



Fiction
Group 1

New Tales of the Yangtze River

Alpha Ngai, 6, Sha Tin Junior School

One dreadful night, there was a storm. The storm was extraordinarily strong. The storm was so strong that it caused flooding. The Yangtze River flooded and the flood rose up the mountain in Yunnan. At the foot of the mountain, there was a small village in Shigu.

That night, only young people and children were in the village. Uncle Ching and Grandfather Ben were in the north fishing. The flood came up the mountain in the south. All the young people were working in the field and the children were happily playing at home. They did not notice the danger. When the flood and the storm came, the young people were terrified but the children were still playing. Butcher Bo said, "We must go and warn them. Otherwise, they will drown." Butcher Bo hurried off. But it was too late because the flood was all around them. The children were all very frightened but they could swim well. So Butcher Bo decided to swim with the children.

When Butcher Bo was swimming, he found a treasure box under the river. Butcher Bo carried the treasure box and swam all the way to meet Uncle Ching and Grandfather Ben. Butcher Bo came up onto the boat with the children. The treasure box was tied up with a lot of chains and an enormous lock. Butcher Bo could not open the treasure box. So he got an axe and was ready to open it. But as soon as he raised up his axe, there was a gust of wind. The wind became stronger and stronger like a cyclone. It picked up all the sand and stones on the ground. All the people held on to the boat and covered their eyes. Butcher Bo peeked through his hand to see what was happening. He saw a red dragon with spikes and a poisonous horn. The dragon grabbed the treasure box. Butcher Bo wanted to fight back and save the people. But the dragon was more powerful than Butcher Bo and snatched the treasure box and flew up into the sky with Butcher Bo hanging on tight.

The dragon locked Butcher Bo into a dungeon of a castle. Butcher Bo shouted for help. The dragon explained, "Don't worry. I am a good dragon. There is a wicked genie inside the treasure box. If you open the treasure box, he will make you his slaves. That is why I locked you up." Butcher Bo thanked the dragon for saving their lives.

Along the Yangtze River in Yunnan, there are layers of rock which make a steep cliff. It is called the tiger leaping gorge. The people of the village painted the dragon on the cliff to remember the dragon for saving their lives. From then on, the people in China believe that dragons are good and brave.

Mother Yangtze

Audrey Wang Xin Jia, 8, Shenzhen Regents Primary School

I stayed in the frozen peak of the Tanggula Mountains for two million years. In the past ten years, we felt hotter and hotter each year. One day, many of us turned into tiny water droplets and rolled quickly down the mountains.

"Hurrah! We are going to get into our mother's body for ten months. After that, we will leave our mother's body and be free!"

"Our mother? Isn't the Tanggula Mountains our mother?" I asked with doubt.

"Our mother is the Yangtze River," my sister said. "She flows for more than 6,000 kilometres across China, drains one-fifth of China's land area, and one-third of China's people live around her."

Suddenly, I felt a warm hug. I knew I was inside the body of our mother – the Yangtze River. I looked at my mother. She was beautiful, clean and gentle. My mother smiled at us. We cheered with joy.

We flowed south into Sichuan. My mother's face changed. She looked uncomfortable.

"Oh my dear son, can't you feel the soil is eroding into our bodies?" my mother roared.

"Yes, but why is it like that?"

"It's men. They cut trees. The soil is loosened and rushes into the river. Animals lose their home. Beautiful forests are turning into deserts..."

Sometime later, I smelled something rotten. "Where are we?" I asked.

"We are in Hubei," my mother answered. "The river is highly polluted. The smell comes from waste from houses, factories, farms and vehicles."

"Our mother is home to some endangered animals, such as the Chinese alligator, the finless porpoise and the Chinese paddlefish. They may become extinct one day if men do not take good care of our mother," one of my brothers added.

"Oh! How cruel are the men!" I said.

Suddenly, it started to rain heavily. The rain tasted sour also. My mother looked very pained and angry. She roared and rolled. Water rushed in from all directions. Flooding along the river was horrible. I could hear men crying for help.

I was really scared and cried, "Mom, this is terrible. Can you please stop it?"

However, mother couldn't hear me, but continued to rush forward. Things were out of control. Trees were breaking. Boats were sinking. Bridges were collapsing...

Then, I saw a big dam. "It's the Three Gorges Dam! It is built to help control the floods!" one of my sisters shouted out.

My mother then slowed down. We flowed through the dam. Soon, everything returned to normal. My mother looked very tired. We were yellow and smelly.

At last, we arrived at Shanghai after ten month's travel inside our mother's body.

"But mom, why don't you come with us?" I asked.

"I can't go. It is my duty to feed all the animals in the Yangtze River. I can bear the pain," my mother replied.

"But..." before I could finish my words, I was in the East China Sea.

"Bye mom! We all love you!" we all waved and shouted in tears.

New Tales of the Yangtze River

Eleanor Cheung Hay Ching, 7, Marymount Primary School

On my seventh birthday, my mom gave me a beautiful glass bottle bought from her Yangtze River cruise. The bottle was adorned with a vivid picture of a mermaid playing with a baiji dolphin. The bottle was filled with water from the upper reaches of the Yangtze River. When I opened the bottle, I could smell a natural freshness. It was so relaxing. Imagining myself playing with the dolphin, I fell asleep.

After a while, I heard the sound of water splashing. When I opened my eyes, I couldn't believe I was floating in the upper reaches of the Yangtze River. The place was gorgeous with tall snowy mountains touching the clouds and daisies scattered all around. The water was crystal clear with lots of fishes swimming around me.

Wondering how I could float in water, I looked at myself. "I have become a mermaid!" I screamed. "I love being a mermaid."

I started swishing, swirling, twirling and whirling with my colourful fin. A dolphin then came circling around me. It was the dolphin I had seen on the bottle.

"I'm the Goddess of the Yangtze River. Who are you?" the dolphin asked.

"I'm Mermaid Eleanor. Do you live in this cold place?" I replied.

"I used to live in the middle reaches of the Yangtze River but it has been ruined," the dolphin sighed.

"Where is your family?" I asked.

"I am the only dolphin left in Yangtze River," the dolphin answered soberly. "Many dolphins cannot find enough food because there are too many fishing activities in the river. There are also too many giant ships that disturb our quiet life. Some dolphins were even killed by the ships' propellers. I am now living in the merqueen's palace for shelter."

* * *

Suddenly, a big fish with a thousand tails swam in front of me. "A monster," I shrieked. The dolphin then led me to the other side of the big fish and I found thousands of small fishes hiding behind it. Some of these fishes had only one eye, others had none and some had curved backs.

"What happened to them?" I asked.

"Many factories discharge toxic waste into the Yangtze River every day. A lot of fishes are poisoned and give birth to deformed baby fish," the dolphin explained.

We then swam to the merqueen's palace where I saw some familiar faces. "Hello sturgeon fish and Chinese paddlefish! I've seen your family in Ocean Park," I shouted excitedly.

"We want to take shelter at the merqueen's palace," both fishes chorused. "Please help us."

The merqueen came to us. "Some fish species are extinct and many are endangered. Fishes need a proper habitat to live and reproduce," the merqueen said. "Only human beings can help. Please teach them to respect aqua-life. We are part of the world too."

"I have an idea and I must go home now," I replied. I waved goodbye to my friends and swam back to the shore.

When I woke up, I decided to write 'New Tales of the Yangtze River'. I want everyone to love and protect our Yangtze River.

Thoughtful Yangtze River

Graham Wong, 8, St. Margaret's Co-educational English Secondary and Primary School

In China, there is a river called the Yangtze. The Yangtze River is the longest river in Asia and the third longest in the world. Long ago, there were many cities near the Yangtze River and they were very poor. They had no money, no food and no water. The Yangtze River decided to help the people. It gave water to them, to make their fields grow more corn and vegetables.

The Yangtze River wanted to think of some ways to make the people live more happily. It found a magic box with some clever minerals. After the people drank from it, they would become more clever. If they used it to water seeds, it would help the plants grow faster, so they could make more food and make their cities stronger. The citizens wanted to thank the Yangtze River for helping them. The people wrote some thank you notes, stuck them in front of flowers and threw them into the river.

The Yangtze River felt very happy, but as the years went by, the people near the Yangtze River became poor again. Over time, they did not do any hard work. Instead they just went to the Yangtze River and shouted, "Yangtze River, you are the best of the best, you can find the magic box and ask the clever minerals to help us make food, water, money and everything else for us."

But the Yangtze River thought and thought. Should it find the magic box with clever minerals to help them? Sometimes the Yangtze thought, "They are so poor, I should help them." But sometimes it thought, "They do not do anything but ask me for the magic box with clever minerals to help them all the time. I should not give it to them."

So, the Yangtze River decided not to find the magic box for them and shouted to them, "You should not always seek help from me, you should think of your own ways to solve problems."

This time, all the people near the Yangtze River heard what it said and realised they were wrong. They needed to help themselves and not just rely on the river. They should work hard and think of their own ways to help their city and not just ask for help. They tried farming animals and growing vegetables. They sold them to other cities to make money. They really worked hard and then lived happily forever after.

A Story on the Yangtze River

Janice Chen Jia Yi, 8, Shenzhen Regents Primary School

One day James and his parents went to the Yangtze River for a ferry tour. After launching the Yangtze ferry, they went to the ferry restaurant for lunch. James wanted to eat a burger but the restaurant served only noodles. James was very disappointed and cried himself to sleep.

When he woke up, he found the ferry was very quiet. He ran around the ferry and found that everyone was taking afternoon naps. He was bored and ran out to the slippery floor outside, and Splashhh! ... He fell into the river and was washed ashore by the tide.

Suddenly he saw a rock moving towards him. The rock came to James and said, "Hello! James."

"What! It talks!"

"Don't be scared, James. It's me. I am Gold, your tortoise."

"Oh! You are!" James remembered his dead pet Gold. "Hey, but how did you learn to talk?"

"The day you put me in Victoria Harbour, I was not dead. I was just too sick to move. I joined the other tortoises and swam all the way to the South China Sea. However, our leader said that the South China Sea was too polluted. We all swam to the East China Sea and settled down on an island in the middle of the sea. Later, I was sick again. My leader said I'd better leave the sea and move to somewhere with fresh water. Then I swam to the Yangtze River. Thanks, James! While I was with you, you used to feed me the vitamin capsules your mother gave you. They made my brain grow fast."

"Oh! Yes. I hated those capsules. I threw them into my pet box and told my mother that I ate them. Hahahaha!"

"Gold, can you come home with me? I do miss you very much!"

"No, James. I cannot. I must wait for my wife here."

"What! You have a wife?"

"Yes. We met one day while we were swimming upward the Yangtze River. My wife was too slow and she was left behind. I am here now waiting for her."

"Ok, Gold. However, I have to tell you some sad news. People here built a dam on the Yangtze. Your wife cannot swim up here to meet you."

"What!" Gold began to cry. His tears were salty and flowed into the Yangtze. Some fish died immediately when those salty tears fell into the river.

"Help! Someone help me. Help Gold and the Yangtze fish! Help!"

"What happened to you, James!" When James opened his eyes, he saw his father looking at him.

"Oh!" James found himself sleeping on the chair of the restaurant.

"You refused the noodles and cried yourself into sleep and shouted HELP." said his father.

"Oh! Dad, I found Gold. He is still alive. Let me tell you what happened when I fell into the Yangtze River."

"Son, you slept here the whole time. It was only a dream."

The Whale That Got Away From The Sea Monster

Joshua Kim, 6, Korean International School

Once upon a time, there was a whale living in the Yangtze River. The whale liked to play everyday. One day, the whale swam to the bottom of the river. Then something dark was coming towards the whale. It was a sea monster. The sea monster caught the whale. Then the whale called for help. But nobody could hear him, so he thought of a plan and had a good idea. His plan was to use the booster in his pocket. When the sea monster was asleep, he put his hand into his pocket and took out the booster. Then he put the booster on his back and switched it on. The booster was very fast, but it was quiet. That's why the sea monster didn't notice that the whale got away. When the sea monster finally woke up and noticed that the whale was free, it was because the sea monster felt there was nothing in his hands. The whale was very happy that his plan worked and he was freed. Then the sea monster decided to go and search for the whale. But the sea monster could not find the whale and at the end he decided to search for another sea animal. After that, the whale lived happily ever after.

A Farewell to My Friend

Kwang Tsz Wun, 8, St. Paul's Co-educational College Primary School

As dawn broke, I jumped out of bed as a shudder of excitement ran down my spine. An idea flashed across my mind. I decided to take a blissful stroll along the banks of the Yangtze River.

I scrambled out of my house and started my journey to meet my friends. As I was walking towards the Yangtze River, I caught a glimpse of the Three Gorges unfolding slowly like a Chinese scroll. Marvelling at the breathtaking view, I suddenly heard a whistling sound echoing through the gorges. I immediately stared at the turquoise water and spotted a pitiful dolphin with watery eyes. When I looked at it carefully, I realized that it was the baiji. Chinese legend has it that the baiji is a reincarnation of a beautiful princess. She drowned herself in the river because she refused to marry a man she didn't love. Baiji was the "Goddess of the Yangtze".

The dolphin was in agonizing pain. Her fin was injured severely by a fishing hook. Seeing that her tears were trickling down her face like a never-ending river, I dived into the river courageously and removed the piercingly sharp hook. Blood streamed down from her wound and she cried out in pain. I bandaged her wound at lightning speed. After patting her softly, I whispered to her, "Baiji, wait for me. I will be back soon."

I scurried back home and got some fish for her. When I returned, the wounded Baiji had already vanished. I was dreadfully disappointed. All of a sudden, I caught sight of my lost friend again. She was swimming gleefully towards me. I pranced in delight and let out a joyful cry. Baiji gazed at the food that I hurled at her. In no time, she gobbled up all the food. Baiji popped out of the water and looked at me as if she wanted more. I made a pledge to her that I would come back the next day.

Humming my favourite tune all the way home, I thought about how lucky I was to have met Baiji. Just as I stepped into the house, my mum's sobbing voice startled me. "My family have lived here for generations. I can't abandon my beloved hometown," she wept.

"The Yangtze River has flooded thousands of times. This fearsome dragon needs to be tamed. We will build a dam to control the devastating floods," said the stranger proudly. He continued, "Start packing now because the village will be submerged soon." The man patted my mum's back and left. That night, I couldn't sleep a wink.

Next morning, I darted to the riverbank, hoping to bid farewell to my friend. But there was no sight of her. My heart sank. Tears began to stream down on my face. Baiji, did you leave because the Yangtze will never be the same? If the Three Gorges region could talk, I knew that it would plead for mercy!

The Secret Kingdom

Kylie Chan, 7, Kennedy School

Judy jumped into the raging water to rescue Fang but she did not know how to swim. "Help!" cried Judy. "Someone, help us!" But no one heard her. Judy and Fang were thinking they were going to be swallowed by the rapids of the Yangtze River not knowing they were about to be saved by an enormous bubble instead.

Judy was a clever 10-year-old American Chinese girl who loved travelling with her parents and her loyal Beauceron pet dog Fang and she enjoyed reading about mythical beasts. She was excited about the cruise on the Yangtze River and visiting China for the first time.

Surprisingly, a small boy about the height of Judy appeared and startled her. They were all in the bubble spiraling down deeper and deeper into the water. The boy's name was Cai Long (or multicolor dragon), a young prince dragon who could transform himself into anything and had a body made up of rainbow colored scales that overlapped like the tiles of a roof.

"I will take you back to my kingdom one million years into the past, and show my fellow dragons what I have found." said Cai Long. Judy could hardly breathe. As the bubble spun faster and faster, Judy saw clips of the people who lived by the river and how the floods destroyed their towns. Then she fainted.

When Judy woke up, she found herself and Fang in a dark dungeon. Little odd looking creatures like Bishop Fish, Hippocampus, and Remora, gathered around wanting a bite. Cai Long unlocked the dungeon door and took them to see the King and Queen.

"Cai Long, lock these two up in the dungeon forever," yelled the King, "so they will never tell anyone about our kingdom." "Of course, Dad." said Cai Long. But seeing how Judy was sobbing with fear, he quickly put Judy and Fang under the invisibility cloak instead. He then led them off to the tunnel to go back to the future and said "Wear this mother-of-pearl locket. Every time you look in it, you will see me. Let's be friends. Promise to keep my kingdom a secret."

Suddenly, Judy heard a loud voice saying "Please prepare for landing and fasten your seatbelt. We hope you enjoyed flying with Pacific Airlines." Judy woke up with a start and looked around. She sighed happily because she realised that she was flying home with her family. It was all a dream. But wait! Something sparkled in the corner of her eye. She felt for the necklace around her neck. It was the locket from her dream! She was shocked and scared. She quickly turned to her mom and asked, "Mom, where is Fang?" Perhaps it wasn't a dream after all. "Fang is in his cage, pumpkin. Do you like the locket Daddy got you as a souvenir?" said Judy's mother.

Judy was relieved but a little disappointed because the great adventure was only a dream.

Miracle Adventure

Phoenix Hui Sin Hang, 7, Marymount Primary School

It was the eighth century AD, a time when the Vikings were already a famous nation in pirating and treasure hunting. Jack was an adventurous Viking child who loved to explore.

One quiet night, Jack and his friends, Lulu, Stephen and Charles, secretly set sail on his father's boat to a nearby island to hunt for treasures. Suddenly, a furious storm caught the little pirates by surprise. All of their clothes were drenched by the sudden downpour. The little pirates were terrified by the rumbling thunder that roared over their heads.

"Bang..." a flash of lightning struck them and they blacked out immediately.

The rain continuously falling on Jack's face woke him up. He opened his eyes and glanced around. "Hey! Wake up! Hurry!" Jack shouted anxiously.

Lulu woke up to Jack shouting, "Where are we? Why did our clothes become so strange? Oh no! Why are we talking in this strange language?"

Before Jack could answer Lulu, Stephen pointed up to the sky and shouted, "Look! A huge dragon is flying in the sky!" At the same moment, the huge dragon discovered them.

Jack shouted loudly, "RUN! We will be the dragon's snack!" Stephen spotted a huge temple and yelled, "There! We can hide there!" Without hesitation, they stretched out all the sails and steered towards the back of the temple.

Suddenly, they heard a weak voice, "Hey...Hello..."

Lulu stammered in fright, "We were just chased by the dragon, and now we are seeing a ghost?"

Jack grinned and replied, "It's not a ghost! It's a boy hiding behind the window over there!" He walked closer to the window and asked, "Who are you? What is this place?"

The little boy answered, "My name is Xouming and I live in this village. This is the Yangtze River."

Jack asked, "But why is it so bleak now?"

Xouming replied, "A dragon lives here, and every few years, it comes out of its cave to find food. When it comes out, the village floods. You guys came at a really bad time!"

Charles asked curiously, "Why are you here alone?"

Xouming replied shyly, "I was taking a nap in the temple. Everyone was gone when I woke up."

Lulu asked anxiously, "If the dragon discovers us here, what should we do?"

Stephen waved his sword and said proudly, "Don't be afraid, I will use my sword to fight. It will know how powerful I am."

Everyone cheered for Stephen. Suddenly, a strong, smelly wind swept them off their feet. While the little pirates were enjoying Stephen's sword dance, the huge dragon quietly crept up behind them. The dragon swept its enormous tail at them and they blacked out again.

When they woke up, Lulu shouted with surprise, "Why are we wearing these strange costumes?" They looked at each other and they were all dressed in Chinese costumes. No one spoke for a long while.

Jack turned to his friends and exclaimed, "This is an awesome adventure!"

The little pirates all cheered!

A New Tale of the Yangtze River

Yunah Frank, 9, Discovery Bay International School

Long ago, in ancient China, when water never existed, there lived a wise, peaceful and brave dragon called Ping. This dragon was no ordinary dragon, though. Ping was a very rare water breathing dragon who also talked! He had scaly, bright yellow skin, round beady black eyes, which sparkled in the shining sun and soft, frizzy brown hair, which bounced up and down whenever he walked.

A hundred years later, on a sunny day, Ping looked around and asked himself, "Why didn't I ever try to look for fresh, clean water? It's ever so hot! I'll just wait for a while." A few minutes later, Ping couldn't take the scorching weather any longer, so he took off into the clear, aqua sky and searched for lovely water.

Ping searched day and night until he journeyed the whole world and returned to his home, with not much luck. On his way, he bought spell books and tried chanting strange spells, looked for a wide range of sparkling flowers, stones and herbs, sang magic songs, danced with all his might and created wonderful potions. Sadly, none of them worked.

Suddenly an idea popped into Ping's head. It was a brand new idea. It was something he had never thought of. It was marvellous, magnificent and outstanding! Ping could just shoot water from out of his mouth and make a river! Ping realised that he had been so dumb, because he was, after all a water breathing dragon. Anyhow, Ping didn't get mad, or cross, or upset. He stayed calm and relaxed. Without waiting, he flew around China searching for an appropriate place to create the river he wanted.

After a while, Ping found the perfect place between two towering mountains. He huffed and puffed, through days, weeks and months until he had completed his river. Ping took a step back. "Ow!" he cried as he clutched his aching leg. He felt another sharp pain on his back. This sudden action made Ping collapse onto the cold, earthy ground. He knew what was happening. He was getting too old to continue his life. Ping had known that it was going to happen some day. It was a rule that all the dragons in China knew. The rule was, 'Whenever a dragon lies down to rest, he will never rise again.' Ping took one last gaze of the breathtaking landscape and lay down. As he lay, Ping said just one word. That one word was 'Yangtze'.



Fiction
Group 2

The Wish Pearl

Anahita Kaman, 9, Kellett School

It all started when I saw a dolphin in the Yangtze River, where I had gone for a swim. I stared at it in wonder. I had never seen a dolphin before. Suddenly, with a flick of its tail it started swimming away. I followed it as fast as I could without splashing much so I wouldn't scare it. I had been trailing it for some time when I felt some force pulling me. I looked around and saw a whirlpool sucking me into its centre. Immediately I turned around and tried to swim away frantically, but I was getting closer to the core. I was under so much strain, as I was just about to surface, I blacked out.

When I gained consciousness, I found myself lying down on a bed of ... seaweed? I looked around me. There was blue all around me. I realised I was underwater! I was surprised I could breathe. I sensed someone was watching me so I slowly looked up. Standing right in front of me, 20 feet tall, was a majestic silver dragon.

I screamed so loud, a passing eel froze.

"Please don't eat me!" I whimpered, hiding behind a fern in fear.

"Come out. I won't eat you. I'm a vegetarian, actually," he replied in a deep but friendly voice, "I'm Yin Long." I looked up amazed.

"You mean the one in the legend who used to be a boy but turned into a dragon?"

"Ah, you know about me," he replied as he sat down on an enormous beanbag.

"Can I ask you something?" he said suddenly. I nodded.

"Well, in my legend the Prince Dragon gave me a pearl that would grant me every wish, right? Well I lost it and I want it to turn myself into human again." I gave him a questioning look.

"You can have a wish!" he said.

"I am in!" I replied immediately.

"Good," he smiled. "We start tomorrow."

Yin Long woke me up at the break of dawn and we set off for the Prince Dragon's palace.

"Getting to his palace is a one and a half day trip," he said studying his map.

After a few hours of travelling past corals and caves, we sat down exhausted. I decided to ask him a question that kept rising in my mind.

"After all these years here, why didn't you find the pearl during that time?"

"The time wasn't right," he replied. "You have come through a whirlpool, bringing me a friend. Certainly, that is a good omen."

We started when I saw a Chinese man gliding past us. Somehow, I knew he was no ordinary man. Maybe it was the fact that he was underwater, breathing effortlessly.

"Yin Long...?" I said. He looked towards where I was pointing, went over to him and brought him to me.

"Meet Qu Yuan. He says he knows a shorter route," he stated.

"You mean the one who drowned and asked for rice, in a legend?"

"Yes," Qu Yuan answered. I gaped at him. Being late, Yin Long suggested we settle down for the night. We lay on the sand and I wondered what my Mother was thinking because I hadn't come home for the night. I was then surrounded by snoring noises from Yin Long and Qu Yuan. I soon fell asleep.

Qu Yuan woke me up as soon as the sun rose in the sky, so we could continue our quest. Suddenly an alligator swam in front of us with startling speed.

"A Chinese alligator!" Yin Long and Qu Yuan cried. "Hide!" I scrambled behind a rock before it could spot me.

"Dragons are terrified of alligators too." Yin Long whispered to me. Unfortunately, Chinese alligators must have a good sense of hearing because it quickly turned its head towards us spotting Yin Long's tail. I saw Qu Yuan hunch up into a ball. Well if they weren't going to fight the alligator, who was? I broke off a long stick of coral and charged at the alligator brandishing it.

I didn't even get to fight it! As soon as I had taken a step, it backed off and swam away.

"Phew!" Yin Long said. "According to the Qu Yuan, the palace is behind that boulder in front of us!" We scurried to the boulder and a breathtaking sight washed over us. The palace was huge, made of glittering pearls of various colours. We dashed inside and found a majestic Rainbow Dragon sitting on a sofa.

"Hello your majesty," said Yin Long bowing down. "We would like the pearl of wishes."

"For what need?" the dragon answered.

"I would like to be a boy again," Yin Long replied.

"But you can't," the dragon said. "Don't you know that now, as a dragon, you are immortal, if you choose to become human again you will die instantly after all these years?"

"I didn't realize that," Yin Long murmured looking downcast. The dragon asked if Qu Yuan and I wanted a wish. We refused. It didn't seem fair that we would get what we wanted and Yin Long couldn't. We left in silence. Outside the palace, Yin Long suddenly smiled.

"There's no point me staying sad," he explained. Pointing at me he said, "But you must go home. Here take this shell to remember us. Only one hour in human time has passed. I will cast a spell to take you home. Goodbye, it was nice meeting you."

Qu Yuan bid farewell too. I grasped the shell tight in my hand.

"Goodbye!" I called out to them as a whirlpool transported me back to the normal world.

I found myself lying on the grass of the riverbed. Could that all have been a dream? I felt something in my hand. I opened it. Lying in my hand was a shell. I smiled to myself as I got to my feet and raced off home for lunch.

The Yangtze's Kindness

Ankit Kumar Misra, 10, Delia School of Canada

Once upon a time, a small boy called Lo Xiang lived with his parents near Wuhan on the banks of the Yangtze River. They were so poor; they had to depend on the river for their daily living. Mrs Xiang would grow some vegetables on a small patch of land, while Mr Xiang would go fishing in the river. Lo Xiang loved to help his parents.

One day, when Lo Xiang was on a fishing trip with his father, he asked, "Papa, why can't we live in a city or a village, where I can have friends?"

"We **have** to live here because we can't afford to live in a city, or even a village," answered Mr Xiang.

Lo Xiang asked, "But why can't we go to Wuhan?"

"But even that is very expensive for us. And we can't go and live in Wuhan because **here** the Yangtze helps us, but we don't know anything about the conditions in Wuhan," replied Mr Xiang.

"But if the Yangtze helps us here, why won't it help us in Wuhan?" asked Lo Xiang.

Mr Xiang was getting impatient. "If you want to live in a city or a village, ask this river to help you. It has helped many people, it might fulfil your wish too," he said.

From that day on, Lo Xiang went to the river every day, and prayed, "O River, you are so large and great. You have helped so many people. I know that you don't flood and kill so many people every year on purpose. Can you please help me? I would like to live in a city. I want to go to school like other children. Please do something to help me."

One day, they saw a young man drowning in the river. They saved the shivering man and brought him home. Even though they had less food, they shared their food with the sick stranger.

Lo Xiang often talked and spent time with the stranger, who said his name was Fu Chang. Mr Chang liked Lo Xiang very much. Every evening, when Lo Xiang went to talk to him, he would find Mr Chang waiting for him.

One day, Lo Xiang told Mr Chang, "You know, I really want to go to school. I also want to live in a city. But my parents just can't afford it."

"But you can go to Wuhan, right? I have heard that there are many schools there," said Mr Chang.

"But we can't even afford to live **there**," said Lo Xiang, sadly. "We just don't have the money."

After Mr Chang was fully cured, he thanked them gratefully and left.

A few days after Mr Chang had left; a messenger came to their house. "Mr Fu Chang has invited you to visit his house in Shanghai," he said. The messenger also told them that Mr Chang was a rich businessman in Shanghai.

Lo Xiang had often heard the people of Wuhan talking about Shanghai and what a great place it was. He ran to the Yangtze as fast as he could.

"Thank you, O Great River. You have fulfilled my wish," he whispered, excitedly. "Now I can live in a city and go to school! Thank you! Thank you! THANK YOU!"

Suddenly, he slipped down the rock he was standing on and fell into the river with a big splash! His parents heard the sound and came running towards the river.

"Oh no! Lo Xiang is drowning in the river!" cried Mrs Xiang. "Somebody help him!"

Mr Xiang dove deep into the water to save Lo Xiang. Lo Xiang was saved, but he was found unconscious.

After Lo Xiang came back to consciousness, his parents found out that he was sick. So their trip to Shanghai was delayed for ten days. Lo Xiang lay in his bed all day, waiting to recover.

After Lo Xiang recovered and his parents asked him what had happened, he just said that it was the Yangtze's way of hugging him.

Lo Xiang and his family started planning their journey to Shanghai. They decided to go along the Yangtze River to get to Shanghai because they couldn't afford any other means of transportation.

"Where are we going to get food from when we are in places that are desolate?" asked Mrs Xiang.

"We'll eat fish from the Yangtze," Mr Xiang said.

"That's a nice idea!" Lo Xiang exclaimed. But they didn't know that their journey wasn't going to be as easy as they thought.

After collecting everything they needed, they were ready to set off on the long journey.

"Let's go!" said Mr Xiang.

"Come on! Let's go!" shouted Lo Xiang, excitedly.

And so, they set off on their journey.

As they had planned, they ate food from the trees as well as fish from the Yangtze. They had some unexpected problems like heavy rain and extreme heat on the way.

Finally, they reached Shanghai safely. Lo Xiang was delighted to be in a city for the first time in his life.

But they didn't know that there was a big surprise waiting for them. Just as they entered Mr Chang's house, he told them that he wanted them to live with him! "I will pay Lo Xiang's school fees. Mr and Mrs Xiang, you can work on my farm."

Lo Xiang got a chance to go to school, a place that he had always wanted to go to. He made new friends. The teachers were very surprised to see that a person who never went to school was so good at maths, science and almost everything else that other students who had gone to school all their lives asked him for help.

When Lo Xiang grew up, he became a famous businessman. He made several dams to minimise the Yangtze's flooding. He was very kind to both rich and poor people. Everybody wanted to be like him.

The Rock of the “Waiting Wife” at the Yangtze River

Anna Wu Jia Ying, 10, Shenzhen Regents Primary School

The lady who turned into ‘The Rock of the “Waiting Wife” at the Yangtze River’ was not there waiting for her husband at all. The truth is she has been waiting for a clean Yangtze River for thousands of years.

Thousands of years ago, there was a beautiful town along the Yangtze River. People there cut down trees, put those tree trunks along the river and waited patiently for the next flood to come. When the flood came, the tree trunks were washed into the Yangtze and floated downstream. Those peasants would collect the tree trunks downstream and sell them in big cities. Year after year, trees were cut, soil was washed into the river making the river dirty, and living things in the river died.

The River God was worried. “I must save the Yangtze. I must teach these ignorant people!” he thought.

One morning, a stranger came into the village. She looked very old with white hair and skin that looked like the paper from an old book. “Who wants to live longer? Who wants to live longer?” The strange old woman shouted. “If you don’t want to die now, listen to me, listen to me! The river will flood tonight! Let’s run, let’s....”

“Shut up!” A peasant’s wife opened the door of her house and laughed at the old woman. “What a pack of lies! How do you know the river will flood soon?” Another woman walked out of her house and scoffed. The strange old woman said, “You will regret it if you don’t take my words seriously. You people are destroying the Yangtze. You will be punished! Stop cutting down the trees. God will reward you!”

“What? Stop cutting trees? Then what can we do to earn a living?” said the mayor of the town who looked like a wise owl.

“My child,” said the strange old woman, “if you keep cutting down trees and let the soil be washed into the river, the Yangtze will die and so will all living things that live in the Yangtze. You will have no fish to eat. Stop and I promise that God will reward you.”

“What reward?” asked the peasants eagerly.

“Rocks under your feet will become gold,” said the strange old woman.

“Nonsense! We don’t believe you. Who are you? Where do you come from?” shouted the peasants.

“You all need some time to learn the lesson,” sighed the strange old woman as she slowly walked away and disappeared into the forest.

The peasants gathered together and discussed what they had seen until the sun set and the sky got dark. They all agreed that they should not make the Yangtze dirty and cause the fish

to die. However, they did not know how to make a living without cutting down trees. Then everyone went home and closed their doors.

Less than an hour later, flood water from the Yangtze River rushed through the town with a terrifying force! Torrents of water poured into the town and washed away everything.

"What happened?" The peasants and their families woke up from sleep and asked. In no time, they were washed away by the flood. "Help! Help! Ooooooooooh! I understand what the strange old woman said now. God help me! I will not cut trees anymore! Help!"

The next day, when the flood was gone, people sat on the top of a hill weeping and praying together to ask God to forgive them. Suddenly the strange old woman appeared. "I will bury the gold deep under the ground. If you are good to the Yangtze, the gold will come up a little bit every year. You will find the gold right under your feet when the Yangtze is clean, beautiful and safe. I will stay beside the Yangtze and watch you people." The strange old woman flew slowly toward the hill and with a loud thundering sound, she stuck herself into the hill and stayed there as still as a rock.

The peasants regretted what they had done very much. However, they did not know how to make a living among those steep hills without farming land. They kept cutting the trees.

Not until the past few decades, have people started to know more about pollution and to control the number of trees they cut down.

The rock the strange old woman turned into is still there. However, people forgot about the truth and made up a story and named the rock 'The Rock of the "Waiting Wife" at the Yangtze River'.

I know the true story because my grandmother is a native of that town. Last year, during Chinese New Year, I visited my grandmother. I asked her about the promise of the strange old woman. "Do your people have gold under their feet now, granny?" I asked.

"Dear, yes. We have oil shale in the area. It's better than gold."

"What is oil shale?" I asked.

"Go Google it, darling," said Grandma.

"OK, my great technical guru Grandma!" I laughed.

The Dragon, the Beggar and the Baiji

Celeste Wu, 12, Diocesan Girls' Junior School

“**T**errible! Humans never learn,” Yangtze grunted. The devastating news had just reached him – land reclamation would begin 335 alligator lengths north. He roared in utmost fury. After all, Poseidon, the god of the sea, gave Yangtze the dragon responsibility to take care of the Yangtze River, but now... Breakers started to form as he thrashed around angrily.

Shing the beggar was walking back to his old hut. Gloomy clouds started to form and he knew it was going to be stormy. But, as he crossed the Three Gorges Dam, a claw-like wave dragged him down to the river...

Ying the baiji suddenly heard someone fall into the river. **Probably one of those selfish humans**, she thought. She zigzagged her way out, and **not** to her surprise, she saw a man struggling to resurface. However, his attempts were in vain. Ying felt sorry for the man. So she decided to give him the baiji charm (which enables creatures to breathe underwater) and carried him to her home.

All Shing could remember, was being rescued by a baiji. It (or rather, she) gave him something and he was able to breathe. She settled him down on a comfy chair. “Hi, I’m Ying,” said a shy voice that was unmistakably the baiji’s. Shing’s eyes bulged out. Baijis could **talk**? After that, he politely (though a bit tongue-tied) introduced himself.

Ying let Shing rest for a bit while her parents discussed what they should do about the beggar. Ying’s mom bawled in misery, “I can’t believe we sheltered humans! We’re the WBEL (worst baijis that ever lived)! I insist we give him to the hungry Chinese alligators.”

Her dad said, “Whoa! Darling, that’s mean-hearted! I think we should ask him for help.” Ying’s mom’s eyes widened. “We can tell him to stop his race from polluting the world’s third largest river,” Ying’s dad suggested.

Shing started to wake. “What were you talking about?” He lifted his head groggily. Everyone froze. Ying filled him in on the parts he had missed. Shing shook his head sadly, “I told you, I’m just a—” Before he could continue, he fainted and fell to the ground. Ying’s mom proudly lifted up a rod.

“Why did you knock him out?” Ying’s dad grumbled, seemingly displeased. “I was planning to bring him to Yangtze’s palace, and this makes it easier!”

So the three of them (towing Shing along) ploughed through the water and arrived at the palace, standing right in front of Yangtze. Ying and her parents bowed instinctively, and Ying’s father quickly explained what was on his mind. Yangtze nodded in agreement.

Meanwhile, Shing blinked his eyes open and almost screamed in alarm when he caught sight of the ferocious dragon. Yangtze swam to Shing until they were three centimetres apart.

He sniffed Shing and explained what Shing needed to do.

Shing started to protest, "I'm just a puny old beggar! What can I do? I'm as useless as drifting plankton—" But he was cut off by the dragon's threatening growl.

"You are wrong there, my friend. You see, no one is useless in this world. Everyone is created for a reason. Even the drifting plankton, they are a crucial food source to fish and whales. Same goes for you." The dragon's voice was surprisingly calm and soft.

"I don't want to get eaten like the plankton," whimpered Shing.

"That's not what I meant. What I meant was that no one is useless. Everyone can make a difference no matter how small you think you are. Have you ever heard of a man called Nick Vujicic?"

Shing nodded vigorously and grinned, "He's an amazing fellow; he really is. Although he doesn't have any limbs, he can still be optimistic and give touching speeches to the world! Who would have thought a man without limbs could be so... useful?" He blushed at the word he had used.

Yangtze beamed radiantly, "Exactly! That proves that no one is useless! Now, listen. Next week, Tuesday night, I will send a nightmare to all those who live beside the river. All you have to do is to persuade them to stop land reclamation. If they don't listen to you, foretell them about the ominous dream. Also, I'll give you these running shoes. They do the walking for you, you will never get tired and will walk at the speed of sound."

Shing obeyed at once. He made his way to the shore. He checked the surroundings and saw the Three Gorges Dam. Shing was in Yiling, Hubei. He started his journey.

"Haha, you're talking complete nonsense!"

People jeered and sneered at him when he spread the news. No one believed in him. Shing didn't care. He continued his journey. He soon reached Hunan. The same insults, same yelling. Shing shrugged. Next, Jiangxi, Anhui and Jiangsu were warned. Everyone thought Shing was insane but he simply ignored these foolish men. Last but not least, Shanghai. He reached his destination just on time – Tuesday at dusk. After Shing finished warning the people, he dozed off by the river shore.

Everyone who lived near the Yangtze River was fast asleep when the nightmare reached them. It started to rain heavily. Everyone woke up startled when the storm came. Lightning lit the surroundings with random flashes.

"Flood! Run for your lives!" someone yelled. There were muffled screams. Everyone fled. The waves were the rage of an indignant alligator, crawling nearer and pulling the people into the depths using its strong jaws. The people were being swept away. Everyone thought they would drown...

So it turned out that what Shing said was true. Yangtze had found Morpheus, the god of dreams, to help him send the nightmare to everyone. The people were guilty and frightened. They quickly contacted the government and land reclamation was stopped. Better still, people stopped polluting the Yangtze River. Yangtze and Ying couldn't resist smiling from ear to ear. The Yangtze River was saved from destruction.

Flying over the Yangtze River

Charlotte Leung, 10, Diocesan Girls' Junior School

The small city of Fengdu (豐都) lies on the banks of the Yangtze River. This famous "City of Ghosts" has been linked with many supernatural stories. People believe that it is the gateway to the underworld. Ronald and his wife Jessica, successful musicians, business persons and philanthropists, owned a beautiful villa in the outskirts of Fengdu. Danny, their 13-year-old son, was gifted musically. The family was the envy of the whole town.

The previous summer, Danny was bitten by a bizarre-looking rabbit in a nearby woodland. He then contracted a mysterious disease, which made him weak and caused severe nocturnal pain. He became depressed, temperamental and unreasonable. The wonderful music from the villa that once enchanted the villagers was replaced by bouts of screaming and sobbing.

On my way to the villa, I stopped at a shop and asked for directions from the shopkeeper. "Are you sure you want to stay there?" asked the shopkeeper, trembling with an anxious tone.

"I'm going to be the boy's music teacher. He's a promising pianist, I've been told."

"Poor boy, who used to be so vivacious," the shopkeeper sighed. "The house is UNCLEAN, my friend. Many villagers have witnessed the 'Rabbit Demon' wandering around the house during the small hours, disguised as a woman, all in white. Her green eyes sparkling like hellfire. My advice: AVOID THE HOUSE!"

Despite the shopkeeper's dissuasion, I arrived at the villa. Ronald and Jessica greeted me warmly, but I could tell there was sadness behind their cheerful façade.

"You must be Neila. Welcome to Fengdu," said Ronald. Jessica turned to a boy who was standing behind her and said, "Danny, come and meet your new teacher." Danny remained motionless. His stare was vacuous and his expressionless countenance made me uneasy. I tried to approach Danny but he retreated and started to shout at me, "Go away, leave me alone."

"The boy can be moody sometimes," Jessica spoke with embarrassment while Danny was running away. "I'm sure you'll be good friends very soon."

For the next few weeks, Danny's temper remained volatile. A minor hiccup would trigger a tantrum. Ronald and Jessica did their best to appease him. Danny avoided me. The piano lesson was the only occasion when he would spend an hour or two with me.

One day, I was playing Chopin's 'Puppy Waltz' during the lesson. The music fascinated Danny. He stood up suddenly, swivelled around, just like a jolly puppy chasing its own tail. Then he barked at me happily, three times.

I started to see light at the end of the tunnel.

It was late in the evening. I was woken by the music from the living room. My watch showed 4am. I went downstairs and found Danny at the grand piano. He was playing Mozart's

'Requiem'. Danny stopped when he saw me. His eyes were red and watery. "Can you play this for my funeral, Neila?" beseeched the poor child.

Sorrow grieved my heart and I put my arms around him. "Don't be silly, my dear. You're not going to die. Go to sleep, good boy, it's late now."

"The pain attacks me at night, I'm scared," replied the melancholic boy.

"How about a hot drink? I've got a special formula from my family, which helps me to sleep when I'm upset. Trust me, everything will be fine," I comforted. "Sit back on the sofa and relax. I'll play you some light music."

Danny was drinking my herbal tea when I started to play Beethoven's 'Moonlight Sonata'. When Danny had finished the tea, I whispered to him, "Let's start our trip. Close your eyes and I'll bring you to a wonderful place, far beyond your imagination."

My music mesmerized Danny. He found peace and tranquillity. "I can hear the waves," said Danny, "and the gentle breeze is kissing my face. The serene moonlight ..."

Danny opened his eyes. "Oh! Is it a dream? A hallucination?" exclaimed Danny in excitement. "This is great! We're flying over the Yangtze River! Woo-hoo, let's join Beethoven to the moon." The Three Gorges passed him, followed by the Great Dam. Danny could not tell how long he had been flying. He closed his eyes once again to feel the magic.

When Danny re-opened his eyes, he found himself in the playground of an institute. The building looked dilapidated and it was surrounded by ruins. Danny walked inside and realised it was an orphanage for the victims of the Sichuan earthquake. From a classroom came the lovely and joyous singing of young children. Danny reached the outside of the classroom and peeped through the window. The children were all handicapped in different ways. Although they had lost their parents and some of their physical abilities, their stamina remained and their high spirits were indeed touching. Danny was emotionally overwhelmed and broke into tears. A new vision of life came upon him.

"My suffering is nothing compared with theirs. I will complain no more. I feel ashamed of myself," Danny thought. "Another story must begin. From now on, I'll do my best to help those in need."

When Danny woke up the next morning, he was lying in his bed. There was a letter on his pillow:

"I'm the green-eyed rabbit that bit you the other day. It's all my fault. I thought you were trying to hurt my baby and I reacted without thinking. I'm terribly sorry my poisonous venom has caused you so much misery. My herbal tea should have cured your ailment.

Be happy and live well! Goodbye!

Love, neilA

A sudden wind from nowhere blew the letter from Danny's hands to the floor. Through the thin paper Danny could see the signature on the blank side – "Alien". When Danny picked up the letter, all the words had disappeared.

New Tales of the Yangtze River

Colin Chung, 11, HKUGA Primary School

Many years ago, two gods named Lo Fat (male) and Man Choi (female) gave birth to three sons. The eldest was called Chang Lai, the middle son was called Yang Hong and the youngest one was called Hoi Lam. Hoi Lam was the most playful of all. Chang Lai and Yang Hong always helped with the housework. Lo Fat and Man Choy were delighted. When Hoi Lam was five, he was assigned to guard the Yangtze River. When he came down from heaven, he was amazed at the scenery. The trees were green and the flowers were blooming beautifully. The water was peaceful; it looked just like a mirror. He played with the fishes and ran around Sandouping, a little town in Hubei province. As a god, he had mystical powers. He led the water to Wuhan and Nanjing, causing terrible floods. However, Hoi Lam did not know that floods could cause trouble. Therefore, he continued playing with the fishes and trees. Of course, he sent more floods to the cities like Shanghai and Chongqing.

The people in those cities were very frightened. Everyone had to get to higher ground. Unfortunately, not everyone could do it. Some pregnant women and elderly people were killed by the flood. Some young men died trying to protect their families or friends. The people who got to higher ground could not grow crops, as the ground was not fertile enough. Some brave people tried to dive in the water to find survivors but they failed. When Hoi Lam came to visit Wuhan and saw the mess, he was very worried that his father might punish him, so he tried his very best to give the people food and save the survivors.

* * *

Things got worse when it started to rain heavily. The water level increased a lot and the people grew more terrified. Hoi Lam thought of more ideas but they were likely to fail and make matters worse than before. Soon, the people started to pray to stop the mess, and this time it was Hoi Lam who became upset; he lamented in despair.

* * *

Usually, gods only help humans if the humans are desperate and this time they were. When Lo Fat heard their cries and prayers, he did not feel bad, but after he realised his son had done it, he paced around furiously. Man Choi cried and cried, her tears making the Yangtze River salty. Lo Fat sent Chang Lai and Yang Hong to settle the matter. Chang Lai and Yang

Hong were astounded to see the human world and totally forgot about the mission they were supposed to accomplish. Instead, they travelled around China, to places that were not affected by the flood like Hong Kong, Beijing, Tianjin and Macau. The people who were affected by the flood started to panic. Many were dead. Hoi Lam knew that his father knew the flood was his fault, but no one came to punish him. He sighed in relief. Meanwhile, Chang Lai and Yang Hong were visiting The Peak in Hong Kong. They passed near a school where someone was giving a lecture about keeping your promise. Chang Lai suddenly remembered that they were supposed to go to Sandouping to punish Hoi Lam!

Lo Fat was very annoyed and disappointed. All of his sons had failed! Man Choi was about to jump off a cliff when Lo Fat had an idea. He stopped his wife and descended to the human world. Hoi Lam was easy to find, but the other two were more of a challenge. Chang Lai and Yang Hong tried to find their father to apologise, but they were lost. Lo Fat used his powers to summon Chang Lai and Yang Hong, he told them to find a way to stop the flood or else they would have to stay in Sandouping forever. The young gods tried not to get worried, but they could not.

Every day, they thought of everything they could think of. Hoi Lam wanted to escape, but Chang Lai said someone would recapture them. They thought of helping the people, but that was not enough to stop the powerful flood. Soon, the dry season came and the flood was over. The brothers were overjoyed. However, a terrible drought followed. There was no electricity. The people had to travel to the sea to get water; they also had to filter the seawater to get a drink. Their lives were hard. Yang Hong was exhausted because he had to help to take the water from the port to Sandouping, which was a long, tiring and unpleasant trip. The ground was starting to harden. Everything was dying, including humans and other innocent creatures. Who knew it was all the fault of the gods? Very few people knew that. The deaths were unpredictable. The deaths made everyone's heart sour. Everything was lifeless, not a single laugh could be found, only sad cries of the people.

The little gods got together and had a meeting. Something had to be done or else the human race would become extinct. They finally decided to sacrifice themselves to make a huge dam. They turned themselves into a dam and controlled the rushing water and generated electricity for humans. The people thought it was a miracle that the electricity started again, the floods stopped and the people were protected by the dam.

Lo Fat expected his sons to deal with the problem for a few years, but it seemed that his sons had been much faster. He set off to find them, but all he could see was a big and beautiful dam standing in the sunlight. He realised that his sons had turned into the dam and was gone forever. Therefore, he named the dam Three Gorges Dam. The people cheered. Everything was better. Flowers bloomed, the grass was greener than before, fish swam peacefully in the ponds and lakes, bees and butterflies flew around and the people were happy. Man Choi did not weep for her sons, she knew that her sons had fulfilled their purpose and she was proud as a mother could be. Everyone lived happily ever after.

The Secret of the Phantom Tomb

Ethan Joshua Luk, 9, St. Paul's Co-educational College Primary School

As the sun rose from the mountains, the same old man would push his rickety carriage along the streets of Wuhan. He would hum and whistle leisurely. As he strolled down the pavements, a colossal wave of people would rush to his carriage with eyes full of bewilderment and hope. Every day, the story was the same from the old cart-pusher: another archaeologist missing after risking his fragile life at the horrific Phantom Tomb. Some would break down and cry until their eyes were swollen, some would stare at the old cart-pusher in disbelief and walk back to their houses disappointedly.

That was the story that my grandma always told me, which I could never understand. It was always a mystery to me. There was only a beginning but no ending or conclusion. Every night when I lay in bed, I looked at the sky full of glistening stars and wondered about the ending of my grandma's story. No matter how hard I thought, I still couldn't find out the missing piece of the puzzle. I always thought: why did the story have no ending? Just then, an idea swooped into my mind as fast as lightning. I decided to explore the missing piece of the puzzle.

The following day, I visited my grandma. I plopped down on her lap on the rocking chair, enjoying the fresh air and green shrubs of foliage.

I curiously asked her, "Grandma, what is the Phantom Tomb like? I want to go and explore! Like Christopher Columbus!"

She stared straight into my eyes and said fiercely, "You are prohibited to go to the tomb! It is extremely dangerous, ghosts and evil spirits will try to murder you! People don't dare to go near the Yangtze River because of this malicious and sinister tomb. The tomb is right on the other side of our village. Luckily, we have the Yangtze River to protect us, or else we will all die."

Grandma didn't manage to convince me. I guess she had forgotten that I was already nine years old! So, the courageous and the gallant me – Ethan – decided to go to the Phantom Tomb with my sidekick, Ringo the Rambunctious.

I immediately called Ringo the moment I went home. He was excited and agreed to go and explore this Phantom Tomb with me.

We met each other at the Wuhan pier. The sun was about to set, and we were pumped up for the amazing adventure! We got ourselves some snacks, sleeping bags, a pen and a notebook. The tomb was just on the other side, and it took us 50 minutes to cross the Yangtze River.

We arrived at the massive mountain where the tomb was. What a stunning sight! We both gasped in astonishment! It looked so fierce and powerful, like a lion, but our hearts started pumping and pumping. We knew there was no turning back.

We crept up the sandy, filthy stairs. Suddenly, we heard an echo. We looked around, full of fright. We held our hands tight. We knew we had to be very cautious. We went step by step, hoping that we would make it safe to the entrance of the tomb.

Aah, finally! We reached the top of the mountain! We panted and puffed, it was like running a 45km marathon! We were exhausted. A door with gold and silver all over it stood right in front of us. We looked at each other, shudders of nervousness and excitement ran through our bodies. Both of us were thinking the same question – Would we survive? Fate would decide.

As we opened the door, it creaked and croaked. It was full of darkness. We turned on our flashlights and tried to make our way through. It had an eerie atmosphere. We could see figures and shadows dangling in midair. We held our hands tight. Sweat was trickling, and we took miniature steps. We were so scared that this was the ultimate end of our lives.

I stuttered, "Ringo, I think we won't last long. The ghosts have found their long awaited prey."

Ringo timidly nodded his head. He couldn't stop sobbing. I knew I had made a catastrophic mistake. Our lives were about to falter. We huddled together and cried.

Suddenly, we saw something drifting in the midst. A ghost! We shrieked! Now I knew grandma was correct, I should have just listened to grandma! But I knew we couldn't give up, so we risked our lives by walking a few more steps...

"Oh gosh!" we gasped in amazement. There was a note on the floor. Ringo got the note and read it aloud:

Congratulations lucky one, you have passed the test and have succeeded. You have tons of courage, great old lad. I've been hiding here for many years, the secret is there are no ghosts. The people died because they committed suicide, they thought a ghost would kill them any way. But you went the all the way through and never gave up. Tell the world the secret.

RTP

Our story spread all over the village, the nation and the world. After hearing the story, people were no longer afraid of the Yangtze River and began to use the river for sanitation, water, irrigation, transportation and lots of other things. Not long after, it became one of the most famous rivers in the world.

Ringo and I became famous and we are always receiving star treatment! For two boys from Wuhan, this dream is too good to be true! We also have a new nickname – The Terrific Two.

Oh sorry! I must end there. I need to go for an interview at CNN with Ringo! Bye!

And RTP stands for Rick Terence Po, who was the old cart-pusher at the beginning of the story.

The Jade Dragon

Isabelle Pomfret, 9, German Swiss International School

On the banks of the Yangtze River, there lived a greedy emperor called Chang. He had a long grey moustache that reached the tip of his toes and dirty yellow curling fingernails that clawed the air and made him look quite terrifying.

He was obsessed with every tiny detail. If his moustache had one extra hair, he would execute the hairdresser. If as little as one grain of rice was more or less than he requested, he would throw the cook into the dungeon for a year.

As you can see, he wasn't a very nice person and his kingdom was completely out of control with his people gripped by terror. Since nobody wanted to work for the emperor, he refused to rule the kingdom at all. Thieves overran the villages and disease crept into the land. Basically, everything was a frightful mess.

The emperor had only one servant; an intelligent girl called Li Shuang. She was very clever and often managed to find solutions to the king's 'problems'. If one side of his moustache had one whisker more than the other side, she would pull it off with her chopsticks and so on.

One day, there was a problem she couldn't get around. A jade dragon was stalking the palace, swearing revenge for its great treasure that had been stolen by the emperor many years ago. It hadn't actually been stolen by the emperor, but one of his greedy soldiers who had given it to the emperor for a bag of gold coins. But, as far as the dragon was concerned, it was still the emperor's responsibility.

The emperor told Li Shuang that if she didn't take care of the situation, he would throw her into the dungeon for life. Li Shuang had no idea what to do. She was a servant, not a brave warrior!

She had already tried to persuade the emperor to give up the dragon's treasure, but it just made him more furious, so eventually, she was forced to go and find the dragon.

Through clever hunting and questioning of local peasants, she soon found the dragon's cave. The opening didn't look very comforting with skulls and bones scattered across the floor, but she bravely held on to her white jade amulet, her gold fan and her small bag of food and water. As soon as she entered, a brain-chilling bitter frost swept over her. Her mind went blank and she couldn't think, so she opened up her bag and scooped a steaming pork bun.

Her senses returned and she carefully walked forward. She was now overwhelmed with a tremendous heat bursting from inside her. Swiftly, she reached into her bag for her gourd of icy cold water to quench her thirst.

Fanning herself, she sat on a rock with a crack running down it and what appeared to be a strange red glow coming from deep within. The rock seemed to move and the crack became wider. Li Shuang looked at the rock and saw a dark oval move from left to right. She instantly realised what she was looking at – the giant eye of the jade dragon! Shrieking, she jumped off her 'rock' and backed away.

"Sorry I frightened you," the dragon said.

Li Shuang mumbled, "Excuse me Miss Dragon, but I was wondering if you could possibly stop attacking the emperor's palace ... please?"

Unexpectedly, the dragon burst into tears, sending scalding drops onto the ground. "Would you like it if someone stole your treasure?" she sobbed, her jade green scales trembling across her back.

Li Shuang shook her head in agreement.

"Exactly!" exclaimed the dragon, blinking away her tears. "No one seems to like that emperor anyway. Why don't we just get rid of him?"

Li Shuang was stunned for a moment, but after some thought, she quite liked the idea. "How could we even do that? And what if we fail? We'd both be sent to the dungeon for the rest of our lives!"

The dragon sighed, "What sort of an intelligent girl are you? He doesn't have any bodyguards to protect him so we can ambush him and you can be empress in his place! Easy!"

At that moment, the emperor was travelling along the Yangtze on his imperial barge, decorated with gold and silver. In the corner of his eye, he saw Li Shuang riding on what appeared to be a green cloud. As it got closer, he realised that it was the jade dragon. "Good," he smiled to himself, revealing his rotting teeth.

The emperor addressed Li Shuang. "Servant, I see you have controlled the beast. Congratulations, now you won't have to rot underground. I want you to take this horrible troublemaker and lock it in the deepest, darkest dungeon."

Li Shuang smiled, "Your majesty, I'm afraid that you are being arrested for executing the hairdresser, imprisoning the cook, ruling the kingdom unfairly and stealing this dragon's treasure. What do you have to say for yourself?"

The emperor's eyes grew wider and wider as she spoke. "What!" he shouted, erupting like a volcano and spraying yellow spit all around him.

Li Shuang burst into a fit of giggles. "Guilty, dear leader. You, yourself are to be put in the deepest, darkest dungeon. Be off!"

The Flood of the Yangtze

Jarra-Devi Sisowath, 9, The French International School of Hong Kong

Once upon a time, many years ago, there was a small town below the plateau of China by the source of the Yangtze River. The town was called Kali, which is also the name of a tree that is so strong that villagers have long believed that it would not burn in fire.

Every spring, the melting of the winter snow would make the level of the river rise, creating a flood. But the villagers were not always aware of the rising water so had no idea how to protect themselves from the flood. Two ministers, called Mr and Mrs Reverante, who came to the village from the border of France and Spain convinced the villagers that their huts made of mud and straw should be rebuilt with the strong kali wood. That way, the ministers said, the houses could withstand fires and floods. The villagers agreed because they had so many trees around that even building a palace would not get rid of this huge amount of wood. Sadly, the ministers died of typhus a few years after the end of construction.

In the village was a girl named Alexa. She was the daughter of the two ministers. Alexa was very wise although she was only nine years old. Alexa had shiny blond hair and a lovely smile. On her neck dangled a golden locket that was given to her the day her parents died, a month after her fifth birthday. Alexa believed her locket brought her good luck. She often went to the river to gaze at schools of silvery fish swimming or to read a book on the riverbank while listening to the sound of the water. The sound of the river reminded her of the song her mother used to hum when she was a baby.

During the winter, when it became too cold for Alexa to go out to the river, she stayed inside reading one of the many books her parents left or watching her grandma knit. One cold evening after dinner, while reading **Robinson Crusoe**, her favourite book, given to her by her father, she got an idea of making a small raft with fallen branches of kali tied together with her grandma's special wool. Alexa asked her grandma, "Grandma, do you have spare balls of wool that I can use?" Her grandmother quietly put her hand in her apron pocket and took out four balls of grey wool. "Would these be enough?" Alexa's granny asked curiously. "More than enough," Alexa replied with a slight smile. Alexa took some wool and tied the small branches of the kali tree tightly together. What she made really looked like a raft, much too small to travel to a deserted island like Robinson Crusoe perhaps but big enough to hang her arms around to float. By the end of the winter when the spring arrived, Alexa made so many small rafts that she thought the entire village could use them if they wanted to. But would anyone want to? After all, Alexa's raft was only the size of a small tray. But she was proud of her rafts because they were a product of her activity to beat the winter boredom. Besides, she used nothing but exactly four balls of wool and fallen branches around the house.

One spring day, Alexa was coming home from the river trotting happily through the evening breeze. She entered the house and watched her grandmother knit on a chair, when suddenly, the ground started to shake. Alexa peeked outside through a tiny wooden window of her granny's house and saw a HUGE wave of water coming her way. She quickly grabbed her grandmother's arm and shouted, "Grandma! Grandma! FLOOD!"

Alexa and her grandmother ran out of the house as fast as they could but it was no use. The flood outran them in less than five seconds. Alexa and her grandmother slowly sunk down into the Yangtze, passing curious fish of silver and blue. Alexa held her locket in her hand closing her eyes. When she slowly opened her eyes, she was facing the back of her locket. Something was written on it. Alexa read the tiny cursive letters.

"when water comes, wood swims."

Alexa repeated the words in her head and suddenly remembered the rafts she had made over the winter. She swam up to the surface and saw her grandmother floating on a tiny raft. "Everyone," Alexa shouted, "grab the floating rafts!" Alexa and all the villagers managed to grab a raft each. They hung their arms over the tiny rafts and held on. The rafts made of kali wood and grandma's grey wool floated along the Yangtze all through the night. When the sun rose, Alexa's floating raft stopped at the edge of the dry land. One by one, all the floating rafts came to the shore. Alexa, her grandma and the villagers rose to their feet. They were all wet and exhausted. Suddenly, they heard the birds singing and butterflies dancing over the green vast valley. Alexa hugged her grandmother and clutched her locket in her hands and whispered to herself, "Thank you mum and dad."

Attack on the Yangtze Tribe

Jessica Tang, 11, Singapore International School (Hong Kong)

Roaring water crashed into steep cliffs again and again, making water droplets splatter everywhere forming a miniature rainbow beside the big and monstrous rocky cliffs. Then it continued its long winding journey through this cradle of one of the oldest civilizations, cutting out a great variety of landscapes and spawning a long string of memorable folktales.

Along both banks in the upper areas of the river were steep gigantic cliffs that stretched so high as if they could touch the sky. Few people had the courage and stamina to scale these cliffs; except for the natives and the mountain goats.

On top of one of these tall cliffs was a small peaceful village.

People living in that village were born tough. They had to climb the cliffs in order to do any chores such as grow crops, gather firewood, get drinking water ... even go to the toilet. Juan was a little boy living in the village. He was muscular with dark ebony eyes and brownish coloured skin. Juan was very popular in school and his best buddies were Ski, Feng and Shui. For years, they had a simple and very happy life, until the Japanese invaded China.

As the war dragged on, China suffered many casualties. The government had to recruit more people. Not even peasants living in remote or hard to reach villages were spared. One day they marched into Juan's village and took the males for soldiers and the females for nurses, leaving behind only the children and elderly. Juan was devastated at that time and helplessly watched his parents leave with the soldiers until they vanished from sight.

"Now, Juan. You are the head of the family," his grandmother announced.

"Yes, grandmother," replied Juan and then walked slowly back to his hut. A few days later, a messenger came to his house with the bad news that his parents had been killed in an enemy ambush.

Juan ran up to the cliff behind his house. A sense of grief swept over him like a huge tidal wave. Silent tears streamed down his face. Juan wiped them away and made a promise to himself that he would one day avenge his parents' deaths.

As Juan walked back to his village, he saw smouldering remains of their huts. "Who did this?" shouted Juan, as the rage ignited his bloodshot eyes, to become a volcanic red.

"Juan! It was the Japanese, I heard them saying that they'll bring in more men to flatten this place," replied his grandmother.

It suddenly dawned on him there was no time to grieve. He also knew that this could be the chance to seek revenge. Juan sprang into action and gathered all the children to form a mighty fighting force. They called themselves the Firearms.

Juan stood in front of the team and said, "All right, we are going to defend this village. We have the advantage of the cliffs. We don't have guns and rifles, but we can put the rocks and stones to effective use from high above the cliffs. If the enemy soldiers climb up the cliff, they will be tired. That's when we start throwing rocks and they will be driven down the river!" Everyone roared in agreement and immediately went about making the necessary preparations for battle.

At nightfall, they made a makeshift campfire to keep them warm. They sat in a circle, casting huge shadows, and exchanged stories.

"Juan, are you sure that we are going to win?" Ski asked Juan.

"I'm not sure but we have got to try," replied Juan while he slurped down his soup and then proceeded to send his two buddies, Feng and Shui to scout the area. The two dark haired boys nodded and ran swiftly, disappearing into the dark night.

When the scouts came back and reported to Juan that they had seen two big boats coming in their direction. Juan nodded and said, "Prepare for battle!" Ten children quickly picked up their own weapons and followed the two scouts.

As they got to the edge of the cliff, they heard the Japanese soldiers complaining. "Zuki, how come you did not tell us about this steep cliff! It will take us ages to get there with all our heavy armour," said a Japanese soldier at the front.

"Sorry!" Zuki said.

"Enough blabbering, now climb!" the commander with a sword retorted.

They climbed up the cliff with great difficulty. In the middle, Juan could hear them panting uncontrollably, and that was the signal he was waiting for.

"One, two, three. GO!" shouted Juan. The children threw their rocks down at the enemy soldiers.

Ping! Pang! "Ah ...Oh!" Down they went, one after another until the whole contingent of enemy soldiers fell into the Yangtze River and were never to be seen again. After that, Juan and Ski went to the shore and picked up all the weapons left by the enemy.

From then on, the Firearms had some potent weapons to fight with. Their reputation also grew with time, attracting a lot of praise and many more new members. Taking full advantage of the knowledge of the cliffs, they managed to carve out a zone that was much feared by their enemies.

When the war ended, many folktales telling of their heroism circulated not only in the cliff regions but also far beyond the Yangtze Basin.

In the decades following, the Firearms army gradually died. The Yangtze cliff people honoured the warriors by burying them in a traditional fashion. Big holes were dug high up on the cliff to house their coffins, which are called the Hanging Coffins. That burial method had not been used for hundreds of years, but the cliff people owed their lives to the Firearms army.

Still to this day, there lie the bodies of some of the young heroes who defended the life and freedom of their fellow tribesmen.

Not a Paradise

Justin Mak, 10, Bradbury School

In a cloud above the mountains of China, there lived a snowflake called Little White. She lived in her cloud-city with her parents. Her biggest dream was to go down the cloud-to-ground slide to explore the world. This desire had been born from her many days of looking down at two happy children who lived in a run-down wooden house playing in the snow. She wanted to join in the fun too!

* * *

"It's not fair!" Little White shouted the next day, after her parents refused to let her go down the slide. Little White stomped up to her room, a storm of frustration raging inside her. When she got to her room, her place of aloneness and thinking, she collapsed on her bed and started sobbing uncontrollably.

As tears slid down, an idea sprung up. Little White would sneak out of her house to the slide!

A long line of snowflakes were at the top of the cloud-to-ground slide. Little White trembled with excitement as her batch neared the front. This was it!

"Remember, the slide doesn't go all the way down to the ground, only halfway." A supervisor said, "Once it is no longer underneath you, you can ask the wind spirits to take you wherever you want.

The slide let Little White and thirty-nine other snowflakes down. They could feel the wetness of their cloud upon their faces, cold and fresh. They could see other snowflakes from other clouds, whirling around in the whistling wind. They could hear their own laughter. They could taste their own exhilaration, warm inside themselves.

Once the snowflakes left the slide, many of them asked the wind spirits to take them away, but Little White and some others chose to drift down slowly behind a family's house.

Just as they landed, a boy and girl ran out into their snow-covered backyard. Little White smiled widely. She was finally here! The biggest dream of her life had been achieved!

The children dived into the snow, rolling around. Suddenly, the boy threw a snowball at his sister. It hit her on the back of her head. She shouted something, and then counterattacked. A snowball fight!

All of this, Little White watched, spellbound. She was brimming with joy.

The boy piled some snow up with Little White in it, and shaped it into a ball. The children were building a snowman! Gusts of wind threatened to blow over the snowman, which made Little White look behind her. For the first time, she saw a river. It stretched long, further than her eyes could see. All the snowflakes near the river were muttering: "Yangtze, Yangtze..."

The Yangtze River! Little White had heard stories about it, but she never realised it was right under her home!

Another gust of wind blew, and the snowman toppled over – into the Yangtze River! Luckily, most of the snowflakes landed on leaves, and didn't melt.

Now in the Yangtze River, the few hundred snowflakes began chittering and chattering. They drifted leisurely in the Yangtze River. At first, they only passed occasional houses, and the landscaperemained bleak: whitesnow on blackmountains, but then tributaries began appearing.

The snowflakes, excited as ever, became even more electrified. The tributaries forked off in different directions. Some snowflakes decided to travel on to the tributaries, saying goodbye and being rushed off by the current in another direction. Soon only Little White and a handful of other snowflakes remained in the Yangtze River.

The snowflakes soon saw more civilization. There were small villages with stilt houses built with logs and branches.

Some time later, the snowflakes noticed that something felt wrong. They spread their senses out, alert and vigilant. It was Little White who felt it first. Her stomach felt queasy, and she was unusually cold, like she was severely ill.

"Everybody!" she rasped. Then stopped. What was wrong with her voice? Swallowing, she continued, "Something's horribly wrong!"

All the other snowflakes gasped at the sound of her voice. "This is bad, very bad..."

From a few metres downriver, the snowflakes heard weeping. As they drifted along the river, they discovered the source of the noise was a fish living in the river.

"What's the matter?" an old snowflake asked.

"It's the pollution! Every day, it gets worse and worse. It has killed my family! The humans are almost as bad as the River Devil!" The fish's face hardened with anger.

"So that's what made me feel so sick," Little White said in the croaky voice, realisation dawning upon her.

"Oh," the fish said, eyeing Little White. "I'll bring the herbs up here for you."

True to her word, the fish brought up some seaweed and placed them into Little White's mouth. Surprised, Little White felt a little bit better. As the snowflakes and the fish drifted down the river, they saw more signs of the misery created by the pollution: dead family members and incurably sick babies. It seemed that all hope the river animals had was lost.

With the appearance of more human civilisation as the snowflakes drifted along the Yangtze River, they noticed there were fewer plants and sea animals. The river was filled with dirt, industrial waste from factories and discharges from ships. Nearby, buildings with pollution smoking up were seen. The situation was going from bad to worse.

"How am I going to survive this?" Little White wondered.

All the snowflakes soon became too sick to do anything. The sun was beating down on them harder, and harder. They were all feeling very drowsy, when they had the sensation of floating into the air...

* * *

Little White's eyelids fluttered open and found her parents gazing anxiously at her. "Where am I?" Little White murmured blearily. Memories flooded back to her. The slide, the Yangtze River, the weeping fish, the pollution...

"I'm sorry I didn't listen to you. I now realise the Yangtze River isn't a paradise."

Then she fell back to sleep again.

Jim's Bizarre Adventure

Ko Yuet Kiu, 10, Pui Kiu College

This is the story of how Jimmy, an arrogant boy, turned into a caring young gentleman. Jimmy was learning about the Yangtze River. One day, his teacher said, "We've been learning about the Yangtze River for about a month. I'm sure you've already memorized the books about it because we have read them so many times. Now we are coming to the end of this module and we are going to do a project. I'm sure you have heard about the story of Qu Yuan, the man who drowned himself in the Yangtze River, right?" The students nodded. The teacher then said, "Now I want you to write a new story about him for your project." The students instantly began grumbling. Jimmy was complaining too. He thought this task was hard and began sulking the minute he arrived home.

His mother knew at once that something was wrong and asked, "Sweetheart, what's the matter? You know you can tell me anything." "Oh, leave me alone mum. I'm not your little baby anymore!" Jimmy groaned. "Why do mothers have to be so disturbing?" he thought. "All right pumpkin, but if you need me I'll be right in the kitchen." Then his mother muttered. "Perhaps some chocolate cake will do him good."

Suddenly, a puff of smoke raised through the air of his bedroom, then out of the mist appeared an old man. "Mum, is this some kind of joke? What is this old man doing in our house? Is he our visitor?" "Can't hear you, the chocolate cake is in the oven sweetie, don't want it to get burnt, do we? Wait a minute, honey. I'll be up in a jiffy. Finish your homework!" Jimmy, being a curious boy, asked without thinking, "Who are you?" The old man smiled and said, "That's for you to find out." Jimmy thought, "This man looks like ...Qu Yuan!" After that, the furniture of Jimmy's bedroom immediately began fading.

Not long after, he found himself next to a river – the Yangtze River! To his surprise, the patriotic Qu Yuan was about to throw himself into the river before he was stopped by enemy soldiers sent by the wicked emperor. Before he could flee, Jimmy was caught by the soldiers too. Now he was on shore, Qu Yuan seemed a bit mad about the incident and demanded, "Can't you see that I think life is not worth living? I tried to kill myself because the emperor won't listen to my advice, you ruined my plan! Don't you know that I think life is hopeless?"

The soldiers sniggered and told Qu Yuan they were going to send him to the emperor and get a reward. Jimmy was terrified and warned Qu Yuan that if history was changed, there would be no Dragon Boat Festival in the future. During lunchtime, the wise poet thought of a plan. Qu Yuan mysteriously smiled and told the stupid soldiers, "Don't give me this awful rice anymore! It smells disgusting!"

"Oh yeah," said the captain, "it was not like that before. It's because the man who used to take the rubbish away left his job, and nobody was willing to be the garbage man because of the meagre income. So we have no choice but dump the rubbish in the sea, sorry about that! But we suffer too. We have no fish to eat because they are all polluted. We only eat vegetables now." "You are right, the fishes are not only polluted, they suffer from food poisoning! And yeah, the rice is cooked with the water from the river and is probably poisonous. It's practically inedible. Am I supposed to eat that stuff?"

The soldiers then asked, "My fellow Qu Yuan, so wise and mature, what is the solution to this horrible problem?" Qu Yuan said, "In my memories, I once went to Hawaii. I was sailing that day when I got lost. I saw an island ahead, so I went ashore. I didn't know the island was home to a wise old man, he was famous around the world for his knowledge. Since I met this man, I asked if there was any food or potion to make the dead return to life. He said salt is both nutritious and delicious. It feeds the dead, not only that, one in a million even returns to life."

Meanwhile, Jimmy looked bewildered. Regenerating the river with salt was never taught by his teacher. He was frantically taking notes, hoping this would help him with his "New Story of the Yangtze River" essay. "I really need this for my essay. If I get this all in my notebook, I'll get high marks. I'll get the newest Gundam toy as a prize. Now just do me a favour, go on," Jimmy muttered, "keep talking."

The foolish soldiers, who believed every word they heard, gathered all the salt they could find from the village and poured it into the river, hoping to rejuvenate the fish. Jimmy and Qu Yuan escaped from their guards while they were busy gathering salt. Tragically, Qu Yuan drowned himself again in order not to change history. The fish, already suffering from pollution, could not bear living in a salty condition and swam away. The unlucky ones, who weren't fast enough, died, making the river more polluted than ever. The idiotic soldiers had to move away because drinking water was no longer available.

Jimmy was inspired by Qu Yuan's care for the environment and love for his country. He put down what he learnt in his essay and got a perfect score. His teacher was surprised and rewarded him since he appreciated his effort and creativity.

When Jimmy got home, the scent of chocolate cake was in the air, and when his mother came he murmured, "All's well that ends well." "I beg your pardon," his mother asked. "Nothing, Mom," Jimmy answered. "So what's your problem my dear?" his mother asked. "Forget about it, I was just joking," Jimmy replied. "Then how about some chocolate cake!" his mother asked. "Who would say no?" Jimmy praised and ate the delicious chocolate cake.

The Talking Tree

Leonard Yip, 10, Singapore International School (Hong Kong)

There was once a poor and old fisherman. His name was Xiao Yu. He had always limped quite badly as he walked; the bones in his leg were also visible. Xiao Yu's house was a shabby hut with shattered windows. He always went to the Yangtze River to fish for food. He sailed in his old small boat hoping to catch a large fish. He was too poor to support a family.

One sunny and bright day, the sun dazzling on the surface of the river, Xiao Yu was sailing in search of fish. While he was looking in another direction, his boat suddenly bumped into something hard, it made the wood crack. Xiao Yu abruptly turned around and saw a massive tree with extremely long vines hanging from the branches, growing on a small island. The old fisherman thought, "I don't remember ever seeing this tree!!"

"I am a very special tree and I emerge every hundred years. I know many places where you can find treasures but I speak in a language that nobody understands" said the tree in a very deep voice. Xiao Yu strangely understood what he was saying. Astonished, he hopped off the boat and went on the small island. The tree continued, "You are the only one who can hear and understand me, you are lucky even though you are poor." Xiao Yu almost fainted and had to pinch himself to make sure this was not a dream. The tree spoke again in the same deep voice, "I will tell you where you can find a treasure because you have never polluted the river when you fish, you've never used a net to catch too many fish and you never feel discouraged when you cannot catch any fish either." The tree told him where to find the treasure, which was very far away from Xiao Yu's house and in the city. The tree stretched out a vine, shuffled through its leaves and took out a map, which indicated where the treasure was. Xiao Yu thanked the tree and set off to find the treasure.

* * *

The map stated that he had to sail to the end of the Yangtze River, which was about 6,418 kilometers. On the way, Xiao Yu saw hundreds of poor people living just like him, living in old huts and living off fish. When he got to his destination, he felt exhausted. It took him six months! Xiao Yu found the treasure where the map had indicated. He saw the crystal shimmering in the sunlight. Xiao Yu was on cloud nine, he was dancing around the boat and jumping in and out of the water.

On his journey home, Xiao Yu saw the same poor people holding their bellies and crying of hunger. He felt very sorry for them and gave each of them part of the treasure in exchange

for fish. By the time Xiao Yu returned home, he had helped so many suffering people, he found out that he had very little treasure left but lots of fish.

Xiao Yu really wished to find the talking tree because he wanted to tell him his story, but the tree was not there. Instead, he found a big and beautiful stilt house built exactly where the tree had stood. There was a note on the door that said:

Xiao Yu, you have proved that you are a very compassionate and generous man. This stilt house is for you. Living here, I am sure that you will always be grateful to the big Yangtze River that feeds you every day. You will always remember me. – The Talking Tree

Xiao Yu felt really touched by the tree's words and he thought, with such a big stilt house, he could invite the other fishermen to have dinner with him every night. He would not feel lonely anymore.

The Revenge of the Yangtze Dragon

Michael Chiu Yan Kit, 11, St. Paul's Co-educational College Primary School

A long time ago, back when my grandfather was still a young boy, a terrible flood swept away more than three million people in eastern China. The river that flooded was the longest river in China – the Yangtze. Scientists are still studying that flood, even now, and have finally decided the cause was heavy rainfall.

But, there were still some survivors, who were interviewed by scientists about the flood. My grandfather, who is called Chen, was the first to be interviewed.

He told the scientists the scientific version, but he told me the REAL story about what happened. Now, I'm going to tell the story. So, here it goes...

* * *

It was December 1939. My grandfather, who was 18, and his family lived in Yangtze village, a place which lay unnoticed by other Chinese civilisations, even now. It was like other Chinese villages, but with one difference, this village, which was hidden by the thick bamboo forests, believed in an unlikely creature: the dragon.

Now, I'm not saying that other Chinese don't believe in dragons, it's just that the villagers' beliefs were much stronger. My grandpa said that he and his villagers dump half of the harvest into the Yangtze every 12 years just to please the Dragon of the Yangtze.

But there was one exception.

Cheung, who was 30, the richest man and merchant of the Yangtze village, didn't believe in dragons. "Made-up nonsense, dragons," he used to say. But I digress.

One summer's day, Cheung was on his rowboat with my Grandpa, who was his best friend, when they saw, lying on the riverbank, two meters long, a snake-like creature with fish scales, a big head and mouth with dagger-like teeth, and two horns. Its razor-sharp claws gleamed in the sunlight, and it slowly breathed in and out...

"It's...it's...it's the Yangtze Dragon!" my Grandpa exclaimed. "Oh, what a beauty!

But Cheung shook his head. "I don't believe in dragons, Chen, it must be some new species of lizard or something. In fact, this would give me a lot of money, if I could just find a way to preserve it..."

At this point, my Grandpa got angry. "You mean kill it? You'll bring disasters to the village if you do that! Besides, I'm not going to help you load that dragon onto the boat..."

"I do not believe in this dragon nonsense! And get off the boat if you won't help me," said Cheung.

My grandpa jumped off the boat and ran into the forest, and as he looked back, he could see Cheung trying to load the sleeping dragon onto the boat without waking it.

Cheung succeeded all right. He stuffed it with poison and preservatives then put it into a glass case. Before that, he had taken the eyes out and put them in a jar. "They might give me good luck, even if I don't believe in this stuff," he said to himself as he climbed into the bed.

* * *

But the story doesn't end here, you know.

It was midnight. Cheung's eyes opened. There was a faint yellow glow in the room but Cheung was too sleepy to notice. He was just about to go get some water when he got the shock of his life.

The dragon's eyeballs, which used to be in a glass case next to his bed, were now on the lid of the glass jar!

As Cheung watched, each eye slowly swivelled in his direction, so that they were now staring at Cheung, who was white with horror.

A white mist was starting to surround the two eyes now, slowly but surely, until Cheung was staring at a two-meter long, snakelike creature with fish scales, a big head and mouth with dagger-like teeth, and two horns. Suddenly the dragon roared a terrifying roar, which knocked Cheung from the bed onto the floor. "Oh ghost! Please don't kill me! What have I done wrong?" Cheung pleaded shakily, covering his face with his hands.

"What have you done wrong?" cried the dragon ghost angrily. "You killed the Yangtze Dragon, son of the East Dragon king! I should have killed you earlier, you non-believer!"

"Oh please forgive me!" cried Cheung. "I'll do whatever you say!"

"Ha ha ha!" the ghost of the Yangtze Dragon threw back his head and laughed evilly. "You think it's that easy? I know that deep in your heart, you still refuse to believe in dragons. Unless you prove that you will respect me for the rest of my life, I shall make you suffer... ha ha ha!" and then, the dragon ghost faded away, leaving the two eyeballs back in the jar.

Cheung didn't sleep a wink that night. Just a day later, he received a message that three of his merchant ships were destroyed by a mega-hurricane, which was moving towards the Yangtze.

And then the storm came, and Cheung began to feel the dragon's power.

The mega-hurricane brought in heavy rain. It rained and rained and rained, until the banks of the Yangtze couldn't hold it anymore. The water rushed in, sweeping away houses of the lower Yangtze village.

For a year the flooding continued. The villagers in the upper parts of the village were running low on food, and every day, the storm and the flooding worsened, till Cheung's house was barely left standing in the storm.

Horrified, Cheung looked at the preserved dragon, and suddenly knew what to do.

He took the preserved dragon and the eyeballs outside with him just in time to see a giant wave ready to swallow the house. Instantly, Cheung threw the preserved dragon and the eyeballs into the flood and prayed for forgiveness to the dragon.

There was a flash of lightning, and the wave disappeared. The water subsided, uncovering the village. As Cheung watched, the tail of the dragon flicked out of the Yangtze, then disappeared.

Remarkable Find in the Yangtze River

Mihan Rathinde, 9, Hong Lok Yuen International School

Mark Blackmore and Max Richards had been good friends since primary school. They were laughed at when they paid attention to the rocks, minerals and dinosaur names, while other kids at their age played soccer, basketball and with toys. But Mark and Max did not mind. Wherever there was an opportunity for them to learn about dinosaurs, their attention and interest quickly drew them there. They knew each other so well, that they could do things together as a team like the famous palaeontologists of history.

When Mark and Max were studying palaeontology in college in Wyoming, they both were really interested in the finds in Asia. Parasuchus is a crocodile like creature whose fossils are found in India, but some scientists believe Parasuchus could have lived in China too. It was said to be about 2.5 meters long and was about 210 million years old.

When they learned about these prehistoric crocodiles in Asia, they really wanted to find out more. So they went to India. They knew that this was a big risk, but they both knew there would be amazing finds on the way.

The landscape today in India shows how prehistoric animals survived there. Pranhita and Godavari rivers flow to the south of the Bay of Bengal. It is prone to flooding during monsoon season. Flooding can cause many good results for palaeontologists. Flooding can reveal new species and also the history of old species.

The two friends became more interested in Parasuchus the more they found out. It looked like a crocodile, walked like a crocodile, had jaws like a crocodile and lived like a crocodile, but it wasn't a crocodile. Their bones, trace fossils and tracks interested the curious, young palaeontologists. They passed the Lufeng basin in Yunan province, China. Life was not easy, but Mark and Max were very determined.

Eighteen months passed since the start of their expedition. They were tired but knew what they were doing. They decided to take the most difficult route along the Yangtze River passing the beautiful Three Gorges Dam. The Yangtze River is the longest river in Asia and it is more than 6,300km long. They had read about the Yangtze River and the problems related to it during the past 20 years, but when they saw the situation it was really sad for them to see how people suffered, having to leave their villages, and how animals became extinct without their natural habitat. Cranes and Yangtze River dolphins were all gone. Mark and Max thought there could still be hidden wonders in the river. "The climate's changed, the river bed, density of water everything changed. With all these, can there be a new species in the lonely corners of the Yangtze?" They both wanted to find an answer and decided to travel east.

Days, weeks and months passed. Their binoculars worked day and night. The little laboratory in the boat helped them to test the specimens of water, mud and debris. They found nothing unusual until one gloomy morning Max discovered something in the fishing net. They both were amazed. It looked like a crocodile egg! Of course, there are crocodiles in the Yangtze River, but the shape, size and the colour was different. Instead of a regular oval shaped egg this one was circular, the egg was about the size of a tennis ball and instead of a regular white crocodile egg this one was brownish black. Max and Mark were wondering what animal this egg could possibly belong to. They heard crashing sounds coming from the bushes, so they quickly backed up to the boat. At night, they got special infrared gear to see. They went to the same place where they saw the nest, and they saw a crocodile-like creature but it was a bit smaller than an average crocodile and its jaws were more elongated.

By this time they knew there was something really fascinating coming their way with these new findings. Mark and Max made their way to this crocodile cove every day and they found something more every night. One dark night when only fireflies were sparkling instead of stars, they saw one big family of these amazing creatures. Some were lying down while the babies were frolicking around. With many days of effort, they tranquilized a sick animal with a big gash in its limb. They treated the creature first and got its scans and x-rays, before releasing it.

The young palaeontologists were busy in their micro lab on the boat. They were communicating frequently with the central lab in Wyoming. They compared the skeleton, scans and pictures with existing crocodiles, alligators and caimans, but none of them matched. Then Max asked Mark, "Are you thinking what I'm thinking?" Mark said with a smile, "OK, let's match that to *Parasuchus* just for the fun of it." Then they decided to do it and surprisingly it was a perfect match!

They couldn't talk. They knew that this beautiful Yangtze River was hiding many secrets. Well, they had revealed one. That was the most amazing one for the palaeontologists. Their hard work had finally paid off. No one would ever think that they were crazy.

"Prehistoric Croc Rewrites History" The headlines appeared in every newspaper and TV channel. Mark and Max were given a grant from China's Yangtze River Foundation for further experiments and new findings.

Their families and friends together with everyone who wished them success were happy and proud of them. The Chinese government agreed to preserve and protect wildlife around the wetlands near the Yangtze River.

Mark and Max really think that a few untouched corners and shores still might have some exotic wildlife left. So their discoveries along this 6,300km-long river will not come to an end just yet.

Mystery of the Yangtze

Robyn Lee, 11, The French International School of Hong Kong

There once was a girl named Ming who had the most beautiful voice in her village. Everyone who heard Ming sing was captivated by the sound. Every year the Emperor of China held auditions to discover all the new talents in his empire. In order to qualify for the auditions you had to be 16 years of age. Anyone who was acknowledged by the emperor to be talented was showered with gifts and wealth, and brought fame and honour to their village. Ming grew up knowing that it was her destiny to journey to the palace. On Ming's 16th birthday, she went to show off her talent to the emperor and set off on her journey to fame and fortune.

On her way to the palace, she came upon a colossal glistening river with dolphins and fish galore! She immediately knew this was the Yangtze River. The emperor's palace lay on the opposite side of the river. It was evening and the sun was setting but Ming thought she would try to get across the river.

To cross the river she had to pay a toll to the Guardian of the River, a red Chinese dragon who guarded the only bridge across the great expanse of water. The Guardian of the River would ask three questions and she had to answer all of them correctly before she could continue on her journey to the emperor to show him her musical talent. She had been warned that if she failed to answer the questions correctly she would find herself jumping into the swirling waters and spend her life in the sea with the rare dolphins of the Yangtze River. The guardian had seen many youngsters try to cross the river before but none of them could answer the three questions correctly.

The first question the guardian asked was, "What colour is my river?" Ming's immediate thought was "blue" but she hesitated because she suddenly realised that in the different lights of day the river would change colour. So Ming decided to watch the river for a day to see which colour would appear the most. Ming asked the dragon for more time to answer the question and the dragon said that he would give her 24 hours knowing that she was young and being confident that she would get the answer wrong.

That night Ming did not dare to sleep. She noted that the river was black in the dark of night. As the dawn broke, the sun cast a glow over the water turning the water to a bright marigold. As the sun rose in the sky, the water turned to cyan deepening into green in the late afternoon. As the sun started to set on the water the river turned a molten red before becoming grey in the cool light of dusk.

Her time was up and the dragon appeared before her demanding an answer. She told him your river is not one colour but a multitude of colours depending on the light of day. The

dragon was bewildered at how the girl had got the question correct, but he was sure she would find the next one more challenging and back down.

The dragon asked her the next question, which was the following riddle:

“On this path of melted ice
 Many gaze with great delight
 Of their dreams and future life
 On this earth so very bright
 What am I?”

Again, Ming asked for time to answer the question and again the dragon agreed but this time only gave her 12 hours. Ming went down to sit beside the river to think. She was so tired from not having slept the night before that she immediately went to sleep. As Ming was sleeping she dreamt of her mother whose ancestors came from high up in the mountains in eastern Tibet. In her dream her mother reminded her of the stories that she had told her when she was a little girl, of the great river that started in her province and ran through China. Ming woke up knowing the answer to the riddle was the Yangtze River itself. Later that day the dragon appeared in a puff of smoke, and was astounded when Ming again answered the question correctly.

For his third and final question, the dragon asked Ming, “Which mammal lives in a school but learns nothing?” Again Ming asked for more time but the dragon was getting angry and made the time shorter, giving Ming only six hours to provide an answer.

Ming sat on the riverbank to think and heard frantic splashing nearby. Looking down, she saw a baby dolphin caught in the river’s reeds. She waded as far as she dared, in jeopardy of her own life, to save the dolphin. Finally, Ming untangled the reeds and the dolphin was free but just before he left he told Ming the answer to the question, since he was stuck in the reeds he had heard her whole conversation with the dragon. The dolphin said to Ming, “The answer to your question is ‘a dolphin.’”

Ming ran to the bridge and shouted for the dragon to come. The dragon appeared not looking very happy, as Ming had disturbed his sleep. “What is it?” the dragon asked. Ming replied, “The answer to your question is a dolphin”. The dragon was enraged at how Ming had got all three questions correct! However, he had to honour his word and let her pass.

Ming carried on her journey to the palace, impressed the emperor with her musical talents and had a life filled with fame and fortune, but she never forgot her experience at the Yangtze River.

Riddles of the Yangtze River

Sriya Bandaru, 10, Glenealy School

Mei Lin was late for school. "Ma, help me find my coat!" she shouted from her room but her mum couldn't come. Soon she found her coat and came down for breakfast. Just as she opened the door to go, a piece of paper flew in and she read it. It said:
You have five days to answer these riddles or I will take away your house:

1. It whispers, it roars, it blows. It is untamable. What is it?
2. I am a very lazy fellow. All of our kind are. We never get out of bed. What am I?
3. I open my mouth and close my mouth, people go in and come out. What am I?
4. I wake up and come out gloriously. I shine bright, where everyone can see and I leave at night. What am I?
5. I crawl amongst the leaves, I disguise and deceive. What am I?

Once you are done, put all the answers in a bottle and send it down the Yangtze River.

Sincerely, Xi Wang

Horror crept upon her face as she read it. Xi Wang was their house owner and they had forgotten to pay the rent for the past few months. "Why did he ask us to send the answers down the Yangtze River?" questioned Mei Lin. "His house is built right next to the Yangtze River," replied her mum. "So that explains it," she thought. Then she sighed. "Me, Liang and Kylie will have to answer them," she declared. Liang and Kylie were her best friends. They all went to the same school in Nanjing. Just then she remembered about school. She exclaimed, "Hey! I almost forgot about school!" Then she hurriedly left for school.

At school, she met Liang and Kylie. She told them about the note. Soon after school, they started searching. They had no clue where to begin. "Why don't we go to the top of the hill and think about it?" suggested Mei Lin. "Great idea, Mei Lin," replied Liang. So they went to the top of the hill and sat there. "Mmm... first, let's think about the fifth one. It sounds simple," muttered Kylie. "I crawl amongst the leaves, I disguise and I deceive. What am I?" read Mei Lin.

Suddenly, Liang saw something. He exclaimed "Hey! What was that? It looked like a lizard!" "Where? I can't see anything," asked Kylie. Mei Lin shouted, "Maybe it's a chameleon!" "But why are you shouting?" inquired Liang. "Because it matches the riddle perfectly! Just take a look. I crawl amongst the leaves means it lives on trees, I disguise and deceive means it

camouflages itself with its surroundings and that's exactly what chameleons do!" Then Kylie told her to write it down. They thought that one answer that day was enough so they went back home.

The next day, their teacher announced, "Children, tomorrow we will travel to the Yangtze River to study. All you need is a water bottle, a rain jacket and lunch." The same day, after they were dismissed, Mei Lin decided to go to the temple. She asked Liang and Kylie. Kylie could come but Liang had some other work. As soon as they reached there a priest greeted them.

They went to a room. The door of the room was a dragon's mouth. They went in and saw a statue of a dragon. Just before leaving, Kylie said, "Hey, wait a minute, I think that just answered the third riddle. A door opens and closes like the dragon's mouth door. It swallows people when we enter and when we exit it lets us out." Mei Lin shouted excitedly, "Yes, that could be the answer!" She wrote it down. Just then the priest scolded, "Quiet down, will you?" Then he shooed them away.

The next day she woke up early because of the field trip. She saw the sun rise. She thought "Why, it's so beautiful! It's almost as if... Yes! It could be the answer of the fourth riddle, I'll just write it down..." After that she left for the field trip.

Mei Lin and her friends were getting bored with the lecture. Just then something caught Liang's attention. The teacher was still talking about the river. She was saying, "The bottom of the river is called a river bed. It's as if it sleeps all the time." And then she chuckled at her own joke. Liang thought hard to remember the riddle. It was something about a bed. He shook Mei Lin and asked her to give him the note. She did and within seconds Liang had the answer to the second riddle.

The next day school was cancelled as a gale hit Nanjing. Mei Lin was bored. The wind outside went rough and suddenly went calm. Her thoughts were interrupted by a phone call from Kylie. She had the answer to the first riddle! It was wind. It blows strongly and slowly and it destroys stuff too. She wrote that down quickly and put the note in the bottle. After the gale, she and her friends went to the Yangtze River to let the bottle go.

After two hours or so, Ju Long, the trickster, came in laughing his head off. Liang asked why Ju Long was laughing. After laughing, he said, "You were so dumb to believe my trick! Ha ha ha! That note wasn't by Xi Wang. It was only me trying out a trick! I wanted to see how dumb you were." Then Mei Lin asked the question that was troubling her all along, "But how did you get Xi Wang's signature?" He replied "It wasn't genuine. It was just me trying to copy it!" The kids saw the funny side of it and started laughing too. They knew they would be made into a laughing stock at school but they didn't mind. "It was actually fun!" said Mei Lin and they all went home laughing.

The Yangtze Storm

Timothy Yung Ngo Tin, 11, Yaumati Catholic Primary School

Flowing from Qinghai in the Tibetan Plateau to the East China Sea at Shanghai through 11 Chinese provinces is the Yangtze River. One of the most beautiful rivers in the world, it was once like a gigantic sword slicing apart the northern and southern China. Why? And why is it called Yangtze? The ancient story begins on a day when...

A violent thunderstorm was stamping with craze along the Yangtze River. The gale whooshed and howled. Piney trees bent and swung, branches tore off into the air.

On the northern riverbank stood Enchanter Wu, his lengthy grey hair flying and shiny robe flapping in the wind. He opened his palms, pointing to the sky, and thunder rumbled to pain the eardrums. He clutched his fists, lowering his arms, and thousands of lightning stretched down from the sombre sky as if countless lanky fingers were coming down to hook people to the unknown heavens. On the rough waters, a dozen warships went bumping with broken masts and torn sails. The storm was forcing them to the jagged rocky bank. Finally, the entire fleet was sunken and vanished from sight.

From his palace on a mountain top a handsome young man in a bright gown had been watching the enchanter. His inky short hair and his dark round eyes looked prominent on his face. He is Tze, the king of northern China. By this time, a dove flew in and there was a faint sound of music. With a puff of smoke, the dove turned back into the enchanter.

Tze laughed, "Wu, it is you? Did you scatter the Yang army over the extended bank as I ordered?"

"Certainly, my good king," said Wu in a cheerful voice like the dancing melody from a piano.

"And where is the evil Yang?" Tze demanded.

"He is disheartened over his daughter, believing her to be drowned. But she is not," continued Wu. "I have already used my spell to bring her here. She is on her way."

Tze sighed, and his face wore a gloomy look.

"Twenty years ago, when I was still a child, Yang killed my father and took his place as the southern king. My mother escaped with me on a junk cast adrift in this long river to the sea. We were left to our destiny. Luckily, you took us ashore and helped me become the king of northern China. I am very grateful to you. This time, I need your help to take revenge."

* * *

On the clearing at the exit of the dense jungle was a young lady with silky long hair. Her helmet was gone and fine wool uniform in tatters. She was Meili, daughter of Yang. Bewitched

by Wu's magic, she shuffled a long way to the clearing next to Tze's palace. Immediately, Wu transformed her into a heavily coloured butterfly and she flew to Tze's chamber.

Wu broke the spell and turned her back into her human form. At the first sight of one another, the two young people fell in love. Never ever had Tze met such a charming woman, and the man was the most handsome Meili has ever seen. As if both had been enchanted, they held each other's hand with a blissful smile.

Then, Tze asked Meili about her stories. But he was puzzled when Meili said that the old southern king was cruel to his people and only treasured money and enjoyment. Her father General Yang killed the king for justice's sake. Unable to find the king's heir, he had to take the throne. This time, the Yang army came to hunt down Enchanter Wu who the southern people wrongly believed to be evil. Tze only replied that he was the king's son.

* * *

In the jungle, Yang was desperate with thirst and hunger. He did not want to continue because he believed that Meili was drowned. He wanted to wait to join his daughter in the heavens. Then, a faint sound of music wafted to his ears. Without a word, he sprang to his feet, and looked everywhere. The sound stopped and Wu appeared from a thick mist. Yang swung his cutlass towards Wu's face but fell into a spell when his cutlass touched the enchanter, who was unhurt.

Some hours later, Yang's trance was broken and he found himself in the palace's courtyard. Lining the courtyard was tall reddish granite walls. At this moment, he saw Wu standing at the palace's gate with three guards. Enraged, Yang pulled his cutlass out again and ran towards Wu yelling.

"Father, stop!" Meili called out nervously, appearing from a tower.

Yang was greatly surprised to see her alive. Meili hurried to give him a big hug. The old man's eyes were filled with joyful tears.

"Yang!" a voice echoed in the courtyard. Yang saw a figure dressed like a king coming up from afar.

"Who are you? Why did you take us here?" the trembling old man demanded at the top of his voice.

Meili held her father by his sleeve, saying, "Calm down, father. He is Tze, the son of the bad king."

Yang was as elated as sorrowful to find Tze here. He apologised to Tze for killing his father, but explained that the bad king made his people live in sadness. Tze showed his understanding and had actually forgiven Yang when Meili unfolded everything because she was under Wu's spell to tell the truth.

At last, Tze married Meili and became the emperor of China. Yang was honoured as the Grand General. To celebrate peace, Emperor Tze named the river Yangtze, making the name Yang come first to praise his good work to the people.

As for Enchanter Wu, he was made the guardian of the Yangtze River. Today, if you are lucky, you may still meet him along the river which is now like a healed wound marking the power of forgiveness on the map of China.

New Tales of the Yangtze River

William Goo Sze Yin, 9, Victoria Shanghai Academy

Deep in a cave at the top of a mountain by a river with no name, there lived four dragons. They were the red dragon, Nile, the blue dragon, Danube, the green dragon, Amazon, and the yellow dragon, Yangtze. Every day they played together. One day, the emperor flew down from the Palace of Heaven, and saw the dragons blowing out fire from their mouths, burning trees for fun. The emperor was disappointed with the dragons' behaviour, so he pointed his finger at the dragons like a magician with his wand, and magically they were thrown back into a cave and then lots of large heavy rocks closed up the cave, locking them up.

Nile cried, "Oh no! We shouldn't have burnt the trees for fun. Now we are stuck here!" Danube said to Nile, "Don't worry, we'll be fine, as soon as I find a way out of here!" With that Danube charged at the rocks, but nothing happened. "Oh great, now we're trapped. If Danube can't get us out of here, then I guess we're all stuck here forever!" cried Amazon. Then Yangtze, the youngest but bravest dragon, suggested, "How about we all try to move these rocks together?"

Everyone agreed, and they all slammed into the rocks together. The rocks shook, but only some rocks fell, which allowed some light to shine into the dark lonely cave. Amazon complained, "We did manage to get rid of some rocks, but none of us can get out of this not-so-big hole, and we're all tired!" As they were feeling desperate, Yangtze suddenly said, "I can get out, I'm small!" Danube exclaimed, "You're right! And, you're very brave!" So they agreed to let Yangtze go out and try to get help.

Yangtze twisted, turned and squeezed through the hole, but when he came out, he was shocked to see that China was flooded. People were leaving their beloved land, and crops planted were ruined. Yangtze decided to try to stop the flood first before helping his brothers out. He flew around, wondering what he should do. "Oh no, China is flooded. What shall I do? What shall I do? Hmm..." he thought and flew around for a few minutes, then had an idea. He thought, "First, I'm going to move the rocks and free my brothers. Then, I will use those rocks to stop the water by building a dam." And so he flew around China looking for a way to move the rocks.

When he reached a mountain and saw a man shivering and rubbing two pieces of wood, trying to make a fire. Without thinking, Yangtze blew fire out of his mouth and made a fire for the man to keep him warm. The man said to Yangtze, "Thank you, kind dragon. Why are you here?" Yangtze replied, "Because my brothers are locked in a cave and China is flooded. I need them to help build a dam." The man said to Yangtze, "Let me ride on your back, fly to the cave and together we'll move the rocks."

Soon Nile, Danube and Amazon were free. They too were horrified to see China flooded. Yangtze explained to them his idea, and they agreed. They moved the rocks from the cave to the water, one by one, and soon they built a dam. But what about the humans? What happened to them? Had they already died in the flood, and was it too late? Yangtze searched everywhere, and soon he found out where the humans were. The humans were safe behind the dam, rebuilding their houses and planting their crops.

Many days, weeks and months went by, the humans were still safe. But then one day, the largest wave that Yangtze had ever seen was heading straight for the dam, and no one else had realised it. Yangtze quickly went to find his brothers, and told them that a huge wave was coming and not even the dam could stop it. Amazon said to Yangtze, "You must be going mad, Yangtze. This dam is safe and strong, and nothing is able to destroy it!" Danube and Nile agreed with Amazon, but Yangtze said, "Why don't you look at the wave yourself?"

So Danube, Amazon and Nile looked out, and saw a large wave coming. They were horrified by the wave. They had never seen anything quite like that. The wave was dark green and blue, wind and a thundering storm came with it. They panicked and told the humans, who started panicking too, and soon everyone was panicking except Yangtze. He had a sudden idea, but it was very dangerous, and could kill him. He would tell everyone, including his brothers, to flee and go to somewhere safe, but he would hold the dam to try to stop the wave crashing it. When he told his brothers this idea, they all said, "Yangtze, you are very brave, but you can't do this. This is too dangerous for you. We should do it, but not you." But Yangtze insisted. He kept nagging them until they finally agreed.

Yangtze held on to the dam while Danube, Amazon and Nile told all the humans to flee to somewhere safer. Then, when the humans had escaped to safety, the water arrived, the dam shook and Yangtze held on to the dam very firmly, even though he could not hold it any longer. He used all his energy and succeeded in defending the dam, but died of exhaustion. When the water had gone, the humans returned, only to find Yangtze's dead body by the river. They all felt very sorry for him, even the emperor, so they named the river after Yangtze, which is now well known as the Yangtze River. And what about the other dragons? Well, they left. Danube went to Europe, Amazon went to South America and Nile to Africa.

The Yangtze Angels

Zoe Grace Lowe, 11, Marymount Primary School

The Yangtze River has been a grave, a life saver and a source of inspiration. Great minds spent years on its banks. They became famous later, and had magnificent lives. Their legacies survived when they met their ends. But there's one tale of the Yangtze River that has never been told, its heroes never recognised. It hasn't been written or heard. Now, I'll unveil this monumental story. Ladies and gentlemen, the Tale of the Yangtze Angels.

The Yangtze Angels is an organisation. Parts of our tale are missing, erased from history. But I know that it was founded over two millennia ago, by a group of scholars threatened by the first emperor to be buried alive. This was around the time that the emperor, obsessed with national stability, was burning books and inflicting punishments upon the learned. The poet Qu Yuan killed himself when the emperor refused to believe his warning of an attack. He drowned himself in a river. This may be one of the reasons that the Yangtze Angels took the river as their symbol. His friends hated the emperor for this. When he banned books, he only backed up their motives to escape his harsh rule. So, they became the first angels.

These angels travelled China, saving books, disrupting the emperor's plans. They followed their river over all of China. It was their friend and guide. We've never left the water. The banks are our home and headquarters, hence our name. We prevented the emperor from destroying literature completely, and saved many works.

The emperor despised them. He was merciless, sending assassins and mercenaries after them, ordering rogue warriors to kill angels on sight. But they always slipped just out of his grasp, and he never caught them all.

He had all evidence of the angels' existence destroyed. He didn't want anybody to find out about his lack of control over a bunch of mere scholars. So nobody knew except for the descendants of the angels and the emperor himself. But then the emperor swore a few of his most highly ranked officials to secrecy, and told them about the entire dispute. He made it his dying wish that the angels be hunted and destroyed. He even left them a reminder: the Terracotta Warriors. Contrary to many beliefs, they aren't protectors of the emperor in the afterlife; they were modelled after the faces of the Yangtze Angels, and he told his followers that he had etched the faces of the criminals in stone so that they would know what they looked like. So even after his death, the angels weren't safe.

The descendants of the angels and the royal court engaged in a secret battle that spanned centuries. Our foes' thirst for blood can only be satisfied by revenge on the Yangtze Angels. They no longer strived only for the fall of literacy, but also the fall of their emperor's enemies, and so the Yangtze Angels fought back.

Not all scholars were faithful, though. Once, an angel became an official in the court of the Qianlong Emperor, acting as a double agent to convince the emperor to give up his idea of suppressing books. But he became too fascinated with imperial life. Instead, he encouraged the slowly maddening emperor's notions, and helped with the literary inquisition known as 'Siku Quanshu'. His name was Ji Xiaolan.

Other than that case, the angels were loyal. True to our founders' wishes, we've always stayed close to the Yangtze River. The water is our base and lifeline. So the descendants of the court decided to make it the site of our downfall. One time, in the Eastern Han Dynasty, two officials travelled along the shoreline of the Yangtze and founded Fengdu, the ghost city. In this city was Nothing-to-be-Done Bridge. Legend says that when the virtuous walk across the middle arch, nothing happens. When the corrupt do it, the bridge collapses.

The legend isn't true. But this is: the two officials were foes of the Yangtze Angels, and they built the bridge in town because they knew that the angels often passed through the area. They rigged the middle arch so that it would fall whenever something touched it. Before they did this, they'd have a couple of bystanders walk across the bridge safely. When the angels came, they would make the bridge fall. This would give them an official excuse to arrest them. But the bridge never fell. The officials couldn't figure out how. The public decided it was a hoax and the officials gave up. They never bothered us in our own territory again.

Our secret empire was at its prime in the period between 1861 and 1915, during which the Empress Dowager Cixi, a top agent, unofficially ruled.

Then the Chinese empire fell. That is, it was replaced by a government. With no imperial court, the men of the emperor no longer had the means to chase the angels. And with the Westerners there, our heroes weren't what they used to be. Both sides found their power dwindling. Both sides kept a low profile. Both sides couldn't afford to lose any more resources. Things quieted down over the next century.

So why am I telling you this? What drastic event has forced me to publicly announce a secret hidden for years? The last angel over 17 years old has just passed away. The only ones left other than myself are six other children. We're capable, but we're young, and alone. I'm telling you this because we need your help. The emperor's followers will find out sooner or later, and they'll come after us. Once we're out of the picture, they'll start the revolution of their forebears. I wish it were fiction, just an entry in a competition, like you think. It isn't. But those of you with heroic blood will answer the call. I don't think I need to tell you where I am. If you're clever enough to be reading this, you'll find out.



Fiction
Group 3

The Lost King

Aashman Vyas, 11, Discovery College

Memory is merely a manifestation of one's thoughts.

* * *

The weary thuds of the horses' hooves alongside the shore flowed in a string unified harmoniously with the tempestuous trickle of the river outside. He was different. He gazed outside his luxurious chariot looking down at the grooves and hills that delicately composed the world around him, contemplating the situation currently at hand. He had been in these sorts of circumstances before, only to get banished and even rejected by his own family. **Why would my dear king send his best men to escort me to his palace? Surely it must be important if the King needs me so much as to capture me in such harsh mannerisms to simply take me to his castle. I could do that myself.**

The chariot was travelling on the edge of the hills that loomed of the Yangtze River. The terrain was exceedingly bumpy and this was not a comforting fact to the coachmen knowing that they had to get to Chengdu by following the Yangtze River before nightfall and it was raining marvelously.

The white noise created from the flowing of the river, made a surge of sleepiness come over anyone listening to it.

Without disruption, his head swung back and he fell asleep. In his mind, he was looking out at an ocean with leaves of sunlight shimmering in the vast blanket of water that lay before him. Before he could do anything, he whipped to the next scene. This one was a bit different and peculiar. A warzone. Many soldiers fighting, losing lives every second. War cries could be heard from a mile away. Then the next scene. It was a man in red robes, being crowned. It seemed as if this was so familiar that he could predict what would happen next.

Unnoticeably a sort of natural melody started to intrude on him, slowly and painfully melting away his senses. Flashes of white echoed through his vision. He started to hear a faint utterance that gave away to a ghoulish voice. **Wake up. You know enough.** For the first time in his life, he was scared. "Wh-who are you?" he tried to whimper. **You must wake up.** With a dark change in tone this time. **You do not know.**

His mind woke up back in the chariot, rocking gently to the vibration from the soft thudding of hooves. "Where am I being taken?" As he peered across the Yangtze River from his chariot, he saw the palace. And the answer became apparent. **I am different and I am the king.** And I need to wake up. He then surrendered to the world and lay back, thinking.

After some time, he woke to a hard knock. A head protruded through the curtains that were keeping the rain out. "Are you alright your majesty?"

"Yes" he replied. **I'm more than all right.**

"If you need anything, just ask one of the coachmen." The young guard said. The guard took his head out of the curtains and turned to the guard sitting beside him. They were both on an elevated stand at the back of the chariot looking over the compartment the "guest" was in.

"Does he remember anything yet?"

"No, while I was inside it seemed as if he felt quite awkward. Warrior Dao must have hit him pretty hard." Said the younger guard. He pulled out a half eaten apple, munched on it briefly, and shoved it back into his pocket. "Nice weather, isn't it?" the older guard shouted over the heavy rain. "It's always like this around the Yangtze River."

The loud voices of the guards outside were a bit unsettling when mixed with the ambient sound of the rain. The curtains protecting the passenger were soaked and water was dripping into the padded abode of the chariot. Over the muffled voices he could make out a person saying: "Definitely. By the way, I do think he should be lynched. A new emperor is due." This puzzled him. **What are they talking about? Are they talking about me?** As soon as that thought occurred to him, white flashes echoed through his head. Again. Over his pain, he could make out an angry voice "Don't say that! Pieces of information might activate his residual memory!"

Everything came towards him. Scenes of his life drifted past him. An imperial palace. A Battlefield. Through all this chaos, one scene stood out. He himself was fighting another warrior. Both of them traded several blows but the warrior landed one his right shoulder. Then the warrior fiercely went ahead to slice his head, missing, but landing a heavy blow. "Remember my name." **What was his name?** It suddenly came to him. **Dao. Warrior Dao.** Slowly, pieces of information came to him. He remembered everything. He remembered several soldiers drugging him, and taking him somewhere. He was the emperor. **I am the emperor.**

Coming out of his trance slowly, he started thinking about what was going on. **I have been drugged and put here.** I was injured in battle by probably a powerful adversary. They must be planning to kill me. The thought sent a cold chill down his body. He started panicking. Looking around his chariot, he started looking around for anything to use to escape. Nothing. The only option left became apparent. He took a deep breath and jumped out of the chariot. As he looked back, he could see that everyone but the horses were fast asleep besides being soaked. He landed in soft grass a bit too harshly. The chariot raced away and soon faded into the distant mist. He got up and brushed his clothes. Stabilizing himself, he started walking in a sound rhythm, heading towards his own castle. Walking on the great hills that surround the Yangtze River.

A Hidden Secret of the Yangtze River

Au Yee Ki, 13, HKUGA Collage

Look down at Tiger Leaping Gorge, how amazing is the rumbling water, finding its way through the rocks. There, far below and away, the water goes to a peaceful lake reflecting every minute detail of the trees on the shore. It is absolutely amazing to look at the quiet, pale green water while the river roars in white just below. Oh, there floats a little black figure of a boat, swaying from side to side, gentle as a lullaby. The soft blue sky, the jade green foliage, the stunning brownish-orange rocky mountain and the colourful water ... Yes, you're right! We're at the Yangtze River.

Well, as we all know, the Yangtze River is the third longest river in the world, with a hundred connected lakes and all other massive numbers making it legendary! But you may not know how this miracle was formed. It all started at the top of the Tanggula Mountains, where the God of the River, Sixiang, lived. He was generous, brave and kind to people. He was very short compared to other gods but indeed he was the one who created the river, all 6,300 kilometres, which became the origin of the Chinese people.

Not long after the river was created, sea creatures of all kinds moved in, including some species that only belonged to the Yangtze River; for example, the Yangtze dolphin, the Yangtze sturgeon and the Chinese alligator. People started gathering around the river and formed different tribes. As the population grew, the land was populated with plants and life. Sixiang loved to watch and help his people with their daily lives.

Far down in Hell, the devils took notice of every single life form; they hated all of them. They thought the river was the most horrible, disgusting and uncomfortable place on Earth, because they were used to and only enjoyed their creepy, cold and dirty world in Hell. So, they mounted a massive assault on all life. They designed a devastating plan for their next move. They appeared around the river, and all of a sudden, the warm sunshine turned into the lonely light of the moon, the dew drops turned into purple damp cold mist, the warm smiles on the inhabitants' faces turned to worry. The devils occupied the river, from the open end towards the ocean up to Jin-Sha River. The jolly population living in their occupied area became slaves of the devils.

Sixiang grew very angry with the devils, so he decided to fight back for his people. Sixiang came out from his home. Firstly, he met the king of the devil's two poisonous snakes, which were each three metres long. They had two sharp fangs, spooky green eyes and were even taller than Sixiang. They almost swallowed Sixiang with a swift bite. Although he was stunned for a while, he took out his sword steadily and killed them one at a time. The two snakes were in charge of the Yangtze upstream. After they died, their bodies lay on the same spot, extending

almost 4,500 kilometres, gradually this area turned into two rivers called the Mekong and Salween. These two rivers running alongside the Jin-Sha became the first world heritage site of the Yangtze River and was called the Three Parallel Rivers of Yunnan Protected Areas.

Sixiang was very satisfied with his first triumph. He carried on along the river until he felt something strange. A huge mountain, about 5,000 metres high, was blocking the way of the Yangtze River. He thought he had made sure that the river was on flat terrain when he created it. After a while, he realised that it was the devils, and it must be the king of the devils because only he had such powers. The king of the devils appeared with a long spiky fork sharpened for killing Sixiang. The god battled the king of the devils for around a year; at last, Sixiang pushed him down with all his might. At the same time, perhaps due to the force of the devil's power, the great mountain split with a crack 30 metres deep creating the Jade Dragon Snow Mountain and the Haba Snow Mountain allowing water to run through. Because the crack was a bit small for the gigantic amount of water, the flow of the water at Tiger Leaping Gorge is abnormally strong and fast.

The death of the king was a huge relief to Sixiang, though he knew those millions of nasty devils would never give up. So, he carried on his fight down the Yangtze River. One day, he found the devils' main camp, and there was no one guarding them. He thought of hiding himself nearby and waited for them to come back. But after he looked around, he thought of a better plan! He changed back into his initial form of god, and then he simply redrew the straight river with a sharp turn on the mud with his little finger. Seconds later, the sharp bend became part of the river. Late at night, the devils started to come back. Devils were evil but they did not know how to swim and they were very small, just about the size of human beings. Sixiang saw around ten to 15 boats of devils, all of them seemed to be lost and confused because they had not seen this section of the river as it was supposed to be clear and straight. Sixiang took this opportunity and exhaled a small puff of air and almost immediately, great waves and wind started splashing and howling. Without defence and warnings, the little boats broke apart and the devils all died. And this bend of a 180 degrees, turning from south towards north, is the first loop from the very beginning of the Yangtze and now people call this 'the first turn of the Yangtze River'.

Sixiang had been fighting against the evil devils his entire life and he had almost succeeded. Unfortunately, the creepy little devils had evolved into humans like you and me. They have not stopped damaging the Yangtze River. Precious animals brought to the river began to become extinct, leaving us forever. The devils all knew that animals were there to maintain the balance of life on Earth.

And it was those devils that made the Chinese alligator, the finless porpoise and the Chinese paddlefish critically endangered or even extinct. The Yangtze River is the only place besides the United States of America that is home to some of these species. There are new threats to the river such as the Three Gorges Dam. However, Sixiang had used up most of his power and energy on fighting the devils.

We should all join in and play our own part to help Sixiang in saving the Yangtze River. Indeed, we should extend our care for the environment to all other rivers and oceans for the numerous lives that flourish in them.

Free

Catherine Wang, 12, Chinese International School

They say that death happens in an instant. Its unfelt wind brushes past coldly, snuffing out the final dregs of warmth from fading light. It steals the senses, numbing the crisp tinkle of bells or the gentle stroke of a hand, kneading all feelings into a monotonous, dumb roar. It drowns the surroundings in dark, unknown silence, leaving the fleshy shell of man quiet, blind and unknowing.

But for me, death did not come at once, terrifying yet ingratiating. It lingered, taunting me, battering my mind between a world of pulsing white nightmares, perhaps of the past, and the gritty, sharp visions of reality. I begin to doubt my eyes. Was the cage-like room truly lined with grey or was this only the salty, tangible sorrow staining my vision? Were the strange forms now by my side merely dreams or solidly warm bodies clutching my calloused hands, gazing at me with steely eyes?

"Tell him a story." A girl, who stands no taller than the squat metal machines that line the walls, speaks. Her young face, a shade of yellow tan, is already creased with years of work, framed by a mop of wild black hair. There is almost a liquid calm in her voice. "You remember how much he liked telling them, listening to them. Come on, **baba**."

"No." A man this time speaks, his reply short and stoical, but his eyes are watering. The man resembles the girl, but with a receding hairline and a mouth of crooked, canine teeth. His shoulders droop and he shudders, his voice wavering. "He doesn't r-remember, anyway – right Doc?"

Another voice butts in, this time in a mellifluous, positively saccharine tone oozing with authority. The doctor's face is lined with a pedantic superiority as he shakes his head in my direction. "Concussion is a tricky one. He wouldn't be able to recall anything from around the time of the incident. Honestly, it's a miracle he's alive. Damaged, but alive." His volume drops slightly. "He may not be for long."

The girl turns around to face her father, her expression an indecipherable, strong mask. "Then tell **yeye** about everything he's gone through. He has to know before he goes."

A lady beside her touches her arm lightly and draws out a tired, rattling sigh. They share the same eyes: hollow black, lined with brims of tears. "Are you sure, sweetie?"

"Yes." The girl by their side remains stubborn and decisive. "I'm sure. Tell him his story, **baba**. Tell him now."

Her father sighs and sits down on a rickety plastic chair, so chipped and pale it looks fit to crack under his bulky mass. There is something about his presence that seems to trigger something inside.

“You are **Li Qiao Long**,” he begins, wringing his hands. “And you are in Sandouping, Yiling. It is 1999, the year of the rabbit. This is your story.”

* * *

“You have always loved the river. It was the source of your livelihood, your voice. There was something about the ceaseless rushing current, the hustling whisper of the water, which made you happy and carefree. With your wife, you brought up your child by the river, nourished by the fresh air and the tangy fish. Over time, with education, food, water and care, your child grew up to become an engineer and had a child of his own with a lady he loved. He, or I, did you proud.”

“But those times were not the easiest, nor were they the best. Gradually the serene boating port that you relied on for business was blown up to massive proportions, replaced by huge steam-churning liners and bustling markets. Industrialism, they called it. To add to that, your wife, **Ma Gui Hua**, a lovely lady with an easy smile, was tormented by sudden, thumping pains in her chest. It made broiling red fish, or cooking for that matter, near impossible, and sometimes left her in shuddering fits. With great reluctance you took her to see the doctors.”

The silence that follows seems to solidify in the room, mixing in with the flecks of dust outlined like slow-moving birds in the dim sunlight.

“When she died, there was nothing anyone could do. I was there with you. She simply exhaled and passed on like the peaceful jasmine flower for which she was named. The doctors tried to explain that cancer was something that developed over time, but you wouldn’t listen. You let your sorrow consume you as the most important piece in your world faded away.

“The government decided that it was time to build a dam for the **changjiang**, to provide hydroelectricity and protect the cities from floods. It was to be named the Three Gorges Dam, for the three valleys of which the waves flowed through. You were furious. It felt that the river was your freedom, your right, and it was being retained and harnessed by their manipulative power. The design would mean that your home would be knocked down for room, and thousands of souls relocated to the nearby, more urban areas. Despite your wisdom, your endless petitions and arguments, they ignored you. The dam would be built, they said. It would be the best for the people. The party always knows what’s best.

“When you found out there was a huge demand for workers, you were appalled. There was no way that you would help construct the thing that would be constricting the very essence of your existence. But they made you work on the dam, in the end, because there were so many hands needed, tens of thousands of men. Oh-h-h-”

The man, my son, suddenly starts to cry, as if it was a strange action entirely new to him and he was just discovering how. It is a while before he continues.

“Nobody knew exactly how you fell. Just one second you were on the scaffolding, and the next you were deep in the water. Luckily, the people nearby were able to fish you out, though you suffered serious head injuries. They were doubtful about their actions, because they were certain that it was only a corpse that they had rescued. But they brought you here only to find out a weak pulse still beat.

“We came and we comforted. There is nothing we can do about the dam, but you will always love the river.”

* * *

I snap out of my reverie, my ears still tingling with the sharp timbre and pace of his voice and his tale. Is it true? Have I just heard my name, so alien and unrecognizable to my muddled mind?

One word that I can still not place resonates in my head until I can stand it no longer. My throat, like a key turning in a rusty lock, creakily opens.

"Free-dom," I groan, startling my family, feeling the soft taste of the word against my lips. Like honey, it beckons to be sung again. "I – freedom!"

The girl comes over and strokes my wrinkled face, each line running like a deep crack, distorting my features into a vast, dry canyon. "Don't fret, yeye," she whispers. "Don't be scared. We will be here. You can be free."

They say that death happens in an instant. Its unfelt wind brushes past coldly, snuffing out the final dregs of warmth from fading light. It steals the senses, numbing the crisp tinkle of bells or the gentle stroke of a hand, kneading all feelings into a monotonous, dumb roar. It drowns the surroundings in dark, unknown silence, leaving the fleshy shell of man quiet, blind and unknowing.

And as I close my eyes, for the first time I can remember, I tilt my head up and smile.

Act Now!

Chan Ngai Lik, 14, Pentecostal Lam Hon Kwong School

Everything happened due to a newspaper...

One sunny holiday, I stayed at home and wanted to enjoy a comfortable morning. While I was reading my favourite book, **How to Protect Our Environment**, my wife, Isabella, suddenly called me.

"Oh my God! Kitson, come quickly! There's big news!" I went to the bedroom quickly and when I entered, she gave me a newspaper and said excitedly, "Look at this! A time travel machine will be invented within 20 years!" Well, my wife was an inventor, so she was very interested in inventions. But I am not!

"Oh dear! You called me so urgently just because of this?" I said in an impatient voice.

"What do you mean? Don't you think this is a big surprise?" she said loudly.

"Certainly not!" I replied. While we were arguing about the time travel machine, our son, Leo, was woken up due to our resounding voices and cried loudly.

"Oh my goodness, little Leo has woken up! He must be hungry. You sit here and read the newspaper. Then you'll know just how amazing the time travel machine is." Isabella then left to take care of Leo.

I read the newspaper and found news that was far more interesting than the time travel machine. The title of the article was 'Dragon Appears in the Yangtze River'.

Ah! I've forgotten to tell you what my job is. Actually, I am a doctor who engages in environmental protection. I first went to the Yangtze River when I was 15 years old. At that time, the Yangtze was very beautiful and clean because there was less pollution and fewer people. But in recent years, many researchers have pointed out that the pollution problem of the Yangtze River is becoming more and more serious. Waste materials and water produced by factories are poured into the river. While people keep doing this, they are killing our 'Mother River'! I wanted to go to the Yangtze River again but I had too many jobs to complete. While I was thinking about this, Isabella came back. She saw I was reading the article on the Yangtze River and asked me, "Do you want to go there?"

"Yes, I do. But Leo has just been born. I need to take care of him," I said sadly.

"Don't worry! I will look after him. Just go!" Isabella said.

"Thank you, honey," I said and then kissed her face softly.

"When will you set off? I need to pack for you," Isabella said.

"Then pack for me now. I will buy a ticket for a flight tomorrow." Isabella gave me a bitter smile and then went to pack for me.

The next day, I started my journey to the Yangtze River. At first, I was looking forward to seeing the beautiful views and rare animals of the Yangtze. But when I arrived at the river, I was totally disappointed. The pollution was far more serious than I'd imagined. In fact, the river was so dirty that marine life could hardly be seen because so few could survive the dirty environment.

I then made my way to the upper reaches of the river. I found that there were only a few trees left there. In the eyes of human beings, trees are very useful things. Carpenters can make lots of pretty furniture with wood from felling the trees, and after that, people can have more space to build factories or do other economic activities. However, after doing all these 'useful' things, humans need to bear the consequences. After immense deforestation, the flooding problem of the Yangtze River has become a lot more serious than in the past. Added to this problem is the one I mentioned earlier. Factories pour filthy water and materials into the Yangtze River, and the marine life dies or becomes poisoned due to the dirty environment. If people eat them, they will get food poisoning. If humans continue to do this, they will kill themselves one day! See! The Yangtze River was angry too! She was roaring ... Wait a minute! The Yangtze River could not roar... Then, what was roaring?

Suddenly, a huge creature came out from the Yangtze River. It looked just like a dragon. Oh, I must be too tired. If not, why was my mind playing tricks on me? "Kitson, come here!" Oh my God! I must be sick! If not, why could I hear a huge creature calling me? "Hey! Don't be so impolite! I am calling you and you shouldn't go away!" Oh my God! It's true! There was a dragon in this world and he was calling me. What a big surprise! The dragon seemed to be tired of calling me. He flew near me and said loudly, "Kitson, can you hear me?"

"Certainly I can hear you, Mr Dragon. Also, if you lower your voice, I will be able to hear you more clearly and comfortably," I said as I covered my ears.

"Oh! I'm sorry about that. Actually, I want you to help me do one easy thing. Will you help me?" Mr Dragon said softly.

"It's my pleasure. Tell me what I can do to help you," I replied. I felt the dragon wasn't as cruel as I thought. Mr Dragon looked very happy and said, "Thank you very much, Kitson! Then, please get into my mouth." Well, forget my words! A dragon was the most savage animal in this world!

"Err... Mr Dragon, if you want to eat me, you can just open your mouth and then swallow me! You don't need to ask me!" I said furiously.

The dragon looked troubled and answered, "Trust me! I'm not going to eat you!" The dragon looked pitiful. Sigh! Leo, my son, you must listen to your mother, I thought. Isabella, don't miss me. We could see each other in paradise.

"Open your mouth and let me go inside!" I said. The dragon smiled and then opened his mouth. I closed my eyes and then rushed into his mouth...

"Hey Dad! Dad! Wake up!" I opened my eyes and saw a young man hit me lightly and call me Dad...Dad? Wait! Leo was just born this year. He didn't know how to speak! I asked the young man, "Who are you?" The young man looked troubled and said, "If I say that I'm your son born 20 years ago and the dragon is a time travel machine, will you believe me?" The time travel machine! It was really invented within 20 years, just as it said in the newspaper. And this young man looked as handsome as me.

"I trust you, Leo – my son," I said and then gave him a hug. Next I asked him, "Why have you come to me?"

"Look outside and see the state of the Yangtze River after 20 years. Then you'll know the answer," Leo said. I looked outside and saw a river which was dark in colour. There

was no creature around or in the river. The environment was deathly silent. Was this our 'Mother River'?

"Isn't it terrible? This is the fault of human beings. They didn't stop polluting the Yangtze River so the river became dark in colour and all the marine life died. They didn't stop deforestation so flooding occurs more frequently and seriously. Many people have died due to flooding. They tried to solve the problem and built many dams but this destroyed the ecosystem as well as the cultural heritage. After all the dams were finished, many people had already died or moved away from the river. If humans hadn't felled the trees, flooding wouldn't have become so serious and far fewer people would have died," Leo said sadly.

"I know all these things. I know one day this will happen. But it has all happened too fast," I said sorrowfully.

"No! It's not fast. You still have 20 years to change these things. Please! Save the Yangtze River and let your descendants see the original Yangtze River!" Leo said.

"I will. And I will ask all humans to do the same!"

"Err...Sorry sir. I don't want to disturb you but it's time to go. You need to meet your dad in the future at seven o'clock," the time travel machine said.

"If I arrive late, will you be angry?" Leo asked.

"Certainly I will!" We laughed together and then started to go back to our own century.

When I returned to my century, lots of reporters were waiting because they had heard that the dragon appeared here. "Good Luck, dad!" Leo said.

"What do you mean?"

"You'll know soon." I walked out of Mr Dragon's mouth after that. And after a few seconds, Leo went away and I finally understood his words when all the reporters ran towards me...

The next day, all the newspapers in China had the same front page and the headline was "New Tale of the Yangtze River".

Ming Ming

Charmaine Au Yeung, 12, King George V School

Ming Ming’s heart raced like thunder as she jolted up awake at midnight. As expected, the mighty typhoon reached the small community of wooden sampans clustered near the trading docks in the Yangtze River, waiting for the storm to pass.

Ming Ming’s deep and warm, coffee coloured eyes scanned her family’s small sampan. Her eyes settled on the crack of two curtains that led to the front of it. Ming Ming could see small wicker baskets her mother had laid outside filled with salted fish, “thousand year” eggs and rice – tomorrow’s dinner. As far as she knew, their dinner would not survive the storm if they were outside.

Taking a deep breath in, Ming Ming opened the curtains.

“If mother can do this, you can do this.” Ming Ming told herself in a series of rapidly spoken Chinese. Pacing herself, she grabbed three baskets and dashed back into the inside of her sampan.

Ming Ming exhaled sharply as soon as she reached the comfort of her dry home. Her cloth dress stuck to her body, the water acting as an adhesive. Her shoes had dark spots in random places, like ink being dotted on a piece of paper. Grabbing another dress, she changed into it, feeling the stitches scratch her body, making it itchy. Ignoring the discomfort, she slowly braided her damp hair and tied it off with a strip of cloth.

It was one of those moments where Ming Ming wished that her father hadn’t died.

You see, Ming Ming’s father had been a wealthy merchant, selling an assortment of fish – salted fish, cod – You name it.

But everyone’s life had to end. You see, her father was well-loved by almost everyone but when he had died, Ming Ming and her mother had lost everything – money, food, and even respect.

It was as if her father had been a firecracker whilst everyone around them had been snails, afraid anything as loud or as big as a battle. Once her father had “exploded”, they didn’t have to respect any of its descendants like Ming Ming and her mother.

Ming Ming pushed her thoughts aside as she yawned loudly. It was already past two in the morning as Ming Ming laid onto a stuffed burlap sack – her mattress. When Ming Ming finally fell back into her slumber, nightmares came to haunt her.

* * *

So, there was a man running through a narrow alleyway by the sea alone at night. Hiding among the shadows, another man quietly stalked him, tip-toeing to avoid the bamboo lying on the ground. In the moonlight, something glinted in the man’s hand. As he stepped out of

the shadows, you could see part of his face: cruel eyes and a mischievous smile. With his free hand, the man grabbed the other man as he thrust the shiny object forwards.

The nightmare ended there.

* * *

Ming Ming's head was throbbing with pain as her mother softly patted her awake. Groaning, Ming Ming rubbed her temples as she stood up. After washing her face with a bucket of water, Ming Ming sat down for breakfast: A bowl of rice. As they were eating, Ming Ming heard the sound of heavy footsteps pounding the boat. Suddenly, a man burst into Ming Ming's sampan. His entire face was covered by a large cloth pouch with holes for his eyes and in his hand, he held a knife. Ming Ming came to an agonising realisation: The man had come onto their boat to kill someone.

As he brought down his knife, Ming Ming and her mother dodged his strike. Unfortunately for them, the man didn't give up as he brought out a bow and arrow. As Ming Ming crawled into a corner, her hand brushed against a rough surface: A heavy rock. Reacting quickly, she threw her rock just as the man reached for an arrow. Ming Ming prayed that the rock would hit the man before he could get the chance to shoot.

Her prayers were answered.

The rock managed to hit the man on his foot. Howling with pain, the man withdrew and limped back to the dock.

* * *

As midnight approached at the speed of light, Ming Ming laid down on her rough burlap sack. She couldn't stop thinking about how the man came on to her family's boat armed and ready to kill. It didn't seem coincidental at all. **Was he the man who killed my father?** Ming Ming wondered. As she laid onto her side, Ming Ming felt the urge to run off to find out about the Mysterious Man. And since she couldn't sleep, it seemed like an awfully good idea.

Tugging her slippers on, she grabbed a cloth shawl and headed outside.

* * *

Thirteen Years Later

It was half past three in the morning as Ming Ming tucked herself into a warm, soft bed. As a Twenty-Five year old, you were easily distracted by your surroundings: Men, Silk Garments and Money.

But Ming Ming was different. She had discovered the man that had tried to kill her and her mother. His name was Zhang Li. He was also responsible for her father's death. Now, he was dead after Ming Ming told the Emperor about how she found out. In return for her services, the Emperor had given her money and a place to live in the safety of the Forbidden City.

Ming Ming was also appointed as the Emperor's head strategist.

* * *

Nowadays, her soul can be found lingering around the remains of her Sampan, touching the pieces as they bring back memories of when she was alive.

New Tales of the Yangtze River

Darren Leung Chun Tao, 15, St. Joseph's College

“This is precisely the place where the ancient poet Qu Yuan jumped into the Yangtze River to commit suicide, as a form of protest against the corruption of the era, after learning of the capture of his country's capital. Since then, people eat Chinese Zongzis and hold the dragon boat race at Mid-Autumn Festival to commemorate his death. Therefore, we can see how loyal Qu Yuan is towards his country. I myself treat Qu Yuan as a model. To describe the greatness of Qu Yuan in mere words would be like bottling the multitudinous sea into a jar...”

Andrew frowned at the tour guide in distaste. What a boring girl! He crossed his arms and continued to stare into the howling waters, ignoring the constant droning of the tour guide. History had long been his least favourite subject, and although he had heard of the myth of Qu Yuan, he refused to believe such a ridiculous story. Surely, no one would do such a stupid thing! Andrew began to wonder why he had followed his mother's advice and joined this trip to the Yangtze River.

Suddenly, something attracted Andrew's attention. A faint green light seemed to be gleaming under the howling waters of the Yangtze River. Andrew stared. Certainly, nothing can withstand the mighty Yangtze River, yet the greenish light seemed so real! Then, without knowing why he did it, Andrew tried to reach out to the light source, slipped, and fell straight into the Yangtze River.

Andrew woke up to find himself in a comfortable but extremely humid room, dressed in the type of old-fashioned coat only found in ancient Chinese operas. The room was small but heavily decorated, with a bed decorated with Chinese dragon patterns and a few wooden crates decorated with Chinese words. There was also a painting of the sea in Chinese style.

Andrew was astounded. He had no recollection of what happened after he fell into the torrents of the Yangtze River. He wondered if he had drowned and ascended to heaven. Or, had he been rescued by some fishermen and sent to this cosy little room?

Andrew went to the window in his room. The view certainly surprised him. Instead of seeing a rushing stream of water and a piece of grassland, Andrew saw a huge block of water and thousands of fishes and marine creatures swimming merrily in the water. The waterbed was covered with stones. The whole sight was magnificent.

Andrew stood in disbelief. He was at the bottom of the Yangtze River, looking at the creatures that lived in its depths! That was certainly impossible! Andrew hit his head. It hurt.

“Thank God! You are awake!” A voice rang behind him. Andrew turned around to see an unhappy-looking man also dressed in old-fashioned Chinese clothes. “Who are you, and where are we?” asked Andrew.

“Well ... I suppose everyone knows me after I fell into the river ... Anyway, I'm Qu Yuan, and we are in my underwater fortress,” said the stranger.

“Qu Yuan? I thought you died thousands of years ago! And how can you speak English?” Andrew queried, confused at the fluent English the Chinese poet displayed.

“Well ... Some foreigners who dropped by taught me English ... But anyway, that’s not the main point. Since you are here, can you please help me save the Yangtze River from being destroyed?” said Qu Yuan.

“The Yangtze River ... destroyed?” stammered Andrew.

“Yes, destroyed by Qin Shi Huang. Qin Shi Huang has been trying to destroy the river and the world since he came down to the riverbed 2,000 years ago. Recently, he found a small cube that is rumoured to be able to cause a great explosion, even greater than that of a nuclear bomb. If we don’t find the cube before him, the Yangtze River and the Earth will be doomed!” said Qu Yuan.

“What? That serious? Then how on earth can I get that cube?” asked Andrew.

“Well ... Actually, I know the location of the cube, but I just chickened out. Can you help me?” enquired Qu Yuan. Andrew agreed.

“Then, let’s go immediately!” said Qu Yuan. Before Andrew could react, Qu Yuan opened the back door of the room, and pushed Andrew into the waters.

Andrew was amazed that he could breathe underwater. He immediately followed Qu Yuan, fighting the fast-flowing currents of the Yangtze River. He eyed Qu Yuan with envy as he moved through the currents with little effort.

After an hour of fighting against the currents, Andrew suddenly saw a small cube with different colours lying on the ground and an ugly man trying to get it from the other direction. Andrew became afraid that the person might get the cube before he did. He redoubled his efforts to get to the cube.

Suddenly, the person spotted Andrew, and instantly sped towards Andrew with a sword in his hand. Andrew retreated in panic, but to no avail. The person was too fast for Andrew. He approached Andrew, his sword slashed down. Andrew closed his eyes.

A sword suddenly came out from nowhere and parried the attack. Qu Yuan had saved Andrew from being sliced. He exchanged furious blows with the person, and then shouted, “Let me deal with Qin Shi Huang. You get the cube!”

Andrew was surprised that the ugly man was Qin Shi Huang, but he obeyed Qu Yuan’s order by advancing to the cube and picking it up. He then saw Qin Shi Huang lose his focus when he was hit by Qu Yuan’s blade. Suddenly, a strong current hurled Andrew towards a piece of metal. Andrew fell unconscious.

Andrew woke up again to find himself at the entrance hall of Qu Yuan’s fortress. Qu Yuan was standing by his side, pointing at a door nearby and said, “We finally slew Qin Shi Huang and saved the world from being doomed! Anyway, when Qin Shi Huang died, the energy transformed into this portal, which will lead you back to the outer world. Or maybe it is due to this cube...”

Andrew took a look at the cube. Each face of the cube was divided into nine grids, each with a different colour. “That’s not a high-tech weapon! It’s only a Rubik’s Cube!” exclaimed Andrew, as he grabbed the cube from Qu Yuan.

Andrew stepped into the portal, the cube in his hand. He heard Qu Yuan stammering, “Rubik? Who’s Rubik?” before he became dizzy and fell unconscious again.

Andrew woke up to find himself on the riverbank of the Yangtze River. The tour guide was still talking about Qu Yuan. Andrew grinned. Everything that happened in the depths of the Yangtze River seemed like a dream...

Then he looked down, and in his hands was a Rubik’s Cube.

The White Emperor: Leanna's Diary

Emma Kious, 12, Zhuhai International School

Day 1

This morning, we began our cruise on the Yangtze River. My dad lent me an old manuscript. Even though I couldn't read it, I enjoyed the beautiful illustrations. Dad told me it was about ancient tales of the Yangtze River.

I am really amazed by the river. Just looking at the water, one could tell a long history was hidden under there. I would love to go on deck and lean against the railing to watch the water.

All I know is that I slipped and fell. The cold water felt like hundreds of small needles whipping my face. I looked in panic but I couldn't see the boat! I started to swim and got to the bank. Once I was safe, I checked to see if my bag was still there. Thank God it was. Inside was this diary, my iPad and my dad's manuscript, all safe. I was cold and started to walk to try to keep myself warm. The landscape around me was different, but I couldn't understand how or why. I just looked at it and finally realised it was the same landscape that was in the manuscript.

The black coat of night had started to fall over the earth. It was getting colder. I knew I should search for shelter. I saw the lights of a village in the distance. I walked towards it. When I got nearer, I realised the houses were so old!

As I entered the village, people began to come out of their houses, looking at me as if I was strange. Then some of them started to run up to me and they bowed down in front of me as if I was a kind of goddess. I didn't know what to do or think. There I was, lost, alone in a world so different from anything I ever knew with those people on their knees in front of me. I felt bad but suddenly, a man in white came up to me and gestured to me to follow him. I did. We walked quite a long time and I could feel hundreds of curious eyes following us. Neither of us spoke a word.

The house we arrived at was magnificent. It was a huge castle made out of stones and wood. I was now freezing. The man noticed. He shouted something and some seconds later, a servant came holding a blanket. She put it on my back and led me to a warm room where a very long table was set with many strange dishes on it. I couldn't hold my questions back. "Excuse me sir, but who are you?" I asked.

I didn't know what to expect. How could this man understand me? But to my total surprise, he responded, "I am General Gongsun. But let me ask you your question back, who are **you**?"

I didn't understand what was happening but it was like I was in a dream so why not go on dreaming? "My name is Leanna, sir. May I ask you where we are?" I replied.

"We are in my fort on the Yangtze River," General Gongsun said.

"And when are we?" I questioned.

"I beg your pardon?" General Gongsun said in a confused tone.

"I mean which year?" I asked again.

"Why, we are in 25 AD," stated General Gongsun.

So I was having a conversation in Chinese with an ancient Chinese General! But how?

While I was eating, he did not talk but looked at me a lot. When I finished, he clapped his hands and his servant came. I followed her in silence.

When we climbed up the stairs, I was once again amazed by the dimensions of the house. I couldn't help but stare in amazement. The room was beautiful! The walls were covered with very old (I knew they were old but they looked as if they were just made) and beautiful Chinese paintings. The bed was made of carved wood. The mattress was quite hard but I fell asleep immediately.

* * *

Day 2

When I woke up this morning, I went back down to the dining room. Gongsun was there.

He looked very nice. I decided to tell him what had happened the previous day. I told him absolutely everything. I was sure he would think I was crazy and would throw me outside but I needed to talk to someone and as far as I knew, he was the only person I was able to communicate with.

When I finished, he was silent. Then he talked very quietly but firmly, "Now listen, Leanna. I believe you and I want you to believe me too. I think there is a reason, a purpose, for your presence here. I need your help, would you provide it to me?"

I looked at him in wonder. I had just told him I came from the future and he continued to talk to me normally. What did he want from me? I decided to be honest and asked.

He smiled sadly, "Right now, China is governed by people who only think about themselves and I would like to change that. I know I can do something but I have to make people believe in me. And here you are, coming from another time, so obviously different that people think you are a goddess. And I believe you are the one sign I was looking for. How old are you?" he asked, a little off-track, I thought.

I stared but replied, "12 years old."

"Then you're going to help me become an emperor for 12 years," he explained calmly.

"What? How?" I asked, very confused. I looked at him thinking that one of us was now totally out of our minds and wondering which person it was.

"I will tell everyone that you came from my dreams and that you urged me to be an emperor to save China and its people," answered General Gongsun.

I didn't know whether to trust him or not but something inside my heart told me that I should help him. After all, maybe he was right. Maybe such a crazy story was just a dream and I had to dream it until its end if I wanted to get back to my reality. "I will help you if you promise me two things," I finally said.

He smiled again with his sad but gentle smile. "Which two things, if I may ask?" said General Gongsun.

"First, you must promise me that if you become emperor, you will do good things for China's people. Not for yourself," I warned.

"I promise," said General Gongsun.

I continued, "Second, I need you to promise me that you are going to help me go back to my home, time and family."

"I don't know how but if I'm right about you being here for one reason, then I'm sure this will happen when the purpose of your coming will be fulfilled," said General Gongsun.

I would have preferred a clearer promise but he was being honest at least and I accepted. We then discussed how we would work it all out.

He went to talk to the village people and I went out in the garden to sit under a beautiful Banyan tree. I took out my iPad and started to work. I made a kind of movie with a white dragon coming out of a white fog. It took me the entire afternoon but at the end, I had made something I was proud of, some dreamy fantasy. I hoped people would believe in the magic of it all.

* * *

Day 3

This morning, Gongsun offered me a beautiful white silk dress. I put it on, took my iPad with me and went with him to the village.

People again kneeled in front of me and Gongsun smiled. He looked sure of what he was doing. I was not afraid. I believed in him. He told them about me being his dream and I showed them the dragon I held in my arms. For some time, the people were speechless. But suddenly, they started to applaud and cried, "Hooray for our new emperor!"

Gongsun smiled a bright smile and bowed his head to me. Then it looked as if a fog was coming out from my iPad. I closed my eyes. The air density changed slightly and when I opened my eyes, I saw the deck of the boat. I ran to my cabin, changed clothes and carefully packed the white silk dress. Then, I don't know what but something urged me to open the manuscript. Gongsun was there, smiling his beautiful smile, standing in a white dress. He was the White Emperor and behind him, was a drawing of a white dragon in the fog. I had created a new Yangtze River tale. I smiled, carefully packed the book alongside the dress and ran to my parents. I desperately wanted to hug them.

Was it Always a Dream?

Gwenyth Slaughter, 11, Hong Kong Academy

Finally closing my chestnut eyes, I drift into a dream of fantasy and mysteries. I'm different. I have dreams that always come true, but sometimes they're black hearted.

I have been known to wake up drenched in sweat, screaming at the top of my lungs because of a nightmare. I used to dream of fairies and mermaids in enchanted forests, but now it is about a girl that falls in a lake basin and I have to find her before it is too late.

Who was the girl that fell in the lake basin? Was it me? Who was it?

With the lucid morning call of the nightingale I woke up. My heavy eyelids opened slowly as I looked out the window. I saw the sun that was at the rim of the Yangtze River. The sun reflected on the water as if it were about to explode into hot magma. As I sat up, my black hair untangled to my hips in thick locks while I got out of my bed. My name is Shu jīng, which means Crystal in English, I am 13 years old and I am the daughter of the last Emperor. We migrated from the Forbidden City to Hunan province. I moved because the people of Beijing hated my father being on the throne. The people are now taking over every palace we own. My poor grandmother lived in the Summer Palace and she was sent away in her marble boat with no food or any instrument of survival.

Father moved me here a year ago. We now live in this tiny palace that didn't even exist until three months ago. Before the palace that we call **The Hideout**, we lived with a jeweller in his apartment above his shop. I love the jeweller with all of my heart. His name was Leo and he was the world to me. He was an old wise man who was always ready to seek an adventure. He always took me down to the Yangtze River and we would dig tunnels through the lake basins and the water would come flowing in.

It was fascinating to see the happiness emerging from a free spirit of a man who once saw death. Leo told me that his daughter fell in one of the lake basins and then never came up. While he told that to me he mumbled something under his breath. That tragic day was on September 11th. He said that he went there every year and mourned the death of his daughter. I thought it was a horrible tradition. A tradition that should end. She was the daughter of his dreams and he didn't want anyone to touch her. She was as perfect as a moon and as warm as the sun. She was the girl that made a wish come out of hiding and she was the one that died.

I made it down the cold marble steps. My swollen bound feet were aching so badly they felt as if they were about to burst. My chest was burning from the itchy red silk qipao. A qipao is a silk or satin dress that is usually tightly buttoned at the top at a 45 degree angle. I walked into the breakfast chamber and Father was there eating his prawn congee with his tea. He was wearing his usual yellow silk robe with the dragon on it. As he set eyes on me I made a small

bow and he grunted as usual. That meant he was saying hello. As I sat in my chair I was served noodle soup. Father didn't say one word to me. I snuck out of the breakfast chamber and then went straight to Leo's house. Leo served me tea and we talked about how much I was like his daughter. We told jokes and laughed nonstop.

"Crystal?" asked Leo.

"Yes," I said.

"How are things doing at home, in **The Hideout** I mean?" he asked.

"Fine I guess," I said. What was he playing at, I thought?

"What if something happens? What if the people of Beijing find you and your father? It is not hard to find you. You live right on the Yangtze River." He said.

"Well let's hope for the best," I said meekly, trying to change this foul subject. We then just talked and laughed as usual. Leo then began to go all weird and creepy again. I felt cold and not adored when this happened.

"Leo..." I hesitated. "What is wrong? You have been acting strange and desperate today." I said trying to be strong, but considerate.

"Oh ... My Crystal ... I need to tell you something." said Leo. Oh no, I thought. What was he about to say?

"Okay..." I said, choking on my saliva.

"I carry magical powers. I've been so concerned about you and Your Majesty that I've put a spell on the people of Beijing to stop them looking for you," stated Leo in one breath. I was so shocked, thankful and spooked out... "Wow, Leo. That is some interesting, spellbinding secret," I said smoothly. I then said, "Thank you."

That night I heard the thunderous sound of people screaming and doors getting yanked off their hinges. Was it a nightmare? Who were these people? What was happening?

"Father!" I yelled at the top of the marble stairs. There were people all over the house with weapons of every sort. "Father, where are you?" I shouted now or rather screamed. I then saw a man that had a white cloth taped to his mouth. It was father, the last emperor. He was getting dragged against the cold marble floor. Those barbaric people were treating him with no respect or any sort of kindness. Were those the people of Beijing? How did they find us? What were they doing here? All of these questions were flooding through my mystified head. What was going on? I thought Leo promised that the people of Beijing were never going to find us. I thought that Leo had devoted his magical powers to protecting my father and especially me.

I was on the verge of death. I had to get out of this perilous situation. The men started to climb up the steps with sharp looking spears pointing forward. I had to act. I ran to my room and locked the bulky door. I ran to my side window with the moon high in the sky, with bright moonbeams reflecting on to the tranquil water. I opened the window and jumped with no sense of thought. I hit the sharp grass that cut into my skin with a feeling of death. Blood was trickling down my shins. That still didn't stop me from running away. The only place I thought to go was to Leo's. I sprinted with all my force. My bound feet were aching on a whole other level now. I could feel the agony of my bloodstained knees and my feet felt like they were infected. I still ran. Even with my dry, bloody throat. I made it to Leo's small and poor apartment. I banged on the heavy oak door with all my force. I screamed, "Leo! Leo!" I then realised that the door was open. I ran up the steps and saw that no one was home. I turned around and saw a calendar on the small wall. I looked at it carefully and realised it was September 11th! Leo was at the lake basin! I quickly built up my energy and scurried down the steps. As I ran down the hill down to the lake basin I saw a bright glow. I ran faster and faster until I saw Leo there spinning a stick that looked like a staff.

"Ah... Crystal, I was waiting for you," he said without turning around.

"Leo! The people of Beijing! They found us!" I shrieked.

"I know," said Leo sounding mysterious.

"What?" I asked back.

"You know, Crystal... You remind me a lot of my poor daughter. My poor daughter had a horrible fate that can be fixed if I trade her for someone else." While Leo spoke I could see an evil look in his eye. I knew I was going to die. He was so much stronger and more powerful than me. "I brought you here, Crystal. I was the one who brought you into this world, I was the one that made the people of Beijing angry, I was the one who brought you here." As he spoke I felt uneasy. "I can trade you for my daughter, I can and I will."

I screamed as he pushed me in the water. A whirlpool formed. I then saw a girl appear next to Leo.

"This is the new tale of the Yangtze river."

The Song of the Goddess of the Yangtze

Harmony Yuen Hey Wen, 11, Po Leung Kuk Ngan Po Ling College

“Oh! Mama, are we going to granny’s home for a family new year dinner tonight?” I shouted in excitement and rolled my eyes wide big at Mama. “Yes, my dearest Bernise. 7 o’clock sharp at granny’s house.” I grinned at Mama foolishly. “Perhaps you’re thinking of her mysterious gift?” Mama always knows what I want and think. And she’s always right. I have been thinking about the secret gift that granny said she’s going to give me at the last family reunion. I wonder if it’s a cash coupon for a toy shop. (You know, I want the furry dolphin doll badly!)

As usual, the adults were at a table and all the kids were playing. Granny loves children, so she’s always the one to take care of all of my cousins and of course, me. Granny often tells me that I’m her favourite granddaughter. She loves me a lot and I love her too.

Only harmony is seen on granny’s face, and that’s the reason why I like her so much. “Attention, my darlings, granny has prepared a special gift for every one of you.” She had a warm smile on her face, and she took out big and small gifts from her bag very slowly. “This is for you, and this is yours...” Granny spoke softly. The girls received dolls with shiny golden hair and the boys had robots. “What about me?” I thought with jealousy, though I hate those dolls. All the girls and boys walked around the living room in excitement, leaving granny and me alone at the dining table.

Granny brought me into her bedroom. Her bedroom was nice, and her duvet was of golden dolphins and a red background made of silk. I ran my fingers over her duvet as she was taking something out of her small drawer. Then, granny was holding a pink velvet bag. It was tiny. It was not only that, I could see something inside...Oh! Is it a necklace or a ring?

I stopped my imagination when granny started talking, “Bernise, this is yours. It’s a treasure. It was passed down by my grandmother. It has been passed down for thousands of years. I was told to give it to my granddaughter at the age of 80.” I was shocked, but I didn’t make a sound. She continued as I stroked her duvet. It was smooth. “Do keep it in good condition. It is...it is magic.” She made the word ‘magic’ very soft. Then I couldn’t stop myself from screaming “Magic?” Grandma covered my mouth gently and whispered to my ear, “Do you notice that you love dolphins?” Then she giggled, “And so did my grandma and I. My gran once said that there was a very gentle kind of dolphin called baiji. They could only be found in the Yangtze River.” Granny opened the little velvet bag. There was a sapphire necklace attached to a golden chain. “With this, you’ll have the special ability to communicate with the baiji when you’re holding the necklace in your palm. But remember, the spell will be ruined if you don’t believe in the magic. And bear in mind, the sapphire will vanish if it’s seen by other people.”

My brain was confused. I have thought of the baiji for a long time. I wish to go to the Yangtze one day and see them. Unluckily, I knew from my previous research that baiji's were endangered, possibly even extinct. I wished to meet them, but I just couldn't believe that there was a way. I was thinking so deeply that I didn't know granny was calling me. She put the sapphire in my palm and smiled. Then she said, "Go to bed earlier tonight, and hold the necklace tight in your hand before you sleep. Have sweet dreams!" Granny left the bedroom with a smile on her face. I ran my fingers on her duvet again and murmured, "Oh, dolphins."

"Night night, Bernise. I don't know what gran has given you, but you seem a bit strange. Anyway, it's a secret between you and gran. Sweet dreams and Mama loves you!" Mama winked and I winked back. She turned the lights off and closed the door. I had been thinking about granny's necklace all night. I took the velvet bag out of my pocket and kept the necklace in my palm. I stared at the sapphire and it was sparkling with blue light. Was it the magic? I rubbed my eyes and it was dark again. Did I make all that up? Or was it true? I couldn't tell. I closed my eyes and held the necklace tight. All of a sudden, a strange bluish light was streaming from the sapphire, and there were golden and silver sparkles all around it. I shivered in excitement. Is this all real? Not unless it's magic!

I opened my eyes. I wasn't sure where I was. I was under water! I looked around, and my eyes widened in astonishment at the sight of all the colourful fish! I tried to breathe and talk – and I could! Oh! I could even sing, and in extremely high frequency and pitch! It must be the voice of a dolphin! Dolphins communicate by sound frequency.

The sapphire was still in my palm. I put it on my neck and held it tight. "Bernise!" came a tinkling voice. I twirled around to see a dolphin swimming towards me. Granny didn't lie. The dolphin was a baiji and I could understand what it said. It must be the magic! I was too happy to respond. I must be in the Yangtze River! The baiji continued, "A long time ago, the sapphire necklace was found by a woman, who was your grandma's grandma's grandma's..." The baiji sighed, "In fact, baiji's became extinct a long time ago." I was shocked. "The sapphire necklace can take you back hundreds of years, and the purpose is to save the other dolphins, my friends." I asked without hesitating, "So what can I do? How can I bring the baiji back to 2012?" The baiji seemed to be laughing, sadly. Then it said, "Of course you can't bring us back! How could you!" I frowned and went quiet. It continued, "The sapphire necklace can only work once for each keeper, like you. Each time the keeper goes back to the Yangtze hundreds of years ago. The baiji, like me, who meets the keeper, would sing the song of the Goddess of the Yangtze, the song of us. After the song, the magic would disappear and you would be back to your normal life. And you will find your way to save us..." I wanted to say something, but the baiji started to sing:

**The Goddess of the Yangtze
The goddess of the river
Was the dolphin, the baiji.
Sweet and elegant, across the river.
But then a man came.
He poured in dirty water.
A few of us were killed...
Some other men came—
They threw in white and red bags, big and small.
They choked us.
They overwhelmed our home.**

Some more of us were killed!
And then, a woman was washing.
She washed the clothes with detergent.
Even more of us were killed...

Years and years and years passed.
Baiji vanished, forever.
The polluted water!
The plastic bags!
The toxic detergent!

Human, human, human
Destroying our home and ruining our lives.
Why did you do that?

We forgive. No revenge.
We just want a gift, the most precious of all:
Please, we beg—
Protect the lucky ones, who are still alive.
Stop polluting the oceans and rivers
Especially the Yangtze, our home a long time ago!
Keep it a nice place, a clean and clear river.
We beg, we beg, we beg.

The song of the baiji was still in my mind. I opened my eyes and I was lying in my bed. The necklace was still with me. I sat up straight and turned on the computer, holding the sapphire tightly in my hand while humming the baiji's song. Then I searched for the website of Friends of the Earth. I typed...

Dragon of the Yangtze River

Justin Yu, 12, Kiangsu Chekiang College, International Section

Prologue

The Yangtze River: long, vast and mysterious. A lone Chinese fisherman sat on a tiny boat, his basket of fish almost full. He was satisfied and ready to go home when he heard a wail echoing through the valley. The fisherman looked up, startled. The wail started again, like a baby that had lost its mother. The fisherman turned his tiny boat and rowed in the direction of the noise.

He stopped near a small rocky gravel beach. Again, he heard the wail, closer this time. The man stared ahead and whispered a word in Chinese...

'Long' – dragon.

* * *

Chapter 1

The hotel receptionist sat at the reception desk of the most expensive hotel in Shanghai. Three vans with the word PREDATOR scrawled across their doors piled up in front of the hotel. The receptionist's eyes widened as the doors of the vans opened and armed men poured out. The leader pushed through the spinning doors, removed his helmet and told the startled receptionist, "I've got a booking under the name of the General."

PREDATOR was a group of special biologists, formed to protect people from creatures of different time periods which came through rips. The rips were holes in time and space. So far, PREDATOR was in control of 200 time rips in 25 different time zones. They had been told of a new one and six people had disappeared in mysterious circumstances.

The General turned to a scientist in a lab coat who was tapping away on a laptop.

"Our sources say that the time rip is located to the west on the Yangtze River, about three hours drive from here."

"Very good General, if that is indeed your name."

The General shifted uncomfortably. Nobody knew his real name. Only he knew what it was. The scientist, Professor Saxon had been with PREDATOR since a smilodon rampaged through his home in London. He had since then sworn to protect people all over the world.

* * *

Chapter 2

The next day, the vans drove on to a small gravel beach. The General got out of the van.

Instantly he recognised the shady opening which was the time rip. The time rip led into a peaceful beach located in the area between different times known as the time vacuum.

"Professor! I've found it!" he yelled. A man burst out from a cave so suddenly that the General was off his guard for a second but he quickly regained control and pointed his rifle at the man.

"Stop! You can't hurt him! He doesn't mean any harm!" The man, a fisherman, waved his arms and yelled at the bewildered soldiers and scientists.

"Who doesn't mean any harm?" The man launched himself at the Professor just as the General fired a tranquilizer dart into the man's arm. The fisherman collapsed to the ground and started snoring peacefully.

"Take him away," Professor Saxon ordered grimly, "He knows something."

The time rip shivered and something stepped out of it.

"At last," the Professor breathed, "The future." The figure that had stepped out of the rip was human. But he wore green armour and a biker-like helmet. The figure opened his mouth and spoke.

"I am looking for a dragon."

* * *

Chapter 3

It turned out that the man owned a zoo in the year 6792.

"So you're some kind of futuristic zookeeper?" the General asked.

"Indeed," replied the man, "I would like to stay and chat but I've got a dragon to catch."

"By yourself?" one of the soldiers asked, amazed.

"It is just a baby, one person is enough."

"But it is responsible for the disappearances, it has killed six people!"

"Unlikely," the zookeeper replied.

"You are correct," a voice said, "It wasn't the dragon, it was me." Both the zookeeper and the PREDATORS knew what he was.

"Time Rogue." No-one knew where the Time Rogues came from. They appeared to be human but their travelling through the rips made them change. Time Rogues had red skin and could breathe under water. They drew their power from the famous first elements: fire, earth, water, air and spirit.

"I came here because the Yangtze River has so much power," the hooded figure cackled. "This power could fuel me so much that I could live for all eternity!" His laughing stopped abruptly.

"I can feel the dragon trying to stop me," he hissed. A head erupted from the surface of the water. It was a Chinese dragon. It had a face with wise eyes, deer's antlers, a lion's mane and sharp teeth and it was the size of a German shepherd.

"That's a bit of a disappointment," the Professor sighed. The Time Rogue hissed and conjured up an orb of pure time. The dragon coughed and summoned up a tsunami wave so terrifying it could drown a civilisation of fleas.

"I think the dragon needs help," the General deduced wisely. He took aim and fired at the Time Rogue. It hit the red horror in the temple.

"You think mere darts can stop me!" he growled. He pointed at the time rip, which swallowed up all the PREDATORS.

* * *

Chapter 4

Professor Saxon woke up in a rainforest. He was alone. In front of him stood a herd of bewildered but harmless dinosaurs.

The General woke up on a field. He was alone. Norman and Saxon soldiers were staring at him in amazement.

Meanwhile, back in 2011, the zookeeper stared at the Time Rogue.

"Where did you send them?"

"Random places in time," the entity cackled, "Anywhere from the Big Bang to the destruction of planet Earth."

"Bring them back," the zookeeper ordered, looking around at abandoned weapons and equipment.

"Oh I think it would be much more fun if it was just you and me, General." The General-zookeeper stiffened, for he was the future of the now proud and powerful General, a zookeeper. The dragon whined, annoyed at the lack of attention.

The future General sighed. "Here boy, we're going home." The Time Rogue laughed as the future General picked up the dragon and walked towards the time rip.

"So this is how it ends," the Time Rogue cackled, "Failure! The great General accepts failure!" The future General stopped and turned. Looking at the Time Rogue with a sad smile on his face. The dragon in his arms yipped impatiently.

"By the way, the Three Gorges Dam is going to burst and all your power will be drained away."

"How do you know?" The Time Rogue asked, suspicious.

"Because I," the future General grinned, "Am from the future." He stepped into the time rip just as the Time Rogue yelled in fury and disappeared. In his place sat the PREDATORS, shocked but unhurt.

China was upset about the Three Gorges Dam bursting, but life carried on. One day the General was offered a job in a zoo and he accepted. The Professor was the one who sealed the last time rip and as for the future General, he was doomed to live for eternity during some point in time and he lived this out in a nice house with his good friend, the dragon.

Fu's Tale

Keith Leung, 13, St. Joseph's College

This is a story about an evil religion along the Yangtze River in the Ming Dynasty and my adventure related to it. My name is Fu. I shall transfix you with my strange tale.

There was an uprising in Sichuan, where I came from. In order to get away from the civil war, many people fled the province via the Yangtze River, with my uncle, I fled with them.

At the port, my uncle bought two places for us. He went aboard the more luxurious Shui Tai, while I boarded the sister ship, Shui Sing. We only realised the mistake when both ships set sail for Hangzhou, which was a long way off, and my uncle waved to me frantically. The captain refused to stop and it was no use pleading. We would have to reunite when we reached our destination.

I thought that as there was no use trying to stop the captain, I might as well take a look at the other passengers. It may be worth making friends with them. I was aghast when I saw how many people were on board. There must have been at least 1,000 people. After much questioning, I found that most of them were weathered sea dogs. My skills as a doctor were much needed. Although I may call myself a mediocre one, I soon became popular. Some days passed, and there was a great storm. The wind blew furiously, rain drops splattered mercilessly on us. Suddenly, a huge bolt of lightning pierced the sky and struck right next to us. Everyone was much relieved. With a jolt, I remembered that the Shui Tai was beside us, right where the bolt of lightning had struck.

Butterflies fluttered in my stomach as a cry of dismay rose from the passengers. The Shui Tai had been obliterated. Only a few pieces of wood and a bone, human perhaps, were left drifting on the surface. Oh my poor uncle! May he rest in peace!

I found that the hull of Shui Tai was much smaller than that of the Shui Sing. It was obviously constructed not long ago, probably three years. Also, the captain, Captain Dragon, as he was called by the sailor-passengers, made regular visits to the cabin underneath the water level, where we passengers were strictly prohibited to go. There must be something murky and dark going on. Once I tried to peek into it. I could only see a huge rock and lots of yellow pieces of paper in the vast room. There were some scribbled writings on it. I recognised what it was right away – a spell to keep evil spirits away. Were there dead people or demons in that room?

Suddenly, somebody pushed me aside roughly. It was the first mate, Hong. I immediately apologised to him for my rudeness and under his glaring eyes, fled back to the deck where I shared my bone-chilling discovery with my new friend, Chun. We both agreed that something fishy was going on down there.

At night, I tossed and turned in my bed. I couldn't wipe the image of the yellow papers away. Then, I heard a sobbing sound and I froze in terror. I instantly connected it to the thing in the underwater cabin. I prayed for it to go away but instead it came closer. The third time I heard the sobbing sound, it was directly beneath me. I had an uneasy night.

The next day, the storm was still raging. Therefore, the captain held a god-worshipping ceremony. As it started, the crew hauled a huge statue of a strange god up. I gawked at it. It was composed of a hawk's head; its big, fierce, evil eyes bore down on us. It had a naked man's torso, an extremely muscular body and the feet of a horse. The passengers seemed to know what it was for they clapped and cheered and they read a long passage in a language I had never heard of and ate a large chunk of meat. The ceremony was over.

The captain sent for me as soon as the people left to go to their own bunks to chat. "Ahoy! You that snooty doctor! Yes, you! Captain Dragon wants to see you!" bellowed Hong.

"I heard that you are a good doctor, and a discreet one, too," the captain said mildly. "I hope you would spare some time and have a look at my daughter, Lin."

"Daughter?" I was incredulous, and wanted to laugh. Captain Dragon looked like a hippo, what would his daughter look like?

"Yes, and may I lead you to her room," he gestured toward the room with the yellow papers.

Though I now knew that the sobbing creature down there was just a sick girl, I still felt scared and reluctant to go, but I went in anyway.

Trying to ignore the yellow spirit-proof papers, I made my way to a bed in a corner, where a girl was sitting. She was very pretty.

The beautiful girl looked about 16 and was very pale. I measured her pulse and found nothing unusual. Still, she looked expectant, so I gave her some medicine which I thought could not cure her, because there was a large pile of the same medicine in a corner and that spoke of at least five doctors already consulted. Now I saw that the yellow papers were part of a therapy. Therefore, the illness would not be easily cast off, that was my deduction.

A few days passed before I became the trusted right-hand man of Captain Dragon. I was credited for curing his daughter. Actually, I know that the illness hadn't really gone away, but I wasn't going to tell him.

Then one day, the captain sent for me in his private room. I knew in an instant that he was going to tell me something important. What was his dark secret?

"Three years ago, we found a shipwreck. It belonged to a wealthy Han merchant. The ship was loaded with goodies. We weren't able to take much, for our ship was small, but now we've got a much bigger ship, we are going to take everything. Then, everybody will be rich."

I shared it with a small group of passengers who I trusted not to leak the news, Chun was included in the band.

Without warning, one of them suddenly stood up and shouted, "I'm not going to be one of those eaten!" He plunged into the water, attempting to swim to the shore. A humongous crocodile surfaced, ate him up in one gulp. We stared at the blood in the water and thought, "Why was he so scared? Why would we be eaten?"

Nothing but greed drove us on the following week. Finally, one of the crew said, "Shipwreck to starboard!" We were overjoyed to have reached the treasure island and celebrated on the ship for one whole day.

The next day, we boarded the shipwreck. We found a large room filled with gold and jewellery. We stuffed our bags full and entered a side door, anticipating more treasure.

I felt ominous in the oddly bare room we just entered. Maybe that was only a feeling every one of us was experiencing, but even I didn't believe that explanation.

We proceeded into another large room with a large pit in the middle.

I peeked into it. At least 1,000 people were in there, standing in a spiral shape. Their skin was smooth and soft. They looked alright except that they had a dead look in their eyes that made me understand they were dead.

"Oh no! We have to get out of here," I said. I was really scared.

"Exactly 5,000 people, very satisfying," Lin, daughter of Dragon, said quietly. She transformed into a monster, which resembled the evil god I saw back on the ship. People were horrified when they realised what was happening.

"No, please let me go!" One of the passengers cried in terror.

From his stuttering statements moments before his death, I was able to figure out that the evil god of Yangtze surfaced occasionally to collect people and drag them down into the river to eat. It had also taken the shape of Dragon's daughter to remind them to sacrifice 5,000 people in compensation for his escape three years ago. We were shipped here to be eaten.

"Too late now," Lin the evil god said, as a maelstrom formed and ripped its way to us, swallowing everyone but me.

"Farewell, good man," the evil god said to me. I lost consciousness.

The next time I woke up, I was safe and sound on a beach in Hangzhou.

I have kept it a secret for 20 years, for I fear the evil god of Yangtze, but now I have decided that the world should know about the 5,000 missing of Shui Sing.

Dragon Warrior

Ryan Ng, 11, Dulwich College Beijing

Under the misty region of fluffy, pale pink clouds and a cerulean blue sky in the grand, powerful, almighty land of China, there was a towering mountain that pierced the clouds, that gave people their creativity, emotion and power, and a slender river that snaked through the land, giving people their willpower, knowledge and soul. These were the two elements that supported human life, yin and yang. If even one of them were to be annihilated, it would bring down with it humankind and the world itself.

To help protect us from the evil that may happen, there were two dragons that one day, in a flash of brilliant lightning, descended from the heavens to protect us. The black dragon flew to the north, to protect the Mountain of Yin, and the white dragon flew to the south, to protect the River of Yang. Everything was peace and quiet – for a while, anyway.

One day, an evil wizard from Japan came to this blessed land of China. Not just any evil wizard, mind you, **the** Evil Wizard, who had thrown countless lands, regions and empires, even, into hopeless peril.

The Evil Wizard cackled, “Now, what can I destroy? Hmm... Ah! I shall carry my 50 most poisonous, deathly, nasty, evil and wicked potions to destroy the dragons from Heaven and finally destroy the yin and yang!” With an evil cackle, he slinked away to his cauldron to concoct his ghastly brews.

In the capital of China, Xi’an, the holy oracle in the emperor’s court suddenly jolted up and rasped, “Something disastrous is going to happen. I see ... a dead dragon! Send him help immediately!” The Emperor Tze, however, was completely lost in thought and only heard the word ‘dragon’. Suddenly he was a different person, in a completely different era, in a completely different place...

The emperor was 11, and he had wandered out of the palace in search of a rare mushroom. It was there, at a small hill just north of the palace, that he met the most ferocious dragons ever seen. They hissed smoke and spurted acid. Their once golden scales now corrupted; a deep violet shade. They slithered down to the petrified prince, glaring at the future emperor with a dagger-like stare. Suddenly, a sleek white dragon burst through the skies and let loose a ferocious thunderbolt. It struck a shadow lurking in the shelter of these beasts. There was an ear-piercing scream as the dragons, looking quite bewildered as the shimmering golden sheen returned to them, flew off in various directions back to their homeland. The shadow, who lay crumpled on the earth with his hand covering his face, screeched in agony.

“Curse you, dragon! I will not rest in peace until your bones are scattered across this doomed land. I’ll take my revenge!” With that, he vanished in a flash of darkness. The young

emperor, frightened by the sight of both the dragon and the wizard, slumped to the ground, unconscious. This evil man was now the evil wizard plotting against the dragon. After his defeat by the dragon, he strived to destroy the world, a feat tried by many and completed by none. He worked relentlessly for months, years and decades and as said before, he toppled countless empires, just to absorb their knowledge and energy for the final fight.

Meanwhile, back in court, the king had ordered two legions, 1,000 men each to strengthen the security along the two sacred sites. His Head of War, however, totally disagreed and suggested that the troops be used to protect the people. The emperor, with a splitting headache pounding his temples, left the two leaders to continue their senseless bickering.

Somewhere else, the slender white dragon woke up from a quick nap under the shade of the forest by a sudden jolt to his spine. Sensing an evil presence lurking not too far away, he shot up into the sky to perform a patrol of the nearby areas. He thought, "Strange, this presence that I feel now is the same when I saved the young emperor from that man. Could it ... Oh no!" He rushed off to find his twin, the black dragon, immediately.

Back at the palace, the Head of War had won the debate and was now sending troops to the nearby towns. Emperor Tze had decided to pay his very dear friend, the dragon a visit by the river when suddenly a messenger dashed into the hall announcing both dragons were spotted at the Mountain Yin. This made the emperor decide to get there as soon as possible, to not leave the river vulnerable to attacks.

Unfortunately, completely unknown to both the emperor and the white dragon, the evil wizard was already beginning his first move. Stepping out of his secret hideout deep within the valley, he muttered a strange incantation and a strange indigo orb descended from the sky. It unfurled its wings and lifted his head. It was Garaunda, the bitter rival of the twin dragons. Garaunda cocked his head and splattered the glowing slime on his wings everywhere.

Garaunda moaned, "You again? The last time I helped you, you led my entire legion of dragons into a one-sided battle! Why should I trust you?"

The Evil Wizard brushed the dust off his robes and sneered, "Because, my friend, this time I have prepared very well. My assistant has led the emperor completely on the wrong road and the white dragon is very far away; all the way up in the north with his twin. Nobody, I repeat, nobody will get in our way this time. Yin and Yang shall be ours!" His evil laugh echoed throughout the mountains, resounding in the ears of the emperor.

Just then, the emperor rode into the valley on his mighty steed where the Evil Wizard was and drew his golden dragon sword. "Evil Wizard, your reign in this land ends today! I shall crush you completely!"

The Evil Wizard just grinned and said, "Oh really, your sword against my magic? And with only one general and two soldiers? My, my, my, you're getting over-confident, aren't you? Well, now it is time for your doomsday. Sajagahradihnest!" The wizard raised his hands toward the sky and a jagged bolt of purple lightning fell out of the sky, instantly killing both soldiers and the general. "You're next!" grinned the Evil Wizard.

A storm began gathering over the valley. Sheet after sheet of rain began pouring down onto the ground, causing an instantaneous flood. It swept away both the Evil Wizard and the emperor, continuously dragging them beneath the malevolent waves. At last it spat them both out at the River of Yang, where stood before them, towering down from the heavens, the black and white dragons.

"Curse you!" the Evil Wizard spat, "You have intercepted my plans yet again!" Then his face morphed into a horrible grin. "But as we speak, my lieutenant is invading the Mountain of Yin." Seeing the confused look on the emperor's face, he laughed. "I have possessed your

Head of War to do my bidding. Instead of leading the troops to protect, they're going to destroy the mountain!"

Suddenly the emperor launched himself toward the wizard, his sword swinging around in a wide arc. The Evil Wizard easily stepped aside and sneered, "Bring it on!" The ground began crumbling beneath the emperor's feet, creating an endless abyss.

The emperor managed to grab onto a ledge and swung himself to the top, kicking the evil wizard backwards, leaving him stumbling. Then he let out a powerful battle cry, "I am the Dragon Warrior!" Gathering a mass of lightning with his sword, he shot it towards the wizard. The wizard only just barely managed to put up a shield while throwing a mass of different potions toward the emperor. A mass of fire from the twin dragons incinerated them; causing the contents to spurt everywhere, on everyone.

The Evil Wizard, lying on the ground defeated, gave a weak grin as the emperor approached him. "It's too late. We'll all die." Just as the emperor was about to lay the final blow, Garaunda, who until then had been hiding, flew towards the twin dragons and let loose an acid blast against their lightning bolts. Then an explosion.

So you were wondering what happened? Well, all three dragons, the wizard and the emperor died in the explosion, their bodies not to be found. The force of the explosion was so big that the river turned its entire course to central China. The people of China now remember their emperor and the black and white dragons as heroes, 'The Warrior and His Twin Dragons'. And of the Head of War, when he tried to destroy the Mountain of Yin, the force destroyed the entire group of soldiers but also scattered the Mountain of Yin into five pieces, now the Five Great Mountains of China.

Since the emperor was called Tze, as a tribute to his great sacrifice, they renamed the river of Yang as the Yangtze River, the river of sacrifice, hope and, most importantly, courage.

Children of the Yangtze River

Shannon Hu, 11, Yew Chung International School

The twins are born near the water at the Wu Gorge. Their parents will not survive much longer. The mother was once a beautiful Mermaid of the Sea and the father a royal Prince of the Sky, but they were changed to humans because of their children. They died, knowing they had been changed to humans for nothing, because the twins would die as well. But the children survived. And this is their story.

* * *

Tze Yuan, the girl, wakes up from a deep sleep. She sees her brother Yang Fei lying near the water and shakily drags him away. As she does this, her arm dips into the water and something inside her stirs. Suddenly, she can't resist feeling the liquid again and the same feeling washes over her. At this moment Yang wakes up and stretches his arms, trying to clear his thoughts. But as he stretches he feels something well up inside him, like what Tze had felt. He is stunned. Tze looks back at her brother and for a moment they share the same stirring feeling inside them. Without thinking, Tze dives into the water, marvelling at the wonderful feel. Inspired by his sister, Yang lifts himself up and soon his feet have left the ground and he is flying. As Tze watches Yang twirl and dance in the sky, she suddenly feels as if the world is spinning...

* * *

Tze woke up on the sand at the bottom of the river. "Look! She's awake!" a melodic voice murmured. Soon many mermaids had surrounded Tze, all peeking at her curiously. "Susie, how can she breathe down here? She's not one of us," one whispered. Tze tried to concentrate on them through the filtered light of the sun. "Take her to Mistress; I'm sure she'd be interested," the one named Susie chirped. A mermaid gently picked Tze up, saying, "Now, be obedient."

Tze was brought before Mistress, an old but powerful mermaid. "Mistress," Susie addressed her, "Sorry for the disruption but we thought you might be interested in this child we found."

"I can see you have brought a child. But what interests me is the fact this child can breathe underwater when it's not a mermaid..." Mistress's spidery fingers inspected Tze. Suddenly she gasped.

"No ... it can't be. She couldn't have survived ... a miracle! Melanie, take it away and lock it in a chamber. We cannot let it escape."

Melanie and Susie took Tze out of the throne room and down a long corridor. "How is she a miracle?" Melanie wondered.

"And why would Mistress lock her up?"

"Strange of her, don't you think? And who did she mean when she said 'she couldn't have survived?'"

There was a pause. "I think I know," Susie whispered.

Susie was older than Melanie and more experienced.

"The girl's mother, Rosalie ... she had children with a Prince of the Sky. But Mistress was angry she disobeyed so she banned her from returning and changed her to a human. Mistress never expected her – or the children – to survive."

"Here we are: Chamber H391." The chamber was dark and small, like a dungeon.

Susie suddenly could not let go of Tze. "I can't do this, Melanie. It's not right."

"We can't disobey Mistress. You know that."

There was a long silence. "Melanie's right." Tze's tiny voice rang. "Just put me into the chamber and forget about it. You can't save me if it means you will get punished."

Melanie and Susie both stared at Tze, and they made their decision.

* * *

"Shh!" Melanie shushed. "Try to open the door silently, Susie."

Creak. Thump.

Suddenly there was the sound of movement nearby. The mermaids ducked into Chamber H391 and slammed the door behind them.

"We're dead, Melanie," Susie whimpered.

"There's an opening in the ceiling," Tze whispered.

"Who is it?" a guard's voice rambled. "I know you're here. Don't think you can hide from me!"

There was the sound of Chamber H391's door opening and someone entering. The mermaids quickly exited out of the ceiling and found themselves back where they had found Tze.

A force suddenly took hold of Tze and made her survey the bottom of the river.

Look at the Yangtze River. A voice crooned. See the plants, the fish, the water, and the sand. They are happy and content, but not for long.

The Witch Goddess will take over and all creatures that refuse to swear loyalty will suffer. Mistress is trying all she can do to destroy evil, but there is one piece missing from the puzzle. This explains why she was overjoyed when she realized who you were.

The Witch Goddess wants you and your brother for reasons nobody knows. And if she doesn't have you both by the end of this season she will destroy the Yangtze.

Look, the Royals of the Sky have already taken your brother. An image appeared: Yang,

struggling with guards of the Sky... **The King of the Sky will no doubt contact Mistress and you children will be given to the Witch Goddess as soon as possible.**

We all want to give you a choice, but trust me, you can't say no. Would you really watch the Yangtze River be destroyed knowing you could have saved it?

The way it was put Tze could never refuse. She was just a child, after all. No more than a year old and facing such serious problems. But Tze was not a normal girl, and neither was the situation she faced.

The day arrived and Tze was tied to a tree near the shore where Mistress could see her from the water.

Tze could tell time was short; the waters were already turning black and choppy.

Clouds in the sky parted and the King of the Sky descended, along with two men carrying Yang.

That wonderful moment when Tze and Yang saw each other! They both felt much stronger than before.

Yang was then tied next to Tze and the prosecution began.

The priest of the Sky came before Yang and Tze: "Please repeat after me," he paused. "We, Tze Yuan and Yang Fei, are aware that our parents have broken the law and our existence is a mistake. To mend this mistake we will offer ourselves to the Witch Goddess as a sacrifice."

The children repeated after the priest.

"It is time. Let us proceed," the priest's voice echoed.

The waters were now looking a dangerous colour, and the mermaids were looking uncomfortable.

After this, Mistress and the King had to sign special papers and recite after the priest.

"And it is done," the priest called.

Suddenly the waters swirled up and twisted every which way, with the Witch Goddess on top.

"Finally, I've been waiting for your call a long time. Yes, it is done."

With that, the Witch Goddess disappeared underwater, and the swirling waters lunged at the children.

All that was left was a few broken pieces of rope, lying slack on the ground.

Yang and Tze were gone. They had combined in one, now named Yangtze, and they took all the evil of the Yangtze River along with them.

Yangtze Secret

Taylor Payne, 13, Canadian International School

In Shanghai, Ms. Jenny Xiao's publishing office was one of the biggest buildings in town. It was 67 floors, and the top floor, where she worked, had a breathtaking view of the Yangtze River. Inside, there were about 70 people sitting at desks, typing away. The room smelt of coffee and freshly printed-paper. At the biggest desk sat a woman, around the age of 30, with jet-black hair that went down to her elbow. On her desk was a huge placard that had her name engraved on it, "Xin Shu". Xin Shu had a long slim nose that matched her long, slim face. She had small brown eyes and a thin, red mouth. She was wearing a black pencil skirt, and a tailored black jacket. Around her neck was a long thick, silver chain. She stood up, and organised the papers on her desk. Wobbling on her high, black stilettos, Xin Shu sauntered over to the photocopy machine.

"Xin Shu! Xin Shu! Lai, lai! Come here!" a loud, grainy voice screeched from behind Xin Shu.

She froze and looked around. No one seemed to have heard the nasally screeches calling out her name. This was not good. If the boss screamed at you like that, it was a good topic for gossip. She quietly slipped through the black, metal door, making sure no one saw her. Inside was another small office with a huge black desk and shelves stacked with books. The carpet was scarlet red, much nicer than the dull grey one in the other office. A Bonsai tree was placed precariously on the windowsill, and standing next to it, looking out the window was a tall, skinny woman with a huge black bun stacked on the top of her head.

"Xin Shu, you're fired," the woman said flatly.

Xin Shu froze. She started to feel nauseous. Gripping the desk with one hand, she grabbed her head with the other.

"What? Why?" Xin Shu asked in confusion.

She felt as though her knees were going to buckle under her.

"You made a mistake on one of the dates that was going to be published. I can't have mistakes. Especially not in this economy," the woman explained, turning around.

She had a square shaped face and lipstick covered lips. As she walked over and sat down on her chair she adjusted her red glasses. Around her neck, a huge jade pendant swung back and forth, brushing against the pearl buttons of her white, silk blouse.

"But, but, Ms. Xiao, I'm a single mom! I have kids!" Xin Shu stuttered, her hands shaking.

"Then I'll fire your kids as well," Ms. Xiao snapped, standing up and turning her back to Xin Shu to file some papers. "I expect you to be packed up and out of here by 12:00 noon today."

Xin Shu was shocked. She had worked here for 3 years, walking Ai Bai, and An Bao, Ms. Xiao's chowchows, getting her special diet green tea, taking calls, organising meetings, and now after messing up just one of the dates, she will end up on the streets. Anger started to build up inside her. She made a grab for the desk when she felt a piercing pain in her hand. Wincing, she looked down to see a long line of blood on her right hand. She glanced over to the desk and saw an ancient Chinese dagger, one of the many artefacts Ms. Xiao had in her office. She picked it up in her hand and looked at Ms Xiao, still filing and organising with her back to her. Just one swift movement and she would pay the price. Xin Shu's eyes narrowed and her breathing increased and became heavier. She gripped the dagger tighter and her anger overflowed.

"You're still here!" Ms. Xiao sang coldly without looking at Xin Shu.

Xin Shu slowly made her way towards Ms. Xiao, holding the dagger above her head.

"You can't fire me. You need me!" and with that, she plunged the dagger into Ms. Xiao's back, and ripped it out.

Screaming, she stabbed her repeatedly. How could she do this to her? She had been loyal for so long. And how had she repaid her? By kicking her to the curb! Ms, Xiao's face turned white. She fell to her knees, gasping for air. Her eyes widened as her white blouse turned scarlet red. As she fell to the floor, her head made a loud thump.

Panting, Xin Shu dropped the dagger and kicked it under the desk. Collapsing to her knees, she put one hand over her racing heart and the other over her pounding head.

No one could know. She had children! She couldn't lose them! And it was not that hard to hide. No one saw her enter Ms. Xiao office, and the doors were sound proof because Ms. Xiao often had loud fights with her ex-husband. And the carpet was already scarlet red, so no one would notice the stain straight away. She would have to hide the body so that no one would see it and freak out. Tossing Ms. Xiao over her shoulder, she staggered over to a huge wooden closet at the back of the room. She propped her up and slammed the door shut. She grabbed the dagger and headed over to the mirror.

She straightened herself out and practiced breathing. She smiled, putting the dagger behind her back. She looked normal, for someone who just committed murder. She got ready and headed over to the door, then stopped in her tracks. She couldn't just walk out of the room in front of everyone! Someone will eventually find Ms Xiao, and she will be the first suspect. She looked around. How was she supposed to get out? She found a small fire escape, and clutching the dagger, raced down the stairs. She jumped into her car and sped down the street, heading straight for the bank of the Yangtze. Taking care that no one was watching, she opened her window and tossed the dagger into the river. It rolled and turned under the small, rippling waves, and eventually submerging completely. How many secrets did the Yangtze hide, she wondered, before speeding away. Now, it held hers.

She picked up Ms. Xiao's dry cleaning and her regular tea order so that it would look like she left the office for a reason. Then, she jumped in her car and zoomed back to the office. She slammed the door and ran into the elevator. Nervously, she bit her nails and tapped her foot.

She counted the floors in her head. "Level 63, 64, 65, 66, and liu shi qui! 67."

She stepped out and walked over to a young, petite intern with a short, black bob and placed the tea down on her desk.

"Ni hao Mei Le. Hello Mei Le. Can you please drop this off to Ms. Xiao office? I need to work on a publishing layout for her," Xin Shu pleaded, smiling sweetly.

Mei Le gave her a fake smile and grabbed the cup.

"Sure Xin Shu!" she exclaimed through gritted teeth.

“Thanks so much!” Xin Shu grinned, and spun around.

Mei Le rolled her eyes and trudged over to Ms. Xiao’s door. Xin Shu watched as she banged on the door. When there was no answer, she opened it and walked through. Xin , Shu’s eyes fluttered from her computer and back to the open door. After about one minute, Mei Le walked out of Ms. Xiao’s office and walked over to Xin Shu.

“Um, Ms. Xiao is not in there,” she announced, gesturing with the cup to the door behind her.

“What do you mean ‘she’s not in there’? Did you see her leave? Ai ya, do I have to do everything myself, la?” Xin Shu stated, getting up and strutting over to the office, with Mei Le following behind.

Xin Shu walked into the office and looked around. She turned to Mei Le.

“Well, did you check to see if her coat was gone?” she asked, walking over to the closet.

She pulled it open and Ms. Xiao fell out. She screamed and Mei Le burst into tears.

“Someone quick! Call the police! She’s dead! Someone killed her!” Xin Shu screamed, running out of the room.

* * *

Soon the place was packed with cops, questioning Xin Shu. She heard them saying things like “she was out running errands for her and she was the one who found her in the closet.” Soon, one of the officers approached her.

“Ms. Xin you are free to go. Xei xei ni. Thank you for your time,” he informed her.

She smiled and nodded, and headed into the elevator. When the elevator doors closed, she grinned. She got to keep her job, but that didn’t really surprise her. After all, Ms. Xiao wasn’t the first boss who tried to fire her, unsuccessfully.

Sacrificial Twinning

Vanessa Ma Yuen Kwan, 14, Diocesan Girls' School

“**W**ow!”

“Awesome!”

“The world’s biggest hydroelectric power station, papa!”

The tourists scattered, eyes glowing, cameras emerging, chatter buzzing in the thick summer air. Children tugged urgently at the hems of their parents’ sweatshirts, and even the sulkiest of teenagers turned up their grimy faces to survey this masterpiece in subdued awe.

Looming ahead of them, a silver island basking in the harsh midday sun was China’s newest, greatest pride and joy. The “ultimate solution to flooding” on the Yangtze River: the Three Gorges Dam, the most capacious hydroelectric enterprise in the world, and source of electricity to nearly ten per cent of China.

Perched on a nearby cliff, the tourists ooh-ed and aah-ed as the water swelled up to the dam, slapping against the sturdy stone structure, before returning with renewed, multiplied adrenaline, swishing and gurgling, then bursting over the dam, hurtling down to the lowland: a streak of burning, foaming white, leaving a fearful lion’s howl in its wake.

Piao liang de bei hou ding shi hen duo de xi sheng.

Behind beauty is always a lot of sacrifice.

So true, he thought. He had led tourists here numerous times, and while each chattering group had been as dazzled as every other, there never seemed to have been any novelty meant for him. Wiping his brow with a soiled handkerchief, he sighed heavily and closed his eyes.

Xiao shi hou, ma ma dui wo jiang

Da hai jiu shi wo gu xiang

Gu xiang. Homeland. How much had been given to him there, and how much more taken. Swivelling around, he squinted downwards, and gentle waves lapping against a smooth, weathered slab of sedimental stone came into focus.

We used to fish for prawns there, Haixiang and I. We never found any, but it was worth rediscovering all the trash we’d accidentally discarded earlier. A magical smile spread across his face. **Remember how, the first time you met, you fell into the water? He dived into it at once**

to save you. A little voice echoed inside his head.

Yeah, he did. He remembered with utmost certainty. **And I promised myself I would always, always remember that. I promised I would one day return that sacrifice. And now I don't even know where he is anymore.** Prickly heat spread through his body, bringing on a rush of anger. **I don't even know whether he's alive, or dead.**

* * *

There are things that contribute to an unspoken pride for a dying-out village: knowing the native tongues, playing the folk songs ... And sharing all of that with one special person.

Haixiang and I. We were the kids who went missing for one night, sitting on a nearby cliff which we dug a tunnel to get to, laughing as the whole village set out to find us, and guffawing even more the next day as they recounted the incident, including how abashed they were to find us sound asleep, albeit rather muddy, in our own respective beds.

The non-biological Siamese twins. That's what we were. We swore never to forget each other, always to look out for one another. But that all changed.

It all started with me coming back from a trip with a few other fishermen. It was a time-honoured event, attended the generation before by my father, representing our village, and now me. To socialise with other fishermen as an ambassador was one of the highest honours anyone of our background could be granted. It was something memorable, exclusive and a symbol of ultimate achievement.

Receiving the compliments of others towards our culture and accomplishments, we ended the event by cooking over a bonfire at a nearby island, and then parted to our respective residences.

However, something boded ill. About half an hour to my community, there were two infamously dangerous precipices. Nearly touching, the turns were sharp, and the current strong. Many a fisher had lost their life in this place. My family dubbed it **chuan de fen wu** – boat's cemetery. But today, I seemed to never reach it.

Realising this too late, I shivered. To my right was a looming shadow, serenely terrifying. Something portended horribly ill. Bravely, I turned my head.

When I was little, my grandfather planted a tree on top of a cliff facing our village. I could recognise it anywhere. But this time, I found myself face to face with the trunk of the tree. And that could only mean one thing...

* * *

Flooded. All flooded. All for the purpose of this dam. He remembered seeing the tip of the clock tower, remembered breaking into a window and seeing everything – memories wet and sodden. He remembered the eerie silence when he yelled and howled with despair and helplessness. He remembered when he swam back to his boat, which had drifted peacefully off, seeing plastic-vested construction workers hard at work building this wretched structure.

He remembered the outrage.
He remembered the pain.
Family, friends, memories, home.

All gone.

He didn't remember how he rowed to the nearest city. He didn't remember who picked him up. He didn't remember how he earned enough money to buy a train ticket. The next thing he knew, he was in Hong Kong.

* * *

I recall my parents once saying that there was one city, one beautiful city in China, called Hong Kong. They said it was once a paradise for fishing. So, when the government refused help to me, and offered no apology as to why none of us were notified of this new project, that was where I went.

Little did I know, Hong Kong had changed. Instead of being a tranquil harbour where chatter about seafood would be common, where the marine industry would be upheld and honoured, it was now a financial city, with glistening skyscrapers made from bulletproof glass, and men in suits, rushing around tapping on small, talking gadgets.

It took a while for me to settle down. Aimlessly, I travelled to Tin Shui Wai, hearing a businessman saying it was a district full of poor people.

Tin Shui Wai at night was a very busy place. It was a time of trade, and of the convenience store. It was dinner, hand-letters and Hong Kong culture. Many of its citizens could barely afford the money to purchase a cart and sell cooked goods or handmade crafts. Before, it paid much better. But ever since hawkers had been banned, we lived in constant threat and fear that policemen would somehow outrun us and confiscate all we had.

I sold sauce. Prawn sauce, to be exact. Made from the prawns Haixiang and I wanted so much to procure. Each time I sold a jar, each time the grubby coins were stuffed into my sweaty palms, I would remember my promise.

To return that sacrifice.

* * *

He reminisced about how he managed to scrounge enough profit to find a decent second-hand suit. He thought back to spending hours and hours in the library, researching the Three Gorges Dam, the afflicted affair which had sent the tightly knit ball of yarn which was his life rolling, unravelling, entangling. He tasted the fervour and urgency, the anger and bitter sweetness a rich tang on his tongue.

And one day, he remembered deciding he had had enough. He walked into a tourism agency, advertising a tour to the Three Gorges Dam, and demanded to see the manager. Once he was invited into the posh, leather-coated office, he gave a speech on the dam that had so destroyed his life. He spoke with flair and with passion, and a loud silence followed the end of his rant, as the last rings sounded off into the day.

It was impossible for the manager not to be impressed by this young lad's extensive information bank on this one large structure. It was even more certain that he must be overwhelmed by the amount of unspoken emotion he had for it.

Needless to say, he got the job.

"A sunset!"

A ringing child's voice jolted him from his reverie. He stood up and surveyed the cliff, hoping against hope that the folk song had not been just a hallucination.

**Zou pian tian ya hai jiao,
Zong zai wo di shen pang**

To the depths of the sky and the ends of the sea, you'll always be with me. A song once shared with the most important person he'd ever met in his life. The ending note sounded sweetly, sorely in his ear. Reminded once again of his unfulfilled promise, he bent and masked his tears behind a shock of matted hair.

He had lost so much: family, friends, occupation, belonging, a place to call home.

So much to sacrifice for something China had to show the world.

So much to sacrifice for beauty.

The tears came faster, hotter.

A hand rested on his shoulder, warm and inviting.

"Why are you crying?" a deep voice asked, in his native tongue.

He turned on his heels, flabbergasted. A dark face with a wide smile greeted him.

"Welcome back, twin."

A World of Metal

Warrick Chung, 13, The International School of Macao

Paul Ahnksithami stood on the banks of what was once the Yangtze River. He was one of a group of people who resided closest to the centre of the Steel Bowl. His group was called the Resistance. This was rather apt considering his was the only group actively opposing the Servants. This name was ironic considering that the Servants didn't serve anyone. In fact, they used captured humans to serve them, which was also ironic as the Servants once used to serve the humans.

Perhaps an explanation is in order. It is the year 6010 and robots are ruling the world. These robots are not what your mind would normally conjure upon hearing the term. They actually look like alarm clocks until they sprout metallic clawed legs, razor blade arms, and a whole lot of other weaponry. The 'alarm clocks' are the minds of the robots. They are equipped with artificial intelligence and have an incredibly fast capacity to adapt. These Servants are derived from a group that once served as bodyguards, hence the weapons. There used to be many branches of Servants such as cooks, builders, butlers and others. The bodyguards wiped out all of the other branches when they took over. Now, their main goal is to capture humans to clean the Servants, wash them, repair them and make more of the Servants. The victims are all placed under a mind-controlling device that renders them incapable of fighting back.

As Paul stood staring out into the deserted wasteland, all he could do was wonder how his ancestors could have lost control of the situation so entirely. How had they been defeated so easily by something they created? The truth was very simple. His ancestors had become fat and lazy, so the Servants stole the instructions for making themselves from the fat old president while he was drooling in his sleep. Paul's group was fighting for survival. They were planning a battle that would turn the war with the robots in their favour. All they had to do was convince the other groups to join them, but this was no easy feat as most of the others were too terrified of the Servants to live out in the open, much less oppose them. Others were actually interested in the offer, but were not ready to oppose the Servants.

Paul had been chosen to help recruit the other groups because of his speaking skills, his tender age and the effect he was supposed to have on other people. He never understood it, but whenever he asked in a certain way, people wanted to help him. The next day was the first time he was supposed to meet with the nearest group called Group Agriculture because they grew plants in secret. The reason he had never been used before was because he had always refused to participate, but now he had his own reason to help. His father Adam had been captured and he hoped that he could rescue him after the battle. A cold fire burned in the pit of his stomach. He was ready.

The next day, he went to the headquarters of the Group Agriculture. They put armed guards around him, with weapons taken from a robot that they had killed purely by accident. A guard had been on duty when he had run into the robot. The robot had attacked him, but only managed to slice open his water bottle. The robot had recoiled instantly and had seemed almost afraid to approach. When the guard had thrown his bottle at the robot and a few drops landed on it, by pure luck, a cluster of small metal nodules in the alarm clock had promptly dissolved, leaving the robot dead. They figured how to make the robot's weapons, and then duplicated them.

They went into the hovercraft and flew to the Group Agriculture. He walked up onto the platform, his guards surrounding him. He raised his arms, and the crowd quietened, puzzled that they were being addressed by a 12-year-old boy. He lowered his arms and spoke. "People of Agriculture, we are in desperate times, we have made a battle plan that can be used to turn the tide of this war around, all we need are troops to command our weapons. Please help us and we will be able to defeat the Servants." He bowed his head and walked off the stage to many nods and claps.

He was greeted by the Resistance commander, Wolfe. He said, "In all my life, I have never heard someone get so many people to agree on something with so few words. You have an amazing talent."

Paul travelled from group to group convincing the people to join. They had finally united all the groups against the Servants. The upcoming battle was inevitable, and everyone anticipated it with both fear and excitement. As every group travelled to the stronghold of the Servants, they made their own preparations. Technology, another group, had managed to hook up the weapons that were to be used against the Servants to a small branch of a river. When all the groups had gathered, they saw that the Servants had also made preparations. Cannons and lasers had been mounted on the city walls. They could see the army of Servants preparing and drilling. The battle approached.

The next day, Wolfe made the announcement they were waiting for. They would attack at sunset. Everyone took their positions, and Paul was placed in a small group of guards. They would infiltrate the base and try to rescue as many people as possible. Sunset approached and the first of the weapons powered up. The weapons were hoses. The first hose unleashed its cargo over the wall and was immediately greeted with many crackles and fizzes. The doors of the fort burst open and out flooded the Servant army. Paul and his guards ran into a smaller side door behind the fort. The guards blasted it open. They quickly had to find where the prisoners were hidden.

As Paul and his guards ran through the streets, he noticed that they were alone. It seemed that all the robots were outside, battling. They noticed a big building, like a jail in the centre of the fort. They ran towards this prison. They blasted open the doors and were greeted with a score of Servants. Luckily, they were all armed with high-pressure water pistols and quickly dispatched them with alarm clock shots. The guards broke open the locks on the prison doors and detached the mind repressors. The prisoners woke up as if they had just taken a nap. As they kept freeing the prisoners, Paul looked for his father.

After about ten minutes, they heard a rumbling noise and lots of clanking heading their way. They realised that this was the robots. They had to leave now or be overwhelmed by the sheer number of Servants. The water hoses had done their job too well, and the Servants were retreating. Paul, his guards and the freed prisoners quickly ran back to the side door and got out before the robots managed to reach them. Paul was completely crushed that he had not been able to rescue his father. They made their way back to the army where everyone was

celebrating. The water cannons had worked extremely well and there were minimal casualties and injuries.

As Paul stood once again on the banks of what was once the Yangtze River, he thought, "Maybe this was a huge victory, and we are one step closer to defeating the Servants, and rescuing my father." He knew that the Servants would come back, better prepared. "Let them come," he thought, "I am ready."

Legend of the Yangtze River

Wong Hiu Yue, 14, St. Mark's School

5000 BC, Fuyuan Village, Yangtze River

It was a brisk morning. Ping woke up especially early. A refreshing morning breeze gently kissed her cheek.

"What a good day! Today is Shing's birthday. I hope everything will be perfect." Ping crept out of the room and went to prepare for the big day. Ping and Shing were a poor, yet well-known and virtuous couple. Shing was a fisherman and they barely managed to survive on Shing's slender earnings from the daily catch and Ping's traditional Chinese needlework.

Ping really got fed up with such monotonous work, but she knew she must keep working for a living. Ping picked out her workbox and started to work. She kept on weaving and wondered about what she should give Shing for his birthday? Finally, she came up with an idea. She decided to weave him a handkerchief.

"Run! Run!" Ping was shocked when she saw mothers carrying their babies in one hand and holding their elder child's hand tightly in another hand. She heard people shouting, children yelling and babies crying. All of them seemed to be running for their lives! Ping realised that something terrible must have happened, but what was it? What had happened?

The village was in total disarray; chaos. People were running for their lives. Babies were crying and small kids were crying for their mothers too. The peace had gone, leaving nothing behind but a cheerless and lonely street. Many of the houses collapsed; the entire village was in ruins, destroyed. Villagers were homeless, and the crops they planted in their fields were washed away by the deluge of water. It was the grim and disastrous torrent which brought such devastation to the village. Fuyuan village was ruined.

2011, Museum of Yangtze River, China

Annikan got up in a hurry. He would be late if he stayed in bed. Today was Tuesday, and he had to attend a meeting with Luke at the Museum of the Yangtze River. They had been studying for a project based on the Yangtze River; one of the most important rivers in China.

"Why can't you be punctual? You're always late by just a couple of minutes! I don't understand you..."

"Alright, Luke! I know. Just change the topic!" said Annikan.

Annikan and Luke were the staff at the museum. Today was their holiday, but they were very interested in studying the history of the Yangtze River, so they didn't mind coming back to their workplace to search for information.

"Ladies and gentlemen, this picture shows the beautiful scene of the Yangtze River..."

Annikan and Luke listened to every word the guide said.

"Hey, Lukie, it's fun to exchange roles. Now we are the tourists!" Annikan was waiting for his buddy's reply, but...

"Luke? Luke!"

He saw his friend picking up the description of an exhibit.

"Are you crazy? You're damaging the exhibits! And you know very well what would happen if you were spotted!" Annikan said agitatedly.

"Ann, can you read it? Why is there a space between those words? It seems that..."

Annikan gently rubbed the aged paper until he could just about make out the faint Chinese character '成'.

"Shing?" Suddenly, the wind started to blow. The strong and unexpected wind made it hard for them to keep their eyes open.

In a split second, the wind stopped. Everything went silent. Absolutely silent.

"Where are we?" asked Luke.

"How do I know? Wait, this place looks so...so familiar...I know! It's Fuyuan Village, the setting of the legend that I've just seen on the description! But how did we get here?" At the same moment, Luke found a handkerchief on the ground. It also had the character '成' on it.

5000 BC, Fuyuan Village, Yangtze River

Ping quickly went to find Shing, but he was nowhere to be seen. Instead, she saw two young men dressed in strange costumes. Instead of traditional loose-fitting Chinese long gowns, they are wearing short-sleeved shirts and denim jeans. One of them was holding the handkerchief she made for Shing.

"Who are you? Why are you holding my husband's handkerchief?" Ping asked.

"Don't be afraid, young lady. We didn't mean to startle you. Actually, we only arrived a few moments ago, but we don't know how we got here," said one of the two young men.

Ping looked at them for a while and there was a few seconds of silence. "You look very strange, but I believe you are not bad people. Would you like to come into my humble house and have a cup of tea?"

So, they went to Ping's house. "Oh yes, I forgot to introduce myself. My name is Ping."

"I am Luke and he's my friend, Annikan," Luke replied politely. Then, they started chatting about what has been going on in the village.

"When I was about to go to work this morning, I heard people screaming and crying. Then I noticed that something bad had happened. It's the river monster! He used to live in the river. Whenever the river flooded, we all knew that the monster was awake. It must be our fault. We have done something wrong and it is punishing us. Oh please river monster, don't take my husband away! Forgive us..."

After hearing the story, Luke and Annikan felt sorry for Ping. They made up their minds to try their best to help Ping and to save the villagers.

Under Ping's guidance, they finally came to the riverside. Luke and Annikan were amazed by the spectacular sight of the river. "I can't believe that this beautiful river could bring such damage!" said Annikan.

"You must give something to the monster in exchange for those you want to save. I am not sure if this really works, but for Shing, I must give it a try. Okay, when I count to three, you throw the rope and I will bring along the handkerchief and jump into the river. If I don't show up, you must leave me and go," Ping explained briefly.

"But Ping..."

"Don't worry too much. Ready? I'll go now."

Luke and Annikan waited and waited, but they still couldn't see the shadow of Ping.

They finally decided to leave in despair. Suddenly, they felt the rope tremble. They turned back to look... Hurray! It was Ping, together with Shing. They had made it!

"I really don't know what to say except thank you," said Ping gratefully.

"We've only done what we could," said Luke and Annikan.

To celebrate this good news, Ping invited Luke and Annikan to stay for the night.

"For Shing's return. Cheers!"

As they were drinking the wine, Luke felt a bit dizzy. A strong wind blew, and soon both of them fell asleep.

2011, Museum of Yangtze River, China

"Where are we?" asked Annikan.

"I think we're back. Back to reality," said Luke.

"How about Ping and Shing? Are they alright?" asked Luke.

"We will never know. Come on, buddy, let's start working."

They started to search for the information about the Yangtze River.

Luke took out a pile of notes. He then suddenly saw a small handkerchief between the dusty notes. It was covered in dust too. It was a tender story about how a devoted wife saved her husband's life. "Hey! Annikan! Come and see! The story is so familiar! It seems that it is..." Luke called Annikan.

"Yeah! It is exactly what happened in the Fuyuan Village!" Annikan answered.

They were both puzzled about the abrupt surprise, but they believed it was a gift from Ping, which reminded them of this legend of the Yangtze River.



Fiction
Group 4

The Risk-takers on an Adventure

Anna D'Souza Melitta, 16, St. Margaret's Girls' College, Hong Kong

Once upon a time, in a faraway land called China, lay a very mysterious river, the Yangtze River. In the ancient myths, it was said that a lot of miraculous things happened around that river.

The Yangtze River flows through a lot of provinces, one being Qinghai. In Qinghai, on one of the highest mountains, lived the Fu family, consisting of five members, the grandmother, the father, the mother and the twin brothers. They were very poor. However, they had always been a happy family.

The boys had never seen the Yangtze River, as it was far and they didn't have enough money to take a rickshaw.

One night, Jason and Jackson asked, "Mom, could we please go to the Yangtze River tomorrow? We've heard of so many interesting tales and miraculous events taking place there! We've also got to go there and pray for dad, so that he may recover from pancreatic cancer."

"No! You cannot go there. Do you know how many people go missing after going there? It's a very dangerous place. Why can't you boys understand that?" Mary yelled. "And as for your father, we are trying our best. We might not have the money but we are praying for him and doing everything we can. Please boys just trust in God! He'll help us." Mary explained.

"Yes, mom we understand and we are really sorry," the boys apologised. "Very well then, you boys better go give your dad his medicine, wish everyone a goodnight, say your prayers and go to bed," their mom told them. Jason and Jackson did as they were told and settled down on the floor and went to sleep.

That night, once everyone was asleep, Jackson started nudging Jason. "Jason, wake up! Jason, wake up! I've got an idea!" "What Jackson ... I'm tired," Jason said sleepily. "Please just wake up and don't make any noise. Everyone's asleep. I've got a plan," Jackson said quietly. "Alright, I'm up, but this better be quick," Jason said. The two boys went out of the house to have a little chat where no one could hear them.

"Okay Jason, I know mom said no but we've got to go to the Yangtze River. We've got to help our dad. It may be dangerous but we've got to take the risk for him." Jackson explained. "I guess you're right. We can't just let him die! Besides I don't mind a little adventure," Jason agreed.

The next morning, the boys decided to tell their mom that they were going to their friends' house for the day. They said they wanted a break to chill with their friends and to their surprise, their mom agreed. However, "I need you boys to be back before supper," she said. "Sure mom, no problem. You can count on us," the boys replied jollily.

The boys then started packing things they thought they might need for their journey. They packed two bottles of water, a container and a rope. "I'm so excited," Jackson yelled with joy. "Me too, but I still feel bad that we're lying," Jason said with a grin. "It's okay! We're doing it for a good cause," Jackson replied.

Jason and Jackson made their journey to the Yangtze River on foot. They left the house in the morning. They decided to jog halfway in order to get there faster. Along the way, they got to explore the village as well. They saw people they had never seen before and waved at and greeted everyone, including the animals. They got lost a couple of times but they always found people who were helpful enough to lead them back on the right track.

However, every time they asked for directions to the Yangtze River, the villagers always gave them strange looks and warned them not to go there. After having a few villagers repeat the same thing, the boys started getting worried, especially when the villagers said that people who went to the Yangtze River rarely came back. However, the boys tried their best to stay strong for each other. They were still motivated to get to their destination and find a cure.

Finally at around three o'clock, the boys reached the river. "Oh my goodness, that is pure beauty," Jason said, amazed. "Yup, it's truly beautiful, but where do we start looking for the cure? It looks like there's just water and grass. Nothing else," Jackson replied. The water in the Yangtze River was rushing down quickly. The tides were high but it didn't seem to bother the boys. Jason was standing on the edge of the river, trying to look for something that could lead him to the cure needed for his father. Meanwhile, Jackson was looking around, trying to pick up clues when, out of the blue, "Crakk, Crackk, Crackkoo!" they heard a sound, and then came crows from nowhere and pushed Jason into the river. Jackson began yelling, "Jason, hang on! I'm coming! Please hold on to something," White terror had risen in Jackson's eyes when he saw a crocodile approaching his brother. "Jason, let go and swim! Grab something else! There's a crocodile!" Jackson cried.

Jackson then quickly grabbed his rope from his bag and threw it to his brother and yelled, "Catch!" However, the crocodile caught the rope and pulled so hard that Jackson fell into the river as well. Now both the brothers were in a life-and-death situation with the crocodile on their tail. Jackson finally grabbed a tree branch with one hand and grabbed his brother with the other. But the crocodile was still there. "Ahhh! Help! Help!" yelled the two boys.

Suddenly, Jason spotted a small hole in the side of the river. The water wasn't really flowing into it. "Jackson, we've got to get into that hole," Jason yelled. "No, that's too risky, we don't know where it leads to, and whether we can fit into it," Jackson cried. "But it's our only option. It's either that or we're going to be eaten by the crocodile. C'mon, we've got to keep our faith in God," Jason cried. Both the brothers finally agreed that getting into that hole might be their only way to escape from the crocodile.

Jackson got into the hole first and before the crocodile could grab his brother with its mouth, he pulled his brother in as well. Once both of them were in the hole, they were no longer wet since the water couldn't get in. It was truly a miracle. The crocodile tried to get into the hole as well but was unsuccessful. The water then pushed it forward and it flowed downriver. The boys took a deep sigh of relief and once the crocodile was out of sight, they decided to get out of the hole, but, "Jackson, I can't get out! I think we're stuck! There is a weird type of shield and I can't push through it!" yelled Jason.

Suddenly, the hole expanded and the boys fell further into the hole and like a hypnotizing dream they were twirling and twirling, screaming and crying and finally with a loud clang they both landed on the ground.

When they gained consciousness, they realised they were in a place they had never seen before. "Where are we?" cried Jackson. "I don't know! Some sort of desert I'm guessing," Jason responded. "Craw! Craw!" came the sound again and they saw crows in the sky and began to run for their lives. They ran as fast as they could until finally they saw an odd tree in the desert. Luckily, it was a tree house. They quickly opened the door and got into the house. They shut the door as fast as they could and **took-took-took** came the sounds of the crows banging against the door. Taking large huffs and puffs, the boys finally settled down with horrified looks on their faces.

"Well hello there, young ones," said an old woman. "Ahhh! Who are you?" the boys yelled. "Welcome to my tree house. I'm Natalie Lee, the owner of this house." "Where are we? And how do we get out of here?" asked the boys. "I'm sorry but I don't think I know the answer to that question, young ones. I've been trapped here for the last five years myself and I haven't found a way out either. I can't even contact my family back at the village," she said solemnly.

"OMG ... are you Natalie Lee, the one that went missing and never returned?" Jason questioned. "I suppose that's probably me," she responded. "But besides me, there are several other people here from the village who you might recognise. I would request you to live with me for the rest of your lives because I'm sure you won't be able to get out, and if you go searching for clues you might come across CHERNOBOG!" she said with a scared look on her face.

"Chernobog? Who's he? We've got to get out of here. Our parents would be worried and we promised our mom we'd be back before supper," the boys said with worried looks on their faces. "Chernobog is the ruler of Choimania, this place. He is pure evil. He has made the rest of the missing villagers his slaves and the ones who do not obey him are crucified and fed to his crocodiles and lions," she said with fear.

"But you're not one of his slaves, how is that so?" the boys asked. "I've been hiding here in this tree house for the past five years and none of his slaves or soldiers have been able to find me. I don't even think they know I exist and I would really want it to remain that way, which is why I recommend that the two of you to join me and stay here, where you guys will be safe," she said reassuringly.

"No way! We came all this way to look for a cure for our dad and we aren't staying anywhere. We are going to get that cure and return home safely to rescue our dad," the boys said. "You boys are crazy you'll get yourselves killed! You're making the wrong choice," Natalie said angrily. "We're sorry Ms Natalie, but our dad has taken a lot of risks and pain for us since birth and we've got to do the best we can to give him back all that he's given us. Besides, we can't bear to lose our dad, have a broken family, our mom a widow," the boys said, in tears.

"I suppose I can understand what you boys must be going through. But, please, before you guys leave, take my map, some tools and food. You will definitely need it on your journey," Natalie said. "We can't thank you enough, Natalie," the boys replied. They took the map and the other stuff and got ready for their journey.

The boys headed towards the north, where the centre of Choimania was located. It was almost dark and they started to worry about their parents and what they promised their mother. However, they had to forget it. They had to figure out what their next step would be. They saw slaves being bashed by weird-looking creatures that were half human and half pterodactyl, which is a dinosaur bird. They had human faces shaped like pterodactyls, with hands and legs, humungous wings and long tails. The boys recognised a lot of the slaves as missing people from the village.

But what really caught the boys' attention was a tall mountain. It didn't look like an ordinary mountain. Instead of being covered in grass, it was covered in gold and there seemed to be a water spring all the way at the top of the mountain. However, there were dozens of those creature servants guarding the water spring. The boys were wondering why there were so many of those slaves up there when, "Hello there..." came the voice of an ant that wasn't very tiny. "Whoa! You can talk...?" Jason stared at it in shock. "Well of course I can, you little nutcracker! What you boys are staring at is the magical water spring," the ant replied. "Oh Jackson ... that's it! That's what we need to heal our dad. C'mon! Let's go get it." Jason yelled.

"Hold on, you little tiger! It's impossible to get there. Not with all of them there. Besides, anyone who touches that water will be crucified," explained the ant.

Seconds later the sound of trumpets was heard and they were unbearably loud. The boys and the ant put their hands on their ears. "Presenting His Royal Highness Chernobog!" Just like his slaves, he was also a hybrid. He was a mixture of a dragon and a tyrannosaurus. He looked like the vilest thing alive. He started walking towards his throne and everyone bowed down to him forcefully.

"We've got to put an end to this," Jackson told Jason. "Agreed. We keep our faith in God, not a monster resembling Satan," Jason replied. "Hmmm ... but what are we gonna do? There's so many of them and only two of us," Jason asked. "Make that three," the ant said. "Really? Thanks Mr ... ermm?" Jackson said. "Mr Ching," the ant replied.

"Anyway, I've got an idea. There is a secret sword all the way south of Choimania. It's the one and only sword that can kill Chernobog. Legend says that a mighty wizard blessed the sword and with that blessing, the sword can kill Chernobog. However, it is believed that the sword can only be used once every ten years and can only be plunged into his body once. Therefore, the aim must be accurate. Once every ten years, the sword somehow retrieves its blessings and strength and is able to kill the demon. However, up till now no one has had the courage to go against Chernobog. Everyone was too frightened of the consequences. I'm proud of you, having the courage to fight this battle. However we can't do this alone. I've got some friends in the south who want to battle him as well," Mr Ching said. "That's great!" the boys replied.

Immediately, the boys and Mr Ching headed towards the south, and into this cave where the sword was kept. You could see the flaming spiritual power it had around it and once it was lifted, the person itself could feel the power of the sword. That night, the boys met Mr Ching's friends and they were told all about the plan. It took a couple of days for the boys to learn how to fight. The ants trained them.

Back at the village in Qinghai, their parents had been worried sick. Their grandma complained to the police about her missing grandsons, as it had been a week. The mom went up to each and every one of the boys' friends' houses to see if she could find them. But wherever she went, there was no sign of them. Until they both decided to head in the direction of the Yangtze River. Villagers told them that they had seen the boys go there. The mom and grandma were shell-shocked. They couldn't find the boys and the villagers guessed that they were probably missing like the others and wouldn't return.

In Choimania, they were prepared for the battle. The boys trained hard and were getting the hang of kung fu. They decided to attack at night while Chernobog was sleeping. They made special armour to protect themselves and weapons to kill the half-human and half-pterodactyl creatures.

On the ninth day, they decided to attack. They had an army of 20. They attacked quietly. It was hard to kill the half-human and half-pterodactyl creatures. They were successful until one

of those creatures saw them. He quickly set off the alarm and that woke the whole Choimania. Jason had the special sword and made his way into the castle, where Chernobog was. Chernobog woke up and so did all the slaves. The creatures were starting to rip those ants apart. The slaves watched and were amazed by their bravery. Immediately all of them picked up some tools and joined the remaining ants in killing. It was a complete bloodshed in Choimania by the time the sun rose. People, ants as well as those creatures were dying. Chernobog made his way out and started blowing fire. He then saw Jackson and tried to kill him.

Jackson quickly grabbed a rope and swung around Chernobog, trying to distract him. With one enormous pull, Jackson lifted Jason from the back and threw him towards Chernobog, stabbing the sword into his rib. At that moment, everyone was shocked and couldn't move. They just stared. However, Chernobog didn't die. He was laughing. There wasn't even any blood. Jason was hanging onto the tip of the sword. "Push it through his heart!" yelled Mr Ching.

"Noooooooooooooooooooooooooooo!" roared Chernobog. But with one swing, Jason pushed the sword in at a slanted angle and chok! – it went right through his heart. He began to fall and slowly he died. Along with him, the half-human and half-pterodactyl creatures died as well and turned into dust. The slaves rejoiced and praised the boys and the ants for their bravery.

Everyone then got containers and filled them up with the water from the water spring. Suddenly, a porthole opened up – a porthole that led back to the village. The boys made sure everyone got into the porthole, including Natalie Lee.

The villagers of Qinghai were overjoyed to see their loved ones return. The boys were praised and the whole village was proud of them, including their family, and because of them, their father was healed and their family was no longer poor.

Everyone had a happy ending except for the evil ones, of course.

The Bard of the Yangtze

Chim Wung Cheong, 16, Shatin Tsung Tsin Secondary School

A nightingale chirped a musical note, from afar or near no human could tell. Distinct and close, another voice replied – all at once, the unintended unison, the undirected orchestra. A hundred souls, a hundred throats, all at once below the benign moon’s quiet smile.

A soft breeze blew, startling a million leaves, a deep resonating rustle of life, gradually fading and falling, a diminuendo off the trembling strings of violins. Wind, the guide swept invisible arcs in air and bows obliged, sliding on strings; imaginary wolves sombrely followed, their howling mouths hollowed; birds of the night joyously chorused, the great choir of the trees on shore. The crescent of fruit-bearing summer cast her silk cloak woven of serenity and rapture and adorned with diamonds and stars upon mortality’s realm. The musky earth sang and her residents also, at their own rhythms and pleasures.

The steadily beating motor of the yacht almost seemed silent under the resplendent symphony of the unblemished lands of the Yangtze River. The slender figure of an adolescent girl stood upon its deck, her unstyled hair flowing, carried by the tender arms of wind, her heart fluttering at such sensational delights filling the channels of her ears. There around her was a silver aura, so fair, so brilliant that she ceased to resemble a person under it, but a nymph of the country.

Within the gentle strokes that caressed the white hull of her sailboat were history and time, the river herself wizened with age and countless millennia beyond the counting fingers of humanity. Wendy Marvell had come seeking the ancient angels that roamed these waters, the beautiful dolphins now rumoured to be the kindest blessing to be bestowed upon any who caught a glimpse of them.

Yet here she was, utterly mesmerized by the scene she found herself in, her objective forgotten and abandoned. Wherever be her curious glance laid, she discovered such gifts nature had set in her alcoves and caves, atop imposing cliffs and jagged rocks. Each second a new surprise would come knocking on the door of her mind, shocking her ... What joy! What a sight to relish in!

“Hey, Dave! Come and check this out!” she called to her companion in an earnest voice, but Dave was too deep down in the abyss of his slumber to hear her.

Wendy shook her head in mild disappointment and turned her dreamy gaze to the borderless sky, shutting her hazel eyes in comfort and perfect harmony with the world that surrounded her. My paradise, my heaven this is, she mused in blissful contentment.

Abruptly a peculiar feeling crossed her soul, sending a dreadful shiver up her spine.

Wendy's eyes flew wide open and saw on the cloudless expanse of black a twisting form. A snake! A snake that materialized out of the thin air! It twitched its scaled tail, swinging back and forth, as though it was a thin ribbon endowed with life, all alone, moving, dancing of its own accord.

It was a dragon.

She gasped and gaped, her mouth round in a comically round circle. Astonishment had knocked sanity out of her and her chin was still hanging off her head when the legendary beast vanished behind a dense mist of clouds.

After several blank moments, she blinked as consciousness returned. A frightful shiver ran through her flesh and bones, startling every last inch of her fibres. Her encounter with a supposedly fictional creature far exceeded her anticipations, and for some uncanny reason, despite how amazing the experience had been, it left her with more fear that this was an ill omen than awe.

Then, she heard it, a sorrowful song that emerged from everywhere and nowhere, from the stirring stream, from the tall, sweeping willows, from whispering leaves and even the sky's benevolent grin.

**Oh, you elder Dragon of Yangtze,
So ancient and riddled with age,
I wonder what tragedies has his old eyes seen,
That renders him the wisest of all sages?**

Instantly she beheld him, hovering on the river ... oh no, he was merely sitting and singing aloud in a tiny wooden boat, approaching her, filled with mirth and merriment, with music bouncing off the tip of his tongue. He drew up to her yacht and ascended to the deck with such grace not granted to men. He was donned elegantly in a set of oriental robes, brimmed pale gold around folds against blue. The sleeves were not as obscenely long as Wendy had seen in movies and documentaries.

"Who are you?" she asked cautiously in Chinese, immediately wary of the stranger in odd attire.

"Call me the Bard," he answered with a calm smile, quite unaware of her risen alert levels.

"The Bard," repeated Wendy in a thoughtful murmur, her head bowed in thought, chewing on each letter, pondering over the implications of the name. Doesn't sound like the name of some evil bandit though, she concluded finally.

"I know what you seek and trust me if you will, you'll not find them here," the Bard interrupted her contemplations with an intriguing sentence. She instantly looked up to stare at the man, her voice gruff as she attempted to bring a formidable tinge to her normally childish timbre.

"Then what exactly is it that I seek?" she assumed the role of an interrogator and propped herself onto a raised platform so that she could add some height to herself and her position over her subject.

"The dolphins of Yangtze," he replied without the slightest hint of being intimidated, "All that filth and toxins humans have poured into the River have long driven those poor water-elves away, from here and many other places. Surely, you can't expect yourself to find any here."

Wendy's mouth fell open but then she snapped it shut firmly again: she had not known. She could not believe the torrents under her feet were in truth overflowing with industrial slime and grease. Desperately searching for reassurances to her theory, she spun around wildly

and aimlessly, her eyes darting rapidly, from here, to there and there. No, all had seemed so peaceful, so unspoiled! All at once, she dared not trust her vision, her sense of smell or her hearing. As the delusions of emerald jades and nature's best gemstones shattered to a thousand fragments, what horror that filled her horizon!

There were fallen trees and trunks floating in the pungent, reeking river. The river was defiled and discoloured to a ghastly shade of brown. Quite frequently, she spotted a hideous patch of darkness atop the howling, rushing waters, leaked oils and corrosive chemicals. A horrendous stench arose, the scent of a decaying world had overwhelmed her feeble senses. She stood powerless on the brink of fainting under the fury of the truth pounding upon her mind and soul. She swayed where she stood, strength drained from her knees and, with a horrified yelp, she collapsed to the floor.

Just as she did, the nightmare faded, yielded to reality and once more she sat on the lap of the generous Mother Nature, glancing up into her warm, mollifying smile, yet the agonising revelation was upon her: Such fairness would not last long and all that she had foreseen would come true. Mother Nature's smile broadened to a knowing one and she nodded.

Wendy turned to the Bard, now a self-satisfied man, with imploring eyes and pleaded in supplication, "Please, would you please take me to the dolphins before the storm takes them too?"

* * *

She knew not how far they had ventured down the mystic length of the river. Ever since they climbed into the Bard's cramped, primitive boat, they had been shooting down the foamy rapids, hurling their lives into the hands of fate and praying one random wave would not plunge them both into the lightless depths. Wendy was particularly mortified when she realised how dangerous the wrath of the Yangtze actually was, because aboard her yacht, everything seemed to split so easily before its steel hulk. She began regretting her choice of following the Bard who, unlike her, must have gotten used to a life on turbulent waters and was now singing, yet again, this time, a cheery tune.

**Little dolphins, you lovely beasts,
How your fortune arouses envy in me!
This lady you summoned from across the sea,
Has nothing else but you to see!**

The blind animosity of the river tossed them high and metres above. Bolts of water splashed in, slicing splendid trajectories in the humid air, splattering on her cheeks. She felt terribly vulnerable against the unreserved, unleashed might of the Yangtze, raging all around her, threatening to engulf them, confining their skeletons eternally to its mud floor, waging its unbearable retribution on humanity once and for all.

Wendy could almost hear its anguished growl, its accusations, "Humans! Do you recall how I have nourished you with my own body? How I have allowed you to drink from my fluids? How I have moistened your lips when you pathetically crawled on dry barrens? You sly villains, how have you repaid me? You forced me to drink poison, all the wasteful debris you have no use for! Am I nothing but your latrine in the backyard? Die, you malevolent monsters, and suffer my vengeance!"

Suppressing a tremor, biting down on shaking animal fears, she mustered what calmness was still within her possession and shouted over the deafening roars, "Are we there yet, Mister

Bard? Shouldn't I be returning to my ship? I don't like the thought of leaving Dave behind!" Brandishing her friend's name as her excuse, she flung around this glamorous banner, yelling one slogan that could not have been more apparent, "Let me go!"

Instead of any ordinary response in the human sense, the Bard lived up to his romanticized name, uttering yet another ballad:

**Come, worry not about your friend,
For the treasure lies far, near the end.
Your journey home shall be swift with ease,
In no time you shall find yourself on Safety's knees.**

**Friend, if you chase the shadows of old,*
You must venture boldly into their tempest hold,
Fear not the phantoms you fearfully see,
For ancient beauties of Yangtze you soon shall see.**

Wendy fell silent, sensing mockery in the Bard's latest invention of poetry. "But why shouldn't I be scared?" she mumbled, disgruntled. Frankly, doubt was starting to bubble up in her sceptical mind. She could not help but wonder: do the dolphins really live here? It did not seem probable to her that the intelligent mammals would dwell in this hazardous region.

With no prior warning, everything ceased, halted as though by divine interference. They had stopped in the middle of some of the deepest and most unfathomable part of the river. There was no sound, no majestic current, and with an awkward blush, she realised she had been pronouncing her meditations aloud. Not at all perturbed by her open inquisition of his knowledge, the Bard dipped a hand into the still water surface, disturbing and setting off numerous ripples.

**O' Dolphins, you adored sons of the Yangtze,
You have drifted in darkness from living eyes,
Long have you lived in fear of mortal blight.
Now hear me, hear me, and take no flight!
We mean you nothing but the benign,
Come forth from your sacred hold,
Your profound beauty let us behold.**

Suddenly, gray gleaming fins erupted all over the mirror surface, swimming, tracing out a miraculous oval. They were not the scimitar blades of sharks with bleak, lethal points, striking insanity into the hearts of all who saw them, but tiny triangles, a dozen of them, forming a perfect shape, slowly rotating, closing in, a soundless glissando.

Soon their glistening bodies surfaced, seamlessly smooth and capturing the silver beams of moonlight so that they radiated brightly at night. Wendy saw genuine, undisguised delight in the mischievously glittering eyes of dolphins, as they leapt out. The corners of their mouths were somehow upturned in the likeness of a grin, gaily embracing all who arrived on their doorstep. **And for such atrocities we have committed on their habitat**, she grieved for the

* Shadows of old: Yangtze River Dolphins are known to have swum the waters of Yangtze for millennia, thus gaining the name "living fossils". Here, the Bard is referring to the ancient Yangtze River Dolphins.

endless torment these angels were jinxed with and sighed in futile guilt, **they greet us like honourable guests.**

She felt a timid tickle on the back of her hand, turning towards the source, a bittersweet smile spreading on her lips. So akin to a child trying to please his parents, a toddler dolphin was gently nibbling at her hand, its eager eyes lit alive with innocence and affection, two lively black dots meeting her hazel ones. If only it knew she was a member of the kin that caused the slaughter of its race, if only it knew, it would have assaulted her in reprisal for its brethren, however young it was. Yet, no, they knew nothing, absolutely nothing... She felt unworthy, corrupted in their presence.

Spinning to the Bard with a surge of appreciation, she found herself staring into an empty spot. The peculiar feeling had returned to her again but this time she did not glance up. Oh, you elder Dragon of Yangtze, she recollected from the shrapnel of memories and with recognition, her eyes shot up to the dragon, to the Yangtze.

The River

Constance Chan Yan Chuen, 16, Belilios Public School

A man rushed to the school building on a cold autumn morning. He had forgotten his students' work and wanted to retrieve them so he could mark their papers during the long and cold weekend. Unaware of his partially opened briefcase, a piece of paper slipped out.

Wind blew harshly against the people on the street. Clutching their coats tighter, they hurried to their destination. An updraft blew the paper high into the sky. The man continued towards the school in haste, hoping to return to his cosy home quickly.

Oblivious to the citizens in the quaint town, a foreign fighter plane zoomed above. The pilot aimed carefully, and pulled the lever. The first bomb dropped on to the city below. Colliding with the paper and smashing it into smithereens, the ominous object continued its descent upon the unprepared city.

* * *

Kang sighed deeply as he sank into his chair. Munching on his pencil, he stared blankly at the paper in front of him, racking his head for ideas.

The Yangtze. What kind of a topic was that? The stupid river outside wasn't special. But Kang never dared to say it aloud. His grandmother would rave about the history of China, how the Yangtze protected the inlands from foreign invasion. Kang, despite all his grandmother's stories, couldn't see how the river was special.

For three hours he sat as the clock ticked away. Kang tapped his pencil annoyingly on the desk and propped his head up with his hand. He blankly gazed outside, at the subject of his composition. Up ahead, a dark cloud loomed. Kang didn't notice.

"The Yangtze is one of the two cradles of our civilisation. The river offers protection."

Inspiration hit him like a freight train. In his mind, the words strung together to form sentences, the sentences wove to form paragraphs, and the paragraphs consequently forming a beautiful essay.

Kang scribbled away furiously, as he hiked up his long linen pants to soothe an itch on his calf. Only the scratching of pencil on paper was heard. The ten-year-old boy, with trademark Chinese white porcelain skin and round brown eyes, immersed himself fully in his own small world of perfection, full of bliss and laughter, only existing inside a young child with the world waiting for his discovery.

Satisfied with his work, Kang put away his paper and went downstairs to join his family for tea.

His father skimmed the newspaper, while his mother and grandmother sipped their tea daintily.

As Kang sat, his father lowered the paper and sighed. Worry graced his features and his tired eyes turned sad. Kang's mother poured some tea for Kang and refilled the other cups. She noticed Father's distressed appearance and grew worried.

"What's the matter?" Mother addressed Father, while arranging snacks on the table. Father shook his head with sorrow, reluctant to answer.

"A war is coming soon."

A cry of lament escaped Grandmother. Kang grew alarmed. He knew that his country was in turmoil and hadn't had peace for a while. He thought himself very fortunate to not have lived through the horrors of foreign invasions; the revolution, and the warlords. He knew there had been peace for a while. But now there was a war. Kang couldn't even understand how a war started.

"It wouldn't hold out long, it's a matter of days."

The adults grew quiet, understanding the situation. Kang was left in the dark, protected from the inevitable disaster that was to come.

Miles away, a city was making preparations. Generals were busy counting supplies. Military leaders were busy analysing the map, marking important conquests crucial to their domination. In the airport, aircrafts were given last minute checkups while flying crews were given a last minute rundown of the strategic invasion. The ships at dock were loaded with weapons and machinery, the navy in a hustle to ensure that everything was organised.

* * *

Teacher Ming locked the door and hurried out, facing the harsh cruel wind. If he hadn't forgotten his students' assignments, he would be in his cosy home, wearing comfortable clothes and grading papers while sipping hot tea.

He rushed, in hopes for a quick return, leaving his briefcase unzipped. As he dashed towards the school building, braving the cold wind, a slip of paper fell out of his bag. A gush of cold breeze blew; Teacher Ming shivered and wrapped his coat more tightly around himself. Other neighbours hunched over, walking briskly, wanting to get out of the cold.

An updraft lifted the slip up high into the sky. It flitted and fluttered, just a tiny white speck on the horizon. But it wasn't the only dot. Gradually, dark spots appeared, zooming at high speed.

A fighter plane surveyed the town below, calculating his targets, aiming at important structures. The pilot squinted, before eyeing his target. He tugged the lever and the first bomb made its descent.

The wind blew as the paper began to flutter, meeting the dark object. The bomb smashed the paper into smithereens.

More planes dotted the sky, each selecting its own victim before releasing the destructive weapon. A sharp whistle broke the citizens out of their reverie. As the bomb drew closer, many started to panic, running in all directions seeking cover.

Teacher Ming froze and looked up just as a huge impact flung him backwards. His body flew into the air like a rag doll.

* * *

Mother counted the coins carefully. They couldn't afford to waste money during harsh times. Food was scarce, and she was forced to watch helplessly as Grandmother slowly withered. Mother, herself, was slowly growing weak.

Kang stood patiently by his mother, listening intently to her instructions. He knew the importance of this trip. It secured their food for the next few weeks.

"Remember, don't attract attention. Go quickly and quietly. Be safe and look out."

Kang nodded, reassuring his mother. He swiped his face with coal, to divert the attention of the Japanese from himself.

"May I go with Xiao?" He was deathly afraid to go out on his own. The rifles and swords, boots and soldiers scared him immensely. Mother nodded. Kang smiled slightly before slipping out the door.

Trepidation filled him as he headed towards his best friend's house, somehow he felt uneasy. Kang pushed the dread to the back of his mind, determined to focus on his task. He knocked quietly on Xiao's door and waited. She slipped out, wearing a plain shirt and pants.

"The market?" Kang asked, praying that she would go with him. Xiao thought for awhile before nodding, taking his hand.

The two strolled down to the market, chatting softly. To their surprise, a small crowd met their eyes, though gone was the usual din. Everyone performed their task soundlessly.

A false sense of security settled over the young children, and they visibly relaxed under the quiet atmosphere. Flitting from stall to stall, Kang purchased food and necessities with Xiao's help, slipping items into his sack.

With their job nearly done, Kang decided to have a little fun, and started to tickle his friend, just under her ribs where the ticklish spot lay. Xiao doubled with gay laughter. Her bony hands clutched her sides as she gasped for breathe. Kang couldn't help chuckling. He looked at Xiao mischievously. Her eyes widened with shock and disbelief. Giving him a mock glare, she slowly backed away, her small body colliding into a hard chest.

Xiao whirled around and met the eyes of the town chief. She gulped at the menacing glare. The Japanese collaborator growled.

"Why, you little b—"

Without waiting for him to finish, Kang snatched his friend's hand and hauled her behind him as he ran weaving through the thin crowd. His worn out shoes did nothing to protect his feet, tiny pebbles and stones dug their way into his delicate soles.

Loud cursing and heavy pounding feet trailed them, attracting attention in the market. Kang and Xiao glanced behind them and saw the burly man running towards them, eyes blazing and fists clenched tightly. They gulped.

Ducking and dodging as they ran past stalls and people, they gasped for breath as their feet continuously collided with the dirt ground. The bag of food was lost during the confusion. Their lungs burned for air, hearts pounding violently against their chests, heads spinning delirious with fright. Xiao's grip loosened and started slipping from Kang's grasp.

He turned and glanced at his friend's frighteningly gaunt frame and wondered how long she could hold up with the chase before collapsing. They both were weak from starvation.

Glancing around frantically, he searched for a place to hide. In their rush, they had run in the oppositedirection, entering the most dangerous part of the city, where the Japanese soldiers concentrated. The thumping of feet steadily neared and didn't seem to lighten.

The heavy footsteps grew louder and quicker by the minute. Without another thought, Kang yanked Xiao along with him and dashed down the street. He headed for an alley, hoping to slip in unnoticed and wait for their pursuer to lose their tail.

A sharp glisten of metal in the distance caught Kang's eyes. He froze and Xiao halted behind him, her breathing quickened, nearing hyperventilation.

Ahead, the tips of two sharp points elongated, transforming into a long spear. The bayonets shimmered in the distance, flashing as they reflected the sun. The two Japanese soldiers strolled down the path with a fierce synchronized march. Dark green shirts tucked smartly into black polished belts, pants free of wrinkles and black polished boots, shimmering in the light, casting a glow.

"Oh God," Kang cursed beneath his breath. Xiao held his hand in a death grip, shaking with terror. His knees weakened and buckled, trembling from fear.

"Calm down Xiao," Kang whispered, himself trying to contain his own fright.

Xiao tried to relax to no avail. They slowed to a walk as they neared the Japanese, hoping and praying to appear unsuspecting. The strength in their legs melted away with each step, until they feebly ambled along. Kang's heart rattled against his chest, the furious beating echoed loudly in his ears.

Gravel crunched as the soldiers neared. Xiao dipped her head and bowed with Kang following suit, their hands clammy with sweat and quivering as they stood stock still, waiting for the soldiers to pass by.

Not daring to raise their heads until the thumping of boots became nothing but a distant whisper, Kang quickly bolted for the alley. Diving head first into a pile of sacks, Xiao clambered in behind him and covered themselves, listening to their surroundings. Huddling close together, they sat in the dark. Rays of light filtered in from the cracks between the bags offering weak light. Kang brought his legs close to his chest and hugged them tightly. He rested his head on his knees and closed his eyes, lulled to sleep by the quiet breathing.

Bright rays flooded into the tiny hiding place. Kang blinked his eyes open and squinted, not used to so much light. He let out a silent scream, as he noticed a tall dark shadow towering over them. Xiao clutched his shirt, nails digging into his flesh.

All at once, terror gripped the young children, encasing their bodies pushing out every inferior emotion until it was all they felt. The man's big long teeth protruded, covering the entire bottom row. His hungry stare and eerie smile was of a starved man, drinking in the sight of a bountiful feast.

"Well, well." The man gave a huge grin, "Food for me at last!"

Kang glared at him, "We're flesh and blood. You wouldn't hurt your own people." Xiao nodded enthusiastically in agreement.

The man pondered the boy's words for a while, before breaking into a sinister smile. "Oh, but I would, wouldn't I?"

The children shrieked and sank back into the wall, wishing with all their might that it would open and swallow them whole. The man grabbed their arms with his grimy hands, hauling them out of their refuge and dragged them out into the street.

Xiao tripped over her feet as she tried to keep up with his pace. The man, disgusted threw her down and she rolled to a stop, in front of a shiny pair of boots. Kang wrestled furiously, trying to get out of the man's grasp but his grip only tightened, until Kang was sure that bruises would certainly form.

The Japanese soldier looked at Xiao with a calculative stare. His eyes roamed her frame. Frowning his brows, he stroked his bayonet.

"Too thin."

He swung his bayonet, slicing into Xiao's thigh. The angry red gash appearing on the dirty flesh started to run, forming a bloody red trail. Xiao bit back a scream of pain.

The man frowned and thrust Kang to the soldier. The Japanese dug into his pocket and produced a few coins. The man shrugged and left without a glance.

"Koushin. March!" The soldier barked, yanking Xiao to her feet. She hobbled, putting her weight on the good leg. He grabbed Kang, his hand forming iron shackles around his wrist. Xiao shuddered slightly as she felt the cold metal of the rifle digging into her back, pushing her into a forceful march.

The street was deserted. A ghost of what it was a few weeks ago. Houses were in shambles, destroyed by the war. Rubble lay everywhere, and the buildings were reduced to skeletons. Not a soul was on the street. No birds chirped; no insect dared to crawl out. The sky was bleak and the trees bent their heads, resigned.

The soldier led them to the headquarters, transformed from a local police station. Instead of entering, the soldier pushed Xiao and Kang into the ranks of other captured victims, filing into two columns. Two guards watched them, with an intimidating glare, daring the victims to try something. The soldier conversed with his other comrades in what was gibberish to Kang, their words running on and on, rambling nonsense. A murmur rippled through the crowd.

"They plan on taking us to the river."

Kang and Xiao looked at each other, knowing they were going to die. Why else would they be going to the river? They just hoped that they would have a quick and painless end.

A cry rose from the group, and the Japanese soldiers glared. Some cowered slightly under the fierce gaze.

"Quiet!" A soldier barked. He raised his pistol and shot aimlessly.

The group immediately huddled together, trying to gain safety in numbers. Kang felt Xiao's grip loosen and her warmth slowly slip away. Alarmed, he turned to look at his friend, only to see the life vanishing from her eyes. Blood gushed from the side of her head. She fell to the ground with a dull thud.

The Japanese swung the butts of their rifles, like herding cattle. The captured shuffled and marched to their destination, feet dragging on the ground. Their heads were bowed and hands clasped together, yielding to their fate.

Kang followed silently, not daring to do anything. Shocked at his friend's murder, he was filled with different emotions as he arrived at the Yangtze. It wasn't the same Yangtze he wrote about weeks ago. The river didn't sparkle and shimmer like diamonds, reflecting the sun's golden rays. It was dull brown with tinges of red reflecting in the sun.

Again, the Japanese jabbered amongst themselves, and the group grew nervous.

A lady screamed, maddened with shock. The shrill sound pierced the still air. One soldier grew annoyed, thrusting his bayonet into her stomach, tilting it at an angle to stab her heart. The tilt forced the lady to impale herself upon the blade, becoming a victim of her own weight.

Kang shuddered. Fear gripped him once again. He recalled his grandmother's words.

"Click your tongue at the Yangtze river in a time of need, and help will come to you."

He didn't hesitate, and clicked his tongue. His eyes trained to the water, finding his saviour. A ripple broke out on the surface of the water, but the Japanese didn't notice. He saw a sleek dark shadow of a dolphin, gliding beneath the water.

Fuelled by the lady's death, the Japanese shot randomly into the crowd. Many groaned and collapsed, while others ran for cover. Kang dashed towards the water and dove in. Grasping tightly the fin of the dolphin, he was led away from the massacre. Looking back, he saw the Japanese shooting those that attempted escape. One by one they fell.

The dolphin swam upstream, heading towards the forest. Feeling safe, Kang clambered out

of the water. He knelt by the shore and stroked the snout of the dolphin with gratitude before disappearing into the forest. The dolphin stayed, watching Kang's retreat back.

Scared to go out in the open, Kang wandered in the forest, sleeping in trees and eating what he could scavenge. He remained until a sense of desperation lead him back to the river. His rustling footsteps alerted the Japanese soldiers. Kang's eyes grew wide as he saw the dolphin that saved him being bound together with tight ropes without resistance.

Kang wanted to protest but couldn't form words. He stood there watching, as the two soldiers worked.

A soldier glanced up and his eyes dilated as he looked at the young boy.

Kang's image blurred. His dirty hair turned dark and glossy, round eyes into sleek black irises, thin pale cheeks grew rosy and chubby. Right there, in the Chinese forest, a young Japanese boy frolicked among the trees in front of the soldiers, as illusion willed.

Kang looked at the dolphin. Its sorrowful eyes betrayed the eternal smile of its snout. As the two soldiers slaughtered the dolphin, he stood there and watched, unable to bring himself to action. As they wandered off with the carcass, Kang grief-stricken, dove into the river, his mind merging with the dark depths.

The soldier glanced back, as one lonesome tear fell.

His Love, His Fate

Eirene Woo Kar Lam, 15, St. Mary's Canossian College

The dark sky was being painted in light blue gradually. Then, the sky was marked with a brilliant stream of sunlight. The surface of the Yangtze River reflected the clouds and the sun directly as if it was a mirror. Meanwhile, a little carp woke up when the sunlight broke through the surface of the river.

His eyes lit up when he saw the amazing scenery from the bottom of the watercourse. "Wow! I've never seen such a beautiful view in my entire life!" he screamed excitedly. His mum frowned, trying to cover her ears with her hands, but he continued screaming and shook her hands, "Mum, are there any other scenes that are prettier than this one in the world?" She attempted to ignore him, but unfortunately she failed.

"There are lots of attractive places along this river. Why don't you simply swim along it?" she answered him impatiently.

"Hurray! That means we can travel to thousands of lovely places when we have time, am I correct?"

His dad rubbed his eyes gently and said, "But there are many humans living along Yangtze River ... Carpy, never believe in..." he paused, "never forget that humans are as cruel as sharks, as powerful as whales, as harmful as *Gymnotus*..."

"How come travelling along the Yangtze River relates to humans?" Carpy scratched his head and asked with a stern look.

"Because... Because..." mum hesitated, attempting to change the topic immediately, "Sweetheart, let's go out and find some food for Carpy..." She turned her head to Carpy, "And you, stay here 'til we come back." Then they both swam away swiftly.

* * *

Darkness started to swallow up all the brightness in the sky. Carpy looked around anxiously. "Where are you, mum ... don't you remember that I am afraid of places without any light? Dad, I'm starving ... don't leave me alone!" He murmured, trembling with fear and worries.

An old carp nearby gave him a look of disgust, but he didn't seem to realise. However, his face lit up suddenly when he saw her, "Mum! I missed you so much! Where have you been?" The old carp froze in astonishment when he hugged her tightly, "Stay away from me!" "What?" "I said – stay – away – from – me!" She wiggled forcefully and roared with anger. Carpy tried to rub away all the tears that blurred his vision. He soon realised this carp was not his mum

and he cried hysterically. "Sorry, I didn't mean to bother you, but I would like to ask, have you seen my daddy and mummy? I haven't seen them since this morning..." "Someone told me that many fish died at Yichang ... you may go there and take a look..."

"WHAT?" He grabbed the old carp's hand forcefully, not allowing anyone to let go of him anymore. However, she just swung away his arms and swam as fast as she could. He froze in astonishment; his entire body was filled with disbelief. He laughed sadly, "She must be kidding, mustn't she? That's impossible..." He closed his eyes, not allowing any tears to run down his face again. After a short while, he slept quietly, wearily, uneasily...

* * *

The next morning, Carpy woke up with a pair of swollen eyelids. His mind turned blank, not eager to move until he heard some drum-like sound from his stomach. He simply put something inside his mouth and continued to think of his parents. This situation lasted for weeks. One day, when he glanced at the sun that had the same shape as his dad's face through the water, he heard his dad's words, "Carpy, don't look back and just go on with your own life." He looked around, but no one was there. Although he still felt depressed, his father's words had provided an abundant amount of energy to his soul.

He looked at the sun again and said, "Don't worry, dad and mum, I will go to Yichang and find out where you are," he blinked back his tears, "though both of you may be dead, I will still find your dead bodies and bury them." His face glowed with strength.

* * *

He started swimming after a while, trying to look up whenever he felt exhausted. Hundreds of trees and millions of flowers were skimming the surface of the water over his head. He stared at the entire scenery in amusement; two tall mountains covered with grass were standing side by side, watching strange faces across the river seriously like guards; flowers in various colours surrounded this river like a crowd of friendly villagers who reach out their arms to hug newcomers. He put on a smiley face gradually, feeling a bit relieved about this wonderful beginning.

He kept swimming along the river. Soon, he saw many rock-like figures that were so tall that they almost reached the sky along the riverside. There were holes on their smooth surfaces.

"What're they?" he murmured.

"They are called 'buildings'. Many human beings are living inside their 'stomachs'," a hoarse, low-pitched voice answered.

"Who are you? How come you know all these things?" Carpy frowned in shock, gazing at this fish with a pair of puffed eyes.

"I am a Catfish. I've been living here for more than a year. Sometimes when I chat with my friends and neighbours, I get to know more about humans. So ... who are you?" Catfish asked.

"I'm Carpy, I'm now going to Yichang to find my lost parents." His eyes became more puffed.

Catfish was impressed by his toughness and filial piety, he cleared his voice, "Let me go with you." Carpy looked at him doubtfully, so he continued, "Firstly, since my wife is lost and many fish died in Yichang, I have to find her also; secondly, as you are too small to take care of yourself, I'll help you." His face turned pink.

"Thanks, Cat," Carpy was touched beyond words. Suddenly, he found it hard to breathe; the entire river was turning cloudy from right to left. He saw some brown liquid rushing out

from many tiny circles. The water was blackened within a short period of time. He tried to grab everything around him in order to take hold of Cat's hand, but he failed. He exclaimed, "Where're you, Cat?" He sobbed in fear, "Don't leave me behind!" Meanwhile, a fish held his hand, bringing him to a clearer place. As the water became a bit clearer, he saw Cat's face right in front of him, his lips twisted upwards warmly.

"How come the river turned dark?" He coughed, feeling uncomfortable about the abrupt change in the river.

"I don't know. Maybe it's due to the drainage system," Cat paused, "Some humans discharge many dirty things into this river for their convenience, and those dirty things may suffocate us. Don't you know that humans are very selfish?"

Carpy was totally stunned by what Cat said. In the past, he had just heard of this special term "humans" from old fairy tales, and he had always imagined humans in the most perfect way; they were kind-hearted, talented and beautiful. Something crossed his mind suddenly, he thought, "How come Cat is so mean in his thoughts about humans? He must be kidding! Otherwise I must prove to him that he is wrong!"

* * *

Carpy remained silent as they wandered around looking for food. After a short while, when he was still thinking of various ways to prove that Cat was wrong, his small head banged against a pillar accidentally. He was speechless as he looked upwards. Bending backwards, he saw an enormous eel-like creature right in front of him, trying to straighten its snowy white body to link two invisible ends together...

"Those ten stones are as tall as hills, don't you think so?" Carpy asked with awe, looking at those ten white and tall "stones" that were used to support the creature's huge body.

"This is the Shanghai Yangtze River Bridge. The 'rocks' under it are called 'pillars'. There are at least two pillars per mile. Don't you know that there are several pillars along this bridge built by humans?" Cat said calmly.

"Wow! Human beings are so powerful!" Carpy's eyes sparkled with delight, "What is it used for?"

"I am not quite sure ... maybe it is used to connect different people in different places so as to strengthen the bonds between humans..." Cat scratched his head.

"See! Humans are so united! They're ... perfect!" Carpy had finally found one point for the debate, but Cat, who was still finding food patiently, didn't respond to him.

* * *

After having plentiful food for lunch, Carpy continued the journey with Cat happily. Carpy was still admiring the scene of this modern city while Cat was thinking of his adorable wife...

They had been swimming along the river for several months, when they arrived in Wuhan. Though Carpy was feeling better and better, his body had become weaker and weaker because of the polluted soil nearby. Once he saw many cube-like buildings, but much lower. He asked curiously, "What's that?" "You may call them 'villas' or 'houses'. People live inside them." Cat frowned, but Carpy wasn't aware of his strange look.

He attempted to swim nearer to see the houses more clearly. His fishtail swayed from side to side, raising his head to enjoy that pleasurable moment with a big smile hanging on his face. However, the shorter the distance between Carpy and this land, the faster Carpy's heart beat.

He didn't realise this unusual situation until he touched the soil. He asked in a weak voice, "Cat, I feel so uncomfortable ... what's happening...?"

Something went through Cat's mind immediately. He swam towards Carpy and embraced him with a pair of strong arms. He looked at the sky and murmured, "Mum, is the soil being polluted like the previous time that spoiled your life? Tell me ... please." But no one replied.

* * *

Cat kept swimming along the Yangtze River as fast as he could in order to find a less polluted place for Carpy to take a rest. After a long period of time, the scenery on the land had changed from thousands of buildings and houses that beamed dazzling light across the river to complete darkness with birds' witch-like cries echoing around these two fish.

Carpy coughed with purple lips moving slowly, "Cat ... I'm afraid I will die soon..." He smiled slowly, saying a word that meant much to both of them, "Thanks..."

Cat cried hysterically since he had experienced too many separations from loved ones in life and death. "No!" he exclaimed. He then persuaded himself to calm down; he whispered with a trembling voice, "Carpy, just take a break and you will be fine. Just take a rest ... will be fine ... just take a ... rest..." Carpy closed his eyelids.

While Cat lightly touched Carpy's forehead like a caring father, he glimpsed at the big round moon, "Mr Moon, you represent the reunion of families, don't you? It must be right, my mum told me so. So please, please let Carpy become a healthy, lively fish so that he can find his parents..." He paused. "By the way, why do the humans keep damaging this beautiful river? Why? Don't they know that all this construction and waste disposal is poisoning the soil, polluting the river and taking away our lives?" he shouted with anger.

A breeze passed by, blowing his words gently along the Yangtze River.

* * *

The sun rose gradually, and sunlight shone on both their faces. Cat woke up and mumbled, "Let's continue our trip, Carp." No one replied. "Wake up," he ordered Carpy as usual while stretching his body. When he was about to turn in anger and scowl at Carpy, he realized Carpy looked ... lifeless; his face was pale, his lips remained purple, and he frowned in pain... Cat laughed nervously, "That is not fun, Carp. Come on, wake up and we'll find your parents together." He slammed into Carp's back. His strange laughter stopped. His mind went blank while his entire body was numb with fear. "Are - are you - kidding - ME?" His voice was faint.

After a few seconds, Cat's expressionless emotion changed into an uncontrollable cry. He wept for Carpy's ... death ... while he was trying very hard to rub away all the tears in his eyes, he saw... he saw Carpy's lips curling a bit! He rubbed his eyes again to ensure it wasn't an illusion! Carpy's lips trembled slightly while the purple colour on his face faded gradually... His pair of big eyes looked around wearily. However, he couldn't take his eyes off Cat, who looked straight into Carpy's eyes.

"GOOD ... morning ... I thought you were..."

"Stupid." Carpy seemed to understand what Cat was trying to say...

His eyes filled with tears again since he was very glad of being called "stupid" by this little fish. He hugged Carpy so tightly that he was almost choked to death.

"Cat, I feel much better after sleeping for a l-o-n-g time. Don't worry."

* * *

They both stayed away from the soil after that, though there were no houses or buildings on the land at all.

While they were moving towards their final destination, Cat asked, "Carpy, why do you think that humans are kind?"

"Because ... in the past, I've heard of some old fairy tales that mentioned what humans were ... Okay, let me tell you one of those stories ... Once upon a time, there was a fish who's mouth was trapped by an octopus-tentacle-like object."

"After that, he disappeared from the river," Cat glanced at Carpy, "And then a human – a human – SAVED him from the devil's hand and put him back into this river, and he lived happily ever after with his family."

"That is just a fantasy," Cat looked straight into Carpy's eyes, "not reality."

Carpy was a bit angry over Cat's disbelief, "How come you never believe in humans. They're so..." He was shocked that he couldn't find a good adjective to describe humans. "... Good!"

"Let me tell you one thing. The reason why you found it hard to breathe was due to the soil pollution caused by humans..."

"Cat, I think you're too subjective, maybe it's because the river is dirty..."

"The reason why the river is dirty is that humans throw too much rubbish into it!" Carpy was speechless after listening to Cat's words. He started to doubt his own belief...

* * *

After swimming for a few weeks, they arrived in Yichang.

"How come there's no dead fish here? The old carp told me that my... my parents are here, ain't I correct?"

Cat didn't say anything. He just observed everything seriously. Meanwhile, Carpy was very impatient since he couldn't see his parents and he was starving.

"Cat, let's find some food to eat before you find your wife. I am S-T-A-R-V-I-N-G!"

Suddenly, his eyes glittered with hope – there were millions of earthworms! He couldn't wait anymore! He peered at Cat, who was staring all around him, and swam nearer to the paradise of earthworms in order to pick the plumpest one for his meal.

He decided to eat it, and when he heard Cat shouting, "Stop!" he had already opened his mouth and bit into the worm subconsciously. There was a pain spreading from his chin; he tried to rub away this awful feeling, but unluckily he failed. He gazed at his chin in astonishment – he was bleeding! Soon, he discovered that his mouth was trapped by an octopus-tentacle-like object. He was so afraid at first, but he remembered that the fish in the story was saved by humans afterwards and hence he screamed, "Cat, I'm now showing you the reality that HUMANS ARE NOT BAD AT ALL!"

Before Cat could think of any solution, Carpy was pulled out of the river. All of a sudden, Carpy saw there was a man who was using a snake-like figure to hang him up in the air! However, the man didn't seem to be planning to let him go back into the Yangtze River... The man exclaimed, "Darling, let's cook this carp tonight!" "Sure!" The female next to this man nodded, "Oh-my-GOD!" She shouted as she pulled two carps out of the river... "Wow! We'll definitely have a great meal tonight, right?"

Carpy did not understand what the couple was talking about, he just shouted at those two

carps in excitement after he saw their faces clearly, "Dad... Mum, I... I... missed... missed..." Before he could say the last word, he felt that he couldn't breathe anymore; his swim bladder was going to explode; his whole body was losing energy bit by bit... He attempted to swing his tail by using all his remaining power so as to go back into river, but he couldn't. He tried to shout at the humans, begging them to save his life. However, when he looked at the couple with their evil smiles and witch-like laughter, he knew that he was... wrong...

* * *

His father's words ran through his mind abruptly, "Carpy, remember not to believe in humans, they are as cruel as sharks, as powerful as whales, as harmful as *Gymnotus*..."

* * *

"A couple is suffering from food poisoning after eating a carp that was caught from the Yangtze River. Meanwhile, lots of chemicals were found in that carp's body..." The reporter's voice was echoing around the house that was located right next to the Yangtze River...

A strong wind passed by, trying to blow away her annoying voice along the river...

The Girl with Emerald Hair

Gene Lin, 15, Kiangsu Chekiang College, International Section

The odour of spring thrives pleasantly like the sweetness of fruit. The long awaited warmth had condensed upon the earth finally. At last, winter had passed.

Yet, something is happening. As Li Xiang trails slowly down the riverside, he inspects the emerald river closely as he agilely hops from one rock over to another. The woods appear to be just as ordinary as they always are; the humming of cicadas echoes endlessly among the willow trees and flowers flourish at every step he lands; even right now, he can find butterflies fluttering their delicate wings before him, chasing each other like innocent children playing hide and seek.

But something is wrong in the river, something unnatural; something so foul that it defies the law of nature, a defiance that has occurred ever since Ling fell from the cliff. The river is green. Such a simple colour change cannot possibly express the impact it has brought upon the village, but whatever is happening, the River God is certainly not at peace with his new bride.

The Yangtze River that used to be clear as mirror had turn into an unmanageable mass of green water, as though it had been infested by swarms of algae within a single night. The river seems to be sick, like a wilting plant infested by pests that is dying of rot. The villagers find the water difficult to consume, for it causes sickness and poor health. The fishes are dead; fishermen are returning home empty handed every day. The village is dying, and no one knows why. Li Xiang returns to the village pervaded by the taste of misery. He immediately notices the sudden rise of noise by the shore where the fishing boats are kept. Something has attracted the interest of the whole village, something apparently so fascinating that everyone has abandoned their daily routine. For a brief while, Li Xiang assumes people had finally made the first harvest in a long while, for most fishes are soon proven to be unable to survive in the new green habitat. Or maybe it's just the death of another child he knew, the Zhang household had lost their newborn two days ago from the disease of the water, everyone knows it's just a matter of time before one more little grave appears on the village-side. However, as he moves through the crowd and discovers the source of the attention, he finds himself utterly speechless. At first glance, Xiang cannot believe his eyes. A girl stands motionlessly in the centre with her scarlet wedding dress soaked with water, her body seems to show no sign of injury or harm at all. Yet despite the fact she survived in the river for over a month, her long hair that used to be ink-black had made a curious transition to a strange yet beautiful emerald green, just like the river water she returns from. The emerald hair glimmers in the reflection of the sun like strings of silk dyed by fine, valuable green paints. Ling has been returned by the River God.

* * *

Xiang cannot make sense of what is happening. It was over a month ago when a flood struck the village with tremendous destructive force. The villagers showed admirable patience, but that had come to an end eventually. Facing reality, they listened to the village chief who proclaimed his solution to the disaster:

The River God is angered; a bride must be sent to appease his rage.

And therefore, Ling was pushed off the cliff into the traitorous flow of certain death. She had disappeared into oblivion along with her red dress and Xiang's despair.

* * *

The day ends in the silence of constant whispering, whispers that quickly spread through the village like disease. At one point the whole village, with the exception of Xiang, has reached a somewhat mutual agreement that is impossible to overthrow.

The green haired girl has brought misfortune to the village. The River God is not satisfied. She turns the river green just like her hair.

Ling is imprisoned with the other victims of disease the next day, her existence in the village is the target of ignorant gossip. She is treated like a contagious disease, something so foul that even making eye contact with her is dangerous. Ling, in the meantime, shows complete unwillingness to struggle ... in fact, she is unwilling to do anything at all.

Ling isn't the same. The girl who used to smile and sing so often, had turned into an empty shell, as though her soul has been washed away by the river. She stares into space a lot, her mind driven away from where she is. She speaks dreamily, like a bewildered child struggling to respond to questions beyond his intellectual ability.

While the village decides to ignore the existence of Ling, Xiang has been suffering the painful realisation that he might be unable to restore Ling's sanity, while simultaneously trying everything in his power to do so.

"So, what happened after you fell?" Xiang asks.

"The River God found me." Ling speaks clearly yet impassioned. Although her memories remain, she has developed a sense of coldness towards Xiang, as though an invisible and divine boundary is drawn between them. Sometimes Xiang even wonders if he is talking to an utter stranger.

"Yes, yes, we've talked about this over and over again, but what happened then?" Xiang speaks impatiently, his frustration is difficult to conceal.

"I fell into the water, it was dark, and..." Her eyes wander off to the window outside, the warm sunshine makes her hair shine like jadeite, making a striking contrast to her scarlet dress. "...and I remember, something is in the river, something big ... very big, it swam towards me and ... it ... ate me."

For a moment, Xiang thinks he has misheard Ling's words.

"He ... ate you?"

"He was swimming towards me... and I went into him." Ling concludes, staring at Xiang. "And when woke up, I was by the riverside ... the water was green."

Ling plays with her hair mindlessly as she looks at Xiang, he cannot detect the slightest hint of sentimentality from her, her glare simply penetrates into his, Xiang feels she can look into his mind; it is not a nice experience.

"But why is he making the river green?"

“He has no choice, he cannot go. Humans from downstream have blocked the channel,” (Xiang feels uncomfortable about how she refers to people as **humans**...) “He cannot travel anymore and he is caged here. That’s why the algae are growing, they are growing too fast because the River God is here, the River God should not stay at one place too long, he needs to travel.”

Although Xiang finds the story hard to believe, the fact that the miracle before him has survived a flood and returned with this impossible appearance makes his doubt feeble. He stands up and when he is just about to leave, Ling speaks again.

“Xiang, the River God travels, he should not be caged ... he will not be caged ... not for long.”

* * *

Despite Xiang’s unwillingness, it seems Ling’s prediction does carry some truth in it. Soon after she returned to the village, the Yangtze River has again revealed itself to be itching with rage. The untameable water stirs more violently every day. Soon it is impossible for the villagers to avoid hearing the crashing of waves against the shore even in their sleep. People can sense the frustration, the impatience, and the wildness; the river is ready to strike again.

“The green girl brought this!” the chief claims.

“The River God is angered!” Xiang’s father exclaims.

“She needs to be sent back where she belongs!” Ling’s mother demands.

As the village discusses this at the chief’s house, Xiang is the only person excluded from the conversation, as he is known to be in contact with the subject of their discussion.

“The River God is trapped here – there is something wrong downstream, that’s where the problem is.”

Xiang speaks; his voice draws the attention of everyone around room. The one that speaks to the green girl had spoken.

“Stupid child! How easily you believe the voice of the devil!” the chief scolds, followed by the crowd’s low remarks of agreement. Xiang’s parents immediately pull him back, out of everyone’s sight, like he is something inappropriate to present in public, something of shame.

The village decides to travel to the highland before the flood comes. The plan is to leave the green girl in the cottage to be washed over by the flood ... again.

The bride is to be returned to her husband.

* * *

Xiang rushes back towards the cottage, and opens the gate to discover that Ling is still in the barn, sitting calmly along with other vermin that are left to die. It almost appears that Ling is not aware of what is happening; the water has risen to her waist already.

“Ling! QUICK! We have to go!”

Xiang tries to hold Ling’s hand yet hers fails to cooperate; her face is calm and determined, completely unaware that half of her body is submerged in green water.

“LING! We need to go!” Xiang shouts to her as he shakes her shoulder as hard as possible to wake her sanity.

“Xiang, I don’t want to go, I don’t belong here, not anymore,” she responds, her hand slips softly through his palm, refusing to grip on to it. “I ... I don’t feel human... anymore. I feel different, the river is calling me.” For the first time, Xiang sees a sense of gladness on her face.

“Xiang, the River God is leaving!” Ling announces clearly.

And then, all is gone.

The confined world of the cottage is completely shattered by the enormous wave of river water striking the village unexpectedly. Xiang and Ling are instantly thrown into a world of pure green. Xiang cannot see, he does not know which way is up or down, forward or backward – all he sees is green.

The silence under the world of water is mesmerizing; such calmness is ridiculously different from the world above that is in riot. Xiang kicks his legs and waves his arms, doing anything in his power to search for the exit of this invisible cell of no escape. It feels as though something is pressing against Xiang's chest, crushing harder and harder, and somehow he knows his lung will eventually be ruptured.

Suddenly, from the far distance of darkness, somewhere from the other world, a high, magnificent, wild voice echoes in the world of the water, it is so powerful that even in such a desperate situation, Xiang can feel a strange mixture of chilling fear and excitement running through every cell in his body ... because even though he cannot see it, he knows who the owner of that voice is, and it is on the move.

A firm arm grabs his wrist and draws Xiang quickly towards a certain direction and plucks him out of water. The relief of being able to breathe again is sweet and satisfying.

It is Ling – even now, she seems to be in no shock at all, in fact her face is now coloured with unmistakable joy. She giggles at Xiang as he tries to cough out water, coming to the realisation that they had made it out of the water.

As they swim towards the nearest visible land, Xiang still replaying what just happened in his mind, he finds himself at the cliff again, the one that Ling was forced to jump from. Still coughing out the water out of exhaustion, Xiang sees Ling walking towards the cliff. Her hair looks exactly the same as the water right now – emerald green.

“Ling!”

The river has submerged the entire village, Xiang has never felt so frightened beside the river, how easily he can be devoured by the green monster simply by making the mistake of tripping over the moss.

“Xiang,” she turns around and speaks, smiling, looking just like how she used to be. “Stay here and you’ll be safe. It’s going to be over soon. The River God is waiting for me.”

Ling turns to the cliff as she moves towards her desired destination. Her scarlet wedding dress flows gently in the air, impossible to miss.

Xiang runs over as he grabs her arm and tries to pull her back. But Ling leans her face towards Xiang and whispers in his ear,

“I’m going home.”

And so it is that Ling turns around and disappears once again into the air Xiang once desperately tried to catch. And just like last time, he fails.

Xiang stares into the empty space just like he had done a few months ago and yet, he feels exactly the same way as last time, the devastation does not feel any less painful on losing his friend again.

Xiang falls to his knees and crawls towards the edge of the cliff, the water is not as high as last time but no sight of Ling can be found. Even from such a distance, Xiang is undeniably petrified by the power of the river he once considered a peaceful creature to live by.

And then he sees something.

The exact spot where Ling fell is starting to flutter with an unnatural pattern of wave. As it grows stronger, the wave forms a vortex. It grows larger and larger, until a black hole appears within it – an endless black realm with no end or beginning.

Then, a high, magnificent, wild voice emerges from the darkness, the same voice Xiang heard in the water, something is in the black hole, and it's coming.

It grows larger and larger ... closer and closer, until it reaches the surface and reveals its true identity.

Xiang cannot believe what he is witnessing.

The creature appears to have a long, emerald body; its skin seems like it is made of jadeite scales. It looks like a snake, but with the head of a beast that has sharp canine teeth, long golden whiskers and horns. It has claws like a reptile yet it moves so gracefully that you doubt whether it is a beast at all. The monster's eye met Xiang's. It's an eye of pure black that is so large Xiang is absolutely petrified, because he can see his own reflection within its pupil.

The creature begins to release a divine howl so powerful the earth might have been on the verge of destruction. Xiang's body flinches uncontrollably as he sees the beast in astonishment. The beast's voice seems to break the heavy clouds in the sky and releases warm sunshine that spills upon the land like precious gold.

The River God had completely revealed himself; every patch of scale on his skin reflects the sunlight unlike anything Xiang could ever imagine.

And then, with a slight bend of its body, the snake-like River God makes a gesture that almost seems like a bow to Xiang. The two exchange a long stare in which Xiang finally understands this creature knows exactly who he is.

The River God releases his last howl, declaring his departure, and glides elegantly towards the sunshine from the great entrance in the sky. It is as though the river itself is leaving too. The green snake grows smaller and smaller, and eventually, disappears along with the sunshine the moment it penetrates the cloud.

As though it had never happened.

Xiang stands speechlessly by the cliff, unable to do anything but keep staring into the point in the sky where the dragon vanishes.

Upon the small island of rock, Xiang feels something has been taken from him. With a sense of relief, he feels peace for the very first time.

* * *

Years pass, Xiang is forced to leave the village after the dam downstream somewhere called the Three Gorges causes the water to rise, submerging his village beneath it.

In the final few years of Li Xiang's life, he returns to the river once again where his village used to be, as his trembling hand struggles to hold on to the cane that keeps him standing alongside the rolling bottle of oxygen that sustains his every breath. He takes something from his bag; something that was beyond extravagant in his youth but merely valuable nowadays; something he discovered washed ashore the day after he survived the flood.

A scarlet, Chinese wedding dress that is too small for a grown woman to wear.

Li Xiang rubs the piece of fabric against his palm, feeling it slipping through his fingers and fall into the Yangtze River.

At last, what was once taken had finally been returned, and that is how the story ends.

Daphne of the Yangtze River

Jaslyn Chiu Lon Yan, 15, Shatin Tsung Tsin Secondary School

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to heaven, we were all going direct the other way – in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only.”

Myrtle Townsend slammed her literature book shut, glancing at the distant Three Gorges Dam through the fading light. With its state-of-the-art large turbines, it was a historic engineering, social and economic success for the Chinese. However, as the massive turbines and generators spun and buzzed to life for their daily monotonous chores, the dam innocently crushed wandering fish that had never been taught ‘curiosity killed the cat’ with its wicked and monstrous jaws; it had smothered archaeological and cultural sites to death, infuriated nearby slopes till they snapped and crumbled, nauseating the nearby lands who then vomited tons of sediments every day, shaved the hair off forests and wrecked the homes of millions.

Myrtle sighed, she was no philistine; the dam was a drop-dead gorgeous piece of art sculpted by the hands of man but it had knocked nature off its course. Now, she felt contrite, like a toddler who had knocked over and broken all the wine bottles at a wedding party. Her mercenary billionaire parents had showered money on building a resort hotel beside the dam, promising the ailing Yangtze River another infection of viruses – bustling tourists who had no sense of environmental protection and would create stagnant waste. In fact, they had brought her along on this cruise to witness the opening ceremony of the hotel. Her parents might have loved her but they didn’t understand her.

Myrtle stood at the tip of the deck, arms flailing out, eyes closed, rivulets of water spraying on her cheeks, the wind whistling a symphony of cicadas and nightingales. Myrtle felt like Rose in *Titanic*, with the wild wind as Jack, embracing and caressing her gently.

Suddenly, a strong gust of malicious wind knocked Myrtle off balance. Jack lost grip of her and Myrtle found herself parachuting, without a parachute, into the river. Her desperate screams for help were swallowed by the voracious wind as ice cold water gushed up to greet her with pure torture. Myrtle shrieked out and put up a gallant fight against the engulfing currents but only found herself sinking deeper and deeper, choking on bone-chilling water. Soon, her vision of the cruiser faltered, like she was about to be awoken from a nightmare,

only this was no ordinary dream, it was real. With sinking horror and disgust, her science knowledge reminded her, "The waters near the dam could reach hundreds of feet in depth." It was like falling into an abyss, water filling up her lungs, kicking all the oxygen out. Myrtle's vision darkened.

"When you look into the abyss, the abyss also looks into you. I'm going to die ... there's no way anyone could save me ... or find my body..."

With that, she passed out.

* * *

A ray of light and hope blinded Myrtle.

"Where am I?" murmured Myrtle.

"You're in Arcadia, Myrtle," a singsong voice chirped.

With a start, Myrtle bolted upright to come face to face with a beautiful girl around her age.

"Pardon me for waking you up, Myrtle. I'm Princess Daphne, the princess of Arcadia.

Please, call me Daphne. Are you all right? My butler found you drowning near the dam. I was so perturbed you would never regain consciousness. Oh, thank God!"

Myrtle blinked and scanned her surroundings. She had long given up on believing in fairytale kingdoms but what greeted her eyes pushed her doubts aside. Flourished with jewelled flowers and grasses, Myrtle had practically stepped into a children's fairytale book. However, much to her surprise, a creeping fog was shadowing Arcadia's edges, withering flowers and trees where it touched them.

Sensing her unsteadiness, Daphne smiled sadly, "Or welcome to what is left of Arcadia. The sinister fog you might have noticed is the result of all the pollution and disruption you human beings have brought to the Yangtze River. With each passing day, the fog is sprawling wider and wider. Soon, the fog will smother the whole of Arcadia and Arcadia will be destroyed. But it is under control with all the Arcadians' combined efforts. Hopefully, Arcadia won't come to an end for another centenary or so."

Suddenly, a masculine voice broke Myrtle out of her spell. "Daphne! Daphne! Hades is planting a Pandora's box in..." Myrtle found her eyes locked on the boy dashing in. Tall, with intense forget-me-not-blue eyes, a mop of curls and finely-moulded features, Myrtle felt her heart melt for him.

"Myrtle, let me introduce you to my brother and the heir to Arcadia's throne, Prince Apollo."

"Pleasure to meet you, Myrtle. Forget all about that prince and heir stuff, just call me Apollo," Apollo flashed Myrtle a sunshine smile. "Oh. Back to business, Daphne. The Crystal Lake showed a vision of Hades planting a Pandora's Box near River Styx and the human world being blown apart. I must stop her!" Apollo exclaimed indignantly.

"For Pete's sake, Apollo. In a few years time, you'll be crowned king. When will you grow up and stop getting yourself killed?" Daphne sighed.

"Count me in, Apollo. I want to help you save the already damaged world in the name of all humans from the claws of evil as a sign of apology for destroying it," Myrtle volunteered bravely.

The atmosphere was as quiet as a graveyard for a few moments as Apollo and Myrtle glanced at Daphne hopefully, like two toddlers begging their parents for permission to go to Disneyland.

Either Daphne sensed that there was no point in trying to thwart the two obstinate heroes' plans for saving the world, or she had a soft spot for Apollo's pleading eyes, but she finally nodded and could only say, "You have no idea what you've stumbled upon."

* * *

Soon, Myrtle and Apollo were whizzing at breakneck speed in a bubble.

"In a nutshell, Hades is Daphne's doppelganger, a dead ringer for Daphne.

Unfortunately, while Daphne decided to be tolerant and forgive humans' foolish behaviour, Hades resorted to fighting as an eco-warrior, planning deadly revenges against humans. In fact, their attitudes towards humans have mixed as well as oil and water. Sadly, Hades left Arcadia for River Styx with one-third of Daphne's male subjects to build the headquarters for her deadly catastrophes. Hades kills anyone who gets in her way or becomes a burden to her even her subjects. As far as I know, they have only come up with one effective weapon, the Pandora's Box, which explodes like a bomb and could kill every human being, except for Arcadians and animal species," Apollo said. "Oh! We're almost at the Styx region."

Styx ... the river to the underworld of Hades in Greek mythology ... the name gave Myrtle the creeps.

The Styx region lived up to its name. As they passed an unfriendly gate warning people not to trespass, the temperature dwindled to teeth-chattering cold. Under her feet, gnarled fingers of scabrous seaweed clawed at the bubble, threatening to drag them down to join their collection of bones. As the last nightmare of seaweed left them alone, drawing themselves away like the red curtains to a mesmerizing drama, Myrtle could only gape in terror at what unfolded before her eyes. The drama was a horror, set in a spooky history museum in disarray. Everywhere, bits and pieces of bone fragments of grotesque species from a child's monster nightmare were strewn across the earth like a scattered jigsaw puzzle, a long-forgotten cemetery left to rot in hell. Here and there, dissected replicas of nameless cultural sites were buried by sand dunes, like antibodies attacking a virus.

"Hades built this living hell to indoctrinate her followers and remind them of all the 'good deeds' humans have done to the Yangtze River, making precious species extinct and sinking cultural sites. Look, there's a baiji's fossil," Apollo pointed. Myrtle drew her gaze away, expecting to see some science fiction monster. "Hey! That's Hades' hideout and the Styx River. This is it, Myrtle, we're going to save the world!" shouted Apollo.

Looking at the cave looming ahead, Myrtle gulped – she had a few doubts.

* * *

"How are we supposed to get in, this whole cave is a fortress!" whispered Myrtle from their hideout behind a boulder. Four armed guards stood at the cave entrance, statue-like, glaring at each passing speck of dust. "Beats me!" Apollo muttered feebly. "Psst ... I think I can help!" rang a voice behind them. They turned to come face to face with a girl covered from head to toe in soot and rags. Myrtle blinked, the girl's sea-blue eyes and fair hair seemed awfully familiar, yet she couldn't remember where she had seen that face. The girl fished out a small piece of grilled lizard. "The guards love lizard meat more than their lives, they would sacrifice their lives for it, just toss it out and they'll be too busy fighting each other to notice any intruders," the girl continued.

Taking the lizard, Apollo asked, "How can we ever thank you for your help, miss? By the way, what are you doing in Styx all alone? It's no place for a girl to loiter around."

Tears welled in the girl's eyes as she forced a lopsided smile, "I'm Ella, a former slave of Hades who was considered an eyesore and banished by her. Now I'll spend the rest of my life rotting here, forgotten and abandoned." "No, you won't. My sister can help. She has a home for

refugees that could offer you shelter. Here, hold on tight, let me offer you a lift to her place." Apollo blew a bubble around the girl. In a whisk, she was out of sight.

Myrtle tossed the lizard out. Sure enough, the guards pounced on it like cats on a mouse, kicking and biting each other. Apollo and Myrtle tiptoed into the cave.

Once inside, they shuffled along a tunnel to an opening. The two of them ducked into an alcove as six shadows drew closer. Myrtle peeped at the approaching leader. There, leading the small procession was Hades herself in a black cloak, giving instructions to her subjects, "Now, I want you to take care of the ribbon and handle it **carefully**. The box has been delivered and set up secretly. The opening ceremony offers us no second chance if we screw things up. Do you hear? I'll meet you at the hotel in half an hour. Now, I've got bigger fish to fry..."

Myrtle blinked. Ribbon? Opening ceremony of a hotel? What about the plans of blowing up Styx River?

Myrtle stole a glance at Hades' subjects. To her surprise, they were all male and bore a strong resemblance to the guards at the entrance, the same burly build, bald heads, smart dark suits and sunglasses. Hades' subjects were all men. But then what about Ella?

With mounting horror, she figured out the intricate solution. The pieces of the puzzle fit together. They had been tricked.

"Apollo, run! This whole thing is a trick!"

No sooner had the words tumbled out than the cave shuddered and shook violently. A dull rumble echoed the tunnel. Looking around, Myrtle saw tongues of boiling lava licking their way out, heading straight for them.

Apollo blew a bubble just in time to carry them out to safety. Heat penetrated the bubble, threatening to melt it and tip them off to join the fake Hades and her subjects, perishing before their eyes as they sped away.

Breathing a sigh of relief, Myrtle rasped, "We've been pawns in a cat and mouse game, Apollo. Hades was planning to finish us off first, by luring us into the cave in the form of pathetic Ella, then go after Daphne. Worse still, she will watch the world burst into flames as my father snips the ribbon at the opening ceremony of his hotel in half an hour."

"We must beat her in reaching Daphne. She's in grave danger!"

* * *

But it was too late. There, lying in a crumpled heap amidst a sea of pillows was Daphne's body. Fear, anger and sorrow stabbed Myrtle like the knife embedded in Daphne's heart. As if that wasn't heartbreaking enough, the dripping blood on the blade spelt 'GAME ON', scoffing at Myrtle for her foolishness. Get a grip, Myrtle! You've got a murderer who's going to blow up the world on the loose! She thought indignantly, reproaching herself.

Contrary to her expectations, Apollo didn't shed a tear. Gingerly, he took out a pocketknife and snipped off his sister's long, silky hair.

"Daphne wouldn't have wanted us to sit and mourn her while Hades' plans are going on flawlessly," Apollo said, without a hint of sorrow. "She would have had urged us to hatch a plan to save the world." He continued, "Now, here's my plan B, Hades must've gone to the ceremony to watch the holocaust of human civilisation like a horror movie. We must catch her with this..." he tied up Daphne's hair into a lasso. "Daphne's hair is the only thing in this planet which could hold Hades. We must tie her up and incarcerate her in our ice caverns forever." "And stop my father from cutting the ribbon," Myrtle piped in.

There was no time to lose. The hotel opening ceremony was starting in five minutes. Every ticking second on the clock was a countdown to the bomb that would end the world, not to mention the fact that Myrtle's father was going to cut the ribbon.

Myrtle nodded at Apollo, who blew bubbles around them until they were engulfed in a giant bubble bath. "Bubbles, please take us to the hotel."

In the twinkling of an eye, Myrtle and Apollo found themselves at the entrance of the imposing hotel, two drops of water in a river of high-strung people. As the two of them weaved their way through the flooding crowds, the MC's resonant voice soared above the stifling crowds, "And now, we have the honour of inviting Mr Townsend to cut the ribbon for our opening ceremony."

To Myrtle's horror, she caught a glimpse of her immaculately-dressed father, picking up the scissors, poised to cut the ribbon. With more than 20 yards to go, less than five seconds before her father wiped every human being off the face of earth with his bare hands and the evil mastermind swallowed by the crowds, Myrtle knew there was only one thing to do. It was the oldest trick in the book – "Sniper! Everyone get down!" Myrtle screamed at the top of her lungs.

In a wink, Myrtle's father was ushered away by an army of bodyguards, leaving the scissors and ribbon behind. Wave after wave of people toppled over like dominos, all except for one.

"That's Hades!" shouted Apollo. "Oh no! It looks like she's finishing her dirty work by herself! Not so fast, you moron!"

Sure enough, Hades was galloping towards the ribbon, knife in hand. Apollo spun his lasso and threw ... but missed.

Cackling with laughter, Hades raised the knife...

"No!" Myrtle threw herself on top of Hades and kicked the knife out of her reach, wrestling Hades onto the floor. But she was much too strong for Myrtle. Shoving her aside, Hades scrambled up and reached for the scissors. Mustering as much strength as she could, Myrtle stuck out her leg in Hades' way and sent her falling, face first.

Apollo saw his chance and threw the lasso again. Luck was on his side, as the lasso looped itself neatly around Hades.

Myrtle sighed and smiled, as Apollo blew bubbles to send the infuriated Hades to the ice caverns.

* * *

At sunset, Apollo produced a heavy bag of ashes and offered it to Myrtle.

"My dear Myrtle, would you proudly accept my offer to sprinkle my sister Daphne's ashes all over the Yangtze River? "I'd be honoured to do so," Myrtle replied.

As the egg-yolk-sun spilled its last contents over the Yangtze River, Myrtle and Apollo travelled along the river in a bubble, sprinkling the ashes all along the river like Hansel and Gretel's breadcrumbs, sowing the seeds of hope and peace along with them.

"I guess we'll have to say goodbye at the end of the day, Apollo. My parents must be worried sick about me. I hope the fog in Arcadia will one day dissolve completely," Myrtle said, a lump in her throat.

"I'm sure it will. I'll never forget you and your help in saving the world, Myrtle," Apollo avoided Myrtle's gaze.

"Looking on the bright side, I have set up a mission for myself. My family has the immense wealth to build resorts that destroy wildlife and endanger species but we could put

aside our big plans to earn big bucks. Instead, we could combine money and heart to protect and preserve the world's nature, not just the Yangtze River, from being destroyed!" Myrtle exclaimed enthusiastically.

"That's a brilliant idea!" Apollo reached into his pocket and took out a locket. "Here's a small locket to always remind you of Arcadia and me, Myrtle. Wherever you are in the future promoting wildlife preservation, if you ever need a helping hand, just call my name and I'll be there."

"Thanks, Apollo. Look! Some Daphne seedlings are already growing!"

As the sun retreated and yawned after a tedious day of exhausting work, a shooting comet whizzed past the Daphne seedlings.

The Newcomer

Kelly Chan, 15, Sacred Heart Canossian College

The water was deadly tranquil; sunlight shined upon the sky and warmed the lifeless river. Silently, XiaoXi sat at the bank of the river, hoping that he would come, again, from the world that he knew nothing of...

"DR. KIM, EMERGENCY CASE! 10-year-old boy committed suicide, seriously injured in the head, unsteady heartbeat. We need your help!" a nurse shouted. Edwin swallowed his last spoonful of rice without chewing and dashed towards the emergency room.

To Edwin, it wasn't aberrant seeing people at such young age committing suicide, there were at least six to seven cases every single day. Some of them woke up saying that they were in heaven; but others just could not make it.

"What is the meaning of life?" Edwin thought, as he was taking a break in his room, "what if I died in a car accident, will it make any difference?" He gazed at piles of files of his patients, buried deeply in his own thought.

Suddenly, everything around Edwin seemed to flutter, his vision gradually became vague and fuzzy as if things were spinning vigorously around him. Before envisioning what was happening, he had arrived in another place, a place that was thoroughly different from the one where he belonged to.

"Where on earth am I?" Edwin asked.

Slowly and unhurriedly, Edwin realised that he was standing on top of an isolated knoll. Ahead of him was an ancient village, walls of houses had worn down; tiny pavements between houses seemed to have experienced lots of attrition. Large fields in between houses were planted with grain and vegetables. Yet, what caught his attention most was the river at the furthest north. Though part of it was blocked by those sparsely distributed houses, Edwin was confident that he had seen that river before.

Suspiciously, he rambled towards the village.

Things weren't as expected. Scarcely when he reached the main path of the village, people started to investigate him with a curious look. Simultaneously, Edwin noticed that people around were all wearing ancient Chinese costumes with loose lapels and long sleeves. It was really awkward for him wearing a white medical gown.

Though it might have sounded capricious, the fact that Edwin had travelled back to the ancient time was crystal clear. He hastily escaped the crowd and fled. Without complications, he was able to find a place to settle down, which is a house located near the river. Soon, he started to help cure people with diseases, meanwhile, hoping to find a way to go back to the modern world.

Every day, he met patients with similar diseases, like influenza, diarrhea, etc. He often thought about his patients in the modern world who mostly suffered through committing suicide or drunk-driving.

“What is the meaning of life?” he questioned himself.

Silently, he sat at the river bank, refreshing himself by the soothing scenery. Water in the river was deep and dull; he wondered what was under it. Drip flow from trees dived deep into the water; causing ripples appeared on the water surface. Occasionally, some petite boats would travel along the river, carrying carts of goods for trade. Every so often, villagers would come with a gigantic bucket and filled it with water, some of them used it to water their crops and vegetation; others drank the water just to alleviate themselves under the blazing sun.

“This is the Yangtze River, isn’t it beautiful?” a boy appeared from nowhere muttered and sat beside Edwin.

“The Yangtze River.” he repeated slowly, “that’s right! This is the Yangtze River.” he gushed in enthusiasm. As he turned to the boy, he gaped in surprise with his mouth opened – one of the boy’s eyes was all white – he knew at once that the boy had serious cataract in that eye and at that stage, that eye has gone blind. When looking into his hollow eyes, Edwin felt a second of sourness in his heart. Yet, despite the fact that he was half-blind, his face was slender. He had dark mousy hair and a bulbous nose, which made Edwin thought of the boy whom he saved after committing suicide.

“So, you are the new-comer! I am XiaoXi, nice to meet you.” XiaoXi greeted him in a friendly way.

“Hi. Nice to meet you, too.” Edwin replied in an uneasy manner.

“Oh! Don’t worry. I can see you, there’s nothing to be afraid of!” he prattled with a childish smile on his face. Nevertheless, XiaoXi knew exactly that there was no cure for his eye; furthermore, the disease in his left eye was gradually spreading to his right eye. Doubtlessly, Edwin was aware of that. He knew that ere long, the boy would be completely blind, it was just a matter of time.

“Isn’t that amazing? The sky, the sun, the River... I like to smell things and taste things, and sometimes sitting here all day, feeling the beauty of the River and nature. Even though I can’t see everything clearly, I can still feel them, right?”

Edwin closed his eyes, trying to feel the nature. He took a deep breath, warm air immediately passed through his throat and filled his lung. Perhaps it was the flowers, he could smell a fragrant scent from the air; perhaps it was the birds in the sky, he could hear them chirping in delight. Edwin opened his eyes full of wonderment, “this boy is different” he thought. Again, he reminisced the scene when he received an emergency case of the 10-year-old boy.

One month passed, XiaoXi’s eyes were getting better day by day with the help of modern methods. Everyone in the village was astounded seeing XiaoXi’s eyes recovering, as cataract at that time could never be cured.

Every day, the two of them would meet at the bank of the River. Together, they chatted about everything; now and then, they would just sit at the River bank and appreciated the delectable view of nature. “The Yangtze River,” XiaoXi said “is one of the two most important things that connect every one of us in the village. We drank from the same river, farmed with water from the same river...” “If the River is just one of it, what is the other one?” Edwin thought, but didn’t ask. Until one day, XiaoXi suggested to bring him to explore more about the village. After all, Edwin had worked for a long time without having been truly acquainted with the place.

It was just a ten-minute walk to the main path of the village, where population was highly saturated. As it was in the middle of the day, men were working in the field, busy forking over the soil and watering the crops; women were clustered in groups and started chatting; children were playing around cheerfully without any worries in their mind. Edwin felt as if he was in his hometown, where people interacted with each other. It was rare to see such a scene in the modern society, everyone would be immersed in their own affairs: neighbours didn't greet each other, colleagues just aimed at competing with each other, and students fought for higher grades with distinctive methods. It was nothing compared to the love and care that was found in the village.

"It's love." Edwin mumbled.

As soon as he muttered those words, he disappeared out of sight.

All of a sudden, everything went back to normal. He was sitting at his office desk in his medical gown.

"It's love." He answered.

Troubled Utopia

Kendra Cui, 15, Sha Tin College

“Political language... is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind.”

George Orwell

* * *

That day, two beings called Liu died. The dolphin named Liu, and the human named Liu.

* * *

Liu woke to the sound of his robot: Good morning, Mr Liu. Normally, he might have been agitated to be so rudely woken up at this time of the morning, but today was special. It was the first of August, the year 2050, and the first day of his new job. He was to be a junior manager for the government’s new Yangtze River environmental program. All the pollution of the past decades was to be completely cleaned out, and the river restored to its former natural glory – albeit with a few modifications for human usage, of course.

He had had many jobs before this, but this one was special. This job was for the government – the absolutely incredible government that had made such important advances in previous years. Forty years ago, while the world was on the brink of nuclear war, the government had pulled everything together, introduced a series of strict measures that had re-established a world where society was perfectly balanced, and everyone was happy. No war, economic crises or famines. Liu was determined to repay his duty to the government, maintain that perfect balance and make the public happy – and his job on the Yangtze River was just the first step. As a bonus treat, he would also be working with the Yangtze dolphin – an animal he had studied for four years as a graduate marine biology student.

Liu had been told that sentiment was his weakness – he would become emotional at the most inconvenient times – that was how he had lost his previous jobs. But not this time. He would not allow his emotions to get in the way of him completing his job.

In the sky-transport station on his way to work, Liu bumped into Mr Maupassant, Ms Rodriguez, Mrs Hepburn and Mr Masahiro. Although Liu lived in Chongqing, the fifth largest metropolitan in China with a population of exactly twenty million and five, fifty point four percent of the population was foreign – a perfect example of the absolutely perfect globalization and population integration and control scheme carried out twenty years ago. The

new government had controlled the size and ethnicity of each family until a perfect population balance was reached in the world, and all races coexisted in harmony. As Liu said good morning, his four neighbors all flashed him the same set of pearly white and very, very straight and symmetrical teeth.

In the streets, Liu saw no beggars. The meticulously planned economic control program had been executed to perfection. Capitalism had been abolished and replaced with strict measures that deemed absolute economic equality. Everyone received exactly the same wages and exactly the same pensions and paid exactly the same prices for the same products. No one was richer than the other.

* * *

“The first thing you must know”, the supervisor told Liu at his orientation session, “is that everything must be run with the utmost care and PERFECTION. No mistakes. What. So. Ever. None at all. And I do not expect any from you. You were the best, chosen from over five million candidates, and you will live up to our expectations.”

Liu was determined not to disappoint on the first day of his job, and snapped straight as he said, “Yes, of course, sir. Anything for my duty to contribute to a better society, sir.”

The supervisor then took Liu on a moving platform along the river. “Here, we are reconstructing the natural environment of the Yangtze, so that biodiversity may thrive once again. Scientists have created genetically modified plants that will absorb all toxins from the river water. Exactly 1,437 nutrients have been added and are monitored every 23 minutes to ensure easiest growth for river fish. Like human society, the dolphin community also requires the strictest measures in order for it to thrive to its full potential.”

Liu smiled with familiarity as he recognised the marine preservation techniques he had studied in graduate school. The government was doing a perfect job indeed with its conservation.

As the two men passed a chamber, Liu was suddenly struck by a wailing, screeching sound; it was beyond pity or description, it was torturous and bloodcurdling – it was almost beyond the human range of hearing.

As he shuddered at the torturous sound, Liu felt as if spiders were creeping up his goosebumps, and turning his neck like a mechanical doll, he peered into the chamber to find the source of the sound. What he saw caused his insides to twist.

A Yangtze dolphin, one of the animals he had admired so much, was pressed against the floor of the chamber, while a long, claw-like needle repeatedly extended in and out of its abdomen. Blood flowed out, even brighter than lava, while piercing screams echoed from the dolphin. Yet that was not what unsettled Liu the most. The dolphin did not really look like a Yangtze dolphin, but at the same time it did – it was just ... something about the dolphin was false and cold.

What were they doing to the dolphins? Wasn't the program supposed to protect the dolphins? And why did the dolphin look so unnatural? Liu's emotions threatened to boil over – he had loved studying the dolphin in university – but the supervisor suddenly cut Liu with a stare so sharp that Liu immediately recoiled both internally and externally. Not now ... you were told sentiment was your weakness ... don't risk your job ... you need this job ... this job that will allow you to contribute to the perfect society...

* * *

Thus, Liu pushed these thoughts to the back of his mind, and carried on with his job. Although he did not approve of this treatment of the dolphins, he did not let this get in his way – he was repaying his duty to a perfect society, and the numerous achievements of this governmental program far outnumbered and outweighed this one incident.

Every day, Liu monitored all 1,437 nutrients of the river every 23 minutes, he made sure all the correct species of plants were brought in and he checked the river water for ion concentrations. Then he surveyed the area's geology and he checked the health of the dolphins, with up to exactly 384 checks to be performed six times a day. He made sure there was not one millimetre or one gram or one millilitre of error in all the measurements, working with a mechanical and inhuman precision.

All the while, Liu had imagined his job to be much more glorious as opposed to arduous and repetitive, but he was eager to please, and accepted his work without complaint. This strictness and control was necessary to maintain the balance and perfection of the Yangtze River environment, just as the same strict control was necessary to bring the world back from the brink of nuclear war forty years ago and establish this perfect New World.

His real challenge came two weeks later.

* * *

What's BZZZ going on? Will someone tell me what's BZZZZZZ BZZZ going on? How do I turn this off?

Sirens wailing in the control room, Liu rushed about, checking all the readings. No, he was sure that he hadn't made one single mistake with his measurements. All nutrients, organisms and their health were accounted for; everything was, apparently, perfect according to –

"WHAT'S THE MEANING OF ALL THIS?" the supervisor shrieked as he burst in the room. "You were to make no mistakes at all! I thought you were capable of maintaining everything perfectly!" Bits of spittle flew across the room.

"I – I'll check again."

Liu's hands and eyes darted frantically over the control board, searching for the tiny error that had caused the warning system to go off. He flinched as his gaze suddenly passed over a meter he had neglected during the past two weeks – it had seemed too insignificant at first to give attention to. Blood pounding like drums in his ears, Liu noted the population of the dolphins in the river: it was at four hundred and sixty-two, one more than the specified four hundred and sixty-one.

"Who allowed that one more dolphin to be born? Who allowed two dolphins to have sexual intercourse? WHO? Do you understand the seriousness of the implications of a surplus population? When there is a surplus population, it means there is a lack of already strained nutrients and resources for each individual, meaning that individuals cannot grow to their full potential and perfection meaning that imperfect organisms are produced and the community as a whole cannot develop! This one extra dolphin could upset the perfect balance of the whole community – a balance you should be no stranger to, after having experienced the government restore balance to the human race!" Liu's face was now quite moist with saliva from the supervisor's mouth.

"KILL THAT SURPLUS ORGANISM!"

Liu's heart leapt and his eyes wept as he watched from a surveillance camera a blade fly in from the air, and lodge itself in the brain of the tiny creature, barely three months old. In his mouth, Liu tasted regret and despair bitter as blood in the face of the murder of this baby dolphin.

"As for you, you are a threat to the perfect balance of the dolphin's society, and ours. Had this mishap happened in the human world, the consequences would have been more severe: people fighting over already limited resources and space. It would have ruined the perfect balance. You must be rectified."

* * *

Rectified? But ... Liu was back in that chamber he first saw two weeks ago. Long needle, crimson blood and screaming dolphin. The memories and feelings of disgust and sadness threatened to drown him again. Rectified? Here?

"What's ... going to happen to me?"

"The same thing that's happening to them. You see, the Yangtze dolphins were incompatible with humans before the start of the New World. They were weak and imperfect. After being resurrected from extinction, scientists replicated their DNA and spliced desired chromosomes from desirable features of other organisms. What you are seeing is the genetic splicing operation. These new dolphins are much more superior and can survive alongside human industry and withstand pollution, whereas the previous dolphins could not. Now the conservationists are happy, and the big developers are happy."

But the dolphins aren't happy ... Liu thought. "And I am not happy – both with their treatment and mine! This perfect society you speak of ... is it really worth it to sacrifice so many lives to create this perfect, balanced society? I'd rather we went back to the nuclear wars where life was at least sacred!"

"No matter. You will not have an opinion after this operation. Yes, we shall remove your flaws of stubborn sentiment and imprecision in your work. **In our current society, there is no space for imperfection. There is too much competition and pressure to maintain a perfect, balanced society. There is no space for weeds like you. Besides...**"

The soul named Liu was dying.

"... isn't the public better off not knowing? Isn't it better not to upset the perfect balance the government has created? One has always known that to achieve a perfect society, sacrifices must be made, right?"

The River's Letter to an Orphan

Louise Yung, 15, Renaissance College Hong Kong

Ever since I was born, I have always loved to stay by the Yangtze River all day. The rush of water amongst the tranquillity of the mountains, the smooth waves in between the rough gorges ... I spend all day counting the number of peaks in the region, spend all day counting my small footsteps as I make my way up the mountains; yet try as I might, I can't measure how long the river is.

I wonder: where does the river stretch to? Is it trying to reach, endlessly, for its family too?

"Yang!" The lingering note of Zhu's call, drifting along the night's icy cold breath, breaks through my thoughts and drags me back to reality. Zhu is an old widower in the village, and has raised me ever since I was five. He claims to be my uncle, but I can never know for sure. My parents aren't here to confirm, after all.

In an attempt to shake the thought away, I quickly divert my gaze at the water, and glance at the letter that I have preciousely held in my hand. After folding my letter along its old creases and pocketing it carefully, I begin my walk back to the village. As I walk up the path alone, I still cast occasional backward glances at the river; it seems to have a mysterious, sad aura. One that I feel connected to.

Eventually, I reach the house that I share with Zhu. Zhu is standing in the usual corner of the house, stirring some spicy dinner in the old cooking pots and pans. Scratching his white, wiry hair, he seems very tired as he leans his bad leg against an old shelf.

"Zhu," I say as I close the door behind me, signalling to him that I am back. Zhu lets out a weary laugh, "Yang, don't call me Zhu. That is not a respectful way to address your uncle. You should call me **Uncle Zhu**." I turn my back to him and take off my coat. "Mama and papa aren't here. No one else is here to prove anything. I don't have a family, so I don't really know whether you are my uncle or not."

After pouring the spicy porridge into a bowl, Zhu slowly approaches me, creating dull sounds on the wooden floor as he drags his bad leg across. He quietly replies, "We are your family. Everyone in the village is. They care for you, they love you." I merely shrug and go along with what he has just said as I slowly eat my dinner. But my family is long gone. The instant mama and papa's bodies went cold, I became an orphan. An orphan is someone without a family.

Shortly after dinner, we hear sounds of laughter out on the paths from the opened windows. Zhu hurries me out, telling me to join my 'friends' as the villagers gather for entertainment. I don't really have friends. I do have one or two classmates who tend to talk to me, eat lunch with me, and we do play games occasionally. Yet I don't see them as friends. I am someone not worthy of love. I am an orphan.

* * *

Before I leave the house, Zhu wraps me up in thick layers of clothing, and presses his flaky lips to my forehead as he whispers, "Have fun, Yang. I'll be there shortly." Glad to approach the river again, I quickly wipe the remaining trace of warmth off my forehead and run towards the gathering crowd of villagers around the campfire near the river.

The children are all playing with firework sticks, all emitting their own sparkles in the night; several villagers see me standing alone, and have thrust several sticks into my hands, patting my head softly as they hint that I join the fun.

Of course, later in the night, more adults will gather. My classmates will all wave goodbye to me, and turn to cuddle close to their mamas and papas, wrapping their arms around them to keep themselves warm from the cold night wind ... slowly falling into sweet dreams as the grown-ups crowd around the fire to chat.

During these times, I will pretend that I don't care, and walk down as close to the river as possible. At night, others may try to stay away from the icy waters and turn to embrace the warm fires and hugs instead; but I am different. I don't mind coming down here. I don't mind keeping the river company. It is alone, and I am too.

The river has a misty blue tint to it, and as I crouch down to reflect my emotionless face on its currents, the same question strikes me again. Sometimes, I wonder where the river stretches to? Look to the left, and you still see its muddy waters; look further, and you will see a thin line of greyish blue. Look to the right, and it is the same long stretch of currents.

Is it waiting for something too? Stretching endlessly, yet still not reaching for that one thing it desires?

Tired from constantly crouching down, I lie down on the cold grass and once again find myself staring at the faraway cliffs on the other side of the river; those rocky surfaces with the occasional caves, with dark holes that not even the moonlight can invade. I've heard stories. Stories of our ancestors, from the Ba civilisation, who placed the dead in wooden coffins and had them sit up on the cliffs overlooking the Yangtze River. To them, the Yangtze is their home, no matter whether they are living or dead.

I stretch my arm towards the direction of the cave and close my palm, as if trying to catch hold of the spirits. Yet I catch nothing except the cold air. The caves seem to be unreachable up on the cliffs. The dead seem to lie so silently, so isolated from us, the living. Yet I wonder if papa and mama are up there too? I wonder, if they feel lonely too? Do they still worry about me?

I close my eyes and reach into my pocket for the letter I've put there earlier, a letter that I've written when young ... words that I've crumpled up and shoved into rubbish bins countless times, yet still never fail to retrieve. A letter written to my parents on the day they died, seven years ago.

"Yes, that's old Zhu's boy. Poor kid, I am worried!" "Such a young age! Ever since his parents left him..." "My boy says that he sometimes finds him crying silently. Let the poor boy heal his wounds..." The voices of the seemingly faraway villagers linger in the night air. Too bad they are all lies. My parents have not left me. Before they closed their eyes, before their hands went cold, they promised me that they would watch over me. I do not cry silently, either. I am a man; in fact, I am already 12. Papa's boy would not cry so easily. Hugging myself tightly, I rock myself to the sounds of the river, and use lies to mend my own heart.

Still unable to calm down the unease in my stirred mind, I tighten my grip on the letter, and from the corner of my eye, notice a plastic bottle disposed nearby. I slowly pick up the

bottle and brush away the soil on top. **Papa, mama, please. Come back and tell them that they are wrong.** Tell them that I am loved, that I don't need them to pity me. I shove my letter into the bottle, screw the top tightly, and throw it into the river, allowing the currents to carry it away.

I hold my hands tightly together, close my eyes and recite the letter's content in my mind:

Dear River, are you waiting for someone too? I am, so you may understand how I feel. It seems as though you can travel a long way; I mean, I can't even see the end of the river from where I am standing! If you can, do you mind looking for my parents along the way? It seems as if they got lost. I mean, I can still see them, their bodies and such, but they are cold, hard and smelly. I can't even cuddle them now. The adults say that they are dead, and so I ask them: Where do the dead go? Is it far from the village? When will they be back? The adults won't answer, which is really mean of them. Papa had once said that promises can't ever be broken, and he has promised me that I will always be loved and watched over. That means that they'll come back, right? Find them for me, and tell them, I am still waiting in the village. I want to be loved. Yang.

A sudden rustle in the bushes behind me has disrupted my thoughts; a sound of a muffled step. Yet when I turn around, there is no one there. I quickly rub my eyes and make my way back to Zhu's home.

* * *

The next morning, I have woken up early as usual, but am surprised to see Zhu up as well, brewing something in the kitchen. Just as I am about to leave the house for school, he drapes a large coat on me and hesitates before saying, "Today's Parents Day at school, isn't it? I'll be there shortly." I remain silent, and just nod before leaving the house. It doesn't really matter to me. I am intending to skip school today.

Yet when I leave the house, I see two of my classmates standing outside. "Yang!" One of them, Chan, smiles as he shoves a lunchbox into my hands, "Today's going to be chilly. Mama has told me to bring this to you. She says that you are too thin for a healthy boy!" "True," my other classmate, Shing, says as he jokingly punches me on the shoulder, "Hey, do you want to play with us today after school?"

I hasten my footsteps and shake my head, "No, sorry. Zhu ... just now, he has just asked me to do something for him. Yeah, I can't come. Sorry." After a moment of silence, Shing asks softly, "Are you thinking of skipping school today?" I jokingly reply, "It's Parents Day. It would be pretty meaningless for me to go." Surprisingly, the two of them do not exchange worried looks, but merely glance at each other excitedly, "Then you will be down by the river?"

I nod suspiciously, and wave slowly at their friendly smiles as I walk the opposite way from where the school is. I am an orphan. An orphan without a family does not deserve any friends either, you see. I am quite a burden to them. I bet they are forced to look after me, just because I am a pitiful child. I don't want them to look at me like that. I'd rather be alone.

I lie down on the grass beside the river, and find myself gazing at the distant caves up on the cliffs again. I don't want to look at the river, and be reminded of my stupid act from last night. I should be old enough now to understand that it is impossible to get a response just by throwing a letter down the river.

After taking a long nap, I decide that it is about time to return home now. I stand up and brush the grass away from my pants; yet as I am about to leave, I suddenly catch a glimpse of shimmering white.

A plastic bottle is floating down by the river, but it is now slit opened with a fresh piece of folded paper inside. I jerk my head towards the direction of the caves. Mama? Papa?

My mind is immediately blinded by the flash of white. As I race after the plastic bottle, even treading into the mud in my feverish attempt to get closer, my knees are scraped by the rocks. Yet I can't stop. I can't stop crying, and I can't stop racing after this hint of hope. This hint of family, of someone that cares for me.

"Careful!" A deep, male voice rings beside my ears. A scent of dust and spices, the familiar sound of muffled footsteps. Before I realise, a warm arm wraps itself across my waist and stops me from toppling into the river. It is Zhu.

I struggle harder as I see the bottle drifting away, but he holds me strongly. "It's mama and papa! It's my only family!" I shout. Zhu holds me tighter, and I am surprised to feel droplets of tears falling down to touch the back of my hand. He speaks in a croaky voice, "I have caught and read your letter last night. I wrote that letter! **I am your family.** Everyone is your family. Why can't you see that?"

I stand there, feeling shocked and numbed, not only because of what Zhu has just said, but also at the scene of more and more plastic bottles drifting along the current. A sea of plastic white, all with letters inside. Even from this distance, I can see the scribble of pencil on all of the papers in different handwritings. From the hand of teachers, from the hand of classmates, from the hand of villagers ... from the hand of friends? Standing behind this scene is the large crowd of those who have written the letters; they all wave to me with warm smiles on their faces, like the shimmering rays amongst the waves of the river.

Shing shouts out to me with a beaming smile, "Yang! We've heard everything from Zhu. Please don't just ignore all of this; everyone has written their replies to you, all in their best handwriting!"

It seems to me that this scene is the reply that I have gotten from the river. I turn around, and embrace Zhu tightly. Then, Shing joins in. More and more people begin to join the group hug, as the bottles continue to drift along the currents until they reach the sea. The sea is the river's home. We have all found our families.

The Spirit of the Yangtze River

Tai Wei Chen, 16, Singapore International School (Suzhou)

A long time ago, China was fighting against invasion by the Mongolians. The Mongolian cavalry was strong, but ruthless. They conquered many cities of China, and they massacred the people in all the cities they destroyed.

One day, the Mongolian troops travelled to Hubei, a city on the banks of the Yangtze River. The scenery of the Yangtze River is marvellous; it is decorated with the great mountains of China, and cranes gracefully flying and singing over the rainbow. It is the paradise of China, a paradise for the Chinese people, but not when the innocence of the river turns bloody, not when the joyous laughter of the children becomes the screaming of fear, the squealing of death, or the mourning for others.

It was a nightmare, it truly was. Toddlers were being pierced through by the spears of the cavalry, being lifted and tossed around, the wickedest game that inspired the creativity of the devils. The women, who used to be kind and generous, reading stories to their children before they went to bed, pleasing their husbands by preparing wonderful dinners after they had finished their work on the farmland, were now being raped in the streets and being killed for trying to refuse. It was ugly and brutal, and yes, it was what war was like, the rawness of war.

"They are coming. I can hear the horses trotting," said the boy.

"Do not make any sound," his dad whispered. The sound of the horses came closer and closer. Boom! The door was kicked open and two Mongolian soldiers barged in. One was fat and one was skinny.

"If there is anyone hiding in this house, you'd better come out now. Otherwise you will regret it when you are found," the fat soldier shouted in broken Chinese.

It was quiet, and the soldiers thought that it was an empty house. "Mice are quick at running away," said the tall soldier. Just as the two soldiers were about to leave the house, a slight trembling sound from the closet caught their attention. The fat soldier reacted immediately. He dashed to the closet and kicked down the door, with a speed unexpected because of his size. At a glance, he saw an old man, with two young girls and one young boy crowding each other in the small closet. The younger girl was trembling, as a lamb seeing a wolf, the fear obvious on her face. She was holding back tears, the intense atmosphere not allowing a sudden outburst of emotion. The room seemed filled with the smile of the two Mongolian wolves, saliva flowing from their lips.

"Gosh, they are cute," said the fat soldier, staring at the girls.

"You can take the younger one. I will take this one," and saying that, the tall soldier grabbed the older girl out of the closet.

"Don't touch her!" The young boy stood up and crashed into the tall soldier. The soldier almost lost his balance with the unexpected strike. Enraged, he pulled his sword out of his sheath, and pierced it through the boy's breast, felling the boy.

The old man said, "You can't take my daughters away, please!"

"You have no choice," said the fat soldier.

"No! Help me, dad! Help!" shouted the younger girl.

"Dad! Please!" shouted the elder sister. The two soldiers grabbed the girls by their waists, and strode out of the house laughing.

The old man quietly took the knife he had hidden in his pocket, and ran toward the soldiers. By the time the tall soldier reacted, the knife had already pierced his back. He screamed with pain and went down. The old man was waiting for this moment when the soldiers might be careless, and he made his kill on the tall soldier. The fat soldier again reacted with unexpected speed. He jumped and rolled and leapt up again, with sword in hand, and lunged to avenge his comrade. The old man was clearly defenceless and the sword pierced his chest. He rolled his eyes, slumped to the floor, and died. The old man did not save his daughter, but he tried his best with his wisdom to fight against the devil. The fat soldier escaped with his agile body, and grabbing both the girls to him, laughed with the voice of a beast while he strode out of the house.

After a long time, the boy opened his eyes, and his ears sensed the silence. Despite the pain in his body, he saw something that stunned him, and he was pretty sure that he was dead, because he saw an angel, an angel with a smile on her face, and yes, it was an angel, because there was light surrounding her, and she was so pretty, so pretty that she stole his heart in a second.

"What is your name?" the angel asked.

"Am I dead? My name is Wei. How about you? Does an angel even have a name?"

The girl chuckled, "I am not an angel. My name is Tian Tian. I just walked past here, and I saw you injured. How do you feel now?"

The boy looked at his breast, and saw it was well wrapped. He said, "Thank you. You saved my life. I feel less pain now."

"Why were you hurt so badly?" Tian Tian asked in an innocent voice.

Wei briefly told the story, and then he said, "I have to find my sisters; they are going to be tortured, and where is my dad? Is he okay?"

The girl was silent for a moment, and said, "Your dad did not live, I am sorry. I buried him in the backyard."

The boy was stunned by the news, and after a few seconds he cried and screamed for the loss of his own father. The girl did not speak, because she knew that he needed the emotional outburst to release what he had suffered.

After a long time, the girl finally broke the silence, "So what do you think? Do you want to save your sisters and take revenge for the death of your father?"

"I will, and I have to. My sisters are my best friends. They took care of me, so did my father. I have to save them, and take revenge for him."

"Yes, that sounds good, but how? There is no way you can fight against the Mongolians by yourself alone."

"You're right, Tian Tian. The only way we can do this is to unify all the Chinese people to fight against the Mongolians."

"That's right, Wei. See, now the Mongolians want to build an empire in China, and the people are suffering badly. Why don't we get all the Chinese people in one spot, and fight against the Mongolians?"

"All right, so we should get all the Chinese people together first, and let them understand that if we do not fight back, we are just going to live under repression and the fear of massacre for the rest of our lives!"

A melody was heard. "Look at the sky, look at the mountains, China was great with peace and joy. We were united, we were tough, and China was the paradise of the earth. China was green and bright, but now it is turning bloody and fearsome. We can get our peace and happiness back if we stand up to the Mongolians. We can be strong again. We just need a leader. We just need a guide, to put us back on track, to lead us to the light. We have hope, and we will never give up. We are the Han, we are the greatest, and we will always be."

"Wow, Tian Tian, you are quite good at singing."

"Listen, Wei. We need you to be our leader; we need you to lead us. You are going to be the person who brings us out of this repression."

"Tian Tian, am I that capable?"

"Wei, so you mean you don't want your sisters back?"

"No, I do! You're right, Tian Tian. We should stand up and outwit the devil, to save our people, and prove the spirit of the Han!"

It was a sunny day, the sky was bright and it was cloudless. It was silent; the only thing you could hear was the hearts of the Chinese people pounding. They might not even know how to fight; they might not even dare to kill someone. But the savagery of the devil turned them into warriors; the massacres of the cities turned their joy into rage. They were now the Chinese people who knew how to fight back. They were now the Chinese people who knew how to defend their own country.

Wei rallied his troops. He raised his sword and shouted fearlessly, "It is time to get our dignity back; it is time for us to kick the devil out of our country. We are the Han, and we are the greatest! Let's draw our swords and enjoy the taste of the blood of the invaders!"

There was no question of victory or defeat, the momentum of the soldiers proved the answer to be the prior. There was no fear of death, but the bravery of honour.

Wei led the troops and crashed into the Mongolian cavalry, who had the reputation of being undefeatable. Now they were being struck and knocked down with fear. They could not believe what they were seeing. The Chinese people, whom they had played with like toys, tortured with evilness, now, with their swords and looks of determination, were fighting back with such power.

The Mongolians were defenceless. They scattered like bees, ran with wet boots, full of urine, but they couldn't escape, despite how hard they tried. The rage of the great nation hunted them down like poor dogs, and they were not wolves anymore. They were now ducking around with such terror, and it was the end of the story of the ambition of the Mongolians. They were crushed, and the Chinese were the ones standing till the end.

After 200 years of pain and despair, the Chinese people finally avenged their nation. They grew from divided to united, they grew from cowards to warriors, and now, the land of China is not bloody and nasty as before. It is green and lively with the singing of birds, with the joy of the people.

The water of the Yangtze River is not full of blood anymore; it is now clean and limpid. You can see the fish swimming nimbly; you can feel the love of the water. It now shines with peace. There will be no more fighting. There will be no more killing. It is at peace.

"Tian Tian, thank you for inspiring me and letting me know how important it is to save my people, to unify them. And thank you for letting me know what I should do to make it happen. You got rid of the uncertainty in my heart; you pushed me to accomplish what I have done," Wei said with gratitude.

Tian Tian smiled and nodded, "It is you who has done everything; it is you who did what had to be done. You are the hero of China." Tian Tian hugged Wei and gave him a kiss on the lips.

Wei hugged Tian Tian tightly, and kissed her again and again, and it was the best moment of Wei's life. Wei didn't want to let it go.

"Wei, there is something I have to tell you."

"There are no secrets between you and me," Wei said with a smile on his face.

Then a strange thing happened. Tian Tian's body started to disappear, shocking Wei.

"What is happening to you, Tian Tian. Why is your body disappearing?"

There were tears flowing from Tian Tian's face. She was trembling, and Wei hugged her even tighter.

"Tian Tian! Tell me, what is going on with you? There are no secrets between us. Tell me, huh?" Wei asked with an anxious face.

"Wei, listen. I am actually the spirit of the Yangtze River. The Mongolians turned the river bloody, and there was no joy. I had to save the people, and I knew that you were the one who was going to save the Chinese land; I knew that you were the one who was going to bring hope to the country. I came down to the mortal world to let you know who you are, and let you know what you had to do. Now I have finished my job and I have to go back to where I belong. Wei, I am not a human being. I have to go..."

"No! I don't care if you are the spirit of the Yangtze River or whoever you are, do not leave me alone! You are the person who has made me who I am today, and you know that I love you! Do not go, Tian Tian! Don't leave me!" Wei choked back sobs, his eyes full of tears. He was not ready for the separation, but it had to happen.

"Wei, I have to go. Find a girl who is better than I am. My blessings are with you for your safety, and for your true love. Wei, goodbye. I am sorry for not telling the truth, but I will never forget you, forget what you have done. You will always be my best friend..." Tian Tian kissed Wei for the last time, and it was time to go. Tian Tian disappeared, leaving behind the peace of China, the limpidity of the Yangtze River, tears, the love of Wei, and his pining.

Wei cried non-stop. He could still feel her lips, her warmth. But the truth was, Tian Tian was gone, and it had to happen. After Wei had accomplished so much, dedicated so much to his country, to the happiness of his people, he had lost his love, leaving him hollow, his heart empty. But that is life. You never know what is going to happen, but when it does happen, it might be joyful, it might be sad, but you can never know. That is life.

The Yangtze River is now as beautiful as always, decorated with the great mountains of China, and cranes gracefully flying and singing over the rainbow. It is the paradise of China, and the spirit of Yangtze River blesses the Chinese land, the people, and Wei, the hero of China.



Fiction
Group 5

The Rising of the Date

Christopher Lo Ting Ho, 11, Korean International School - Springboard

In 1545, a group of Japanese people known as the Date landed at the Yangtze River. Once they landed, they pillaged the nearby villages. The Date was an aggressive clan and did not make friends easily. At the same time, a clan called the Tokugawa was also arriving at the Yangtze River with the idea of building a life, trading and farming in a new China. The Tokugawa was led by a mighty, prosperous and wise man named Iesada.

When the Tokugawa heard that the Date had arrived at the Yangtze River, they armed a fleet and set off for battle. A stand-off began that would last for many years. During this time the Ming emperor allowed Iesada to stay in China and let him build a fortress. This opened up trade between Japan and China.

When the leader of the Date, the evil Hindermune found out, he began a campaign of terror, burning down Chinese villages and enslaving the citizens. Hindermune and his men had weapons called Matchlock guns that they had got in trade with the Europeans. They arrived at where Iesada and the Tokugawa had made their fortress on the Yangtze River and made camp on the banks across them. The siege had begun.

The siege went on for many months and the Tokugawa became more and more desperate. They needed provisions of food, weapons and fresh water. A Chinese man who worked in the fortress volunteered to lead a militia to get the provisions that were needed. The man was called Qin Sho Mi. The militia set off during the night and crossed the Yangtze and soon arrived at the Date's camp. They found where the weapons, food and fresh water were kept and slaughtered every Date warrior that they encountered. Qin Sho Mi and the militia made it back across the river back to the fortress as heroes with fresh provisions.

When Hindermune found out about the theft of his goods he was furious and ordered an attack on the Tokugawa fortress. The siege cannons fired and took the walls down. Then the Date warriors got out of their boats and climbed over the ruins and began battle with their enemy. It was a bloody fight with 4,000 troops dying in the first hours. The Date had already stormed the first level of the fortress and soon took control of the gates. Then the news came that Iesada, the leader of the Tokugawa, had been fatally injured. It was a huge blow for the Tokugawa, nobody was in charge to give the orders. No one until Qin Sho Mi stepped up. He took fifty of the fiercest militia and attacked the Date from behind their lines. Many of the Date generals lost their lives and soon the generals that were left sounded the horns of retreat. The battle was over. When the Ming Emperor got word that his friend Iesada had been murdered in battle, he sent his navy to destroy the Date.

The Japanese fleet was no match for the Chinese warships and were put to a watery grave. The evil Hindermune escaped, but his army was so defeated that he never came back to the Yangtze River again. Qin Sho Mi became the new leader of the Tokugawa and sent the body of Iesada back to Japan to be buried in the town where he was born. The Tokugawa stayed in China and set up home on the Yangtze River, where they remain to this day.