



Fiction
age 9 & under

The Cyclone Swordfish

Justin Mak, 8, Bradbury School

One warm spring evening, a curious boy called John was sitting on his bed, reading a book called *How to Build Submarines That Can Move Faster than Light*. “Why don’t I go over to Jim’s house and build a real submarine with him?” John said to himself.

Jim was John’s best friend and a very smart kid and he knew everything about building time machines, spaceships, rockets, robots, anything mechanical.

When John arrived in Jim’s room, he exclaimed, “Wow! Jim! Your room is just like a metal scrapyard!”

“I took these materials all out of this cupboard when I saw you in my binock-you-binoculars.” He pointed to a rusty cupboard made of silver and aluminium. “What’s binock-you-binoculars?” asked John curiously. “It’s just like a normal pair of binoculars but it can tell you where the person you are looking for is located and it can read the person’s mind,” answered Jim. “Now, what was that we wanted to do?”

“Build a submarine that can travel faster than light.” John said flatly.

In no time they had made an ultra-comfortable, super-fast, convenient and shiny but small submarine which could travel faster than light with the help from Springy the Robot out of unbreakable aluminium, stainless steel, mega-tough iron, platinum, bronze, leather, cotton, glass and wires.

“Okay, now we’ve finished. Let’s name it. Hmm...it’s vigorous, powerful, as slender as a sword and it can move swiftly in all directions, like a cyclone. So let’s call it the ...” said Jim.

“Cyclone Swordfish!” ended John.

“Why don’t we go on a trip right now?”

“Great idea, Jim! Springy can come too!”

“Super!” replied Springy.

When they had all climbed in and closed the cockpit door, Jim started the engines. Then John yelled over the rumbling of the engines, “Jim! Wait! Where are we going?”

“We’re going to visit the bottom of the South China Sea to uncover a long-lost treasure!” Jim screamed over the roaring engines. “Wahoo!” John and Springy cried.

Suddenly, the floor cracked open beneath them and the Cyclone Swordfish plunged rapidly into the deep icy water.

John let out a battle cry “Aaaaaaarrrrrrrrrrggggggggghhhhhhhhh!” as they were surrounded by the dark and mysterious water. They were covered in blackness for a few minutes until Jim turned on the submarine headlights. “Phew!” said John. “Thank goodness the drop was over.”

“Yeah,” agreed Springy.

Jim then turned on the “Locator Pad”. Seconds later, words flashed up on the screen: “One kilometre east away from a mermish city. 30,000 kilometres above a treasure.”

There were also some coloured blobs shown on the screen. “What exactly are the blobs?” questioned John.

“The black blob is our submarine,” said Jim. “The two orange blobs represent the two of us and the yellow blob is Springy.”

“What about the third orange blob?” questioned Jim.

“Um...oh my gosh! I think that ... that might be a mermaid or a merman!” explained John.

Suddenly, all the lights in the submarine turned red and the alarms sounded.

“SUBMARINE MALFUNCTIONING! HOVERING TOO LONG! CYCLONE SWORDFISH SINKING!”

In minutes, they were trapped in a deep dark pit. The two boys were horrified but Springy stayed relaxed. “I have good news,” said Springy in an expressionless voice. “We are in a rocky pit where the treasure is.”

“Maybe we can shout for help. Hopefully someone will hear us. Luckily I brought my Electro Microphones. They can make your voice sound 500 times louder!”

They shouted “help” for 10 minutes. All of a sudden, an orange and blue immense submarine with spotless glass windows landed gracefully in front of the Cyclone Swordfish.

The two boys and Springy were stunned. “Magnificent,” they all whispered.

Then three mermen and two mermaids glided out of the submarine. The merpeople all had black hair, yellowish peach skin, brown eyes and a red tail. The mermen were more muscular while the mermaids were slimmer. The mermen also had darker skin and long and thin tails.

Jim and John put on their oxygen masks and went out of their submarine together with Springy. “Good evening,” said a mermaid. “My name is Ling. This is my friend, Jem.” She pointed to the other mermaid. “She was the one who heard your cries of help so we decided to come down and investigate. This is our submarine’s captain, Bruce.”

“Find out what caused their submarine to crash down here. Try and fix it.” Bruce commanded the two mermen.

Meanwhile, Ling, Jem and Bruce invited the two boys and their robot onto their mermish submarine. “Let’s go to the ‘weapons quarter’ first. It’s my favourite place,” suggested Bruce.

The “weapons quarter” was a small room with lots of extraordinary weapons including the whale scythe, the serpent blade and the thunder musket. John was fascinated: “Cool! I’ve never seen anything like these.”

The two mermaids laughed. “There wouldn’t be a ‘weapons quarter’ if it wasn’t for Bruce.”

Bruce chuckled. “If you mermaids weren’t on board, there wouldn’t be a ‘catering corner.’”

“Can we go there now? I am starving and I bet our guests here feel the same.”

The “catering corner” was a very clean and large kitchen with a spectacular display of mermish food, including seaweed biscuits, sea grapes wrapped in sea grass and coral root tea. Both John and Jim ate some seaweed biscuits dipped in coral gravy. “That is the best vegetarian meal I’ve ever tasted!” the two boys yelled.

Then, the two mermen entered the lab and said proudly, “Everything’s fixed.”

“We want to give you a gift for saving us.” Jim and John asked Springy to find the treasure chest inside the rocky pit. Springy dug up the treasure chest and gave it to Bruce. “Thank you for saving us,” the three of them said gratefully to the merpeople and boarded the Cyclone Swordfish.

They took off and were surrounded by blackness again. John closed his eyes and when he opened them again, he found himself lying on his bed, waking up from his wonderful dream.

Ringo Saves The Sea

Samantha Brooks, 9, Bradbury School

Ringo the pink dolphin whizzed hastily through her garbage-filled ocean home in the South China Sea. She was going to Tooth Rock, a place where Ringo liked to think. When Ringo glimpsed at the jagged tooth-shaped rock as it loomed up ahead of her, she gasped with utter horror. The rock was surrounded by mountains of garbage! Ringo darted in between bags and cans, as she tried to reach the safety of her grooved-out cave, which was a slot in Tooth Rock.

Ringo dived into her dark limpet-filled cave and as she did so she realised she needed to breathe.

Ringo swooped out of her thinking cave like an angel, and headed towards the surface of the polluted sea. When she burst through the slimy cover of horrible brown froth, Ringo breathed deeply and swallowed.

“Yuck!” thought Ringo as she gazed in shock at the moldy ugly froth that covered her rose pink back. Ringo gulped as she discovered that a piece of fishing net was caught over her swishy fishy tail. She leaped back into the water and found a sharp rock on which she cut the blue net. The shaggy net bobbed away and Ringo swam quickly back to her cave which was in the complete opposite direction.

Ringo got back to her cave just as a heroic idea started to plot itself in her mind. When Ringo was settling herself onto a comfy rock in the middle of her cave, a wobbly black shape caught her blue eye. Then all of a sudden, three ebony shapes came zooming towards the terrified but amazed dolphin. Ringo rushed to the back of her cave and darted behind a large sturdy boulder to hide. In a second or two, the black shapes were in the cave and Ringo felt the water rippling lightly. As she shivered, she noticed the shapes had tanks on their backs. They were divers!

Ringo was horrified at the thought of being caught by the exploring invaders. What if they trapped her in an aquarium and she never saw her exotic ocean home again?

Ringo hushed herself and edged further back in to her cave trying to stay in the safety of her boulder. The divers, named Sam, Edward and Jenny, moved swiftly and elegantly through

the barnacle-filled cave. Ringo noted that the three divers were enquiringly lifting up stones and putting shells into baskets, which were slung over their strong arms.

Edward and Sam looked behind the muscular boulder where Ringo was hiding. Ringo gaped as two gleaming eyes poked around the edge of the boulder. She realised that the boulder wasn't exactly up next to the wall of her cavern and there was just enough space for her to swim between the boulder and the wall, so she could escape. Unfortunately for her, Jenny was searching for water crystals right on the other side of Ringo's hideout. Then Ringo remembered that she had seen blurry white writing on the divers' sleeves earlier; she peered at Jenny's sleeve to try and read the writing, but of course Jenny was moving around too much, so Ringo hardly got a glimpse of her left arm. She just noticed that the writing said "GARBAGE GATHERERS".

All of a sudden Ringo noticed that Edward was poking her back. She flung herself round and nearly bashed him on the nose with her beak. She quickly murmured "Oh, sorry..." until she yelled at herself that she shouldn't have spoken. Sam cried, "You can talk!"

Jenny informed her friends that she suspected Ringo was a magical dolphin and Ringo grinned at her. Without thinking, Ringo blurted out her heroic idea to her new friends (Ringo suspected they were friends). She blurted it out so fast that Edward had to stop her. Sam asked Ringo what her name was and if she could help them. Ringo nodded a few times before asking her new pals what they needed help with. They addressed her with their plan, which was this:

"We are trying to go through Hong Kong waters to look for garbage and if we find anything dangerous we will take it back with us to put in a proper rubbish dump or recycle it. So... Ringo, can you help us?"

Ringo told her new buddies that she had the same idea as them and she would definitely help them. "But- but- but- there are sharks out there!"

"Don't worry Ringo," Jenny said calmly. "We won't take you where the sharks are."

Ringo nodded slowly, grabbed a bobbing plastic bag and zoomed out of the cave, calling after her "Come on guys, we've got an ocean to clean!" All four friends swam and crept about the Hong Kong sea, gathering rubbish and putting it in their large bags. After days of searching for stranded garbage, the four friends swam up to the icky surface for the last time, took a deep breath and looked around them. There was disgusting froth everywhere. Sam said that all this garbage was really too much for three people and a dolphin to do on their own and we could keep this environment clean by being eco-friendly. That means not throwing garbage in the sea, not reclaiming land, not polluting the air, cleaning up and we can all help each other and have a wonderful green world if we do just that.

You can be eco-friendly right now by walking out of your door and going along your street and picking up garbage and by telling people to be green and not to throw rubbish in the ocean or cut down trees. You can be green in other ways too! Think about it – see what you can do to help the Hong Kong environment! Be green!

How Dragons Got Their Long Tails

Venyatha Manne, 8, Delia School of Canada

Long, long ago in China, when the first dragon lived, everybody wanted to be happy but there was one tiny problem. There was a dragon named Ching. Ching boasted about how strong he was, he boasted about how he was the first dragon. But he mostly boasted about how handsome he was. “I look so handsome, you look so ugly!” he would say to the monkeys. “I am the strongest living thing on Earth!” he would say to everyone. Everybody in China got tired of it.

One day Ching saw that everyone was going away. Ching asked the birds why everyone was going. The birds said that a devil named Namoe was going to create an earthquake. Ching thought that this was the best time to show how strong he was. He didn’t go away with everyone even though the animals warned him. Then after a few hours the earthquake began! Oh, how dreadful it was! Ching tried and tried to kill Namoe but he was too strong. Ching held onto a tree with his short tail. His tail stretched and stretched.

Then by the time the earthquake ended Ching was bruised from head to tail, and his tail was so long! Ching hid himself from all the Chinese people and the animals, and stopped boasting. After that more dragons were born. They weren’t born bruised from head to tail. But they did have long tails. That’s how dragons got long tails.

Home of the Chinese White Dolphins

Alma Chan, 9, Diocesan Girls' Junior School

In the early 17th century, the Silk Road trade route passed through the South China Sea, and linked China with the Western world. At that time, a shipwreck occurred in the South China Sea. There was only one survivor, Richard Gullen. Who saved him? It was actually a secret. During the shipwreck, some precious treasure hidden in the ship had sunk into the depths of the South China Sea. Richard knew about the precious treasure and told his sons the story. However, he could not tell them who had saved him since he had promised to keep the secret. He could only give a hint to his sons, "If you find my saviour, please help me to reward 'him'." They too, in turn, told their sons the same thing and so the legend carried on.

One of Richard's descendants, Edward Gullen, heard about the treasure. He decided to explore the sea and tried to find it. His wife, Bella Wan, pleaded with him not to go since she knew that it was very dangerous. But Edward had already set his heart on it.

Edward started his journey on his birthday, 10th November. He brought all his scuba diving equipment and lots and lots of food. He said goodbye to his friends and set off. When he was on the boat in the South China Sea, he passed by a beautiful village with a huge harbour.

Using an old map, it took him two weeks to find the correct place where the ship had gone down. "One, two, three!" he cried to himself and jumped off the boat into the sea. He searched until it was pitch black and decided to try again the next day.

At night, he dreamt of his wife, Bella Wan, his dear friends and... "Pling, Plang, Pling, Plang" he was awakened by these weird sounds. There was a big storm coming, which was making huge waves and rattling his cans of food. He checked his waterproof watch and found out it was only four o'clock in the morning. "Oh! Never mind, I'm awake now and I can start my adventure again." And off he went.

According to the map, the treasure was right underneath him. He dived down for what seemed like forever. Then suddenly, he saw the ship. He thought, "Hooray! Hooray! I have found the ship!" But he thought too soon. An octopus appeared and sprayed ink all over him, so he could not see. The octopus seemed to be defending the ship so he thought of how to defeat the octopus. But he could not think of a solution. He yawned, checked his watch and found it was very late. So he went back up to the surface and slept.

He had a strange dream. He dreamt that an octopus was hunting for food and ate a lot of molluscs, especially crabs and crayfish. "Ha!" he thought, "I can defeat the octopus this way." He decided to draw its attention from the ship by putting its favourite food in front of him. So he went to find the octopus' favourite food. At last, he found ten crabs, three molluscs and eight crayfish.

Then, he brought all the food to the ship and put them in front of the octopus. But the octopus realized it was a trap and angrily shot some ink out of its mouth. Edward fainted and helplessly drifted away. When he came to, he found that he was lost. Suddenly, he heard a high-pitched squeaky voice, "Are you OK?" So, he answered, "I am lost. Who are you? Can you help me?" Then, something suddenly swooped up and caught Edward neatly on its back. "I am the Chinese White Dolphin's leader and we have come to save you. As you know the secret of the treasure, I must have saved your ancestor before. We will help you find the treasure, but you must promise not to tell anyone that we can communicate with humans like your ancestor." Startled but pleased, Edward promised. Actually, the dolphins had a secret passage to the treasure. Edward got the treasure successfully and became one of the richest people in the world.

He promised the Chinese White Dolphins that he would come back later and reward them. Edward's family moved to the beautiful village he found. He spent his money to develop the place and named it Hong Kong – meaning Fragrant Harbour.

A few years later, Edward bought a yacht and sailed out again to find the Chinese White Dolphins. He introduced the beautiful fishing village to the dolphins. The dolphins liked the place so much that they moved there. And that is why we can find Chinese White Dolphins in Hong Kong and they are not scared to be seen by humans. But when you are swimming with them, don't say bad things about them, because they can understand YOU!

Pirates in the South China Sea

Jessamyn Chiu, 8, Diocesan Girls' Junior School

It was a stormy day, and our captain, Ayush, was getting desperate. The wind blew our flagship, *Magdalena*, into a much sunnier place where no storms were brewing. I was relieved.

"Ship ahead to the east! Flying a French flag. She's sailing low in the waters, she must be loaded with treasure! Go get 'em!" shouted Captain Ayush.

I raised our flag, which was two crossed swords and a skull. Then I saw some oil rigs, and I reckoned that we had sailed into the South China Sea.

"Board the ship!" I cried, as I was the quartermaster. I grabbed a cutlass, a pistol and a dagger and hung them onto my belt. I then lit wicks laced with gunpowder and put them into my long hair, so smoke weaved out of my head, giving me a notorious and swashbuckling look.

I charged onto the ship, where I saw Azhar, another crewmember and Ayush, torturing this ship's captain. They had him naked, and were slapping him with the flat side of their cutlasses and daggers, so if he flinched, he would be cut. I stopped them with a wave of my hand.

"Yes, ma'am!" they muttered.

When the captain saw I was a girl, I noticed the man had a look of hope that the worst was over. I clapped my hand onto his back and said, "I understand you must be extremely hot and thirsty." Azhar eagerly placed lit candles in a circle around the main mast. The captain was shoved into the ring. "Now start running inside the circle of candles and don't stop until I tell you to. If you step outside the circle of candles, we will kill you," I commanded.

After he had run for ten minutes, I stopped him. "Men, cool off the poor gentleman and refresh him with water."

My crew picked up the captain and, with glee, tossed him overboard. They ransacked the place while I held the dead captain's crew by gunpoint and tortured them. I hollered as

we whipped their quartermaster with a cat-o'-nine-tails, "You are nothing but a bunch of yellow-bellied milksops. You deserve to die!"

Some of them muttered, "What a ruthless, bloodthirsty woman, so ferocious and violent!"

Parvesh, another quartermaster of *Magdalena* and a great friend of mine, helped me toss all the cowards into the sea.

"Fellows, this is a wonderful ship. I shall use it for my own good and call it *Marquesa!*" I addressed my crew.

"Hurray!" Everybody whooped and cheered.

I could see that Ayush didn't like it, but he was so chicken that he didn't say so. He acted as if there was a cloud hovering over him, while the others all yelped with joy.

"There's treasure down here!" Azhar, who was searching the *Marquesa* for valuables, had found tanks of opium down in the decks! Opium was priceless these days. We were all very excited. Opium was a drug to make people drowsy and the Europeans used it to control us. We dumped a lot of it into the sea.

"Ship close behind! She's flying British colours and is loaded with twenty cannons. Looks like more than several hundred sailors!" Parvesh reported. "Roll the cannons around, fly the flag, all hands on deck!"

Hey! The deck was empty! Everything was so quiet that you could hear a pin drop. Nobody obeyed my orders. Parvesh was still balanced upon the crow's nest.

"Where are the men?" asked Parvesh.

"Dunno," someone replied.

Now, the other ship sailed behind, fast closing in on us. "I'm so frightened by them... they might kill us ..." someone cried. All the men cowered below deck, moaning and groaning.

"Are you men? It's only an attack. Why is *Captain Ayush* so petrified and panic-stricken? Why is Azhar, *the courageous one*, so alarmed and terrified? Huh?" Parvesh shrieked sarcastically.

Nobody answered. She was interrupted by a shout, "Here we are!" The men from the other ship boarded our ship.

We grabbed our pistols and daggers and began to fire at the crowd. Our cutlasses flew to and fro so fast that it soon became a blur. Dozens of enemy attackers fell down immediately, but there were more to come.

"We can't go on like this," I whispered to Parvesh behind my bleeding hand. We were cut by flying debris and bullets whizzed past our ears. Then I had an idea. "Just follow me," I said. I leapt over the rails into the lukewarm water, swam to the other side and scrambled up the empty *Marquesa*. I took one of the shell explosions out of my pocket and lit it. These bombs explode after you count five hundred seconds. I put one in the captain's cabin, grabbed the bags of booty and hurled it over the other side, onto our ship. We then lit bombs here and there – in the food cupboard (we threw all the food out first), in the decks below, in the secret compartment in the steering wheel... everywhere! Dozens and dozens of them were hidden in every nook and cranny.

By the time we had finished our mission, the first few men from the enemy ship came on board. They weren't as quick as us. We fired at those upon the hull, but we let some go on purpose. As the last man climbed on deck, we plunged into the water. The two of us were still swimming as the first few explosions rocketed the fire ship, forcing us to swim underwater to avoid getting hit by the flying debris. We reached the *Magdalena* and looked with satisfying fascination as the flaming ship listed to her side and sank.

The pirates were still dancing along to the music of the fiddler at midnight.

"Rubina, we'll just get the riches and go, yeah? This pirating life is not for us," said Parvesh.

The Curse of Nessirora

Holly Keeffe, 8, Discovery Bay International School

One day coral sprouted from the sea and it was a new product to have. Divers went down, took the coral, and sold it. Sometimes people made them into bracelets.

A middle aged village lady wanted to show everyone that ladies could do helpful things like men. She decided to dive down under the beautiful blue sea to the ocean floor to collect some coral to make necklaces. Under the sea was the goddess of the sea Nessirora. She was beautiful. Her long golden hair covered her back, as her blue dress swayed in the water's current. Nessirora warned the village lady that she should stop taking the coral before a curse fell upon her. When the village lady was at her market stall she tried to think wisely if she should believe Nessirora or not. But she was not wise; her greed was stronger than her belief of the curse. The following day she dived down again to collect more coral. She was warned again but still took no notice of Nessirora. She sold her beautiful bright necklaces for lots of money and that night Nessirora came again but in her dreams.

"Do not take any more coral from the sea, all the pretty colours will be gone, and you will be cursed!" warned Nessirora.

She still took no notice. The next day she went back out to sea again, but before she could go into the water a heavy rain storm began. The boat rocked back and forth causing her to fall out. She started going pink and growing fins! The curse had come upon her! She had turned into a pink dolphin! Nessirora told her that making her a pink dolphin would bring more colour back to the sea.

Little Goo Travels to the South China Sea

Natasha Karolina Hirt, 9, German Swiss International School

One bright sunny morning, a factory near the Pearl River Delta was operating at full capacity. Tons and tons of sticky green, toxic goo were bubbling into the already heavily contaminated river. Little Goo looked around him with his sticky eyes in wonder. The water he was swimming in was brownish grey; patches of yellow algae were floating on the surface.

Soon, Little Goo spotted billowing masses of foam with minnows desperately leaping out of the water to breathe. He decided that this could only be the work of a powerful toxin. He remembered gossip about a “fellow” called Tox-ing who caused this kind of behaviour in minnows. Excited, he decided to make friends with him and called out, “Hey, Tox-ing! Will you come with me to the South China Sea?” Tox-ing answered, “Sorry, I can’t. I first have to poison this school of minnows completely. But to get the job done right I have to stay here for a while!” Little Goo sadly kept on sliming downriver.

Hoping for more luck than he had with Tox-ing, Little Goo slowly arrived in the South China Sea. After half a day’s travel he almost gave up hope when he saw a nice looking pile of garbage completely covered with oil. He thought, “Maybe there is a toxin or something in there!” Out of curiosity Little Goo drifted closer to the heap of junk when he spotted a blackish thing bobbing on the surface of the water. Interested, Little Goo asked, “Um, excuse me, but, uh, what is your name?” The thing answered gruffly with a voice that sounded like rocks cracking, “What do you think? My name is Tar Lar. Now leave me alone. I am in a private conversation with my friend J-unk. Bust out of here!” Confused, Little Goo swam away, figuring that Tar Lar was friends with J-unk because Tar Lar could keep J-unk from drifting apart.

Still dizzy with confusion about Tar Lar, Little Goo nearly floated into a huge yellowish cloud sprinkled with brown particles. Wondering who or what that was, he huddled closer. As the brown bits finally enveloped him, he nearly slimed out of his goo in recognition. He read

the Pollution Herald every time he got a chance. Last time he read it, he had noticed a column that discussed some form of water pollution, which accounted for roughly 30 per cent of it all. The members of that group were all distant cousins of him and called themselves the Sewag Yuk Clan. Little Goo, sadly realizing this particular Sewag Yuk Clan member ignored him completely, swam away muttering under his breath about the rudeness of it all.

Tired out by all his travelling, Little Goo hung around the Pearl River Delta and started clogging up some minnows' gills for a sport. Now, not far away, some liquid lead was contaminating the same school of minnows. Just as Little Goo looked up to see how much more he could do, he was amazed to find many minnows already dead, WITHOUT CLOGGED GILLS! Wondering what could have caused this, he slowly worked his way around all those dead minnows when it finally hit him. That must have been mighty Lead Duo's work. Yes, right, lead poisoning must have killed the minnows. Just that very moment, he spotted a silvery streak in the dirty water. Hoping that he would finally find a friend, Little Goo eagerly hurried towards the glittering streak. Then he heard a crackling voice.

Little Goo blinked in amazement and asked, "Is this really you, Lead Duo? Do you want to be my friend?" "Yep, that's me! But, who are you?" There it was again, that strange, metallic, cold voice. This time it seemed to come from the left. Swinging sharply in that direction Little Goo answered bravely, "I'm Little Goo!" In that very moment he spotted the silvery streak again. "Okay, stop playing games with me, Lead Duo!" The silvery streak drifted towards him and said, "Fine. So you want to be friends with me? Sure. These days, it can't do you any harm to call goo a friend!" Little Goo bobbed on the water's surface in anticipation. Finally! He found a friend that he could share all the wonders of his bubbly, yucky, stinky, slimy world with. Beside himself with excitement he answered happily, "I will be your friend until my dissolving day!" Lead Duo paused for a while before he said, "Wonderful. Then let's drift on. I know a place in Shenzhen Bay where there are quite a few stretches of yellow foam we could have fun with."

Soon, they were there. Little Goo looked with joy at the masses of yellow foam which rode on the tips of the waves and sparkled in all the colours imaginable. The foam was also beautifully layered out on the beach forming quite an impressive landscape. At last, after what seemed an eternity, Little Goo and Lead Duo managed to pull themselves away from the beautiful scene.

Little Goo and his friend were still intoxicated from their encounter with the yellow foam but thought about having some real fun when they spotted a flock of beautiful dolphins playing nearby. Minutes later, Goo and Lead Duo successfully managed to clog up the blow hole of one of the cheerful animals... and the dolphin turned pink... and that was THAT.

The Water Monster

Sonja Wong, 6, HKUGA Primary School

I don't know if this is a true tale or a false tale. Many years ago, a Country called Gundam and a Country called Caesar were at war. Their soldiers and warships were fighting in the sea.

Suddenly, a soldier of Caesar saw a big tail in the sea. He was very scared. He told the other soldiers. They wanted to turn back.

The big tail pulled the Gundam ship down. The soldiers of Gundam sank into the sea. Half of the soldiers died and the water monster ate them. The other half swam back to the beach.

The ship of Caesar quickly turned back and the soldiers landed on the beach. They met the soldiers of Gundam on the beach.

They became friends and did not fight again. They made a new country called Peace.

The Mystery of the Unlucky Undertaker

Gareth Chan, 9, International Christian School

You have undoubtedly picked out this story by mistake, so I advise you forcefully to *please put it down*. In this story, all the mischief of men has been faithfully and dreadfully recorded in these few pages. I cannot think of a single reason why anyone would dare enter into a world of criminals filled with misery, mischief, and despair. Every time you come to a paragraph, all I can do is to warn you to think twice. My solemn and sacred occupation is to write this story but it is NOT made to be read.

Now, the story finally begins ...

A mortuary quietly stood on the edge of one of the most expensive suburbs in Singapore along the South China Sea. John Bellamy, the owner of the mortuary, spent his life among the dead. As an undertaker, he did not enjoy his job. His mind became a bit twisted since he spent his days with corpses.

To be precise, he was an embalmer. He embalmed the bodies, treating them well by not letting them decay.

His face was drawn and pale, while his white hair seemed to stick out all over his head. His nose looked broken in three places. He always wore a sad expression on his face, showing sympathy for the miserable people who had died.

One night he went out for dinner at a local Singaporean restaurant. When he came back he found his mortuary sabotaged. A number of bodies were stolen, the papers were messed up, and his desk was nowhere to be seen.

He felt a mixture of anger, curiosity, fear, and confusion. He just did not understand why anyone would want a dead body.

Just as Bellamy was about to report the robbery, an intruder with a mask on walked in unexpectedly. All of a sudden he realised he was being watched.

Immediately he felt his first stirrings of fear. Completely startled, the old man gulped and slowly walked towards the direction of the mysterious stranger.

“Who are you?” he challenged. “People who are not members of the mortuary are not permitted in here.”

The strange-looking intruder covered his face with the mask. He seemed to enjoy his menace by not answering, leaving Bellamy more and more frightened. After a few moments of silence, the trespasser reached into his pocket for a knife and hurled it at Bellamy's chest. As the knife pierced into the undertaker's heart, the killer's mask fell off. In that last moment of life, Bellamy recognised his murderer. Then, his mind closed down for eternity.

Sergeant Murphy, the Singaporean Chief Inspector, walked into the Bellamy mortuary right after he had heard the terrifying news that an undertaker had been murdered.

The moment the policeman walked into the mortuary, he gasped with surprise. The mortuary was clearly sabotaged, with files that appeared to be missing, and some of the bodies stolen.

He frowned. If there was something he detested, it was murder. Fortunately, he had two secret "weapons", Steven and Fernando, who simply loved murder cases. And because of this, he knew that this case could be easy to solve.

A few hours later, Steven and Fernando arrived at the police headquarters. As the two incredible detectives listened carefully to the murder, Steven, aka Encyclopedia, took notes.

Encyclopedia and Fernando decided to visit the scene of the crime. They walked to the mortuary, and when they arrived they saw a parrot.

"Hi, I'm Encyclopedia," Steven greeted the bird.

"*Encyclopedia! Encyclopedia!*" squawked the parrot.

After their visit, Encyclopedia's notebook was full. When he reviewed all the facts, he let out an outburst of excitement. "Sergeant," Encyclopedia said breathlessly. "I've solved the case!"

Sergeant Murphy could not believe how anyone could solve a mystery so quickly. As Encyclopedia shared the facts, told him who the suspect was, why he was the suspect, and how a trap could be set, Sergeant Murphy congratulated him.

The next day, Sergeant Murphy took the only suspect to the location where Bellamy had been murdered. When they arrived, Encyclopedia and the others were already there.

Fernando, dressed as Bellamy, was facing Encyclopedia. Encyclopedia held a knife in his hand and pretended to stab Fernando.

"Alvin! Alvin! Don't stab me!" squawked the parrot loudly.

There was a long awkward silence, nobody said a word.

Then the bird repeated its message.

Encyclopedia beamed. "The only witness to the murder has spoken," he said cheerily. He added, "Sergeant, you've got your proof and can make your arrest now."

The man called Alvin flared up. "Proof of WHAT?" he screamed. "That dumb bird hasn't proved anything!"

Grabbing a knife from his pocket, he did not give a moment's thought to what he would do. He shoved the knife right into the parrot's throat for accusing him of murdering his own father, spilling the bird's blood on his clothes.

"Alvin," Encyclopedia paced the park as he said this. "It's very clear. You're the one who murdered your own father. Your father threatened not to let you inherit his wealth, and you were mad. So you decided to assassinate him. You wore a mask, disguised yourself, and stabbed him to death."

Encyclopedia explained everything, until Alvin was lost for words. Finally, as Sergeant Murphy put the handcuffs on Alvin's wrist, he heard a noise.

Ignoring the blood that had accidentally dropped on his blonde hair, Sergeant Murphy forced the cold-blooded murderer into the police van.

Encyclopedia and Fernando watched the police van drive away. "I'm glad we solved this case," grinned Encyclopedia. "But I hope this gruesome case doesn't appear in the newspaper."

Abducted by Aliens

Thomas Humphreys, 9, The International School of Macao

One cold winter night, I was fast asleep in my bed. The whole house was silent. I woke up and felt a gust of wind sweep over my body. I looked over at my window; it was only a fraction of a centimetre open. Suddenly I saw flashing lights; I also heard a weird whirring noise. I opened my window and looked outside. *Oh my goodness*, I thought. “What is that huge circular shaped object doing outside of my house?” I leaned out of my window to get a closer look and fell down. A big green light flashed and I started to rise off of the ground. I was being abducted! *But by what?* I thought. *Help, help!* I hollered but no one heard me. When I got about a metre away from the top I saw someone jump into the green light, he was being abducted too! I saw a bright white light that blinded my eyes. I fainted.

I woke up in a large freezing cold metal room with the other person I saw last night. I stood up and asked what his name was. He said his name was Simon. I thanked him for jumping into the green light with me, but I wondered why he did if he saw that I was being abducted. Most people would be too afraid to even come close if they saw that, but I didn’t ask him. Instead we just talked about a way to get out of this place. I noticed that this room only had one door to get out, and it was on the other side of the room guarded by spikes. Suddenly, out of nowhere a ladder and a door popped out of the ceiling. The ladder fell all the way down to Simon. He started to climb up and I followed him. We climbed all the way up to the top where both of us got knocked off our feet by a hurricane-force wind. Two big scaly, muscular green alien men came into the room. They both ganged up against Simon and started beating him up. I had a quick glimpse of Simon and he was really mad! Simon wasn’t very strong against them but he was quick and agile. So he started dodging their moves. Suddenly I was in the middle of the fight! Simon and I knocked out one of the alien men and then went for the second man but he knocked us out and dragged us to the captain of the ship.

When we woke up we looked around and we were in a really big horrible stinky room. There were lots of bars in front of us. There were two big muscular aliens guarding us. They

were talking to each other in a weird language that I have never heard of before. It sounded harsh and bleeping like computers. One of the guards seemed to be holding keys to the cell we were in. He was swinging them back and forth in front of my eyes. Soon it was dinnertime. It was this disgusting green mushy thing which looked like barf. The guards got the same thing but they seemed to be enjoying it a lot. After the horrible dinner the guards changed and they were these aliens who looked like a gigantic vampire bat guarding us. They were almost as big as the jail cell we were in!

The following morning was very hot. Simon and I felt like we were approaching the sun! We were brought a horrible breakfast which was an even worse colour than dinner. It was a sickly green colour. After we were heaved towards the captain's room. The captain was also speaking the weird language but it sounded as if he was ordering his guards to beat us up! But no, instead we were heaved back towards the jail cell we were in earlier. Simon turned to me and said, "I have a plan to get us out." Two minutes later Simon had finished telling me his plan. It was that I distract the guards and he gets the keys to the room we first started in. It wasn't the best plan but it was at least going to keep my hopes up. So I got the guard's attention by showing them a fake magic trick with a piece of cloth in my pocket. All I did was drop it from between my thumb and index fingers and catch it with my other pair of fingers. They were amazed! Soon Simon had the keys. And when the guards turned around we both ran for it. The guards stood up and started chasing us! We ran all the way back to the room and climbed down the ladder and sent ourselves back to my home. When I got home I felt so tired that I couldn't haul myself to my bedroom. So I slept on the floor.

The following morning my mom woke me up, she said "What are you doing sleeping on the floor during winter?" I didn't know what to say to her so I just told her the quickest thing I could think of, I said, "I went to go get a drink of water but then I felt so sleepy I fell asleep on the floor." My mom actually believed me but she warned me that if I do that again I would get into a lot of trouble.

In the afternoon I decided to go to bed early. I saw the same thing I saw the night before and also heard that whirring noise too but I decided to leave it alone.

Tiger Bay

Jemima Ridley, 9, Kennedy School

It all began on a bright hot summer's day when a family was out sailing on their yacht *Scintilla* in the South China Sea. A 12-year-old boy named Finn found a lifelong friend that would change his life forever.

The hot, yellow sun was shining and the birds were singing. The boat quietly sailed into a beautiful, blue lagoon with crystal clear waters. The only thing missing was a beach with golden sand. Just a ruined hotel and juice bar remained on the rocks, left to rot by a Wan Chai businessman, who had gone out of business. In the distance the children on the boat could see old wooden statues lying on their side in the bushes.

Excited with anticipation that all young boys have, Finn begged his dad to let him take the kayak out to explore the bay and its surroundings.

The cool water lapped around his feet and bony ankles as he paddled off into the distance. After a few minutes he stopped for a break and glanced across the horizon towards the mountains beyond. Through his piercing blue eyes he thought he saw a glimpse of something bright, orangey yellow disappearing into the luscious green undergrowth. His heart pounding, he quickly carried on paddling to the rocky shore line in front of the old ruined buildings. After clambering up the pebbly slope and securing the kayak to a knobbly old tree, Finn set off to explore. Around the back of the ruins he stumbled over remnants of old wooden animals left to rot.

Walking deeper into the undergrowth he came across the entrance to a dark, round cave. Putting his ear close to the entrance he could just make out a faint snoring sound, the noise that you might hear if a giant was sleeping. Finn sneaked into the cave; the tunnel entrance led deep into the mountainside. It was so dark he had to use his hands to feel his way around. The walls of the cave were cold and rough against the silky, smooth skin of his young hands. The snoring sound came closer and closer until Finn could feel the warm air coming from the beast's nostrils. The thing moved, then shuddered, then yawned.

“Who’s there?” the thing snorted in a gruff voice.

“Ummm...” staggered Finn.

“WHO’S THERE???!?” shouted the thing.

Finn was ready to run when he saw a bright orange and black striped tiger lying on the floor of the cold, gloomy cave.

“Who are you?” stammered Finn.

“I am a tiger of Askablan and I will not hurt you, for I am a kind tiger, not like my mean, ugly brothers,” the tiger said in a proud voice. “And who, may I ask, are you?”

“I am Finn Ridley. I came here on my kayak, and I found this cave so I thought I would try it out, and then I found you!” replied Finn, who was interested in the tiger.

“Come sit down, my child, on this lovely bed of moss, and let’s talk. I was born in China, and then moved here when I was only 3 years old. I was a cute cub then, all soft and fluffy, and everyone adored me. When I grew older, I worked as a servant in the King Tiger’s Den, which was a dark, damp place, and all of the servants dreaded coming to work every day. When I was an adult, I was sent to Mr. Chang’s lair in Beijing and took the test all Chinese tigers have to take.”

“What test was that? A math test?” asked Finn.

“No, not a math test. A Hood test, that’s what it was” replied the tiger, shamefully.

“Is everything okay Tiger? Is something wrong?” asked Finn, inquiringly.

“That test was extremely challenging.”

“What was it for, Mr. Tiger?” asked Finn, dreamily.

“It was to see which tigers would work for Mr. Chang; it was the best job of them all,” recalled the tiger.

“What happened, Mr. Tiger, did you pass?” Finn asked.

“No I didn’t, I failed terribly” sobbed the tiger. “If you don’t pass, you get sent away to a faraway land, and you are never welcome to tiger land ever again. That’s what happened to me, and my life. My mother was a kind tigress, and loved me dearly. She desperately tried to convince the tiger government, but it was no use. I was sent away that very afternoon. My mother came and watched me leave, while my brothers were off to meet Mr. Chang with my father. They didn’t care about me one little bit. My mother was crying bitterly, and so was I. The tiger guards tied me with a rope on my neck and took me away,” sobbed the tiger. “They dumped me here in this lonely cave far away from my home. Here I am now, with nothing, no friends and no family.”

The tiger was crying now, so hard his wet tears made a puddle on the cold floor of the cave.

“Oh dear Tiger, there is no need to cry those big wet tears” said Finn, sympathetically. “I am your new friend now, and I will never leave you.”

“Thank you Finn, you are a very kind and polite boy,” replied the tiger.

“You are a very lovely tiger. I will never ever forget you,” answered Finn. “I need to go back to my boat now.”

“Oh, that’s fine Finn, but will you come to visit me every time you come here?” asked the tiger.

“Of course, I will always come and visit you!” replied Finn.

“Goodbye, dear Finn!” waved the tiger.

“Goodbye, Mr. Tiger!” answered Finn.

And from that day on, whenever Finn went to Tiger Bay with his family, he would go to meet the tiger and they would share stories about their adventures. Finn always kept his tiger a secret and no one ever knew about their talks. The only thing was, Finn was never told the tiger’s name.

Replace The King

Moe Kawakami, 8, Kiangsu & Chekiang Primary School, International Section

Chapter One – At The Beach

“Hey Lucy – watch out!” said John throwing the ball to his sister Lucy. They were playing ball at the beach when they noticed something strange.

Lucy whispered, “John look over there, has that fisherman just caught a turtle?”

“It looks like he’s going to sell it,” answered John.

“Hurry, we must see what’s going on.” urged Lucy.

Chapter Two – The Special Egg

They saw that the turtle’s eyes were shining and filled with tears. Both of the children rushed to the fisherman and said, “Please, we’ll give you some money! Please let the turtle free.”

“Certainly,” said the fisherman. And he traded them the turtle for all their money.

Suddenly, the turtle spoke to them. “Actually, I can talk.” The children were shocked. “It’s all right. Don’t be frightened. I’m a messenger from the sea. If you hadn’t saved me, I couldn’t have saved my poor eggs. Thank you!” she said.

“Now I want to show you something. Come here”, she whispered. They both saw that there was a special egg in the turtle’s nest. One that was different from the others. It was bigger and a golden colour. The turtle handed the egg to John. The children had a feeling that they needed to protect the egg and keep it warm. They wanted to know where this egg came from.

So, they asked the turtle, “Who knows this sea and who is the King of these waters?”

Chapter Three – Meeting The Sea King

The turtle answered, “The crazy old man who lives in a cave by the water’s edge is actually the Sea King.” The children cradled the egg as the turtle led them into a magical cave where the Sea King lived. The turtle led them to the King’s throne hidden away from view. The King seemed to be waiting for them.

Lucy went ahead and said, rather shyly, “May we please ask you what this is this?”

“It’s a 1000-year-old egg of a mythical creature from year 1010. It takes a millennium for it to hatch,” explained the kind old man.

“So what will we do with it?” they asked.

“You just have to wait until it hatches,” proclaimed the Sea King.

It wasn’t going to hatch for many days and the Sea King invited them in to stay until it did. He offered to use his magic and slow down time in the human world so their parents wouldn’t notice them missing.

Chapter Four – The Egg Begins To Hatch

One morning, Lucy heard the sound of a cracking egg. She shouted, “John, John, look!” Before they knew it a little baby dinosaur broke out of the shell. He was growing by the second and was huge within minutes.

“What shall we name him?” asked Lucy.

Before either of the children could speak, they heard, “I am the Oceandino and I am here to help save Oceianna. The kingdom is in trouble. There is a bad King that overthrew the good king and locked him in a dungeon. Will you help?”

“Of course we will”, replied both of the children. The Sea King called out orders for a dolphin to be brought to them. “This dolphin is going to take you to Oceianna,” he said.

After a long journey the group finally arrived at the underwater kingdom, Oceianna. It was completely different from the Sea King’s happy kingdom in the cave. Oceianna wasn’t a jolly place. Most of the people seemed sad. The dolphin explained, “This place used to have a wonderful and kind King who cared about the people. One of his trusted friends threw him in the dungeon and declared himself King. Now the real King is dead and the new bad King is terrorising the people.”

The children and the Oceandino knew they had to do something. “That means we will have to find a new King,” said Lucy.

“The new King has already been chosen and he is waiting to be the replacement,” explained the dolphin. “He is in hiding and protected by some merpeople as they make a battle plan and wait for help,” said the dolphin quietly.

“Well, we are here to help,” said Oceandino.

Chapter Five – The Plan

They all ran off into the wilderness to avoid being caught by the bad King. There, they met a group of people who were also hiding for the same reason. Oceandino asked them, “Are you hiding from the bad King and do you have the replacement King with you? We are here to help.”

The merpeople knew right away who Oceandino was and they were very excited. He was the hero that they had been waiting for, for 1000 years. Now that he was there, they could begin their battle against the bad King, with Oceandino as the battle leader. “We have the courage now to fight for our King,” shouted all the people.

Chapter Six – The Battle

With Oceandino leading the way, the battle began and all the merpeople joined in the fight to get rid of the bad King. Soon the battle was over and the bad King was angry as he was sent away from Oceianna forever. Oceianna’s replacement King wasn’t a King at all — but a Queen named Jolleria. She quickly began to rule Oceianna fairly and kindly. Oceandino and the children knew it was time to say goodbye.

The Queen and merpeople shouted out to them, “Thanks for all your help,” as they left Oceianna for the real world.

Chapter Seven – Back to The Real World

Oceandino took the children back to the real world and said goodbye as he left them on the beach near the Sea King’s Cave. They saw the fisherman still fishing and heard their mum calling them in for dinner.

“Was it all a dream?” Lucy asked.

As they walked by the cave, the crazy old man who lives there winked at them, and they knew.

Ian the Sperm Whale

Ian Kim, 9, Korean International School

Hi! I'm Ian the Sperm Whale. I'm about to tell you about an incident that happened to me last fall.

One day, in the South China Sea, while I was swimming with my pod, a squid got scared of me and squirted ink all over me. While I was washing the ink off, the rest of the pod proceeded. When the ink came off, the pod was nowhere to be seen. So I swam around and around, but I still could not find their trail.

I was scared.

So at night I swam into a lagoon, driven by fear. I woke up not attacked by predators, but washed up on a beach at Clearwater Bay. I was dehydrated and dying fast. I was so desperate for water that I drank the water on the beach, hoping that it would save me. But it just made things worse. Sand had gotten into the water and I started to choke. But luckily and just in time, a group of scientists pushed me back into the ocean because they felt sorry for me. I was so happy that I said "thank you" in Whalese. After saluting the humans, I took a huge gulp of water to wash the sand out. Now here I am, as a medium calf, unharmed, and alive in the South China Sea.

Turn Wild Bernise to an Elegant Girl

Harmony Yuen Hey Wen, 9, Po Leung Kuk HKTA Yuen Yuen Primary School

Hi, guys. I am Bernise. I live in Tuen Mun, Hong Kong with my mum, dad, and elder sister. I love to wear shirts with black stripes on them, and jeans, too! But I hate dresses and skirts, so I hide them under my closet when my mum buys them. I also hate fancy colours, especially pink.

My favourite hobby is playing football with my teammates. My classmates always say if they just look at me from behind, they will think I am a boy.

After Bernise and her class finished the game, there were still five minutes left before class. Bernise and her best friend Giselle ate their snacks and chatted. “What do you think about the book that girl is holding?” said Giselle. “Ring, ring, dong, dong,” ringing sounds came from the large, golden bell hung nicely on the wall.

“Recess has finished, all students should get in line. I have an announcement to make. Our Hong Kong governor will be coming to visit our school in eight days. To show our respect, our school will have an election for an elegant girl to present a bouquet of flowers to our governor. Thank you for listening to this announcement! The election will take place after lunch,” said Ms Highheels.

Lucy, Agatha, and Daisy were very popular among the girls. All the girls said that they would vote for one of them.

However, some of the boys wanted to play a trick on Bernise. Roger, Bosco, and Oscar told all the boys to vote for her.

Ms Highheels told all the schoolmates “The election for the elegant lady will take place soon. Please decide which girl you’d like to choose and write her name on a piece of paper.”

All the girls wrote down Lucy, Agatha, or Daisy. But all of the boys wrote down Bernise’s name!

“The girl who has the most votes is Bernise! Congratulations!”

“Eh, Bernise is the girl to present the flowers? No way!” all the girls whispered angrily.

In the other corner, the boys were all laughing crazily “Ha ha...”

“This is the biggest mistake of my life!” murmured Bernise.

Ms Highheels added “She will get an orange hair band, a red dress, and a pair of pink high heeled shoes!”

Everyone went back to their classrooms, but only Bernise and Giselle stood still in the hall. Ms Highheels came to them and said, “This is not the end of the world. I can make you an elegant lady in seven days.”

On the first day of training, Ms Highheels met Bernise in the hall. When she got there, Ms Highheels told her, “A popular stylist and a professional make-up artist will measure your... I don’t really know what will they measure!”

“Hello!” two ladies said politely while they were coming down the hall.

“You two should be the stylist and the make-up artist, right?” asked Ms Highheels.

“Yes we are. I’m the stylist, my name is Cindy and she is the make-up artist named Debby,” the stylist replied. “Now, I need to measure your head to make a wig for you, and Debby will design a new style for you. We will send it to Ms Highheels soon.”

On the second day, Ms Highheels read the results to Bernise. “Your style will be an elegant and royal girl.”

“But I...” murmured Bernise.

“No more time-wasting!” yelled Ms Highheels.

“Okay, okay... So, what will I learn today?” asked Bernise.

“Elegant greetings,” answered Ms Highheels. “First, when you see the governor, say hi with a kind smile and also introduce yourself. Then give the flowers to him and say you are representing our school.” Ms Highheels said as she handed a bunch of nice flowers to her. “That’s all for today, remember it. Bye!” she added.

On the third day, Bernise tried on the clothes, wig, and hair band. They were a perfect fit.

Next day, which was the fourth day, Ms Highheels taught Bernise how to have a perfect smile even if your feet are hurting from wearing high heeled shoes.

On the fifth day, Ms Highheels told Bernise to do all the things she taught her before. Surprisingly, Bernise did them extremely well. “Great work!” Ms Highheels clapped her hands. “Sleep well and eat well. In two days, which is Monday, the governor will be visiting. Come and find me; we will meet in the school hall. Remember what I’ve taught you!” added Ms Highheels.

On Monday morning, Bernise came to school at half past seven. When she stepped into the hall, Ms Highheels gave her lots of beauty products. She put on the red dress, the pair of pink high heeled shoes, and wore the orange hair band.

“Time to meet our governor. Get ready!” yelled Ms Highheels. “Okay!” Bernise smiled. Ms Highheels gave the bouquet of flowers to her and they ran down the stairs to find the governor.

“Good morning!” said the governor. Bernise presented him with the flowers very nicely. “You must be a gentle girl!” said the governor. “Um...” Bernise replied. “May I... remove my high heeled shoes, sir? I am in pain.”

Everyone laughed and teased her. But actually, the governor didn’t mind!

Ziggy Travelled to the East

Wong Hei Yin, 8, St. Margaret's Co-Educational English Secondary and Primary School

Once there was a zebra named Ziggy. Ziggy was on a boat travelling from China to Hong Kong. On his way, he saw a long bridge named Tsing Ma Bridge. He saw another bridge named Ting Kau Bridge. He was as excited as you can be. Then he asked the people on the boat when he could get off. One of them said: "30 minutes." Another person said: "45 minutes." Ziggy did not know when he would reach Hong Kong Island. He had to wait for some time.

At last he got off the boat and could not wait to walk towards all those tall buildings he saw. Ziggy saw many interesting shops, so he went into one of them. He saw the bridge he came across. It was a miniature Tsing Ma Bridge. But he did not buy it because he wanted to spend his money wisely.

He went to a building called IFC. IFC is the tallest building in Hong Kong, but he said to himself, "what a busy building this is." He continued walking and he reached a train station. He walked to the counter to get a map. He studied all the train stations and he wanted to explore Hong Kong Island, using all the money he had.

From Central station, Ziggy took a train to Wan Chai. He walked towards the bay and went to the Golden Bauhinia Square. At the square, he learned that the Bauhinia sculpture was a gift from the Chinese government marking the 1 July 1997 return of Hong Kong to the motherland.

He then walked back to the train station and he saw a very crowded street. He was told that was Tai Yuen Street and that it has many toy shops that sell mostly inexpensive children's toys. Ziggy took this chance to get some toys for his children.

He finished his journey in two days. He was so happy and he told himself that he would come back again with his mother one day.

Mary's Story

Miles Chiu Chi Wai, 8, Singapore International School

A long time ago, there lived a girl named Mary. Mary was very beautiful, with big shiny eyes, and long blonde hair that went down to her waist. One day, she went on a boat trip with her family. They prepared lots of food and drinks, fishing nets and a bucket of worms for catching fish.

It was a very nice day when they departed from the pier. The sky was very clear and occasionally filled with clouds. Mary was really happy to see the blue sea, fish and coral. In the midst of the voyage, the weather changed. They heard rolling thunderstorms and lightning. The wind was blowing hard which caused unsteady waves. The waves were so high that the boat rocked. They held on to each other but they all slipped and fell to the floor of the boat. Eventually, the boat capsized and Mary fell into the water.

The next day, when she woke up, she realised that she was now living in the water! She tried to stand up to walk, but she could not. She tried repeatedly, but she still could not walk. She felt like something was tightening around her legs and holding her afloat! Her body was acting unusually, but she did not know the cause. She started to use her hands to touch her legs, but surprisingly, she found something different! Instead of two legs, Mary only found one leg. She was very frightened. She bent over to see what had happened, and realised her legs had disappeared, and had been replaced by a tail. She discovered that she had turned into a mermaid!

Mary did not know what to do so she started to explore by swimming back and forth, up and down. When she swam to the bottom of the sea, she saw the Sea Kingdom. She found out that there were a lot of sea animals who wanted to be the King but the sea animals had finally chosen the starfish as the King. In the Sea Kingdom, there was a huge room for all the animals to sleep together during the night, and the King would sleep in a private room by himself. The Kingdom consisted of a lot of other sea animals and creatures like sharks, dolphins, corals, crabs, shrimps and seaweed.

The dolphin and Mary the mermaid became close friends and the dolphin introduced her to their Starfish King. The main duty of the King was to take care of the animals, ensure that they would not be attacked or eaten by their predators and to keep the Kingdom enjoyable and comfortable. The other sea animal's duties were to ensure that they finish their tasks before they could start playing. The tasks included cleaning, tidying, hunting and keeping the place environmentally friendly. After introducing Mary to the others, the King assigned Mary a new task. Mary's job was to make sure the animals played fairly in games, like "hide and seek" and "catch".

Mary and the other sea animals played often. Whoever won could have more delicious food for dinner. The one who lost had to find food for the others to eat and they would have less food. They were very happy to play the games and they all felt that they had a very wonderful life. However, sometimes Mary thought of her parents at night and hid in a corner to cry because she missed her parents.

One night, the King saw the mermaid crying. The King asked suspiciously, "Why are you crying?" The mermaid replied that she missed her parents.

The King understood and said, "I will grant you a wish."

The mermaid answered, "Thank you, I would like to have one." The mermaid was silent. "I want to go back to my real home and stay with my parents."

The King responded, "I will grant you this wish but on one condition, you have to help keep the sea water clean. You will not throw any rubbish into the seas otherwise you will come back and live in the Kingdom again. If you come back next time, you will not be given another chance to see your parents."

The grateful mermaid replied "Okay." The mermaid's friends overheard and were so sad that Mary would be leaving them soon. The animals had mixed feelings. On one hand, they wanted the mermaid to stay with them, but on the other hand, they wanted the mermaid to see her parents. Finally they accepted Mary's decision and bade Mary goodbye.

Mary's parents had been looking for her for a few days but they could not find her so they started waiting by the seashore with hope that Mary would come back soon. At last, they saw something swimming towards them. They thought that it looked like a mermaid as it approached. Mary's tail was turning back into normal legs and started walking towards the shore. Her parents were relieved and asked, "Where did you go?"

Mary replied, "I fell into the water and lived there for a few days. It was a very exciting and fun place. I met with the Sea King and made friends with the sea animals."

They asked her, "Were you a little bit lonely?"

Mary answered, "I felt very lonely and I missed you."

Her parents kissed her and were thankful that Mary was still alive.

Although the sea environment was extremely beautiful, Mary preferred to live on land. She quickly went to tell every person she knew about her story and educated them not to throw rubbish into the sea. It was everyone's responsibility to keep the ocean clean. Everyone agreed and said that they would not only help her by making sure the ocean was very clean, they would also make sure the whole earth was clean.



Fiction
age 10 to 11

New Tales of the South China Sea

Caitlyn Chan, 10, Beacon Hill School

The widespread, pure green hills and the frozen crystal clear sea carpeted mainland China. There was a young delicate lonely girl sewing her silk pictures in the nearly deserted village. Around her were bold trees with the last crumpled leaves hanging on the twigs, farmland animals waking up ready for another new day and the old rusty temple sitting quietly on the nearby hillside. Xiao Tong was her name.

Xiao Tong had long, pitch-dark hair like ink, lips as juicy red as a freshly picked cherry, eyes the colour of coffee, and always had a cheerful heart-warming smile on her peach-coloured face. Her favorite colour was yellow which always made her bright and happy. She was an innocent little girl but her mother tried her best to give Xiao Tong a good education. Her Dad died when she was a few months old because of a deadly illness that could not be cured. Xiao Tong was taught to respect her dead ancestors since she was a young girl; so she visited them in the temple every day.

On one chilly early morning, Xiao Tong skipped to the temple and arrived with a shock! In her amazement her most loving grandmother's spirit was sitting on the dusty rug waiting for her. Grandma opened her mouth and whispered, "My little Xiao Tong, come here and sit next to me." A frightful shiver crept down Xiao Tong's spine and with a gulp, she did as she was told. Grandma gently put her arm over Xiao Tong's shaking shoulders. Immediately, her face turned pale, the hair on her back rose and sweat trickled down her neck. Grandma told her not to be afraid and started chatting with her. A few minutes later, Xiao Tong started laughing and talking to her as if she were still alive! Grandma told Xiao Tong that her best wish was for Xiao Tong to be a smart, brave and intelligent girl. At last, before Xiao Tong left the temple, Grandma told her a special secret and gave her a special gift.

There, standing in front of the fresh yellow hay, grooving its own leg softly, was a gorgeous white unicorn just like the one Grandma described in her secret! The unicorn was called Ma Shen. He invited Xiao Tong for a ride on his back over the South China Sea. He

explained that Grandma had sent him here to bring her on a fascinating journey. Without thinking, she packed some snacks and was ready to set off for the great adventure.

Over the famous vast ocean they flew. Xiao Tong's hair was flickering behind her as the wind blew against her face. She gently bent down and whispered into the unicorn's ear, "Can you please tell me more about this adventure and the sea?" Xiao Tong was told that every hundred years, there is a person picked by the Jade Emperor to go and kill the Sea Dragon. That person has no choice, even if they don't want to go. The dragon lives under the depths of the South China Sea and wakes up every hundred years to find gold, valuables and food from every country surrounding that sea. These countries are the south of China, the east of Vietnam, the north of Malaysia and the west of Philippines. When these countries refuse to give him what he wants, terrible things happen. He creates horrible disasters like earthquakes, tsunamis, typhoons, hurricanes and volcanoes which destroy those countries and put them in a disastrous mode.

Xiao Tong was a loving, caring girl who always cared for others and tried to help. But after hearing all this, her heart was broken into millions of pieces; she just couldn't bear it anymore and said, "I'll go and fight him. I won't mind sacrificing myself to save other people."

Ma Shen was surprised and answered: "Well in fact, I'm not afraid of telling you that the Jade Emperor has..."

"Picked ME?" Xiao Tong interrupted, not letting Ma Shen finish his sentence.

"That's right. The Jade Emperor has indeed picked you this year!" Xiao Tong screamed in disbelief, her eyebrows raised and she gave a shocking look. As Xiao Tong fell off the unicorn with fright, the white clouds blended in slowly with the disappearance of Ma Shen. Xiao Tong was now screaming even louder than ever and running around in the air as if she was a headless chicken! Within a few minutes, Xiao Tong realised that she could float in the air.

As Xiao Tong was dancing and prancing away happily in the air, the Sea Dragon arose from behind her, watching her waltzing away with an imaginary partner. He was waiting with his arms crossed until Xiao Tong stopped enjoying herself dancing to get on with the battle. As expected, Xiao Tong was in shock again. But this time she didn't scream, nor did she sweat. She placed her right leg in front of her left leg, bent down with a determined "I'm going to beat you" expression, and was ready to be challenged. She had remembered the special gift that Grandma had given her. Xiao Tong lifted up the small bottle of potion which was hanging around her neck, cleared her throat, and declared: "Mr. Sea Dragon or whatever your name is, open your mouth if you want the perfect potion to cure all your discomforts." The dumb dragon obviously got tricked and opened his mouth as wide as possible to be fed with the potion that can kill ten men just with one drop!

Without questioning, the dragon died and disappeared just the way Ma Shen did. At the same time the dragon faded away, Ma Shen reappeared. He congratulated her and invited her for another ride back home. Ma Shen had told Xiao Tong that the Jade Emperor had been watching the great battle from above and was extremely impressed. More than impressed, mother had heard the whole story and was so proud that she wept for hours. Xiao Tong landed safely and told her mother everything she learned about the South China Sea.

The next morning Xiao Tong skipped to the temple like her normal self. She had been awarded with the certificate for having Grandma's dream come true which was for Xiao Tong to be a smart, brave and intelligent girl. We all have to be brave to face difficulties in life with a positive attitude like Xiao Tong and keep trying without giving up. This is one of the exciting New Tales of the South China Sea; stay tuned for other adventures with Xiao Tong.

The Tales of Blue

Tara Clements, 10, Bradbury School

Thousands of feet above ground, on the peaks of mountains in the west of China, glaciers were glittering in the sun. The hot rays blazed down on the edge of a glacier and a tiny droplet of water melted away from the thick blue ice. It slowly fell off the edge of a cliff and started tumbling down the steep and slippery mountain avoiding every object in its way. It landed on a beautiful lime green elephant ear leaf.

“Oh dear, what’s that on my back? Who are you?” exclaimed the leaf.

“Well, I used to be part of a glacier but now I’m not quite sure what I am,” said Blue (the water droplet).

“You don’t feel cold and hard like an icicle, you feel quite wet like a water droplet!” answered Ellie (the elephant ear leaf).

“Oh no, I must have melted off a glacier!” Blue said in a very worried tone.

“Don’t worry, cheer up. Shall I take you for a ride?”

“I’m not sure where I would like to go, but my icicle friends have heard hikers talk about the south of China and a big city called Hong Kong. Do you know where that is?” she enquired.

Blue and Ellie started their journey down the Pearl River, with the water flowing slowly and calmly, the sun reflecting on the river and birds singing their beautiful songs, and fish swimming below them and crabs ready to pinch people. It was a perfect day. Then suddenly the clouds covered the sun, the stream became steeper and the current started getting faster and faster. Ellie was being forced further and further down the river at soaring speed. She pushed down on the water to try and slow them down but it was no use. Together they weighed nothing more than a feather. They couldn’t do anything but hope the current would slow down and the river would level off. They closed their eyes and prayed.

“I think we are slowing down,” yelled Blue.

“Yes, I think you’re right. Thank goodness for that, we are safe!” Ellie exclaimed joyfully.

They glided on top of the water happily, and confident that they knew where they

were going. They saw the sun shining again, the water glittering in the sun and bubbles trailing behind them. They were approaching Southern China and things were beginning to change. The scenery around them was becoming less green, less open and more congested. The buildings on the river bank were getting taller and there was less vegetation on the mountains.

“Why is the water dark green?” Blue asked, scared something was going to jump out of the water.

“It is just a little bit murky, that’s all,” answered Ellie in a calming way.

“What’s murky? Is it going to hurt me?” questioned Blue.

“No silly, it just means there’s less clarity,” explained Ellie.

“Oh,” said Blue, still a tad confused.

“Well, the good news is we are almost in the South China Sea!” Ellie said excitedly.

“That really is good news!” Blue blurted.

They had just entered the estuary leading to the South China Sea and the water was getting darker and darker. It was less easy to see what was below them and there appeared to be a lot fewer fish swimming around them. The river opened into the great expanse of the sea. Blue looked around him and saw things he had never imagined. There were big container ships; huge fishing boats with nets trawling through the water; bridges high above the sea and cars speeding along the bridge. As they sailed closer to shore Blue saw bright lights, tall buildings and lots of big shopping malls all crammed onto one very small island called Hong Kong. Blue was very confused by all that he was seeing. He started dreaming about home and gazed up at the sky.

“Why is the sky grey?” Blue asked, still staring at the sky.

“There’s just a little bit of pollution in Hong Kong but you’ll get used to it!” Ellie commented.

“I can’t breathe! I have heard pollution is very bad for your lungs.”

“Don’t worry. A little bit of pollution won’t hurt you. At least that’s what I’ve heard,”

Ellie replied.

“Okay, here it goes,” Blue took a deep breath in and out. But he was struggling to breathe.

“Ellie please, this is not right. I don’t belong here, my home is in the west of China,” Blue cried out.

“I will take you back as soon as the sun rises,” Ellie told him.

It had become dark, there was not a single star in the sky and there was no wildlife around them. All they could hear was loud music from parties on the beach and ambulances going to the rescue.

“This is not how I pictured Hong Kong at all,” thought Blue.

You Can Make It Up To Me!

Eleanna Amias, 10, Carmel School

All her life, Thea felt a strange connection with the ocean. She yearned for adventure and often slipped into a far away fantasy about adventures on the sea. One evening, after Thea had another argument with her dad about being on the phone too much, she left the dining room in a huff. She stormed into her bedroom and slammed the door angrily. She was so fed up with her dad's work and his mobile phone that she dived into bed in a fit of rage hoping to close out the world.

Hours later, when her dad was heading to his bedroom, he passed by Thea's door. He knew she disliked how much he worked, but he had to. He pushed the door open quietly to check in on her, he sat on the edge of her bed, scooped her close, and was careful not to wake her.

"I am so sorry, I love you so much. I promise I will make it up to you."

Thea smiled a secret smile as she pretended to sleep. Thea couldn't help but smile wider as she marveled at all the things her dad could be planning for her. Before Thea fell asleep that night she prayed that whatever her dad had planned, he would remember how much she loved the sea.

The next day, Thea jumped out of bed with excitement. For some reason, she felt like there was something to be happy about. She just kept thinking about the surprise that she hoped was coming.

Dad soon arrived to the table for breakfast, as he sat, a smile grew wider and wider on his face. "Guess who is going on the RMS Constellation," he inquired, "You know, the 5-star cruise ship?" He waited for a response. "We are! On Saturday, does that work for you?" he beamed with excitement. Thea smiled widely, and ran over to her dad, and hugged him tightly.

When Saturday came, Thea burst out of bed and got dressed and climbed into the car faster than anyone in her family. She twiddled her thumbs and pranced in her seat impatiently the entire way to the RMS Constellation.

As her family boarded the colossal ship, her excitement grew. She remembered the many stories her granny had told her of her old life on the South China Sea. You see, her granny studied marine life on the South China Sea as a marine biologist in her younger days.

As Thea boarded the ship, she noticed a boy, Matt Daimos. Matt was the biggest bully. He got expelled after Thea told the teacher that he had stolen her math homework. He had been planning his revenge on her ever since.

“Hey, rabbit-brain!” he called. “Why aren’t you in a daydream again, huh?”

Thea’s parents did not hear him, but Thea sure did. She just ignored him and carried on walking. She knew how much Matt did not like to be ignored.

“Fine, I’ll show you what happens to people who don’t listen to me!” he shouted. Just then, Matt charged towards her and with all of his might, he shoved her off the ship and into the sea.

As she sank head-first into the sea, she could not help but feel scared. She couldn’t see anything and she couldn’t hear anything, but she could feel her heart beating first with fear, then with excitement. Soon, she started to run out of breath and just before she fainted, she felt something cold pull her deeper into the ocean.

Mer-anda, the young mermaid, dived down to her house to show her dad the cute little thing she’d found. Mer-anda begged her dad to let her keep it.

“No, no, and no! That is a human!” yelled her father, “I will not have a klutzy little human trampling over our whole house!”

Mer-anda quickly realised she would not win the argument and she disappointedly went off to find Sondo, her best friend the seahorse. She hoped he would listen to her.

On the way to Sondo’s in the deep water of the South China Sea, Thea started to wake up. She couldn’t believe there was a mermaid and a talking seahorse staring down at her. She looked around and saw a city made out of brightly coloured corals, jellyfish with jewels, and sea anemones that danced in the swaying current.

When Thea was fully awake, she asked, “Am I really underwater? It’s beautiful. This is how I always dreamt it would be.”

Mer-anda and Sondo stared at her. They were shocked that she could speak. Even though she said she was happy, Mer-anda and Sondo could see disappointment on Thea’s face. When they asked her what was wrong, she said, “Although I have always dreamt of the sea, I miss my home.”

Mer-anda was sad. She wanted to keep Thea, but understood that Thea missed home. It was time for Mer-anda to summon the help of the dolphins and she let out a high frequency whistle. With that, a group of graceful pink dolphins came at once. Mer-anda whistled to them and the beautiful pink dolphins shook their heads in agreement. They helped Thea onto the back of the strongest dolphin and together they led the way to the shore. Mer-anda and Sonda had to stop as they could not get any closer. They waved good-bye from the water and hoped to see Thea again.

As the beautiful warm waters of the South China Sea, lapped the shore, Thea slowly walked out of the water and onto land. She lay for a while on the beach and thought of the miracles she had discovered. Thea couldn’t wait to see her granny, to speak to her about the adventures. She wasn’t sure if granny would believe her.

Maybe, she wondered, I should just keep this to myself.

It Will Never Be Forgotten

Sum Ping Leung, 10, Diocesan Girls' Junior School

Dinara couldn't sleep. Moonlight was filtering through his window, casting long streaks of light on his blanket. He was thinking about the morning, when all of his family except him and his brother would go out fishing in the sea. Slowly though, the sound of the waves crashing against the bay rid him of all thoughts, and he fell asleep.

Dinara was a little Vietnamese boy, who lived in a village by the South China Sea. Like all the other people in the village, his father was a fisherman. Being only eight, Dinara had yet to go fishing with his father, but he had heard tales of fishing from his father, how they had thrown gigantic nets into the sea and brought up large, fat fish, and he thought it an exciting job. Although fishing was for men, every year on the twelfth of August, every family member over the age of twelve would go with the men to fish. That day was exactly the day that Dinara was thinking about before he fell asleep.

Dinara dreamed that he was drowning in the South China Sea. He yelled as hard as he could, but no one heard him. He sank slowly to the bottom of the sea, where he saw an amazing sight – an underwater kingdom, with a castle made entirely out of shells and little shell cottages inhabited by mermaids and colourful fish. The current brought him into the castle, past many rooms. Finally, he arrived in a chamber where a merman sat on a throne. A younger mermaid and merman sat beside him. “The humans are getting out of control,” the king said. “They have invented huge nets that scrape the floor of the sea, bringing up every single little sea creature in its path. Because of them, many sea creatures, even the tiniest of babies, have lost their lives. This is enough! We need to destroy them!”

“Father...” the mermaid began.

“I have an idea,” the king said, ignoring his daughter. “Tomorrow is the day that the fishermen bring their families to fish. We shall ask the whales to capsize their boats, then ask the sharks to kill every one of them, not sparing even the youngest of the children. That way, they shall have a taste of how we feel when they throw their huge nets down here!”

“Father, you can’t!” cried the mermaid, “The children didn’t do anything, they’re innocent!”
“Who cares?” cackled the king. “Like I said, they’ll be able to have a taste of how we feel!”

At this, Dinara started to rise back up onto the surface of the sea. Halfway through, a voice started to fill his head. “Dinara, this is true, tell your village to stop their overfishing and not to come today, or your family will all die!” It was the mermaid’s voice echoing through his head as he rose up, up, and into his bed.

August the twelfth, a day for all to feel excited. A day of fishing for all over the age of twelve. For Dinara though, it was the day of death for his family members. Over breakfast, he told his family about his dream and the mermaid’s warning.

“Nonsense,” his father laughed. “It was just a dream. A stupid dream. How many times have I taken my family out to sea? Nothing will happen, except big, fat, fish and tiny fish that are delicious when fried. Think about it, Dinara. All the fish together in one spot, letting us fish easily and have a huge catch. Don’t spoil our fun.”

Dinara knew it was no use convincing his father. All he could do was to keep quiet and watch his father leave with his boats, joking with family members who were old enough to join him. Dinara prayed to the gods that his family would return alive.

The day passed without any incident. Dinara’s brother Thor, who was not old enough to go fishing either, suggested that they go hunting for frogs, but Dinara refused. He was too wrapped up in his thoughts to do anything other than walk across the room.

When evening came, he looked nervously out the window, hoping to see his father’s silhouette and hear his loud laughter as he joked with family members. Instead, he saw the village elder Guaymo approaching. “I’ve got some bad news for you, children,” Guaymo said. “Your whole family has died during the fishing trip. In fact, the members of the village who went fishing all died. I’m very sorry, but there’s nothing we can do.” With that he walked away. Dinara couldn’t say anything. He didn’t know how to respond. So the mermaid was right. His family had met their death.

That night Dinara couldn’t sleep. He was filled with sadness at the loss of his family. Suddenly, unexpectedly, someone tugged at his shoulder. It was the mermaid. “You’re mourning about the loss of your family,” she said softly. “It was meant to be a lesson, to warn you to stop overfishing. Listen to me, Dinara. I want you to erect a stone plaque. Write on it the date of this tragedy. Write about what happened. Then, write this: Do not use nets to fish, let go of baby fish, create a resting period so that fish can reproduce. My instructions end here. Farewell Dinara.” With that she disappeared, and Dinara woke up.

Dinara knew this was no dream. He did what the mermaid asked him to do, and added a word “remember”. The remaining villagers saw the plaque and decided to follow the instructions on it. From then on, although the catch was never big, Dinara found out that the fish caught were always fatter and more delicious than before. Perhaps it was because the fish had time to reproduce and grow. Dinara could never forget his family, but he knew that the tragedy was, in a way, good for the fish, and for the relationship between man and nature.

The Legend of the Elephant and the Spider

Michelle Mui, 10, Diocesan Girls' Junior School

An orange sun appeared in the midst of mountains in Xi'an of China. The first rays of dawn shone on a shabby cottage covered in twigs and rotten leaves. Spider the Tomb Raider owned this cottage. He had a wife named Elephant who was the ugliest woman you could ever imagine. She had a really flat nose, small eyes, small ears and a big mouth. She had always wanted to look elegant and be the fairest woman in the world, but she knew this would never happen. Elephant didn't like the idea of her husband stealing things from tombs at all. She was not against stealing, but she was against stealing cheap things from the dead. Why couldn't her husband do big-time robbery, like robbing a bank?

Spider, on the contrary, loved spooky things. He loved tombs, big and small. So he was really excited that morning as he was going to pull off a great masterpiece – he was going to the biggest and grandest of all tombs. He heard from his friends that there was a really huge and grand mausoleum of some great Chinese emperors dating back to the Qin Dynasty. He would be going there that day and seeing what he could lay his hands on.

Upon arriving at the mausoleum, he noticed that there were quite a few pits there. He clambered down the closest one and immediately froze with terror on the spot – he nearly bumped head-on into a huge guard! He quickly glanced around and saw millions of guards lining up all around him. He dare not move. But the guards did not move either. Strange! So he tried to lift one foot slowly. None of the guards moved! Then he tried to move his hands a bit. None of the guards moved. He became bolder and put his hands in front of the guard closest to him. Still, none of the guards moved. It was really strange indeed! He looked at the guards closely and nearly fainted – they were all statues, life-sized statues, and they all looked so real. It was really creepy. He was not used to stealing things under so many pairs of eyes, so he moved away towards the far end where there seemed to be fewer guards.

As he moved, he slipped into a big hole in the ground much to his alarm. He was just finding his balance when he caught sight of something glittering. “Good gracious!” he thought. “Could there be heaps of treasures here?” He leaned forward to take a closer look, and to his big disappointment, he only saw a mirror. When he picked up the mirror, something dropped to the ground. It was a note with these words written in Chinese:

“Beware. Beware.

This mirror is fragile. Handle with care.

Tell me your wishes then all will be taken care of.”

Spider felt his heart thumping in his chest as he read the note. He nearly choked on the words with excitement. He forgot about looking for treasures in the mausoleum and hurried home, clutching the mirror hard.

He was back in the living room of his small cottage. What could he possibly start wishing for? All the riches in the world? That would be too boring and straight-forward. Then a thought struck his mind. Changing his appearance to scare his nagging wife a bit would be a good start! “I wish I could have black hairy fur all over me,” he said... There was a quick whirl of wind around him which stopped as suddenly as it had started. Spider looked down at himself and shrieked with laughter, “This is real fun!” Spider couldn’t wait to make another funny wish, “I want eight legs and yellow eyes.” The quick whirl of wind came and went a second time. Spider studied his new look and was amused. This would surely scare Elephant up to the roof! He couldn’t stop making outrageous wishes as he knew he could undo all of them so long as the mirror was there. He was enjoying himself immensely.

“What is all this noise?” shouted Elephant as she walked in. She screamed with fright when she saw the monster in front of her eyes. Then she heard her husband’s laughter, saw the mirror and the note, and slowly understood what had been happening. She wanted to have her turn. The first thing that came to her mind was her flat nose. She had always wanted a longer and taller nose. So she closed her eyes and made her first wish. It was granted to her and she was exhilarated. Just like her husband, she couldn’t stop this wishing game. “I want great big ears.” “I want four strong legs.” “I want big round eyes.” “I want fair skin.” Oh, she was really having fun indeed. “I want to have a longer nose,” she went frantic. ‘Longer! Longer! Longer!’

CRASH! The mirror shattered into a thousand small pieces! Elephant’s nose was growing so long and so fast that it crashed right into the mirror before she had a chance to stop it.

“Oh, no! You broke the mirror! How can we change back into our old selves now?” wailed Spider hopelessly.

And those were the last words they could ever speak because as the last piece of glass reached the ground, one of them became a big white animal with a long trunk, and the other became a small black insect with eight legs.

That was the first elephant and the first spider. And that is why we still see spiders crawling all over the place busily spinning their webs, because they dangle from place to place trying desperately to look for a new magical mirror. That’s also why we see elephants stomping all around the earth because they are still very angry with spiders and they want to kill each and every spider as soon as they set eyes on them.

The New Bear in China

Jemma Keefe, 10, Discovery Bay International School

A On a foggy day in the middle of China, an older blind man was feeling the way back to his house. The wind howled and the rain started to fall. The man felt around for shelter. He continued to walk until he found shelter on the edge of the bamboo forest where he huddled down for the night. The next morning the old man woke up not knowing where he was. He stood up and wandered away from the forest and stopped when he suddenly crashed into a big furry being.

He put his hand out to feel whatever he had banged into. Then he remembered that he had felt the bamboo of the forest and knew where he was. He stood up and felt its eyes and mouth. He believed it to be a small boy who must be lost. He grabbed his hand and took him back to where he lived. He was tired that afternoon and had a nap. He forgot about the little boy that night.

The next day he had still forgotten till he tripped over the boy curled up on the floor. He got to his feet and said sorry but there was no reply. The boy had not spoken since they had met. Then suddenly there was a knock at the door. He went and opened it.

“Grandpa!” Two arms wrapped around him. It was Lucy Lin, his granddaughter.

Grandpa smiled and then put his hands around her. Lucy Lin passed him and ran into the house. She gasped and her eyes were wide open. The room was a mess, the furniture was scratched and the curtains dangled from a thread.

“Grandpa, why is your room a mess?” Lucy Lin looked over her shoulder. “What’s that on the floor? That creature. It looks fuzzy, plain black and it has long claws!”

“The boy, yes, well that’s a boy. He was lost, so I brought him home!”

“THAT’S NOT A BOY! That’s a bear! Ahhhh!” Lucy Lin screamed in horror. She grabbed a stick and started whacking it.

It got up and scratched its head. Lucy Lin stared at it. She thought for a moment then ran into the cooking area and pulled out some soya milk. She poured some into the bear’s mouth,

who guzzled it down in one gulp. Some of the milk flew everywhere, on the bear, on Grandpa and even on Lucy Lin's new woven top made by her aunt. She then went to the cold pantry and took out some dumplings. Grandpa had fallen into a deep sleep, while Lucy Lin was trying to get the bear to follow her to the tub in the little garden full of weeds. The bear stood next to the tub and Lucy Lin poured a bucket of water over him, while he ate his dumplings. The milk would not come off, even though Lucy Lin scrubbed and scrubbed nothing came off. In the end he was clean, but black and white. The bear padded along to the end of the littered yard and pulled a piece of bamboo out of the tangled bush and munched on it until there was nothing left except the roots, which he dropped on the dirty ground.

When they were back in the house Lucy Lin decide to name him Panda, that's what she had first thought of. It was simple and it matched the look of the bear.

"Grandpa! Wake up!" Lucy Lin whispered softly into her grandfather's ear. He smiled at the sound of her voice. "Can I please keep Panda? Please!"

"Who? Oh, the bear! You can't keep a bear in a small house like this one. And what would your mother say about that?"

"BUT, where will panda stay?" Lucy Lin started to sob.

"Where he belongs," he said. "In the bamboo forest." Lucy Lin made a face. "Come, let's go for a walk and bring the soya milk with you."

They walked as Lucy Lin helped her Grandpa to the bamboo forest, which surrounded most of the village. They walked deeper into the forest where they met a female bear. Grandpa took the soya milk and fed the female bear which splashed everywhere on her furry coat. She looked exactly the same as Panda.

"I will name this one Panda too Lucy Lin!" Grandpa said and laughed as shehe nodded happily.

The two bears circled each other then walked away together. Then eventually they had children and that's how the panda was created.

The Old Tales from the Southern China Seas

Gigi Lowe, 11, Discovery College

Not so long ago there was a sailor who happened to be one of the best and only storytellers. He told his family scary stories, romantic stories, anything you can think of. Yong Lee did not only make up the stories on the spot, but he did something much more spectacular; he made them come to life.

No one knows how he did it or why he did it, but it did happen. If Yong was, casually, one day telling a story about a little black pony, then somewhere in China you would find a little black pony that fit the description. No one believed this legend but some thought that reading some of Yong's stories would bring back what they thought was a curse. But one of Yong's stories may have carried a curse inside it. It was about a boy, a girl and a walled city.

Somewhere, not so long ago, in the city of Hong Kong lived a father, a mother, a son and a daughter. They were the poorest family in Hong Kong. The daughter, Lei Xue, was curious. She wondered why her parents always seemed to get older. Her older brother, Da-Ge, assured her this happened all the time. She believed him, for a while.

Weeks passed and life went on, Lei forgot about all her worries. However, she knew something was definitely wrong when her father received an anonymous letter with bold, red characters. Hearing her father whimper she resolved to find out what that letter was.

At midnight, Lei quietly slipped out of her comfortable bed and headed for the living room. Careful not to creak the floorboards, she tiptoed around the sofa and found the envelope. The excitement was bubbling up inside Lei as she carefully opened the envelope and revealed what was inside:

Mr. Dong Xue
1324 Ling Ching Hse.
Ming Tuen, Hong Kong

Dear Mr. Dong Xue,
Final warning. Your loan is now overdue with our bank. Take this letter seriously. You have until the 17 June.

Mr. Ling Kuan
CEO

Lei didn't like talking about money or thinking about it. It made her sick in the stomach and light-headed. Lei thought to herself that she *had* to do something. Someone had woken up. She ran to her bedroom, closed the door and nailed her eyes shut. *Tomorrow, tomorrow...* and she drifted off into sleep.

When Lei awoke she tried to dream of a plan but nothing came. Disappointed as she was, she sat down and stared at the morning's newspaper:

Two men were arrested yesterday, trespassing on Mr Fu Jin's territory. One has admitted they were trying to find "the walled city". Our officers believe that they are using this as a cover story since "the walled city" has always been a legend – a myth.

Lei had an idea, it wasn't foolproof but it would help her family. "The walled city" was certainly a myth. But if the men were trespassing on Fu Jin's land that would mean that "the walled city" was there. It would be difficult to get there without being noticed. Those men had to know something about it and the only way that Lei was going to succeed was to do *a lot* of research.

Fu Jin happened to be a descendent of Pangu who separated the sky and earth. When the Three Emperors came, they saw what Pangu had done and had men build a city around him, "the walled city". That's where "the walled city" is, inside Fu Jin's house. But how was Lei going to get in without getting caught? She was going to need help. *Fast.*

Lei had some friends from school but when she told them about her plan they all called Lei names, all except Shui. When she got home, everything was awfully quiet. All eyes were on her, it didn't help that she had a curly-haired, brown-eyed boy trailing behind her. She did what all girls with a mission do, she ran to her room to plan. Her plan was simply thought: *sneak in, take pictures of the walled city in Hong Kong as proof and then leave.*

The front gate of Fu Jin's house was massive, you know the kind: silver and daunting. There was, however, a back door that had no lock on it whatsoever but it was guarded by a Rottweiler. Steak, anyone? Lei and Shui left after dark and carried a raw steak with them, which worked like a dream. There were a lot of corridors in Fu Jin's house; it was the biggest house in Hong Kong. They found a room with a door inside. It was bolted down with locks but resourceful Shui picked the lock. The door creaked open and behind it was "the walled city". It first shone a blinding light but then it was really just a myth. What was behind the door was Fu Jin's secret hideout! The light shone brightly with candles and lamps. There were marvellous books on bookshelves but also dirty laundry and scattered food. Lei and Shui, staring with their mouths open, heard Fu Jin arrive. He wasn't meant to be here! They crouched behind the bookcases. The children tensed as Fu Jin's leather shoes scuffed the floor.

“With all the taxes that these morons give me every month, I’ll have enough money to buy Asia!”

Lei gasped at the sound. Fu Jin didn’t notice and continued,

“If anyone found out that I was stealing all their tax money, I would have to leave Hong Kong! That is why this place must never be revealed.” He left with a click of the door handle. Lei and Shui crept out.

This discovery was going to change everything, but would anyone believe her? Shui brought out his camera. It was a bulky old-fashioned one but it had film so it worked. He took photos before returning his camera to his backpack. Fu Jin wouldn’t be the mayor for long.

Things were calm for a little while. Everyone praised Lei and Shui for their heroic bravery and even though her parents shouted at her, they were so proud of her. Hong Kong’s “walled city” was rich with wealth allowing the Government to build apartments for local people to live. Yong Lee lives there now with his family where everyday he tells them stories, which someday, somewhere, will happen.

Untitled

Chantel Woo, 11, Discovery College

In a compact apartment in Tin Shui Wai lived a frail old woman with her 16-year-old grandson, whose father had died in an accident at a construction site and whose mother committed suicide shortly after giving birth. Jackie had lived with his grandma ever since. With only a single bed and a cracked floor for sleeping on, Madam Chow followed the same old routine everyday – buying groceries, cooking with pots that have been used for 20 years, cleaning the apartment, and in her spare time, collecting recyclable items to sell. Though her weak hands, the Government’s monthly subsidy and her grandson were all she could depend on, Madam Chow strived to provide her grandson with a contented life. All they had was each other.

“Grandma! I’m home!” Jackie called, grasping his grandmother’s bony hand. “Any luck today?”

“I found some cans and sold them for 30 cents each. Oh, and the subsidy arrived today,” Madam Chow replied, gently twirling her grey hair. “How was school?”

“The usual, except Ah Fai referred a summer job to me, now that school is over!” Jackie exclaimed.

“Grandma, with me working, we might be able to afford a consultation with the doctor for you! I’m not sure about the medicine, but I’m sure we can work something out!”

“That’s wonderful, but you shouldn’t work because you have to. I want you to work because you want to,” Madam Chow commented, with a toothless grin. “Remember, don’t do anything dangerous.”

* * *

The distinct odour of tobacco filled Jackie’s nostrils as he dawdled down the dark, noiseless alley.

“This job better be worth it.” Jackie muttered under his breath. As the cigarette smoke cleared up, Jackie reluctantly picked up the speed and walked deeper into what seemed to go on forever.

Unexpectedly, Jackie felt a firm hand on his chest. Breathing heavily, Jackie blinked twice and desperately tried to see what was holding him back.

“Afraid? You should be,” a deep voice echoed through the alley.

“I should go...” Jackie stuttered nervously.

“Don’t scare the boy. He’s with us, now,” an even lower voice spoke.

Evidently, anyone would try to run in a situation like this, but Jackie stood still. No matter what it took, he would get the summer job, for his grandma and for himself. A face and a silhouette then stood out from the blurry mist. Jackie started to shake uncontrollably.

“Is...is this where I’m supposed to meet... Mark Gor?” Jackie stuttered, feeling claustrophobic.

“You’re Ah Fai’s friend, eh? You want the job?” Mark Gor questioned.

“Yes.” Jackie stood tall and plastered a bold, firm expression on his face.

“All right. Here, take a cigarette...” Mark Gor smirked, and a spark of fire appeared.

“I don’t smoke...” Jackie apprised. “Look, I spent a lot of time and money to get here, so I better get the job. I’ve taken the MTR for the first time in my life and I don’t want to come back for another ‘interview’. I’m begging you here.”

“Give it to the boy. And tell him what he’s going to do.”

A deafening knock from the door jarred Jackie awake from his weekend snooze, causing him no choice but to wake up and answer the door.

“What’s the matter, Mrs Chan?” Jackie sleepily grunted.

“Jackie, your grandmother had a heart attack while she was at the market. She’s been sent to the Poi Oi Hospital,” Mrs Chan revealed.

Jackie’s mind went blank. As he was processing his thoughts, a familiar ring tone sounded unexpectedly. It was the pirated phone that Mark Gor had given to Jackie. Jackie listened to Mark Gor telling him about his ‘mission’.

As Jackie was sprinting to Poi Oi Hospital, Mark Gor’s voice lingered in his mind. “Jackie, all you have to do is collect the cigarettes across the border and bring them back to us. \$500 is at stake, Jackie.”

Jackie was in a dilemma. If his grandma knew he broke the law, she would never forgive him. However, Jackie wanted the money! If he took the job, he could at least pay for the medical fee!

Sprinting as fast as he could, Jackie bashed the doors of the Poi Oi Hospital open and spoke to the nurse. “I need to know where Madam Chow is!”

“Jackie, is it?” the nurse asked, flipping through her records.

“Yeah, where might I find my grandmother? Do I have to pay for anything? I only have \$204 here!” Jackie blurted.

“Please Sir, relax. Madam Chow is on the 3rd floor. The doctor will let you know the details,” the nurse kindly remarked.

Sitting on the plastic chair outside the emergency ward was something Jackie never wanted to go through again. The anxiousness of waiting was just unbearable. Staring at his feet, Jackie suddenly realised that he shouldn’t even have considered taking the job. Breaking the law would mean breaking his grandma’s heart. Nothing in the world was worth that.

The minute the doctor stepped out of the room, Jackie jumped up with a tense look in his eyes.

“Doctor, how is my grandmother?” Jackie sobbed.

“I’m afraid your grandmother is no longer with us. We tried our best,” the doctor muttered with a crestfallen, downturned mouth.

Jackie was speechless. All he managed was: “Thank you, Doctor.”

As he turned away, the doctor tapped him on his shoulder. “Oh yes, Jackie, before she left, she told me to pass you a message...” the doctor gently said. “She said to let you know that she’ll always be proud of you... and never to lose your pride.”

Jackie walked out of the hospital and looked up. With his head held up high and tears rolling down his cheeks, Jackie clinched his fists and cried: “You can take anything away from me, but never my pride and dignity.”

* * *

Epilogue

Hong Kong is considered a world-city that boasts of the finest dining, accommodation and shopping. However, a study has claimed that around 1.23 million people (17.9% of Hong Kong’s total population) are still living in poverty today, with the elderly and teenagers being the worst hit. In particular, Tin Shui Wai, which has been dubbed the ‘City Of Sadness’, because of its high rates of unemployment, suicides and spousal/child abuse.

Out of the Box

Michelle Kempis, 11, French International School

I looked across the table at Vanessa; she was fidgeting, touching everything except her food. I could see that I'd have to get her out of there before she broke something.

"Mum, can Vanessa and I go down to the fishmongers' boats?" I asked, in hope that a short walk might stop Nessy's fidgeting.

"Well alright, if you must," she paused, I took this chance to stand up and make my way towards the door,

"Just don't be too long, no longer than fifteen minutes," she called after us,

"On the dot," I said as we hurried out the door.

We were in Sai Kung, right down by the sea, where fishermen and women sell their live catch right off their boats. I love squeezing through the crowd to have a look at what interesting things they might have, and watching their efficient system of shouting down from above and agreeing on a price then handing the fish up in a plastic bag on the end of a pole. The part that disgusts me is when they kill the fish, and clean it right there with everyone watching.

As Nessy and I ran down the street towards the salt splattered railing that rimmed the edge of the dock we had to slow down because of all the people crowding around and shouting. I didn't have to worry about losing Nessy because her bright red hair stood out amongst a sea of black.

We had both been born in Hong Kong, though our parents grew up in Ireland. I still could not understand a word of Cantonese, so now all the shouting and arguing might as well have been Greek, except for the occasional number. That's when I heard Nessy call my name.

"Leah, Leah!" her voice was urgent but not scared. It only took me a moment to locate her in the crowd and begin to struggle towards her.

"Leah, come look at this! Quick, Leah, quick," she whined,

"What?" I asked, Nessy was only nine so the smallest of things could excite her. Pushing to peer over the rail I was expecting a colourful shell or maybe a big fish. I was definitely not expecting to see an octopus.

It wasn't big, like those huge ones you see in cartoons, just a little one, but still an octopus. I stood there in shock for a second. Then I felt Nessy pulling my shirt,

"We've got to save it, Lee," I could see the look in her eye that meant she wasn't just being a drama queen.

"I'm sorry Nussy but there's really nothing I can do," I said back into her pleading eyes.

"But Lee," she begged, looking back at the octopus. I followed her gaze. The poor creature was crammed into a polystyrene box.

"Please," she pleaded with me, and at that moment, I could not say no to her eyes.

"Alright but we've got to go back to Mum just to tell her we are OK."

"But Lee," she whined

"First we go to Mum, then we can save the octopus," I commanded.

The run back to the restaurant was filled with exhilaration. At that moment I wasn't thinking of troubles, like how we were going to communicate or where we'd get the money, all I was thinking of was how great it felt to be rescuing that octopus.

We slowed down as we burst through door and walked briskly to our table. "Oh there you are," Mum sighed,

"See anything interesting?" Dad asked

"Yes!" began Nussy,

"Just a few pretty shells," I cut her off. I didn't want Mum knowing what we were up to, she'd never allow it.

"Can we go out again now?" asked Nussy impatiently

"What about your dessert?" Mum said. Nussy crumpled.

Suddenly I had an idea. "Actually, is it all right if we buy some ice cream from Mr. Softy?" It was my only hope, though I felt terrible lying to Mum and Dad, I promised myself I would tell Dad later.

"That's fine. Here's more than enough for both of you," Dad said before Mum could interject.

"Thanks, Dad!" we shouted, racing back out the door.

We headed straight for the boat we knew the octopus was on and only when we reached the rail did I realise that I could not speak a word of Cantonese, and that the fishermen probably didn't speak a word of English. I shouldn't have worried though because before I could stop her, Nussy had pushed through to the front and had started shouting and jumping around, doing her best to attract attention.

She got so wild that she tripped over her own feet and fell out of sight. "Vanessa!" I screamed in a sudden flurry of panic. I started to push through the crowd; I was so flustered that within my first step I managed to trip over my own feet. As I pulled myself up a man came up and offered me his hand. I was so confused that I just took it without thinking. Once I stood up, he asked, "Are you okay?" in a kind voice that suggested he wasn't going to hurt me

"My sister tripped and I can't see her!"

He immediately cut in. "She's fine. I happened to be standing next to her while she was making all that commotion and she fell on top of me. She's right here." That's when I noticed that Nussy was standing right beside him. "She's explained the octopus to me, and I think I may be of some help in the communication department," he smiled

"Thank you so much!" I said, relieved.

We made our way over to the boat and I just listened as he spoke to the lady and then turned back to me. "She says it costs fifty dollars, but she can do forty for you." I counted the money and realized we just had enough

"Perfect," he turned back to the lady and seconds later the money was handed down and the octopus up. We took the octopus and turned back to the man.

"Thank you!" I called as I started to run towards the stairs leading down towards the ocean.

When we got there I hurriedly undid the bag and gently poured our octopus into the ocean. Together, we watched him swim away. Away from his box.

Looking For Someone Like Me

Daniella Spinks, 10, German Swiss International School

I have been looking for months for someone like me, someone pink, sleek, but I now realise I might be the only one left in the South China Sea. I never thought something like this would ever happen. Or even something minor would happen. My Lantau was always so peaceful; nobody would hurt or do anything to anybody, until it all started.

I remember so many of Grandma's tales. She always told me one or two every night, or even three if she had time. Our clan had always lived in the caves of Lantau. The wonderful colours of the coral reefs and so many different colourful fish. I had so many cute and small fish friends and some were almost as big as me! The water was so clear you could see the caves of Cheung Chau from our Lantau. All of the swimming games, we chased each other for miles along the coasts of the South China Sea with the reflecting blue, purple, magenta and gold lights against my pink glow. We had warm underwater caves to hide in and we used to hide behind big schools of fish if we were playing tag!

The change was slow at first. We didn't mind the land creatures. They were strange but they talked to us and fed us fish every day... well almost every day. So we followed their noisy speechless whales. But there were more and more of them and some of the speechless whales grew larger and the land creatures were not so kind and did not feed or talk to us. The fish disappeared, slowly but surely, and they never came back. I still don't know why all my fish friends disappeared. Was it because of the big, huge speechless whales? Or was it something different? I asked Mummy and Daddy, but nobody knew.

Then came the monsters. All we could see was their huge claws and jaws full of boulders. We avoided them and the elders made a plan: when they came close, we would hide in the cave. So we stored food for months. But then the fateful day came. The noise at first was so loud that I couldn't even hear myself speak! Then huge rocks came flying through the water. We all swam for safety to the cave. We were scared but somehow the old cave made us relax. But then the cave entrance started to close and there was panic. Families were swimming in all

directions looking for each other. I was grabbed by Mummy and Daddy. We swam, dodging stones, and I got hit on a fin by a big stone. It was dark and murky, with the water churning with sand and mud. We could hardly see each other and we swam until we were so tired. After we rested we returned to the cave but I never found grandma again. There were many gone, either stuck in the cave or killed by the stones. That day seemed to be the most fateful and horrible day in my life and probably the worst day of everyone else's too, or at least that is what I thought then.

So much has changed in this new South China Sea. There are no more deep caves. Everything was covered by the sand and dust of the monsters. The water is always so dark and murky now. There are hardly any fish left and everyone started to get sick. The water is polluted of course and we are starving. We have to travel so far to find fish. There are no more games anymore. Instead, everyone has to look for food for hours and travel for miles, only to find that they are all gone and only if you are lucky might you find two or three fish.

Things couldn't have been any worse, so I went to go find some fish for Mummy and Daddy. It took two days to find some fish and I found quite a few fish but when I went home, everything was gone. There was a new mound of stones, and the cave was completely buried! No Mummy, no Daddy, there was nobody left. I was heartbroken. Were they buried somewhere in the unknown? Or did they escape?

I have been swimming for months looking through my river of tears. I am still searching, but I haven't found anyone who looks like me.

A Dream Come True

Milton Tang, 10, Hong Kong International School

“**M**om!” Came a call from the 3rd floor.

“What!?” The woman yelled to her nine-year-old son, John, from the 1st floor.

“I broke my car again. Do I get a new one?”

His mom was already prepared. She immediately whipped out a box full of new toys from a closet. Come to think of it, would any parent spoil a kid this way by offering him new toys all the time? This family’s problem was that they were filthy rich and the boy grew up with everything he needed without having any sense of value or affection for anything.

John lived in a mansion, a house that was filled with china, antiques and ancient Chinese paintings. All the rooms were very grand indeed, but the most unique of them all was probably John’s room which resembled a toy store. There were boxes of action figures, guns, jigsaw puzzles, and even a pool table. Every so often when the servant opened the door, the boy would shout, “HANDS UP!” pointing his gun at the servant. The servant’s natural instinct would make him raise his hands straight up spilling the whole cupful of milk on to his head! Even though John seemed like a happy little devil, he always felt lonely. He had no siblings to play with and the kids in school lived far from his mansion.

John knew his house well except for one room which always remained locked. One day, he challenged his parents to a chess game. If he won, he could receive the key to the locked room. If he lost, he would give all his toys to charity. John remembered that he had a Chinese chess board. Although he only played chess once in a while, he was ready to take on his parents. After a long, exasperating match, John won.

John’s parents had a reason to lock up this room. It was a special room, one that led a person to a magical world. Like John’s father and ancestors, whoever entered was challenged. If one passed all the challenges, his dream would come true, otherwise he would stay inside forever. Right away, John thought that there was some sort of a maze inside and if he got to the

end he would be awarded a grand prize! Therefore, he dashed in quickly without looking back.

Inside was like a dream. John wandered about for a while and found a garden where a few kids were playing hide and seek. He watched the children play with laughter and enjoyment and was gradually drawn into the game. Suddenly, one boy, who was hiding in a tree, fell out and splashed into a ceramic pot filled with water underneath. All the children panicked except John. His wisdom prompted him to pick up a rock and smashed it against the pot with all his might. The pot broke and all the water seeped out quickly. The boy was saved and all the children praised him for his wisdom.

Suddenly, John's vision became blurry, so he closed his eyes and rubbed them. When he opened them once again, he was taken to a different place. He thought he was in a maze, but instead, he found himself in a forest. Suddenly, a glowing object on top of a tall tree caught his sight. Being curious, he started climbing the tree hoping he could reach it. He would die for sure if he fell. Being terrified, John held onto a branch, regretting that he had climbed up in the first place. He looked up at the glowing object once more and thought, "All my hard work would go to waste if I gave up now. I've got to continue!" Finally, with his last bit of power, he crawled to the top. As John was holding the object in triumph, it suddenly glowed brightly, blinding his eyes.

Once again, John was taken to a different place and this time he found himself in a busy market. In the midst of the crowd, John noticed an old woman who was struggling to carry her bags. Something compelled him to go and help this woman. As he offered to carry her stuff for her, he was astonished by the weight of her bags. It seemed that gravity was struggling to hold them back. With tremendous effort, he finally got to the woman's house, but ungratefully, the old woman entered her house without even thanking him or offering him a drink. John sat on her doorstep, trying to regain his strength. He needed to close his eyes and rest for a moment before he could continue on his journey. Then he remembered what happened each time when he closed his eyes. He knew he would be teleported again to another place and might need to do something exasperating again! John forced himself to keep his eyes open, but it was too late...

Suddenly, John found himself floating in the middle of a platform. The same ungrateful old woman appeared again in a glowing figure. As the light faded away, there stood a fairy in her spot! The fairy congratulated him on his completion of all the challenges. He was praised for his courage, wisdom and kindness. For this he would be granted a wish, so the fairy asked him what his dream was. Like John's ancestors, she expected him to have a greedy wish, but to her surprise, John requested a sibling, one who would play with him and share his happiness. The fairy smiled, then waved her wand. The platform suddenly disappeared and John started falling!

John hit the ground with a thump. When he opened his eyes, he found himself back in his own house. He sighed deeply thinking that the fairy had refused to give him what he wanted. Suddenly, a small boy, one who looked just like John, walked in. John stared at him. Could it be? A sibling!

Magnificent

Kelly Chu, 11, International Christian School

Long ago in the Ming Dynasty, Ming Lee, the daughter of the Emperor and Queen, thought her parents only cared about the country, the money, the fame. She thought that if she screamed at the top of her lungs they wouldn't even notice her. One day, she slipped out of the castle and into the town. She wrapped a scarf around her face, showing only her eyes, to hide her identity. A few feet away she saw a friendly old woman selling antique mysteries. "Maybe that kind looking woman can help me find a friend," said Ming. She went up to the senior and greeted her.

"Ni Hao," she bowed with respect.

"Ni Hao, child," the old lady held out a bottle of perfume "Would you care for this unique perfume? Those who spray it shall no longer be lonely..." quoted the old woman.

"How did you know...I mean sure, I'll take it please," she stuttered as she searched her pockets desperately for her coin purse. Oh no where are my coins! I HAVE to have that item, she thought to herself. When she looked up to make an arrangement with the good senior, all she saw was the fragrance. "Where did that woman go?" Next to the bottle, was a letter. "Hey what's this?" she wondered opening the piece of paper.

Written on the paper was a single word: Magnificent...

Back in the palace Princess Ming stood by the window holding the special perfume. "Hmmm will I really no longer be lonely after spraying this unique perfume? Well, it wouldn't hurt to try." As she sprayed it the house began to shake.

"Oh no, what have I done now?" she thought as she ran out of the room. Then the shaking suddenly stopped.

"Huh, what now?" she asked as she ran back to the trouble making perfume. The lights turned off and she heard a noise behind her; causing her to turn around.

"Who's there?" she questioned the dark.

"I am your friend," replied the creature.

“Who are you, show yourself now!” ordered the scared princess. Then there was a bright light that nearly blinded Ming until the glow went off. Only Ming and the dark were there still. Ming darted out of the room, making her way out until something grabbed her arm before she reached the door. *flicker* a small flame appeared with a girl Ming’s age holding a candle. Amazed, Ming asked, “Did you come from that perfume?” and showed her the perfume bottle.

Then the girl started chanting in reply: “The place where I’m from is indescribable; I live to be your friend forever even if you’re gone.” At this, the princess was so happy and jumped with joy. From then on, they were known as the Magnificent Friends – Grace and Ming. The spirit was always with the princess even when Ming was showing signs of disease. Shortly after that, at a young age, Ming developed a kidney disease which led to an early death. And the spirit named Grace disappeared at the same time back into the bottle.

January 2010

“Hey Mom! I found this old trunk in my room!” said a girl, Amy Ming Lee. The Lee family had just moved into a new apartment in Sha Tin.

“Why don’t you ask the old lady who owned this house before?” Mrs. Lee shouted from the kitchen.

“OK,” replied Amy as she ran to the phone and dialed the grandma’s number. “Hello? This is Amy Ming Lee. May I speak to Mrs. Lau?” said Amy.

“Speaking,” said the voice in the receiver.

“Um, I found this old, brown trunk in my bedroom, do you want it back?” asked the young girl.

“Hmmm...Ming Lee, you say? Well that trunk is just right for you. There is a key for you in one of the kitchen cabinets. I have to go dear. Good luck,” Mrs. Lau informed Amy and then hung up.

Then, Amy bolted to the kitchen, eagerly opening and searching all the cabinets. “Honey, what are you looking for?” said Mrs. Lee.

“Just some key for the trunk in my room,” replied Amy while she felt around for the key. Finally, she found the dusty key in the last cabinet and ran up to her room.

“Hope this fits,” Amy said as she placed the key into the key hole and turned the key perfectly. As she opened the mysterious box, the floor under her began to vibrate and the lights suddenly went off for 10 seconds, then came back on. Bravely, she picked up one of the mysteries – a perfume bottle.

A Fish Story

Chloe Lai, 11, Island School

Somewhere off an island of the Philippines is a small white underwater forest. It's cold and dead and the bright, colourful leaves have become part of the misty green sea that the warmth of the sun will never touch. A great, rusting iron pipe lies half buried in mud, spewing out clouds of gas and lumpy, green sludge. Those who did not leave have been poisoned by oily waste, and all that lies here now is the memory of a forgotten time, before the factory, and the killer pipe.

Galura's eyes flickered over the colourful kingdom he ruled. He drifted closer and squinted at a few scrawny dots. His eyes glowed silver and he flashed through the seaweed, razor fangs tearing at the water. *Snap!* Thirteen sardine eggs were gone, and in a confusion of bubbles and misty water, so was he. A palpable sense of relief settled over the reef, and its inhabitants emerged once more. And three little sardine eggs danced in the current.

A few metres away from the coral forest, the three little eggs sat innocently in a crevice. The biggest one started to quiver, closely followed by the other two. Then *plop! Plop! Plop!* All three fishes exploded out of their eggs and floundered to the safety of the coral.

The small sardine family spent a simple and happy existence in the coral reef, nibbling at seaweed and chomping on water snails. Vaska was the fish that taught them and their friends everything they knew. The sardines grew quickly and all too soon, they had grown up.

Reganna recalled Vaska bubbling about the graduation ceremony, tonight.

The mood in the coral was one of excited fear. Reganna's brother and sister were both exhilarated and nervous about going over 'The Edge' that night.

The sea was almost pitch black. Vaska led the solemn procession to The Edge, the border of the coral city.

"We are gathered here tonight," Vaska declared, "to witness these fry become full fish! Tonight, they will go over 'The Edge', and see the world, as we have done. May they prosper

and live long!” Nobody moved a muscle. The atmosphere snapped, and too fast, too soon, they were being swept out into the vast blue sea. Reganna stopped to look back at the only world she had ever known, saw the familiar faces she would probably never see again, then gave a bubbling sigh and left it all behind, forever.

Reganna found eight other little sardines like herself. Together they explored the dark caves of the continental shelf, watching out for predators and living together in the sunlight.

In April, there was a storm so large that the sea seemed to throw itself against the coast, leaping and clawing. The sardines sheltered in a deep cave, out of the chaos outside. An unlucky turtle was caught by a sudden swirl and smashed into the rock. When it came away, there was blood in the water and its head lolled loosely and its blank eyes stared, puzzled, at a world it could not see. The storm lasted for three days, and when it stopped, it was a sad world that met the sardines’ eyes.

The sardine noticed the faraway black shadow, wondered if it was a whale, but changed his mind when it came closer. “Run!” She screamed.

Galura was on the brink of starvation. He could hardly believe his luck when he saw the school of eleven sardines directly in front of him.

There was no coral, no caves, nothing to hide in. They simply swam for their lives.

And then Galura lunged forward. He shot towards them, faster than a torpedo.

The fishing trawler came from the direction he was moving. The little sardines felt its current long before it arrived, and flashed downwards, just in time. Galura saw it, paddled desperately backwards, swept forward by his own momentum. He gave a moan of horror, and then the gargantuan monster smashed into him full steam.

Reganna saw it coming again, a huge black shadow rising out of the mist. She dived, deeper than she had ever before.

Then she was powering up, and there was a feeling of dread in her guts.

Reganna approached the surface again. She saw the shadow, dragging away her friends in a massive net and Galura, almost unrecognizable, his eyes staring in shock at nothingness. He really looked like he was looking at her. She turned and fled.

It was the middle of August and Reganna was going home. She had laid her eggs in a small, quiet patch of coral, wished them happiness in their lives and started heading where she belonged, home.

The first thing she noticed was the eerie silence, then the cloudy green murkiness of the stinking water. The coral was bleached white, it was hard. With a jolt, she recalled Vaska saying, *white coral dead*. This coral was dead. A skeleton of a fish with shrivelled flesh clinging sparsely to its scrawny bones. No worms dared to feast on the carcass. The smell was overpowering as she drew nearer to the shore, and she felt dizzy. Everything was dead. What had happened to the reef?

Now she was only a few metres from shore, and everything was so green she could only just make out the indistinct shape of a... *something* that looked like the top part of a tube coral, that was black, and poured green slime that emanated an unspeakably evil smell and made the water around it even greener. She stopped and stared at it, realisation dawning on her. *The sludge is from the... thing... that’s killing my home*. Then the kindling that had lay in her for so long was ignited, and the flames were roaring inside her. She remembered her life, her last sanctuary, all gone now, she could not resist the fire. Reganna charged at the pipe...

...and never made it to the end.

And on a distant patch of coral, nine sardine eggs hatched.

I Am a Pink Dolphin

Steve Kwak, 10, Korean International School

I am a Pink Dolphin and my skeleton is in the Science Museum. One year ago, I was living in the East China Sea. I heard that Hong Kong was warmer than China. So, I went to Hong Kong for a week. But some of my friends, the electric eels, said, "Don't go to Hong Kong! There are many ferries, so there is oil in the water!" But I said, "I think it's okay. China is colder than Hong Kong. I hate cold places. That's why I'm going to Hong Kong." I ignored electric eels and I finally went to Hong Kong! But the electric eels were right. There was oil and rubbish in the water. I could not breathe, so I died. Some fisherman caught my body with nets. The fisherman gave my body to scientists. The scientist checked my body with some machines, then they cut my body and pulled out my bones. They put my bones in a box, and I was sold to a museum. Now I have my wish. I am in Hong Kong but I will stay in a museum forever.

Encounters from the South China Sea

Catherine Wang, 10, Kowloon Junior School

The storm was a large blustering gale, and the rain howled and beat the ship like a wild animal. The sailors were soaked to the bone, and the wind lashed about their ropes and tools as they struggled to remain on board. The waves played with the ship, tipping it one way before pushing it another. The entire deck was echoing with clashes and bangs.

The *Proud Queen* was sailing upon the South China Sea to deliver some cargo when the storm came. It was something they had never experienced before – the sky a dirty black, the clouds a pale green, the wind whipping their sails with such great force.

Kit, the ship's cabin girl, was a resourceful girl. She pushed against the wind which determinedly pushed her back. Scrambling inside the hold, she slammed the door shut. The windows were opening and slamming, playing a noisy game with the wind.

Among the whirling of papers, there was the captain; the loud and obnoxious man had turned into a small and rather timid man who was sitting in his chair, wringing his hands.

"Why are you not helping us save the ship?!" Kit cried, banging her fist on his flimsy desk. "You're the captain!"

The captain glanced up at her and shook his head sadly.

"I wish I wasn't," he said, rocking on his chair. "I don't know what to *do*!" he said, his voice rising, his eyes welling up with tears.

Kit decided she would rather face the storm than watch, when suddenly the storm strengthened, the waves enveloped the deck before disappearing back into the sea and producing another wave. The wind was tearing apart the sails in large tears, leaving gashes in the cloth. Leaves, dead fish and debris now flew around in the air. There was no way for them to survive – either they would drown in the sea or drown in the ship. Quickly Kit rushed out and jumped inside the emergency boat – a small vessel that had had many mishaps. The main

ship was being torn into pieces now, and the floor was giving way. She undid the rope quickly and landed on the water with a small splash. She pumped her arms with all the strength a 15-year-old could muster, but the boat was not a seaworthy vessel and was quickly overcome by a large wave. Kit tried her hardest, but before she could stop it her senses blanked out and everything was black. She had lost consciousness.

The sun that had risen up gave everything a peaceful red glow. The wind was obviously apologetic and there was a nice breeze, and the waves, following the wind, were small and calm. The morning that had followed the chaos was certainly a peaceful one. As for Kit, she woke up with light in the sky. She was surprised when she realised she was in a rickety wooden boat, drifting across the South China Sea. It took a while for her to remember yesterday's catastrophic events, and following so; she straightened herself up and realised she was hungry. She had not had a proper meal since the storm, and that meal consisted of a rather dirty portion of bread and a small drink of water – not enough for a hungry person. Her stomach lurched unpleasantly. Still in search of breakfast, she squinted out into the horizon and spotted an island not too far away. She began paddling towards it, pumping harder than she had done the night before.

As she approached the island, she realized it was a lush green land, in which laid a green rainforest that had birds of paradise flying here and there, with squawks and roars and hisses, the most wondrous sounds emerging from the forest. Kit stepped onto the sandy shore, where her feet sank into the sand. Bestowed by the beautiful land upon her, she ran as fast as her feet could into the trees, and began feasting on the soft and juicy fruit they provided. The fruit was the most wonderful she had ever tasted. Surely, she could help herself? She continued to eat.

A small movement in the surrounding trees attracted her attention immediately. Kit stared at the trees, fruit juice still sweet on her face. There was a very tense pause. Apparently she had faced many dangers before, including sharks, disease and attacks from angry groups of pirates. Her hands tensed around the fruit she was holding. She decided that if the hidden object pounced, she would hurl the stone of the fruit and run towards the shore.

Suddenly, a small human-like creature emerged from the leaves. It had large, black eyes, a small raspberry-like nose and small feet and hands. The most astounding part about this strange creature was its tail, its long coiling tail, which seemed longer than the creature itself. She quickly pocketed the stone, then abruptly the creature snapped its fingers and after a shock, they were standing by a glistening lake.

"This is the Lake of Life, the source of life in the entire Tentra Island," the creature whispered. "Choose between the past, present and future. Hurry before it is too late!"

Kit considered this. If she remained on the island, she could befriend the natives, eat the luscious fruit everyday – with no worries. She then thought about her job, her family, and her life. She sighed.

"The future – the perfect future in which the storm did not happen."

The creature nodded and pointed to the lake. It bubbled and glowed a brilliant green.

She muttered goodbye to the paradise before leaping into the waters. How peaceful. After a sharp blast, she found herself inside the *Proud Queen*. Rubbing her head, she realized she was back in her small cabin. Feeling a lump in her pocket, she reached into it and pulled out the item inside. It was a shiny fruit stone.

Life by the South China Sea

Natasha Rode-Christoffersen, 10, Norwegian International School

Becca hated the way the little thing that's supposed to be her nose was so small and her hair so short. Not only that, but it was yellowish and black on the top. But one of the rare things Becca liked about herself was her eyes; one was dark brown the other dark green. Becca was still looking at her reflection in the water when the water rippled. Becca suddenly realised where she was, out in her boat near her house. Her house was on a beach near the South China Sea. Becca lived with her mom, dad and dog Fuzzy.

Fuzzy was a big wolf dog. Becca had had Fuzzy ever since she was born. Or Fuzzy had Becca. Fuzzy had once protected Becca from a robber. Since then he had felt like a mother to Becca.

Becca's mom was from England and had blue eyes, yellow hair and dark red lips. Becca loved her mom. They would talk about things like animals and the beach. Unlike other moms, Becca's mom was very outgoing.

As for Becca's dad, he was a very stern man. He was not easy to convince even though Becca could convince the queen of England that she was in charge. He came from China and was very proud of his country. So proud, that he joined the war a few weeks ago.

Becca almost fell out of her boat thinking about her family. She rowed her boat back to shore. Her mom would be waiting for her. She quickly took off her boots and coat and went in. Her mom was sitting with dinner ready. Her mom asked her if she had caught anything. Becca picked up the bucket and showed her mom. Her mother smiled and told her not to take animals into the dining room. Becca expected this and put the bucket in her bedroom.

After dinner Becca went fishing again. It was lovely rowing out to sea after dinner. When she rowed so far out that she could hardly see the beach, she threw out her net. When she was about to pull it up, something huge flew out of the water. Whatever it was, the thing wanted her to follow it. So Becca followed and realised it was leading her to a beach.

There lay a hurt baby seal and next to it was a pistol. She picked up the baby seal and looked at the thing that had led her here. It was the mother seal. Becca put both seals in her boat and rowed home. It was harder rowing now that she had two seals in her boat.

When Becca came home she saw her mom in the garden tending to the vegetables. Becca sneaked into the house with the two seals. She took them straight into her room. Becca's mom did not let her keep any sea animals in her room. But Becca's mom had not seen that she had put a shrimp in her bedroom. Both seals looked extremely hungry so Becca gave them the shrimp to eat. After they finished eating they looked tired. Becca did not know what to do. She did not know how to look after them. Becca picked up a huge book of animals and looked up seals.

Then she looked at the baby seal, it definitely was badly hurt. She had a hole through one flipper. A bullet had gone through it. It was horrid to look at. Becca went to get her first aid box. She kept it under her bed. She looked through the box. There were bandages and plasters and lots of other things. She picked up the baby seal. First Becca put some gooey yellow stuff on her cut and then she put the bandage on. Becca was pretty impressed with herself.

Suddenly the door started rattling, Becca turned around quickly. She knew who it was, it was her dog Fuzzy. Becca did not know what to do.

She hurried both seals onto her bed, put the covers over them and opened the door. It was not just her dog it was her mom too. Becca said she had been busy with stuff. Her mom asked her what stuff. Becca just said stuff.

"Well," said her mom. "Fuzzy wants to come in."

Becca let her dog in and showed him the two seals. Fuzzy started barking madly. Becca calmed him down but before she could do anything her mom had popped her head in and screamed. Her mom looked at Becca in amazement. Becca looked down.

Becca's mom told her just what Becca knew she would say. She told her that the seals had to go back to where they came from. Becca looked dully at the floor.

"OK," she wept.

"You have to let them go," Becca's mom said.

Becca went out without saying anything. She put both seals in her boat and rowed away. She let them go in the middle of the South China Sea where she had first seen the mother seal. Then she rowed back.

When Becca came back home she found both seals had been following her. Becca panicked and ran into the house. When she came into the dining room there sat her father, fit as ever. "Daddy," cried Becca giving him a big hug. "You have to come," Becca rushed her dad outside.

There sat both seals waiting for her to come outside. Becca called her mom too. Her mom came running.

"Look," said Becca. The two seals were clapping their hands.

"Oh how sweet," said her mom.

Once again Becca thought about her family, but this time there was no boat to fall out of.

Adventure of the Mermaids

Christine Ellen Daley, 10, Pui Kiu College

Once upon a time, there were two sisters called Isabel and Stephanie. They were mermaids who had beautiful long black hair that flew in the water as they swam. They had green sparkly, shiny scales which shimmered in the sun. They were princesses; they lived in a castle in the ocean. It had beautiful shells on it. It was a treasure chest which had a golden floor made of coins and seaweed growing out of the bottom. Pearl necklaces hung as decoration from the ceiling and a diamond shimmered as the light in the centre.

They had a clamshell for their bedrooms. The mermaids always heard the sound of dolphins clicking or whistling to each other. Sometimes the mermaids would play with the seahorses when they were bored. Every living thing thought that the ocean was the best place to live – because it was filled with beautiful seashells and joy filled the air.

One dark night, they sneaked out of their clam whilst everyone was snoring and blowing bubbles. They had read in a book about a deep cliff that dropped far into the ocean which hid a magical pearl. They wanted to explore it.

They swam to the reef that was mentioned in the book. It was full of colourful coral and shells. They swam through the reef carefully because they were scared as the sea's current was strong. They reached the edge of the cliff and looked down but it was too dark to see anything. Suddenly the edge of the cliff they were on crumbled and they fell into the hole. They started to scream...

In spite of their screaming, nobody showed up. So they stopped screaming, and tried to swim back up, but it was useless. So they decided to try to look for the magical pearl. But instead of finding the pearl, they found some strange fish. They had lights hanging above their heads and they had big sharp teeth. They were not scary, but friendly. So the mermaids started asking questions about the magical pearl. Finally, they had lots of information about it.

After chatting with a school of fish, they started the hunt for the magical pearl. Now the mermaids went deeper down into the hole, but that night, something strange happened to the

mermaids. They saw a shining light sparkling behind the coral, it was the pearl! They were so happy that they started to dance with the fish.

But when the mermaids picked it up, they had a strange feeling that they were changing. Their fins were changing into arms. Their tails were changing into legs. They were humans! They started to breathe fast and they did not even know that they were running out of air, but the school of fish saved them. They helped them swim up to the surface to let them breathe. When the mermaids woke up, they had no idea where they were. So they started asking people. Then they met a prince. They asked if they could stay in his palace and work as maids, and the prince's answer was "yes" and when they arrived at the palace, they found out that the prince had a brother, and both princes thought that the mermaids were pretty, so they asked them to marry them, and that's what they did. Then, they lived happily ever after.

However, a few years later, they didn't live so happily anymore. The country they lived in started to have financial problems, and everyone was holding protests on the street. When it was time to elect a new president, who worked for the king, people didn't want to vote for Hilary Obama, the smartest and prettiest woman in the country.

The princes also had problems! They took up drinking habits and went to bars and got drunk every night, which made Isabel and Stephanie really worried. Isabel and Stephanie would go to the bar and take them home, but the princes were always angry at them, and sometimes even slapped them!

Eventually, Isabel and Stephanie had reached the point that they could no longer put up with it and Isabel told the king that they would be going on a summer vacation without the princes, but actually they were going to escape.

So they packed up everything – including closets and cupboards – and dumped everything into their brand-new limo. Finally, they were settled in France. They worked as chefs in the most famous restaurant there, and since they were so talented, they became the best chefs in town.

One day, while they were cooking fish in the restaurant, they realised that they had nearly killed their friend, Noah! Noah was one of the fish that they met in their journey to search for the magic pearl. They realised how much they had missed their friends in the sea. They were so tired of being humans with their self-created troubles that they desired to live their lives as mermaids again. So they found the map they kept, wore swimming suits and snorkels, and dived into the sea to search for the magical pearl.

Since they were in France, they had to swim a long way to get to the cliff where they had last seen the pearl. When they finally arrived at the cliff, they found the pearl, and when they nearly got to it, their air tanks ran out of air! So Isabel and Stephanie took their last gasp of air, and touched the pearl. But it took too long for them to transform and they fainted the second before they fully became mermaids.

Luckily, they woke up because they could breathe again as mermaids even without the air tanks. They went back to their castle where everyone greeted them and lived happily ever after, for the second time, but this time as mermaids!

The Dragons of Mystica Mist

Jessie Lau Xing Yi, 11, Singapore International School

I live in a hut at Mystica Mist, my hometown. My name is Blossom and I am 11 years old. My dream is to go to the South China Sea. I've heard of the mysterious beings and magical dragons.

There were five mysterious creatures that ruled the seas, their masters are always with them. They travelled together, master and dragon never separated. Some flew, some went underwater. The dragons each had their own special powers. There was the power of earth, fire, water, air, and last of all, weather.

Lin-Seng was the earth dragon, able to move entire countries. Niva was the fire dragon; she could control fire and could blast fire balls with the heat of an erupting volcano. Wai Lim was the water dragon; she could fill and empty seas as she wished. Carme was the air dragon, able to blast the whole earth 300 kilometres away with one breath. The youngest dragon, Hay Lin, had power over the weather that would change to match her mood.

They were all great sisters and loved each other dearly. They all had access to somewhere no normal being could go. They could reach the Heavenly Cities, a place where the sisters and their riders have their meetings. It was where they lived. It was located above the centre of the South China Sea.

As Mother told me, it was rumoured that the dragon riders were replaced once every decade and the dragon would choose its rider. But no one was ever sure. There was another rumour that the riders might also have their own powers. A decade has already passed since the dragon rider was last seen. I'm really looking forward to be one of the chosen.

It was one silent night, the moon was bright and shining and I felt a long shadow fall on my face. I opened my eyes in shock to find a beautiful creature staring down at me. It had crystal shiny scales that reflected rainbows when light hit, long sharp lethal teeth and pearly blue eyes, glittering as they looked down on me. "Greetings, Blossom. I'm Hay Lin, your dragon. Welcome to the Heavenly Cities." As the dragon spoke, we entered a magnificent place. The palace was covered in mist, waterfalls coming out of nowhere, ending in a large shiny pool of water. When I looked over the edge, I saw that we were on a floating island. When I peeked around, I saw six other islands the same as the one I was on but each was uniquely designed. I watched in awe as more dragons entered this weird dimension. They assembled onto their own mini islands with their own rider. I was vaguely aware of everything around, Hay Lin was explaining to me what was happening. "That's Lin-Seng with her new rider Grou Lin." She used her tail to point at a milky brown dragon with emerald eyes.

"By the way, how do you know where I live?" I questioned Hay Lin.

“Easy,” she answered me. She glided over to a large rock wall next to her cloud bed. She poked a button with her nose and said “Blossom” to the diagram. Immediately, a large map popped out and a red dot was blinking on the map.

“Hey! That’s where I live!” I exclaimed.

“Yup, that’s how simple it is to find you.” She replied, grinning.

“Hello, my name is Hazel. What’s yours?” a friendly mouse brown haired girl asked me as she landed on our mini island. She was dressed casually, jeans and a lavender coloured sweatshirt. The same colour as the dragon next to her.

“M-m-my name’s Blossom...” I stuttered.

“Hi Blossom! Nice to meet you! This is Carme.” her voice rang out across the wide empty space, creating an echo.

“Welcome to the Heavenly Cities, Blossom. It’s been a pleasure to meet you. But we must move on. Too-loo!” she spoke in a wind-chime voice.

Quickly, I got to know all of Hay Lin’s sisters and their riders were all very friendly. I liked Hazel the most. I found her very friendly and she had a kind heart. I already had a close bond with Hazel. She was my best buddy up here.

“Alert! Alert! Enemies approaching!” a loud siren suddenly sounded.

“You have enemies?!” I questioned Hay Lin as she motioned me to climb onto her back.

“Yes, they are the dark evil forces that try to override our planet,” she growled menacingly.

“But I don’t know how to fight,” I whimpered helplessly, clinging on to her scales.

“But you know how to hunt with arrows, right?” Hay Lin queried.

“Y-yes. I do,” I mumbled.

“Then shoot them down with all your might!!!” she replied.

We exploded out of the clouds and saw a large swarm of black ugly beasts flying over. They had two heads on one body and three legs. They each had a large pair of black feathered wings.

Wai Lim exploded a large water ball at the enemies. It hit the target but some evaporated into thin air. A huge war broke out. A large purple orb whizzed past my ear. I picked up an arrow bravely and shot. Score! Two down, plenty to go. Hay Lin controlled the weather; she made lightning strike the enemies non-stop. Hail rained down on the enemy’s parade, killing many at once. Suddenly, an ear-piercing scream rang out across the war zone. Oh no! Hay Lin was hit. I was so angry. I felt the anger build up inside me. I couldn’t take it anymore, I couldn’t just sit here and watch my friends get hurt. I shouted in fury at the top of my lungs, “Aaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!”

Suddenly I felt a strange elastic thing burst out of me. I saw an incoming purple orb going right at Hay Lin and I put the see-through film in front of it. The purple orb came in contact with the film and evaporated. Cool! I wrapped the shield around my friends; my shield was willing to follow them as they moved around. Hay Lin saw what happened and stared at me, wide-eyed.

“Did you do that?” she asked me, looking shocked.

“I’m all over this,” I answered, with a large smile on my face.

The enemy saw what happened and knew we could not be beaten and retreated with a sharp bark of command from the leader.

Everyone was so shocked and excited as they heard the story from Hay Lin. “It was because they were frightened of you, Blossom. I saw the shock on their faces as they saw what happened,” Hay Lin boasted happily. My cheeks turned bright red with embarrassment as everyone stared at me in wonder.

“You should be happy to be the hero of the day Blossom!”

Treasure of the South China Sea

Claudia Jane Sousa, 11, St. Paul's Co-educational College Primary School

Ever since I could remember, when I was very young and I would sit on my grandmother's lap, she would tell me stories about a mysterious ship which sank in the South China Sea many centuries ago.

The ship was supposed to have been carrying precious treasures and it sailed from Lisbon in Portugal to the tiny city of Macau. She was a huge vessel, with large sails and thick masts. Her name was the Monte Velho, with a crew of over one hundred of the finest Portuguese sailors, and she was the grandest ship at that time. The captain of the ship was a tall and handsome man, with a long beard. His name was Captain Antonio Aragonés.

During its maiden voyage, there was an enormous storm. It was a storm with strong, howling winds. The sky was dark and the clouds blocked out the stars. It rained heavily and the waves battered against the ship's hull. All the men on board were doing everything they could to keep the vessel afloat. Captain Aragonés was steering the wheel and trying to get himself and his crew to safety.

After they had been fighting against the towering waves for almost five hours, most of the men were exhausted. However, the storm still continued its offensive, and although the sailors tried to fight for their lives, they were unsuccessful and the Monte Velho sank somewhere in the South China Sea.

No one knows exactly where she sank and countless people have tried to find the shipwreck, especially the lost treasures of the Monte Velho. Treasure hunters have searched large areas of the South China Sea but nobody has been able to find it. Finally, people stopped looking for the treasure about 50 years ago and no one has told the ancient story any more.

It is now the year 2029. I finished my university degree at Harvard University in the United States five years ago. I studied oceanography and I enjoyed every second of it. I made many new friends from many different countries. One of them had the same dream as I did and his name was Miguel Aragonés. We both wanted to be treasure hunters.

His surname is the same as the great captain of the Monte Velho. Miguel's father had told him about the sunken ship and that their family were descendents of Captain Aragonés. He told me more about the tale of what had happened to the grand vessel.

After we completed our education, Miguel and I agreed that we would hunt for the lost treasure. We needed money to buy advanced technological equipment for our search. But we had no money, so at first we tried to ask our parents for help. However, they could not assist us very much financially. So we had to hold fund-raising activities with the help of Harvard University.

Miguel and I also got assistance from the governments of the United States and Hong Kong. We finally raised enough money. We were also provided with supplies and a vessel. And so, about three years ago, we began to search for the lost treasure.

During those three years, we had to do a lot of preparation work. We had to learn many different skills, like underwater diving. But our most difficult task was researching for information about the possible resting place of the ship.

Over the past few years, we have been diving around many different spots. We had made over twenty dives and found nothing. But in our latest dive last week, we discovered a new clue when we found a shoe on the seabed which looked like the kind of shoe that people used to wear centuries ago, during the time of the men who sailed on the Monte Velho.

The shoe has been given to scientists to conduct tests to confirm whether it might really have belonged to someone from that great ship. The results will not be available for at least a few weeks. When we first found the shoe, we were very excited.

Until the results come out, I will be very nervous about whether it is really an artefact from the Monte Velho. But it will still remain a mystery until we finally find the wreckage of the ship. Maybe I will be a famous treasure hunter, and in the future, I can tell my story as a new tale of the South China Sea.



Fiction
age 12 to 14

Fireflies

Andrea Kung, 13, Canadian International School

In the powder blue sky, the radiant sun shone brighter than ever. Gleaming in the bright sunrays, knotted and tangled vines twisted down onto the forest floor. When the light wind blew, the evergreen leaves rustled against each other as the thin branches swayed gently in the air. Pink, delicate orchids grew next to the sturdy tree roots that reached above the surface. Ten thousand feet above this beautiful valley, lay the peak of Mount Tai, shrouded in mist and so tall that it reached above the clouds. Many Gods lived on the peak of Mount Tai in Shandong Province, which was hidden from the view of humans by a thick cloud cover.

Perched on the peak of Mount Tai, Heng-O quietly fingered and swirled the cloud beside her with her nimble fingers. Searching for the gods and goddesses impatiently, her twinkling eyes glanced freely about. She had a delicate complexion and a crescent moon on her forehead. Her dark black hair was tied up behind and some locks floated down her long, thin neck. She wrapped herself in an amber robe and held a lunar disc in her right hand.

All the gods descended and landed gracefully on the sheer summit of Mount Tai. After a while, Heng-O cleared her throat and the chattering slowly died down.

“Welcome, you may wonder why you were all called here,” Heng-O announced. “You should know that a second sun called the North Sun, has appeared on Earth and is destroying the human’s crops. Shen Yi was supposed to shoot down the North sun after it reached nighttime for the villages. However, he arrived earlier and shot it down when it was still daytime...” She waved her hand as puffs of brown smoke began forming in front of her. “A group of loggers has been lost in the woods. Without light, they cannot see.”

The puffs of brown smoke faintly formed into a moving picture of the tired humans with ragged clothes sitting down on the ground, their eyes adjusted to the darkness. Some stared hopelessly at the pile of branches that was laid in front of them, while the others tried to use them to make fire.

Shen Yi wistfully looked down on his lap, as he confessed remorsefully, “I’m sorry, I forgot that humans could not see in the dark.”

“So what does that have to do with *us*? They could wait until the morning when there is enough light and could set back home again,” Zhu Rong, the god of fire, cut in stubbornly, as he leaned back and crossed his arms.

“That will *not* do,” Yu Huang, ruler of all gods, replied wearily and shook his head. “The demon has escaped from the cage, she is in the forest the loggers are in *now*. If they stay in the forest long enough, she *will* smell the scent of the humans. This is what the demon looks like.”

Yu Huang scooped some mist out of his cloak pocket, and carved it with his fingers into the creature he was referring to. When he finished, he showed it to the other gods and goddesses. The creature had the body of a lioness with a tail that terminated in a snake’s head, and spikes arose on her back at the center of her spine.

Yu Huang added solemnly, “This was partly my fault. I underestimated the power of the demon, and she ran away.”

Kuan Yin’s hands flew to her face as she exclaimed sympathetically, “*Poor humans!* They are probably confused and lost. We should definitely try our *best* to help them!”

“Maybe *I* could help to kill the beast. If she’s too strong for me, I’ll just come back. After all, *I am* the god of the wind,” Fei Lian suggested confidently as he stood up and transformed into a stag covered in golden fur and dark spots with a long, serpentine tail.

“That’s a *great* idea, and I would like to help too, Can we?” Shen Yi asked enthusiastically and equipped himself with bows and arrows.

“Yes, of course, but you should know that the demon...” Yu Huang tried to explain, but they hurried away before he could continue. Yu Huang sighed and closed his eyes to watch the scene.

As swift as the wind, Fei Lian glided through the forest with Shen Yi behind him and stopped behind the demon. As they prepared to attack her, the snake from her tail saw them first. The slender snake rose, opened its wide mouth with fangs of poison, and hastily rushed towards them. With quick reflexes, they jumped back, their eyes as wide as saucers. The demon turned around, grinding her teeth furiously, opened her large mouth and breathed out streams of fire. Fei Lian and Shen Yi jumped out of the way, their clothes slightly fringed on the sides.

“She can breathe *fire*?” Shen Yi cried in alarm as he hid behind a tree.

Fei Lian focused his eyes on the demon and replied anxiously, “She’s *too strong!* We *can’t* defeat her...”

Shen Yi peeked out of the tree and exclaimed, “*Oh no! Look!* She’s going to attack *again!*”

Suddenly, a flash of lightning shot down from the sky and missed inches from the demon’s nose. She blinked a few times from the sudden light and whimpered pitifully as she ran away.

Fei Lian and Shen Yi appeared back on the summit of Mount Tai as Zhu Rong flexed his muscles with electricity flowing through his arms. Fei Lian turned back into human form as beads of sweat trickled down from his forehead. Fei Lian’s clothes were burned at the sides and he shakily dabbed his forehead with a white damp napkin.

“That demon could breathe fire!” Shen Yi blurted out as his hands flew to his head. “How can we defeat it if she can *even* see things behind her?”

Everyone was quiet for a minute, while Heng-O waved her hand again and the moving picture of the people appeared. Then, she realised that a group of people from the village were holding burning sticks and were preparing to walk into the forest to find the missing loggers.

Heng-O cried frantically, breaking the silence, “The humans from the village are going to go in the forest to find the missing loggers. If they go in any further, the scent of the humans *will be* stronger so the demon can smell it easily and go after them! *What should we do now?*”

Zhu Rong sneered as he watched the villagers enter the forest and suggested viciously, “How bout sending *wolves* in the woods so they will scare them off and then the humans will run back to their village?”

“I do not agree. What if the wolves follow the humans *back* to their village and they will destroy *all* their crops and shelter!” Kuan Yin commented sternly.

“Good thinking, Kuan Yin. Also, the wolves will even *kill* the humans because the humans will *not* be strong enough to defeat those creatures,” Yu Huang agreed as he cracked his stiff fingers and sighed in fatigue. “But we could send a shower of rain on top of the group of humans so the fire on their sticks will be gone, *and then* they would have to return to their village, agree?”

Everyone nodded their heads and went to get some water from the cloud well. The cloud well was a very big cloud where lots of water was stored in it. The gods and goddesses would get a cup and carefully squeeze part of the cloud. Then, they would hold the cup under the cloud well for the water to pour in.

Yu Huang scooped a large amount of cloud out of his pocket and soaked his hand in the cup of water the gods and goddesses gave him. Then, he gracefully flicked his hand on top of the cloud. Drops of water began to soak in, as it slowly became slightly darker.

“That’s *just* right. Heng-O, Shen Yi and Fei Lian, come and help me bring this cloud,” Yu Huang ordered as he gestured them over.

Each held a corner of the cloud and drifted across the sky to find the right place to bring the rain. After a while, they found the group of villagers by the blobs of fire dancing among the trees.

“Now, remember, we are *not* creating a storm. We are *just* creating a light shower of water droplets. To do that, we must carefully turn this cloud around a few times on top of the forest. Also, *please* try to avoid splashing water across the ground,” Yu Huang explained patiently.

They began turning the cloud around in circles and water droplets fell lightly onto the ground. They sprinkled water droplets around the forest and some rain droplets fell on the villagers’ burning sticks. One by one, the fire on the villagers’ burnt sticks was put out. The villagers muttered in annoyance and headed solemnly back to their village.

Yu Huang squeezed the water away from the cloud and put it back in his pocket.

“That was *great* everyone. The villagers are safe from the demon now,” Yu Huang commented proudly.

The gods and goddesses reappeared back in the summit where Kuan Yin sat twirling her finger around a small puff of cloud that was floating in the air.

“What should we *do now*?” Kuan Yin murmured dreamily as her sultry eyes followed the heart-shaped cloud floating towards Zhu Rong.

Zhu Rong crushed the cloud in his hand and snapped sharply, “We still have to deal with the loggers in the forest with the demon.”

“I’ve got an idea,” Heng-O exclaimed as everyone turned to look at her. “We could create a creature to show them the way *out* of the forest.”

“Oh yes,” agreed Heng-O enthusiastically. Her eyes began to shine brightly. “The creature should be tiny to move freely in the forest, and with a glow on its body for the night.”

Shen Yi pointed out, “Plus, the glow on the creature’s body *must* be non-flammable *or else* it will catch fire on the trees while flying through the leaves.”

Fei Lian added, “The creature *also* must not be poisonous or dangerous to humans.”

“I’ll be back in a minute.” Yu Huang disappeared and reappeared back with a jar labeled in Chinese words. “We can create *any* kind of creature with this special kind of mist by forming it.”

Yu Huang got a small piece of mist out of the jar and handed a piece of mist to Heng-O. Heng-O shaped its body and head, and then gave it to Shen Yi. Shen Yi touched the body of the creature with his fingertip and the mist-creature’s body brightened a little. Zhu Rong took the

creature and created its mouth and legs. After he finished, Kuan Yin formed its sturdy wings, antennae and eyes.

“Let’s see,” Heng-O reflected and held the delicately shaped mist-creature on her palm. “It has a body, a head, a bright light on its body, a mouth, legs, wings, antennae and eyes. Is *that* enough?”

“Yes, but we *still* have to duplicate the same creature for it to reproduce.” Yu Huang answered as he scooped the same amount of mist out of the jar.

Crafting meticulously, the gods and goddesses repeated the same thing over and over again until they got a group of identically shaped creatures. They were laid on the table and Yu Huang held his hands over them. As soon as he touched his finger on the delicately shaped mist-creatures, there was a flash of bright light and the creatures began to twitch and flutter their wings.

“I just thought of an appropriate name for these creatures,” Shen Yi suggested as he stared at the bright light on the table. “How about ‘firebulbs’?”

“No,” Zhu Rong disagreed defiantly. “I like it better if it is ‘firebattles.’”

“How about ‘fireflies’?” Heng-O pointed out as she carefully picked one up and touched its wings. “That name is *much* better.”

Everyone began arguing about which name would be better, then they decided to vote. The most votes was ‘fireflies’, so Yu Huang named the creatures ‘fireflies’.

Fei Lian used his powers to teach the fireflies how to fly while Heng-O sent the brightest of all the fireflies to the forest. Kuan Yin meticulously crafted a transparent case with wood and glass. Then, she put a few fireflies inside the case and the fireflies lighted up the case. The loggers received it and stared at the bright light in awe. With the lamp and the fireflies lighting up the forest, they were soon back to the village where they came from. After that, Fei Lian and Heng-O sent the other remaining fireflies across the world.

While everyone was working on what they were assigned to do, Zhu Rong sat down stubbornly on his chair and crossed his arms. He was very frustrated because they didn’t agree on any of his ideas. To prove his greatness, Zhu Rong taught the reindeers how to fly but one of the reindeers, Rudolf, insulted him. Scolding furiously, Zhu Rong got one of the fireflies from the forest and stuck it on Rudolf’s nose. After that, all the other reindeers laughed at him, calling him “Rudolf, the red-nosed reindeer.”

New Tales of the South China Sea

Marcus Wong, 13, Chinese International School

The heat in the UN conference room was searing as talks continued for the tenth day running. Air conditioning had long broken down, but the overzealous delegates in the room were far too engrossed. The stench of body odour overpowered the fragrant incense the cleaners had burnt in a vain attempt to mask the smell. Four of the top generals and ambassadors, each from a resource-hungry Asian nation wanting to flex its political muscle, sat around a polished circular table, wallowing in extravagantly decorated golden chairs. In the centre of it all was a map of the prize they all claimed, the mineral-rich, strategically important Spratly Islands, located in the busy shipping lanes of the South China Sea. The Spratly Islands are made up of no fewer than 51 tiny islands, with the tallest being a mere 4 metres high. They sounded like the perfect holiday destination, albeit one with a possible billion-dollar oil contract lying on the sea floor.

The talks had stretched for far longer than expected, with each country hoping the others would tire out and give up. “Gentlemen, we must reach an agreement by tomorrow, otherwise...” the UN arbiter droned on as the other four delegates chatted amongst themselves, oblivious to what was going on. Personally, they all thought that this meeting was a waste of time and would rather send in their troops to take the islands by force, but “one must at least appear peaceful and diplomatic if one is to stay in power,” each of their prime ministers had said, and who was to argue with the big boss?

Suddenly, the Chinese delegate appeared rejuvenated by the UN arbiter’s speech and stood up on his chair so that he towered over the slouching delegates. “The Spratly Islands have always belonged to China, ever since our honourable ancestors found them 2000 years ago!” he hollered, waving his silver-handled cane around as if to make his point. With his ruffled hair and bushy moustache, he looked like a little King Charles spaniel, but what he lacked in appearances, he made up with a booming voice.

At this moment, the general from Brunei stood up and shouted indignantly, “The Law of the Sea states that the Spratly Islands are part of our...” All of the delegates secretly hated

him because he behaved like a spoiled brat and would throw his hands up and curse whenever something didn't go his way. As the shortest of the four, he hated being reminded of his height and so he always wore a pair of army boots with soles six inches thick.

His comments sparked a rude interruption by the Malaysian commander-in-chief, who sprang to his feet and bellowed, "The continental shelf principle tells us that we are the ones who..." Of the four of them, he was the tallest and had enormous tree trunk-like arms and a rock-solid six pack, something he took pleasure in reminding them about whenever he was lost for words.

To cap it off, the Philippines supreme head of the army stood on his chair and started yelling, "The Spratly Islands lie within our..." He too had a terrible temper and, along with the general from Brunei, was one of the main troublemakers at each meeting. However, he was also the youngest with the most to prove and his eagerness to strike a deal made it difficult to keep his temper in check. Soon the conference was a scene of chaos, with noise levels outdoing those of a high school disco party and each delegate trying to shout out each other.

Then, the UN arbiter, the only person who was not yelling, brandished a piece of cardboard like the bible and yelled, "Hallelujah!" All four delegates spun around in surprise, stopped shouting and stepped off their chairs.

"Gentlemen," he said, trembling with excitement, "I have the solution to all our problems!" Saying so, he whipped out a version of Monopoly Spratly Islands and showed it for all to see.

"I have grouped the islands together and placed them on a Monopoly board. Tomorrow at 10 o'clock, we shall play until the first person goes bankrupt and then split the islands from there." Deciding that this was the best solution to reach a conclusion and gain bragging rights, the vote was unanimously passed and each delegate returned to their luxury accommodation for a much needed shower and rest.

The next day at 10 o'clock in the morning, four re-energised delegates returned to the conference room. Sitting at the table was the silver-lined Monopoly board, complete with playing pieces encrusted in pure gold and a die made of diamonds. After rolling the die to decide who played first, the Malaysian commander-in-chief started, much to the Chinese delegate's disgust, who accused the UN arbiter of match fixing. "YES!!!" he shouted with glee, pumping both fists into the air as he landed on Itu Aka airport, arguably the best place for a reasonable price.

Moments later, the Philippine head of the army kicked the table in anger, having landed on the income tax square. He too cursed the UN arbiter of favouritism before heading off to sulk in a corner. The match continued in similar fashion, with each delegate yelping with joy when something went their way and then sulking childishly when it didn't. With every tantrum, it seemed as if each delegate was trying to outdo each other. The game toddled along at a snail's pace, for each player spent longer and longer accusing the other of cheating.

Then, at midnight, after a tiring 14 hours of play, the game was still deadlocked with each player having 5 properties each. All of a sudden, the Philippine supreme head of the army, who had just landed on the Chinese delegate's triple house square, lost his cool and threw an enormous tantrum. We shall never know whether it was because he was frustrated at no conclusion being drawn after 10 days or because he had forgotten to take his pills, but the result was an eruption of anger and annoyance. Flinging his arms around in gigantic windmills, he hopped onto the table and started to vent all his frustrations on the million dollar golden game board. In that one moment, all the delegates forgot their years of diplomatic training and simultaneously piled in. Million dollar monopoly pieces flew across the room, the diamond die hit the UN arbiter in the face and soon they were all rolling around on the floor like a bunch of five-year-olds.

By the time they had calmed down and taken their medication, the conference room was in shambles. The golden chairs were all but ruins and the original splendour of the brightly polished table was replaced by four, humble table legs, standing straight as if trying to salvage what was left of their pride. Last but not least, the entire Monopoly set lay trashed on the floor, forgotten. The four men lay in a pile in the hole in the centre of the table, dazed and whimpering with pain. However, the UN arbiter seemed quite unfazed from the recent turn of events. In fact, he had an insane smile on his face like a believer who had heard the voice of god. “Gentlemen, we have reached an historic agreement!” He shouted with joy. The other delegates suddenly became focused and held their breath. “In the spirit of the Spratly Islands Conference 2009, we have unanimously decided to have another meeting and another game of Monopoly this time next year at the same venue. In the meanwhile gentlemen, practice!”

The next day, four private jets from their respective nations flew in to take them back home. Each believed that it was they who had made the historic change and reported to their presidents and prime ministers as so. Parties were hosted, promotions were given and the world was “enlightened” with this piece of “world shaking” news. But like the Monopoly board left lying on the floor of the conference room, no one cared. The world kept turning. People still continued about their everyday lives and left the four delegates, the ones who thought they had changed the world, practicing their Monopoly.

Back

Nicole Tanner, 14, Chinese International School

The sky is a bottomless blue, like a blanket over the earth's head. The sea rocks in its unique timid motion, daring the angel to waltz with the devil. All around, the green grass embraces the sky and the sea like a piece of beautiful artwork, an imagery of Mona Lisa. Yet in the midst of all this, no breath is found and no life is scrutinised. Through the ragged opening of the cave, this painting is set firmly at the huge gap, almost whispering a hallucinated fantasy into our minds. The walls of the cave are Goliaths, heaps of bravery and courage, yet the sense that David is near hollows at his bravado, and seems to fall and cave in because it has lost the battle. The mint breath of a dragon blows at my face, a cold breeze, yet a warm welcome from the sea. Not just any sea, but the South China Sea.

“孩子推，” the plump nurse bustled, “Push harder dear! She is ready... she's coming... 她快来了! Dr. Chan, 陈医生, hurry the poor young lady is in labour!” I felt her chubby arms squeezing my leg and then she ran at full speed toward the welcoming doors of the labour room. Through the narrow peepholes of my mask, I saw droplets of sweat dripping out of the nurse's mask, wetting the thin cloth on her shoulders. Yet she was smiling, because everyone smiled, every day and every moment for the reason that each mask produced was stamped with a perpetual smile, an inert statue formed to force every citizen to smile. Because it was assumed a fact that smiling was the way to anything, through anything and out of anything. Thirteen hours after the poor baby girl had kicked open my water balloon, she was thumping hard in my womb, her feeble fists drumming at my stomach in a demonstration to be released. It was unbearable, a prick of pain in every direction and I felt her pushing and knocking at my bottom, yet the gates that enclosed her would not open. The war was perpetual; she kicked, it remained closed. She knocked, it still remained unopened. She needed to come out immediately because I was in a hurricane of pain and agony, and she needed freedom. I felt a fast breeze catching my tangled hair as the nurse continued to pump her legs toward

the labour room, finally successful in obtaining the doctor and pushing me into the room. Everything was a blur. Nothing seemed clear. A million masked faces crowded around mine, examining me, scrutinising me, instructing me. Everyone was smiling, and so was I through the pain, not because I wanted to but because I was forced to. Push. Harder. I felt the gates tore open and the doctor easing the baby out. Then everything went black once again.

“Your name,” I whisper, “will be Saoirse, the Child of Freedom.” I timidly caress her gentle skin, over the smooth creamy surfaces and over the mountainous blue venous malformation that keeps this special face unmasked. The venous malformation inflates at such a size it is only shy of an orange. It is such a mystery that because of a birthmark, a lump of deformed veins, a physical malformation completely not detrimental, this pure and harmless creature is to be shamed for life in the city only because the Mask is not structured to fit this protuberance into it. The Mask has perfect complexions and is understood to free those who are chained by repulsiveness. Those who plead to plainly be who they are, are forced to wear the Mask of perfection, of holiness and of all things, freedom. But as I gaze into this mystified face, a mark of imperfection, the sudden longing to simply be free from perfection gnaws at me.

I woke with a feeling that somewhere in my belly, there was a hole that was supposedly filled with pain. “How are you feeling dear?” The benevolent nurse queried. I nodded a “I’m fine,” as I picked myself up, carrying the empty pit along with me. “Miss,” she called after me, “Dr. Chan would like to speak to you in her office.” Something about her tone of voice made me jump, made the hairs on my neck stick out, made me anxious and quiver. I wobbled to the wooden door on which a silver plate marked “Dr. P. Chan,” and with each step the quiver became like an earthquake. Did the nurse not promise that I could see my baby immediately in the nursing room after I became well? Did the doctor not say that I could be on my own after the baby was released? Why would I have to see the doctor when every other mother was picking herself up in glee and running to her treasure in hopes that it was a baby boy? As I entered the room I sat myself at the chair opposite her desk. Dr. Chan looked up from her paperwork and stared at me, almost panic-stricken.

Swish! Swish! The salty cool water brushes at my toes, a tranquil and timid tide whispering at Saoirse and I. She is asleep in my arms as I rock her gently. The tender wind swirls like a giant fan for the little shamed princess. Looking past the rocks and sand, the South China Sea is like a wide scarf that Mother Nature is knitting, one row at a time, while the ruffled wool bounces off in playful tides. This is my favorite place to be in the world and I often recuperate here when I am in sorrow or fury. Frankly however, the sea is nothing but a wasteful lot of water gathered under the sky. But if you look intently into the motion of the waves, this sea knows how to be free. When she feels joy and glee, the waves bounce joyously in the same non-rhythmic motion. When rage splashes by she will climb high walls and punch the sand in fury. When she feels tired and worn out, she lays inert, peacefully enjoying the nature. It is peculiar how something so insignificant in this complicated world, is able to laugh and frown at her own rate of feelings. The sea is freedom and I am plastered by the law that the Mask is life.

“I have some horrifying news for you,” Dr. Chan begun. Pump. Pump. “Your child has a venous malformation on the right cheek near her lips. Now this is not a traumatic disease that will influence her mentality, but it does offend the law and her future. The venous malformation is a very simple birthmark that is quite large compared to a usual birthmark. I am sure you have seen or heard of birthmarks in history books of an age where humans were

unmasked, but the venous malformation is more complicated. It is when the walls of the veins in certain areas are lacking the smooth muscle cells that characterise a normal vein. Unfortunately in your child's case, the venous malformation is in large lesions which will not allow her to wear the Mask. The cheeks formatted in the Mask are too small to fit this birthmark in."

I froze. My mind was overloaded with information and only occasional selective words seemed to be of any meaning. I swallowed hard and managed to squeak, "What do I do then?"

The doctor nodded knowingly, "I have gathered that the only way possibly to keep this child from offending the law or from living in shame for the rest of her life is euthanasia. Additionally, there is no point in keeping this child who will be purely shamed as it will cease any chances of a second child as you are aware of the One Child Policy." Euthanasia. The peculiar word brandished against my mind as I thought deeper. Euthanasia. Noting that I did not understand, the doctor continued, "Euthanasia is unfortunately killing out of mercy. The only way your baby can survive this malformation is not to survive." With that I ran – out of the doctor's office. Through the bustled hallways, into the doors of the nursing room and seizing the only baby with a purple swelling bulging on her right cheek, I ran out the hospital and down the only route I knew. The route to the South China Sea.

Just one day ago, everything was perfect. Just a few hours ago, everything rocked my world. Now staring out into the free South China Sea, I hold my new born child, still in her hospital suit. Resting on the coast of the South China Sea, a sudden pang of understanding seems to wake me from my sleep. I understand now that it does not matter that she is imperfect. It does not matter that this creature of shame is shamed because somewhere deep within everyone there is a hollow pit of imperfection and shame. Underneath the Mask, each of us is crying out to be ourselves, even if it is the imperfect side. True, painful love is not based on our perfect facades, but it is to love in spite of all the flaws. This baby is loved. For the reason that even when all perfection has abandoned her, she is loved because she is not flawless. Freedom is the right to be imperfect, it is the right to express our feelings even if they are the terrifying ones. Freedom allows inadequacy because nothing in this world, not even Masks, can hide the big ugly truth: imperfection. For the first time in my life, I reach behind my head and pull the lace. The mask slides off my face and falls into the sand. A wave comes and carries it into the South China Sea. Nobody is perfect, and that is okay – only in the haven of the South China Sea.

The Lion's Requiem

Yoon-Ji Han, 14, Chinese International School

They came with the storm. They always did. I look up from the tangle of nets I hold in my hands. The expanse above the Spratly Islands is monotonous as always, an artist's canvas left unpainted. It has always been gloomy like this, ever since I can remember. Sometimes I wonder, though, if there was once a time when the sky was a beautiful colour, as if a million pearls were embedded in a vast tapestry hung over the earth, reflecting the sunlight in a hundred different hues. *What if...*

I am startled out of my chimerical reverie when suddenly, the sky darkens and roils, as if an unknown god has spilled a can of shadows into the world. The first drop of rain falls, plummeting from zenith to nadir, and with it come the Raptors. The engines roar, the propellers whir... and the bombs start to fall. Without another thought, I drop the nets, leaving the entangled fish thrashing in the salty sea. I run across the shallow water, fighting the voracious sea that is intent on keeping me in its embrace.

My sister. Mai, I have to get to Mai, I think to myself. The thought lends my legs strength, and my feet finally touch the hard sand of the coast. The ground shakes for a split second, but it's enough to send me sprawling onto the beach. I immediately pick myself off the ground, spitting out a mouthful of bloody sand, but fall back onto the floor when my ankle screams in pain. *Mai.* Gritting my teeth, I stand up and start running again until I reach the village.

"Mai!" I yell, but my voice is lost in the screams of the people and the bellows of the bombs. "Mai! Where are you? Mai!"

I push through the tumult of panicking people, screaming her name over and over again. I see Tong, one of the friendly neighbours who take pity on Mai and me and give us some of the leftover fruit they harvest, but the sight I see isn't a welcoming one. He is sprawled over one of his fruit carts, broken like a rag doll, with eyes staring blankly at the sky as if he is lost in a daydream. The sky weeps for him and drapes his lifeless body with a blanket of its tears.

Mai.

My feet automatically start to move, bringing me closer to our little hut in the fringes of the village. The sound of my footsteps in harmony with the incessant pitter-pattering of raindrops creates a melancholic dirge. “Mai!” I yell, and it seems as if my soul escapes with that one word. The hut is decimated, utterly beyond repair. I force my feet to move, and I stagger to the ruin that was once my home. A rag doll. The hook of my fishing pole. A burning flower. But no Mai. I sink to my knees and pain blossoms from my heart with the knowledge that the most important thing to me is gone. I let my tears mingle with the deluge of rain and ash that cascades down from the sky above.

A hand on my shoulder. I turn around, ready to fight, despite the sorrow wrenching my heart. “Look, if you don’t want to get caught or blown to bits, you’re going to have to come with me.”

I see a tan figure staring down at me. Not a Chinese soldier... a Vietnamese boy.

Everything is numb.

The boy grabs my arm and pulls me up. “We have to go. Now.” When I don’t respond, he groans. “Look...”

An explosion. Without another word, he begins to start running, pulling me with him. I fall, my ankle twisted in an awkward position. I don’t cry out. Darkness washes over me, and I embrace it. Silence.

Voices sneak their way into my ears, shattering the hush within me.

“She was in shock.”

“Shocked or not, you shouldn’t have brought her. That’s one more mouth to feed.”

“*She* is not one more mouth to feed. I’ll share my rations with her.”

“Look, Cadeo, we’re lucky we’re alive! This time the Raptors blew the whole place up! No one else survived. Do you want to starve for some stranger?”

“She’s not a...”

I open my eyes and see the boy and another, older man standing in front of him, arms crossed. The boy sees me and stops mid-sentence.

“You’re awake,” the boy says.

I blink, letting the words slowly register in my head. My mind feels like rice pudding. Rice pudding. I let out a hysterical giggle at the thought.

“Great. Not only is she a burden, but she’s crazy as well,” I hear the man mutter.

“Just leave us alone,” the boy snarls. “Now.” He sounds feral, and I find myself flinching away from him.

“As you wish, *master*,” the man snickers.

Loud footsteps ring in my ears as the man stomps away.

The boy sighs and runs a hand through his hair, creating soft waves of a midnight sea. He turns around, and the fierce look in his eyes vanishes, replaced by something gentler, more humane.

“How are you feeling?”

I frown as I try to remember how to speak. “I’m...okay. The ground is sort of rocking, though. Must be a headache.”

He hooks the leg of a stool with his foot and sits down. “We’re on a boat. That’s the only place that is safe for now. Your ankle’s pretty banged up.”

When I look down, I see my right ankle bound in fresh, white bandages. Memory returns. “My...sister. Mai. She’s... gone.” The sound of my voice seems distant, as if I’m listening to someone from the other side of a wall.

I see something flicker in his eyes, like small candles sparkling before sputtering out in the darkness. Pain? Recognition?

Before I can continue pondering on the subject, he gives a sad, comforting smile. “I’m sure she’ll be fine.”

Silence becomes a tangible thing in the air around us. The understanding that Mai isn’t coming back is unspoken, yet something that both of us realise. It comes crashing down onto me in torrents of hurt, grief, and rage. A choked sob escapes from my lips, and a rebellious tear runs down the bridge of my nose. It drops onto the clean white linen, a tiny shadowed stain in a vast plain of snow. *I have to be strong. I can’t cry.* Yet the pain comes again, unfurling like a beautiful flower that eventually drifts off its branch to wither on the cold winter ground and die.

A tentative touch. I look down numbly through tear-filled eyes and follow the tan hand resting awkwardly on my arm up to the boy’s face. He smiles, and his eyes make two upturned crescent moons of midnight.

I am surprised by the compassion in his smile, when he had displayed such ferocity to the other man just moments ago. I stare at him, and for the first time I notice the way his long, slightly wavy dark hair brushes the top of his eyes, mingling with his long lashes that create gentle shadows on his desert-coloured cheekbones. His eyes are filled with liquid night, and every look he takes is sharp and intelligent, yet there is a hidden melancholy, pushed down into the deepest corner of his eyes. He is clean-shaven, though I think he is around my age, maybe sixteen or seventeen. I blink. I remember him from somewhere.

“I know you.”

His eyes widen slightly, sending his brow arching upwards, as if he is surprised that I’ve spoken. “My name’s Cadeo. We used to go to the same school. You know, before the Chinese blew it up.”

“Oh. I remember you now. Your name means song or something”

“And lion,” he says with the slightest glimmer of a smile. “Your name means lion.”

I give a half-hearted smile despite the sadness that is leeching onto my heart. It’s the first time I have smiled in a very long time.

The sun sinks gracefully below the water, trying to find the moon in their never-ending game of hide-and-seek. We talk about ourselves, our interests and hobbies. We talk about the abundance of fish in the sea. We talk about how the war between Vietnam and China is affecting our lives. Then we talk about our families, which brings back a pang of pain, but this time, it isn’t as harsh. The nascence of friendship can do that to you.

“Do you mind if I ask you a question?” Cadeo says from the other end of the bed.

I nod, chewing on my lip.

He pauses, as if phrasing his words in his head. “Why do you care about your sister so much? I mean, I’d be devastated if my sibling...momentarily disappeared... It’s just that...” He stops again, and I notice that when he pauses, he’s really thinking about something. “It seems that what you and your sister have, it’s something that surpasses the bonds of normal siblings.”

I chew on my lip before answering. “Have you ever felt that you’re given such a big responsibility, and...And you feel like you have to try your hardest to fulfill it?”

Cadeo’s gaze drops onto the floor, but not before I recognise pain in his eyes. “No.”

“Well that’s exactly how I feel.” I take a deep breath before continuing. “Ten years ago, when I was just seven years old, and my sister was three, my mom became really sick. I never knew my dad. He died fighting in the war. One day, I was bringing a bucket of water up to our room because she had a bad fever. But when I sat by my mom’s bed with a rag in my hand to soak into the water, she stopped me and told me to save the water for me and Mai. Then she said that she was going to be away for a long trip and wouldn’t be here for a while, so I had to take good care of Mai and to remember to stay strong.” I look down at my palm. Calluses and scabs disfigure my brown hands from long hours of pulling in nets, but I’m proud of them.

These are marks of my hard work. I exhale slowly. “Then she closed her eyes. I thought she went to sleep, but... I couldn’t wake her up, no matter how hard I tried.” I don’t wince when a scab peels off my palm, opening up the wound and leaving it vulnerable. “The funny thing is, I didn’t even cry. I’m a monster. Who doesn’t cry when their mom dies?” I look up at him, challenging him to say otherwise, yet afraid that he’ll agree.

He only stares back at me, and then suddenly reaches over. “You’re crying,” he murmurs as he catches a falling tear.

I touch my cheek, and am surprised to feel a wet trail left by a tear of sorrow.

“You’re crying,” Cadeo says again. “You’re not some heartless monster, Lion. You *feel*.”

His eyes gaze into mine, and carefully, slowly, he pulls me towards him and hugs me. I feel safe in his arms, safer than I’ve ever felt. For the first time in my life, I completely let go of the self-control I have built brick by brick ever since my mom died. I close my eyes and let my tears soak into the soft fabric of his shirt. “I promised her,” I sob into his shoulder. “I promised her, Cadeo. I promised her... but I couldn’t... couldn’t keep that promise.”

“Shh,” he murmurs into my hair. “Don’t cry, Lion. Don’t cry.”

I stay there in his arms, letting all of my emotions loose. In the end, I give in to weariness and the knowledge that I am safe, finally safe, and let sleep close my eyes with her gentle fingers.

Sunlight. I open my eyes and immediately shut them again. After a while, however, I gradually open them again, letting my eyes adjust to the glare of the sun. I notice that the white linen is tucked carefully around me, and that someone has rested my head on a stuffed sack that must be a pillow. I look down and smile. Cadeo is curled up on what little floor there is next to the bed. He looks so peaceful, lost in another world, far, far away. I slip off the bed, test my ankle, and gently lay the linen on top of him. I hobble out of the room as quietly as I can, but not before looking in the rusted mirror by the wall. My eyes are swollen from the weeping last night, and an ugly pair of scratches adorns my left cheek.

I lift the large blanket hung over the entrance that serves as a makeshift door, and step into the little hallway of the boat. I walk over to the end of the cramped hallway and climb up a ladder. When I push open the trap door, I inhale, sending the fresh sea breeze cascading down my throat and into my lungs. I walk over to the railing and look down at the water. The boat isn’t moving, so I try to look into the murky depths of the jade green sea. I see some flashes of silver, where fish dart rapidly through the waves. The sunlight dances gracefully on the water, embellishing the surface with crystals and diamonds. It is a rare sight.

Suddenly, the capricious sky darkens, and raindrops start to fall. A strange figure in the water catches my eye. Is it a whale? A dolphin? It gets larger and larger... I let out a loud scream.

A corpse floats face down in the water, limbs outstretched. Its hair creates a corona of shadows in the water. It... I shut my eyes, gripping the railing tightly with my hands.

“Ly! What’s wrong?”

I whirl around, and see Cadeo, still wiping the sleep away from his eyes, yet tense and wary for any sign of danger.

I point a shaking finger to the floating body.

Cadeo looks and swears. I see fear and panic flicker across his face. The one person who makes me feel protected is afraid.

He hurries back down through the trapdoor, and I can hear him yelling, “The Death Ship is near! Tang, pull up the anchor and change course. Phuoen, Thu, get everyone else. Meet on the deck. Hurry!”

I heard the frantic raucous of people yelling and footsteps reverberating throughout the boat. Cadeo emerges from the trap door again, and I run over to him.

“What’s going on?” I ask, worry filling my voice.

He looks apprehensive, but I see determination and courage in his eyes. “We don’t really have much time, so I’ll make it quick. The Death Ship is also known as the Scarborough Ship, like the Scarborough Shoal. The Shoal was captured by the Chinese fifty years ago, when this war started. The Death Ship is where they keep all the prisoners, and they throw the corpses into the sea. It’s sick and wrong. The bottom line is, it’s dangerous to be near the Death Ship, or we’ll be the ones thrown off it.”

Prisoners on the Death Ship. “Mai...Mai could be on that ship!” I exclaim.

Cadeo takes both of my shoulders in his hands, his gaze serious. “Look, Ly. I know you really want to find Mai, but we just can’t afford to.”

“But...Cadeo, Mai is on that ship! I know she is! She’s not dead yet.”

He sighs and rubs his forehead. “Lion. Listen to me. The people on this boat are probably the sole survivors from the Spratly Islands. That bombing was the most dangerous by far. We can’t...”

I cut him off, rage obscuring rational sense. “We could have more survivors if we rescue Mai and other people from that ship!”

“Ly! There’s a reason it’s called the Death Ship!” Cadeo yells, and I stumble back, as if I’ve been physically struck. In fact, his words hurt me more than any physical blow could. This is what I get for letting my guard down, for letting someone get close to my heart.

“Fine. I’m going by myself.” My words are sharp and brittle as I turn away from him and start to walk toward the emergency raft by the side of the boat.

“Ly...Ly, don’t go.” I turn around at the sound of his voice, but I don’t mean to. “Ly, listen to me.” He covers the distance between us in a few long strides.

“Look, Cadeo, I don’t want to hear it, okay? If you’re not going to help me, then don’t.” I hate myself for turning around, for trusting him, for letting him into my heart.

I turn around again, but he grabs my hand before I can take another step.

“Remember how you asked me if you’ve ever felt like you had to live up to your responsibility?” He stops. He thinks. “When I was eight, and you were seven, I was wondering why you didn’t come to school for a whole month. Then one day, I saw you, carrying that bucket of water from the village well. You looked so serious, like you were fifteen instead of seven. I learned about your mom’s condition,” he pauses, then whispers, “And I made a promise to myself that I’d keep you safe.”

Tears fill both our eyes, but I manage to stop them from falling. “I’m sorry, Cadeo. I made a promise, and I’m going to keep it.”

I don’t look at him and turn around. I start to walk towards the raft. As I walk, I let my tears mingle with the pouring rain. They slide down my cheek, and plummet down to the deck. It is my last gift to Cadeo, my last gift to my song.

The Good Fight

Nathan Chan Sheung Hang, 13, Diocesan Boys' School

*26 June 1839, The South China Sea,
180 miles away from Shanghai, 4:30pm*

Li Chuan strolled around the upper deck of his junk boat. Weathered softwood floorboards creaked under his footsteps as he walked to the bow of the junk. He glanced out at the colossal South China Sea. A vast and boundless piece of blue stared back.

Li felt the familiar salty breeze of the sea breathing on his face and the calm rushing of the lucid waves whispered in his ears. The unfathomable sea was a mirror, reflecting the sapphire sky and the glinting sunlight. The junk rocked to and fro as Li held onto the boltropes swaying down from the sails for steadiness. "A peaceful day," Li thought silently as he gazed at the fair, cloudless skies. This was going to be a usual day at sea, routine and ordinary.

Li never viewed his junk as a prized possession. It had two sails, with horizontal members called battens that provided strength for them. It was made mainly in softwood and it had a high poop deck which was supported by a horseshoe-stem stern. It had a few cabins in the interior of the junk which was where Li and his companions slept and it was around 30 metres long.

Though ordinary, without any excelling feature, the junk was the family heirloom of Li; his forefathers were all men of the sea. Its once white, proud sails were now yellowed due to age. Its once polished anchor had now rusted. The wooden floors creaked even at the lightest contact. Nonetheless, the junk had served Li well. It had kept him safe from numerous typhoons and storms.

"Li, we are near," a deep, gravelly voice rang out behind him. Li turned around. A tall, lean man with deeply tanned skin was facing him; anxiety was marked on his face. "Do not worry, Hui. We should not be afraid," Li said with a soothing tone. "I'll go summon the others." Hui turned back and hurried into a cabin at the rear of the ship.

At the age of 30, Li had an appearance that did not resemble his actual age. Deep wrinkles were etched onto his forehead and he had dark, grave eyes, filled with wisdom and determination, but also sorrow.

Hasty footsteps sounded. Li looked around. Three familiar faces, including Hui's, glanced back, all with a tense expression on their face.

"Li, we have to go now, we are approaching..." a heavily-built, burly man called Fang Zhung said, with a hint of urgency in his voice.

"Fang's right, Li, we have to leave," interrupted a diminutive, bald man with a deep scar on his cheek, whose name was Ng Juan.

Li sighed. "You're right, now is the time, prepare for leaving." Hui, Fang and Ng nodded in agreement. The four were not normal fishermen. They were *Jinyi Wei*, or imperial guards of the emperor of China. They were warriors, about to fight for their country in the South China Sea.

Five miles away

William Shamstire stood on the deck of *The Enterprise*. The Union Jack waved proudly on top of the ship's flagpole. Men were working speedily all around the ship. Some were repairing the broken floorboards and others threw fishing nets deep into the sea.

The Enterprise was carrying a prized cargo – 50 ponderous crates of opium. It was heading to Shanghai, China, where the opium would be sold for a high price.

William Shamstire was a "tai pan", a foreign merchant doing trade in China. He worked for the East India Trading Company and he had made himself and his company a huge fortune by selling opium to the Chinese.

Shamstire was aware of the hazardous consequences of consuming opium. But he simply didn't care. The Chinese were second-class humans to him, worthless and lacking any value. He just wanted to be prosperous. If the Chinese wanted to get their bodies seriously harmed by opium, let it be – it was none of Shamstire's concern.

Shamstire could almost smell the wad of money he was about to earn in a matter of days. He was excited.

"Sir?" Shamstire turned around and saw the captain of *The Enterprise*.

"We are due to arrive at Shanghai by tomorrow morning." Shamstire rubbed his hands together in glee and grinned.

Two weeks ago

It was a gloomy, sunless morning when Lin Zexu, the renowned scholar and close advisor to the Emperor, summoned Li and his three companions into the Forbidden City. The four were surprised at his sudden request; they had never seen the man before, nor did Lin have an association with them.

They were led to Tai He Dian, or the Hall of Supreme Harmony. They found themselves alone in the grand hall after their escort left. The hall was impressively built, with six tall golden pillars, as yellow was the colour of royalty. A coiled, fearsome dragon was depicted in the paintings drawn on the ceilings and it rose 30 metres high from its surrounding square. Located in the centre of the Forbidden City, Li, Hui, Fang and Ng could understand why Tai He Dian was the centre of imperial power for centuries.

They were admiring the skilled craftsmanship of the pillars while an old, raspy voice echoed behind them. "You have come." Li, Hui, Fang and Ng turned around and saw an old, senile man with a short beard limping towards them.

It took only seconds to realise that he was Lin Zexu.

The four bowed down their heads and greeted Lin formally. Lin nodded, and led them to an inner hall. The hall was modestly decorated, a stark contrast with the main hall of Tai He

Dian. There was an ancient-looking, round table with a couple of chairs. Lin motioned for them to sit down.

Li said, "I suppose you have no idea of why you're here?" He questioned.

"You are right, sir. Please tell us the reason," Li broke the silence and answered.

Lin shook his head and asked, "What is the greatest evil now in China?"

The four were bewildered by Lin's response. However, Fang replied, "Is it corruption?" Most government officials gained their current position through paying vast amounts of money.

"No, no, it is not." Lin shook his head in disagreement. His tone changed and his originally affable expression turned to sheer anger.

"It is OPIUM! Opium has caused the *lao bai xing* of China to be weak and powerless. Opium has caused our young men of flourishing bodies to deteriorate to frail bodies with minds of emptiness! Opium has made our people poor! It is all because of the drug the *yang gwei*, the bloody foreigners sell us. We have caused shame to be cast upon our nation!" Lin yelled bitterly, with the fury and remorse of a father losing his son.

"In these times, we must have people who shall stand against the *yang gwei*; we must have heroes who will dare fight against the *yang gwei's* guns."

"The opium the *yang gwei* are importing into our country must be destroyed." Lin declared. "And it is up to you four," Lin looked at the four, "- to do the job."

The four were dumbstruck. "How...how can we destroy the *yang gwei's* opium? I...I mean, we don't stand a chance against their firepower. Let alone there's only four of us..." Ng spluttered out.

"Oh yes, you do! Don't forget your true identities. You are the best of the *Jinyi Wei*! You are the best of the imperial guards of the Emperor! You have sworn to protect your King and your country!" Lin's hammering words were a hard blow to the four. They did vow to defend their country and its King to their deaths.

"The four of you are the best fighters and warriors in China, only you can stand a chance against the *yang gwei*." Lin's tone softened.

"But how?" Hui asked.

"I have received news that two weeks from now, a foreign ship will arrive at Shanghai, at the south of the South China Sea, with 50 crates of opium. You'll have to destroy that ship before it even reaches shore. If you succeed, fewer people will be tormented by the drug and you will save the lives of many *lao bai xing*. You'll be heroes.

"But if you fail, China will be crippled and it will fall into the hands of the *yang gwei*. Opium will gain more control over our people's bodies. More and more people will become addicted." Lin clenched his fists. "Now, will the four of you take up the duty?"

The four looked at each other. No words were required; the four had all made their choice. The same choice.

Li answered, determined, "I speak for my comrades; we are willing to fight for our King, and for our country!"

Lin smiled, with relief and joy.

*26 June 1839, The South China Sea,
180 miles away from Shanghai, 4:45pm*

"We are willing to fight for our King and our country." The very words Li had said two weeks ago echoed in his mind. They were approaching the cargo ship Lin had told them about. Lin had provided them with the course and the appearance of the foreign ship, which was now proven to be accurate, as they could now see a dim outline of a ship in the far horizon advancing towards

the junk, fitting Lin's description. A blue-striped flag was wavering on the ship.

"They are here," Li announced to his three companions. Ng, Fang, and Hui stopped polishing their swords immediately and returned them into their respective sheaths. They swiftly wore extra outer shirts, which concealed their weapons. Ng pulled a net over his shoulder; Fang smeared his face with dirt and put on a fisherman hat; Hui grabbed some dead fish from a cabinet and threw them onto the floorboards of the junk, and also in some bamboo baskets.

Now the four of them looked as if they were ordinary Chinese fishermen, and their junk looked like a normal fishing boat, fresh after a catch. The smell of dead fish drifted in the air.

10 minutes later, on The Enterprise

William Shamstire saw a fishing boat to the front of *The Enterprise*. On the boat were four fishermen. They were, no doubt, clearly Chinese. They were yelling out Chinese, whilst the English sailors shook their heads in confusion. William deduced that they were trying to sell their fish to *The Enterprise*. He saw dead carcasses of fish on the fishing boat and was disgusted. The scent of dead meat wavered to his nose. He felt a rise of nausea and turned into his cabin.

Meanwhile, the sailors on *The Enterprise* all agreed that they would buy some fish from the Chinese fisherman, so they could have enough food for the return to England. They all motioned to the fishermen to board *The Enterprise*. They threw down a rope to the fishing boat and signaled for the fishermen to climb up.

Li felt lucky that everything was going according to plan. He climbed up to the deck slowly, allowing time for Fang, Hui and Ng to stay close with him.

When he finally laid his feet on the deck, he looked and he could see a dozen pale-faced *yang gwei* sailors who stared back. "These are the people who have harmed China." Hatred sprung immediately in his mind but Li continued acting, pulling a basket from Fang which was full of fish, and motioning to the sailor to buy it, whilst at the same time, gibbering in Chinese. Ng, Fang and Hui stood aside, ready for the moment when they would start their plan.

Some sailors picked up some fish and examined them carefully. Others either joined in discussing the quality of the fish, or they just stood, looking; Li was gibbering nonsense in Chinese, then all of a sudden he yelled out a startled "NOW!"

The reaction was immediate. Fang yanked out his dagger and plunged it deep into the heart of a sailor. The sailor gave out a pained scream and fell to the ground.

Dead.

Ng and Hui unsheathed their weapons.

The sailors were caught off guard, but they immediately knew that the fishermen were not what they seemed. They quickly picked up weapons lying around the deck and attempted to defend themselves. Luckily, none of the sailors had a musket; they were only armed with swords and knives. The sailors were now powerless, and virtually defenseless against the four skilled *jin yi wei*.

Li slashed at a sailor's throat and sent the sailor's head flying. Blood and bits of brain were everywhere. He dodged an incoming sword blow, and with a forceful stab, the attacker's wrist was impaled by Li's sword and he dropped the sword and screamed with extreme agony. Li finished him off with a mighty blow with his sword, silencing his painful moans. He spotted a sailor armed with a spear trying to creep behind Fang; Li picked up two daggers lying on the deck. With all his might and strength, he threw them at the sailor. It was a direct hit and the daggers pierced through the sailor's brains, splattering blood everywhere. In a matter of minutes, all the sailors were slain – Li, Hui, Fang and Ng were not severely injured, Hui had minor scratches on his shoulder whilst Fang was cut on the thumb.

Li ordered, “Hui, take Ng and search for the opium crates and set fire to them.” Hui nodded and headed off with Ng, searching for any signs of the crates.

William Shamstire was in his cabin. He could hear the clanking sounds of the parrying and striking of swords. He was curious. He opened the door of the cabin, with caution, like a prey leaving his hiding place, aware of a predator’s presence. What he witnessed horrified him.

The originally, seemingly dumb fishermen were slaughtering his men. The deck board was soaked with blood – the blood of his sailors.

Shamstire then remembered he had a musket in his cabinet. He opened it and he was relieved to see a loaded musket with a few additional rounds. He crept out of his cabin and saw one of the Chinese barking out orders to another Chinese.

Shamstire stayed still for a few minutes; suddenly he could hear the sounds of a brewing fire. He was confused, and then it struck him: the opium! They were burning the opium! He was furious. If the opium was burnt, it would mean he would lose a fortune. He couldn’t let that happen.

He stepped out from his hiding place and aimed his musket at one of the Chinese.

Fang suddenly saw a figure appear. It was a *yang gwei*. He raised his sword and ran towards the pale-skinned man with speed. He noticed that the foreigner was holding up a long object and aiming it at him. Fang was confused for a moment.

Then he realised the truth. The *yang gwei* was holding a gun.

It was the last thing Fang saw.

Li heard a deafening bang. It was still ear-piercing despite the fire creating a high level of noise. He started to walk to the place where the sound came from.

Shamstire headed down to the compartment where the opium was stored. A fire was already burning heavily. The heat was unbearable. Most of the crates were already destroyed. Shamstire’s anger rose.

He suddenly caught sight of two silhouettes in the misty smoke. They were Chinese, probably those who started the fire.

Immediately, Shamstire raised his gun, aimed, and fired.

Twice.

Li could hear two more bangs. He was puzzled. Nevertheless, he still continued to walk to the place where the first bang sounded out.

William Shamstire had slain.

Three times in rapid succession. Now there was only one left.

Li saw a body lying on the floor. It seemed oddly familiar. He knelt down and turned around the body’s face.

Fang’s lifeless face stared back.

The fire was becoming bigger and bigger. The heat was becoming more and more unbearable. Shamstire could now see the remaining Chinese man kneeling against a dead body – of the Chinese man he first shot. He was crying – out of remorse and bitterness. Shamstire didn’t feel pity or sorry for the man, he raised his musket for one last time.

Li heard footsteps behind him. He turned around.

A white man was aiming a gun at him.

Li now realised the *yang gwei* had already killed Fang, Hui and Ng.

Now the *yang gwei* was going to kill him. Li wasn’t going to let that happen.

With a cry of agony and hatred, Li picked up his sword and charged at Shamstire.

‘BANG! BANG! SLASH!’

All was quiet on the South China Sea, except for the crackling fire, that kept burning.

The Dark Trail

Chan Sze Chai, 13, Diocesan Boys' School

10,000 years ago, in a cave on an island south of present-day China, in the South China Sea, a tiny pair of red lights appeared, glaring out of the cave like fire. The earth shook hard. The ground collapsed. From the hole in the ground, a large creature, standing 140 feet tall, weighing around 38,000 tons, climbed out. This towering monster stomped forward, feeling the warmth and light of the sun after being trapped underground for more than 5,000 years. It waved its long, yellow, spiky tail with a whoosh and stretched himself, yawning. It had two menacing forearms: one with slimy tentacles, the other with dangerous pincers. Its two legs were thick and heavily armoured, with fluoroantimonic acid, a super strong acid which corroded the landscape, squirting out from its toes. The acid made it smell bad, like rotten eggs and decomposing meat. On its head were the two lights – the eyes. They seemed full of anger and evil. It seemed as if fire was sizzling in them. The monster had a big mouth with sharp fangs and a long, muscular tongue in it. Its whole body was covered in rough, yellowish-brown scales. There were armour plates on its back. This creature, whose name was Onomatopoeiakaiju, stampeded in the huge palm forest next to its cave, destroying palm trees and the other vegetation with the sonic boom from its mouth, fiery breath from its nose, and the acid from its toes.

8,400 years later, in the 5th century A.D., a young monk, Sun Yat, started a normal day at the Shaolin Temple. Waking up to the sharp cry of the cockerel, when the sunlight was just starting to creep up the horizon, Sun started his day by heading off to a serene meditation room in the temple. In the incense-infused darkness he recited the words of the Buddha with the chief abbot, the Indian Batuo, and then went for breakfast at the huge dining room big enough to hold all the monks. After his sumptuous breakfast of salty egg congee, Sun left the dining room, passing through a bell tower, to martial arts training with his master Guo Kit. Being the finest disciple of his master, Sun was always loved by Guo. Today, Sun continued to do his best, but Guo had a long face.

Suddenly, the old Guo fell down, clutching his chest. Sun quickly went to Guo and pulled Guo up, carrying him in his arms. Guo said, “My disciple, it is time for me to go.” Sun replied, “No master, I can save you.”

Guo ignored Sun, and said, “I have one last wish. According to legend, there is a monster called Onomatopoeiakaiju on an island in the South China Sea. It is an ancient creature of great evil. My ancestors and I have pledged ourselves to destroying this great threat to human kind. We have all tried and failed.

“Onomatopoeiakaiju is a great threat. It may unleash its terror on human kind at any time. It’s up to you now. You must defeat it. Just follow the dark trail in the sea until you reach the island. You must succeed.” Guo closed his eyes as if he were sleeping, never to open them again.

After attending the funeral of Guo Kit, Sun said goodbye to his fellow monks and headed to southern China on a Ferghana horse borrowed from the temple.

A week later, Sun finally arrived at Tolo Harbour, Hong Kong, a rural village where people hunted pearls and fished for a living. Sun went to a fisherman’s house and asked if the fisherman could take him to the island of Onomatopoeiakaiju. The fisherman, who did not know what Onomatopoeiakaiju was, but seeing a chance to make money, agreed to help. Sun paid the fisherman and started his journey across the South China Sea.

After two days of travelling, they finally found the dark trail in the water. The trail was totally black, as if it had swallowed all the light. It was very narrow, only about a metre wide. Sun’s boat sailed next to it. Sun wondered aloud, “Why does it smell like rotten meat here?” After looking at the trail closely, he noticed bodies of fish, big and small, floating on the surface. He also saw the top half of an Indonesian man floating. After another few metres of travelling, he saw the bottom half, torn away by the corrosion of sea water. Sun was shocked to see the halves. The fisherman, who was rowing the boat, noticed Sun’s startled expression, and said, “This is the Trail of Death. Legend has it that the trail posses great evil. Once something alive touches the trail, it dies instantly. I guess this poor man touched the trail and died.”

Sun could feel his heart beating faster after hearing this, and sweat was forming on his eyebrows.

After three more days, Sun finally arrived at the island. It was huge. It had an enormous volcano that vomited hot magma out from its crater. At the center of the island, fluoroantimonic acid was jumping out of the springs every minute or so as if they were triggered by an alarm clock. Sun climbed out of the boat and strode across the white beach to the dense palm forest beyond.

Suddenly, the earth shook hard, and with a roar, Onomatopoeiakaiju crashed out of the volcano, where it was living, and stomped over palm trees towards the beach.

Fee-fi-fo-fum! Onomatopoeiakaiju left a trail of destruction in his wake as it arrived at the beach. With a growl, it blew up the boat with an ear-splitting sonic boom and its fiery breath, killing the fisherman. After the flames and smoke cleared, the only things left to be seen were pieces of wood and bits of fisherman.

Sun was terrified. He quickly jumped behind a thick bush to hide from the monster. He was sweating and panting heavily. His heart seemed as if it wanted to jump out of his body. Many thoughts were racing through his mind. He wanted to close his eyes. He wanted to wait for his death. Yet, he remembered what his master said: “Onomatopoeiakaiju is a great threat. It may unleash its terror on human kind at any time. It’s up to you now.” Sun knew that he must destroy Onomatopoeiakaiju.

Drawing out his weapon, the *Staff of Justice*, a weapon that had been passed from father to son in his family for generations, Sun jumped away from the bush and readied himself for the confrontation, taking deep breaths and positioning himself to unleash an attack. With the strong, durable, golden *Staff of Justice* held firmly in his right hand, he charged forward, launching himself up into the air by using the staff as a pole vault.

Sun hit Onomatopoeiakaiju hard on the nose. But, the yellowish-brown monstrosity did not seem to feel anything. Batting Sun away like a rag-doll with its powerful tentacles, it shot its fluoroantimonic acid out from its toes. Fortunately, the acid missed its target, but only by millimetres. Heavily injured, Sun continued to utilise everything he had learned in all those years with Guo and fought Onomatopoeiakaiju until he fell to the ground, unconscious after

being hit right in the face by the monster's sonic boom.

Onomatopoeiakaiju was unharmed. It jumped a few times into the air and flicked its tail around, roaring, as if it were doing a little victory dance. It then drew all its evil power, and shot a purple laser through its tentacles and pincer into the sky.

At the point where the laser met with the cloud layer, dark clouds started to appear. The clouds began spreading out, enveloping the Earth in total darkness, unleashing evil everywhere.

The victorious Onomatopoeiakaiju flew into the sky. It kept on flying until it reached Hong Kong, where it started destroying the rural villages. People were screaming. People were running. People were squashed. The whole village was full of fear.

Meanwhile, back on the island, the *Staff of Justice* suddenly glowed with blinding light. The light engulfed Sun and revived him. Sun saw the blazing flames from Onomatopoeiakaiju rising from Hong Kong up into the air. The fire was huge, so Sun was able to see them even from the island. Sun thought, "I'm too tired, I cannot save the people of Hong Kong. Help me!"

Suddenly, Sun heard his master's voice ringing in his head, as if Guo were next to him. Guo said, "Sun, remember what I said? If you don't stop the monster now, humankind will become extinct. You're our only hope, you mustn't give up!"

With that, Sun found power deep within him and stood up. He suddenly knew what he had to do. He mustn't give up.

Sun thrust the *Staff of Justice* into the air, and the blinding light of the staff and the aura around him shone brighter than ever. The *Staff of Justice* and Sun's body were blending into the light, until at last they merged together.

The ground shook hard. A gigantic, red and silver, humanoid being had emerged out of the light. It was Sun. Sun had transformed into Ultraman Shaolin! Ultraman Shaolin (Shaolin) was 130 feet tall, weighing 35,000 tons. He had big, yellow, serene eyes. On his chest was an inverted triangle which had turquoise light shining out of it.

Shaolin took off to the skies. Flying at Mach 5, which is supersonic speed, he arrived in Hong Kong in the blink of the eye.

Onomatopoeiakaiju, who was surprised by the sudden arrival of Shaolin, quickly steadied itself and threw its sonic boom at Shaolin. Shaolin evaded the boom and sent two laser bolts flying out at Onomatopoeiakaiju. The bolts hit their target, and Onomatopoeiakaiju screeched in pain. Shaolin jumped and used his Shaolin flying kick on Onomatopoeiakaiju. The monster struggled to fight back, but Shaolin still had the upper hand. Shaolin picked up Onomatopoeiakaiju's tail and swung it around, throwing it into a mountain, which crumbled upon impact. Onomatopoeiakaiju, who was severely weakened, decided to use its signature move. It raised its tail above its head like a scorpion's sting, and focused all its dark energy in its tail spikes. With one great thrust, the spikes unleashed a devastating laser at Shaolin. But, Shaolin conjured a barrier between himself and the laser. Shaolin was unharmed. After all the dark energy of the monster had been used up, and the laser had stopped firing, Shaolin took down the barrier. It was now time for him to use his own signature move. He crossed his hands and shot his Shaolin ray from his right hand. Onomatopoeiakaiju, who was already weakened to the point that it could not stand up, felt the full force of the Shaolin ray. Boom! Onomatopoeiakaiju exploded into flames.

Ultraman Shaolin, who had completed his mission, dissolved into light and transformed back into Sun Yat. Sun looked up, and saw that the dark clouds had dispersed, revealing the smiling face of the sun again. Sun looked out over Tolo Harbour and saw that the Trail of Death in the South China Sea had disappeared.

Light was gleaming all over the Earth. Darkness had died. All was well.

The Dragon Ship

James Kung Chun Hin, 13, Diocesan Boys' School

1987 AD, South China Sea

The lone diver flipped from the small rubber dinghy into the clear blue water. He sank like a stone, all the way to the seabed, helped by the heavy metal and stone weights secured around his waist. Knife in hand, he slowly advanced forward, breathing slowly from the scuba gear on his back, bubbles occasionally rising from his mouthpiece like small jellyfish. Soon, he espied a large clam half embedded in the mud. Slipping his knife in the miniscule crack between the two halves of the clam, he easily pried the pearly white shells apart. Inside, snugly nestled near the hinge of the clam, was a large round pearl, glistening despite the darkness of the water. The pearl hunter smiled. His family would have something to eat tonight. He kept on walking along the bottom of the sea.

Suddenly, his foot bumped against something hard. He glanced down, and saw something that looked like a log covered in rust lying on the top of the seabed. On second thought, maybe it wasn't a log. Logs weren't gold-coloured, and they couldn't rust. Apart from that, they usually weren't hollow. A closer inspection revealed that the object was actually a cannon made out of brass. The diver was puzzled. Why would this ancient weapon of war be here under the sea? He stared around in the darkness. As his sharp eyes roved around in the gloom, he saw the looming bulk of a shipwreck a short way away. He swam over to it and peered inside. It looked like a Chinese junk from its flat bottom and horseshoe-shaped stern, and there were no valuable objects, as far as he could see. Just as he turned to leave, a glimmer of white caught his eye. It was a porcelain dish, with a gilded rim and a picture of a golden dragon in the centre. The pearl hunter grinned widely. An antique dish, especially one as old and as beautiful as this, would sell for even more than the pearl, which was already very valuable. Overjoyed, he cut off the ropes binding him to his weights using his knife and swiftly set off for the surface.

2009 AD, South China Sea

A group of divers jumped off the large research vessel and landed with a splash in the clear blue water, drenching everybody on board with the spray. They shot down into the deep blue water like a school of fish, coming to a stop in the vicinity of the wreck of the ancient ship. They then lowered a humongous metal cage into position, right above the spot. The crane above slowly lowered it, and the cage slowly sank into the soft mud. The base of the cage closed, sealing the ship and the surrounding mud inside. The crane heaved, and carefully started to lift the heavy cage. As the cage went up, the surrounding water became lighter and lighter, until with a spray of water, the ancient ship saw full and bright daylight for the first time in 800 years. Applause rang out as everyone, on the ship or in the water, marveled at its size, elegance and beauty. The cage was carefully lowered on to the research vessel, and then secured by strong chains. The research vessel sped off towards the mainland, sunlight glinting on the spray thrown up by the powerful motors.

A few hours later, they reached the shore. There was already a large crowd of spectators and workers on the harbour beside another gigantic crane. The ship swiftly and smoothly came to a stop beside it. Inside the top of the crane, an operator pushed a joystick. The crane swung smoothly over the ship, mechanical parts moving with unerring accuracy, and came to a halt on top of the tank. The crane lifted the tank up into the air and onto a large trailer nearby, which sped off along the coast. On it went, until a few kilometres away, it came to the seaside Chinese Maritime Museum, also known as the Crystal Palace, where the ship would be kept for further studying.

Present Day, Chinese Maritime Museum

The loud patter of running footsteps, followed by the rapid and sharp knocks on the door, woke the ageing director of the Chinese Maritime Museum from his blissful daydream. A young man with very untidy hair and a slightly messy suit rushed in panting, and screeched to a sudden halt at the foot of the battered and weathered oak table. Without waiting for the director to acknowledge him, the assistant shouted excitedly, "Director! We've found a golden dragon in the largest room of the ancient shipwreck! Follow me!" Without even stopping to see the director rise from his antique leather chair, he turned on his heels and sprinted like the wind out of the open door. Sighing loudly and muttering about the liveliness of youngsters, the director slowly rose and followed.

When the director finally arrived at the spacious main building, he found a large crowd of divers, researchers and scientists already assembled beside a small wooden table. As he came closer and shouldered his way through the throng, he finally managed to see what everybody was looking at. The small statue of the dragon was about six inches long, and was exquisitely carved. It was made entirely out of solid gold, except for the eyes. They were two rubies, bright and blood-red, and still shined and glimmered despite their immense age, and having not been polished for several hundred years. They seemed to stare at the people around them, and flickered almost as if the dragon were alive. The director stared. His grandfather was originally a pearl hunter, and he once had found an ancient shipwreck off the South China Sea. From there he had brought back a porcelain dish, on which there was a picture of the golden dragon that lay on the battered table in front of him. The dish still lays in a special frame in his home. The director finally spoke. "Wipe it clean, desalinate it, and bring it to my office for safekeeping." Everyone rushed away to do his bidding. Soon, everyone had left the main hall, except for the director. He stood silently at the table beside the golden dragon statue, brooding, and the dragon's blood red eyes flickered in the light.

When the gold dragon was sent to him in his office, cleaned, polished and shining, he immediately placed it in his large display cupboard. As he worked, he occasionally glanced at the small statue of the dragon sitting in the cupboard, and smiled with pride. Sometimes, the dragon would appear to stare back at him, red eyes glinting in the sunlight, but he did not care. A few weeks passed, and the dragon remained in its place. But the director would not stare at the dragon any more. For the dragon seemed to be looking at him whether he was looking at it or not, and chills often ran down his spine when he stayed in his room. But he still kept the golden dragon in his cupboard, and whenever people came in to visit, he eagerly showed them the small carving.

One morning, the assistant ran in again. "Director, we..." The director was slumped in his chair. "Director? Director?" "There was no reply, and the director did not move or sit up. The assistant shook the director hard. "Director! Wake up!" But the director's blank eyes stared at him. The director's body was stone cold, his white shirt untucked. And there on his stomach, was a tattoo of a golden dragon.

The Crystal Palace was in uproar. The police were notified and everybody was mobilised to search the entire museum. There was nothing missing. Everyone was suspicious. Why would someone kill for nothing? Another question was the matter of the tattoo. No one had ever seen it before. The tattoo was exactly the same size and shape as the statue, and its red eyes shone with life, seemingly threatening to fly out and destroy everything. The coroner's report was even more intriguing. It stated that the director of the Crystal Palace had not died of any form of murder. In fact, the director had not died of anything. There were no signs of being stabbed, suffocated, poisoned, disease, or any other things. Another thing was that the tattoo seemed to behave in a very strange way. It seemed to scramble all of the signals sent from the medical instruments to the computer when they were placed close to it, and when the coroners tried to directly use the instrument on the tattoo, the instrument would fail completely. As the director was very technologically savvy, he might have gotten a tattoo made out of special minerals, but the tattoo was exactly the same size and shape as the dragon, and as for the medical instruments failing utterly, that was completely impossible. A feeling of suspense and fear slowly but surely crept over the museum.

Night fell.

The wail of alarms rang out through the museum. The vice-director grabbed an assistant and roared, "What's the matter?"

"The main tank containing the ship has broken! Water is flooding the lower levels and more is pouring in from the sea!"

"But... how?"

"The explosive force of the breaking glass shattered the front wall. We are now under the weather and that nasty storm outside!" And it truly was a horrible storm. Thunder and lightning boomed and flashed all over the place. Sheets of rain pounded down on the buildings and pedestrians below relentlessly. The wind whistled and howled, and blew heavy things, such as rubbish bins and roadside advertisement boards high up into the air, where they spun for a few seconds before plummeting down to earth with a crash, scattering people left and right. Debris from shattered objects was flying around in circles, smashing into the people who walked in the streets. Amidst all the pandemonium, the ancient shipwreck slid out of the museum, born on a river of water.

A strange light seemed to come from the ship. It was a pale, ghostly glow, which turned into a halo of fire that outlined the ancient ship and highlighted all of its features. With a large and thunderous boom, a giant golden dragon flew out from the depths of the ship.

The dragon was magnificent. It was sleek and scaly, and powerful muscles rippled across

its skin. A pair of blood-red eyes stared around at its surroundings, and at the shocked people down below on the harbour staring back. A head containing two rows of razor-sharp teeth and a long, forked tongue were adorned with two sharp horns. The golden light danced and leapt around the long body of the dragon. Those who had seen the dragon statue were stunned. The dragon statue was this massive behemoth shrunk down to six inches. The dragon rose, and flew three times around the ancient ship. Then it opened its mouth and shot out a pillar of fire that lit up the ship and its surrounding area like the sun.

Sudden darkness.

Then, slowly and cautiously, light began to filter in through the large windowscapes facing the giant and peaceful sea. As the people slowly recovered from the shock, a miraculous scene came to their eyes. The museum was whole, the water tank unbroken. The large dragon in the sky had disappeared, and the ship was serenely sitting, as before, at the bottom of the tank. But the most amazing thing was that there on the prow of the mysterious ship, there was a porcelain dish. It had a gilded rim and a picture of a golden dragon in the center. And in the middle of the dish, there was a miniature statue of a golden dragon. The ruby eyes of the dragon were shimmering and shining, as if the dragon would come alive once more to roam the night skies.

Pepper Treasures

Gerald Williams, 13, Kiangsu Chekiang College, International Section

Hong Kong, 21 August 1900

By any account, the man looked odd. He had a wooden peg where his leg should have been, but that didn't stop him from walking into a bar with his head held high, with little regard for anything those around him had to say about his odd appearance.

Inside the bar, the noise was loud, everyone was cheering after a loud drunken game involving a few men and rounds of ale. There were more than 10 glasses on the table, not a single drop left inside the glasses.

His appearance shocked the crowd into an uneasy silence. After all, it wasn't every day that a disfigured man walked into the establishment.

"I'll have an ale," the man said to the bartender.

While everyone tried not to stare, one person who seemed to know the stranger peeled himself away from the crowd to speak to the newcomer. The man, Edward Allen, was known for his forthrightness and his ability to speak his mind.

"Hey Albert, what on earth happened to you?" Edward asked of the man who had walked in.

"Rather not say, you'll think I'm a freak after this," the man known as Albert shot back, as the bartender handed his drink over.

"I'm not trying to be mean. I want to know what happened."

Albert took a sip of his ale and walked over to where Edward and his mates were sitting. He pulled over a chair and slowly he sat down. By this time, the group had grown completely silent. Some sniggered behind their hands; others shook their heads in quiet sympathy.

"I fell down a cliff and here I am," said Albert

"That's not the full story. I fell off a cliff and I don't look as messed up as that," replied Edward.

"OK. Fine. You remember that voyage from India to Hong Kong?"

"Yeah it was attacked, by pirates wasn't it?"

"No, I was on that voyage..."

Albert's Tale

It was a warm summer's eve, and I was on a cargo ship, taking supplies of spices up from the Dutch Indies to Hong Kong, where they would eventually get packed and sent off to England. Everyone was in bed except me and the helmsman; I could not sleep. Strong currents and gusts of up to 69 knots meant that the seas were very choppy. Funny, isn't it, that I spent my entire life on the sea travelling from Hong Kong to India and back all the time and for the first time ever I was scared. It was never as choppy as it was that night. No one was on deck now, and I took the opportunity to go out for fresh air as a way of dealing with my queasy stomach.

“Can’t sleep?” said the helmsman.

“No, a very choppy sea out tonight isn’t it? Am not much good in waters like this.”

“Yeah, never seen it like this,” replied the helmsman, grimacing in the winds which were not cold but strong and punishing.

All I could hear were the howling winds and the helmsman’s voice. Slowly the ship came to a grinding halt.

“What happened?” I asked.

“I don’t know! I can’t move the wheel” replied the helmsman.

“What happened?” asked the captain as he came staggering up the steps that led from his cabin below.

“That’s what we want to know,” I replied.

Just as suddenly as the ship came to halt, it suddenly came to life, lurching from port to starboard, making even the most seasoned helmsman turn green.

The sickening rocking motion increased, and for a while we thought that our ship with all its precious cargo of spices would soon be under water.

The ship rattled. All of a sudden a claw came through one side of the boat, discovered the precious stash of peppercorns as though that was the treasure it was seeking. On the other side of the boat, a second tentacle crashed through, discovering one of the now awake and terrified members of the crew. The tentacle threw the man into the air, caught him and sprinkled the terrified man with the huge crate of peppercorns... and then we heard the sickening crunch of the man’s bones as the monster chewed him up and swallowed him.

Terrified men began attempting to jump off the ship; each more scared than the last. But each time the menacing tentacles were able to catch the men, the claw waving in the air, covering the men in a smattering of pepper before they disappeared into the sea. It was then I discovered the hideous monster was a regular on the spice route; he was hungry, and we were the spicy starter and entree to his monstrous meal.

It was not long before the sea became as red as the blood of the men who lost their lives as dinner to the menacing beast. Still hungry, it went after me. All I could do was cling to the mast of the sinking ship. I was immobilised, I was hoping that he would leave me alone.

But it was not to be, as he still kept trying to strike hoping I would give up. It was not long before the claw came after me, the menacing tentacle waving its box of peppercorns.

A rifle caught my eye and I started to sway madly toward the rifle, but the claw grabbed at my leg. I quickly grabbed the rifle while I still had the chance and fired it at the beast. With a giant howl of pain, he let go. I shot into his mouth and he slithered away. I was the only survivor.

A passing ship came and rescued me a day later after looking at the state of the ship. I caught a glimpse of one man who looked like a doctor. He saw me and came running towards me. The doctor on board feared that the tentacle that had me had left a terrible poison, because the cuts had started to turn green and smell, so he decided to amputate my leg to stop the poison from spreading.

At which point Edward interrupted Albert and said, “Mate, how much have you had to drink?”

Albert stared at the man and said indignantly, “If you don’t believe me, venture into the sea sometime with a cargo of peppercorns and see if you survive. The beast will be watching, and waiting.”

And he is waiting still, not realising most people in the 21st century take airplanes.

But the beast seems to be real because that very next day Edward went out for a cruise and he was never seen again.

Metamorphosis

Nandita Seshadri, 14, South Island School

*As a caterpillar, in a tree
Wondering who I will be;
Trapped in my cocoon for a time
When will I get out? Thinking I'm. . .*

Tring! The shrill sound of the bell startled me out of my reverie. Gathering my books, I left the classroom. When walking out of the door, I could hear Sheila sniggering at my outfit. Cheeks hot and red, I quickened my pace. The toilets had never seemed so far away before. I locked myself in a cubicle and wiped away a few tears of anger and bitterness. Why, oh why, did Dad have to be transferred so often? It was always the same case – new school in mid-term, new people, everybody already in groups and me always a loner. Every time I felt lonely or depressed, I used to think about the poem my grandmother used to recite to me when I was a kid. However disappointed I would be, that poem always lifted my spirits. It was about a caterpillar turning into a butterfly. Little did I know then how relevant that poem would be to me. At least the weekend was something worth looking forward to. Annabelle was to pick me up for Chung Hom Kok, a lovely barbecue spot (so I had heard!) near Cheshire Home. It also had a tiny beach area with many rocks to clamber over for the adventurous.

“As I was saying, this place is perfect for pictures. Shruti is also bringing her camera. We’ll also visit the beach before leaving, okay?” remarked Anna.

Nodding my head, I caught my breath at the picturesque sight that my eyes beheld. Unwillingly, I set aside my camera and started to set our barbecue spot. Very soon everything was ready, and the fire was going on merrily when Shruti joined us. She was extremely late, because it took us quite a while to start the fire! She had papads and we started roasting them. We had brought with us capsicums, sweet potatoes, chestnuts, corn cobs, asparagus and a few baked potatoes. It took us some time to roast them, and we saved some for later. We had decided to watch the sunset on the beach.

After eating a considerable amount, I got back to my neglected camera. While taking pictures, I noticed an Indian family nearby. From their talk, I picked up that they were on holiday. However, they were unwilling to return my smiles and ignored us completely. On the other side was a barbecue set by Chinese teens that were about our age. They did not even glance our way. A feeling of despair took over me. Somehow in the six months that I had spent in Hong Kong, my bond with India had greatly weakened but I still hadn't fit in with the Chinese. I thought about the Parsees in Gujarat. Although they weren't Indian, they had managed to make their place in the community. My greatest fear was: would I blend like sugar that is added to the milk and make it sweet, or would I be discarded like curdled milk?

Tring!

"It is your phone Shruti!" I called. She spoke for a while and replaced the receiver.

"Penny for your thoughts?" she smiled.

"Nothing much, just thinking about how it would have been if I had grown up in Hong Kong like you did."

Shruti's smile wavered, and I thought I detected a gleam of a tear in her eye. "Yes, you wouldn't have felt odd about so many things that you never attempted before. And you might have "fit in" with the people here. This society is a lot more liberal than yours. But you share a certain bond with OUR country which I probably never shall. And you are incredibly lucky in that manner."

On hearing her words, I was speechless. I had never really thought of it in that aspect before. Just then, our conversation was interrupted by Anna, who reminded us of the beach. In a hurry, we packed up and left our barbecue area as spotless as we could. When leaving, I caught a wistful look from the Indian family and a reproachful one from the Chinese gang.

*All my dreams lead to a star
It seems to be very far
To break the barrier around me
Isn't that my destiny?*

We lazed on the beach, basking in the sunshine like a King in the splendour of his subjects. After a daring attempt to enter the water, I ran out in less than a minute, squealing as Anna splashed me. The water was as cold and chilling as an icicle, unlike at our pond back home which was as warm and inviting as a campfire in winter.

"Don't miss the sunset! I promise it will be a memorable one," said Anna.

I sat and awaited the glorious sight. The glowing sun was slowly losing its magnificence and died down before reaching the sea. Somehow I found little pleasure in watching it. I did not feel the awe or wonder that I used to find back at home not very long ago, I used to run home from play (only temporarily), to watch the sun rays reflecting on our pond. Now, I missed that sight almost as much as I missed my grandparents. Having grown up in a joint family, I was not used to the ways of the nuclear family. I had had the good fortune of being around with my grandparents, and I had treasured every moment. I got them to speak to me and I listened to them because they had a reservoir of wisdom that no one else could equal. True, there was no real measure of knowledge and neither could there be any comparison of the older and newer methods of knowledge, or imparting it. But there seemed to be a certain magic in the age gone by. And I wished my grandparents were with me. My sister adapted to any new environment much faster than I ever did. In that sense, she had a huge advantage.

* * *

Tring Tring! The sound of my phone exploded in the silent classroom. Sheepishly smiling, I switched it off. But as I stared at the desk, I could still feel the teacher's disapproving eyes boring into the back of my head.

"As I was saying, before being rudely interrupted, today, as you have all been informed beforehand, is the last day to finalise the activity you wish to do for your Work Experience. As you are all in Year 11, you have to do some kind of a job; either help the other teachers holding the Focus Week activities for the lower classes, or else choose a job. You will have a real life experience of what your dream job is like. And just to inform you, the following activities are already full... Year 7 Camp, Digital Photography, Blue Water Sailing..." droned on Ms Wong.

Her voice trailed away. I didn't pay attention to what she said. I didn't really care what I did, so long as I was along with either Shruti or Anna. I had already decided that I was just going to join whatever they joined. Since I had joined the school late, everyone else had already chosen something, and at that point, it didn't matter what I did. I just wanted to be with someone I was comfortable with.

"...Cycling in Thailand, Horse Riding..." Tring!

"Oh! That was the bell! Never mind, the activities which are available are put up on the notice board and please keep in mind that if you don't join, you'll lose 10% of your final marks!" she completed.

"So what are you guys joining?" I asked my friends as we left the classroom.

"Oh, I am gonna be working with the famous artist, and my role model, Damien Hirst. However, he will work with only five people at a time and it's already full. Sorry!" said Anna, ruefully.

"Nah, that's fine, I'll just join Shruti's activity. What are you up to?"

"I am doing culinary experience in Hong Kong. And I think we still have a spot for another helper. Wanna try?" grinned Shruti.

"You bet! Let's check out the staff room and ask Madame Launay if I can," I added confidently.

Ten minutes later as we left the Staff room, all my confidence and cheeriness had ebbed away.

"I am so sorry that this one was full too. But don't worry, you can work with someone whose profession you wish to follow! And you'll get a taste of their life as well! So what do you wanna be?" inquired Shruti.

"They don't have the job I want to follow. I wish to be a children's writer like my role model, Enid Blyton. And I checked the list; the only two activities available are either Trekking in Nepal or Sun and Sea Adventure. I don't think I will be comfortable going overseas right now, so I will have to do Sun and Sea adventure. Boo you! You get to do exactly what you want," I retorted.

"Looks like luck isn't with you! Just inform Ms Wong that you will help in Sun and Sea. Au revoir!"

And hence, I ended up in Sun and Sea Adventure, assisting students between Years 7-9 to attempt rock climbing. Since I had done this before, I felt a little better because for once, I wasn't an amateur. My parents were keen mountaineers, hence I had also picked up a few skills in the previous camps which I had been to. This activity involved a two-night stay on the different beaches in Sai Kung. On the first day we went to Peng Chau, a fishing village. All the students were stunned at seeing houses on water. My mind flew back to my village. We would have a festival every year when a temporary shrine would be built on a pond. Everyone would come and worship the deity from afar. After the festival would end, the shrine would be removed and the deity would be sailed into the sea. In our village, almost every house would

have its own pond, complete with frogs and fishes. I thought about the excitement I had had when our pond was chosen. Throughout the festival season, I was worshipped by my playmates only so I could let them see the shrine first!

The chatter around me grew in volume, but I was lost in the past. Suddenly, a shrill TRING! burst from my watch in which I had set an alarm, and I was thrown back into reality. We went by a boat to one of the houses. Everyone stood there gaping. The “house” consisted only of two rooms; one outside and another with a cot and mattress inside, and if someone was very “rich” they had a television as well. The fisherman living there allowed us to take a look at his catch. There were various kinds of fishes and a couple of turtles in there. Being a vegetarian, I couldn’t stand the smell of fishes, but that day, packed with twenty other people on a tiny raft, I didn’t have much of a choice!

The next morning we went rock climbing. I was feeling a little lonely, because none of the students were very comfortable speaking to me. They found the instructors fascinating, and their teachers were the authority, but I was just an outsider. However, when we clambered over the rocks, I felt that I was in my element. Surprisingly, I overtook our guide and astonished everyone by getting up to our location before anyone else. Somehow, I didn’t really think our guide liked that, so I prepared myself to be shunned by him as well for having crossed his path. But I was hardly expecting for what came next.

“Boys and girls, this young lady here will be teaching you to abseil!”

I don’t think anyone was more astounded than I was, but I agreed. And, to my immense disbelief, the children actually took interest in me!

“How did you manage to go up so fast?” asked a small Chinese girl.

“Is it your shoes?” asked her friend, peering at them with interest.

“Ha ha, no it is not!” I laughed. “I have done this before, back in my country. And it is not quite as hard as it looks. All you need to do is test every rock before you trust it. You must never put all your weight on it at once...” and hence, I managed to talk to a couple of the girls. They found me fascinating, and didn’t think of my words as a boring lecture. I was relieved that I had at least started to win the trust of some of them.

*Struggling inside the cage
It's seems to have been an age
I will surely burst away
There's a crack! T'is the right way!*

The day was fun-filled and all of us enjoyed the new experiences. It astonished me that working with the lower school would be so much fun. That evening, everyone was sent to gather sticks for the campfire. The instructors were to get the other equipment for the fire. As I was walking towards the beach, I felt someone tug at my sleeve. I turned around and saw the Chinese girl, Jae Min looking up to me with expectant eyes.

“Will you please come and help me and Leah collect firewood? We will be the first ones back with the sticks if you come and take us as fast as you did this morning.”

Words would have been insufficient to describe my feelings. I was overwhelmed that someone wanted me to help them with something.

“Yes, of course, let’s go!” I said.

Her face lit up and we set off together. I don’t think she guessed that the feeling was mutual. They wanted to know more about my “adventurous” life. It was then that I overcame my fear of public speaking. Who wouldn’t if they had such an enchanted audience? We were nearing the campsite when we saw the sun setting. It was bright orange in the sky, but sank into

the sea in a flaming red ball. At that moment, I realised that I had had this experience before. I was filled with the same amazement and wonder that I used to find earlier at home. I was a child again.

Jae Min and Leah went on. I stayed back for a while to watch the sun set completely. It was darker now and the insects had come out. Just then I felt something on my outstretched, open palm. It was a lovely butterfly. I smiled and whispered to it:

“Go and tell my people that the sun and the sea are the same for all.” Saying so, I blew it away and watched it fumbling and trying to find its way about in the dark. Reflecting upon my stay so far in Hong Kong, I realised that I had changed completely from what I was when I came here and what I was now. Then I apprehended that without my knowing, the shy caterpillar had blossomed into a beautiful butterfly after all.

*The world outside is glowing bright
I finally can feel my might
Now to that star I can fly
Cuz I'm a mighty butterfly!*

The Day I Traded My Arms for Wings

Alyssa Jacinto, 14, St. Margaret's Co-educational English Secondary and Primary School

It was a wet, rainy day. The kind without a single patch of blue in the sky and rain was pouring by the bucketful. Being the forgetful person I am, I'd forgotten to bring an umbrella with me despite the nagging from my mother. I had no choice but to rush to the nearest shelter, a tree. There wasn't a building or house in sight in the middle of nowhere. I was shivering and wet. It looked like the rain wasn't going to stop any time soon.

I leaned against the damp bark of the tree. I sighed in frustration. I should be back home by now! If I had brought an umbrella, I wouldn't have been stuck in the middle of nowhere. I hit the tree trunk in annoyance. Raindrops that hung on leaves rained down on me. I wiped my wet face with the sleeve of my sweatshirt and glared angrily at the sky.

Suddenly, something wet and fluffy plopped on my face from above. My mouth was filled with wet fluffy stuff and I gagged. To my utmost surprise, the fluff ball spoke.

"What the heck?!" the ball twittered.

I immediately swiped that talking fluff ball out of my face, spitting the fluff out of my mouth. It plopped onto the ground. I realized the fluff ball was actually a bird – a house sparrow to be exact. Its dull brown and cream plumage and the black bib on its chest proved that.

I was stunned. This can't be right. Birds aren't supposed to speak right?

"What's the big deal huh?!" it twittered shrilly, annoyed. "You have some nerve knocking me out of that tree!"

"I – I'm speechless." I said, shaking my head in disbelief, "You can't possibly be real."

"Of course I'm real!" snapped the bird, "Why the heck did you knock me out of the tree huh?"

"I didn't mean to, OK?" I said defensively.

"Jeez," huffed the sparrow, crossing its wings.

"How on earth can you talk?" I asked, "Birds aren't supposed to speak."

"Ever heard of parrots?" said the sparrow sounding offended, "They're talking birds."

"I've never heard of talking sparrows."

"I can talk. So what?"

"This is incredible!" I exclaimed, my eyes widening, "You're a sparrow and you speak better than a parrot!"

"I'm no parrot! I'm a human-bird that's why!" the bird retorted, "You know why – TWEET!" It covered its beak with its wings. It looked nervous.

"What's wrong?" I asked, "And what do you mean by 'human-bird'?"

"Darn... Even my speech..." it cursed, its shrill voice raised an octave higher, "Just great..."

"What's wrong?" I pressed on persistently.

"You want to know what's happening to me?" the bird said, "I'll tell you anyway, because I'm not going to be talking for much longer."

"What do you mean?"

"Just listen," snapped the bird, "it's not like you can turn me back into a human. It's too late."

All this stuff was confusing me. Too late? Human-bird? The bird took in a deep breath and exhaled.

"The name's Daniel, came from NYC." he began, "You see... I wasn't always a bird. It all started with my mom's dog..."

* * *

SKREEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE!!! BEEP! BEEP!

Daniel dived in front of the truck, scooped the Chihuahua in his arms and rolled out of the way. The truck swerved away just in time, missing them by inches.

"Watch where you're going!" yelled Daniel, shaking his fist at the driver.

"You actually risked your life for a Chihuahua?" I said surprised,

"I regret saving that mutt," said Daniel bitterly, "That dog always got me into trouble with my mom. I knew that dog was plotting."

"Plotting?"

Talking birds and now plotting dogs?

"Stop interrupting me," Daniel snapped.

"Ok ,ok! Jeez."

"Where was I? Oh yes, that dumb dog."

"You dumb dog!" scolded Daniel, "I could have sworn that you did that on purpose! Trying to get me into trouble with mom again?"

The dog continued panting and wagging its tail. Of course the dog couldn't understand what he just said. Or so he thought.

"I can assure you I didn't do that on purpose."

"It talked?"

"Yes, and what did I say about interrupting!"

"YOU CAN TALK!!!"

Daniel was so surprised that he dropped the dog. The dog landed on its feet unharmed.

"Of course, I'm a genie." The Chihuahua stated as if it was the most natural thing to say.

Daniel had heard of genies in lamps but a genie dog?

"Does that mean you can grant three wishes as well?"

"Don't mix me up with those genies," the Chihuahua said, "I don't grant wishes for free."

"What do mean not for free?" Daniel asked suspiciously, "Do you mean I need to pay for a wish?"

"Something like that," it answered, smiling slyly, "but for you, since you saved my life, I'll grant you a wish."

“Is that so?” Daniel raised an eyebrow, “Something’s up. You’re scheming again you mutt.”
 “No, no, no.” denied the dog, “Why would you think of me like that?”
 “Oh I don’t know. Maybe that other time when-“
 “How about this?” cut the Chihuahua, “I give you a 50% discount. What do you say?”

* * *

“Don’t tell me you took the bait.”
 “I did.” Daniel chirped regretfully.
 I knew it. “What did you wish for?”
 “Freedom.” He answered flatly.

* * *

“That can be arranged!” the Chihuahua said, grinning devilishly.
 There was a blinding flash of light, forcing Daniel to cover his eyes. When the light dimmed down, the dog was gone.
 Daniel suddenly felt excruciating pain in his arms. He could feel his bones painfully growing and being re-arranged. He collapsed on the ground screaming in pain. As sudden as the pain came, it went. Daniel suddenly felt exhausted and was out like a light.

* * *

“When I woke up, I found my arms had been replaced by huge wings.”
 “You grew wings?” I asked confused, “I thought you asked for freedom.”
 “I did get freedom.” He answered, “From then on, I could fly to absolutely anywhere I wanted to. I flew all over the USA, Europe and Asia.”
 “But if you’ve only got wings then, how did you change into a bird completely?”
 “I started to notice I was changing into a bird when I was on my way to south eastern China.”
 “China?”
 “Yeah,” Daniel answered, “I was headed down south because it was getting cold up north and I heard that it was warmer down south. I ended up in a city...”
 The sparrow tilted its head.
 “What was it called? Something like Chong Kong or something...”
 “You must mean Hong Kong.” I said, correcting him, “It’s a city south from here.”
 “I knew that.” huffed the bird.
 “Right.” I said rolling my eyes at him, “I’ve never been there before.”
 “Poor you.” Daniel mocked sarcastically.
 I ignored his sarcastic comment, “So what was Hong Kong like?”
 “Bright lights, full of energy and always something to see.”
 “But...” I said, “Surely people would have noticed those wings of yours. You could have created a big commotion.”
 “Exactly...” Daniel said darkly, “I always had to hide so people wouldn’t see me. I also had to scavenge for food and I often went hungry. I lived like a fugitive.”
 “I see...”, I nodded, “That must have been hard on you.”
 “Yes. It all went wrong from there.”

* * *

Daniel flew above busy Mong Kok. He had not eaten for days. Food was hard to come by. There were people everywhere and he couldn't risk being seen. He'd been flying since sundown. He needed a break. He spied an empty rooftop.

He landed silently. He leaned against a wall and sighed. How much longer could he keep this up? Should he fly somewhere else where there aren't that many people? Perhaps...

His thoughts were broken by the sound of footsteps. Someone was coming! Daniel quickly hid himself behind a metal vent. The sound of footsteps was louder but they did not come closer to him. Daniel peeked behind the vent. He saw a man rummage around in a bag. After a few seconds, he laughed in triumph. He held up a glass bottle filled with bubbling acid.

All of a sudden, the stranger hurled it over the edge, sending the bottle crashing onto the people below.

SHATTER! CRASH!

Suddenly the sound of people screaming in fear and panic sounded below. The stranger cackled with glee.

"Ssserves you right!" cackled the man, with a strange hissy accent.

Daniel didn't want to stay any longer. This person was definitely a criminal. Daniel didn't want to get involved with the cops. Just as Daniel was about to fly away, he felt a clawed hand pull him back, making Daniel fall backwards. The stranger had found him.

"Let me go!" Daniel demanded, struggling against the vice like grip of the stranger.

"I don't think sssso, boy," hissed the stranger.

Now that Daniel had a better look at him, he didn't look like a normal human being. His face was a cross between a human's face and a snake's. His nose was replaced with a snake's snout. His skin was replaced with scales. He even had a forked tongue that flicked out every few seconds.

"You aren't human? Why?"

"Isn't it obvioussss?" he hissed, pulling him closer, "I bet it'sss the ssssame reassson why you've got those wingssss of yoursss, hmm?"

"What do you mean?" Daniel asked, trying to pull away from him, "You mean a wish?"

"Yessss!" hissed the snake-man angrily, shaking Daniel hard, "The dog!!! That cursed mutt! It's the dog's fault!"

The snake-man's grip tightened, making Daniel's shoulder bleed. Daniel yelped in pain.

"Argh! Stop it!"

The snake-man ignored him and gripped harder. Daniel cried out.

"Sssso very weak," He hissed in his ear, "How long have you been a bird-boy?"

"Argh! Why?!"

The snake-man growled in annoyance and shook Daniel hard, "Tell me!"

"A month!" snarled Daniel, "Now let me go! It hurts!"

The snake-man threw Daniel onto the ground, hissing in anger.

"Then why haven't you turned into a bird?!" demanded the snake-man.

"What do you mean?!" Daniel asked frantic.

"Look at me!" he roared, spreading his arms, "I'm halfway through turning into a ssssnake! It'sss only been 1 week!!! Why not you!?"

"You mean I'm turning into a bird?!" exclaimed Daniel in fear.

"Of coursssse you nitwit! Didn't the mutt tell you that?!" snapped the snake-man, "You ssssurely must have noticccecd at least!"

Daniel did notice. He had more feathers than hair on his head and bird-like scales covered his legs. Feathers had also started to spread around other parts of his body.

"No, it can't be!" denied Daniel.

“Facce it bird brain!” shouted the snake-man, “We’re going to be turned into mindless animalssss! That is the price of the wish!”

It all suddenly made sense to Daniel. What the genie dog meant about the 50% off discount was just postponing the transformation from human to animal. He shouldn’t have trusted it.

“No...”

“Oh yessss.” mocked the snake-man.

Suddenly police sirens filled the air.

“That’ssss my cue,” cackled the snake-man, “I have a feeling that I’ll be sssseeing you really ssssoon.”

The snake-man leapt into the air and faded into nothingness. He was gone. Daniel also flew away despite his bleeding shoulder. He didn’t want the police on his tail as well.

* * *

“I knew that dog was evil!” said Daniel angrily.

“Well, you shouldn’t have trusted a talking dog,” I said, rolling my eyes at him.

“Anyways,” Daniel continued ignoring my comment, “I met that mutt again...”

* * *

Daniel hitched a ride on the back of a truck that was headed to the Hong Kong container terminal. He planned to escape from Hong Kong as quick as possible but since his shoulder was badly injured, he couldn’t fly. His only options were either travelling by plane or ship. He knew that the security in airports and planes are very tight and he would be found out very quickly.

He wanted to escape because of his horrifying encounter with the snake-man. He might be on his tracks. He did say that he’ll be back for him. Daniel shuddered at the thought of him. Those yellow glaring snake eyes were constantly haunting his thoughts.

But the thing that made him the angriest was that dog. He knew it. He shouldn’t have trusted that dog. He growled under his breath. If he saw that dog again, he’d give him a piece of his mind.

Suddenly there was a pop and putrid smoke filled the truck. Daniel gagged at the horrible smell and his eyes stung.

“What the?”

The smoke cleared and lo and behold, it was the very same dog that granted his wish.

“YOU!” snarled Daniel, pointing his good wing at it, “YOU BETTER TURN ME BACK YOU MUTT!”

The dog just chuckled and ignored his harsh tone, “No refunds for wishes, Daniel.”

“You can’t just let me turn into a bird!” Daniel shouted, glaring at the Chihuahua, “TURN ME BACK!”

“Tsk, tsk.” The Chihuahua shook its head, “It wouldn’t be fun anymore if I simply turned you back into human.”

“Fun!?” shouted Daniel furiously, “You mean that this is all just a game to you?!”

“Of course, silly boy.” The Chihuahua said, smiling slyly, “This is all just a game.”

Daniel was furious. This Chihuahua was literally barking mad! He didn’t care what was going to happen to him!

“TURN ME BACK!”

“Well...” The Chihuahua said grinning.

* * *

“What did the dog say?” I interrupted.
“He said that I had to fly a hundred miles more to turn back into a human...”
“A hundred miles?!” I exclaimed, “That’s so far!”
“And with my shoulder injured, I knew that it would be too late by the time it finally healed.” Daniel said bitterly.
“That dog really is evil.” I said, nodding, “So, what did you do?”
“I decided to escape anyway...” Daniel replied, “I had accepted my fate by then.”

* * *

Daniel snuck on board the S.S Rhea that was headed for Taiwan. He hid inside a wooden crate which had piles of underwear imported from the mainland. As long as he was far, far away from that snake-man, he could stand a long journey to Taiwan surrounded by underwear.

RIIIIIIIIP!

The cover of the crate was ripped open by a pair of sharp claws. A pair of glaring yellow snake eyes stared down at him. The snake-man cackled with glee.

“Found you, bird-boy!”

His worst fears had come true. He had come for him. Daniel wanted to get away from him but he couldn’t. The snake-man had sunk his claws into his injured shoulder, making it bleed again.

“ARGH!”

The snake-man grinned maliciously, “Got you!”

“NO!!! LET ME GO!”

The snake-man held Daniel up by his shoulder and carried him to the edge of the ship. Daniel, in agony, looked down and saw the roaring sea. He was going to drown him.

“No! Please don’t kill me!” Daniel pleaded.

“You told me to let go and sssso I sssshall.” hissed the snake-man.

“Why do you even want to kill me!?” questioned Daniel frantically, “I swear I won’t tell the police about that acid bottle thing!”

“I don’t care about the policccce!” he spat, “If I kill you, I would turn back to human! That’ssss what the mutt said to me!”

“Don’t trust that dog!” Daniel shouted.

“I have nothing to lossse, bird-boy!”

He let go.

“AAAHHH!”

Daniel was just inches away from the water when suddenly, there was a blinding flash of light. When he opened his eyes, he was in the crate again. The cover of the crate wasn’t broken. Daniel wasn’t sure if he had been dreaming or not. It had seemed so real...

“I can assure you that you weren’t dreaming, my good man,” chuckled a familiar sly voice. Sitting with him in the cramped crate was the Chihuahua.

“What did you do this time!?” Daniel demanded, “What happened?!”

It simply replied, smirking, “I obliterated that irritating man. I had my fun with him. He was no use to me anymore.”

Daniel was horrified. He just killed off the guy he had sent to kill him.

“As for you,” it continued, “You better start flying those miles, otherwise you’ll end up like our reptilian friend, capice?”

Daniel just nodded. He had nothing left to say to this foul dog.

“Very good,” The Chihuahua said, grinning, “Oh by the way, have a nice trip.”
There was a puff of putrid smelling smoke and it was gone.

* * *

“And that was how I got all the way from Hong Kong to Taiwan.” Daniel said, “I slept most of the way and when I woke up, I was here, and I was already almost a bird.”

“So that’s why, it was too late already...”

The rain finally stopped. I looked up and smiled weakly.

“I think my time’s almost up...” Daniel said, sighing, “I feel much better now actually...
Thanks for listening...”

“But... Isn’t there anything I can do?”

The sparrow opened its beak but no more words came out.

* * *

“Mom! I’m home!” I said, closing the door behind me.

“Guess what, dearie!” Mom said, rushing to me with a box wrapped in red paper, “It’s a present from me! Go on! Open it!”

I smiled weakly. I just lost a friend although our friendship only lasted a few hours... I sighed. I didn’t want to make mom upset though...

I opened the lid. I found myself on the ground with something on my chest.

“I know how much you’ve wanted a dog and your father and I talked about it so here’s your new dog!”

The dog smirked at me, with a sly glint in its eyes. I was horrified. It was a Chihuahua.

Once

Eleanor Yung Yan Hun, 12, St. Paul's Co-educational College

“**B**other!” the young sailor grumbled as waves threw frigid and salty seawater onto his face.

“Be thankful,” an older man retorted, hauling the sails up, along with several other members of the crew.

The young sailor wrinkled his nose. “It’s jolly awful in this weather.”

“Yer young ‘uns know nothin’,” the old man proclaimed with distaste. “Yer all soft. Why, there was a time when ah was young...”

“Cut the cackle,” the good-humoured middle-aged captain came up. “Not going to tell us of your old yarns, are you?”

“Ah know more than yah, Cap’n! There were times when the South China Sea ain’t what it is now – pirates, y’know! Huge ships of ‘em!”

“Old duffer must be at least a century old,” the young sailor muttered under his breath.

The ‘old duffer’, however, had rather sharp hearing for someone of 103 years of age.

“Ah heard that!” he yelled. “And it ain’t no fun when one of those big louts has his sword on yer neck!”

The young man blushed. The captain winked at him and prompted, “Go on, old one.”

The old toothless seadog seemed pacified with the answer and continued, “Ah was quite young back then – a long, long time ago. Ever ‘eard of a chap named Cheng Lun?”

The young sailor immediately confessed that he knew nothing about him, and received a smug look from the elderly man. The captain scratched his head and said, “A pirate wasn’t he? Terrorised the South China Sea, and all the coastal areas around it.”

“It ain’t just that,” the old man corrected. “He wasn’t a normal pirate, oh no. Most pirates are poor, desperate people who ‘ad ‘ard lives before, yah know. Cheng Lun, he was from a rich official’s family – a very rich an’ powerful one at that! But he didn’t like that at all, he didn’t.”

“Me? I’d give anything to have more than the miserable salary I get!” the young sailor blurted out.

The old storyteller gave him a dirty look and went on. “He didn’t like the way the government put down the poor people an’ how they ruled – he tried to tell ‘em, but they kicked

‘im out. Well of course he wasn’t happy about it, but no one cared – not even his family.”

“One day he was sailin’ out to sea – this sea – an’ along came this band of fearsome pirates. They chopped up everyone in the crew, except ‘im ‘cause they thought if he was held for ransom they’d be rolling in money.”

“So what happened to him? Did he join them?” asked the captain, who wasn’t so sure about the history of mariners and seas (after all, none of those were tested when he wanted to join the navy).

“Don’t be stupid,” the old man blew a raspberry (and the captain looked as if he wanted to throttle him). “He killed ‘em all. And no – I know what yah thinkin’ – he didn’t actually carve all of them to pieces – he poisoned them. He wasn’t thick, yer know, an’ once he got his hands on some herbs or the other he fed ‘em the lot, an’ they died. He took control of the ship, found some crew...”

“And became a fearless pirate? Doesn’t sound much like something to remember,” the young man interrupted.

“Of course he didn’t!” yelled the old sailor, incredibly annoyed. “The first thing he did was to sail near to the homes of some of those rotten officials and nobles who’s snubbed ‘im, and he robbed them all, burned their houses and basically destroyed what they ‘ad. Then he tried to find his family – not to give a big hug – but they had got wind of what he did and moved inland.”

“Ouch,” muttered the young sailor.

“He began terrorising ships and houses by the coast – but only chose those of the rich and famous. In no time at all he’d got a great empire from robbin’ and wreckin’ all those vessels. He was quite a mean devil,” his thin lips slowly spread apart to reveal rows of broken teeth. “Do yah know what he did to the particularly important prisoners?”

Both sailor and captain shook their heads. The grinning elder said triumphantly, “He gave them options. They could ‘ave ‘emselves disemboweled, poisoned, bashed to a paste, ripped apart layer by layer or fed to dogs – quite a lot of people keep dogs.”

“That’s gruesome!” the young sailor exclaimed with disgust.

“That’s nothin’ compared to what those rich people were doin’ to the poor citizens,” replied the storyteller shortly. “Are yah goin’ to listen or not?”

Without waiting for an answer, he continued like a runaway steam train, “Eventually the Emperor sent out dozens of fleets to get rid of ‘im, but of course they all failed. One time, the pirate managed to sneak inside the palace an’ meet the Emperor – and forced ‘im to make a deal saying that the government would not interfere with ‘is doins.”

“An’ that’s not the end of it. He made glorious wins, captured many ships and even more treasure. Several of the other water-bandits followed ‘im as well. There was once he was stuck in a bay, so he pretended to ship his pirates onto the island where the enemy was, only the pirates never landed – they hid at the bottom of the boats. The enemy thought that there was goin’ to be a land invasion, so they pointed their guns away from the pirate’s ship. So in the dead of night he slipped away...”

“What happened after that?” his audience asked simultaneously.

“No one knows for sure. Some say he died in battle, though nobody seen ‘is body. Others say he’s livin’ like a King, due to all the riches he saved. A good deal believe that he died in poverty, because of gambling – another habit of his...”

“Oh come on,” the young sailor broke in. “You must think – or know – what happened to Cheng Lun after that?”

“Me? Ah think he’s still out there, sailing on the sea he always loved,” said the old man with a fond grin.

Broken China

Azaara Perakath, 14, West Island School

Tumultuous waves rocked the ancient Chinese vessel back and forth, its bow slicing the water each time with more force than the last. The captain sat, pipe in hand, studying the map, with a large red circle around the words 'South China Sea'. Beside him, the arrow of the compass spun wildly in all directions, attempting to realign with the magnetic north.

In a nearby cabin, activities of a very different sort were taking place. Abigail Cooper was pouring imaginary Chinese tea into dainty blue and white china cups. She sat hand in hand with her doll, Cara, who was seated on the window sill opposite. Cara looked across at Abigail with wide, impassive eyes. Their tea party was all that mattered to them. Outside, the high pitched wailing of the wind signalled that a storm was brewing. The door flung open and a firm hand pulled the little girl onto her feet. A voice urged her to make haste. She was adamant but the voice persisted. Amidst the general chaos and disorder of the moment, Abigail was forced to leave her cabin, much to her discontent. Dejected, she followed her father out of the cabin, dragging her handheld carry case behind her.

The ship lurched forward and reared up, in preparation for its upcoming meeting with fate. The series of movements were in rapid succession and the doll slumped into an awkward position. The gust of wind that followed was enough to propel her over the edge of the open window and onto the deck below. She found herself wedged between large wooden crates containing chinaware. There she remained and the glassy expression in her eyes closely resembled one of defeat.

Overhead, the bright yellow sails of the ship ripped at the seams, hurling it further into what seemed to be the eye of the storm. The once folded piles of silk, ready for the month of trading that lay ahead, were now strewn across the main deck. Patches of moisture seemed to be seeping into the finely woven cloth. The torrential downpour, coupled with the clinking of the ropes and chains, were loud enough to drown out the thoughts of even a doll.

People darted in and out of cabins, dodging the masses of humanity. Desperate to locate anything red that might calm the angry dragon. He resided in the clouds and was concocting a storm that was sure to put an end to their lives. Numerous empty bottles of calligraphic ink lay discarded. There was hope that the Chinese characters for good luck might ring true and tempt the dragon to seek his activities elsewhere, despite their reckless provocation. The ship was

fighting a losing battle. Being tossed from side to side, it was insignificant in comparison to the great oceanic rage that played out before them. With each passing minute, people's hopes and dreams seemed to fade away.

A gust of wind caused the ship to veer off course, tilting dangerously close to the icy black waters beneath. While everyone was in search of shelter, the crew worked against the clock to devise an emergency evacuation route. The solitary doll slid unnoticed into the nearest crate of china. She was helpless, and too weak to retaliate. She was pulled under and eventually submerged beneath the shards of glass and the broken remains of the ceramic pots that were like fragments of her life.

The feelings of hopelessness and apprehension as to what lay ahead engulfed everyone. The ship shuddered, daunted by the task at hand, and a low rumbling groan was emitted from the rudder. Life jackets were handed out and the crew radioed for help. The captain detached the life boats and buoyancy aids from the undersides of the benches. Abigail, who was at the furthest corner of the main deck, pointed towards what appeared to be the largest wave that they were yet to face. Her eyes grew round with horror, as the realisation of what was missing, dawned. Watery imprints traced her path on the wooden floorboard as she raced towards her prized possession, her beloved doll. Her father implored her to stay, but Abigail ignored his desperate pleas. She looked around frantically, but Cara was nowhere to be seen.

As if on cue, there was a snapping sound as part of the keel detached itself from the vessel. Abigail's cries for help were lost as numerous screams of anguish emanated from within. The inflatable orange devices were flung into the water. There was imminent danger all around. Some were apprehensive to take the plunge into the piercing depths of the ocean, while others leapt into the lifeboats with ease. It was then that the vessel gave way and water rushed in, forcing the ship under with its unyielding grasp. The remaining people on board accepted the inevitable. The tangle of arms and legs disappeared below the surface. The last thing to be seen was a flash of red dancing above the water's surface. Nobody noticed the wooden crate drifting away, with a single plastic arm outstretched.

* * *

Now a young woman, Abigail was back again in China, pursuing a diploma in Mandarin. She was sprawled across the living room sofa and the sun's rays danced off her radiant, youthful skin. There were days when she still struggled to come to terms with her disability. She readjusted the cushions behind her to find a more comfortable position.

As she had tried to gain a foothold on the lifeboat to stay alive, the weight of the ship on her shoulder had left scars that were more than skin deep. More than a decade had passed since that fateful day, yet she could vividly remember every graphic detail. The atmosphere had been intense, with the cacophony of sound and the smell of sea water permeating the air. The sense of utter desperation and loss had gripped her as she had let go of the little plastic fingers. In that moment, her whole world had changed. A shiver went down her spine. Once again, she remembered the icy waters swirling beneath her, the ship being thrown off balance, and the feeling of numbness that overtook her. She had eventually slipped into unconsciousness and couldn't remember anything beyond that. It had been ingrained in her memory all the same, an integral part of who she was.

A few blocks away, the curators of the museum had finished their night shift and left. The doll was alone once again. The damaged porcelain items had been placed on the worktop, in no particular order. A piece of faded, hand-woven silk was draped across the room, concealing the exhibit from the view of the public, as it was yet to be unveiled. It was evident that

attempts had been made to restore the artefacts. Ceramic pots stood upright, towering above her and making her feel insignificant. She was nothing more than a doll, after all. Here she was, abandoned and worthless. The words echoed through her mind.

A lai see packet was conspicuous behind the display cabinet – a symbol of good fortune. Considering her circumstances, it was ironic. The bright red brought back recollections of a time that she would much rather forget. That was a time when the silk trade route and China's ties with the Western world had meant more to them than her existence.

She had often pondered on the vicissitudes of life. Not many would realise that even dolls could have feelings. Inanimate they may be, but hearts they did have. Her presence amongst the exhibits was due to her being discovered when marine archaeologists had been excavating. However hard it was, she knew she was unwanted and had to learn to accept it. She sat motionless, her glassy eyes reflecting the light from the single beam overhead as she reminisced.

Down by the pier, men sat on discarded tyres and donned bright yellow helmets. Perspiration dripped down their leathery skin. They knew that they had a long day ahead, but were comforted by the knowledge that this was the final attempt to salvage the remains of antiques from the vessel below. It was filled with sea water and silt from the seabed where it had lain dormant. As the net was hauled onto the dock, they braced themselves for disappointment. The haul from down below was diminishing in quantity with every passing hour. They were close to the end of a month long job, excavating numerous relics from the bowels of the ship.

Of these objects, the most extraordinary had been a doll. What was striking about her was the way her features were set into a carefully composed mask, concealing all emotions. She was a class apart from the cobalt blue China. It looked like she had lived to tell a tale. She must have been beautiful, once, but now her dark hair was matted together in uneven tufts. Her tattered chequered dress and her black shoes were sodden. She would need a new wardrobe and the dryers would have to work overtime to get her ready for the grand opening. Yet there was something endearing about her that was unlike anything the men had ever seen. The decision was unanimous. She had been placed with the utmost care into the van transporting the priceless artefacts to the museum.

At dawn, the finishing touches to the exhibits were made. The doll had a resplendent ribbon in her hair, and a dazzling new dress. She felt as though she were starting afresh; though in her mind, she would remain a mere shadow of her former self. The porcelain ware around her had been restored in a matter of days and the gold bars had been placed in display cabinets. The ancient coins that had been found in a cloth bag had been strewn all around her. The exhibition was finally ready for the public.

Yellow flags were raised high on the flag poles outside, pulled taut to prevent them from tearing in the cool spring breeze. A marching band snaked through the crowds, followed by a dragon dance in celebration of the newest additions to the Song dynasty exhibit. Banners proclaimed to the gathering crowd the newest and most keenly anticipated features. It seemed as though the entire populace of China stood outside the museum. Mothers stood protectively, shrouding their infants from the inquisitive eyes of strangers. Old men lingered outside, occasionally raising their hands to adjust their hats. Children darted through the masses, wondering what all the commotion was about.

They were here in great numbers to catch sight of the items that had been recovered from the shipwreck. Some of them had travelled miles to be part of this historic day. Camera shutters went down and flashes went off. They stood rooted to the spot, waiting for the hands of the clock to move, desperate for a glimpse of the 800-year-old merchant ship which had sunk on its last voyage ten years ago. Amongst them all stood a young woman, leaning on her crutch for support.

The rolling shutters of the museum went up and the doors opened. There was an atmosphere of expectancy as the desperate throngs made their way into the museum. This left the young woman alone, staring unblinkingly, oblivious of what was to come. The sound of the trumpets faded away, and the last of the visitors disappeared inside.

Abigail stood, fixated, reminded of how strange it was to be back in a place where she had spent the first ten years of her life with her sea-faring parents. There was a time when she had been remarkably athletic and spent most of her time outdoors. The accident at sea had crippled her, and her social life was restricted as mobility posed a problem. Only very few understood how debilitating the incident had been, physically and emotionally. In her childhood years, her little doll, Cara had gone wherever she went. She had liked that feeling of security. Cara's loss had left a void. They say that time is a great healer, but the passage of time hadn't made this loss seem any less intense.

It was with these very thoughts going through her mind that Abigail made her way into the museum on her crutches. A brochure was handed to her at the entrance. She studied it with interest and was so engrossed in trying to decipher some of the Chinese characters on the brochure that she barely heard the applause when the veil was lifted from the prize exhibits. As she wandered into the main hall, she caught sight of something that made her heart beat lawlessly. As Abigail let out a gasp, her crutch clattered to the ground beside her. She stared, disbelievingly, furiously fighting back the tears. It was unmistakable.

The combination of blue and white fused into the dragon's serpentine body which snaked up from the base and coiled around the neck. There was a crack just above the lip of the vase. It was undeniably eye catching, but Abigail's gaze lay just beside it. She was looking at what was once the focal point of her universe. She was looking at Cara. Her childhood companion looked visibly unimpressed by the scenes unfolding before her. Cara appeared to be searching, lost but not yet found. Time had not touched her; she still retained her former perfection in Abigail's eyes. If anything, she looked more beautiful. It was then that Abigail noticed that Cara had new clothes and the ribbon in her hair was different, but striking.

Abigail ignored the shooting pain that engulfed her torso as she hobbled towards Cara. Her smile illuminated her face, widening with every stride. As she reached the doll, she extended her arms and encircled her in a tight embrace. This time she wasn't letting go.

On the day that Abigail was born, her grandmother had visited the hospital with custom-made Cara in hand. On the doll's belly was the inscription "Abigail Cooper" along with her date of birth. Abigail lifted Cara's dress and was reassured that the etching had stood the test of time. She held on to Cara and approached the lady at the main desk. She whipped out her identity card to prove ownership.

Over the years, Abigail had read in the newspapers that China had made great progress in the field of marine archaeology. She was eternally grateful to those that had located Cara.

Abigail kept turning Cara over and wondered how difficult her life had been during their separation. Had she been attacked by sharks? Had the broken china hurt her delicate body? Did that matter now? She realised that the past was a fascinating place to journey but a dangerous place to settle down. With the present in hand – her present – Abigail walked out into the sunlight, looking forward to the future.

At last, they were reunited. The years of separation had not changed anything. It had only strengthened the timeless bond between a young woman and her faithful doll. This is their story.



Fiction
age 16 & under,
students with specific
learning difficulties

The Fish

Steffi Man, 12, Springboard Project at Korean International School

It was a sunny Tuesday morning in the Hong Kong Harbour. The fisherman caught me and put me in a big green bucket with all the other fish. I was very cross because all the fish kept flipping their tails and brushing my face. There were too many fish in the bucket and they were all splashing water around and snapping at me.

Every time I tried to jump out of the bucket, the fisherman kept putting me back. I looked up at the ugly, old fisherman and said, "I just want to go home to the South China Sea. Please put me back in the water." But the fisherman just put me back into the crowded bucket and lifted the heavy bucket onto the back of his truck. I was never going home. I will never see my mummy again or swim with my brothers and sisters. I felt helpless!

The truck started and off we went. Suddenly, there was a big bump in the road and the bucket leapt up, up, up into the sky. All the fish shouted "Hoorah!" as the bucket landed in the water with a big splash. I swam as fast as I could, kicking my tail to swim faster, just like the Little Mermaid. I swam back to the South China Sea and home to my fishy family. My mother was so happy to see me and made me promise never to swim close to the fishing boats in the Hong Kong Harbour again.

The Swim

Angel Poon, 15, Springboard Project at Korean International School

It was Chinese New Year holiday, and Jacky Chan was back in Hong Kong with his wife. It was a sunny day and Jacky said, "Let's go for a swim at the beach." So off they went in Jacky's sporty red car.

At the beach, Jacky changed into his sporty red swimming shorts and ran into the sea to swim. He was excited to be back in Hong Kong and swimming in the South China Sea. Jacky was having fun splashing about and practising his free style strokes in the cool ocean, when suddenly he heard a boy screaming. As fast as a Ferrari he swam to rescue the boy who was being attacked by a shark. Its teeth were huge and looked like scissors. Jacky punched the shark in the head, but that made the shark even angrier. Then he whacked the shark on the tail but that made the shark even more angry. Finally, Jacky did his special running fire dragon punch that he learned on the movie set for *Rush Hour* in Hollywood. The shark flipped over and swam off as fast as it could.

On the beach, a crowd of people was cheering and clapping. Jacky saved the boy, and the boy wasn't even hurt! Jacky's wife ran up to him and said, "You are my hero Jacky!" She gave him a big hug and kiss. What a hero Jacky Chan is in the South China Sea of Hong Kong!