader firmly. Quiet filled the room.

Finally the sweeping man asked, “Will we fall off the edge of the world?”

The leader laughed, “Don’t be two hundred and fifty! Don’t be stupid! Now shut up and get to work! Load the vessel!”

The men started to take away our food and loaded them onto the vessel. Sister and I hung back at the dark corner with great sadness and heavy hearts. Again, our food was taken away. A few days later, the storeroom was empty.

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After two days, Brother had finally arrived with our cousins.

“Where’s the food? I’m hungry!” Wailed our cousin Xiao Mei.

“We travelled all the way here for food, yet there is nothing here?” Whined our cousin Ya Ya.

“Food was here! I swear! They’ve just been taken. We followed where the food went, I know where they are!” I said.

We went onto the docks. Our cousins gaped at the ships in awe, like we did.

Before I could even move, Sister, the most timid one leapt onto the rope leading to the ship.

“Everyone, follow me! We shall hunt after our food and voyage through the seas!” She said gleefully.

I looked at her and stuttered, “What— What are you doing?”

Sister turned her head around, her beady eyes gleamed with joy and she spoke with a high-pitched squeak, “Weren’t you the one who said to follow the food?”

I smiled delightfully and felt proud of her as she continued walking steadily, using her tail to help balance, her claws gripping the rope. Her dark black fur on her back stood upright in her enthusiasm. From the back I can see her whiskers quiver with excitement. Brother, with the rest of our family, vaulted onto the rope, following her lead.

Feeling an irritating itch on my back, I used a back claw and scratched behind my neck as hard as I could. “Darn fleas!”, I cursed. Then I pounced onto the rope and crossed into the ship.

# Fairy Tales and False Truths

*Yew Chung International School, Lo, Michelle – 15*

A treasure ship in a fairy tale is the basis for a good story, but a fairy tale on a treasure ship is a disaster waiting to happen.

Even so, Li's days onboard the Ming Treasure Fleet are filled with stories. While the other sailors are away on land, his anticipation of their return and the tales that will follow lingers in his mind.

It is an unbearable itch that not even his favorite book of fairy tales can scratch – for the young, plain boy lives for fables of richly patterned Arabian carpets, of tropical fruity wine and endless oceans of amber sand. He thrives under legends of lush verdant rainforests, of exotic spotted animals, and hypnotic dancers in lively linen livery. He drinks up the crew's stories of daring escapes and heroic adventures with an unquenchable thirst and endless admiration.

"Tell me more," he often begs, and while the crew fondly obliges every time, it is never enough. It can never be enough.

As he hears other mariners chatter about elaborate court music in Champa and massive golden shrines in Malacca, a fierce hunger burns within him, insatiable in its fierceness and animalistic in its jealousy. As he scales the rigging, he imagines himself climbing towering trees in the jungle, like the lieutenant in Siam. While he scrubs the wooden deck, he pictures himself slashing through an armada of pirates, like the Admiral in Ceylon. The mere ship's boy begins to nurse a dangerous dream – a desire to join the others on land, on an adventure of his own.

Then, it appears as though Li's wishes have been granted.

One sultry, humid morning, as the fleet drifts past the coast of Dai Viet, the venerable Admiral approaches him. With his imposing presence and tiger-like stride, Zheng He is both respected and feared throughout every port. Li trembles under his discerning gaze.

"You're coming with us when we reach Samudera," states the Admiral.

Those simple, powerful words, spoken with such surety and composure, send Li into a state of euphoria. For weeks, he stumbles through the wooden galleys with a dazed grin; at night, he tosses and turns feverishly, whispering those words to himself like a prayer. "I'm finally going on land," he murmurs, exulted. "I'm going on an adventure. I'm going to be a hero."

"Have fun, boy, but be careful," warns the lieutenant gruffly, his weathered hands hoisting the sails deftly. The seasoned second-in-command is Li's closest confidante and his main source of stories. "It isn't going to be all sunshine and rainbows out there."

Li simply nods and smiles, already dreaming of his future exploits.

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The ship's rudder scrapes against the reef, just as the stars silently fall away to rosy-flushed skies. Pressed against the timber railing, Li observes keenly as the rocky shore of Samudera, dappled with trees and rugged cliffs, draws nearer.

*This is it, Li thinks. This is my adventure.*

The band marches on shore with their sabers and crossbows, and Li can barely contain his excitement as he recalls their mission.

“Samudera’s current ruler is an imposter, and has refused to act as a tributary to our Emperor,” the Admiral had said. “Under his Highness’ command, we shall fight with the true Sultan and depose of this false king. Once we have ensured the throne’s legitimacy, we will establish a new trade port.”

Li can picture it vividly now – the locals cheering for their triumphant heroes, throwing celebrations for him and his friends, as the true Sultan thanks him personally for his help...

“Welcome!” A figure scurries over from a distant ramshackle hut. This man is very broad and very stout, with the beginnings of a paunch. His greying hair is slicked back from his flushed face, revealing beady brown eyes. “You must be the army from the Emperor!”

The Admiral gives a curt nod in reply. “And you are the soon-to-be Sultan of Samudera.”

The portly man smiles broadly. Li shifts uneasily at the display of sharp, yellow teeth. “Yes. I’m glad we understand each other. Please, call me Ratu!” The true ruler gestures at the small crowd of grim, brawny men waiting behind him, all carrying sickle-shaped daggers curved like snakes.

“We’re ready when you are.”

★

For hours, the congregation of armed seafarers, revolutionaries, and eunuchs troop through the jungle kingdom, their boots thumping out a steady staccato like the pounding of a war drum.

They march past wooden houses erected on rickety slats, past verdurous foliage buzzing with strange noises, and past dozens of curious sun-kissed faces. Li stares eagerly at their unusual huts, with lacquered roofs that arch towards the sky and striped walls that slope inwards, like oversized palanquins.

As they journey deeper into the thriving kingdom, the stifling foliage reluctantly gives way to a bustling marketplace. Local tradespeople wearing long sashes, flowing robes, and embroidered headdresses hustle around, dragging wicker baskets of dried beef and jars of aromatic spices. Li longs to stop and explore the market, to taste the curried meats, to rub the smooth silk gauze between his fingers, but –

“Keep your hand on your weapon,” the Admiral mutters. Zheng He’s narrowed eyes are fixated on the massive palace gates looming before them. Enormous eaves jut out over the structure’s gables and overshadow the entrance, which is guarded by sentries in elaborate uniform. The tips of their spears gleam in warning as the crew slows to a stop.

“We are envoys of the Great Ming from China. Under the command of our Imperial Emperor, let us enter.” The Admiral’s tone brooks no argument.

The impassive guards, however, refuse them entry. “The Sultan does not recognize your Emperor as his ruler.”

A troubling gleam enters the Admiral’s eye. “It isn’t a matter of *if* you recognize the Emperor or not – it’s a matter of *when*.” He draws his blade. “Perhaps the Sultan simply needs some persuasion.”

The saber slices through the two guards with the ease of a needle piercing paper.

Li stares in shock, a silent witness to the sudden slaughter before him, although no one else appears surprised. He sees the bodies crumple, like marionettes with severed strings, while time itself seems to slow down. As if in a dream, he sees the blood bloom across their uniforms, dyeing the linen a deep wine red. Vaguely, he senses his friends and crewmates raise their swords in warning.

The passersby sense it too. Slowly, whispers travel through the crowd, rippling through the marketplace, gaining momentum. People begin to shift restlessly, uncertainly. Then, as more guards burst



out of the open doors past their fallen comrades, the market shatters into a hive of hysteria. Murmurs turn into shouts. The locals utter strangled cries. The masses stumble and scramble away in a sudden surge of panic. Covered carts are knocked over. Splintered crates lay belly-up, precious merchandise spilling out like entrails in the sun as the frenzied crowd races by.

Ratu and his followers storm through the gates, charging like bulls seeing red. The lieutenant's face is a mask of equanimity as he lunges into the fray. His crewmates swoop down with fierce cries, their familiar faces contorted into grotesque expressions of bloodlust.

Around him, the deafening clang of metal on metal nearly drowns out Li's cries as he shoves his way to the front.

"Admiral! Why are we doing this? Why are we killing people?"

Zheng He pauses for a moment. He looks down at the boy with an indecipherable expression. Perhaps it is pity in his eyes, or perhaps it is disdain; either way, the stolid man stalks ahead without answering. "For the Emperor!" shouts the Admiral, in a voice like booming thunder. The ferocious troops howl like hounds hunting in the night.

"For the Emperor!"

Li does not think the Admiral has answered his question, but he repeats Zheng He's words over and over again, like a mantra, like a lifeline, until he can almost believe it himself.

He follows reluctantly into the imperial courtyard.

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The once-peaceful garden has become a bloody battlefield. Arched wooden bridges are blackened with dirt, and the pruned bushes are ablaze with fire. The screams of palace courtiers echo through the smoky air.

He hears a quiet, unsettling laugh. Li stares at Ratu, who is staring at the chaos with a faint, satisfied smile. The man's eyes glow with exhilaration and bloodlust.

"Why are you smiling?" Li asks, uneasily. "How can you enjoy this? Why on earth would you *want* to kill?"

Ratu pauses for a moment, surprised. "For the good of the citizens, of course."

"I don't understand. What good is death and destruction for the citizens?"

"Death is necessary for a revolution," the true ruler replies. "Only through revolution, I can rule the people in the best way, in *my* way – with the support of your Emperor, naturally."

Li wonders if Ratu has simply misheard his question, but swallows down his protests and nods, committing the man's words of wisdom to memory. *At the very least*, he concludes, *Ratu will make a sage ruler, if not a confusing one.*

Ratu strolls into the palace as if he already owns it, grinning. The young sailor follows, but he cannot bring himself to smile too. Even as he stumbles through magnificent antechambers with high ceilings and sculpted pillars, through halls lined with intricate tapestries and flickering lanterns, Li can focus on nothing but the grisly image of the dead littering the way.

For the first time in his life, Li feels a pang of regret about coming on land. He had longed for adventure, for heroism, for tales to tell – not for genocide.

★

Despite all that has happened so far, Li is unprepared for what happens next. Someone comes upon him – a young warrior, around his age, with freckled cheeks and determined, terrified eyes – and a dagger appears, aiming for his throat.

Adrenaline courses through his veins, yet Li's sabre remains uselessly limp at his side.

However, from the corner of his eye, Li sees the lieutenant rush over, sword raised. He hears the blade crush the boy's bones, and sees the blood stain the pristine steel. In an instant, the youthful soldier slumps to the ground, face alarmingly pale. His hands flutter uselessly, like a trapped butterfly's wings – once, twice, before stalling forever.

"Why?" Li stutters in shock. "Why did you do that?"

The second-in-command remains curt as he leads Li forward, alert. "We are in the middle of a battle zone. Death happens."

"But why are we doing this?" Li needs an answer – a proper answer. "Are we not heroes? Why do we need to kill?"

The lieutenant pauses for a moment. "For progress," he says slowly, gripping the hilt of his sword. "For development and trade. For after this, we will have a new trading partner and expand our country's territory."

"Progress," Li thinks aloud. "For the Emperor. For the citizens. For progress." *So this is what a hero fights for. This is what people die for.*

Somehow, though, these reasons aren't reassuring at all – especially not when Li glances at the young soldier's rapidly cooling corpse.

"Do you want to be here, boy?" His friend's question catches Li off-guard. The tough lieutenant looks uncharacteristically tender. "You could go back to the ship if this is all too much."

Li wavers, but he thinks of all those days spent onboard clutching to his dreams, and clenches his first. "No. I'll stay."

The veteran nods. He keeps a wary eye on Li as they fight their way through the devastated palace, through the maelstrom of battle, towards the throne room.

★

The old man sitting on the throne stares back at them grimly, almost expectantly. His gnarled hands grip the sides of his wooden throne, but the Sultan resolutely does not move. His wizened face, however, flickers with alarm when he glimpses the remnants of the slaughter beyond the doors.

Li feels a flash of pity, but he pushes the thoughts from his head. *Imposter*, he reminds himself. *Imposter*. He keeps this word in his head as he watches intently from the side.

"You," the Sultan says tiredly, pointing at the one who has come to take his throne.

Ratu bows mockingly. "Hello again, old man."

With bated breath, Li prepares for the false Sultan to plead and beg, while justice prevails and Ratu reclaims his crown to lead Samudera into a new golden age. *This is the moment, the climax of the story; this is where fairy tales come true.*

Instead, the Sultan bows his head in what seems frighteningly like despair, and asks Ratu a question that shakes Li to the bone:

“Why have you come, imposter?”

*Imposter.*

There is a second of utter silence, a moment of quiet in the eye of the storm, in which Li gawks in incomprehension.

“What are you talking about?” The words burst out of him, loud and sharp and shocked. The Admiral gives him a warning look, but Li cannot bring himself to care. “You are the false king!”

The old Sultan shakes his head. “Royal blood runs through my veins, and my veins only. This renegade, on the other hand, has mercilessly attacked my subjects and caused devastation for his own greed.”

“The means don’t matter, old man. Only power.” Ratu sniffs and brandishes his sword. “I *will* be the Sultan, and I will rule the people. I will do a better job than you ever could.”

Li trembles, and raises a shaking finger at the imposter, his voice reaching a fever pitch. “You mean,” he begins, faltering, “that we killed all those people, that we broke into this palace, that we murdered that boy —”

*They said it was for the Emperor, for the citizens, for progress.* Now, though, Li realizes that it was all for show, that it was all for nothing. He recalls the Admiral’s stiffness, Ratu’s laughter, and the lieutenant’s hesitance, and is terrified to realize that he feels somewhat unsurprised.

Nonetheless, he still holds a spark of hope.

Li whirls around to Zheng He and the lieutenant, expecting righteous anger and betrayal at Ratu’s revelation. He waits for the lieutenant to condemn the imposter, for the Admiral to support the actual Sultan, and for the villain to be struck down.

Nobody moves.

Rather, the lieutenant sends a chilling glance at him, leaving Li stupefied at his friend’s sudden frostiness. The Admiral ignores them both and nods at the triumphant usurper.

Ratu smirks at the crumbling, ousted sovereign, and says, “Kill the imposter.”

Zheng He grips his sabre, jaw clenched. “Of course, Your Highness.”

The boy feels the breath leave his lungs. Betrayal and hurt swell into a tsunami, and the sight of the Admiral and the lieutenant beside Ratu strikes Li like a physical blow.

“You knew all along? Both of you?” Li’s idealistic world begins crumbling. He chokes, “Admiral, why are you helping this madman? He is not the true king!”

The Admiral shoots him a stare devoid of emotion. “The only true king,” he says, “is the one who recognizes our Emperor as his ruler.”

And with a slash of his sabre, he rips Li’s fairy tale dreams to shreds.

★

Oil lamps line the ship's galley, casting flickering shadows across the crowded hall as the crew celebrates. Crates of hand-dyed cotton and gold cast statuettes are stacked along the back of the room. The dining tables are piled high with roasted savory meats stuffed with spices and curried rice wrapped in pandan leaves – gifts from Samudera's new Sultan. The chatter of rowdy sailors is often punctuated by a shout or a whoop, and the conversation flows as freely as the wine.

At the back, far from the merrymaking, a young ship's boy watches the celebrations with an oddly vacant expression. The lieutenant sits stiffly beside him.

"We wanted to protect you," his most trusted friend, his favorite storyteller, says. "I tried to warn you, boy. Real life isn't a fairy tale. I know. It is harsh. But sometimes, leaders must be harsh – and to be a victorious adventurer, you must be harsh now too."

"All those fairy tales you told were lies, then?"

"Don't be silly." The veteran lets out a weary sigh. "Fairy tales are just that – fairy tales. They do not exist in real life, and they certainly do not exist on treasure ships like ours."

The lieutenant leaves. Li stays at the back of the hall, tired of asking questions that go unanswered. Deep within him, a silenced young boy mourns.

"Fairy tales do not exist on treasure ships," the boy – now a man – repeats to himself, and then adds bitterly, "not anymore."

★

In the following years, Li goes on many other adventures. He sees countless wondrous sights, encounters innumerable interesting folk, and voyages across the world with the Ming Treasure Fleet. He hears the enchanting music of Champa and gazes at the golden shrines of Malacca, just like the sailors before him. He tells no one of how these sights have failed to fill the void within him.

Although the lieutenant and the Admiral remain onboard as well, the three mariners never exchange more than stiff pleasantries.

Through his travels, Li also hears many folk tales – stories of jade dragons and pining mermaids, of vain queens and wandering ghosts. Local bards retell the same legends often, but with a new twist each time, and the younger sailors adore listening to their tall tales whenever the crew stops at an inn on shore. The ship's boys huddle around dining tables and listen, rapt with attention, as they long to fill the hunger within them with scraps of rich stories.

Sometimes, Li stays at the edge of the crowd to catch snippets of these fairy tales.

But he never stays to listen for long.

# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

*Yew Chung International School, Xixi, Shenghuan – 16*

Zheng He and the other ship's crews were ready to go on the sea navigation. They used new technologies to build the ship that made the ship much bigger, which had 186 meters long and 60 meters wide. This ship could carry thousands of sailors and a lot of gold, silks and other precious items to give away as a gift. Zheng He was the leader of the sea navigation, before the navigation, he asked crews to load on the gifts and the foods needed for the trip. Zheng He told the ship crews about how to operate the ship. He also told them when the crews saw the pirates, they should firstly think about escaping the pirates, if the pirate went closer, they needed to keep the pirates away from boarding the ship. When these were ready, the ship's crews were boarded on the ship and the ship went away from the port.

The crews checked the compass on the boat, they found that the wind was blowing to the direction of Manchu. They put the sail and the ship started to go to the direction on Manchu. Soon they were far from the shore, and they couldn't see the land anymore. At the start of the trip, the waves on the sea wasn't very big, the crews felt safe. Zheng He summoned all the crews on the trip to talk about what to do next. Zheng He had a meeting to talk about what to do when experiencing big waves.

One of the ship crew asked Zheng He: "Did you have any solutions when there are big waves? If we don't come up with some ideas to solve this problem, the ship might overturn and sink, there is no much possibility to survive if that happens."

Zheng He replied: "Our ship is very big, so it can deal with waves on the sea. If the wave is not extremely big, but there is still a risk that the ship might overturn when experiencing extreme waves."

Then, Zheng He announced to all the ship crews: "Our ship was big enough that we don't need to be afraid of big waves in the sea, but still in mind, it will be still a problem if we are experiencing extreme waves."

On the next day, Zheng He and the other ship crews woke up, it was the second day of their trip. After their breakfast, they planned what to do next. Later, one of the ship crew found out that the wind was blowing in wrong direction. He told other ship crews: "The wind is blowing in wrong direction, put the sail down." "Ok", the ship crews obeyed and put off the sails from the ship. Later, when they found out the wind was blowing in right direction again, they then put on the sails.

Then, the crews saw there was another ship in front of them. The other ship was far from them, but they were getting closer and closer. Zheng He saw this. "Hurry up, put down the sails as we will collide with them!" Zheng He told the ship crews. "We put down all the sails, the ship will slow down soon." The ship went nearer and nearer to the front ship, as the ship will soon collide with the front ship, their ship slowed down and the front ship went further and further. They missed a collide.

The next day, at the morning, one of the ship crew woke up and went to the deck of the ship. He looked around at the deck, he found out there was another ship far from them. He looked more carefully, he then found out there were many cannons placed on each side. The ship crew soon realized that this ship may be a pirate ship. He hurried went down and found Zheng He, he said hurriedly: "I saw a ship full of cannons, aren't they are pirate?"

"Let's go up and see, which direction?"

They went up to the deck of the ship.

"This direction, that ship, and it is getting closer to us, they may want to get treasures from us." The ship crew said.

Zheng He went to the dormitory where ship crews were sleeping.

"Get up, we may meet pirates, get the weapons and go to the deck!" Zheng He shouted to the ship crews, "for sailors, put the sail on to see whether we can escape from them."

The ship crews get on the deck, they got all the weapons and looked at that ship. The sailors put on the sail, the ship speeded up. The crews looked at the ship full of cannons, he saw that ship was getting closer and closer to them.

"The ship is getting closer!" He told Zheng He.

"Crews, ready for the battle!" Zheng He shouted out to every crews.

As the pirate ship got closer towards them, the pirate shouted at them: "You are dead now, when I order fire the cannon, your ship will sink. If you don't want to die, you better give us all the treasures or precious things to us so you don't get killed."

“Ok, we will go down the ship to find you some treasures we are carrying, but please don’t fire the cannon, we are surrendering now.” Zheng He told the pirates.

“Crews, we can’t give them our treasures just like this, we need to give these treasures away to the other country.” Zheng He told crews quietly. Zheng He and the crews were all very afraid and sad, as they didn’t want to give away the treasure and other precious things right away that they wanted to give them away to the other country as a gift, they were thinking some ideas to escape from the pirates without giving the gifts.

“What about this, we are pretended to give them treasures, but, when I said ready, we use a bottle of water and spill to the cannons, the cannon will be misfired when ignite line get wet. we can get the water from the sea, and pour at the cannon ignite lines at instant, so they won’t be realize that their cannons were misfired. When they realized and dried the ignite line of the cannon, we will already escaped from them. To do this, we can pretend that we are going to get the treasures, they won’t wonder that the truth is we get a bottle of water.” The crew said to Zheng He.

“Ok, you need to do things quickly as long as I told you, we are danger even if they fired one cannon, so you need to spill water on every ignite lines of the cannon in the short time, and quickly speed up the ship.” Zheng He told the crews.

“Are you ready? I will say three two one, and you all spill together.” Zheng He told the other crews.

“Give us the treasure in three seconds, otherwise, I will fire the cannon now!” The pirate ordered them.

“Spill the water now, ready?” Zheng He told the crews.

“Three...two...one, fire!” The pirate ordered them to ignite the lead of cannon.

As they ignited the lead of the cannon, Zheng he ordered the crews to spill water on the lead. When the pirate almost fired the cannon, the lead got wet and the fire extinguished after the crews spilled water on the lead.

The ship then speeded up and went further and further from the pirates. The pirates didn’t hear “bang”, and soon realized that the leads of the cannon got wet so the cannons misfired. The pirates looked at Zheng He’s ship, they glared as their ship went further and further. They just missed a target where they could just get the treasures. The leader of the pirates was very angry, “Why do you miss that target, I will give you punishments!”

Zheng He’s ship escaped from the pirates, Zheng He told, “Well done, with our smart ideas, we escaped from them! We will have a party together!”

After a few days, they arrived at the Island of Java. Zheng He asked the crews to unpacked the treasure that they wanted to give to the foreign country. Their adventure was nearly ended.



# Fiction

Group 5

# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

*Buddhist Sin Tak College, Chu, Yannis – 16*

As far we know human beings have always been resilient and tough, striving to make the world a better place. Throughout the time of my voyage, we encountered various scenarios—hostile, nonchalant, hospitable and of course there were times of euphoria and exhilaration.

Time flies. We first set sail two years ago and now we are preparing for the second voyage. The sense of pride and achievement that comes with sailing is priceless. Not only do we want to experience a whole new world, but we also want to promote peace and mutual understanding amongst nations as we start our adventures. Thus, we brought along gold, silver and agricultural technology on our quest for the exchange of knowledge. Moreover, we endeavour to meet the locals so as to learn something new from them because they may be wiser than us. Their mentality and experiences will differ from us, city men, we are always fixed inside our own culture and traditions. After a long and careful deliberation, 100 or so sailors and I decided to sail around the world and the voyage would last for at least one year.

When it came to preparation, we spent about half a year, getting everything ready. We prepared the equipment – ropes, kerosene torches, oars...Of course we also needed maps, food, clothes, clean water, weapons and so on. We had a chain of strenuous and arduous trainings. Most important was the boat we used for sailing. We did not buy the ship, but instead we decided to build one. Without doubts, it was not an easy job. From purchasing the best materials to the final step, they were all done with our very own hands. We had hard times. Yet we surmounted all the difficulties like the time the ship could not float for the first time. And finally, we set off.

The first six months was nothing out of the ordinary. Nothing exciting happened. “This voyage is not as amazing as I expected. Was it a mistake to set sail?” These ideas appeared in all our minds. We wanted to pursue excitement but this half of the year disappointed us. What we hoped for was something amazing but got nothing in return. However, our hopes for excitement did not end well. A sudden stormy night took 30 sailors’ lives. The storm came from nowhere. We started to notice the power of nature and that we were at her mercy. It was a general truth that a single natural disaster could break millions of families into pieces. However, being human, we cannot evade these events as we are part of nature. It is patently clear that we cannot surmount nature but we can definitely accept our coexist peacefully.

Good signs appeared in the seventh month. We kept sailing, crossing the Pacific Ocean unwittingly. Eventually we met a boat on the Arabian Sea. They waved at us and were extremely friendly. We made commercial exchanges despite differences in culture and a lack of a common language. The encounter was gratifying, even though we did not speak the same language, we used our body language and facial expressions to express ourselves effectively. We also shared our food and clothes with them. Even though it was the first time for us to encounter such a foreign culture it was not as difficult as we thought to get along. Different nations should definitely seek common grounds while holding back their differences. Please don’t forget that we are an integral whole living on this earth.

The eighth month was of significant value to us as it was the time when we had our first battle with pirates. They had three vessels in total and each vessel was double ours in size! Nonetheless, all of us did not give up and spared no effort to fight them. At last, we won. It was a difficult war because we did not have enough weapons. However, our spirits were always alight and we were led by our primal need for survival. After the war, both sides suffered heavy losses. It was discovered that battles are detrimental in all aspects. As a result, peacefulness should always be pursued as no one wants a life of suffering. Please always bear in mind that there must be some ways that are better than war to settle disputes.

What’s next, we had brand new experiences of meeting aborigines in the ninth month. As we predicted, they were wiser than us but lived in primitive circumstances. Their planting skills were more efficient, I’ll give them that, but the island where they have lived for generations was not as advanced compared to our modern city. Though, they were content. They never grumbled and instead, they strived to better themselves. We may not find this environment acceptable, but why not give it a try one day? I don’t mean that we should live a primordial lifestyle, but we should be satisfied with what we have and not always ask for more. It is impossible for us to possess all the treasures in the world, instead we should learn to treasure what we already have.



The last few months was the time for us to return to port. Unfortunately, one night when we returned to a port near Japan, the heavens opened and the winds were whipping. The sky was pitch black. At the same moment, an enormous wave struck the hull of the ship. It was a stormy and very long night. The next morning, it was found that almost all our crewmen were killed. Finally, we returned home. The Emperor and swarms of citizens came to welcome us back. We were loudly and cheerfully applauded for but those who deserved it most were the ones who sacrificed themselves valiantly.

One year has passed and it is just about time to set sail again. In spite of countless uncertainties, we will continue our journey as mysteries of this world are beyond our imagination. Obstacles will never stop our boats.

Adventures always come along with storms and surges. Yet we never give up in upholding our hopes and beliefs. We endeavour to sail against the current to uncover new worlds.

# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

*Buddhist Sin Tak College, Lau, Addison – 16*

– I held the paper – just received – with my shaking hands. Witnessed the person who sat on *that* shiny silver and bloody red horse; then with a sudden neigh, vanished beyond the far-away darkness. When sand and dust settled around the edge of the glittering flare, there left alone, I held the wrinkled paper, looked between the lines filled with black characters, perplexed. –

## New tales of the Ming Treasure Voyage

1

Exactly one month later, that very same paper became my toilet paper, and had been thrown into the endless, restless southern waters. It was the third day after the departure from the dockyard, and I've already been having severe stomach aches. The captains have reserved themselves all the juicy beef and pork, leaving us the exhausted catch of either smelly raw or already rotten dead fish. Worse still, our livelihood rested upon those inedible fish, throughout this immeasurable journey. It wasn't as if I had an ambitious plan of having a delightful vacation, but I never thought it would be this bad, getting food poisoning every second meal. To make things worse, I was having a hard time sleeping on the rolling wooden ship the first few days, while dealing with both the physical and mental tortures of being miles away from home. I counted the ongoing days with my fingers, lost count with my sweaty hands, and then shook them hard in frustration.

Out of my expectation, the fleet wasn't small either. On my ship, which was one of the 60, there were a few hundred crewmen, forming a full sized navy. Some of the men who were by my side were those I'd met back in the early days at war. I had good times chatting and playing chess with them back in the day. But when darkness fell along with the cold blowing winds, we couldn't do much, except lie somewhere on the ship, closing our eyes to pure nothingness, and we waited for the morrows to delight the sky.

As my mind ran wild, I couldn't get myself into any dream. I climbed up the ladder, out of the wooden chamber, sat on the wet, salty wooden planks, then laid down in the open air. I felt calm winds whispering over my body, and listened to the charm of the pearl blue waves. I looked beyond the sky – the endless, glorious, mysterious canvas of stars – searched for the brightest one amongst the countless glimmers. There I saw Polaris twinkle, shining its hardest, exactly behind where our ships faced.

2

The rise of the sun shined and leaked into the golden waves, happening millions of times over the same old sea. The rays woke me from a really short sleep, *again*. The kitchen offered us our usual half-cooked-but-still-rotten cod for breakfast. I munched between the stale mixture of the stone hard skin and soggy wet flesh, picking a sharp bone from between my teeth. I looked at the nothingness on the horizon for a while, then turned my head towards the fleet, waving in white, sailing on blue, above the untouchable depth of the waters. Maybe there was land out there, maybe an undiscovered civilization, maybe a place we've never known, never stood on.

However, the sun didn't bless us for long, and soon the sky filled with thick, disappointing rain clouds. Bolts from the gods started to strike from the edge of the heights right down onto the unsettling waves. The high wooden poles started to shake and creak. Chaos drowned the wet wooden decks. People scurried, slipped over, then crouched down with fists protecting their heads. Crates rolled, tripped over the wooden bars, and were dumped hard into the waves. I climbed clumsily back into the cabin, and stumbled straight onto the wooden beds, CLONK, between those two somebodies in shock and fear.

The wooden masts cracked and tore apart. The ship started to bank on one side. It was not a good sign. Realising that one of the mates had already jumped onto the ladder out onto the deck, we swiftly followed.

The main mast cracked, fell tilted and drunk, uncovering the raw birch core under the heavy blowing rain. The dark grey sail was torn into pieces, helplessly attached to the end of the pole. We combatted our way through the gusts, supporting ourselves on the heavy beams. Very soon I my body was paralyzed... I could no longer feel anything. It got darker and darker. Voices became muffled...

3

I woke up from a deep sleep, but still felt exhausted. Some sailors laid on the filthy, wet wooden planks like dead fish. There was a sharp pain deep in the center of my skull, my soul felt as if it had been pulled out and thrown into the ocean.

I looked pointlessly among the never-ending waters... With delight, I saw the edge of the sea. Land, *o' land*, an existence I've waved goodbye to two full moons ago. I sat up despite the splitting headache, almost losing balance. But at least I saw green, the colour I've longingly missed.

Beached, the few of us that survived stepped onto the foreign soil, onto this unnamed piece of land. It was unfamiliar to step on solid ground.

4

Over the next few days puffed and purple bodies washed ashore. I sat on the black sand with the broken ship, the injured sailors and disheartened captain. Sun set in the far distance, painting the broken, left over crates on the side in orange. The wind blew, the waves tickled the shore, time passed through my helpless hands.

I took a deep sigh; sat down facing the open ocean; prayed to the setting sun – someone would come to find us.

# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

*Buddhist Sin Tak College, Tse, Tim – 16*

My name is He. My story of adventures all began back in 1404. It was a freezing cold Winter when I was appointed by the Emperor of Ming Dynasty to set sail for visiting some foreign countries for the first time. The purpose of this was pretty obvious: we have to ally with countries nearby to strengthen both our economy and military power. Therefore, in the seven ships were countless gold and silk which were considered the grandest materials in China. No one would ever guess that there were 6 more voyages sailing with me.

"Dear Emperor, please allow me to bring along enough soldiers and powerful weapons to ensure our safety?" The original plan was to have only me, some of my subordinates and a multitude of old women who were good at sowing. Yet, I knew that it was not going to work. Definitely not. How could we protect ourselves when we encountered enemies?

With the blessing of the Emperor he replied, "Yes, please have my elite soldiers and heavy weapons on all the ships."

It took a total of nine months for preparation. With all the "presents" and weapons like the fire cannons and guns packed, we (consisting of over 2000 people) set sail at Qing Long Harbor. Lying on the upper deck of the biggest junk enjoying the sea spray, I felt unprecedentedly relaxed without realizing how enormous the challenges would be.

Time flew by, it seemed like 3 months had passed in a split second. We had visited Vietnam where we were treated like premium guests. The reason was quite patent: China and Vietnam had been friendly to each other since the 13th century for the safety of both countries' armies. The local people gave us boxes of fresh fruits, making all the ships aromatic.

The three months were not easy. The crewmen often told me that they missed their homes and their families. I was a bit homesick too, not having been with my wives and sons for such a long time.

Fortunately, life on the ocean was not unacceptable as we were all well fed by those old women. They were just like our moms, sowing our clothes and taking perfect care of us.

However, peace did not last long.

Around two weeks after we left Vietnam, troubles ensued. It was a cloudy day. "Captain, there are ships with big fire cannons! What should we do now?!" the soldiers screamed. Honestly I had no idea what to do at that time since I had never encountered any form of military attack before. I panicked, sweating all over.

"CAPTAINNN, those ships are getting closer. They have no intention to stop!" Having no choice, I ordered the soldiers to open fire and others to stay on the lower deck. The first shot missed, so did the second and the third.

"Stop your Chinese ship right now!" shouted the captain of the unknown fleet of ships. "We are the pirates who rule this region. No one shall pass without my permission. Stop or you will die!"

At the very moment, one of their ships was destroyed. All of us were shocked, with our mouths open.

"Pirates over there, drop all your weapons now or we will open fire!" completely frozen with horror, I could not even say a word, seeing another group of people wearing weird costumes with grass skirts trapping the malicious pirates.

I kept my mouth open until the leader of them came to me. "We are soldiers from Thailand. I am sorry that we did not come in time. You are safe now," he said softly, like he was whispering.

# Gold and Its Symphony

*Dulwich College Beijing, Lee, Bryan – 16*

Early morning. There was a breeze in the air. I still remember the birds rushing away frantically, scattering leaves from a nearby tree noisily without rhythm as I stepped off the boat and onto the crusty, dirt ground that sprouted no trace of greenery.

I took a deep breath.

In the air was the subtle hint of the sea, and it felt cool against the innards of my neck and skin. This was air that was clean and pure, air that had been absent from the many hours I spent inside the damp and suffocating cabin of the boat.

I looked around, scanning my surroundings. In front of me was a desolate land, a village that held a strange assortment of buildings in alien colors. In its silence, it reeked with a certain kind of unsophistication, and a certain kind of menacing hostility.

Noisily, I turned around, my armor clanking ruthlessly, to find my fellow soldiers looking on at me, and I realized that it was my turn to lead the troops; Commander Zhou had drunk too much last night.

I turned back towards the village. In the breeze, its flags and banners seemed to wave in a way that beckoned me to stay away, to hop back onto my boat and to return to where I had come from.

For the briefest second I obliged.

But alas I took a step forward, and my men followed suit.

We marched into the village, marching like a machine that knew nothing but to keep moving forward, our metal boots crushing whatever shred of serenity was left in the somber, sleeping village. The few heads that were there turned curiously towards us, and my skin began to crawl with an uncomfortable nervousness as I marched step after step. In the back of my head I could feel the growing presence of eyes starting to stick on me, and a growing sea of murmurs rushing and sweeping the village all around us.

It wasn't long until we approached what seemed to be the first actual house in the village. Everything before then was commercialized, artificially colored with lyrical promises and sweet nothings to sell some silk or a slab of meat for a desperate amount of copper coins.

The house was small, wooden and pathetic. I knocked on the door, and it shook so violently on its hinges that I couldn't help but fear that the entire building was going to collapse.

Out of the window peered finally the head of an old man. His small beady eyes gazed at me cautiously and impatiently.

"Gold," I said, raising a small bag I was clutching onto. "Courtesy of the Emperor."

I tossed the heavy bag carelessly at the old man, and a pair of swift, sudden hands reached out to receive it firmly. The old man's eyes widened slowly, and his mouth stretched into a quivering smile so big it looked grotesque. He looked at me, his expression a little bit uncertain, but he ultimately opened the bag, and his laughing face shone with the shade of a brilliant yellow. I nodded to my men and gestured them to march on with me to the next house.

A crowd of people were staring at us now. Their eyes were intently fixed on the bags we were carrying in our hands. There was an unmistakable hunger in the air, and the unnatural silence that followed felt suffocating as we continued to walk on.

"Just do it now," Liu, my second in command finally said to me. "We might as well. There's too many of them."

I stared at him in careful thought, and then looked around to find ourselves surrounded by a colorful collage of silent faces.

Their eyes were still and focused.

I rubbed my chin, unsettled.

"Fine," I said, after breaking the silence with a hesitant breath.

Liu handed me the next bag of gold and I took it and raised it up high like a torch and the eyes all followed. "On behalf of the Emperor," I yelled. "We are giving away magnificent gifts of gold! Let this be a reminder of the Emperor's greatness and endless generosity!" And with that I tossed the bag of gold into the crowd at random, and that was when the chaos began.

There was something exotic in the way the peasants scrambled over each other, breaking teeth and toes in a growing, reddening puddle of wretched sweat, as they fought for what was theirs. Their cries were animalistic, with piercing shrieks and screams, and I watched their bodies undergo the most severe deformations in order for their hands to wrap around a single cold, solid, nugget of gold. It was an ocean of swarming bodies, a grand display of the purest forms of savagery known to man. Peculiar sounds rang into my ears, and I looked away, my face a little green, and my stomach churning threateningly.

I breathed deeply and found myself a little bit relieved, realizing that I was no longer holding the object that had led to this perversely colorful orchestra of the human anatomy.

On the side of the street of the chaos there was a young mother who sat lying on the ground. Her eyes were weeping readily as she clutched onto a small, limp body. It was apparent from her pained sobbing that it was the body of her child; her toddler son, as I was later told, who had been very tragically caught in the crowd, and trampled over by several middle-aged men.

I approached her, and her weak, reddened eyes stared up at me helplessly, whimpering. But behind her glossy wet eyes, I could see a growing curiosity that couldn't be contained.

I handed her a bag of gold, and all the heartache in her eyes disappeared with a disbelieving blink, fading into an empty nothingness. Her red eyes widened, and as if she was in a trance she ceased all sobbing and wailing. She placed down the limp, small body and in its place, she cradled my bag of gold.

For a moment, I couldn't hear the sounds of fighting in the background, and my head spun slightly in a dizzying blur.

She was looking down, but I could still see her face.

She couldn't help but smile.

"Gold is the answer to life," Commander Zhou said back on the boat. He had just woken up and learned about our visit to the village. "It's the answer to all life's problems." He took a sip of his alcoholic drink. "How many dead this time?" he asked as he wiped his lips.

"Reports said around twenty peasants," I replied. "From our side, we lost two. There were just too many. And we still couldn't bring ourselves to kill unarmed peasants."

"Hm," Zhou muttered. "Better than the last village, at least."

I nodded slowly in agreement. "Yes. It's better than the last village."

Zhou sighed, flourishing the damp air of the cabin with the smell of stale alcohol. He glanced at me. "We have to stop tossing the gold like that, and just hand it out like civilized men. Why don't we ever do that?"

He continued to look at me searchingly, looking for an answer.

I gave none.

After a while, he left the cabin, and I was left alone in the room.

Though I gave no answer to his question, I gave thought to it in the safe confines of my head. I supposed there were many different reasons why I always tossed the gold like that. I supposed there was a certain, forbidden fascination to it, a certain curiosity that I couldn't help but satisfy and explore, over and over again. There was something appealing in the raw honesty that the gold brought out from people, something I would never see, back in the kingdom, where people dressed nicely and spoke elegantly in wealth and jewelry.

And then, I supposed, there was a hopefulness in me that always made me toss that bag of gold into the crowd, a side of me that hopes that people would not lose themselves, would not commit themselves to savagery and damnation over something so ultimately... small.

On the table next to me lay the bags of gold we were given by the emperor. They were laid out in an orderly fashion, just sitting there, ready to be delivered and gifted to the world. I took one into my hands and examined it, feeling its cold hardness against my fingertips.

I stared out the window, gazing out into the wide, vast sea, and I found my hands holding out the bag of gold towards it, as if I was offering some kind of sacrifice to the waters.

I closed my eyes, and I saw myself ripping the bag apart, its contents scattering out, pouring like a golden waterfall that seemed to never end into the abyss of the deep blue sea, ridding it and its disease forever from humanity.

I smiled.

But I knew it was impossible.

So I stood up from my chair, and clutching an answer to life in my hands, I walked out of the room, ready to set sail to the next village.

# A Wound That Never Healed

*Harrow International School Beijing, Yao, Caitlin – 16*

“Be careful, Miss!”

Yuqing’s hands were gripping firmly on the branch when Peony, the young maid, shouted with a concerned voice from the distance.

She ignored the remark and steadied herself with her legs, her right hand reached for a chinaberry leaf while her left hand held onto the branch.

“Miss! Please get down!” Peony’s footsteps grew louder. Yuqing turned her head, but her fingers were still fumbling at the leaves.

“Just a moment!” She responded as she plucked the leaf from the branch, “Look! I’ve got it!”

Peony pursed her lips and shook her head nervously.

Yuqing knew Peony was secretly afraid of being scolded by her parents. She brought herself towards the ground reluctantly and stood beneath the tree, waiting for Peony to scuttle towards her.

“Madam doesn’t like it when you climb trees...”

“...or run in the courtyard, or play with a catapult...” Yuqing mumbled along begrudgingly, pausing before she took a deep breath and whispered, “...or obsess over medical herbs Doctor Li told me about.”

Peony sighed, “Madam is waiting for you.” She patted Yuqing on the shoulder, prepared to lead her way. Yuqing trudged behind Peony, her mind was elsewhere. She glanced round the courtyard and fixed her gaze on the silhouettes behind the window of a room – it was Jade bringing medicine from Doctor Li to her ailing sister. Yuqing stopped there, mouthing the names of the herbs in it; she stood still until Peony came over and hurried her along.

★                      ★                      ★

The scene from her childhood played itself in Yuqing’s head as she sat quietly in her room, staring dreamily past the pearls dangling from the phoenix coronet on her head.

“Tomorrow you’ll be married.” A familiar voice murmured from behind; a reflection of her mother appeared in the mirror in front of her, her hands resting on Yuqing’s shoulders, “Look at how beautiful you are.”

Her own reflection became clearer behind the pearls, “I don’t love him.” She blurted out, the emptiness in her eyes became more discernable than ever.

She could see how her mother’s face hardened, and feel how her hands gave her shoulders a firm squeeze as if to bruise them, “We have had this discussion already, can’t you make some sacrifice for our family? You’re marrying General Lin’s son, the most privileged general in the Ministry of War; your father might finally become something more than an insignificant official.”

“So my happiness is sacrificed as a result?” Yuqing bit her lips and glared at her mother, who didn’t reply. She lifted her hands from Yuqing’s shoulders and walked towards the doors, “A woman’s happiness lies in a good marriage and making her family proud.” She said sternly before leaving, muttering “disobedient child” under her breath as she left.

Her room fell silent; only her oriole chirped every now and then behind her.

“It’s such a shame, Miss.”

A man with a hunched back appeared at the doors just when Yuqing was about to close them. He was wearing a long, indigo-coloured robe that distinguished him from the servants, bowing with his hands clasped in front of Yuqing.

“Doctor Li.” Yuqing called his name with relief, “It’s good to see you, are you here to visit my sister?”

“Indeed.” He straightened up and said, “Her coughing seems to be worsening, I have prescribed her more loquat leaves in her herbal medicine to see if there will be any improvements.”

“I see. Any specific instructions?”

“No. Everything else is the same as always.” Doctor Li’s voice took on a serious tone, “There is something I need to tell you and your family – I’ll be leaving tomorrow. As you may have already heard, Admiral Zheng He’s fleet is leaving at sunrise; the Emperor has ordered for him to visit places like Java and Siam. I’m one of the doctors appointed to accompany them.”

“How wonderful.” Yuqing’s eyes lit up at the idea of practicing medicine on a mysterious voyage.

“I have been your family’s doctor since you were this tall.” Doctor Li’s hand hovered at his waist, a faint smile sketched on his face, “...and tomorrow you will be married. You’ll have a different title when I return.”

Yuqing nodded politely, the spark in her eyes a second ago was extinguished. She bid Doctor Li a goodbye and closed the doors, but as if recalling something, she reopened them and called out to him.

“Yes?”

“I just remembered, you said “it’s a shame” when you came. What exactly were you referring to?”

“Oh, that.” Doctor Li took a deep breath and responded hesitantly, “I was referring to you. You had always been keen on medicine when you were younger, memorizing the effects of herbs and collecting them. I could rely on you to sort out my prescriptions. It’s a shame now that you’re getting married; you are obliged to focus on domestic duties and probably will never touch herbs again.”

“I once climbed a tree just to collect them, risking being told off by my mother...” Yuqing chuckled, but then her voice trailed off as she said wearily, “What use does my interest have? My parents would rather have me painting and doing embroidery ‘like a proper lady’. Also, women are never allowed to be doctors.”

Doctor Li sighed remorsefully, “Too bad you aren’t my apprentice, going on the voyage with me.” He tried to sound lighthearted and playful, but somehow the remark didn’t come out like a joke as he had intended, for he saw how Yuqing beamed at him, although her smile was gone in an instant.

“What was I thinking?” Yuqing shook her head and muttered to herself, “Doctor, I really need to send you off now or else I will start to have crazy thoughts!”

There was something about Yuqing’s manner that made Doctor Li felt regret at disappointing her – perhaps it was the way her face glowed that reminded him of her ambitions that she was forced to conceal.

He called Yuqing back as something suddenly occurred to him and said something that would change her life forever, “Miss, I have always been impressed by your passion in medicine. If you really wish to go, there may be a way around this.”

Yuqing’s eyes widened in shock. Behind her, the oriole flew out of the window that was left ajar while the two of them were once again engaged in conversation.

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The Sun emerged from the horizon, casting beams of sunlight in every direction, illuminating the massive crowd that has gathered at the port. Some were loading cargo onto the ships, others occupied themselves with military supplies. Normally, Yuqing would marvel at such a sight, but at this moment panic and anxiety overtook her.

*Change your identity; beware to conceal your gender.* Doctor Li’s words repeated themselves in her head. The sound of them drowned the million voices talking around her. *Try not to draw attention to yourself.*

Her clothes were identical to all the doctors, she was now “Doctor Li’s mute apprentice” to everyone; her real identity was kept only to herself.

“Look at the ship!” Doctor Li exclaimed and pointed.

Yuqing’s eyes followed the direction of his finger. *Huge* would be an understatement for the size of a treasure ship – it looked like it could fit an entire city in; the masts towered the crowd. It was accompanied by several treasure ships and countless smaller ships.

She gazed beyond them and wondered about the world that lay on the other side of the horizon.

*Mother, father, please forgive my departure.* She quietly went over some of the words she wrote hurriedly to her parents the night before. *I will make this up with the remainder of my life – or if I can’t, with my afterlife.*

★ ★ ★

“Take this one! He is wounded!”

Yuqing was brought in front of a soldier, his armour was lifted slightly to reveal a garment that was dyed red by blood, resulting from what seemed like a spear wound. He moaned in pain as she approached him.

Yuqing shot him a reassuring look although she could feel her own heart pounding against her chest with a mixture of nervousness and apprehension. This was the first time that she was allowed to treat a wound like this. Many of the soldiers were injured after helping to fight the uprising at Sumatra and all the doctors were summoned to treat them, before this, Yuqing had only been called upon when a sailor caught a cold or when doctors worked on cures for foreign diseases.

The soldier mumbled as she tried to clean the wound, “Would it...ever..heal?” He stared at her blankly.

Yuqing nodded and put on a sympathetic look; she made a couple of gestures telling him that she’s trying to bandage the wound and stop the bleeding.



“Would all wounds heal?” He asked after slowly regaining his consciousness, “I hope they do. All of us have got different wounds from the battles.”

Yuqing smiled and busied herself with tending his wound. This wouldn’t be time for her to explain, with gestures, how she treats different wounds. She also wanted to tell him that the doctors try their best to ensure all physical wounds could heal but it’s the mental ones that are more difficult; she doubted whether the soldiers could ever forget the deaths and injuries on the battlefields.

Her thoughts suddenly drifted back to her family – there was definitely a wound left somewhere by her battle with her mother. It had been exposed in the air for too long with no one tending to it.

It had been at least a year since they first set sail. Yuqing couldn’t risk asking anyone on board so she tried to keep track of time by counting sunsets. Day after day she watched the red, glowing sphere vanish behind the horizon; watched the pale blue sky become the canvas painted with shades of marigold and crimson.

But she lost count after a year – some days merged into others. What she preserved in her mind was all the sights she had seen that portrayed a world she had once never even dared to dream about.

She remembered the shimmering golden roofs of those magnificent Buddhist temples in Siam; the devoted monks murmuring their prayers in unison.

She remembered the bustling markets in Ceylon; the curious glance of a lady sitting in a wagon, dressed in an exotic sari.

She remembered the mysterious islanders on Java, who spoke a strange language but were nevertheless kind to her; they offered her a piece of a fruit named “*cempedak*” that tasted very sweet.

...

Of course, she had been practicing medicine like she wanted. She recalled the names of countless herbs and their effects; learnt how to take the pulses of patients and figure out what different signs of pulses implied.

This was all she longed for – being a doctor who helps vulnerable patients; there was more – she saw the world beyond the horizon.

“Hey.” The soldier said feebly, “Why are you smiling? Does my injury please you?”

Yuqing shook her head and blushed.

“Anyway...do you want to hear the story of the uprising in Sumatra?” He said abruptly.

She gave him a quizzical look.

“I’m feeling much better now.” He explained, moving his arm a little to prove his point.

She nodded, allowing him to continue, but she only heard vaguely about a son of a fisherman who tried to rebel against the new king of Sumatra, and absorbed none of the details. Instead, she managed to deduce something crucial – they were now going to return, for she heard that Admiral Zheng had promised to help the king to suppress it on their way back. Yuqing felt something tugging at her heart as she thought about returning. It seemed like decades ago when she confronted her mother about the arranged marriage; seeing the stern and disappointed face of her mother as she stormed off; now she couldn’t help wondering about how she had been.

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“Yuqing.”

Doctor Li whispered her name as she was returning to her cabin, looking around cautiously, “This is important, Admiral Zheng is looking for you.”

“Pardon?” Yuqing raised her voice in surprise, “You mean...Admiral Zheng He?” She asked tentatively to make sure she had not misheard him.

Doctor Li placed his finger in front of his lips – a gesture for Yuqing to lower her voice, “Yes, the most important person here.”

“What for?”

“I have no idea. You’d have to find out yourself.”

“Do I have to go?”

“You better do.” Doctor Li pursed his lips, “He has the power here, the wise decision would be not to defy his orders. He arranged to meet you in his cabin at sunset. I need to go tend to the wounded soldiers now; let’s just leave this conversation at that.”

Yuqing frowned as Doctor Li patted her shoulders and hurried off. Millions of questions swirled in her head – What is the Admiral like? What will he do to her? Was she failing to do her duty?

Most important of all – why is he meeting her?

She was left to wonder about these questions herself; she hadn't dared to make friends during all this time she was on board and pretended to be a mute in order to hide her real identity. She sat in her cabin and passed a few troubled hours before twilight arrived.

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It was dusk when Yuqing approached the Admiral's cabin uneasily. It was located above the cabins where she and the other doctors lived; the surroundings seemed much quieter compared to the chaos beneath where small cabins were tightly packed.

Two servants saw her come nearer; they bowed and opened the wide wooden doors for her and followed her as she entered.

There was no one in there apart from a tall man standing with his back to them, "You can both leave now." He addressed the servants, his voice deep and resonant.

"There is no need to pretend in front of me." He said to Yuqing after they left, "Wu Yuqing, daughter of the minister of the *GuangLu* bureau."

Yuqing was startled when she heard her name, "How did you find out?"

"Your father brought you along to the Palace once. I recognized you the moment I saw you with Doctor Li."

"Why didn't you report me?"

"I wouldn't. Every one of us has our own struggles." He paused, "Plus, no other doctors could compete with your diligence."

"I've always dreamed to be a doctor." Yuqing swallowed hard and said, "My sister suffers from illnesses, I have always wanted to cure her and help as many people as I can; but women are not allowed to be doctors no matter how capable we are. I'd tried to escape from the fate of an arranged marriage."

"Have you thought about the consequences of your actions?" His voice was frighteningly calm, "This is why I called you in. Your sister made a desperate attempt to write a secret letter to me. She overheard some of the conversation the night before your escape in the adjacent room, but she never thought you were serious. General Lin was infuriated by it; he felt humiliated; this then led to a conflict between him and your father. Lin made vital contributions to many battles and is valued greatly by the Emperor. No one dared to say anything even if he backstabbed your father..."

"What happened to him?" Yuqing urged, sensing the seriousness of the situation.

The Admiral took a deep breath, "He is now expelled from the bureau and imprisoned. I don't know what would happen to him...and your mother..."

"What happened to my mother?"

"She committed suicide...she felt there was no one to rely on." It took a long while for him to answer, "I'm sorry."

"Would we...make it back before...anything...happens?" Yuqing's question was now punctuated by sobs. Tears raced down her face like a waterfall.

"I don't know." He sighed; now facing her, "I could assign you a vessel, some skilled sailors and soldiers; it'll be quicker than our gigantic fleet if you travel back that way, but the sea can be very dangerous, you wouldn't want to risk it."

Yuqing looked at him with her watery eyes, the Admiral had the most penetrating glare she had ever seen. For an instant she suddenly became more determined than ever, "I'll do it, Admiral."

"But..."

"I will do it." Yuqing gritted her teeth, "Admiral, maybe you don't know me well enough, but once I put my mind to something, no one can ever make me give up. It's my fault that things turned out like this, now I have to bear the consequences."

There was a subtle change to the gaze of the Admiral – it was no longer a glare but showed a hint of admiration, "I can't help thinking what would become of you if you were born a man." He said finally with a weary smile, "You were either born in the wrong gender or in the wrong era."

Yuqing lowered her eyes at his remark, "Could I depart tonight?"

"If that's the best for you."

She nodded and asked for approval, the Admiral granted her request and dismissed her. On her way out she tried hard to refrain herself from bursting into tears, but to no avail. Memories of her family came flooding back to her as she prayed for her father's safety, *If I don't ever see you, father*, she thought silently to herself, *I pray for us to be a family again in the afterlife; then I may be that daughter you and mother wished for – who could make her family proud.*

*This will be the only remedy for the mistake I have made in this lifetime.*

# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

*Heep Yunn School, Fung, Hiu Lam – 16*

'Hey! We got to go, Miss!'

'Fine, I'm coming, wait for me!'

She waved to the crowd who gathered by the shore as she climbed onto Alice – the ship named after her mother. Their leader smiled and the kid in his arms blew a kiss at her. She giggled when she climbed on board and a strong arm tucked her.

'Well, Miss, you've done pretty well in giving away our gifts. Last time when Tim tried to do so, he ended up being mistaken as an invader and had been kept as captive until we went to rescue him. Fortunately, our gifts managed to get to their hands and everyone went safe and sound.'

'Of course I can do well. Father has been teaching me the rules of interaction since I was born. And also, when can you stop calling me "Miss", Dave? You are older than me.'

'Sorry, Miss, but you're the captain's daughter, all of us have to be this formal.' Dave was struggling to keep his face straight, but it was so obvious that he wants to laugh it made his face looked mashed up. She couldn't contain her laughter.

'Only YOU are being this formal, and is my father around?'

'No.'

'Then loosen up.'

'Fine, Alexa.'

'Uhh... still too formal.' She waved her finger.

Dave sighed, 'Lexi.'

'That's better.' Lexi gained. Dave shook his head while pointing at the direction of the captain's cabin.

'Father wants to see me?' Her eyes shone.

'Yes, Mis... Lexi.' Dave frowned when he saw Lexi smirking.

'Yea, you better keep practicing it until you got it right.' She winked at him, brushed her ink dark hair over her shoulder, and skipped merrily to her father's cabin, giving high-fives to the fellow shipmates along the way, failed to hear Dave's warning. 'Your father is worrying, Lexi...'

Entering the lion den, Lexi rushed right to her aged yet vigorous father, who opened his arms and swallowed her completely. He rocked her once, twice, before releasing her, just like when she was little. Lexi face dropped when she saw her father's ashen face.

'What's the matter?'

Her father's wrinkled hands cupped her face. They had a smell of metal that made Lexi thought when was the last time he held a sword. 'Do you know how worried I was when you're out?'

Lexi sighed. This again. 'Father, I keep telling you I'll be fine...'

'I know, I know, I'm just saying. I can't bear the thought of you getting hurt...'

'I'll be fine. And this may be inevitable since I got on Alice. But this is what is right, isn't it? We have to sacrifice when it comes down to it. These are the words that you told me when I came aboard.' Lexi raised her hand. 'Don't talk, father. This quest is for mother, the only wish of hers that we had to complete for her. She knew it won't be a straight way, that's why she told us to help her to complete this noble wish. Right, father?'

'I really have no chance in out-talking you, do I?' Her father gave her a gentle smile. 'Just make sure you don't go visit your mother before me.'

'I won't. I'll stay with the pack. They will protect me.'

Just then, the emergency bell rang and Dave rushed to the cabin.

'Captain, Mis... uh,' he looked at Lexi's smirk. 'Alexa.' She smiled. 'Sorry to interrupt you, but a group of pirates, whom I think targeting our gifts to nations, are attacking us.'

Lexi's father looked at Lexi, 'When you say "they", you mean David?'

Lexi glazed at her father, 'Maybe.' Then she looked at Dave. 'I'm coming with you guys.'

Dave's brown eyes widen in horror. 'Alexa? You may get hurt. Why don't you stay here? Am I right, Captain?'

Lexi's father looked at Lexi. 'Well, Alexa seems determined. I've trained her to fight one or twice, and I believe she will be in safe hands, am I right, David?' He gave a pointed look at Dave.

'Yes, Captain. Alexa, come on.' Lexi rushed out with him, no longer she shutted the door, she heard Dave's exasperated sigh.

'Why do you have to come with us?'

She bounced in front of him. 'Why can't I?'

They began to walk fast to the first desk. Lexi could merely make out some voices made by swords. They began to walk faster. She could now hear people's yelling.

'I've to warn you. You will easily get hurt.'

'Uh, so you're actually caring about me?' She gave him a flirty smile, just in time to hide it when she saw Dave's serious look, with sweat pouring down his face.

'I'm just pointing out you'll be a liability in the battle.'

'Ouch, that hurt.' She glanced at him. 'You seem pretty tense.'

'The pirates I mentioned earlier were some kind of ocean rulers. The few miles from south to north are all their controlled area. We are basically a fish compared to them. I just hope our men are still holding them down.'

They almost reached their destination. Lexi could see the men fighting with all their power. The ship's floor was decorated with pebbles of roses, not that Lexi had seen much in her life. The air smelled of dead fish, only the cloying smell was sweet. Belatedly, she noticed that both their men and the pirates were dripping with blood. All the blood drained from her face. She grabbed Dave's arm before they came to view to the pirates and hid behind the wall next to them. She put her hand on his mouth before he got a chance to speak.

'I know we can save them. We're going to beat the pirates hard before they take things that don't belong to them. But I don't want to hurt them as much as they hurt us. I really hate doing so.'

Dave took away her hand and put his hand on her head. 'You don't have to kill them if that's what you mean. Just wound them and stop them will be fine. Now, are you ready to go and save our men?'

She nodded, and the next thing she knew, she took out the blade by her side, shiny as the sea water and when moonlight cast an eerie look to the blade, as it was a gift from the nymph. Her ink dark hair weaved around her as she, using all the skills passed by her father and the training from Dave, attacked the pirates with such a force that shocked not only the pirates, but also the shipmates as a woman could fight so well in the midst of fog and dark. With the blade passed to her by her mother, she became the new version of her mother – the mighty warrior, who would do anything to protect her own men, to the point on laying down their life. And luckily, Lexi had someone currently by her side and looked out for her.

'Perfect hit, Lexi. Three o'clock direction. Good. Ten now. Use double hit. Good.' Though away from her, Dave still shouted out the things that Lexi had to look out to while using his two short yet merciless blades to fight off the pirates. Sooner rather than later, the pirates, black and blue, jumped back to their ship and crumbled to the floor, with a crowd of people surrounding, no wonder treating them, just like Lexi.

'Traver, can you help him? Thanks.' She went to Dave's side with a roll of cloth and some medicine to treat him. Dave sat on the floor and leaned his head onto the ship's wall. Lexi gasped at the condition of his shoulder.

'Oh God! It completely ripped open. Ok, Dave, just hold still. Now listen, I'm going to sew your shoulder back with my hair, ok? Next, I'll bandage your shoulder with the cloth along with the medicine I brought along from home and I swear it will be much better tomorrow that it could function well. You hear me?' He nodded weakly.

'Oh goodness, please stay with me just for a little while.' Her hands shook as she suppressed her tears. No time for tears, Lexi, she told herself. She took a deep breath and began her work. It didn't take long, her moves became mechanic and her eyes, in the eye of Dave, turned from violent in the fight to concentration, lack of grief and fear, just concrete and selfless. Or she had been selfless all along, thought Dave, as he gazed into Lexi's eyes for escapement from his pained body. After a few moments, her eyes turned relieved and she blew out a breath that she had been holding. She caught Dave's gaze and him, embarrassed, turned away quickly. Lexi smiled, though it seems forced. Dave turned back to her and held her pale hand. She held his between her hands.

'What is it Lexi? Talk to me.' Dave said softly.

'I'm just...' A tear dropped. 'I'm terrified. I saw the blood pouring out of your shoulder just now. And you were so pale, so white, I couldn't stop but think that you are going away, and I'm terribly haunted by this feeling now. Oh God,' she put her forehead to their linked hand, 'don't you dare to do this again.'

Dave gave out a little laugh, and pulled her to a hug. 'I swear I won't scare you like this again.'

She hit his arm playfully, 'Don't fool around now. I'm serious.' Her eyes darken a shade. 'I don't want to lose you.'

The eyes of Dave soften, 'I know. Sorry.' He smiled at Lexi, 'Luckily we drove the pirates away.'

'Yeh.' She held Dave up and they began to walk back to the cabins. She looked at Dave with a mischievous smile. 'Now you can't consider me as a liability anymore, right?'

'Fine, whatever you say.'

'Then am I the best fighter?'

'Oh, you must be.' He answered sarcastically.

A door slammed at the far end of the corridor and the Captain rushed to the side of his daughter with a frown upon his face.

'Oh dear, David. You should have told me that you lots are facing those nasty pirates. I should have come with you...'

'We're fine, father.' She glanced at Dave's shoulder. 'And we will be fine. Also, you see. Your daughter managed it well.'

'Yeah, Captain. She turned on her full vecom-mode that scared the pirates away effectivity. You should see the way her hair attacked the pirates like octopus. Flying all around like seagulls.' He shot a humorous look at Lexi.

'Oh shut up.'

Her father laughed and ushered them to the cabins. 'Go to rest now. When the sun rise, we are expected to be on the land of Lydia. According to your mother research, they're living a poor life and don't have anything decent to use. Hope that we can help them tomorrow.'

'Yes Captain.' said Dave, and Lexi, playfully.

The Captain patted Lexi head, nodded at Dave, and went back to his cabin.

Dave turned to Lexi to ask her a question, he turned his head yet stop short when he saw the face of Lexi. Concern and anxiousness covered her face. He hoped that she was still doing ok after the fight with the pirates just now. Though she had been practicing all through the years, it was still the first time her father actually let her to be on battle. Maybe her father finally saw that she grown up already.

Just looked away, Dave. He told himself.

Yet he couldn't. Instead, he noticed how worried she looked. The Captain had been far more lenient with her, and he had been telling to the others to take care of her, arranging Dave, the toughest of them all, to look after her. Anyone who had been with the Captain long enough would know something was up that the Captain didn't want to tell them, including Lexi. He didn't blame her for being anxious. He himself was. He just hoped she would be able to relax, at least for a while. Just after the daybreak, they had works to do. They couldn't manage to lose focus when they had a great mission tomorrow. The land of Lydia, according to the Captain, was a land of thirst, hunger, and tears. Only with their help would they be able to become a live city.

Lexi caught his staring and looked at him curiously, 'Have I got something on my face?'

Dave looked away immediately. What's with him this day? 'No, you're fine.'

'Oh.' She paused. 'You want to tell me something?'

He widen his eyes, 'How do you know?'

'I'm pretty good at reading you now you're always with me.' She shrugged. 'What is it?'

'It's actually nothing important... I'm just curious. How can your mother knew every places we had to go and that they're in need? Had she been there before? If so, why don't she help them back then?'

Lexi leaned against her cabin door. The corridor light casted upon her made her looked formidable yet gorgeous— goddess-like, Dave figured.

Stop letting your mind wandered, man. Dave pinched his hand to focus on the words of Lexi.

'My mum was once the greatest warrior in the whole country. Yet, as the emperor listened to the wicked that she would threaten his place, he forced her to enter the wild and never went back. Propitiously, her will to survive lead her travel through nations. She met different people, tribes, countries, which she figured out they need help in order to have a decent life that she once had. When she met my father, he had been distributing food to the homeless. Though he was a noble in his country, he still used his very own hand to do so. Before my mother grew sick and eventually returned to God, she worked on the map and the book on the people that she wished to help. My father, wanting to complete her wish, built Alice and brought all of us to serve the others.' She gave a small smile to Dave that he couldn't control himself to give her his. The purity of the hope her mother was magnificent. He had never heard something that noble. He had never believe it. But coming from the mouth of Lexi, it seems that even the least possible thing could happen.

Even miracles were possible.

'Done with the bedtime story, Dave?' Lexi raised an eyebrow. Dave was looking this relax was new to her, just like she was talking to another boy instead of the straight instructor of hers.

'Yes, Lexi. Thanks.' Dave cracked another smile, and it took all the breath out of Lexi. He was just so breathtaking, this normal side of him. 'Get ready for tomorrow now.'

'Dawn practice too?'

'Dawn practice then.'

They opened their cabins' doors, and stopped outside.

'Goodnight then, Dave.'

'You too, Lexi.'

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'We're here.' breathed Lexi. After her training with Dave, she was alert, and being alert in the land of Lydia wasn't a good thing.

Just being here was an agony. There were kids sitting closely to each other as they didn't have the strength to stand up to run. The elderly were lying on the ground, too sick to move. Just a few steps away, people were mourning over their dead relatives, yet they didn't have the power to bury them.

'Oh God, here's disaster. Let's find the one in charge.' Dave tucked Lexi, who was staring ahead blankly. She just nodded her head, too stunned to say anything.

Both of them went deeper and deeper into Lydia. Just after a while, they arrived to the lair of the leader, or the queen, Lydia. Lexi frowned where she looked at the place. It wasn't the same with the description of her mother. mentioned a treehouse. She wasn't expecting the grand palace just like the one back in China, her homeland.

'Wow, looks like we're back home.' Dave raised an eyebrow to Lexi, looking as confused as her.

'Oh, here's the mighty warriors of Alice.' A woman came out of the grand palace, with two tough-looking men beside her.

'How do you know who we're?' Dave asked, stepping forward and pushed Lexi behind him.

'Of course. You dress like her. Chinese.' She looked at Lexi. 'And you look like her.'

She descended down the stairs. 'I'm the leader of Lydia. I remembered your mother wanted to help us since the last time she was here. Come. Give me your gold and treasure.' She extended her hands to them.

'No way.' Lexi brushed away Dave and went face to face with Lydia. 'You're here, living peacefully in the palace of yours while your people suffer. I'll return to the coast and give the gift to the ones in need. They won't receive gold and treasure, only daily necessity will be given. Sorry your majesty, we've to go.' She grabbed Dave's hand and started to walk away, only to notice to be surrounded by Lydia's men.

'Not so fast. With Alice's daughter here, I believe I can get what I want. Fight if you want, you can't go far.' She said in an airy voice and went back into her den.

'You ready, Lexi?' Dave said under his breath.

'We don't necessarily have to fight, dear.' She looked at the confused Dave.

'Our men were already giving goods to the poor. I told them to do so after we went deep into the land so as to save time.' She looked at the sun, which was high in the sky. 'They should've done their job.'

'You mean, we can just escape? How?'

Dave looked around. There're just trees.

Trees, he thought. The ruler here once lived in a treehouse. They should have a route up in the trees for the ruler to move around the land without difficulties. He looked at Lexi and saw she was smirking at him.

'Fine. I hope you remember today's lesson. Put the center of your focus on your shoulder.' He looked at the soldiers around them, relaxing as they thought they had them trapped.

They didn't.

'Three. Two. One. GO!' Both of them ran up the tree beside them, leaving the shocked soldiers behind them.

'Look. Over there.' Lexi pointed breathlessly. There's a road built out of woods. It led to the sea where Alice parked.

'Come on, Lexi.' Dave pulled her hand and together, they went back to Alice and wait for another adventure awaited.

# Death Discovery

*Hong Kong Academy, Raymond, Sierra – 18*

**KKRRRSSSHHH!** A violent force makes my body jolt forward. My vision fades to black; it becomes clear again. I find myself looking down at an urn with my name on it. I only see the urn, everything around me is hazy.

*In loving memory  
Deidre Li  
December 25, 2000 – December 1, 2019  
Loving daughter*

It seems that I'm dead. *Wait what?! I'm dead? I'm Dead! Why am I dead? This is just a bad dream, right?* The hazy environment turns into my living room and people appear in dark formal wear.

"...I'll miss her. She was taken from us too soon. She had her whole life in front of her. Wherever you are Deirdre, I hope you are in peace."

After Dad finishes speaking, everyone gets up and start heading for the potluck. "Dad! I'm not dead!" I yelled out. No one responds. I run over to my relatives, waving my arms frantically in their face. "Are you guys deaf or what?! I'm not dead, I'm right here!" Nothing happens. *Are they... not able to see me? This is a joke!*

I run out of my house and head over to visit Sidney: my best friend and the only person who can tell me what's going on. She lives down the street from our house, about 5 minutes away. It doesn't take me long to find her house. A decent-sized gray house for a family of three. I see Sidney practicing shooting hoops in the driveway.

Just as she was preparing to shoot I walk up and wave to her. "Hey Sidney!" She drops the basketball and looks like a deer in the headlights. *Why is she so surprised? Am I really dead?*

"You're not real, are you? You can't be alive, you're dead." Sidney talks to herself, as if to reassure herself that I don't exist.

"What do you mean I'm not real, Sidney? I don't understand what's going on! First I wake up and see my urn, my dad gives a sad speech about me being dead at a funeral party, and then you act as if I'm some ghost?!"

*I'm getting really tired of this. Everyone that I know is acting as if they can't see me. If this is a prank, then someone has a terrible sense of humour since I'm not laughing.*

Sidney looks at me then looks to the left and right to see if anyone else is around. It was just us. "Of course I'm just imagining things! You died two weeks ago! How is it possible that I can see you?"

"It's been two weeks? I thought it was December first? Why do you keep insisting I'm a ghost? If I'm a ghost, then prove it," I said.

Sidney picks up her basketball. "Hey what are you – " She throws it straight at my head.

I wasn't able to dodge. Just as I was expecting the basketball to hit my face, it didn't. Instead, the basketball flies through my head and goes across the street, onto the neighbor's door step.

Sidney's eyes widen and so do mine.

"I really am dead! No wonder everyone was acting strange!" I said.

Sidney looked troubled, as if she was pondering over something. *It's normal, I mean, how would you react if you found out your dead best friend was a ghost?*

“Sidney? Are you okay?” I said. I move closer to her.

She looks up at me. “You really are here. I thought I was just imagining things,” Sidney said.

“Guess I’m actually a ghost. If I’m a ghost, then I’ll assume that I have unfinished business here,” I said.

“What kind of unfinished business?” She asked.

“Well, from what I’ve see on TV, a ghost’s unfinished business is knowing how they died. Now that I think about it, how did I die?” *I remember everything else but my death! How is that possible?*

Sidney shifts her gaze away from me. “I don’t know.”

“Well, do you know where we could start?” I said.

“No,” she replied.

“What do you mean? You said I died two weeks ago, you had plenty of time to find out from my family. They would have told you since we’ve known each other for years,” I said in frustration.

“Well... We could go check at the police station? My dad might know something.” Sidney shrugged.

“That’s a start.”

Sidney and I take a drive to the police station in her parent’s old dented Volkswagen beetle. Well, technically only Sidney did because I’m a ghost. I just floated besides her in the passenger seat.

Before we arrived at the police station, we picked up a dozen donuts along the way. Our plan is to steal the medical examiner’s autopsy report because it is possible that the police found me when I died. We pull into the local police station and see a couple of officers inside.

*Okay, so here’s a quick summary of the plan. Sidney enters the building and gives the police officers inside the donuts to make us seem inconspicuous. I’ll have to come up with a distraction somehow. Then, Sidney will go to her dad’s desk and get his ID for the file room and take the autopsy report.*

Before we enter the building, Sidney and I look at each other.

“Are you sure this is going to work?” Sidney questions. She raises one eyebrow.

“Of course! Officers love donuts!” I said.

“Right,” Sidney says with a deadpan expression. *This is unusual...Sidney would normally be excited about this. “Borrowing” from the police in order to help her dear old friend: Me!*

We go inside. “Hello, what can I do for you Sidney?” It’s Officer Hinkley. Sidney and I have known him for pretty much our whole lives. Since we live in a small town, everyone knows everyone.

“Hey Officer Hinkley, I got you and the others some donuts. I need something from my dad, do you know where he is?” Sidney replied.

“Oh, thanks! They look delicious! Your dad is eating lunch right now, you wanna wait until he comes back?”

“Yeah, I can wait.”

*Now I need to play my role as the ghost... How can I make things paranormal? I only discovered that I was ghost until a couple of hours ago...*



I look at all the offices and try to imagine everything flying around in the room. Nothing happened. Instead everyone starts to move in slow motion.

“You look like you need some help?” a voice behind me asks.

I turn around and see a man in his 20s with bed hair. Grinning mischievously.

“With what?” I ask.

“With causing a distraction of course!” he exclaims.

“Yeah but who are y—”

“I know this seem random and you have questions and all but I’ll be right back. Here’s your distraction!” The man disappears just like that. That was weird.

Suddenly, I see people’s desks floating in the air. The lights started to flicker fast. Printer paper started to chase the officers. Officer Hinkley was sitting in his chair eating a donut, watching all the chaos ensue.

Since everyone was distracted, I went over to the file room and saw Sidney with my file.

“I got the file, let’s go,” Sidney says. Just as she was leaving the file room, time stops completely. It’s the weird guy again, but this time with parted hair. *Is this guy a ghost too?*

“Nope. Not a ghost, but rather a psychopomp. I’m here because of your predicament. It’s rare that spirits stay tethered to this world. The only reason is because something is keeping you here. Once you find out what it is, you can no longer stay here,” says the weird man.

“I already know what I need to look for: how I died,” I said.

“I can see that.” he looks towards Sidney who has my file on hand. “However, your friend here knows more than she lets on.” The man looks down on a pile of papers and picks them up.

He shows me what’s on each sheet. It states ‘AUTOPSY REPORT... IDENTITY: Deidre Li.’ The papers list that an old dented Volkswagen Beetle was photographed driving away from the scene. The crime was detailed as a ‘hit & run.’ In the pile were some photos held together with several photos from a traffic camera. The car shown was Sidney’s. The report continued to describe that I was run over and found dead, sustaining fatal injuries.

*NoNoNoNoNoNo... Why?! Did Sidney really do this?*

“She did,” the psychopomp stated. He disappears, leaving me with the truth.

“No! She couldn’t have! If she did, she would’ve told me already!” I ran out of the police station and met up with Sidney, who was waiting at the parking lot.

“So the report here says you died because of car accident. So that’s it I guess. You should be moving on now.” Sidney read the file, avoiding eye contact.

*I can’t believe it. She lied straight to my face, and she wasn’t even convincing!*

“That’s a lie and you know it!” I stormed off and started walking away from her. I didn’t want to listen to her pathetic apology. Not after this.

“Deidre I can explai—” Sidney tries to reach out to me, but I cut her off.

“How could you lie to me?! Out of all the people that I know, you were the one I trusted the most. Yet, you lied to me.” I was devastated. The one person that I knew my whole life always told me the truth, but this time she lied.

“I didn’t want to tell you because I thought you would never forgive me. I lost control of the car when I was trying to pick you up from your job, and I ended up hitting you. I—I got scared, so I drove away. When I—I went b—back the police were there a—and the ambulance took y—you away.” Sidney started breaking down in tears.

I was heartbroken. Not by the fact that I was run over by my best friend. Even though that is shocking in itself. But by the fact that she lied instead of telling me the truth. As much as I wanted to forgive her, I couldn’t bear to be around her. Not after this.

Immediately I start fading. My hands are gone and I starts losing my arm. Sidney comes over. “Please! I’m sorry! Don’t go!” she screams. She tries to grab my hand, but I phase right through her. She desperately tries again, but without success.

I got what I needed. Closure on my death. It didn’t make sense for me to stay around. I was ready to go to the afterlife.

My vision started to go black, it was getting harder and harder to see. Soon, I see nothing.

# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

*Kellett School, Lo, Jacob – 16*

Through his locked brows, Emperor Zhu Di<sup>1</sup> gazed at the distancing fleet against the violet rays of the setting sun. He hid his anxiety and excitement as the ambitious maiden voyage of Ming Treasure Fleet set sail. A total of eight ships formed the fleet that was chartered to stretch the dynasty's reach and to deliver the king's dominating grace to the common people far away. The ships were spread out in an orderly fashion, resembling a war-time naval fleet. Chained from stern to stern, it organized itself into a triangular shape, like a piercing arrowhead. As the fleet disappeared into the shimmering sea, a new chapter was being penned.

"I've finally made it." Li Sheng, a young man in tattered clothes heaved a sigh of relief, thinking back to the hardship he had experienced just to be on the ship.

"All the humiliation and pain would be worth it if I succeed. Mother, I will seek justice for you, and Zhu Di will pay for what he did!" Li's eyes glimmered with surge wrath, filled with determination. His glaring stare fixed onto Emperor Zhu Di who sat proudly ashore in his crimson robe, waving his farewell to the fleet. Suddenly, interrupted, a demanding voice pierced through the warm breeze of the sea.

"Oi! Li Sheng! Can you not see that my boots are dirty? Hurry up and clean it, or is it that you want another "tattoo" on your face?" The sailor mercilessly shouted in a condescending tone while he gave Li a menacing glance. Li Sheng nodded as he rushed to retrieve a towel, preparing to wipe off the dirt.

"Good boy, good!! Now, get out of here and clean our squadron's room! If I see a single speck of dust in the room, you will... Hahaha! You know what's gonna happen, right? Shoo!" The bulky sailor waved him away, continuing to drink out of his tankard with his friends.

"Success is within reach... just a little more!" Li Sheng encouraged himself as he walked towards the squadron room. His hatred grew even stronger as it became harder and harder to hide from the naked eye. On the other hand, most of the other sailors around him were all relaxed, celebrating for the start of their operation. Even the Ten Great Guards, who wear an expressionless face, were drinking and chatting. They were truly carefree; being chosen for this mission was a gift from Heaven! This mission chartered by the Emperor is safe and pays extremely well. Not only that these sailors could live a luxurious life on the journey, but they could also go straight into retirement after the operation finished! How could they not be ecstatic?

Emperor Zhu Di has gone all out in his quest for eternal life. The quest for was cloaked with by the voyage's public image is to spread the glory of the Ming Dynasty, the grace of the king and to chart new frontiers. According to the country's Royal Diviner, this voyage would grant the Emperor just enough karma to break the shackles of mortality. Any error in the operation would ruin his transcendence opportunity, so every sailor was meticulously picked.

Abroad the magnificent fleet were happy crews en route to riches, of course, with the exception of Li Sheng. As the abandoned child of the Emperor, Li Sheng would rather die than see his father succeed in transcending to immortality. His hatred towards his father was unfathomably deep, and he was willing to pay for Zhu Di's death with his own. Plotting to kill the king was practically impossible, so ruining this operation was the best he could do. Even if karma didn't truly exist and would have no effect on his Majesty's mortality, it would still deal a heavy blow to the Emperor's reputation. For Li Sheng, either outcome was better alternatives to swallowing his pride in silence and in perpetuity.

Now that Li Sheng was finally on the ship, he could finally execute the final step of his revenge plan. However, it was the hardest step to achieve as it tolerated no mistakes. His goal was to set fire to all eight ships, thoroughly destroying the operation. Achieving this was extremely difficult, but fortunately, Li Sheng

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<sup>1</sup> Zhu Di, the Ming Emperor, also known as Yongle Emperor, was the third Emperor of the Ming Dynasty, who reigned from 1402 to 1424. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yongle\\_Emperor](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yongle_Emperor)

had something to draw reference from – the Battle of Red Cliffs during the Three Kingdoms period. Although the two situations weren't identical, there were still many similarities. In fact, it could be slightly simpler for Li Sheng given he is already on the ship he wants to set aflame, risking his own demise.<sup>2</sup>

This historical phenomenon could possibly, again, be shown to the world, and Li Sheng's idea was hugely feasible. Since the voyage fleets were chained together, it was very possible that his plan would work flawlessly. There was no shortage of flammable goods aboard as well from kindlings to whisky. Everything was ready, and all he lacked was an opportunity for him to act.

"I should probably get this over with as soon as possible. I can't tolerate the humiliation anymore! Tonight, tonight! I would burn all of you into ashes! Chen Dalong, let's see if you can still pick on me after tonight!" Li Sheng thought to himself, chuckling lightly.

Temporarily parking his thoughts, he unlocked the archaic wooden door and entered the squadron's room. He coughed as the smells of musty wood seeped into his nose. As dust in the room danced in the air, a sudden fleeting sense of calm set in as the memory of his childhood flashed before him.

By the riverside, there stood a mother and a child. The gushing sounds from the flowing river paired with the picturesque view were breathtaking. A boy was running around, picking flowers from the beautiful grassland, trying to impress his mother. His mother's vision, however, was drawn onto the bridge afar, and the scent of disappointment is fast approaching.

Suddenly, a man dashed across the bridge wearing a weary face as he waved at the duo. The mother's spirit brightened and her smile blossomed like a flower. The boy bubbled with joy, running towards the man in the robe, giving him a welcoming hug.

Time mercilessly passed as the trio chatted, bursting in laughter.

"Jing—er, I've really got to go. Until next time then!" The man stood up as he adjusted his attire. He gave them a warm smile with guilt.

"Have you not told them yet?"

"Next time, next time. I'm still waiting for a good opportunity. You know, the Royal court has been really unstable recently. There seems to be a divide amongst the officials. I promise, for the last time, I'll get it done as soon as possible! I don't know when we'll be able to meet again, so take the money, alright? Take care!" Zhu Di answered with hesitation. As he spoke, he quickly left the scene, unwilling to turn his head to see the women's disappointed face. He was ashamed, yet he was powerless.

And that was the last memory of Li Sheng with his father. The bag of money from Zhu Di was quickly used up, and her mother's laborious life began. One Month. One year. Ten years. They continued to wait as Li Sheng's mother health conditions slowly deteriorated, constantly working overtime to support their survival. Li Sheng could only watch as her rosy cheeks losing their vibrant colour; her once-beautiful face filling up with wrinkles; her silky dark hair turning white.

"Don't blame your father, alright? I couldn't raise properly, and I've failed to fulfil my duty as a mother! Your father is the Emperor, so how would he have the time to take care of us? If fate allows, we'll meet again in the Underworld..."

Snapping out of his thoughts, a bitter smile crept onto his face. Clasp his hands together, he took a deep breath and held his tears in. He retrieved a towel from his bag as he dejectedly mopped each furniture.

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<sup>2</sup> [Historic context: The Battle of Red Cliffs is one of the most significant battles in Chinese history. The Sun-Liu side achieved victory with an enormous number disadvantage (fifty thousand troops against eight hundred thousand). They sent unmanned fire ships towards the Cao navy army, which set the whole navy ablaze. By manipulating the wind direction, the fire caused a "chain effect" as the fire passed on from one ship to another.]

Swells of tears would occasionally form near his eyelids, which then Li Sheng would sniff quietly as he wiped them off with his trembling hands. His lips trembled, muttering incoherent words, eyes twitching with pain and anger.

"It's all because of you! Why... why couldn't you just be a man for once, and keep your promises? You are the King! Who could act against your words? You liar... Ten years! We waited for ten years! We didn't ask for much, yet you couldn't fulfil it with your almighty power? I rather not have a father like you!" Tears uncontrollably streamed down his face, and his face flushed red. What caused his rant and rave? Was it anger? No, that wasn't accurate. Was it sorrow? That wasn't it. It was disappointment and hopelessness. He had adored his Father, even though they didn't meet much. His father had an unfathomably high position in his heart, comparable to an image of an omnipotent Deity. But now? Everything had crumbled, and only hatred remained.

"Zhu Di... Zhu Di! You're a liar! Mum truly loved you, but what did she get in return? The Great Emperor of the Ming Dynasty? What a joke! You don't deserve her love; you don't even deserve to live!"

Soon it was already dusk. The room now was impeccably clean and tidy, and Li Sheng could finally plan his revenge. Sneaking into the storage room with dazzling treasures, he recorded the layout of the room. By igniting the ridiculous amount of alcohol here, it could definitely cause a unceasing fire. As long as he could time the explosion perfectly, this voyage ship was bound to be reduced to ashes. However, Li Sheng was more ambitious. Destroying one ship was not enough for him to vent his anger; he wanted to thoroughly ruin this operation which will require the cooperation of the heavens' wind as he waited patiently for everyone to let their guard down.

"Midnight, it is then. No one would expect an accident to occur on the very first day of the operation. The wind seems to be quite strong as well, and it's blowing towards the east side. It probably wouldn't burn all seven voyage ships, but burning four of them shouldn't be a problem. Father, you can finally experience powerlessness and disappointment that Mother and I felt..."

The silvery moon crawled out from the endless horizon as Li Sheng made some final preparations. Surprisingly, it went smoother than expected as the sailors didn't give Li Sheng any trouble. The guards at the Treasury were also fairly lax, probably due to the influence of alcohol. Everything was ready, and everything seemed to be in Li Sheng's favour.

Li Sheng was sweating as his hands trembled, holding the flint and steel. His resolution from before disappeared as he continued to hesitate. After all, this fire would kill hundreds of sailors, and his heart wavered. He was stuck in a dilemma. He didn't want to put all his effort to waste, but he didn't want to harm the innocents either.

"That bastard must not live eternally... how would I face my mother in the Underworld if that actually happened!? As long as I'm alive, I would not allow that to happen! But the majority of these sailors have done nothing wrong, and they do not deserve their deaths either. Just what should I do!?" Li Sheng growled as he continued to ponder. Towards his father and those bullies, he wouldn't mind being merciless; towards the innocents, he didn't want to drag them into his personal grudge. Li Sheng's morals wouldn't be easily swayed, despite his deep abomination towards his father.

"I'll just burn one ship... and I'll notify the innocent sailors before the fire spreads too much. If I burn the treasures and sink this ship, he wouldn't be able to accumulate enough karma for his transcendence. This wouldn't kill anyone either. Hm, I guess I will make do with this plan. If Zhu Di still manages to transcend, then at least I've done all I can. Mum, I'm sure you'll agree with my method, right?"

He knelt in front of a tinder bundle that he had prepared beforehand as he struck the steel rock onto the edge of the flint, followed by a quick downward motion. The small spark landed on the bundle as it glowed silently. Wisps of smokes started to appear, and he patiently watched the fire swallowing the fibrous materials. Then, he started pouring litres of alcohol onto the floor nearby, and Li Sheng left the treasury stealthily.

"Twenty minutes and the smoke should start to become noticeable. By then, the fire would already be unstoppable. When they find out the accident, I'll probably be executed. Death – bring it on! At least, I've avenged my mother! I've died a glorious death!"

The next twenty minutes were abnormally quiet. Li Sheng, with a carefree attitude, stared at the starry sky, appreciating the world's beauty. His mind was more tranquil than ever, and he began to wonder what would happen if he decided to not seek his revenge. Would he be able to live a carefree life like other sailors on the ship? He imagined the confrontations of the voyage ships with foreigners, establishing trades, the discovery of new islands, and even the brutal sea battles against pirates. A smile crept across his face, and his heart wavered again. Was his decision a right one?

He didn't regret his decision. If he had stayed, he would still be bullied by others, and he would never attain true happiness as a part of him would constantly strive for revenge.

Smoke began to flood the sky as the treasury door was ignited. The silence was destroyed as the ship fell into chaos. Sailors rushed out of their resting rooms, anxiously waiting for the Captain's instructions. Some immediately tried to put out the fire, but the flame was unaffected. Some ran around, forcefully waking people up from their intoxicated state. Li Sheng watched on the side, observing the situation and merely smirked.

"Here goes the treasury, and the boat. At least all of you get to stay alive, so I've no regrets either. Farewell! Mother, I'll accompany you in a few minutes' time!" Li Sheng thought to himself as he walked to the stern of the ship despite the chaos. He filled his jacket with heavy rocks, and he dove into the boundless sea without hesitation.

The wave struck him as Li Sheng sank and drifted. He didn't struggle, and his face even carried a smile. He allowed himself to sink, being suffocated by the water. His body yearned for air, but his strong will refused. He sank until he lost all consciousness.

...

Years later, the voyage was complete as the sailors returned home after the long journey. The original eight voyage ships whittled down into seven, and the Emperor was furious. Although transcending became impossible, this glorious adventure was still recorded onto the books of history, passed down for generations. On the historical records, there only had been seven voyage ship, and its sole mission was to distribute to the glory of the Ming Dynasty. He hid his intentions to transcend to an immortal, and he mercilessly issued a ban on anything regarding it. The Royal Diviner was killed, and even some normal civilians. "Shut it, or die with it." This attitude established by the court scared many people, and this truth slowly disappeared from the world.

On the book of history, it noted:

There were seven voyages by the Ming Treasure Fleet, and the people on board had many adventures. It carried cargoes of gold and silk and other precious items for the captain and the sailors to give away as gifts. Sometimes they met peaceful people and did give away the wonderful presents they had brought from the Emperor, making new relationships with a variety of countries. The mission was a success, and this mission shall be remembered forever.

# Tale of a Thousand Suns

King George V School, Cheung, Geraldine – 16

Calicut, 1433

“I’m not dying.”

At first his question goes unanswered. With the sleeve of his robes pushed back past his elbow, Zheng He watches as the physician’s fingertips prod at his exposed forearm, pressing at his raised vein. Outside, the sun is going down, and shadows play and shift over the physician’s fingers as he frowns in concentration.

“I am unsure, Admiral.” Li Wei says at last, straightening up and shaking his head. Zheng He lowers his sleeve. “You understand, of course— that when one is ill at sea—”

In that moment Zheng He wants to reply that he does understand, but he doesn’t. For years his rule with ill sailors has been to abandon them on the shore to await death, so that the rest of the crew might not fall ill with the same sickness. It is a cruel rule, but necessary for the survival of the fleet. But now, when it is his turn to face such a fate, he is not so sure, and the hesitation scares him.

“Is this illness a certainty, doctor?” he asks Li Wei.

“Pardons, admiral, but if you were not ill I would not be here.”

“Perhaps you misunderstood me. Must I be put ashore?”

Li Wei rubs at the back of his neck. “May I speak freely, admiral?”

“If you must.”

“Well pardons, admiral, but you are not young.” Li Wei looks apologetic. “This illness may take you, or it may not. The best course of action—”

“I know.”

“It is for the good of the fleet, admiral. For six voyages the fleet has remained strong. It cannot be allowed to wane.”

“I know that too. But I want to wait until we are sure that this is true illness rather than something minor. But until then, do not put me ashore. That will be all, doctor. Dismissed.”

Li Wei nods and bows before exiting, and Zheng He sinks back onto the wicker mat bed. Outside, framed against the cold light, he can faintly see Li Wei’s dark silhouette, speaking with one of his colleagues— one of the 180 physicians aboard his several *baochuan*.

He does not want to meet his fate. For a week now the sickness and the coughing has persisted, and Li Wei seems to want to leave him behind on the shores of Calicut. In fourteen days the fleet will leave Calicut for Hormuz, and by then Zheng He will have to have made up his mind about staying and leaving.

“You are an admiral.” He mutters to himself. “You’ve sailed to over a hundred shores. You are not afraid. You’ll do your duty, and no less.”

But some part of him still refuses to. He chooses to push it from his mind.

Sleep is a long time coming that night.

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Dian Lake, 1377

Ma He does not remember when they first began to play in the lake by the house. Perhaps it was his father who had led him there first, or perhaps his brother, Ma Wenming. Wenming is a year Ma He’s senior, and wherever Wenming goes, Ma He always follows.

Only today, he is not so sure. There is a limestone cliff near the house that overlooks the deep waters of the Dian Lake, easily some twenty *chi* in height from base to summit. When he was a boy he had witnessed Wenming ascend the cliff until he was a distant figure easily hidden by Ma He’s thumb, and had watched him leap from the summit into the lake below. As he fell he had become a blurred silhouette, bird-like and framed by sunlight, a brief laugh escaping his mouth before he’d plunged into the icy water with a spray of white foam.

And now Wenming has led Ma He to the cliff, and it is his turn to take the leap. The clear water below now looks like the mouth of a yawning chasm, mysterious and impossibly wide and a deep, pensive blue. And Wenming wants Ma He to hurl himself into it.

“Will I die?” He asks.

He is leaning against the wind, which is rippling the water of the lake and nudging Ma He towards the cliff’s edge.

Wenming folds his arms. "You saw me do it, Ma He. You should know."

"Will it hurt?"

"Oh, come on, Ma He. Be brave."

He inches forward. A quote from one of his books comes to mind— *Wisdom, compassion, and courage are the three universally recognized moral qualities of men.*

He decides to leap.

The wind whistles in his ears. A blur of white sunlight glances off the deep blue water below. Then there is a splash, a sudden shock of cold, and a wall of icy water erupts around him as he plunges downwards. The world around him is sapphire blue and still, and silver streams of sunlight light the depths.

*Be brave*, Wenming's voice, saying it into his ear, but that is impossible. Ma Wenming died years ago.

And then Zheng He wakes up.

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The next day, before sunrise, he summons Li Wei again.

"Have you rested, Admiral?"

"Rested? May I remind you, Li, that I have over a hundred ships to command?"

"Pardons, Admiral, but all night as well as all day?"

Zheng He presses his fingers to his eyelids. When he was younger, perhaps, the work the Emperor has given him was tiring at the most. But grey has begun to thread his hair, and everything he does seems to take a toll on him.

"Put me ashore." He says, suddenly.

Li Wei's eyebrows rise. "Admiral?"

"You heard what I said."

"You have made up your mind?"

"Put me ashore. The fleet will sail to Hormuz without me." He removes from his sleeve a sheet of paper. In the pre-dawn light it is thin and translucent as a moth's wing. He has spent the early hours of the morning setting his brush to it, covering it with row upon row of carefully inked characters. "For when the fleet leaves for Hormuz."

Li Wei takes it.

By the time Zheng He is settled on one of the white sand beaches that dot the shore the first rays of the sun have already coloured the sky a hesitant, faint blue, bathing his distant fleet in a myriad of shadow and light. As per Zheng He's own rule, Li Wei leaves him with a crackling fire, and enough food and fresh water to last him three days, but no more than that. *Without water I have seven days.* Zheng He thinks. He swallows and nods Li Wei a farewell, choosing to watch the distant ships across the water as the rowboat the landing party has brought with them rows back without him.

Having nothing to do for once, the sun rises and sets over Calicut with astonishing speed. He does not touch the food, instead watching the stars begin to show overhead. He knows the names of every which one he can use to find his way, but either the dull thirst beginning to set in or his gnawing hunger has caused that knowledge to seep from his mind.

He does not know how long he remains awake. A fit of coughs racks him in the night, and in the morning he coughs and sees droplets of blood spattered on the white sand. For a long time he thinks that sleep will never overtake him, but eventually he does.

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*Calicut, 1407*

The first voyage had been the worst.

The first night in his cabin, Zheng He had been unable to sleep. Eventually it had gotten so bad that he had had to rise and make his way above decks, the better to lean against the gunwale and feel the cold sea wind buffeting his face. Outside the distant stars, which had always calmed him down in past years, only seemed to agitate him more.

He places his hands a shoulder width apart on the gunwale and watches the dark sea in silence, lost in thought of storms and shipwrecks and impossibly high waves. It is a while before he realizes he is being spoken to.

"Ma He."



He turns.

The man who has suddenly appeared beside him bears him an astonishing resemblance, although he has died long ago. Both men's eyes are almond shaped and obsidian black, although Zheng He's hair is still dark and his father's has become streaked with grey. The latter approaches and leans beside him against the gunwale, dark eyes scanning the sea.

"You're scared." Says Ma Haji.

"Yes, Father."

"You fear death."

"Yes, Father."

"Why?"

Zheng He swallows. "Perhaps because of what lies there."

"Why fear it?"

"Father, this is the fear of the unknown."

Ma Haji strokes the wooden railing beneath his arms with one finger. "Look around you, Ma He. Where are you going?"

"The ship is on course to Champa."

"And after that?"

"Java. Malacca. Aru."

"Afterwards?"

"After that I cannot say for sure."

"And do you know what Champa is like?"

"No, Father."

"Do you fear it?"

He thinks before answering. "No. I have been there. I have seen the sun rise there, and at Java, and Malacca, and above the mountains of Ceylon besides. Every journey brings another sunrise, and I have seen a thousand. I don't think I fear it."

Ma Haji smiles. "Precisely. Be brave, Ma He."

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At dawn, two days after the fleet has left for Hormuz, the crew scatters Zheng He's ashes over the sea.

Li Wei stands at the stern of a *baochuan*, the revolving sail of one of the ship's nine masts casting him in shade. The sheet of paper Zheng He has left him is clutched tightly in one hand.

He has not read it yet, but now he opens it, his eyes roving over the lines of clear writing, mouthing the words to himself as he reads.

*In the course of a thousand sunrises and seven voyages we have traversed more than one hundred thousand li of immense water spaces, and have beheld in the ocean huge waves like mountains rising sky-high. We have set eyes on barbarian regions far away hidden in a blue transparency of light vapours, while our sails, loftily unfurled like clouds, day and night continued their course with starry speed, breasting the savage waves as if we were treading a public thoroughfare.*

*The fleet now sails on to Hormuz without me— I am on my own voyage now. I know not where that may lead, and I know not how I will get there, but it is another voyage all the same. For what is another sunrise, except for a new day, and a new adventure?*

*— Calicut, written in the reign of the Xuande Emperor*

Li Wei finishes reading and folds the paper closed, looking upwards as he does so.

The sun has risen above the horizon before him, lighting the sky with swashes of orange and gold. Another morning has come— it is a new day once more.

# New Tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

*Korean International School, Shrestha, Prasan – 16*

They were sailing through the smooth surface of a calm yet unpredictable body of water. Ming commanded the rest of the crew to prepare themselves as he could see a distant threat to their vessel. They even named their craft as 'Lady Mary'. They cared and treated this ship as if they were caring for their own women. However, Ming was disparate from the rest of his crew. The closest mortal he could relate to was his little brother, Wong.

When they both first joined the crew, Ming was an entirely different person from what he has become now. He was a very frank person and if anyone in the crew needed mental stability to prepare themselves for the raging seas, they would turn to him. Unfortunately, on one of their various excursions on the waters, many crew members were unprepared as it was their very first encounter with a whirlpool. This whirlpool was not an ordinary one as it somehow seemed like it was sucking in tornados.

The inexperienced crew were struggling to maintain the raging tides of the sea and it could be seen how their lack of qualification was affecting their vessel. Crew members were swinging monkeys on the masts of the ship. Crew members on the ground were rolling like bowling balls from one side of the deck to another. However, there was one member who looked remained still as water. Ming had the mindset of a true captain and was already thinking of methods to get out of this situation. He knew how to get out of this obstacle and was quick to command the crew. He ordered them to first drop the anchor and then rotate the sail away from the whirlpool. The crew were confused from this but soon understood his idea as the ship had turned completely away from the whirlpool. The crew then lifted the anchor back up from the ocean and immediately set sail away from the whirlpool. There were also other ships nearby from them and Ming helped them with his wit. As a reward for aiding them away from danger, they rewarded them with enough supplies to buy a whole new ship. The supplies included silks, gold and other rare materials.

People started applauding the captain after they were a safe distance away from danger. Ming received their applause well as he was thanking and complimenting the crowd. He noticed a distinctive voice that was not heard by him. He usually would be embarrassed by Wong after he had done something of this sort. He would jump on him with joy and would start the 'hooray chant'. However, this time there was no 'hooray chant' or someone jumping on him unexpectedly. Ming immediately started a search for his little brother and as soon as he wasn't found on the ship, Ming went out on sail on one of their emergency boats back to the whirlpool.

The rest of the crew was against this idea, but they couldn't stop the captain from making his own decision, especially after he single-handedly saved all the crew. Ming paddled and paddled to no end with the crew soon picking him up from a nearby shore where he had passed out from exhaustion. As he was making his way back to 'Lady Mary', he thought of what he had just lost. He lost his yang to his yin, his sun to his moon and his light to his shadow.

Existing crew members then started rumors that the captain had turned to a person who felt no empathy towards anyone, almost like a sociopath. For this reason, the captain experienced unspeakable amounts of prejudice from new crew members that he was isolated from almost all the crew members. The only people that he could still communicate without any glares were his two close friends, Tao and Cheng, who were also close friends with his little brother. It had almost been two years since his brother went missing and now Ming was feeling a sense of déjà vu. He could see a distant whirlpool stirring up but in the corner of his eye, he could also see a battle of two ships. He used his spyglass to further examine the ships when he suddenly discovered something unthinkable. He could see his little brother, Wong, defending himself against his enemies. Immediately after he saw this, Ming set sail towards them to further aid his brother. The crew were soon close enough to board the ships and they could quickly dissemble the enemies. After the aftermath, Ming could finally have a chance to catch up with Wong.

Ming was in so much joy that he didn't even realised how long they were having a conversation for. Ming wanted to know how much he had changed since the incident, specifically how he had escaped an impossible disaster. Ming realised both of them were starting to feel dehydrated and went to fetch water. Although Wong insisted that he would go, Ming stressed that it was the least he could do after losing him. As he made his way back to his chamber, he started to hear small decibels of mumbling and grumbling. As soon as he opened the door to his chamber, he could spot that all his crew were tied in ropes and Wong's crew gathering the supplies Ming once received for the price of his brother. Wong's crew were grumbling over how their supplies were inadequate. He tried to set his crew free with his blade but was quickly dismantled by Wong's crew.

Ming then woke up to a grinning face of his brother Wong. Ming was really confused in why his brother would do this. Wong emphasised that he could no longer stay behind his shadow while he was only recognised as a 'second-hand' version of his brother. As they were going back and forth, Ming's crew members were slowly decreasing in numbers. Ming glanced to the edge of the ship and could see his crew members walking the plank blindfolded. He could also see his bare crew members being sliced by the pirates if they refused to walk. In a fit of rage, Ming untied his ropes with what seemed like brute strength. It is true that Ming was an entirely different person after his brother had gone missing, but it also taught him a lesson. He used his favors from the loyal relationships he had established with multiple countries and learnt many things from them. He grew much stronger from all the training he had received from these countries and it was for preventing an incident like his brother's.

He stood up to the crowd of pirates standing out because not only was he the only member of his crew who was still unscathed, he also had a look in his eyes that screamed out vengeance. As the pirates were preparing to attack, Ming was suddenly obscured. He had deployed multiple smoke bombs that contained quick burning tar and rags. This caused the pirates to panic and started swinging their sharp swords around them. Although this did protect them from attacks, they could also swing at their allies which led to them having double-edged swords. Wong was not found anywhere in the battle because he did not care for his allies like Ming does.

Although Ming had disguised himself in the thick smokescreen, he was not delusional to think that he could take out all the pirates. He was stalling for time hoping that the rest of his fleet could see the signal produced by the smoke. After some time had passed, the smoke had dissipated but also the tied crew members.

Hanging from the top of the mast was Ling and as soon as the pirates spotted him, they were swarmed with reinforcements of the Ming Treasure Fleet. Although some crew members were lost in battle, Ling did not want the pirates to face death and left them on a deserted island. Even though Ming's eyes were glowing with vengeance earlier, he wanted nothing but to reconcile with his brother.

With now a new goal of finding and reconciling with his brother, Ming had now set sail again. This was the seventh time that Ming had gone on a voyage and he also had a feeling that it would be the most important. After months on the unpredictable ocean, there was still no sight of Wong. Most of his crew members had already concluded that he had dropped to the ocean bed from getting caught in the crossfire when the reinforcements arrived. Despite all odds were against Ming, he still had only one thought in mind. He told everyone every day of the journey that, 'If my brother could survive a whirlpool, he can survive this.' Although Ming hoped that this would motivate the crew to pull through this journey, almost half of the crew had quit or joined another ship.

After days of rationing food, they could only last one more night. That same night, Ming was scouring the sea with his spyglass to hopefully find his brother. He could not find his brother, but he did see a battle between two ships occurring near them and it was odd for Ming. The Ming Treasure Fleet had gained such a reputation that once pirates saw their flag, they would avert away from them. Yet this ship was attacking right in front of them, almost as if they were trying to mock them. Ming decided that after stopping this attack, they would sail back to their home.

Once they arrived at the battlefield, they tactically devised a plan to help the victims but also not suffer many casualties. Soon after, they boarded the ship only to find that the assailants were Wong's crew. Ming saw the victims and could see they were bludgeoned repeatedly without any sense of remorse. Ming was filled with anger that he yelled out, 'An eye for an eye!' Ming immediately lunged towards Wong and tackled him towards the ground.

Wong felt that one of his ribs had been fractured from the tackled. This was another lesson he learned from Ming's teachers which was to aim for vital points. A normal would be in agony but Wong only grinned. Wong's crew were also in combat with Ming's crew and were evenly matched. Clashing of swords and screaming from pain could be heard. Wong could only laugh amidst of the chaos that was happening around him. He then started to explain how he turned out this way to Ming. As they clashed their swords, they were also in a meaningful conversation.

Wong explained that the whirlpool he entered released his 'true self' and realised that he could control his own crew. However, Ming was still confused at why he would attack other ships and not want peace. Wong emphasised that he didn't want recognition from how giving they were, but from how terrifying they were. Amidst all the chaos, there was a loud blowing noise that could be heard. Ming and Wong spotted a cyclone approaching them and decided to retreat. Both ships tried to move towards the land, but the cyclone had such a powerful vacuum that they could not get out of this danger.

Ming secretly knew how to get out of this situation, but it would cost a life. Ming also realised that the only way everyone could be saved was from sacrificing himself. Without a second thought, Ming immediately boarded Wong's ship and threatened the pirates to board their ship or he would start firing cannons at their ship. Once the ship had been cleared, Ming used the front of the ship to ram his ship. After multiple attempts, 'Lady Mary' finally set sail.

Wong was confused why Ming would still sacrifice himself to save him. Ming explained that he couldn't lose his brother again. Before Wong was out of reach, Ming threw his spyglass to him and told him to accept it. This spyglass was a family heirloom only given to the ones who were the most deserving. Ming begged Wong to continue his legacy, but Wong didn't respond. As Wong turned back to respond, Ming could no longer be seen as the thick clouds produced from the cyclone covered the ship completely.

After they had reached safety, everyone cheered, and it seemed like there was no tension between anyone. Wong looked up and saw sunlight piercing through the thick clouds and he felt that this was a sign from his brother to break into his 'true inner self'. Wong promised himself that he would carry on the legacy his brother created through the way of helping each other.

# A Welcome Change of Sights

*Korean International School, Srivastava, Aryan – 16*

The sun's warm rays were dancing past the light clouds onto the welcoming Ming Court on that fateful morning. The Yongle Emperor was receiving foreign emissaries whom Admiral Zheng had brought along with him from his most recent voyage. His globetrotting ventures had made Zheng He a local legend, and people across the country sang praises of his courage and zealous nature. As boys will always be boys, my friends and I would make toy boats out of reeds, then fight over which one of us was going to be Zheng He on our imaginary voyages. We would fight terrifying ogres and slay sea monsters as we waded past their guts into the awaiting sunset. Zheng He was no mere man in anyone's eyes. He was made from the fabric of legend, and everybody aspired to be spoken of in the same breath as Zheng He.

My mind drifted off as the emperor announced that Zheng He was about to set off on a new adventure. This was to be Zheng's fifth voyage and I could not wait to hear about his escapades. There was no way my name was to be left out of the stories this voyage would bring with it. The destination the crew was headed to flew past my wandering thoughts, and it could have been the moon for all who cared to listen. All I could think of, were the clever ways through which I could sneak into Zheng's ship undetected.

After the ship's lawful boarders had received their instructions from the emperor, they set about the city to take care of any unfinished business they had. I was now in the business of getting onboard the ship undetected, and that was easier than I expected because all the attention was on the revered explorers. One by one, they came on board as the sun was setting, and I was eagerly waiting for the ship to set sail as I hid in the cargo bay. "This is it." I told myself, "This time, I won't have to hear the story from anyone else." I wondered what my friends would think of me once I returned. What if I did not return? A cold shiver accompanied the thought, and the bright moon told the cold night winds which parts of my body awaited its sharp kisses. I drifted off and had a wonderful dream of cheers from everybody awaiting us as Zheng and I got carried in the air by the excited crowd.

The crowd suddenly got violent, and their grips tightened as their cheers turned into scolding. "What do we have here?" they shouted. I was suddenly brought out of dreamland into the chilly night by a thunderous voice. "Answer me boy. Who are you?" I was dangling in the air as the strong man shook my body like a damp cloth in the wind. "My-my-my name is..." I was so scared, I had forgotten my name. "Are you a thief? A spy?" the huge man demanded, as the rest of the crew quickly circled us. I could feel dozens of eyes scanning my body as the man's hot breath made the air warmer.

"This is it." I thought. "They will throw me overboard and forget me as soon as I hit the waters." "Let the boy go." A strong calm voice hit my ears as my feet touched the wooden floor. There was a silence I could now perceive, as the steady and well thought out footsteps approached me. His silhouette was all I could see when I looked up, but even that was unmistakable. Admiral Zheng He was now standing next to me. Looking at me. Seeing me. It then hit me that what would happen when I got discovered had never crossed my mind before now. What did I expect? A warm welcome? Certainly, standing next to Zheng He was not a possibility I had in mind when I set off.

"Get back to work, all of you." Zhen softly commanded, as the huge men scrambled off. It was now just me and him. His eyes examined me from head to toe, and a distant look came across his gaze. It was as if only his body was there with me, his mind far off into a time only he knew. Zheng He had a kind and study face. His beard waved in the wind as he seemed to come back to the present. "I do not approve how you got into my ship, but I admire your courage. You remind me of a younger me, and you have a lot to learn." An air of relief hit my lungs as he said that, and I knew that I was not going to be thrown off the ship. "You are probably looking for adventure, but I cannot guarantee you will find it, or whether you will ever see you home again." I swallowed hard. "You are now part of my crew, and my crew has a job to do. Head to the kitchen and make sure you find something to do there."

"Thank you admiral." I said, as I waddled around the ship looking for the kitchen. The cook scoffed at my presence in his personal space, but burst out into a thunderous laughter as I flinched at his rebuke. "It's okay little boy." He said. "By the time we're back home, you will have grown into a man." I was relieved at his optimism. He seemed to have the notion of going back home affixed in his plans. "Can you cook?" he asked. "Y-y-yes." I replied uneasily. "We shall soon find out." He boomed, as he burst into another air of hysterical laughter.

As the days raced past, the cook and I became accustomed to each other, and my duties were now mainly doing the dishes and serving the food since he found my cooking wanting. I had many lucky breaks, as the cook would tell me to leave the kitchen and claim that he did not need my help. I took advantage of this time by going above and taking in the salty sea breeze. I got to know most of the crew this way, and my zeal for adventure was now in full thrust. I got to hear familiar stories again, but with an original take as they

were told by the men who had been there. I once walked into the cook doing the dishes, and realized that he would tell me to leave even when there was work, because he wanted me to see what the sea and the other adventurers had to offer.

It was during one of these breaks one day, that one of the crew members excitedly announced that he could see land ahead. The ship shook as everyone rushed to the top to see for themselves. It was a magical scene to behold. There were people on the endless beach going about their daily activities, and as we approached, I realized they were unlike anyone I had ever met before. They had dark and strong looking skin, and their teeth were brilliant white, in contrast to their bodies. As we docked on this mysterious place, the exotic looking people came to greet us with a warmth I thought I'd never feel again. The ladies sang beautifully as children came and inspected these strangers who came from the sea. We were led away from the beach into a beautifully green country, with wonders in every direction I looked. My eyes ached for more, the more I saw. I had never thought my eyes would ever want to be that wide open.

There were animals I had never seen or heard of before in my life. Some had stripes and others had spots. Some had manes, and others had beautiful horns. There were some tall animals, which I later came to know were called twiga, the local name for giraffe. We got into the king's compound with the crowd escorting us, as some zebra and gazelles scattered out of our way. Everything seemed like a magical dream.

The generous king had ordered a feast for us, and there was the familiar smell of roasting meat, accompanied by strange, sweet smelling spices that made my stomach ache to be fed. The food tasted even sweeter than it smelled, and the soft meat could not get into my mouth fast enough. We went to sleep that night with our minds going haywire over the sights of all we had seen that day. As I lay on the ground looking up at the beautiful stars, Zheng He walked over to me and asked, 'How do you find this place?' "It is amazing." I replied. Where are we?" I asked, "Malindi." Zheng replied. "Welcome to Africa."

# A Tale of Two Cities

Munsang College, Cheung, Chin Wai – 16

Have you heard of the Ming Treasure Voyages? No? They were a fleet that undertook a special mission from the Ming Dynasty of China. Instead of stealing gold from the places, they gave away treasures. I am honoured to tell you the story of the voyages as a young man on the fleet! Hold on and buckle up, and here we start!

At first, I was just a farmer in the Canton Province, with all but my field and the hoe. All of a sudden, someone announced the recruitment of some workers for the “New Journey”. No one knew what exactly it was, and the law was a draconian one. To be honest, no one dared to give it a shot. I got nothing left; my family members were all killed in an epidemic and I was the only one who survived. I took the plunge then.

I still remember the day: It was the summer solstice when we gathered in a port. The ship was enormous! Only later was I told that I would be one of the people who would be on the ship! I was filled with excitement: What could I see? What would I experience? Flooded by excitement, we then entered the ship. Only after I stepped onto it did I find out that the inside was such a grand place, with well-decorated oil lamps and smooth floor tiles. How silly were my fellow villagers who did not dare to give it a shot and go onboard!

I was allocated as the one in charge for tidying up the place of meeting, like in the palace of the Indian palace. Don’t think that this position is simple! It involved a lot of things, like to prepare all the bits and pieces. Here, I am going to tell you some fun (or not-so-fun) things that I came across with this position.

The Ming Dynasty was unimaginably luxurious! As I was given the permission to enter all the petite storage rooms, I found out that we the Ming Dynasty people lived in a lavish fashion. All the plates we brought were of the highest quality, made of the best ceramics and painted by the best artists in the Ming. Holding one in hand could make me the most glamorous man of my country. When they were under the sunlight, the sunlight simply cast the rays back to the sky, leaving not a single bit of residue. But this is always reasonable; we don’t show others our worst face, do we?

One of the grandest palaces is the Mogadishu palace. The wall was painted in an array of colour, which was also shiny in the daytime. The king met us with great excitement, and offered to give us audience in a grand room. When we arrived at Mogadishu, we were to talk with the peasants there too. From the grapevine, I somehow found out that the king was a cruel man, who collected excessive taxes from the people. This was what made the Mogadishu palace shiny and glamorous; built on a puddle of blood, sweat and tears of the fellow people. We left with great excitement, but my heart went out to the people there.

We visited a poor state too, Ceylon (they said). Ceylon is actually an island, just next to India. It is Sri Lanka today. Ceylon was such a poor place that there were not even a bit of weed on the port we arrived. They had no palace or grand castle, but we were only offered to stay in a hut built by some fellow people. Through gesturing with the people there, I could see that people have great relationship under the leadership of the so-called “head of the village”. In fact, the head worked as hard as every other Ceylon people did, and worried as much as every other Ceylon people worried. This was truly a scene for every one of us to learn from.

On this fleet I have learnt a lot. What amazed me most was not the grand and luxurious palaces, but the strong bonding that tied all citizens of the place together to face the best or the worst. ***Leadership is less about commanding others than empathizing with fellows on their difficulties for a common good.***

This is truly a voyage that I will never forget.

# The Root of the Vine

*Munsang College, Siu, Yiu – 16*

It was 3:00 a.m. The sky was pitch dark. All sounds had been smothered and smudged before being nulled to nothingness. Not even the howls of the wind, the hoots of the owls or the rustles of the lonely trees in the freezing cold were heard. It was a long night.

‘Agh!’ A frustrated gentleman broke the silence. Weak rays of light from the lamp on his working table made him the protagonist in the dark. He placed his hand on the cheek and walked back and forth, just as an anxious child waiting for the release of his term test results. Then, he stopped walking and stared at the piles of documents on the table for a long while. He sat down on the fluffy upholstery and opened the file on top of the others. He tore the very first page of the thick pile into shattered pieces and threw them into the bin with anger. He kicked over the bin and stood at the exact point with his eyes closed. Everything seemed to have been frozen. It was like a freeze-frame in a mime. Then, he turned away from the mountains of files and went to bed.

The name tag on the table marked ‘Mr Xi Jinping, General Secretary of the Communist Party of China’. It was 4:30 a.m.

‘Hey, wake up! We gotta go now. I mean now and we shan’t be late. For no good reason shall we be late and you know we will be in trouble if you stay in your bed. So now, for the one last time that I’m telling you, get up. Shake a leg!’ A man in his mid-40s with a long, black cloak commanded, trying to wake the young gentleman who had been weaned on his warm and cosy bed. ‘Who are you? How dare you speak so rudely to me?’ He stared at the man with a puzzled and annoyed look. ‘I am General Zheng He. I don’t know who you are and I don’t really care but since you are on my fleet, I am quite sure that you are one of my Junior Generals. So now, please get up because we are arriving at our destination, Bangladesh, one of our most aggressive “friends” indeed.’

‘Wait, wait a minute. Slow down. You said you are Zheng He, you mean the Zheng He from the Ming dynasty, the famous explorer who made his way to India, Africa and Arabia!’ ‘Yes, so what? How can you not know who I am! You are on my fleet, gentleman.’ ‘Oh Sir, I...I am...’ He stammered. ‘Okay gentleman, again I don’t care who you are. Just start working now. We will soon debark.’ Zheng He left. He still couldn’t believe in himself, ‘Did I travel back in time? I travelled back in time! Oh my god, when I go back, I am going to publish essays about this. I am sure I will. I definitely will.’

Now, he knew that he travelled from the 21<sup>st</sup> century to the Ming dynasty.

Another General came by. ‘Hey newbie, what’s your name? I haven’t seen you around before.’ ‘Erm... erm. My name is Chun. That’s right, you can call me Chun.’ The General left with an ‘okay’ gesture. ‘Phew. I am really good at camouflage.’

‘But wait, did General Zheng just say we were going to debark on the soil of Bangladesh? From what I knew, Bangladesh was a poor and crowded country. Also, many conflicts and wars arose in that region these years. Was there anything worth exploring? Oh, I really doubt that.’ He murmured these while he was paying his visit to different chambers and parts of the fleet. Soon, they saw the land of Bangladesh.

The first thing that came into their sight was neither the welcoming indigenous tribes wearing cowrie bracelets and beaded corsets nor the breathtaking scenery of Mother Nature — it was the ‘sea’ of tribes holding the poor-looking handgonnes that stood along the front. They gave a ‘warm’ welcome to all the members of the fleet. None of them dared to move. No one was talking or walking. It was like a freeze-frame in a mime.



The tribes first broke the silence. A smart-looking woman with a golden crown shouted and howled but no one on the fleet could understand a single word. They seemed to be annoyed. They yelled with a louder voice and everyone could feel the tension growing in the filthy air.

‘Indeed. They are nothing more than a crowd of the uncivilised.’ Chun murmured with despire. He thought no one could hear what he was saying but, unfortunately, the head of the tribes spotted Chun. He shouted louder and this time, the tribes were loading their gunpowder into the barrels.’

‘Wait! You must have misunderstood us. We are not here to harm. I guarantee,’ Zheng said. He opened his arms with his palm opened, facing upward, trying to show signs of openness and honesty. She stared at Zheng with a suspicious look. He shouted again but this time they put down their weapons. Tension stopped thriving. Finally, all members of the fleet, for the very first time, felt at ease, especially Chun as he was the culprit of the conflict which almost triggered an interracial war.

Just when everyone thought that things were settled, the sky grew darker and darker. It was just as if the sky turned from a clear blue amber into a groaning monster in a blink of an eye. The sky had darkened into a faint violet. A flash of forked lightning and a great clap of thunder came close upon each other. The tribes shouted in their dialect again and they all ran into their huts. This time, Chun and the others wouldn’t need to understand what the tribes were saying to make their situation clear because it was self-explanatory: A storm was coming.

Workers on the fleet started to tremble with fear, not knowing what to do. They said, ‘Let’s leave the fleet and run into their huts. Only through this way will we be safe.’ ‘But the tribes are aggressive. Can’t you remember they were trying to kill us a minute ago? It is dangerous to go out and seek for help from enemies. Also, we can’t leave the fleet. All our assets, gold, food and silk are on the fleet. Without our fleet we are nothing but a crowd of refugee.’ Chun said. Controversies sparked and this marked the beginning of the fierce debate: To leave or not to leave. This is the question. The fleet was on its own now.

Just when General Zheng was caught between a rock and a hard place, a black figure was getting closer and closer to the fleet. It was the head of the tribes who was trying to kill them a moment ago. Zheng was shocked for a second, not knowing the intention of him running towards them.

‘Be prepared, He is coming to attack us.’ Chun shouted. ‘Wait. Is he waving at us? I guess he is asking us to go to their huts. Let’s run and leave.’ All members of the fleet, including Chun sped to the huts. Chun ran with Zheng and they went to the hut of the head of the tribes. They sat on the floor. The head and her family stared at them with a strange look as if they had discovered something brand new. Then, she sat next to them, and she filled the cups on the end table with hot tea and spoke in her dialect again. She seemed to have realised that Chun and Zheng did not understand her. She placed the two cups of tea in front of them and invited them to give it a try with simple gestures. Chun and Zheng were a bit nervous but they still had a try on the cup of tea. It was a traditional fermented tea planted in the region. Chun and Zheng showed a huge smile on their faces and so as she herself and her family.

‘Well, I may have to admit that I was wrong about them. They may really just have misunderstood us and there’s nothing more. I mean they are not as rude and uncivilised as I said.’ Chun said. Zheng remained silent but gave him a warm smile.

The storm lasted for two days. Afterwards the tribes helped the members of the fleet to rebuild another fleet so that they could sail back to China. During the time they spent together, members of the fleet learnt more about the tribal life in Bangladesh. They visited the garment manufacturing workplace, tea garden and wet markets of various tribes. They saw children having lessons and the way the locals interacted with one another. Everyone appreciated the harmonious and loving relationship among the tribes. They were helpful and welcoming. They were much more passionate towards life though their materialistic enjoyment was not as fulfilling as that in China.

Life was simple but beautiful here. Also, there were a lot of local and traditional gadgets, especially in terms of their costumes and accessories such as the Dung-dkar, which is a musical instrument made of sea snail's shell. Zheng decided to trade with the tribes and gave the tribes some Chinese green tea in exchange for these little funny gadgets. 'I can't believe visiting Bangladesh is such an eye-opening journey.' Chun exclaimed. Suddenly, the ground started spinning fiercely and Chun felt faint.

Bang! Chun fell right on the floor. Wait, the floor? He checked out the calendar and the clock on the concrete wall which he was so familiar with. It was 4:30 a.m. He sat on the fluffy upholstery, just as what he usually did, picking up his pen and then he turned over the very first page of the file on of the others.

He then wrote: *The Silk Road Economic Belt* and *The 21st-century Maritime Silk Road (The Belt and Road Initiative)*.

# The Sea and the Treasure

*St. Mary's Canossian College, Kot, Erica – 17*

The dangers in the seas lie aplenty,  
The foremost the demons in the deep.  
If you get a stone to your forehead,  
Your soul goes along with them!

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'Let the ships sail!'

The people on the shore gave us some fanfare with their large drums, and off we went, to the deep blue.

Even the mere sight of our fleet was impressive. More than a dozen of ships, the largest anyone has seen in living memory, started to move as their colorful sails caught the wind. For me, it was even more impressive. Glowing spirits floated everywhere as they patrolled the ship, to protect it from any malevolent force attacking the ships. Yes, spirits. How else do you think that the ship can survive through all these voyages? Blind luck? No, of course not. There are important people on board. SO Instead, the government bribed the spirits; not with money, though, but with burnt offerings on their altars. What use are gold taels for the dead?

How did I know? Good question. And there's a simple answer to that good question: I can see the spirits. It's a special gift of mine. Some people can walk on hot sand without getting a single burn; some can summon tigers with fancy paintings; I can see spirits, whether I want to or not. I had nightmares as a child because of this. But this ability was the thing that helped me earn my ticket on board. When I told the guy that I could see spirits, he immediately pulled me aside, made me swear an oath that I wasn't lying, and I was on board.

My real title is the Marshal of Spirits. Cool, right? Except that reality can be harsh. So my official title is something more like General Horse Caretaker. I know. Laugh if you want to. But at least, I would have a few men to help me out, I thought, as our ships pulled away from the harbor.

Things couldn't be worse. With that happy thought, I set off for my duties a horse-keeper with the rest of my crew.

There stood Chan, a serious person with a temper as easily flared up as a dried pile of firewood. Really, he was serious about everything. He even keeps his clothes as tidy as possible when sowing hay, which is simply impressive. Then there's Leung, who is a slow riser, but in general, he's a nice fellow. And there's Ming, a wad of muscle. He eats a lot, and has a fiery temper, but he's the only one who can lift 3 bags of feed at the same time, which is pretty amazing as I can barely lift one. And of course, there's also Liang, the chef. He's on this trip mainly because he wanted enough money to start a nice little business. He would spend hours talking about how he wanted a small restaurant, and then he could marry the girl he liked. Man, at this point, I can probably draw a full picture of his girl, with him giving me so much detail.

SO here's the daily routine: We (except for Leung) would wake at sunrise, and then we'd wake Leung up with a large pair of cymbals. Then after we wash, we give offerings to the spirit protecting our ship. His name was Wong, who apparently died in the Battle of the the Red Cliffs, and had a wound on his stomach to prove it. After that, a hasty breakfast, then chores. The work includes feeding horses, brushing them, and avoid being kicked. The part of avoid-being-kicked is important. The horses are cooped up – they're skittish, and they pack a good heavy kick. And then lunch, then more horse-caring and maybe swabbing the deck, then we get supplies from one of those supply ships. Usually this means Hui's supply ship. He'd toss us rice and other commodities, and maybe a pint of alcohol if he was feeling particularly good. Most of the time, though, he's in a filthy mood and gods help the person who was foolish enough to ask for more supplies. For he was quite the drunkard, and because he was the captain of the supply ship, he had plenty to drink.

About ten days into sailing, something happened. Ming really wanted to drink.

'I really miss the liquor, y'know? Just a little sip of some liquor, and yeah... I'd be in heaven in no time.'

'You really miss *jiǔ* that much?'

'Yeah, well, you know. What's life all about? I'm no smartie. Life is wine and women. I'm gonna get Hui to toss us the wine.'

And soon came the evening, and boy, Hui was a storm cloud ready to discharge. Like, his face was all red — a sign of him drinking since lunch. After we got our supply sacks, Ming asked, "Yo, Hui, toss us some booze!"

Then Hui exploded. Long story short, Hui vowed we would not be getting supplies tomorrow as he pulled away from us. I wasn't too sure of the details myself, but I was pretty sure I swore. Hui might be a horrible person, but he wasn't the type to bluff. Sure enough, the next day, the supplies didn't come. So for dinner that day, it was just congee from some leftover grain Liang saved up. All in all, no one was happy.

'Okay, it's your fault, right? Ming? C'mon! You ever heard of not provoking someone?' yelled Chan, pacing around the dinner table. Granted, everyone only had half a bowl of congee with a small fish that Leung had the luck to pull up, and that fish had to be shared, so everyone only had a few flakes of fish and half a bowl of congee to be exact. Usually, everyone hollered for seconds, so... yes. It was kind of lacking.

But while I was thinking about food, Ming had decided to let his fists do the honors. He punched Chan in the gut and yelled.

'It's not my fault, dammit! Hui was drunk as a hound, ya ...' He said something I probably shouldn't write down. Then his fists decided to do the rest of the talking and smashed into Chan's stomach and pretty soon, it turned into a fight. I wasn't going to let it turn into a full out brawl, so I pulled Chan away from Ling.

'I'm not gonna end this here!' said Ling, seeing that most of the crew had formed a meat shield around Chan. He spat, then left.

After that, the atmosphere around the Big Horse (as we have started calling it) was pretty tense, although we didn't miss any more meals. Still...

And on the fifteenth day of sailing, we finally spotted land. Everyone was excited that the tension broke. And when the gangplank was lowered, everyone cheered like children getting free candies. Our little crew had nothing to do, so instead of sitting around, we decided to go and walk around, because when you'd been cooped up on a ship for so long, you started missing walking on solid ground.

We started exploring around. During the three days that the fleet got supplies off the island and made diplomatic relations and whatnot, our crew struck treasure. Not the type you think, like a full box of gold, but a full box of spices. Fragrant, exotic spices could sell as well as hot cakes on the Lantern Festival. And from what Liang's seen, the spices were top-grade. 'I say!' he'd exclaim, looking at a dried leaf. 'Look at this brilliant color! And the heavenly smell! This is truly fine!'

Me? I don't really know. I'm no food expert. Nor do I devote my time to studying dried leaves. But I guess everyone has their own interests. As for me, I'm content with studying words, so as to flip over my prospects, but also, because 'he' was full to bursting with interesting stories, since 'he' had been haunting there for quite a while.

Well, with a crew this diverse and having so little space for this diverse crew, disaster was bound to strike.

And strike it did.

One morning, as we all ate our morning meal, Leung noticed something. 'Where's Ming?' I looked around, and didn't see Ming, nor hear him, which was weird, because usually one can hear him from a mile away, and he *is* enormous.

'He's not awake yet?' said Chan, with his mouth full of grub.

'It's possible. But usually, doesn't he wake up the earliest?'

'Right...'

'Let's fetch him,' I decided, swallowing my bite and getting up from my chair. 'I'm not lifting those bags without him.'

The others muttered in agreement.

Still half asleep, we shuffled towards Ming's room, which was the closest to the living area.

'Ming!' Chan hollered. 'Get up already!'

No answer.

'Ming!' Chan yelled louder. 'I'm knocking your door down!'

Yet no answer.

'Let's just break it down! Get something, quick!'

In a jiffy, with a metal pole, the handiest we could grab, the door was burst open and in we stormed. But just after we charged in, we saw something that stopped us. Ming was lying face-first to the floor, very still and quite dead.

---

'Who did it?'

I asked for the tenth time as I paced around the deck, trying to calm myself down and failing so.

'I don't know, boss. But, why ain't he wounded or anything? And there's no blood anywhere too..., ' said Leung, apparently just as distressed.

'And the rock beside him. What could that mean?' asked Liang, who was a bit more weak-willed and so, was sitting on a stool shaking. 'It reminds me of that one poem... no it can't be...'

'What poem?' Chan flared up. 'Spill if you know anything.'

'You know, the poem on vengeful water spirits mothers tell their kids so they don't go swimming in seas?'

'Oh... that poem,' said Leung. 'Wait, what? So now...'

'I think supernatural forces claimed him,' said Liang, still slightly trembling.

'Well... It would make sense,' said Chan. 'Not that we know who did it.'

Really, who was I to argue? But then, I saw Tang's head shake, and I knew the thing was much more complicated than just 'a spirit killed him'. Back in my room (because a little killing can really hold anyone off their jobs, and it's not like the bigwigs can ride in the middle of the ocean), 'he' floated in and started to talk.

'No way it could've been a supernatural kill,' said Wong.

'Why are you so sure?' I mean, this is far-fetched. Someone just floats in and tells you something important, real casual. You'd think it's a practical joke.

'You guys have a guardian spirit, me, right? ... w ho's been on patrol, saying no invaders.'

'Oh yeah...' I've almost forgotten about Wong, even though I give him oranges every day. I guess I should give him more. 'So, who did it? Judging from it ...'

'I tell you, its strangling'

'Why?'

'I've seen that before.'

'Oh.'

So that's 'death by a spirit'. The question of WHO remained. Just then, there was a knock, and Leung came in.

'Who were you talking to, man?

'Er, no one in particular. What?'

'Well... I just wanted to talk.'

'Erm, sure,' I pulled him a chair and poured him some tea. I could understand why he wanted to chat. Sea voyages were long, and entertainment was all but common.

'The murder was unsettling, right?'

'Yeah...'

'Listen, do you know why I am here?'

'No ....' The sudden change of topic surprised me, as well as the eagerness in his tone. Speaking of which, I'd always wondered why Leung was here. I was here because I wanted adventures, Chan was probably here to fuss on everything like a mother hen, and Liang had those big dreams. So why did Leung come on board?

'So why did you come on board?'

'So... well, when I was younger, see... I wasn't well liked,'

'Okay?' This was getting kind of boring. "Um... so? Does that have anything to do with you being here?'

'No, just listen. Ming was one of the biggest bullies. Like... I came here because I kind of wanted to tell him that. But see...'

'Hey, you gotta tell me what. Preferably faster. Stop hesitating your words!' I said, starting to get annoyed.

'Okay. I'm good. See, Ming's family had financial problems since he was five. Apparently his father died, and his mother was weak. So he turned to robbery. Then this year, he somehow suddenly decided to pick up being a trader.'

'A trader? Him?'

'Yeah. But he never had great business because he couldn't get high-quality stuff. So—'

'The spices!' I exclaimed, jumping up and nearly knocking over the stool I was sitting on. 'Those things can make anyone rich.'

'Yeah, but listen, Chan is suspicious too. He is one of the more affluent traders in Ming's area, and I heard before he came here, Ming was getting his customers.

'Huh.' I was never into trading, but I guess that was bad for a trader.

'So, yes anything else?'

'No, not really...'

---

So everyone has a motive.

I'm not sure who did it, but it makes me uneasy to sleep.

Everyone. Has. A. Motive.

Seriously, what is with Ming? He's dead, and apparently, everyone on this ship (except me), kinda hates him. And the spices are trouble too. I'm not sure what charm you can find in a bunch of nice-smelling dead plants, but three people want it, and one of them is dead. Could Chan or Liang have killed him? I mean, neither of them liked him very much anyways. Come to think of it, if we have a popularity poll, Ming would probably be last. All that thinking made me hungry. I went out to the kitchen to look for any spare food, although it seemed chance was slim. Hungry sailors simply don't leave much food behind.

Apparently, someone had the same idea as I did, because Liang was in the kitchen, and on the table in front of him, there was a small fish. 'Um, hello?' I said quietly. It would do the neither of us any good if we woke anyone. Food for two is more food per share than food for five. Simple calculation.

'Why are'nt you asleep?'

'That's my line. What are *you* doing here?'

'Preparing for tomorrow, duh,' he said this as he rubbed more salt into the fish.

'So... y'ou're not here to get food, or you can't sleep?'

'... how did you know that?'

'Well, a murder did take place just this morning...'  
'I mean, it's unsettling all right. Unsettling enough to get me out of bed and start salting fish.'  
'Who do you think killed him?'  
'Wasn't he killed by spirits or something?'  
'What if he wasn't?'  
'Well, I'm not going to point fingers here, but Chan looks suspicious. I mean, they fought once, right?'  
'Yeah...'  
'Anyways. I didn't do it. I have a bright future, and a beautiful girl, all right in front of me. Not going to ruin it by killing that jerk.'  
'You sound like you don't like him.'  
'Well, it's not like he has a winning personality, so... yes. Plus, he, well... I don't think it'll hurt if I tell you this. My parents also had a restaurant, see. Ever heard of Osthams Tower?'  
'The restaurant burned down five years ago?'  
'Yeeah, that. Anyways. The main reason why, was because Ming and his buddies went there once, and they pounded most of the furniture and the stock liqueur into mush,' He sighed. 'Anyways, back to bed you go. You need sleep, man.'  
'I... guess. Good night.'

---

The conversation just made the thing more confusing. The next morning, everyone else seemed shaken. Liang had these huge eyebags under... you guessed it, his eyes. But Chan was really faring bad. He had eyebags, his hand was shaky, and even his usual slightly cocky tone was replaced by something much shakier, like everything was built on top of a chopstick.

'H...hey, you all. Why the sullen looks?' he said, looking very sullen himself and nearly knocking the pitcher of water over as he reached for the salt.

'That...that business yesterday. Bad, right? I mean...' Then he trailed off. If he thought that talking would steady him, it clearly did not work.

This put my little side investigation a bit back. Nobody looked like they killed anyone.

Could it be?

*Could it be?*

I went into Ming's room, which was now very easy to enter because no one locked the door. Inside, there was the body, which remained untouched. Dead bodies were kinda taboo for most people, and unless they were kith and kin, not many even dare to touch a corpse.

I looked through the drawers, every drawer, until I found it.

A suicide letter.

---

So, was a bunch of dead leaves worth the trouble? I thought as I stared at the dark horizons...

The stars were brighter than any jewel. I thought back on the letter, written by Ming, stating his fear and regrets and his decision to die, to let the others take the herbs and as repentance.

Was it?

I tipped the box to the roaring waves below and watched it drift away.

# Seawards

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That was a sound which was excellent in reminding others for alarming and dangerous situations, but I prefer not to have such strong interruption during my sleep and my fantastic sweet dreams..

His voice pierced through my eardrum and I could hardly hear a thing for a short while until a short and stout man appeared behind the cabin door, holding the left ear of a well-built rough man tightly. The tall man who towered into the clouds moaned in pain, begging for the release of his tomato-like ear.

“Avast ye. This is exactly how you will be treated if you dare challenge my authority. If you turn your back on me, folks, dance the hempen!” The short man roared like thunderstorm.

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“The compass is with me.”

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I was furious about such disrespectful act. But soon I realized in hope of settling my adventurous mind, I must first follow, or say, obey the absurd rules and observe the hierarchy on board. Otherwise, I might be kicked out or even killed and thrown into the ocean, unnoticed.

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I decided to stay cool and collected through resting in the cabin. Just as the moment I stepped down the staircase, I heard a deafening and blaring sign of victory.

The cabin crew members were indeed rambunctious and loud, but the excitement they showcased was unusual. I hopped on the deck, and found most of them tap dancing in joy. An inconspicuous grin seemed to show up on the captain's face, his eyes flickering with joy and excitement. His hands trembled, well prepared for the revelation of the precious mystery.

His happy expression abruptly faded away, murmuring, “Shiver me timbers, this can't be. This can't be. This could not have been true.”

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The captain displayed his discontent towards my view by dragging me violently and locking me in my room, keeping me away from the precious jewels. He warned me, “Lad, you better not interfere our lives and work, this is real business, and we're keeping the flow going. Don't you let nonsense come out from your mouth ever again. You shall not hornswoggle us.”

“*All hands hoay!* We have to keep moving.” The captain clearly ordered.

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When I attempted to move the desk, I realized it stuck to the ground perseveringly, as if it is rooted from the thin wooden floor. Panicked and discouraged , I stumbled on the stubborn layer.

I kicked something. Something round, something that bounced back.. it felt just like a button!

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In doubt, but with no other choices or alternatives , I deliberately pressed it. A trap door opened gradually, until a passageway appeared in front of me. Without hesitation, I hopped into the seemingly dark and endless tunnel.

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Out of my expectations, the pathway led to the deck directly. I saw rows of cannons placed at both sides of the cargo ship.

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So everything was fine, and everyone was safe. Thanks to the protection from the cannons!

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“Ahoy, Those at the dungbie, get your limbs and ready and don't bring your sleepish mind here and chew your own knuckles.”

I gradually walked towards the edge of the ship, admiring the magnificent view of the vast Ocean. There was literally no end for the sea, boundless sea.

I heard some gentle footsteps approaching me, and a large palm grasp hold of my shoulders,“Hey lad, lots of great tales on this ship. As well as horror stories. Most of which, characters fell off the ship, straight into the sea. If you don't get your hands off those rails, gentleman, you'll be the next one.”

“Aye aye sir. As well as legend of a grumpy and great captain.” I replied merrily.

“Up to you, but my pleasure. That shall stay secret.” He jokingly commented.

Greater stories are readied to be unfolded.

# Perhaps

*St. Mary's Canossian College, Ma, Gianna – 16*

Perhaps if time was rewinded, it would have happened differently.

Staring at the vast majesty of the ocean, I reflected a lot. I regretted the foolish, sentimental decisions made. Perhaps challenges would breed clarity. Perhaps I could gain his forgiveness.

Perhaps.

Days of drifting on the sea, navigating through strong winds and creating the waves led us to the Pier of ZhànChéng, where we docked. Our grand entrance sparked the attention of many, some of whom were familiar with us. After all, it was our sixth visit here.

We eventually arrived at Rastoke, a municipality renowned for its phenomenal scenery. The marvel of the Korana River was reminiscent of the past.

*It was mid autumn.*

*He sat by the water, staring into his still, moonlit reflection. I held with both my fidgeting hands a lantern in the shape of a carambola, apprehension surging my mind. After moments of pacing and hyperventilating, I finally decided to tap on his shoulder – very lightly, at that.*

*“Good day – I meant good evening, Your Majesty. I had learnt how to make a lantern yesterday from my master’s wife, and she taught me how to do so. But my hands are the least of delicate, and so this is what I made. Despite its poor condition, I hope my incompetent self had made something to your liking. It is understandable that you would want it thrown away. I’m utterly sorry that I speak too much. I–”*

*Just then, amidst the plethora of deriding sniggers, an eruption of the crescendoing light, hearty chuckles jolted me from my train of thought, cutting my unnecessary rambling.*

*I would never forget how he thrusted up with vigor, beaming at me radiantly while carrying the lantern.*

*“Thank you. I appreciate your beautiful lantern. You certainly have put a lot of effort into it! You never fail to surprise me with your diligence,” he said, placing his hands on mine, the apples of his cheeks brimming with glee.*

*Watching him scrutinise my ordinary – no, it was not even good enough to be called “ordinary” – creation, curiosity glimmering through dazzling irises, gaiety and merriment warmed my heart.*

“My Lord, the ministers are here to see you,”

“Right. Let’s go.”

Having been invited to one of the palaces, my crewmen and I inspected our goods once more before presenting them to the ruler of ZhànChéng. He donned a simple, cordial smile, and even told us to disregard the formalities to have a casual banter with him. So we did.

As the sky was enshrouded by a veil of night, we realised it was time to set sail again. It was only one of our myriad of destinations, after all. Prior to leaving ZhànChéng, I spoke to the ruler in private.

I exhibited to him a jade pendant, adorned by shrieks of mineral black and white along the sides, and accentuated with red tassels underneath it.

“Please give this to him, if he were ever here,” I implored with soft pronunciation.

“You do this every time you come here, and yet every time you visit me again, it always goes back to your pocket. Are you sure there is still a chance of him being—”

“Yes, I am certain. Please.”

“If you’re so insistent, there is nothing I can do, is there?”

I smiled, and returned to my ship.

We sailed all of two weeks, until we approached the daunting waters in Gulf of XiānLuó. Peril was in the horizon. Every single time we passed by this mystical bay, jeopardy would come lurking in the shadows of the deep sea.

This time was no different.

Propelling forward, tremors were sent directly to our ship in an instant, as though the ocean telling us not to proceed in the perimeters and warning us of the host of hazards that lay beyond this area.

With determination, we continued moving.

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I heard some gentle footsteps approaching me, and a large palm grasp hold of my shoulders,“Hey lad, lots of great tales on this ship. As well as horror stories. Most of which, characters fell off the ship, straight into the sea. If you don't get your hands off those rails, gentleman, you'll be the next one.”

“Aye aye sir. As well as legend of a grumpy and great captain.” I replied merrily.

“Up to you, but my pleasure. That shall stay secret.” He jokingly commented.

Greater stories are readied to be unfolded.

# Perhaps

*St. Mary's Canossian College, Ma, Gianna – 16*

Perhaps if time was rewinded, it would have happened differently.

Staring at the vast majesty of the ocean, I reflected a lot. I regretted the foolish, sentimental decisions made. Perhaps challenges would breed clarity. Perhaps I could gain his forgiveness.

Perhaps.

Days of drifting on the sea, navigating through strong winds and creating the waves led us to the Pier of ZhànChéng, where we docked. Our grand entrance sparked the attention of many, some of whom were familiar with us. After all, it was our sixth visit here.

We eventually arrived at Rastoke, a municipality renowned for its phenomenal scenery. The marvel of the Korana River was reminiscent of the past.

*It was mid autumn.*

*He sat by the water, staring into his still, moonlit reflection. I held with both my fidgeting hands a lantern in the shape of a carambola, apprehension surging my mind. After moments of pacing and hyperventilating, I finally decided to tap on his shoulder – very lightly, at that.*

*“Good day – I meant good evening, Your Majesty. I had learnt how to make a lantern yesterday from my master’s wife, and she taught me how to do so. But my hands are the least of delicate, and so this is what I made. Despite its poor condition, I hope my incompetent self had made something to your liking. It is understandable that you would want it thrown away. I’m utterly sorry that I speak too much. I–”*

*Just then, amidst the plethora of deriding sniggers, an eruption of the crescendoing light, hearty chuckles jolted me from my train of thought, cutting my unnecessary rambling.*

*I would never forget how he thrusted up with vigor, beaming at me radiantly while carrying the lantern.*

*“Thank you. I appreciate your beautiful lantern. You certainly have put a lot of effort into it! You never fail to surprise me with your diligence,” he said, placing his hands on mine, the apples of his cheeks brimming with glee.*

*Watching him scrutinise my ordinary – no, it was not even good enough to be called “ordinary” – creation, curiosity glimmering through dazzling irises, gaiety and merriment warmed my heart.*

“My Lord, the ministers are here to see you,”

“Right. Let’s go.”

Having been invited to one of the palaces, my crewmen and I inspected our goods once more before presenting them to the ruler of ZhànChéng. He donned a simple, cordial smile, and even told us to disregard the formalities to have a casual banter with him. So we did.

As the sky was enshrouded by a veil of night, we realised it was time to set sail again. It was only one of our myriad of destinations, after all. Prior to leaving ZhànChéng, I spoke to the ruler in private.

I exhibited to him a jade pendant, adorned by shrieks of mineral black and white along the sides, and accentuated with red tassels underneath it.



“Please give this to him, if he were ever here,” I implored with soft pronunciation.

“You do this every time you come here, and yet every time you visit me again, it always goes back to your pocket. Are you sure there is still a chance of him being—”

“Yes, I am certain. Please.”

“If you’re so insistent, there is nothing I can do, is there?”

I smiled, and returned to my ship.

We sailed all of two weeks, until we approached the daunting waters in Gulf of XiǎnLuó. Peril was in the horizon. Every single time we passed by this mystical bay, jeopardy would come lurking in the shadows of the deep sea.

This time was no different.

Propelling forward, tremors were sent directly to our ship in an instant, as though the ocean telling us not to proceed in the perimeters and warning us of the host of hazards that lay beyond this area.

With determination, we continued moving.

# Santa Maria

*St. Mary's Canossian College, Tam, Celine – 16*

Midnight.

A lone figure sat in the middle of the barely-illuminated library, as a single candle burned its life away in front of him. The sound of dripping wax was almost in sync with the sound of tears rolling off of the man's cheeks, as the flickering flame illuminated his face, tear-streaks gleaming.

Even after years of pursuing financial support, the Court had eventually overruled his numerous requests, leaving his reputation at stake. Clinging onto the last sliver of hope he had, he had desperately scoured the shelves of the library for any sort of supporting document that could aid him in his voyages. Despite his eagerness, he knew deep down that any related papers, documenting the famous Oriental maritime voyages 60 years ago, had already been destroyed. At least, those were the accounts of the events that had happened officially; however, he dared not consider any other alternative. After all, giving himself hope was one thing, allowing himself false hope was another.

Until he came across the slim, leather-bound booklet.

A memoir. He had commissioned those who were fluent in the language to translate the contents for him—that was how desperate he had been, for anything that could possibly lend him a helping hand. As he sat down at the library, he started to flip through the pages, scouring for any stray piece of information that would be useful.

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## FIRST VOYAGE

11th July, 1405

One year ago, 16-year-old me was standing in front of the docks, staring at a notice that read "BOATMEN NEEDED", while clutching onto the scraps of a stale mantou someone had thrown out the night before.

Having turning 17 just a few nights ago, I was standing in front of the exact same docks, watching as workers loaded crates and sacks of supplies onto the fleet of ships, lined up neatly across the docks. From my vantage point, I noticed that a horde of men were loading red, heavy-looking chests onto the more extravagant ships, along with countless rolls of what seemed to be silk, and bucket loads of something that shone and twinkled under the sunlight. It took me a while to realize that they were loading pure gold onto the ships.

I had been instructed to report to the supervisor for my assigned ship, standing by one of the docks. He happened to be reading off from a list, while a crowd of men, mostly teenagers, surrounded him. After silently thanking my rather short stature, I slipped into the crowd, careful not to knock anyone over.

"...As I was saying, do note that..." By the time I had gotten close enough to hear what the supervisor was saying, the briefing had ended. That was when the pale-looking young boy next to me stuck his hand in the air, and waved it about. All he did was ask for food.

At that instant, the calm-looking supervisor's face flushed red with fury, and he flew into a rage, spittle flying from his mouth as he yelled at the boy. "Who do you think you are, boy? There are more than 27 thousand men on this voyage. Do you reckon that we have time to serve every single one of you, what with everyone busy preparing the 255 ships for the upcoming voyage?" He frantically put his hand down. I dug out a mantou from my pocket, split it in half, and quickly shoved it into the boy's hand. He flashed me a brief smile of gratitude, fingers closing around the scrap of mantou, before dodging the supervisor's glare and slipping into another part of the crowd.

Truth be told, I did not anticipate life on deck, not to mention my horrible sea-legs. But still, there was no point in turning back now. From the promotion materials at the recruitment docks, the government had

paid any boatmen 2 years' worth of salary in advance. With this lump sum, I could ensure that I would not be left with hunger for quite a while. Yet, for people as poor I am, choices were way too luxurious. We are nothing but disposable pawns on the giant chessboard of life, always replaceable. The best chance for us is to keep our head low, and fight for survival whenever we could.

20th July, 1407

Writing supplies on the boat were scarce, and considering how life on the boat was usually mind-numbingly dull, I hadn't considered keeping an entry. Day in, day out, we followed the same routine. Tending to the ship's sails, loading supplies each time we neared a port, and when the day was over I went to my bunk. Every now and then we passed by some cities, where the treasure ships would unload some of the Ming Dynasty's treasured goods. We might've passed by Ceylon, Calicut, or maybe Malacca, but I insisted on keeping my head low, as a lowly boatman.

But today—two years after the boat had set sail—everything took a turn for the worse. On our voyage back to Nanjing, in the seas of Southeast Asia, something the whole fleet had always dreaded happened.

A pirate raid.

Despite having only been a boatman for 2 years, the pirate's name was enough to send shivers down my spine when I realized who the leader was.

Chen Zuyi. Together with his 5000 men and having 10 ships under his command, he was the most feared pirate in history. From overhearing snippets of conversation, I learnt the fleet had a reason to be afraid of Chen—he had full command of a nearby city, Palembang, and was able to supply himself and his fleet, should resources be depleted.

But the same snippets of conversation had supplied me with the fact that the Grand Director of this fleet, his name being either Zheng He or Ma He, had already demanded the surrender of Chen Zuyi by the end of the day. If not, the fleet would open fire instead, which had me worrying in no time. It was very likely that, instead of choosing to surrender, the pirate would fight back with all he had, armed to the teeth, resulting in a bloody mess. Would I be part of the casualties? Would I not return home in one piece?

I knew that no matter what, I have to survive—I needed the salary, the lump sum to keep on living. Death has never been an option.

16th November, 1407

Glad I can make this entry. I could've lost my life back then, 4 months ago, rather than returning to Nanjing in one piece.

My intuition had been wrong that day. In fact, nobody had expected Chen to signal agreement towards the surrender. Fully believing that the pirate was handing his head over on a platter, a lot of boatmen decided to relax for the day. The tension during the day, which had been so thick you could cut through it with a knife, had mostly diminished by the time night rolled around. Some of my fellow boatmen were even drinking and singing sea shanties.

And just when they were singing the chorus for goodness-knows-how-many-times in a row, the blade of a cutlass shone under the moonlight and cleanly lopped off the arm of the boatman standing right in front of me.

Frozen stiff with fear, I felt my legs lock themselves into place. I cursed my luck, as the pirate turned to me, grinning from ear to ear. Behind me, I heard the characteristic sound of a sword being taken out of its scabbard, as footsteps resounded around me, as two pirates sought to take me down. Cold sweat erupted across my forehead and I began to tremble, watching that gleaming cutlass swing down at me—I closed my eyes and prepared to face my end—

And then I heard a bloodcurdling scream, right when a sharp pain blossomed down my leg, and I felt myself sink towards the deck, my weight crumbling beneath me.

I gingerly pried my eyes open, before noticing that there was something warm and sticky on my face. Lifting a finger to my face, I hesitantly wiped off some of the liquid, when a metallic smell hit my nostrils and my split-second thinking concluded that it had been blood. My first instinct was to run for my life and so I tried to move my legs, before the sharp pain came back, soon blossoming across my whole leg. Incapacitated, I stared at the body in front of me, the source of the screaming, only to be greeted with the sight of the pale boy from two years ago, who I had never imagined could look even paler. Yet now he did, with a cutlass sticking out of his lower abdomen, his eyes tightly shut, as blood pooled on his shirt; and I realized that if it weren't for his timely appearance, the person lying on the floor could've been me instead. But what had struck me as odd was this decision of his: the fleet was a pirate attack, after all. The most logical thing one would do was to preserve their own life, and run for safety. Then why would this pale boy risk his life for me? Was there anything else he viewed as important, besides from his very safety?

The pirate raised his cutlass again, the victorious grin on his face growing wider by the second. As he prepared to strike one more time, the sound of deafening cannons cut his actions short. We all stayed there, frozen, as the sound repeated itself again and again. Eventually, I lost count—but at the end of the day, it were the Ming soldiers who emerged victorious, after destroying the pirate fleet, killing 5,000 of its men, and most important of them all, capturing Chen Zuyi. Only later on did I find out that the Grand Director, Zheng He, had secretly sent out an informant on the day they demanded surrender. That was why he knew about the pirates' plan, and devised a counterattack on them.

On July 19, the whole treasure fleet reached Nanjing, where the Emperor himself had appeared to welcome the fleet. After all, this maritime project had been a great success.

Just last month, Chen was publicly executed in the town center. My broken leg prevented me from attending, and so did Ah Jun, the pale boy who had saved me, and has been living under my roof upon our arrival in Nanjing. He had only gotten out of the coma a few days ago, but was still bedridden.

"Why save me?" was the first thing I had asked him when he woke. Indeed, I still hadn't figured out his actions that day, even if I had plenty of time to look back on the incident. He simply smiled and asked me in return, "Remember the mantou you gave me on the first day?" The unspoken words were as clear as day; Ah Jun believed that risking his life that day was the only way he could repay me. I was in no way related to this boy in blood, yet he was willing to die for someone completely unrelated to him?

Ah Jun might have noticed my confusion, as he soon reminded me, "Is there not an old saying that goes 'A drop of water given in need shall be returned with a burst of spring'? It is only natural that I repay you with more than a mantou." Who would have thought he had joined the voyage other than the same reason I had in mind initially: to survive? Ah Jun taught me that there were more things to life than mindlessly struggling for one's own existence, that there were people out there who cared for my own wellbeing, that even in a world like this, there was eventually somewhere out there where I could truly belong. It was mind-blowing, for an orphan like me.

Yesterday was a crucial day for boatmen like me, as we had to attend a ceremony, which congratulated those who had played a part in fighting against Chen Zuyi and his fleet. While standing on the stage and

receiving the small lump sum of money, a feeling in my gut told me I had earned this through rightful means, through doing what was right. This new achievement indicated that I am valued, and through that, I have gained respect from the state. Perhaps, this odd sense of accomplishment is what they call “self-esteem”: even if I am simply an uneducated orphan, I still have my own part to play on this world, and that I still have my own worth as a person.

23 February, 1427

Twenty years have passed, but not until yesterday had I decided to pick up this journal and start writing again—life in these twenty years had simply been ordinary, except for what had happened very recently. Ah Jun passed away last week, after being bed-bound for 20 years, as I kept watch over his bedside, caring for his needs. If anyone were to ask me if I regret taking care of someone whom I’m not related to by blood, I would reply that it is one of my greatest achievements in life, to have a brother like Ah Jun. Despite having wanted to join the voyages again right after the ceremony, I felt that taking care of Ah Jun was my obligation and a priority. And so I opened a mantou shop for twenty years, to maintain a stable income, while stashing my sailing urges into the back of my mind.

And here I eagerly await the day the treasure fleet leaves the docks of Nanjing, with me onboard.

## SEVENTH VOYAGE

3 July, 1433

Finally the day had come! The new king, Xuande Emperor, had issued the orders for the seventh voyage three years ago on June 29. Soon enough, the fleet departed from Nanjing once again in the winter of 1431, while I found myself on the main ship this time round. It was not a coincidence: the emperor himself had assigned me onto the main treasure ship due to my past experiences with the treasure fleet. It was an honour that I finally had a chance to serve next to the man who was in charge of it all. Zheng He himself.

Sadly, times like these wouldn’t last long. Just 4 months ago, Captain Zheng contracted an incurable illness from India, and soon developed severe symptoms. Bedridden for the rest of the voyage, he was clearly too weak to take charge of the fleets, and so he asked me to act as his deputy. I couldn’t help but question his judgement initially, for there were people on the ship who were far more qualified than I was. But still, I had a more meaning-searching query that demanded to be resolved.

And so, I found myself standing next to Captain Zheng’s sickbed.  
“Why is it that you had launched this voyage, despite your age?”

The reply I received was very much detailed. “At 62, I should very much be enjoying my retirement. But despite my old age, I have chosen to serve my country; as you recall, the new king has just ascended the throne, making stable foreign relationships extremely important at this very moment. After all, he wished to reinvigorate the tributary relations promoted a great many years ago.”

The captain paused to cough, and I realized that he was far too sick to even make it back to the port at Nanjing. “Through the past six voyages, you have demonstrated to the country your capacity and your worthiness. You don’t need one more on your belt to prove it. Then why are you still risking your life for this voyage?” He was visibly straining himself, and I hoped that he would keep his answers brief. And brief they were, as Captain Zheng stated, “As a matter of fact, I know deep down that this may be my very last voyage. But sometimes, the good of mankind is greater than your own good—one small step for me, yet a giant leap for the entirety of our nation.”

This is a lesson that I would never forget for the rest of my life; that, to fully actualize oneself, one should serve the greater good.

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Hours and hours flew past, as the lone figure sat at the desk drinking in every single word the journal had to offer, learning about the voyages documented in the journal, the adventures experienced, until the first rays of sunlight began to trickle into the room, at the edges of the windows. Soon, the library was awash with the light of dawn. He blinked at the light, for his eyes had started to water a little, and he stood up and stretched, a small but confident smile adorning his face.

From this memoir, he noticed that the anonymous sailor had started off with searching for basic needs like food and survival, then to building up a brotherhood, to cultivating self-worth, and eventually reckoning the importance of achieving the greater good. He understood that forfeiting his narrow-mindedness is a must by overlooking his current difficulties, and most of all, actualize the dream of mankind. Gone was the weary and hopeless man from midnight; in his place was a man clearly inspired by the unnamed man's journal clutched tightly in his hands, eyes gleaming with enlightenment and brain abuzz with ideas. With a spring in his step, the man swept out of the library of the University of Madrid, determined to seek for funding from the Spanish Court, and to make his dreams of navigation a reality.

He had only expected to reach East Asia; yet, he had discovered a world entirely new—one could almost say that without the Ming Treasure Voyages, the one to discover America would not be Christopher Columbus himself.

# Reliving a Legend

*St. Mary's Canossian College, Tang, Ally – 16*

A crowd gathered in the middle of the mall, with occasional screams from excited females. Passers-by stared at the crowd, wondering what was going on. A famous movie star? No one was sure.

“Girls, there’s no need to push....” A raven haired male smirked slightly, towering over everyone else. Helping another girl who ‘accidentally’ fell down, he winked slightly at her. “You shouldn’t ‘fall’ for my love,” he chuckled. The girl blushed slightly, then roughly slapped her friend next to her, clearly ecstatic to have received the attention she had craved for.

Still trying to push through the crowd, the male hoped that the headache the screaming girls had given him and the gathering crowd would disappear as quickly as possible.

“Just let me out,” He mumbled angrily. He knew clearly that he couldn’t solve this with violence as this would result in a lot of trouble and an earful from his manager. Never losing his smile and still bending down to take pictures, he yelled, “Alright girls, one last picture and I’ll have to leave!” Awws and Nooos immediately spread like wildfire among the group. None wanted their idol to leave them this soon.

He was more than relieved when he saw his manager’s car running towards him. He jumped into the vehicle, never taking a glance behind his back. “Hit the brake!” He yelled at the driver as he fastened his seatbelt.

“Five minutes late!” a monotone voice said to him on his left. “Yeah, yeah. You think I don’t know that?” He rolled his eyes. “You should’ve known better, He. You know Director Zhao hates people being late, even though you’re an Oscar nominee.” His manager looked at him disapprovingly. Ma He shrugged.

When they arrived at the studio, all members were there waiting for the fashionably late actor. Director Zhao rushed out of his office, grabbed He, and yelled at him for a while before he was pushed into the dressing room to prepare for filming. The team was now making a series of historical movies on Chinese history. Coincidentally, he had the same name as the famous hero in the Ming Dynasty, Zhang He. The team reached him immediately to see if he would be interested in this character, and of course told him that the pay would be satisfactory. He immediately accepted the job, since he had always been interested in the marine history of China, and today was the first day of work. Ma He put on his armor and headed out to the scene.

“1...2...3...Action!” Director Zhao called out immediately after everything was settled, and Ma He started reciting his lines. “What a good day out at sea! My fellow crew members, today we’ll reach Korea! There, we’ll sell our goods to earn money and exchange gifts with officials for the sake of our great country!” Ma He yelled as he took out his sword and raised it above his head as encouragement to his crew. “Soon, we’ll be able to go home and reunite with our family! Gentlemen, stay focused and work efficiently. The day of return is near!” Ma He yelled once more.

He suddenly felt a slight shake beneath his feet, and then a swing. He did not pay attention to it at first, thinking that it was only his imagination. Then the swinging feeling became worse. Ma He began to panic. He felt the ground swinging back and forth, and it was not long before he could hear the roaring of the wind and feel the water splashing around him. He couldn’t hear anything else, not even the shouting of other crew members.

He was surprised when he felt the cold water dampen his clothes. Shivering, he found himself tied up too. “This is not funny” He groaned as he tried to get up. “Director Zhao? Manager Chen?” He shouted.

“Shut it before I feed you to the fish!” a rough voice yelled as he was kicked in the stomach. Ma He curled his feet in pain, but tried not to yell. He was still confused.

“What...what is this? Are we in Act 2 now?” Ma He looked around, furrowing his eyebrows. “Woah, this ship looks too real. Way too real,” He laughed nervously.

Something wasn’t right. He turned to look at the huffy male who kicked him. “Hey, I’ve never seen you around in the studio before. Who are you?” He stared at the male.

Unfortunately, the male didn’t understand him. “What do you mean by who are you? I’m your master now! Your king!” The male grinned. Ma He tried to contain his laughter.

“Yeah, yeah, and I’m the President,” He replied.

The male didn’t share his humor, only kicking him again. “I’m not joking around with you! Call me Master! Now!” the male barked.

Ma He couldn’t stand people ordering him. “Yeah? And who do you think you are? Do you pay my bills? Take care of me? Or did you give birth to me? Why do I have to listen to you? Do you know who I am?” He yelled back, only to find other ships facing them already. They were ready with canons and all sorts of weapons. He reckoned they were enemies. “Hey! Over here! We’re over here!” He yelled at the other ships.

“Captain Zhang! Is that you?”an exciting voice yelled as the cabin crew suddenly grew even more excited.

“Uh, hmm....yeah! Yeah it’s me!” Ma He shouted back, only to receive another punch from the sailor. “Shout one more time, and I’ll kill you before they reach!”the sailor barked.

Ma He suddenly realized he wasn’t in the studio anymore. Had he travelled back in time? The sound of cannons confirmed his thoughts.

One second, he was still tied up on the ship. Then, he was grabbed, and thrown into another ship.

“Captain Zhang!” A servant rushed out. “Are you feeling alright? Did they hurt you? I’ll get you a doctor immediately!” Ma He grabbed the servant. “Who am I?” He asked. The servant widened his eyes in horror. “How badly did they treat you? Have you forgotten your identity, captain? You are the great traveler Zhang He!”

Ma He nearly fell to the ground due to horror. He was...the character he was playing. He laughed at the coincidence and let the servant take him to his room.

When he woke up, he found that the ship was already at a dock. He went out, only to find people hustling and bustling around him. A sailor with a scar on his face gave Ma He a hard pat on the back when he came out.

“A good sleep, cap’n? We’ll have to go onshore and trade today,” the sailor looked excited. “I wonder what we’ll see here in India!”

Ma He’s first thought was curry, but of course he couldn’t say that. He wasn’t sure if they knew what ‘curry’ was at that time.

Ma He stepped off the ship after reassuring the sailor he would be making fair deals and earning great amounts of money. He looked around and smiled. Fortunately, no one would be better at selling things than him, gaining more than enough experience by taking advertisements while he was still an actor. To everyone’s surprise, Ma He sat at the booth, and began to yell.



“The best perfume you’ll ever find on the planet! Come take a look! The first 100 buyers will get discounts! Buy three get one free...” And so he began to yell, attracting nearly everyone around him. His fellow crew members were so shocked that they forgot to do their work once there were customers.

“Is there anything wrong?” Ma He stared back at them.

“I would like three!” the seller opposite him yelled, clearly attracted to his products. Ma He took a look at the products his competitor was selling. Ivory products! He nearly wanted to call the police. “Oh right,” he muttered, “it’s not illegal here.” He examined the delicate sculptures which were the best he had ever seen. Sculptures like castles, people or animals could be seen. Ma He was amazed by the fact that all the sculptures were well crafted. “They should have given me one with my face on it instead of the Oscar’s award,” Ma He said when eyeing the products.

His attention was then caught by something shimmering in the sunlight to his right. A sword ...and... “Wow, so many weapons!” Ma He looked at the weapons greedily.

“Would you like an exchange of products?” the owner used his own special accent and spoke to Ma He. “You have very nice perfume. My wife would love it.” Ma He nodded immediately. The owner took the dagger hanging on the wall, and gave it to Ma He while Ma He handed him a bottle of perfume. “Have a nice day!” The owner grinned in satisfaction.

The crew found that Captain Zhang had turned quite strange after being kidnapped by the pirates. Perhaps he suffered from memory loss after the incident. With that thought, the crew looked at him in a pitiful way and shook their heads, leaving Ma He alone to yell and exchange products that they did not need. “Should anyone tell captain that we have all those on the ship already?” A crew member nudged the one next to him. “Just...just let him be...” the other sighed.

The products sold out very soon, and everyone was even more shocked. “See? I told you it would work!” Ma He grinned proudly. “Should we go back to the ship?” Ma He walked back towards the ship, only to be stopped by some guards.

“Captain Zhang? Our Emperor would like to meet you,” the guard captain bowed slightly and said. Ma He had heard about Zhang He meeting emperors and exchanging gifts before, so he wasn’t too surprised. Taking a little box of perfume with him, he nodded to the guard and said, “Lead the way.”

Although Ma He had seen Indian palaces before when he went travelling, nothing he had seen could describe the magnificence of the palace before his eyes. It shimmered with gold everywhere, making him squint as if he was standing in the sunlight. Marble floors, extraordinary paintings...everything was noble and majestic.

“Welcome, my dear friends from China!” a voice boomed out from the room they entered.

Ma He and his servants bowed to the king sitting in the middle of the room. The king smiled to them and asked them to rise.

“My friends, you are well-mannered. I am in need of your help, but first, make yourselves at home. Do you need anything? Tea? Cakes?” The king looked nice, but of course his acting skill couldn’t be compared to the Oscar nominee’s.

Ma He controlled himself so that he wouldn’t roll his eyes at the king, and with the most polite voice, he replied, “We are honored, your Majesty, to be of your help. Please tell us what we can do for you.”

The king’s eyes twitched a little. “Well, there have been quite the number of criminals in India lately, and I wonder if you would have anything for me so that I could...lower the crime rate by warning the citizens of the punishment for committing a crime.”

Ma He understood the king's meaning. He shivered slightly due to horror. He was silent for a second so that he could find the right way to reject the king.

"Well your Majesty, I'm afraid we don't...."

"You don't?" the king frowned.

"We are only a trade ship, you see...we don't have items that help people to...punish others," Ma He bit his lip.

"Then you're of no use to me! Guards! Arrest them!" The king roared suddenly, even shattering the glass he was holding.

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"And then what happened?" a little girl looked excitedly at her father.

"And then... the king put the captain to sleep..." The father tucked the girl inside her blanket. "Just like what I'm doing now... and so you should go to sleep, just like the captain!" The father kissed the giggling girl's forehead and turned off the lights.

"Goodnight, sweetheart."

"Night, daddy!" The girl closed her eyes.

The father closed the door to the room. His eyes glinted with mischief.

"Ma He! How many times have I told you *not* to tell Audrey stories like this? She'll have nightmares!" a female voice whispered angrily to him.

"And just how many times have I told *YOU*, my name is Zhang He, the great traveler of the sea?" Zhang He stared angrily at his 'wife'.

"I know you love your job, but can't you stop acting at home?" his wife said annoyingly, turned around and turned off the lights.

It had been going on ever since her husband fainted in the studio. He claimed that he was Zhang He from the Ming Dynasty, but she just thought he was joking. No one, except for Zhang, knew that the real Ma He had already been 'put to sleep' by the Indian king, just like what Zhang He told the little girl.

And not just to sleep, but to eternal sleep.

Zhang He whispered a prayer to Ma He to apologize for making him the scapegoat.

"Don't worry," he whispered, "I'll take *good* care of your family for you."



# Fiction

Group 6

# Ming Treasure Voyages

*Harrow International School Shanghai, Bai, Belinda – 9*

Zheng He was a great navigator in the history of China and a pioneer in the communication of world civilization. He was known to all the people in the world as a great spirit and a great hero. He travelled seven times to Western Oceans over twenty eight years to more than thirty countries and regions. He reached as far as the coastal area of Africa. It is the world's most ancient maritime history and the widest scope of action for ocean sailing during that time. Zheng He gave the Chinese nation a good traditional virtue, advanced agricultural science and technology. It's far-reaching influence made the relations with foreign countries wide. The Ming Dynasty developed a sea trade that was a historic breakthrough on the diplomatic history for China. There still remains the imprint of the Chinese nation. This is the only time in the world without invasions from the sea. It is much better than Columbus's voyage.

Zheng He is proud of the sea, he struggled in the sea, he succeeded in the sea, and finally he died in the sea.

## Ming Treasure Voyage

*Harrow International School Shanghai, Hu, Henry – 9*

Hi, everyone. Welcome to the TV show. I am Henry. Today, let's talk about the Ming Treasure Voyage.

In the Ming Treasure Voyage, there was a very important person – Zheng He. Zheng He had nine boats, nine huge boats. There were 3200 people on each boat that followed him. During that time, he had the strongest boats in the world, even better than Columbus. During that time, the king of China was Zhu Li. He is very kind. He agreed for Zheng He to go to the other country and give them money and seeds, gold, silver and china. He was the kindest person in the world. Chinese do not kill people and they just give them treasure.

On the first voyage people thought the Chinese people were bad because they did not know better. Then the Chinese people gave them treasure. The second time, the Chinese people came again and gave them lovely things again. In the other countries people thought Chinese people were kind and also thought they were rich, richer than their own country. So, some of them moved to China and lived there.

During that time, there were black men and white men in China. Chinese people knew lots of things about different countries. And they knew lots of things about China too! During that time, you can see Chinese people eat a lot of food from the other countries. Such as sushi, cheese, pizza and milk-tea. Also, you can see black men and white men eat Chinese food such as baozi, zongzi, porridge and bun. They even can use chopsticks. They love China!

Thank you for watching. See you tomorrow! Zai Jian. Bye Bye!

# The Ming Treasure Voyage

*Harrow International School Shanghai, Shen, Skye – 9*

Hello and welcome to the history show. Today we will be talking about the Ming Treasure Voyages. It all happened from 1405 to 1433. The voyages were started by Zhu Di, The Yongle Emperor.

There are many important people involved in the voyages, one of who is the Yongle emperor, Zhu Di. He was a friend of Zheng He and also the emperor from 17 July 1402 to 12 August 1424. Zheng He was the main leader of the fleets. His dad, Ma He, was captured because he resisted the great Ming empire. He was then forced to be a servant, but his son, Zheng He and Zhu Di became friends and then Zheng He became one of Zhu Di's most trusted generals. Zheng He died on the way back to Nanjing on the seventh voyage. His body was buried in the ocean at Calicut, India. Then he was given an official tomb in Nanjing, although his body never made it there.

The seven voyages all happened from 1405 to 1433. The first one was from 1405 to 1407, featuring 27,000 troops and 317 ships. The fleet visited many places such as Champa (central Vietnam), Siam (today's Thailand), Island Java, Straits of Malacca, Cochin and the Kingdom of Calicut on the Southwestern coast of India. On his return, Zheng He put down a pirate uprising in Sumatra, bringing the pirate chief, an overseas Chinese, back to Nanjing for punishment. The second voyage was from 1407 to 1409, featuring 68 ships, traveling to Champa, Java, Siam, Cochin, Ceylon and Calicut. The third voyage was from 1409–1411, featuring 48 treasure ships, with 30,000 troops. Zheng He visited many of the same places from the first voyage but also traveled to Malacca on the Malay Peninsula and Ceylon (Sri Lanka). When fighting broke out between Zheng He's forces and those of a small kingdom, Zheng He put down the fighting, captured the king and brought him back to China where he was released by the emperor.

The fourth voyage was from 1413 to 1415, featuring 63 ships and 28,000 troops. It visited many of the same places, including Hormuz on the Persian Gulf. The fifth voyage was from 1417 to 1419. The main reason for this voyage was to return 17 tributes from South Asia. On this trip Zheng He ventured even further, first to Aden at the mouth of the Red Sea, and then on to the east coast of Africa, stopping at the city states of Mogadishu and Brawa (in today's Somalia), and Malindi (in present day Kenya). The sixth voyage was from 1421 to 1422, with 41 ships. Zheng He went to many of the previously visited Southeast Asia places and India's courts and stopped on the Persian Gulf, the Red Sea, and the coast of Africa, mainly to return nineteen ambassadors to their homelands. Two years later on 12<sup>th</sup> August 1424, the Yongle emperor died. His successor, the Hongxi Emperor, put the voyages on a halt! Unfortunately, he died the very next year of a heart attack. The Hongxi emperor's successor, Xuande Emperor, allowed one last voyage for Zheng He and his crew. The last, but not least voyage was the seventh voyage, from 1431 to 1433, with more than a hundred ships and over 27000 men! It was more like a farewell voyage than a treasure voyage like the other six voyages. Zheng He unfortunately died on the way back. After that the money and resources were shifted to build a big, powerful, strong, beautiful wall to keep the annoying neighbors (the Mongles) out.

There were many interesting things that the Chinese brought back from the voyages and once they brought back an actual living GIRAFFE! The Yongle Emperor He was extremely shocked because it looked very similar to a Chinese mythical beast, and when seeing it, it meant that the right emperor was on the throne.

China was impressive in building ships four times bigger than Marco Polo's ships and they also built a large quantity of them, as well as a great giant walls. The Chinese exploring spirit has helped human society progress.

# The Ming Treasure Voyages

*Harrow International School Shanghai, Zhang, Evan – 9*

The Ming Treasure Voyages is the most remarkable event of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The Ming Treasure Voyages were the fleet of Chinese ships that explored the sea. It spanned twenty-eight years, from 1405 to 1433, which was over 100 years earlier than the Age of Discovery. The chief captain was Zheng He, who was an aid to the Chinese Emperor. The Chinese Emperor trusted Zheng He. The fleet consisted of 1403 ships and traveled six times visiting over 30 countries. The voyages started from Nanjing and reached as far as the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea.

The fleet had to face many challenges during the voyage: living through natural disasters, preserving cargo, and fighting pirates. Firstly, they encountered many natural disasters that were very dangerous. Secondly, the food and the cargo had to stay in good condition. Moreover, they not only had to protect the goods, but also to defend themselves, because there were pirates at sea. Zheng He and his crew had to be on their alert at all times to be prepared to fight pirates. There were some countries that were hostile to them and would take any possible opportunities to attack the fleet. Fortunately, they did not, and the Chinese sailors stayed on the sea for four years during each voyage!

The Ming Treasure Voyages proved a miracle at the time.

## Zheng He's Voyages'

*Harrow International School Shanghai, Zhang, Evan R. – 9*

Many years ago, in 1405 there were many ships in China. There was a man called Zheng He. He was the leader of seven voyage. He was very strong and when they sailed to many countries (10 in total), he took a

lot of gold and silver. When China returned from these countries Zheng He was the greatest man. He made everything good and he also skillfully fought against those threatening China. The ships had many useful tools and instruments! They used compasses to see their way in the night. They had to see stars so that they could find their way.

## New tales of the Ming Voyages

*Korean International School Springboard, De Groot, Leonardo – 14*

One day a captain in the ocean told me a tale about 616 years ago in the dynasty of Ming. He told me that China had lots of men that had traveled all across the great ocean. In China, there was a large fleet that carried lots of treasure to trade for other resources that they didn't have. They traded for a giraffe, crocodile and all the animals that they did not have. The captain told me that this is what they would get... Now this is where the real story starts. One day when Ming the king was still in power he asked some men to make a fleet of boats to sail all over the ocean and the main reason the ships set off was so they could make friends with other countries and trade different things. They did sometimes take out their weapons to conquer lands, but they were mostly friendly. One day as they sailed on the sea they saw land not far away. They sailed to it and it took weeks to arrive at the shore. After they asked could they trade some of the things that they didn't have? But the people said "Yesterday, a man arrived at our village and then we traded our goods, and treasure. We traded for hours, I even traded my boat for a box of chips".

Later when they were on the sea, they saw land. On that land, they saw no one so they went on shore and started to find treasure. Then they arrived at a mountainside and saw something shiny. They took out their mining tools and started mining until they got all the shiny things and loaded them onto the ships. Then they sailed to another island to gather loot and treasure and traded with some men. The captain sailed across the sea to yet another island and began to trade with some men. They traded an elephant for some food, herbs, medicine, gold, rubies, and some diamonds. The elephant was too big for the boat and as they set off for the next island the boat sank and all the people drowned. The elephant was ok though, because elephants are good swimmers.

## The Treasure on the Spaceship

*Korean International School Springboard, Lee, Hae Chan – 13*

One day in the space center headquarters the Captain launched his space craft to trade treasure with other planets. Onboard the spacecraft was the Captain and an army of soldiers to fight any invaders. They traveled north to search for treasure using a telescope. Their plan was to dig silver and diamonds in space. After they had dug enough silver and diamonds they went further into space. When they arrived on a planet the captain used his sword to point at one of the space center enemies who were on the planet. They said, "No way! You will never ever rob our treasures." The Captain said, "Don't feel scared. We are not here to threaten you. We want to trade treasure. We don't want to invade you, trust us." The enemy said, "Ok you are free to go for the rest of the day. Then at the end of today you must go back to digging silver and diamonds in space." All of the captain's soldiers said "Ok" but when the enemies went away they took the treasure off their enemies and ran back to their ship and went back to travel to their space center. When they got back to their headquarters they looked at all the treasures they had stolen. There was shiny gold coins and jewels. All of the soldiers really loved it. It was the best treasure anyone had ever seen. The captain didn't want the treasure because he didn't like stolen things he wanted to trade with the enemies. Actually the Captain thought the other planet enemies looked like robbers and criminals but he was an honest man. The Captain also had a good mind towards the poor. He wanted to trade. The Captain was a famous leader in space. He was the leader of the space center for about 50 years.

## New tales of the Ming Voyages

*Korean International School Springboard, Lin, Adrian – 13*

A long time ago in Shanghai, there was a 13 year old girl named Mei Mei who lived with her parents Ama and Apa. One day, she met Zheng He the famous Admiral for the emperor. When she met Zheng He, she asked him to take her to Thailand to explore.

When they arrived in Thailand, they went to a pirate ship to explore. She saw a lot of golden coins in the treasure chests! She then stole the coins so that she could give them to the poor people. But, the pirates stopped Mei Mei because she was stealing the coins. Mei Mei gave back the coins and she felt sorry, and explained to the pirates that she was trying to give coins to the poor people. After Mei Mei gave the money back, she travelled back to China with Zheng He.

When Mei Mei travelled back to China, she told her parents about what happened in Thailand. Her parents said “You can’t steal money! You need to work hard to make money for yourself!” Mei Mei then studied hard to become an Admiral. After she became an Admiral, she made money for herself so that she could give it to the poor people. She felt very happy to give money to the poor people. She was also excited to become an Admiral so she could explore different countries. She went to Japan, Korea, Singapore, India and Africa to learn about their cultures.

## New Stories of the Ming Treasure Voyages

*Korean International School Springboard, Lowther, Jessica – 12*

Once upon a time, there was a young man named Zheng He. He was clever, brave, strong and tall. He wanted to go on a journey and explore new places. He travelled to the South to find the treasures with his big ship. He made a big ship made out of wood and inside it had a kitchen for food. There was also a toilet, bedroom, nurse’s room and some treasure. He started taking the boat to the south. It was a long journey. He took two months to sail south. He stopped at an island. He saw a lot of people. A lot of people looked at him because he was tall and had a very big ship. The people kept looking at him. The island was beautiful. There were flowers, trees and a mountain.

He kept on walking for four hours and he found some treasure. The treasure was diamond rings, gold, diamond necklaces and money. Suddenly, he saw a bad guy called Cotton Chicken. He stole the treasure away. Zheng He was not afraid of Cotton Chicken because he thought that he didn’t had any power. Then Zheng He found out that he DID have a lot of power so he was very scared, but he chose to be brave. Then Zheng He started to try to get the treasure away from him. Zheng He had a magic guitar that could blow people away, so he used his blowing guitar and blew Cotton Chicken away. He was proud of himself and he walked back down for four hours and he was still not tired. Then he went to the boat and went back to China for two months. The people were proud of him and they celebrated Zheng He because he found the special and hard to find treasure.



# New tales of the Ming Treasure Voyages

*Korean International School Springboard, So, Kirsty – 13*

Once upon a time, there was a boy named Jung Kook, he saw a big boat outside sitting on the ocean. So he went inside the boat and stole many lots of gold, jewels and diamonds. Jungkook used the big boat to travel. He was happy and went to a forest to find a small house to live. One day he went back to the big boat and found out that all the gold, jewels and diamonds were lost already. He was clueless, who had taken everything away from the boat?

In the afternoon of that day, Jung Kook went to find the gold, jewels and diamonds. He found a monkey in his boat. The monkey wanted to help him to find the gold, jewels and diamonds. So they set off to look for their treasure.

Next day, they continued to find the gold, jewels and diamonds. The monkey found a very big bag of gold in a different boat. He found it in the boat of a bad guy named Chris. Chris had stolen so many Jewels and gold. The next day, Jungkook was still sleeping but the monkey came back to the ship. The monkey said “wake up I have found the treasure on a ship. It has so many jewels, gold and diamonds. There is a problem though, there is a bad bad guy called Chris, on the boat”.

Jung kook said “where is his boat? Can you take me?”

In the morning the monkey brought Jung Kook to the boat. Suddenly, Jung Kook and the monkey saw Chris on the boat. Jungkook said “Hey Monkey, how do I get onto the boat?” The monkey said “you can find a door”. The door was locked. Then Jung Kook told Monkey to jump up and take the key. Monkey jumped up on the tree. He just got the key without anyone seeing him. Jung Kook took the key and opened the door, then they took the jewels, gold and diamonds and went back to their boat and sailed to the forest, and went back to their small house. The Bad guy Chris found out who stole his gold and followed a map and went to the small house, but when he found the small house he thought that there was no way all of the gold could be in there. But it was. Chris jumped back into his boat and never returned. The monkey went back to a tree and Jungkook went back to living in his small house. They used the boat and went travelling whenever they felt like it.

# The Great Treasure of Beijing and the battle of the Terracotta Warriors vs the Guangzhou Soldiers

*Korean International School Springboard, Wai, Kaden – 12*

Long ago, on September 9th 1623 there was a 14 year old called Ming Kashong who lived in a place called Guangdong City. He had two friends called Thomas Longgong and Zheng Xiamen who were also 14 years old. They also lived in Guangdong City. A city in the South of China.

They met in February 1613. The three friends' parents died when they were just four years old. Emperor Chao Ting Lhasa. The Emperor of Guangdong City found them when they just young boys. And when the three friends showed talent, the Emperor Chao Ting Lhasa trained them until their bones cracked for 10 years. The emperor became the greatest kung fu teacher in all of China. Five years later when they were 19 years old, they were the chosen ones to be the leaders of the Guangzhou Soldiers to fight at the great city of Beijing led by Emperor Chao Ting Lhasa.

Over the years, they fought every kingdom in all of China.

They fought every dynasty that came along throughout the years. They fought the Yan dynasty, The Chu dynasty, the Wei dynasty, the Jin kingdom, the Qin dynasty, the Han dynasty, the Zhao dynasty, and the Qi dynasty.

A big reason the Warriors of Guangzhou army kept winning every single kingdom, was because the soldiers wanted to join the kingdom and because the warriors of Guangzhou trained so much longer than every other soldier in every dynasty and they had the latest weapons that anyone had ever created.

One day, when they were fighting the Shang dynasty, all of the Guangzhou soldiers ran for their lives. Now Zheng, Ming and Thomas were surrounded by 60,000 of terracotta soldiers carrying poison darts by another Emperor called Emperor Qin Shi Huangdi. "Well well well. Did you really think you can defeat my kingdom nine months ago?" said Qin

Thomas said "Emperor Qin? How are you still alive?"

"Well" said the emperor "back four years ago I ran out of sight thinking that I was dead. But it turns out, I'm still alive! Then I heard an army down a well when I was walking around the forest and I climbed down and saw a million Terracotta Warriors in the well preparing for there war, so I came down, killed the emperor who was leading them, called Emperor Shu and I secretly killed him with my sword and said, My name is Emperor Qin! I am your emperor from now on! Kneel before me! and they protected me from any kingdom we have ever faced and I'm finally gonna get revenge of what you did to my dynasty with the treasure of Beijing!"

"Huh that's it?" said Thomas. Emperor Qin said,

"No no! That treasure is actually real and there are gods inside that can teach the secret formulas so we can live forever. Once we live forever, we will take over every King and queen in the world, then I will rule the world and become the most powerful man IN THE WORLD!! Wuahahahaha!"

Qin then said, "We have been fighting for 19 years more than you. But Ming said "Not true" "Yeah" said Zheng

Thomas said "We've been fighting for 23 years, this our 24th year"

"Oooohh" said Ming and Zheng.

Thomas then said, "Listen you can't blame us for what happened to your dynasty. Every single dynasty fought each other like the Jin and the Zhao dynasty."

Ming then said, "The Zhao dynasty was so strong they almost blew us up to splinters."

"Grrrrrrrr" said Qin. Then he said "I don't care if I have fought less years than you, I am blaming you. I only care about taking over the treasure of Beijing. Not only are there gods inside. There is gold, jewels, diamonds, emeralds, rubies, gems and cash and when I take them, I'll become the richest person in all of the world, and will take over every single kingdom in every dynasty and kill every king and queen in all of the world, then nothing will ever stop me! Wuahahahahahaha"

The soldiers laughed too. Then he said, "AMBUSH THEM!" "Wait! Stop! No No NOOOO!!!" said our three heroes.

One year later, Thomas, Ming and Zheng woke up. They opened the box where Qin had put them when they got poisoned. "What did Qin do to us?" said Thomas.

Ming said, "he shot us with poisonous darts and placed us in a box!"

"CURSE YOU EMPEROR STUPID QIN!" screamed Thomas "Besides, where are we?" said Ming.

Zheng said, "Hmmm I think we arrived at the city of Old Shanghai"

12 seconds later, they got out of the box and started walking around the city and they remembered what Qin said.

"This is crazy! He's gonna kill us!" said Thomas.

Ming replied "What were they talking about the treasure of Beijing?"

"Who cares?" said Zheng.

Thomas then said "Look all we have to do is go back to Guangdong City, stop Qin then everything goes back to normal!"

"Tell me you're joking, right?" said Ming.

Thomas then said "Just think about it. They have weapons like crossbows, guns, cannons, TNT, bombs and catapults. We could be dead if we battled him now!"

"Ohhh" said Zheng.

Ming said, "Well if we're gonna stop Qin from stealing that treasure, we're gonna need help!"

They asked the King of The Gobi Desert called Jackson Shengfong for help. Just then, a ray of sunlight brought down a monkey called Sun Wukong with his staff and a man named Erlang with his golden armor to come and help them also. The friends were shocked "Are—Are you Sun Wukong and Erlang!?"

"Yes" he replied.

Jackson said "Oh my gosh it is you!"

Ming fainted with Joy and said

"THIS IS THE BEST DAY OF MY LIFE!!"

Sun then said "My gods asked me to come and help you, what seems to be the trouble?"

Thomas said "We got ambushed by Emperor Qin, he's captured all of our soldiers and destroyed our village.

Then Jackson said "And now he's going to find the Beijing treasure voyages where the gods inside the chest can teach him how to live forever and take over the world!"

Sun was shocked to hear that "Then we must stop him!" he said angrily. So their journey began. Along the way they told other people who said they would join them in battle. They told the king of the Yangtze River called Owen Chang. He said Yes

They told the Queen of the Pearl River Delta called Shi Shi. She said yes. Then they told the Queen of the Great Wall of China called Dung Shi Fong. She said Yes. They even told the queen of the South China Sea, Called Jessie Sangzhong. She said Yes.

And last but not least, they told the queen of the Silk Road called Xia Yuenchang. She said yes.

It took one year until they finally arrived at the village where Emperor Qin had just destroyed the Xinjiang Village 2 months before. Meanwhile, Emperor Qin was preparing for destroying the Guangdong dynasty where. They made cannons, guns, crossbows, TNT. Then, one of the soldiers said, "Sir, the cannons, the guns, the crossbows, the catapults and the TNT are almost done.

"Place them near the Pearl River Delta "said Qin" and we must set sail and destroy every village in China.

First we get the treasure and then every country in the world is my reward!! Wuahahahahahaha!"

Meanwhile, one of the soldiers came to the throne room and said, "Sir the 3 warriors are still alive!"

"What!?" said Qin. Then he said, "This is the number one disaster! I don't want these idiots to capture me and try to kill me with their weapons! GO! Find these warriors and bring them to me." "Yes sir" said one of the soldiers. Meanwhile, they came to the emperor's castle. It was very quiet. Shi Shi said "Where is Qin?" Erlang said "I think he must be creating weapons for destroying China and the entire world now." . Then they found Qin's castle and they looked around the castle and saw every Emperor he killed and executed in China. Xia couldn't believe what she saw. Everyone was shocked. But just then, they heard some laughing in the basement. They walked down to see what was going on. They saw a large group of soldiers and Emperor Qin was about to go on his throne filled with diamond swords. He said, "Start all peperations! We will take down the world by FORCE! Wuahahahahahaha!!!"

The soldiers cheered and screamed with joy.

"This is bad, this is so very bad" said Xia.

"So the plan was to get the treasure of Beijing, then they will kill every king and queen in the world" said Jackson.

Zheng then said, "I know, what if we can free the Guangzhou Soldiers and destroy the emperor and every other soldier he has?"

Then Sun said, "But we need the key to unlock every soldier. And besides, it's gonna take a long time to find them."

But Shi Shi remembered she saw the key for the jail cells.

"I can get it!" said Dung Shi Fong. I'm a master of disguise. Almost one hour later, she finally got the key. And unlocked every soldier out of the jail cell.

Sun said "Out this way quietly! We can get past them!"

They started to head for Beijing to find the treasure until they finally found it in a deep dark cave near The Pearl River Delta but first they had to prepare for war just in case Qin came over to attack “I thought my mother said it was just a myth” said Xia. But when Zheng went inside to take it, he heard a rumbling noise.

It was the earth shaking. “Hurry, put it back!” said Zheng. But it was too late. The Terracotta warriors came running across the forest “Uh Zheng? We got company!” said Sun.

They looked back, the soldiers carried all the weapons they created for war. “Is that the best you could do?” Emperor Qin said “This is the best I could do. I have cannons, guns and TNT. How can you possibly stand up to me?”

Jackson said, “Listen we don’t want any trouble OK? Just leave the treasure alone then the war is over you thief! If you don’t put back the treasure in two hours, the whole world will be destroyed!”

“How do you know?” said Dung Shi then said,

“I think he must have a book about the treasure of Beijing.” Said Thomas.

“Hahahahahahaha” said the soldiers

Qin angrily said “I don’t care! that treasure is supposed to be ours so we can rule the world!”

Shi Shi said “Boy, this guy is really intense”

“Last chance Qin, GO HOME OR DEATH!” said Sun

“I am home!” said Qin. “ATTACK!”

“Raaaaaaaaaaaaa!” said the soldiers.

Xia, Shi Shi, Owen, Dung and Sun had powers of their own. Owen had the power of speed, Dung had the power of strength, Shi Shi had the power of sound, and Jackson had the power of fire and Sun had the power of breathing under water, invisibility, his body as hard as a diamond, a magical staff that can grow big and small the power of Lightning, flight, he can shoot laser from his eyes and best of all, he can create land serpents to fight the terracotta warriors. Together, they fought and tried to back off Qin’s soldiers from getting the treasure. Their battle shook the earth, until all of Qin’s soldiers were dead leaving their blood spilling everywhere.

“Hooray!” said everyone. But they didn’t know that Qin had already stole the treasure and 20 Guangzhou soldiers still survived. “Grrrrrrr” said Qin “Call in the dinosaurs!”

Zheng heard something rumbling down the forest “What is that noise?” said Jackson. There were 10 dinosaurs. The Pentaceratops, the Triceratops, the Baryonyx, the Deinonychus, the Herrerasaurus, the Stegosaurus, the Tyrannosaurus Rex, the Therizinosaurus, the Spinosaurus and the Diplodocus. They had to fight every single dinosaur from the Triassic, Jurassic, Early Cretaceous, and the Late Cretaceous periods. “I thought they were all extinct 65 million years ago” said Jessie.

Erlang said, “Maybe he must have secretly kept some dinosaur eggs?”

Almost 45 minutes later they defeated every dinosaur Qin launched. They ran after Qin when he was carrying a long stick that was on fire. Everyone tried to stop him but it was too late. He set the forest on fire. The fire spread around very fast. “Wuahahahahaha” said Qin

“Why are you doing this?” said Shi Shi.

Emperor Qin said, “Because you ruined my plan, and I also have magic powers the evil gods gave me inside the treasure palace and I can change into any monster I want!

“NO!” screamed Erlang

“YES!!!” said Qin.” “And now is the time I turn into a fire breathing monster and the greatest power of HELL!!! Wuahahahahahaha!!!! Wuahahahahahaha!!!!”

He transformed into a fire breathing King Kong Gorilla with the biggest legs and the biggest arms the world has ever seen. His fire was blazing red hot, like lava. He grew bigger and was at least as tall as the Abraj Al Bait Towers. Now they had to get rid of the tallest beast they had ever faced in the entire universe.

Everyone was shocked and surprised. The rock they were standing on grew taller and at least 2110 feet tall started to form into a flat surface “This has to end now!” said Sun. His magic staff grew at least 10 cm taller than him.

Qin roared and he grabbed the staff, and threw it around and around until Sun became dizzy and let go of his magical staff. Owen caught him.

“Sun, are you OK?” said Thomas.

“Oh I’ve been better” said Sun. Ming started to fight him and poked his left eye and Qin let go of Sun’s staff and Ming caught it and asked Shi Shi to hold it. Sun got up grabbed his staff from Shi Shi’s hand and fought him for the 2nd time. “I’ll be stronger than him, I’ll be faster than him. I know I can.” said Sun. Qin and Sun had the fight of their lives. The soldiers decided to fight Qin too and so did the four queens, the two kings and the three friends, Thomas, Zheng and Ming. Sun was very tired, so Thomas, Zheng and Ming decided to help him. Qin tried to step on them, but Thomas, Ming, and Zheng dodged it and Qin almost fell into the fire but managed to grab onto a rock. When Thomas, Zheng and Ming came closer they said, “Game over Qin,” But Qin broke the rock they were standing on and they fell into the fire but luckily managed to grab on. The rock Qin was holding onto cracked and snapped and he fell into the hot blazing fire. He roared and slammed to the ground. He was covered in fire because of his fur. He ran around in circles six times until he went down on his knees and fell flat on his face and died. Thomas, Ming and

Zheng managed to make it back to the rock platform to safety. But then, the world was crumbling and tearing apart. Jackson said, “Come on, we don’t have much time! Place the treasure back before it’s too late! Zheng ran to the cave where they found the treasure and placed it just in time before the world was destroyed. The forest fire was gone and every dynasty Thomas, Ming and Zheng fought came back. The people who died had came back to life. “We did it!” said Shi Shi “I thought we were going to die! said Jessie. Everyone and every villager in every dynasty came to the heroes and threw them up in the air saying, “You rock! ,you’re our hero! you guys rule!” Emperor Chao came and said, “Well done you three. You have proven to everyone you’re great heroes. Ming said, “I think that treasure is for keeping the world alive.” “True” said Thomas. Emperor Chao said, let’s all head back to the village in Guangdong City and rebuild it. Two weeks later, they all had a celebration and the two kings and the four queens of China came too

“Everyone” said Emperor Chao

“Let’s give the three friends Thomas, Zheng and Ming a big round of applause!” Everyone clapped and smiled. Emperor Chao gave them three diamond staffs and on top of it was the Yin and Yang sign. “That was the best battle yet!” said Thomas. Ming said, “defeating Qin was my favourite part”. Two minutes later, everyone saw the fireworks Shi Shi made and they were launched into the sky. The sky filled with many colors and shapes. And that’s how Thomas, Zheng and Ming became the greatest fighters of all China.



# Fiction

Group 7

# My Friend Zheng He

*Korean International School Springboard, Mak, Arthur – 16*

It is 1402, my 19th year and the beginning of my career as a sailor in the Emperor's Fleet. Our Emperor, Zhu Di, has ordered our admiral, Zheng He, to explore all the countries around China and beyond. Right now we are sailing to Indonesia to trade. Below the deck that I am standing on, our ship is crammed with treasures — fine porcelain vases, bales of silk, gold and silver and many other things from our country to trade and give as gifts to the kings and important people of the countries we explore. We have been to Indonesia many times before, but Zheng He has explored countries much farther away. Some of the older sailors say that he has been to countries where people have black skin and there are strange animals with enormous ears and long twisting noses, and others with long legs and necks. Some sailors say they were on the ship that brought some of these strange creatures back to China as gifts to the Emperor from Zheng He.

Our emperor wants to know everything about the world and has entrusted Zheng He to go out and explore the countries that surround China. When Zheng He was a slave in Zhi Di's father's household, Zhu Di recognized how special Zheng He was. His name was not always Zheng He. He was born as Ma He in a Muslim family. Growing up, he dreamed of being an adventurer like his father and grandfather before him, so it was lucky for him that he was captured and taken as a slave to serve the emperor and that Prince Zhu Di recognized how special Ma He was, because when Zhu Di became emperor, he promoted Ma He to Admiral of the Fleet and changed his name to Zheng He. Zheng He's dream had come true, he could now explore the world.

I think Zheng He becomes popular with people in different countries. In our next journey, I have a map that I got from the pirates that we encountered. The map leads us to an island with huge treasures. Once we realize this, we all shout with huge excitement because we want to get our hands on these precious things. Of course, we can't stop thinking of the treasures. They are not just only for us, but they are also for our people in China as presents. Zheng He is right, we are supposed to share with our people first.