

Fiction

Group 1



New Journeys to the West

Diocesan Preparatory School, Pang, Jianan - 9

On 2nd March 2017, a very powerful monkey was born. He didn't know that he was going to be one of the most powerful creatures in the world.

Nobody knew where and how he was formed. He'd burst from a rock. Pieces flew everywhere and it was a truly magical scene.

The monkey was called Sun Wukong. He was smart, strong and performed magic.

One day, Sun Wukong was walking in the woods where he met a monk called Xuanzang, who was going to India.

When Sun Wukong asked if he could go with him, Xuanzang was surprised but agreed immediately.

While they were walking, they saw a rather small but crowded market. Their walking became slower as they went into the market.

After a while, they met a friar and a talking pig. The friar and the pig asked if they could join them to go to India. Xuanzang agreed and they came along.

After they left the market, they started to climb a mountain. At the top of the mountain there was a cave where a monster lived. The monster knew that somebody was coming, so he was ready to attack. He came out of the cave. When the group saw him, they screamed. Sun Wukong suddenly felt a surge of power and used his bare hands to kill him.

Everybody gathered around him and cheered.

Not long after that, they came to a lake. There were legends about that lake. There was a sea monster called Drools. The group didn't believe that but suddenly, the ground began to shake and tremble. A red and yellow creature came out and yes, it was Drools.

As quick as lightning, Sun Wukong was ready again, this time with the pig beside him.

They soon forced Drools into the water again. The group crossed a wobbly bridge and began to eat some fruit.

When they were happy and full, the group continued their journey. They entered a dark, gloomy forest. The forest was really cold.

Almost at once, the trees began to shake. Then they turned into bright purple creatures.

All at once, Sun Wukong was surrounded by big, purple creatures. He used all his strength to fight off those giant monsters. One thing was clear; the travellers had to get out fast. This time, the pig came to the rescue. He jumped up and killed the biggest monster. The others disappeared in a puff of smoke.

Everybody sighed in relief. They all thanked the pig, who was hungry again.

They began to walk towards a desert. When they were in, they looked around. There was no sign of danger here.

They continued walking. A puff of wind blew towards them.

Suddenly, they felt very hungry and thirsty. They needed food and water or they would die. They had no strength to head back.

Sun Wukong then thought of something. He could talk and he was a monkey. Monkeys were not supposed to talk, so he could perform magic. Then with a lift of his hand, they were in India.

New Journey to the West

Regents Primary School of Shenzhen, Robinson, Archie Joshua - 6

Many years ago in China a Buddhist monk, a monkey, a pig and Sandy (a river monster) set off on an arduous journey to India in search of a Buddhist scriptures.

They all had very different characters: Monkey was naughty. Pigsy was lazy. Sandy was stupid. The monk (their leader) was kind. They travelled over mountains, through rivers, across deserts and faced many dangers. Finally, they reached India. They were surprised by the strange sights, sounds and smells there.

Pigsy was hungry, and wanted to try some Indian food. There were no noodles or tofu. Suddenly, the travellers smelt something delicious. They asked the shopkeeper with sigh language as they couldn't speak the language. 'Ah Curry,' said the shopkeeper. "Ah Curry," said Pigsy who stuck his nose straight inside the pot.

The Monk, Pigsy and Sandy ate their food. Monkey was sitting on a tree eating an apple. "I am bored," said Monkey. Suddenly, he heard singing. Monkey sped across the tree tops and dropped down into a garden. He realized he was in a temple. There in front of him was a statue of a monkey. He saw people praying and offering food. Suddenly, he realized the people thought that the monkey was a god. "I like India", he thought to himself. "In China, I am just a king but in India I am a god!" He decided to introduce himself and said in his loudest and proudest voice, "You have been waiting and now I am here!" For a second, none of the people moved, they just stared. Then they screamed "a speaking monkey", and ran towards the temple door.

Meanwhile the Monk, Pigsy and Sandy were still under the tree waiting for Monkey to return. Sandy suddenly noticed that the men didn't wear trousers but skirts. He crept behind an old Indian man and suddenly, snatched the skirt off the old man and ran away. The poor old naked man tried to chase Sandy but he was too old and too slow. When Sandy had lost the old man, he stopped and wrapped the cloth around his waist. He found the clothes so cool, comfortable and stylish.

At this time Monkey, Pigsy and Sandy cried "we don't like India". The Monk sighed and told them to remember the real reason they came to India, for the Buddhist scriptures. An old beggar who spoke some Chinese asked them why they came to India. The monk answered for reason of books and knowledge. The Beggar looked deep in his bag and pulled out a damaged and dirty old book. "This is why you are coming here for, in India, knowledge is everywhere in books. But too few people use knowledge in their daily lives."

A Mysterious Night

St Margaret's Co-educational English Secondary & Primary School, Membry, Kaydyn - 8

It was a foggy and windy night. I shivered as I was getting ready for bed and startled as a branch rattled against my window. As I walked towards my bed lightning flashed behind me with loud thunder not far behind. I sighed and turned round to close the curtains.

Just as I was pulling them together I spotted a cloud coming towards me. Strange though that was, it was even stranger when I saw someone standing on it. When that creature came closer, I recognised him immediately as the Monkey King from the movie I watched last night! He said to me, “I know everything right now makes no sense to you, but I really need your help.”

“But ... why ...?” I stuttered.

“No time for questions now! I will explain everything on the way,” urged the Monkey King.

“But it’s the middle of the night! You know humans need at least eight hours of sleep!” I grumbled.

The Monkey King swung me over onto his shoulder and before I knew it, we arrived at this dark and scary forest. After we landed on the ground, I heard a snarling voice – and then a ferocious, hungry-looking demon came charging towards us! The Monkey King very skilfully navigated his cloud and flew up in the air and distracted the demon, then he threw his bow and arrow to me and I grabbed it just in time to shoot the demon.

“We need your help to defeat the demon king because he created a portal that can travel between different worlds, and he is going to send his army to kill us and get the Monk’s flesh. They believe it can make them immortal!” said the Monkey King.

“I thought that only happens in the movie! This can’t be real!” I said in surprise.

“Oh trust me, this is all truly very real!” the Monkey King replied.

While I still couldn’t believe how I managed to shoot the demon with my new found courage, we had no time to spare but continued our journey to find this demon king’s base. The Monkey King shrank us and put me on his palm as we flew off. He then used his laser-vision to detect any demon aura coming from the mountain ahead of us.

There were demon guards everywhere patrolling the entrance. The demon guards had fangs dripping with blood, and on top of their head a skull helmet.

“I know you will come in handy! How about I distract the demons while you go in and break the portal?” asked the Monkey King.

I fiddled around the portal panel and screamed at the top of my lungs, “Run! The portal is going to explode!”

The Monkey King thanked me. “I will take it from here, thank you very much for your assistance this time!”

I waved goodbye as the Monkey King blew me onto his cloud and I got sent home.

“Jack! It’s time for school now! Wake up!” Mom urged me out of bed.

I smiled and looked at the sky as I jumped up.

The Encounter with Ksher-Rakshasa

St Margaret's Co-educational English Secondary & Primary School, Nair, Aditya – 8

Xuanzang, Sun Wukong, Zhu Bajie and Sha Wujing were making their way towards the eastern part of India in search of the Markandeya-samvada, the Buddhist sutras of good living. During the previous night, the demoness Vishakanya dressed up as a celestial beauty and distracted Zhu Bajie from following the right path, and she misled them to an extremely dangerous forest called Sundarbans which was full of man-eating demons.

As the sun dawned, Xuanzang and Sun Wukong realised the trickery and noted the immediate danger that lay ahead of them. As they were slowly trudging across the densest part of Sundarbans next to a fast flowing river, they came across an old tiger who was lying on the side of the trail with his tail blocking their path. As they were about to walk over the tail, the tiger in a frail voice said, “You cannot walk over this poor tiger’s tail. It will bring you bad luck. You will need to answer this riddle to move my tail: My friend lies on this path who can be smaller than the smallest and bigger than the biggest. Who is he?”

While Xuanzang was thinking of the answer, Sun Wukong realized that the tiger was none other than the feared demon Ksher-rakshasa. Sun Wukong also knew that answering the riddle would not be enough to pass this task, so he whispered something into the ear of Sha Wujing. Xuanzang spoke politely, “Dear old tiger, your friend is your own shadow. An ant’s shadow can be smaller than the ant and an elephant’s shadow can be bigger than the elephant. Would you please let us go on our journey now?”

The old tiger smiled and said, “Congratulations for solving my riddle and as a present you will only have to fight me. If you had not answered it correctly, then you would have had to fight all my other demon friends too.” The old tiger had already transformed himself into the mighty Ksher-rakshasa.

Anticipating this trickery Sun Wukong, who had already taken sand in his arms, threw it into the eyes of Ksher-rakshasa and urged the others to escape. Sha Wujing, as Sun Wukong had earlier whispered to him, had already made a big boat and ushered Xuanzang and Zhu Bajie into the boat to travel along the mighty river quickly. By the time Ksher-rakshasa cleared the sand out of his eyes, only Sun Wukong was left and the other three were making their way out of Sundarbans along the river. Further, Sun Wukong had used his powers of illusion to create thousands of copies of himself, so Ksher-rakshasa had to figure out which illusion was the true Sun Wukong.

Ksher-rakshasa started eagerly devouring the illusions which were as empty as his own shadow but by this time Sun Wukong had transformed himself into a bird and was flying out of Sundarbans to join his companions. As they left, they could hear a mighty roar of disappointment and they were happy to live another day.

True Meaning of Sharing

St. Paul's Co-educational College Primary School, Lee, Kwan Yiu Adrian - 8

My name was Xuanzang, and I was a very poor monk living in a small temple in Hong Kong. Buddha Bathing Festival was coming, I wanted to go to Tianzhu in India to borrow the famous “Three Collections of Buddhist Scriptures.” I wanted to put them in my temple to show to my followers and attracted more people to learn about Buddhism.

When I was planning my journey, I found out that many monks from other temples also wanted to go there and borrowed the famous scripture too! To prevent other people to recognize me, I put on a wig, T-shirt and trousers, and pretended to be a tourist. I wanted to be the first people to get there and borrow the scripture secretly. In order to be the fastest person to arrive Tianzhu and borrow the scripture, I used all my money to buy an air ticket and left immediately.

When I arrived Tianzhu, I found out that a lot of monks already arrived the temple. The abbot of the temple came out and talked to them. One of the monk said, “May you borrow the famous scripture to me? I can give you a lot of money.” Another monk said, “Please borrow the scripture to me, I can give you more money.” Then I thought, “Oh no! I have used up all my money to buy the air ticket. What should I do? I have no money to pay the abbot.” The abbot answered them, “all of you go away, I will not rent the famous scripture to you all!” then he went back inside the temple angrily.

I pretended to be a tourist and followed the abbot into the temple. I said to him, “I am sorry that I have no money because I am very poor and I use all my money to buy the air ticket to here. I want to borrow the famous scripture because I want my followers to learn more about Buddhism and attract more people to believe our religion. I have a suggestion. How about I share the scripture with other monks and put it into different temples every day? In this way, a lot of followers and other people can learn the wisdom in the scripture. I think this is the best way to benefit most people.” The abbot said, “although you do not look like a monk, you are a real monk. I do not want any money, I only want the scripture to benefit most people and let them know more in Buddhism. I will borrow the scripture to you.” I was very happy and took the scripture back to my temple. I kept my promise and borrowed the scripture to different temples every day and let them teach their followers.

One month later, I travelled back to Tianzhu and returned the scripture to the abbot. I told him that many people were very happy to read the scripture and believed in Buddhism. The abbot smiled to me and said that he was very happy to hear this than having a lot of money.

Last but not least, “The more you share unconditionally what others most need, the more you will receive what you most want.”

Diary of a Time Traveler

Victoria Shanghai Academy, Lee, Erin - 7

Ashley smiled as she flipped through the pages of her new book. The pages pleaded to be opened. Suddenly, a terrifying whirlwind strangled her and dragged her through the window and swept her out!

She looked around and saw Sun Wukong, Zhu Bajie and Sandy beside a mountain. Sun turned around and said, "Are you lost? This place is dangerous; my master, Sanzang has just been captured by a one horned buffalo. Why don't you go home?" Ashley replied, "I am Ashley, and I was brought here by a whirlwind. I didn't arrive here on purpose."

Suddenly a claw grabbed Ashley by the arm. She screamed. This was it.

Sun thought, Not again! I HATE this terrible beast!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

The buffalo turned and raced away with Ashley in his claw, but was blocked by the swipe of Sun's cudgel. Ashley was thrown through the air and landed on an awaiting tree, unable to get down. Sun's cudgel swung through the air, trying to hit the buffalo. Suddenly, a bright flash pierced through the air.

Blinded, Sun realized that this was the buffalo's trick and the demon had vanished.

Sun flew back to Sandy and Bajie, frowning, "I have already used all my strength, but this demon is too much for me. What can we do to rescue Sanzang and Ashley?"

Bajie suggested, "Why don't we go to seek help from Kuanyin? She will definitely be able to help us." All believed this was a fabulous idea and headed off to find Kuanyin who lived at the top of the mountain.

When they saw Kuanyin, they explained the troubles that they had and pleaded for her help. Smiling, she flew with them to the cave. The demon suddenly appeared, taunting, "You just think more people can win more merit? Ha! You are completely wrong! I haven't used my powers for a while, it's going to be quite a show, for heaven and earth tremble with fri-?.....".

Before the buffalo finished his speech, Kuanyin threw a ring at the demon. The ring immediately attached itself to the buffalo, causing the buffalo to plead for release in great pain. Then Kuanyin said, "Only if you promise to recite the sutras 999 times for a year and release Sanzang and Ashley." Without thinking, the buffalo agreed.

"Can we see his original form?" Sun asked. The buffalo turned into a colorful macaw and began to recite the sutras obediently.

Then they went into the cave to save Sanzang and Ashley.

When Ashley saw the macaw, she asked if she could bring it home. Sun said, "Sure, but be careful as this is the changed form of the buffalo."

Suddenly, the whirlwind swept in and dragged Ashley and the macaw in spinning circles. Ashley squeezed her eyes shut. When she opened them, she found that she was back in bed with the macaw.

Ashley smiled as she sat on the bed, petting the singing macaw. Suddenly, she felt the whirlwind tugging. This time, she wasn't scared.

Fiction

Group 2



The Mysterious Scroll

Chinese International School, Zhou, Hanyi - 8

Crystal-blue, like a sapphire, the river glistened under the scorching sun. “This ‘Journey to the West’ is such a hoax,” my sister, Joyce, moaned. “I just wish I could take a dip in the water” I whined, sitting on the rail of the deck. “Then I can help you fulfil your wish!” Joyce chuckled, giving me a playful nudge. Completely unexpectedly, I toppled into the water.

My name is Jessica. I’m a big fan of Journey to the West, an old Chinese novel. This may make me sound like an idiot, but I actually think the tale is real. That’s why I begged my parents to take me on the Journey to the West tour. I had seen photos from the tour on Instagram and it looked impressive.

“Calm down! You’re a good swimmer!” I reassured myself. I looked down into the water. A soft thump,thump, vibrated through the river. It seemed to be coming from a pile of seaweed. My curious instincts kicked in. I swam towards it and pulled back some of the seaweed. I peeked through. A cave entrance loomed in the flowing water. I looked closer. There was a long, thin box trapped inside the cave, bouncing against a mossy rock. I shoved my hand inside the cave and grabbed the box, and swam towards the surface...

Sitting on my bed, I tossed the box around, debating whether I should open it or not. I wondered what would be inside. I half-expected to find a precious object, but I also felt like at any second, an evil devil could jump out of the box and snatch me off my bed.

Get that stupid idea out of your mind, Jessica, I thought. I took a deep breath and prised off the lid. Nothing magical happened.

No devil.

No mysterious light.

No voice coming from mist.

In the box, all that lay was...a scroll. A scroll?

The end-of-school bell rang. I ran like a cheetah, racing after its prey. I spotted Advika and dashed towards her.

“Do you have time to have a playdate?” I winked at her.

“Sure!”

At her house, I pulled out the scroll and shoved it in her lap.

“Check this out! I found this from an underwater cave on the Journey to the West tour! I have no idea what this is.”

Advika stared at the scroll. Her eyes widened in surprise. “I think this is in Sanskrit,” she murmured hesitantly.

“What?” I asked, puzzled.

“Sanskrit is, well, an ancient Indian language. My grandpa has books in Sanskrit. I’ve seen it in his study. My grandad might be able to help.” She led me to her grandad’s room.
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“Grandad, can you translate this scroll, please?” Advika asked.

“What scroll?” Advika’s grandad replied. I passed the scroll to him. He skimmed the page, his eyes narrowed, but slowly they widened. My heart was beating so fast that it would thump out of my chest.

“Where did you get this?” he asked, in a trembling voice full of disbelief.

“In an underwater cave at, hmm... I think it’s called Tong Tian river,” I said anxiously. His eyes widened even more.

“What?” I asked, feeling puzzled.

“Legend has it that Pilgrim and his disciples went through 80 ordeals and finally got the scriptures. But Bodhisattva had devised 81 ordeals, so she gave them another task. At the Heaven Reaching River, which is Tong Tian river in Chinese, the old turtle that was carrying them across the river tossed them into the water. They salvaged the scriptures but little did they know that the most important scroll was missing. By the time Bodhisattva realised that they had lost the scripture, as a punishment, the buddhas banished Wukong to the mortal world...”

“Oh!” I knew what he was thinking. “Can you translate it?”

He looked closely at the first section on the scroll: “This scroll shall be returned before the winter solstice of 2018...” He paused in alarm. “That’s just...” his voice trailed off into the distance.

“In a few months,” I finished for him.

“Yeah...that’s not much time,” he muttered. He kept on translating: “Monkey King shall stay powerless in the Kam mountain...”

“Wait a second!” I interrupted, “I mean — sorry, but Kam mountain — it rings a bell!”

Advika raised an eyebrow, but a fraction of a second later I remembered —

“KAM MOUNTAIN, HONG KONG!”, Advika and I said in unison, capering around the room with ecstasy.

We finally arrived at the base of Kam Mountain. The ground was peppered with crinkled, yellow leaves. A nature aroma filled the surroundings. The mountain looked golden under the shiny sunlight. I paced around a big rock, wondering how I could find Monkey King.

Suddenly, a screeching noise ripped through the mountain.

“Could that be----”

“Jessica, look! Monkeys!” Advika yelled.

I looked up. A mob of monkeys were swinging through the branches. I realised why the buddhas had sent Monkey King here. And like a bolt of lightning, a great idea struck me. I set the scroll down on the rock and then stepped back. Advika and I held our breath, waiting anxiously, excitement and tension creeping over our bodies.

After what it felt like hours, a monkey covered in golden fur crouching low in the bushes leapt gracefully onto the big rock. He studied the scroll for a moment. His eyes lit up with gratitude and he winked at us...

Always Together

Diocesan Girls' Junior School, Kwok, Oi Ying - 10

“Well, I guess this is goodbye.” Monkey King was the one who broke the silence. Xuanzang knew this moment would come, but he never really gave it that much thought. Retrieving the Buddhist Scriptures was their faraway objective, and it seemed improbable that this journey was all over. To be painfully honest, he didn’t want this moment to arrive. It was selfish of him, but his three disciples, despite their endless bicker, had been exceptional company, and part of him didn’t want the journey to ever end. Xuanzang knew he should be contented that he’d achieved what no other monk had. Yet as he bade his disciples farewell, his whole body felt numb with melancholy. The monk watched as his three disciples departed. He’d found himself staring at the ground that Monkey King, Friar Sand and Pigsy had stood on. Xuanzang cared more for his disciples than he had thought, and it broke his heart a little to see them go. Shaking his head in bleakness, he clambered onto the horse and headed back to Central China.

The emperor was pleased with his success in retrieving the ancient scriptures and sent him to start translating the old Indian language from the scriptures to Chinese right away. It was certainly tiring, but Xuanzang was determined to help his country. It quickly became an unhealthy cycle of starvation. He rarely left his room now, and didn’t really communicate with people anymore. He seemed to have gotten used to staying up all night and only having a few hours of sleep each day. Despite the exhausting hours, Xuanzang would still keep himself awake so he could continue working. His life now revolved around translating the ancient scrolls into Chinese. It was an unhealthy lifestyle and Xuanzang knew that, but burying himself in the scriptures also had helped him cope with the grief-stricken feelings he had after parting ways with his disciples.

Summer had blessed the Mountain of Flowers and Fruits with green grass and beautiful flowers. The river was filled with spring water so clear that you could see right to the bottom. Birds were singing melodiously, their high notes seeming to reach the sky. The air smelt fresh and clean, and the sun was shining its golden rays onto the mountain. It was a beautiful day. Yet a certain monkey felt it was oddly calm and peaceful. This monkey missed the thrill of adventure, the satisfaction of victory and the contentment of having a goal to reach.

Pigsy was having the time of his life. Monkey King had allowed him and Friar Sand to reside at the Mountain of Flowers and Fruits. He was pleasantly surprised to see countless varieties of fruits, and had wasted no time in biting down on the succulent and sweet fruits of the mountain. As much as Pigsy was enjoying the fruit, he missed the light-hearted retorts his brothers gave and the joy of travelling. It was something he had grown used to.

The friar dove into the water. Aside from flowers and fruits, the Mountain of Flowers and Fruits had quite a number of springs to offer, which Friar Sand thought was immensely relaxing. That wasn’t to say he hadn’t missed travelling, though. He liked doing things that

required bravery as to challenge himself, and the journey had given him a lot of opportunities to prove himself. Not to mention he did miss his master, Xuanzang a little bit. He was sure the other two disciples did too. Sensing two familiar figures above him, he resurfaced, and sure enough, Monkey King and Pigsy were looking at him. “We’re going to find Master,” Monkey King said simply. Friar Sand had to resist the urge to chuckle. That was Monkey King, always blunt and straightforward. Seeing that the friar gave no sign of disagreement, the other two disciples nodded, satisfied.

Xuanzang was making a lot of progress, once more delighting the emperor. He was working doubly hard, he was determined to finish translating the ancient scriptures as fast as he could. Now Xuanzang was really unwell; his face had turned sickly white, and yet he still wasn’t eating properly. Xuanzang was overworking, he was nothing like the levelheaded monk that had set out on a journey to the west to retrieve the scriptures. The monk was extremely sore and tired. His muscles ached, and his stomach had never felt emptier. He felt like fainting. Knowing that he was ill-treating his body, Xuanzang finally gave in to the temptation of rest, and collapsed onto the bed. It was the best sleep he had in years. He ate his meals properly and was soon back to his old self. He wasn’t perfectly healthy, but the color had started returning to his cheeks. He may not have finished as much work as he used to in a day, but it was definitely wiser to rest than to starve himself all over again. Xuanzang had even started getting fresh air outdoors instead of only staying in his room. The monk’s health had started improving, and everyone was relieved.

The three disciples had arrived in Central China and had been searching in vain for Xuanzang, occasionally stopping to compare their land with this foreign region. When they had finally found Xuanzang, the monk was busy writing. Monkey King knocked on the window, catching Xuanzang’s attention. The monk looked straight at them, and his mouth dropped open. There was an awkward silence, until Xuanzang whispered, “Welcome back.”

Xuanzang spent the rest of the day relaxing with his disciples. It was enjoyable and a relief. He felt like a huge burden had been lifted off him. Catching the sight of Five-Finger-Hill, they all felt a pang of nostalgia. It was where their journey had begun. Maybe there had been casualties, or maybe there had been sorrow and pain. And yet as the sunlight illuminated their grinning faces, none could deny that through every challenge and, they always had each other.

The Jade Key

Diocesan Girls' Junior School, Lau, Hoi Ching Janet - 11

It was a breezy autumn afternoon at the school garden. A lone leaf, shaded a brilliant gold, fluttered down from a bauhinia tree and landed on the lap of a sobbing young girl. She picked it up and, as if it brought back awful memories from the past hour, whispered:

“Why wasn’t I chosen as the concert mistress? I am the most skilled violin player in the orchestra! This leaf is just like me, gold unlike the others, and had just fallen out of the crowd.”

As the girl, whose name was Alice, struggled to understand why she had failed in the seating audition that afternoon, she noticed a queer group of creatures standing beside her. The one nearest her was a monkey with the body of a man. Then there were a hideous man in rags, a half-man-half-pig, and a kind-looking young monk. Curiously, she inquired, “Who are you? What are you doing here?”

“We don’t mean to intrude,” began the monk, “My name is Xuanzang, and these are my disciples, Monkey, Pigsy and Sandy. We had just retrieved the legendary Buddhist scriptures, and now we are in search of the Jade Key hidden by Buddha to unlock the wise sayings inside —”

“We just happen to be lost!” interrupted Monkey, harshly.

“Here is a riddle by — stop stamping your feet, Monkey! — by Buddha. It can lead us to the Jade Key,” explained Xuanzang.

“In the Pearl of the East, you will discover
A priceless monument, a bauhinia so gold.
Secrets will be revealed, tales will be told,
When a team of five unites to uncover.”

“We have searched every bauhinia tree in the city but could not find a single golden flower.” finished Pigsy.

“Hmm....let me think. Maybe the ‘golden bauhinia’ from the riddle is referring to the statue in the Golden Bauhinia Square at Wan Chai.” exclaimed Alice.

“Do you mind bringing us there?” asked Xuanzang, interested.

Alice was tempted by the idea, but was also wary of these mysterious strangers. Thinking that it should be relatively safe on a public bus, Alice suggested, “I know a bus that can take us there. Come and follow me.”

On the bus, the foursome marveled at the tall, shiny skyscrapers and the huge cruises flashing neon lights on their sleek surfaces. Yet most of the time they just huddled together, trying to decipher the riddle.

The only one not involving in the discussion was Monkey. He was sulking. Just then, Xuanzang noticed him and beamed. “Monkey, why all the attitude?”

“This bus thing is so slow! If I ride my cloud,” Monkey bragged, “I can be there in less than a minute!” And with that, he leapt off into his rainbow-coloured cloud, disappearing in a flash.

“Typical Monkey!” muttered Pigsy, rolling his eyes.

Xuanzang looked worried. “Does he know the way?”

“Relax, Master.” Sandy comforted. “I’m sure he can just ask for directions.”

When they arrived at the square, Monkey was waiting for them. “You guys are such turtles! Well, I have already searched every corner. The Jade Key’s nowhere here. Let’s go elsewhere!”

“Wait a second!” Pigsy perked up. “My nose detects jade somewhere — jade from Buddha, to be precise. I have never forgotten that holy scent ever since my last visit to Buddha’s palace!”

He scurried towards the enormous golden bauhinia statue in the middle of the square, skidded to a stop, and enquired, “Monkey, have you inspected the inside of the statue? I think it’s in there. Come on! Let’s check it out!”

“Do we have to climb up this giant flower?” asked Xuanzang, shivering with fear. “I’m afraid of heights!”

“Relax, Master.” Sandy grinned. “We will find a way together. Monkey, let’s have a piece of rope.”

Sighing, Monkey plucked a hair off the top of his head. With a puff, it magically turned into a long, sturdy rope.

“Thank you.” Sandy tied one end of the rope to Pigsy’s nine-toothed rake, which made a grappling hook. Then he threw it up to anchor safely in the middle of the bauhinia statue, allowing Xuanzang to climb up.

After everyone had reached the top, they began exploring the inside of the bauhinia. Suddenly, observant Pigsy yelled, “Look! What are these faint etches on each of the five petals? They look like some strange symbols!”

“Let me have a look.” Xuanzang replied. “Hmm... I have studied this ancient language before. It says: ‘Five hands, five hearts united as one.’”

A swift thought flashed through Alice’s mind. “Should we each try placing our hands on one of the petals?” Alice proposed.

Monkey stretched out his hand excitedly and placed it on a petal, covering the symbols. The other four, taking that as a signal to do so, quickly mimicked his action.

Instantly, bursts of warm light emitting from the five petals broke the serene silence — like a thousand rays of the sun, bouncing off the smooth and mirror-like surface of the flower, crowning the bauhinia with an oval of brilliance. The faint echo of Buddha’s majestic voice could be heard: “You have completed your quest for the Jade Key. The legendary scrolls are now unlocked. It is a result of your teamwork — respect for others’ opinions, tolerance for others’ weaknesses, and the combination of each one’s strength in resolving it.”

And Alice understood. She finally realized that no matter how brilliant you are, how much you stand out from the crowd, how much bragging you do — you can never achieve everything on your own. Teamwork is like the Jade Key, unlocking the diverse potential of individuals and creating wonders.

She closed her eyes and smiled, glad to understand the importance of teamwork. All of a sudden, she felt a jolt and opened her eyes, surprisingly finding herself back under the bauhinia tree in the school garden! Just then, a few classmates came over and asked, “Alice, will you join us in the ensemble?”

“Sure, my violin and your instruments will be a perfect match.”

New Journeys to the West

Dulwich College Beijing, Trivedi, Suvarn - 11

The vast far flung desert, coated completely with bitter snow seems to be endless, stretching on for miles and miles. I have been trudging on for many exhausting days, tiring my scrawny knees, causing blistering rashes everywhere. Glistening beetle-black eyes belonging to my deceased grandfather Xuan Zang stare at me through the smeared, fractured glass of a photograph kept in my rucksack. He inspires me, with his daring journey across colossal mountain ranges and deserts. A few weeks ago, I foolishly made the decision to make a trip from my hometown, Nalanda, to China along the very same path that my great grandfather had taken. But, the many deserts he had gone through were now just glaciers. And I never knew how much the feeling of regret, the thought to give up and go back would overcome me. I know I have to go on, to ignore everything and focus, but now I do not feel the same as before.

Little lumps of snow harshly plummet from the overcast clouds, and I immediately know what it is. A blizzard. Cursing under my hazy breath, I footslog forward, frigid wind whipping my sullen face. A large patch of dry leaves is located directly in front of me, each one placed precisely next to each other, and I immediately know something is wrong. Leaves in the winter? This is not right. I look to my left and right, but hills stretch on and on in that area, so I must head forward. Cautiously, I walk on to the strip of dried leaves, but the ground gives way beneath me, and I plummet down. I land on bleak snow that cushions my landing, then spring up to my feet. Someone had set that trap for me. But who? There is no one in this lifeless, uninhabited area. And how could they have possibly known the exact path I was travelling? I gaze around the deep, dim trench. There are two rocks in one corner and a metal groove pokes out of the jagged ground. The walls are too steep to climb, and there is not a chance I can jump out. Abruptly, a thumping noise comes from just outside the trap. A massive looming figure leaps into the trench. In the little light that allows me to see, I can distinguish its features. It looks like a she, and is dressed completely in black, with a flowing black dress, and a beautiful black robe. Pale and chalky white, a little skin could be seen under her clothes.

“Well, well, well, look what we have here.” Her voice is high pitched and raspy; it feels like nails on a chalkboard.

“W-w-who are y-you?” I stutter as I am deathly afraid of her.

“I, am the great *Báigǔjīng*! When your cowardly great grandfather made his expedition, I wanted to eat his flesh. But he and his stupid monkey ruined it all. So, I am here to get revenge!” I backed up against the solid, musty walls, nicking my lower forearm on the metal groove. Blood splatters the ground, and I grimace in pain.

“Lousy mortal, I will finish you in no time!” she bellows, shaking all sides of the pit. Ignoring the pain in my arm, I hastily get back up; she has already locked her pale eyes on my body. Unanticipatedly, all 10 feet of her lunge at me, sharp claws emerging from her inhumanly hands. I dodge the blow and swiftly roll over onto a rough, uneven rock.

“*Báigǔjīng*...” I rack my head trying to translate the name from the little Chinese I was taught at school. In spur of the moment, I remembered. *Báigǔjīng* is the ‘White Bone Demon’

that tried to murder my grandfather and *Sūnwùkōng*, the monkey king. She brutally tortures and murders anyone that she captures; I know that the only reason that my great-grandfather escaped was he was a well-taught Buddhist monk with the help of an omnipotent, clever monkey. To simplify things, I am going to die. There is no way out of this. I jerk to the side, panting heavily. Glaring at my terrified face, she dashes at me once again with her bloodshot eyes. I make a helpless try to dart out of the way, however her deadly pincers grab the hem of my sweat-filled robe, tearing it right off my defenceless body. From side to side, I sloppily duck her punches, until I see something in the distance. It is someone standing near the top of the dike, beyond view of *Báigǔjīng*. Losing my focus, the last thing I see is a massive fist heading straight for my head.

When I groggily wake up, I find myself in a narrow chamber, lined with miniscule and unlit torches. I rest my back against the rough wall, and try to find out where this dungeon is. I cannot escape, as the cell has rusty metal bars lining the exits on each side, with a cramped room outside the jail that had one marble entrance in one corner. I examine the room closely. There is a figure crouched down in the darkness, with wide eyes. Something clicks in my head. It is the figure I saw during the fight. It scurries over to the jail and starts fingering the hatch. It grabs a hairclip out of its blue fanny pack and pushes it in between the gap between the lock and the door. The door creaks open and he beckons for me to come with him through the door.

“Who are you?” I inquire. He pulls down his hood revealing a long moustache and a scowl.

“I”, he says with a pause, “am Xuan Zang, your great grandfather.”

Little Flower

Heep Yunn Primary School, Chong, Colette - 10

Rose

When I was six days old, my Chinese parents gave me up for adoption. It was during the strict 'one-child-per-family policy' in communist China. My birth parents were very poor and wanted to give me a better life. They gave me an old book that was left for me by my birth parents, they had read it to me over the years, I loved the Monkey King and the book taught me a lot. The Buddhist monk faced eighty-one sufferings on his long journey, more than most people, so the book helped me deal with feeling different. I used to wish as a child that I could change into anyone I wanted, just like the Monkey could. I read the chapters many times, it reminded me of my real parents, the one legacy they had left me... the book had journeyed all the way from China, I felt like we had that small thing joining us together.

I was almost 18 when I discovered the note on the last page of the book, I burst into tears. They wanted to meet me. I felt excited but worried. How would I know what they looked like? How would they recognise me? Dylan, my brother said that I should turn up holding a sign saying 'hey, I'm the adopted kid! Are you my birth parents?' but I think I'd look silly, I'm sure he was just trying to cheer me up!

Christmas and New Years passed in a flash, I had questions running through my mind. Mum was worried in case they didn't show up and I'd be disappointed. It's pretty unlikely that they will show up after 18 years. However, we decided to travel to London, we had nothing to lose...so our journey began, I held the book to my chest tightly.

Chinese Mother

I couldn't stop crying as I heard my husband leaving the house with our Little Flower. I felt empty and ashamed because we couldn't give our daughter the life she deserved. If the authorities found out that we had a second child, our family would have been torn apart. Over the years, Chunhua, which means 'Little Flower', has never left our minds. Every birthday, Chinese New Year, I was thinking about her. Chen missed his little sister and dreams of the day he will meet her.

We have saved money and Chen has learnt English and taught us a little too. None of us have ever left China and we worry that Chunhua would be scared of meeting us, or blame us for giving her up. We hope she has the book, and has read it to the end and found our note. If she doesn't come we will try to understand, we want to see where our daughter grew up and it is almost time...

The Book and the Chinese Father

Wow that monkey has travelled! My father's father had read it a million times to his sons and them to their sons and daughters. He loved that book, it was his treasure. I think the monk reminded my father of his grandfather and it had since been passed down through generations and now it was in my hands, worn thin from love of every page. My mother may disagree to me dipping the tip of my brush into the ink and turning to the old, worn, yellowed page and writing my words, or maybe she would understand...

Dear Little Flower,

What we feel cannot be put into words. We think this is the best for you. We wish we could give you everything you deserve. We love you so much. We know that the people who adopted you, are British and good people.

On the 1st of January 2017, your 18th birthday, we will be waiting for you Little Flower, we will find a way. We will be waiting for you at Westminster Abbey; a famous church in London.

In our hearts forever.

Love Father, Mother and Chen (your older brother)

On the day we had to say goodbye, I wrapped her up ready for a new journey west. I could hear her mother sobbing as I tucked the book beneath her. I took her to the adoption agency and will never forget the journey home alone without her.

The Reunion

London was busy as usual, people were rushing around, tourists were taking photos. As the British family reached Westminster Abbey, they were eagerly looking around. The young Chinese girl, Rose was nervously peeking out from behind her black, silky fringe. Questions and fears were swirling around her mind.

Finally, they found a bench and sat down but the Chinese girl was up, pacing back and forth wondering whether they would turn up.

“What time is it mum?”

“5 minutes after the last time you asked...” she replied kindly.

The next moment, a nervous looking Chinese couple approached the bench... “Little Flower”, the man with very kind eyes was muttering as he slowly walked towards Rose, he had no doubt she was his child.

“Chunhua”, he whispered. Rose tentatively stepped forward, searching his eyes before embracing him, it all happened so fast but also felt like the earth had stopped. The next moment, arms were reaching around her from all directions, mothers were sobbing, dads crying, brothers standing awkwardly.

Rose took a step back and found herself facing an older-looking version of herself, she had exactly the same eyes, she realised it was her real mum. She pulled her into a tight hug and over her shoulder she could see her dad shaking hands with her ‘dad’, and Dylan and Chen awkwardly embracing.

The girl felt like a mythical creature, like she had changed into someone else, she somehow felt complete. The families found a cafe and huddled around a table. The British Mother pulled out a family photo-album and Rose placed the huge book “Journey to the West” in front of her Chinese father, a single tear dropped down, splashing the cover.

Journey to the Sun

Kennedy School, Ng, Megan - 10

It was an ancient mountain, one who knew nearly all the world's secrets. They say if you look up at it in the dead of night, it would be perfectly happy to divulge its knowledge to you. Unfortunately, at the time, it would be quite impossible to gaze upon the mountain's splendor, simply because you couldn't see it.

It was as if a huge, dark cloud had drifted towards the mountain, wrapping it in a cloak of shadowy power. This dark cloud, however, was made entirely out of demons.

The demons swarmed the mountain, their sharp talons digging into the rock, climbing higher and higher until they reached its peak, where they waited, watching for the demon who summoned them.

He soon came.

Sheji was powerful by demon standards. No-one really knew what he looked like, as a murky mist always hung over his body. Besides, if you even dared to get an inch too close to Sheji without his permission, the evil he radiated would overtake you, and it would be days until you dared move again.

As Sheji reached the rocky platform, the demons broke into a cacophony of hissing. He called for silence once, quietly, like a whisper, but immediately, silence there was.

"I have gathered you here to talk about a new enemy that threatens us all," Sheji announced, his voice ringing. "A young hunter moves through China as we speak. A young hunter, but it would be best not to underestimate him."

The demons cocked their heads, waiting. A young mortal, cunning as he may be, was of no concern to them.

"I sense the blood of the Sun inside him. He seeks the Sun, an impossible feat for a mortal, but I am convinced he will not fail. He will do anything to get to the house of the Sun, to achieve his goal, whatever that may be."

A wave of excitement rolled through the watching demons. All knew the powerful Sun, who gave light to the world, who saw all, who knew all. This mortal must be travelling west, for the place the Sun sets, where it rests, is always west, wherever you may be. In ancient times, before mankind, the Sun and the Moon had a battle. Their fight shook the earth, created ridges and furrows on its surface, until finally, the Moon was vanquished, forced to only appear at night.

The Sun was badly wounded, and it was said that his blood spilled upon a certain group of creatures and mortals, a group that became smaller every decade. These elite were granted powers the demons could only dream of. This hunter was nothing but a husk containing the power they so craved - tear that husk away, kill the mortal, and the power would be theirs.

Sheji stared at them, glaring slightly.

"What are you waiting for, you imbeciles? Go! Find that mortal!"

There was a flurry of movement as the demons sped off in a haze of bloodthirsty anger. No feelings were inside them, none except evil, pure evil, and a thirst for power. The demons of Fire headed to Xinjiang as a cluster of fireballs streaking across the sky. The slitherers slipped off to scour Shandong, their green-gray scales reflecting the silvery moonlight.

Soaring up above it all were the demons of Wind, gliding along the cool night breeze. The others scattered off to the four corners of China, all intent on finding their quarry.

Before Sheji melted into a pool of darkness, he scratched a character into the mountain's surface, a scratch so deep it burned the hearts of all the demons in China.

Zhao.

Search.

Far, far away, in a dense green forest somewhere in northern Tibet, a young hunter's eyes were fluttering open, away from stormy dreams. Dreams of the Rebels hunting his village while the villagers ran, haphazardly into the night. Dreams of houses being burned down, and the salty-sweet stink of his father's blood.

As the Sun rose, it gave the hunter new strength, just enough to stumble forward. Slowly but surely, he made his way west, to seek the Sun, the Sun who would know how to counter this evil. He was the village's only hope, and he would rather die than come back empty-handed.

Of course, it is a well-known rule that, if your only hope fails, you will have no hope at all, and that in itself is quite an unpleasant experience.

That, and the fact that the demons were still searching every nook and cranny of China. For him.

The Fourth Guardian

Kowloon Junior School, Leung, Avery - 8

It all started one lazy afternoon when I fell into a deep sleep inside Master XuanZang's comfy bag. When I woke up, I found myself bumping along a rocky road with Master, Monkey, Pigsy and Sandy. They didn't realise there was an unconscious little cat in Master's bag and had packed me with all the supplies. Monkey insisted that it was too dangerous for a cat to be travelling all the way to India. I was rather offended because I was very capable of protecting myself, after all I was a stray cat before Master adopted me. After some debating everyone agreed that we were too far away to take me home.

On the fourteenth day, we arrived at a village which looked quite cheery and peaceful. I peeked out of the bag to see a parade of villagers waving at us. "Welcome, you may stay here for the night", declared the village chief. His tone abruptly changed into a mysterious whisper. "Villagers have started going missing recently. So my advice is to lay low and don't go wandering around in the dark". He looked quite affable so we all trusted him.

At night, we all got ready for bed except Monkey who crept outside, probably to look for trouble as usual. A rustling noise woke me up, I thought it was Monkey returning but he was nowhere to be seen. Suddenly there was an impenetrable fog drifting in from everywhere. A scream rang out and we all bolted out of the hut. We were blinded by the haze and kept knocking into each other. Then we heard a lady's voice chanting a melody that was creepy and soothing at the same time. It made my fur stand on end so I folded my ears to block out the tune. Master, Pigsy and Sandy started looking drowsy until they all finally collapsed. They had that swirly look in their eyes, they were...hypnotised!

The blurry fog faded away to reveal a man's shape. I was confused, actually it was the village chief but his eyes were glowing scarlet red. He beckoned Master to leave with him and I felt desperate to save Master. So many questions were racing through my mind: Where were they going? What was going to happen to my beloved Master? How come the chief sings like a lady?

I stalked them cautiously and silently as the chief led Master to a cave. Inside the cave were grimy cages full of captured people who must have been the missing villagers. I was shocked to see human bones scattered all over the foul smelling ground. The chief was in fact a human-eating spell-singing demon in disguise....and Master was going to be his next meal!

There was no time to plan so I leaped into action and scratched his cheek so hard it bled! The chief was so surprised he stopped concentrating on singing and started to focus on me. I fled outside with the chief chasing after me.

I yowled at the top of my lungs for Monkey but nothing happened. The chief's teeth were clenched in fury. He pulled out a knife from his robe and charged towards me waving the razor-sharp blade. I ducked under the knife and pounced on his wrist. He let out an ear-piercing shriek and couldn't use his weapon anymore due to the horrible pain in his hand.

At this point Monkey sprang out from the bushes and gazed about in puzzlement. The chief snarled "Great, another one to get rid of!". Now he turned his attention to Monkey... it was my chance, if I scratched his throat he wouldn't be able to sing. So I launched through the air like a furry bullet with spikes and aimed straight for his neck. The chief was horrified that his throat had been wounded and could only cry out hoarsely. He gripped his stinging

throat and stumbled about until he tripped over a rock and smashed his head against the hard rubble ground.

“Where were you?” I hissed at Monkey. “You were supposed to be protecting us”. “Well little kitty, I went to investigate the missing villagers”, Monkey answered in his usual arrogant way. “While I was exploring the forest, some fog blinded me and I heard some singing that made me freeze. A few minutes later I could move again and then I heard you call. It took me a while to find you...” Monkey paused as he sensed something.

Unexpectedly, misty hands shot out from the chief’s motionless body. I heard that creepy high-pitched lady voice shrieking, “I’m coming for you!”. Master was glancing at us from the cave entrance and the spirit was headed there to possess him. As quick as a flash Monkey put his hands together, closed his eyes and chanted some words in a language I didn’t understand. A blaze of light darted from his hands and split the fog into little wispy bits and pieces. When the last piece of the spirit dissolved, a powerful puff propelled us away into the bushes.

Everyone went back to normal and could finally take control of their own brains. They all cheered but just when I thought I was going to be congratulated, Monkey got all the credit! “All hail the Monkey King!” shouted a foolish villager. “I heard he turned into a fierce cat that killed the chief,” commented another senseless villager. The story got passed on until they even changed the villain into several demons!

Big-headed Monkey was enjoying the praise so much he forgot all about me. I was fuming inside but just then Master patted me on the head and whispered softly: “Thank you, you’re my very best guardian.” I wound my body between his legs and purred merrily. Now you know about how an ordinary cat saved the day and became Xuanzang’s fourth guardian. Time for a nap now, I’ll tell you more about our adventures in the future.

Journey to the West

Po Leung Kuk Choi Kai Yau School, Chan, Ingrid - 11

My master had finally, after coming across an abundance of difficulties, arrived at the sainted piece of land, and had taken the Bible with ease and success. The four of us, including Master, were finally true Saints. I was free.

It was a barren and desolate mountain, and its weight, of which I was bearing, was incredibly heavy. I had wanted, against my better judgement, to take over the Sky king and the Heaven five-hundred years ago, and as result I had been punished to bear the weight of the Five-mountain day and night. A monk would soon come, and I had somewhat been informed by the Buddha that I was to wait for him, and be his apprentice.

When you have waited for something to happen for a long period of time already, waiting for one more day doesn't seem like much. I was saying that to myself, not wanting to give up, trying, with much difficulty, to believe that someone would stumble along and save me. To my surprise, he came. My master. He was walking nimbly, and uttering some kind of prayer. Excitement rose inside my heart, fluttering around like a butterfly. I cried out, using the last of my strength. I remember quite clearly that he had looked disrupted, being interrupted between his prayers. Nevertheless, he looked around, and saw me being under the mountain. It was at that time he saved, and changed, me and my entire life.

I somehow knew, in my heart, that I was to follow the monk, whom I now knew as Master Xuan Zang. We walked miles in days, and had an encounter with the Mud Monster. The Mud Monster had swallowed Master's horse, and I was determined to prove myself to Master and win the horse back. But the Monster hid in the depths of the river that I could never reach. I called the Buddha, but instead of rewarding me with praise, he showered me with mere complaints about the small things I did wrong. He told me I should've said that we were on a mission. I waited for the Buddha to finish his lecture, brows furrowing in anxiety and impatience. The Buddha left, and told the Monster to give the horse back.

We walked on, wandering not with much purpose, knowing only to head West, and then we came along the Pig. The Pig was a human, at least at first he was; and he was married to a pretty young girl. But day after day, he didn't plough or milk, as a proper husband would have. Because of this, or maybe purely because he filled his mind with food and only with food, he was changing, or rather turning, into a big, fat pig. The Pig also went with Master on this particular adventure we were heading ourselves to, and Master had, gladly, let him come along.

Summer had passed, and Autumn had come. We were walking quietly, with our heads held low, when we came across what looked like a big stream of pulsing water blocking our way. There was a sign that said, "Flowing-Sand River. Even a feather can't float on this river." A great wave-like creature rose from the streams, with mingled sand and water dripping from its sides, and it was trying to snatch Master. We battled with it a while, but it struggled mightily, and finally slipped from our hands and went into the waters. I did a somersault, and landed into the temple of the Buddha once again. The Buddha once again, and I must

say quite repeatedly, told me to tell the monsters we encountered that we were on a sainted mission. I must say, he was quite angered when I told him, but at least he saved Master. Master helped himself to his new apprentice, and helped him shave his hair.

We walked on, each filled with determination. We met a widow with three daughters, and the Pig was tricked into marrying one of the daughters, but it turned out that they were the Buddha's helpers, trying to test if our life's ambition was to go to the West. We were mischievous, I must say, and we stole. We stole, and people chased us. We barely escaped every time. We then met a ghoul. The thing was, Master did not have as piercing eyes as I did, as did the other apprentices. They saw an old woman, a bald old man, and a young, innocent girl. I saw a ghoul, a ghoul, and a ghoul. I was frustrated, not understanding why Master couldn't see through the simple disguise. Agreeing with my better judgments for this time, I killed the spirit, doing as only to protect Master. I was banned, as result, for being an apprentice for Master anymore.

I didn't know what was happening for a while, so I went back to the mountain where I was born. I wasn't aware of the days that had passed, the times I'd seen the sun set pass me. I only remember drinking to myself and my fellow monkeys. But I remember being called by Pig to help master get out, and therefore I knew he was held as a prisoner. I battled with the monster that held my Master as prisoner, and saved Master. He was glad to let me be his apprentice again, and he forgave me for what I had done.

We battled some monsters again; same story every time. It was really me who did all the work, honestly. I stole some, battled again; stole, then battled. Though really, I would like to see the others battling, or even managing to battle, without me being there. Pig was too lazy to even look around and tell Master about the place we were battling in. He slept on the mountain, and I was following him. He bowed to three particular rocks and practiced the chain of lies and nonsense which, however pathetically made, he was going to perform in front of us. We went on, and with hearts full of perseverance and determination, we arrived.

That was my version of the story. I was free, and will always be. People now know me as the Monkey King.

New Journeys to the West

Po Leung Kuk Choi Kai Yau School, Chung, Erin - 11

“But what is the route now it’s blocked? If we want to pass the mountain, let alone India, we have to use another route.” Bajie rambled anxiously. His salmon pink, rotund body stomped on the icy bamboo mat as he paced. He pulled a face, as if he didn’t want to think of what the four might have to do.

“I don’t know.” XuanZhang replied as he pondered this question. He rested his head on his callused hand as he formed a plan, the other hand rolling out the map. He caressed the paper, soft from wear. He traced nimble fingers across the drawings of mountains, villages, rivers and forests. The colours of the drawings were once vivid, amazing, perfect even. The charming little houses were so warm and welcoming that he wished to stay. The only two options was to go over the mountain, which was a treacherous path, since it would take at least two days. He could go left, but it was where a demon lurked. Specifically, the legendary White Bone Demon. He wasn’t even sure it existed, but it was powerful if it did. No one knew much of it because if you got to see it, you’d probably be dead. There was also a small village, according to the dingy map they had acquired from the sketchy seller four years back. It was yellowed from age, edges pale brown and crumbling to pieces, a tear ripping through the edge. Jagged, zigzagging lines crawled across the paper from the many times when the four had stuffed the map into satchels.

“Well, if you you’re going to tell me not to kill off seemingly innocent people, we are NOT going to the left.” WuKong suddenly declared. He puffed up his chest, as he tended to do when determined. His faced was set in stone as his eyes gleamed. Once he made a decision, he never backed down.

“Fine.”

The mountain stood in it’s majesty, evoking a sense of astonishment in the four. The image sent chills down Bajie’s spine. He shivered. It taunted him, as if to say, Run away if you want. Leave your friends to face me alone, scaredy-pig. Bajie told himself firmly, I will NOT run away. It was true that he was scared to death, but his determination and loyalty made him stand his ground.

Web-like streams branched out through the mountain, as if they were veins of the earth. Lush, vivid forests bathed it in dark green, a stark contrast to the grey sky. SanZhang’s eyes were wide as he gawked at the sight. He sucked in a deep breath at the heavy, humid haze that shrouded the mountain in mystery. This was the perfect condition for moonberries. Those spherical, snow white berries... He had a moonberry plant. It was thriving, green leaves and impeccably ripe moonberries hanging onto every branch, every stalk... He craved and ached for them.

Next to him, XuanZhang shook his head in despair. WuKong was right. They’d have to go around the side.

“Hello, kind sirs. What brings you to our village?” Her skirts swished around her as she questioned. Brown eyes as milky as chocolate curiously gazed at the four. She smiled graciously as her midnight hair fell from her ears and cascaded down her shoulders. She beckoned the four in, offering a bowl of moonberries. SanZhang’s eyes were as wide as saucers as he stared at the bowl, hardly believing the sight. “Yes, those are moonberries,” she interjected, “My favourite.” She left to make tea.

Steam billowed from the pot as she added a silver, metallic liquid. The substance glittered in her vial before it went in. WuKong glared at her. His eyes bored into her petite, demure figure. However, the girl seemed not to notice. WuKong’s eyes pierced her as he drew a blade, its metallic sheen blazing in the sunset. She was so innocent. The demon who possessed her, however, was not. The demon was going to poison them.

With a flash of light, WuKong was at her side, blade pressed into her neck. This left a trail of scarlet along the blade’s edge, looking sinister, the promise of something more, something even deadlier. WuKong pressed harder.

The girl screamed, her shrieks piercing the air like shards of glass as blood pooled out of her veins. Her brown skirt flew as she fell to the floor.

“How could you?” XuanZhang cried.

WuKong shushed him, telling him to wait. A stormy grey demon flew out. It grinned maliciously, its teeth dripping with scarlet that TangZhang hoped wasn’t blood. It then soared away. It was gone in a flash, as if it had stopped time and gone away before they could slay it.

Soon, all that was left was a body framed with brown hair, a brown skirt and a shirt soaked in blood.

“Where are you, dear daughter?!” A worried voice only a mother could possess cried in pain. Her face was contorted in misery, frustrated tears prickling at the crinkled corners of her eyes. “Where is she?!” She continued her search down the muddy brown brick road, wobbling with each step.

Once again, WuKong strode up to her. With a flash of the blade, before she even could see it, her body lay on the stone cold bricks, her skirts fanned out across the pavement. Her eyes were glassy with tears as she stared into nothingness, into oblivion.

The same spirit flew out, this time stained with black and rufescent blood. XuanZhang marched forward, slaying the spirit with his magical sword. It let out a guttural scream, shrieks piercing the air like daggers, dark smoke dissipating into the cool night air.

“I wish we could’ve done this without killing them.” WuKong sighed.

Hordes of villagers thanked them. Apparently the girl had been acting weird for a month already. “She kept asking whether a friar, monk, monkey and pig were here. Odd.” One had stated.

They had survived the White Bone Demon.

The Fourth Disciple

Po Leung Kuk Choi Kai Yau School, Yu, Justin - 11

The air was dead, the land was bare and the plants were badly dehydrated. The monk Xuanzang was still persistent to continue on his quest. The quest to go to the west to claim a Buddhist scripture. There was sweat down the brows of the quartet, each carrying a heavy load of essentials, each sack was as heavy as lead. Suddenly, there was a gust of wind, cool and humid, in contrast to that of the dry atmosphere. From the middle of nowhere, there was a man, definitely not Chinese, sitting on horseback, staring at them.

“Who are you?” The Monkey King demanded.

“I am a merchant, I need help finding a way out of here!” The stranger yelled.

Xuanzang put his hand in front of the Monkey King, signaling him to shut up. Then he nodded at the stranger, “I shall help you find a way out this dessert, my job is to help those in need,” he calmly says to the stranger, “Join us.” The stranger galloped towards Xuanzang and gave him a thankful look.

Night was falling, as the hot dessert starts to cool down. Now it is as cold as if it was snowing, but no flakes of white fluttered down to the ground, just a cold lump of sand underneath their feet. “We will stop here for the day,” announced Xuanzang. The Monkey King took out some matches and lighted them while Pigsy took out some dough and spring onions, wrapping the dough clumsily around the green onions, causing some of the filling to fall out. Then, the Friar took the dough and baked it over the fire, cooking the scallion pancake. When the pancake was done, Xuanzang gave a piece to their new friend. The newcomer thanked the rest of the group and started eating. The taste of the pancake filled his mouth with a slightly salty, yet appetizing flavour, he had never tried, nor seen this sort of food before. This was an all-new experience for him.

The next day, the newcomer saw the other four waiting for him. He felt slightly embarrassed, for the fact that he woke up late. Xuanzang led them to the end of the dessert. Everyone was sweating hard, there was no water they can drink, the land was still dry, but there was grass. That is always a good sign.

“Can we rest for the rest of the day?” asked the Friar.

“I am tired of all this walking” the Monkey King complained.

“I am starving” wailed Pigsy.

“We’ll stop here for today” Xuanzang answered.

The newcomer was thankful. He was awfully tired, he never had to walk this far of a distance in one day, usually, the running work is for the horses, and he never had to do it. He lacked sleep and food, he had to get used to all this walking, starving and drowsing, because he just had to find a way home.

The newcomer woke up early today, not like yesterday, when he overslept. This is the day they leave this torrid, unforgiving dessert.

“Be careful of any creature that is trying to attack you, remember to always back away when you are being targeted, do not fight back,” Xuanzang reminded.

The huge wet grassland biome wasn’t nearly as lifeless as the dead dessert. Now, their biggest problem is not to use water wisely and slowly, but to avoid being any creature’s mid-

day meal. Life was hard for them, but he had to accept the fact that he was not with anyone who is just really nicely showing him the way home, he was with a monk on a mission.

They made their way through in a couple of weeks. The newcomer spotted a unicorn and got really excited. He also shot a glimpse of a human like small hairy creature. He also saw a fifteen foot long snake shining its teeth in front of him. Xuanzang said that he had never seen these unique animals in his life too, therefore they must be well preserved and should not be harmed, after all, they are still living creatures.

This team also figured some mystical plants that included nuts as big as heads. They picked a few for eating, figuring out it was filled with glorious, yet slimy liquids, sweet and fresh.

The newcomer then found something familiar, a gondola that leads to home, something he had been longing to see for ages.

He thanked the other people on the team for showing him the way home and giving him the chance to experience new findings. Then, there was a gust of wind and he disappeared into the distance. He was homesick, he missed his family and friends, he can't wait to become a merchant again.

He would then share his findings with his family and friends, then to the world, but he does not know it yet.

Xuanzang said, "Our duty has been accomplished, we shall now stay focused on our destiny, our quest that we started months ago."

When the merchant went back to his hometown, he brought new findings and inventions, moreover wrote a book about his travels. He had just figured one of the greatest routes on Earth, inspiring the young generation.

Journey to the West (With a Twist)

Quarry Bay School, Bratton, Luke - 8

It was a usual evening. Sun Wukong, Zhu Bajie, White Dragon Horse and Tang Sanzang were all happily sitting around the Dining table feasting on a banquet. Everyone was having a good time. They were telling jokes and reminding everyone about good times. Except for one thing. Zhu Bajie was acting very strangely. He just wasn't being himself. Tang Sanzang seemed to be the only one who noticed Zhu Bajie and his unusual behaviour.

As it got late, they all accidentally fell asleep at the table. Sun Wukong was exhausted but just couldn't fall asleep. Out of the darkness, he saw a mysterious figure move around. When it left, Sun Wukong woke up White Dragon Horse and Tang Sanzang but Zhu Bajie was nowhere to be found. Sun Wukong explained everything about how he saw a mysterious shadow and how Zhu Bajie had disappeared. That is when Tang Sanzang joined into the conversation. He told Sun Wukong and White Dragon Horse about how he noticed that Zhu Bajie was acting strangely during dinner. The three of them decided that the next day the second they woke up they were going to search for Zhu Bajie.

It was dawn. White Dragon Horse, Tang Sanzang and Sun Wukong set off for their terrific quest. White Dragon Horse agreed to carry all the supplies. Even though they knocked on every door they could find and asked if anyone had seen Zhu Bajie. But the truth fell upon them. No one knew where he was.

They looked and looked until they saw him. But he looked...different. His clothes were torn. Then they saw his face. He was not happy. Questions raced through their minds. Why did Zhu Bajie run away? What was wrong with him? Why was he acting so suspiciously? They decided to follow him, stalker style. What would happen if he saw them? At that time, nobody knew.

Zhu Bajie had led them to the Emperors palace. The guards shouted as loudly as they could. "Halt!" They shouted at the top of their voices. Then Zhu Bajie asked for permission to see the Emperor in private.

The guards escorted Zhu Bajie to the Emperor's room. The doors then closed. What was going to happen then?

Inside the Emperor's room, Zhu Bajie asked the Emperor if he could train as a personal bodyguard. The Emperor said that he could but only if he went through very intense training. Very strangely Zhu Bajie passed it all.

Sun Wukong, Tang Sanzang and White Dragon Horse whispered among themselves. They all thought that Zhu Bajie was very lazy. So was he more athletic than they thought, or was something wrong with him? Then the Emperor decided to announce that Zhu Bajie had passed the test and that he was impressed by Zhu Bajie and his skill and ability. To top that, he made Zhu Bajie his own personal bodyguard. What was going to happen next? Than doors closed. Only the three of them and the Emperor and Zhu Bajie were in the same room.

Then Sun Wukong, Tang Sanzang and White Dragon Horse dashed as fast as they could out of the palace. Something was very wrong with Zhu Bajie. Then, at that very moment, there was a shout for help coming from the palace. Sun Wukong was the first to recognise

who screamed. The Emperor. They then sprinted back to the palace and straight into the Emperor's room. They were so curious of what was happening that they didn't even stop to tell the guards why they were coming in. The second they got in to the Emperor's room the first thing they saw was the Emperor, who had been tied up and had a bandage over his mouth and a smashed window. Tang Sanzang inferred that Zhu Bajie had tied up the Emperor, taken something, smashed the window and had than made his escape.

When they finished untying the Emperor, he said he would tell them everything. He explained that he had been tied up by Zhu Bajie, and then he had taken the documents which allowed him to be the Emperor, smashed the window, jumped out and ran away. "But... Why would Zhu Bajie want to be the Emperor?" said Sun Wukong, who was feeling confused. They all knew Zhu Bajie was a good person. And if he was a good and kind person, why would he do something as horrible as this? But then Tang Sanzang had a idea. "Maybe he was blackmailed! Or bribed!" Tang Sanzang announced. Sun Wukong joined in the conversation. "But who blackmailed him then?"

"I know!" Tang Sanzang announced. "IT WAS RED BULL KING!" At that moment, a thick smoke appeared. It was Zhu Bajie and a very strange looking character. The person began to talk. "I can't believe you fools thought it was Red Bull King! It was I, the Demon of Confusion! I put chemicals in his food at your silly little banquet. Now Zhu Bajie is under my command. There is only one antidote. But I am never going to tell you! I used Zhu Bajie to get the documents from the Emperor! After I destroy you, I shall become Emperor! And then ruler of the world!" Tang Sanzang spoke up. "You will never become Emperor or take over the world with us to stop you!"

"Ha ha ha ha! I'm going to destroy you! Zhu Bajie, attack!" Sun Wukong than quickly said "We can't hurt Zhu Ba-" He stopped speaking as Zhu Bajie had leapt into the air and attacked Sun Wukong.

Than the Demon of Confusion spoke up. "It's a lose-lose situation for you fools! Give up now!" White Dragon Horse than began to charge at the Demon of Confusion. Zhu Bajie saw what was happening. He than bit the neck of White Dragon Horse. Zhu Bajie looked different. He charged at the Demon of Confusion. "You fools have ruined my plans!" He shouted, and than he disappeared. Zhu Bajie spoke up. "Sorry guys. I don't know what came over me." Don't worry, it's not your fault.", said Sun Wukong. They walked over to White Dragon Horse. It looked as if he had stopped breathing. He was dead. "No, no, no! I killed White Dragon Horse!" Zhu Bajie said

"Dont worry," said Tang Sanzang. "He may have died, but to save the world. Let's go home," said Tang Sanzang, with tears in his eyes. And so the three of them began to walk down the road as the sun began to set.

The End

New Journey to the West

Singapore International School (Hong Kong), Chong, Stephanie - 10

“Life is so boring here,” Sun Wukong grumbled as he lay sprawled on the ground, scratching his furry belly, “can’t we do something other than sit here all day?” he pleaded with Xuanzhang who promptly shot the monkey a stern look that made him bolt upright.

“Well, what would you suggest?” Xuanzhang sagely replied. In response, Sun Wukong grunted and slumped back down. “I miss the old days,” he thought wistfully.

At that moment, there was a curt knock at the door. Hastily, Sun Wukong scrambled to his feet. Maybe whoever was knocking would have something interesting to share, something more interesting than sitting on the tiled floor of the temple...

Outside he found one of the dutiful servants of the King of Heaven.

“His majesty would like to inform you that your next mission is to help the citizens of Hong Kong.”

Their visitor then went on to describe the dire situation facing those in the city who were forced to reside in cramped subdivided flats, and that the monk and his disciples were tasked with finding a way to help them. Instantly, Sun Wukong bounded out of the temple and was on his way to find the rest of their troop.

Sha Wujing stood bewildered, his mouth hanging open as Sun Wukong leapt around him in excitement, waving his staff wildly.

“Come on! We have a new mission!” he exclaimed with a screech.

Nearby, Zhu Bajie, the greedy pig, was blissfully stuffing food from the altar into his mouth as fast as humanly possible, taking no notice of the commotion going on around him. Before either of them could protest, Sun Wukong grabbed them both and dragged them out towards Xuanzhang who was perched atop a waiting cloud.

Soon after, the four were descending towards the sprawling metropolis of Hong Kong. Gently, the cloud carried them through the open window of a crumbling apartment building. What they saw bamboozled them. This sparsely-furnished room that felt no bigger than a postage stamp was surely too small to be somebody’s living quarters. Just then, the door opened, and a skinny girl dressed in a school uniform entered. When she caught sight of the four, she stopped dead in her tracks.

“Who are you?” she stammered, confused. Xuanzhang smiled awkwardly before introducing himself and his posse.

“I’m Alice,” the girl whispered.

“Why on earth are you living in this awful place?” Sun Wukong blurted out as Sha Wujing elbowed him in the ribs.

“At least this one has a bathroom” she replied. “My family and I are being kicked out next week because we can’t pay the rent!” she whimpered and wiped away her tears before adding, “We’ll have to live on the streets!”

At once, they sprung to life and Zhu Bajie exclaimed, “Don’t despair! It is our honour to help you!” Alice gaped in wonder as, one by one, they climbed atop the wispy cloud and were soon whisked off to Government House.

“We do have one possible solution,” Carrie Lam stated. The four soon learnt from

her that, rather bizarrely, houses could be made out of those funny big metal boxes that they'd seen piled high on gargantuan ships as they passed over the South China Sea. And the best part was that they took up so little space. What an ingenious idea! Furthermore, the Government of the Netherlands had agreed to provide them for free, but on the one condition that Hong Kong could show evidence that they possessed sufficient land. Fortunately, Sha Wujing recalled spotting a seemingly deserted island not far from Hong Kong. There was only one thing for it! The four clambered atop their cloud again, eager to depart for Amsterdam.

Much to their delight, the gang soon glimpsed the mysterious island. But was it claimed? As they descended to take a closer look, they were rudely greeted by a rotund man who shook his fist and then proceeded to hurl rocks at them. "This is my island and you're trespassing!" he bellowed as he leaned against a rusting and faded sign declaring 'Property of the HKSAR Government' to catch his breath. "We'll see about that," Sun Wukong muttered under his breath to his friends as they took off back into the vast blue sky.

After a long and arduous journey, they finally arrived in the city of canals and bicycles. Upon hearing of their fantastic plans, the Government agreed at once to provide the valuable containers. The clouds above them changed from wispy to round and puffy and came together to form one giant cloud. They loaded the containers on, and Xuanzhang expertly wound miles of rope to secure them. Proudly, they climbed on top ready to return to Hong Kong.

"Homeward bound!" Zhu Bajie snorted.

The clouds seemed to huff and puff as they retraced their journey. They travelled day and night with no rest, with the exception of Zhu Bajie who collapsed against an annoyed Sun Wukong, drooling and snoring loudly. After three days, they finally reached their destination!

"Drop the containers!" Sun Wukong boldly commanded.

They seemed to rain down like a meteor shower, and amazed citizens young and old pressed their noses to their windows to see what was going on. The containers plunked down onto the sandy shores of the island, and best of all, the greedy little man! At the sight of this, Sun Wukong cheered. He'd certainly gotten what he deserved! As if by magic, all of the televisions in Hong Kong crackled to life. Even before Carrie Lam could finish proudly declaring that those in subdivided flats had been gifted with new bigger and better accommodation, cheers and whoops could be heard across the territory. A stampede of grateful families rushed outside and, one by one, the container houses were rightfully claimed. In the crowds, Sun Wukong spotted Alice and her family weeping tears of joy. He grinned to himself, glad to have made a difference to the lives of those less well-off.

New Journey to the West

Singapore International School (Hong Kong), Fan, Xinyan - 11

“More fire? Really?” complained the Monkey King. “When all this is over, I think I’ll need a bath.”

Dragon Horse, a white horse that could turn into a dragon, snorted in response. Bajie, a talking pig, and Sha, a friar, just sighed. There was no getting out of this horrid land of fire... or was there?

Before, when the party had started out to retrieve scrolls in India, they had never thought it would be this bad. After trekking for weeks in marshes and brawling with numerous demons like the White Bone Demon, the team was thoroughly exhausted.

In the process of fighting the White Bone Demon, Xuanzang, the party’s master, had kicked the Monkey King out of the team. He had thought the Monkey King was attacking supposedly needless things that the Monkey King knew was the White Bone Demon zooming around. Now, Monkey King was back as Xuanzang had realized his mistake. He never doubted Monkey King since then.

Suddenly, behind all of the fire and smoke, came a shadow.

“Hey, look! Is that a demon?” Monkey King’s strident voice interrupted Xuanzang’s stream of thoughts.

“What is it?”

“It looks scary...”

“Can I eat it?”

“We will investigate it,” said Xuanzang calmly. “But we CANNOT AND WILL NOT eat it.” He gave Bajie a hard look.

Bajie nodded sheepishly. “Okay.”

It was just a pile of ashes.

“Sorry, guys. False alarm,” called Monkey King.

His furry hands suddenly flew to his face. Sha noticed the sudden movement. He began to suspect that this wasn’t the real Monkey King. He knew that the real him would never have mistaken a pile of ashes for a demon. Never. And why would he cover his face?

Sha wasn’t the only one suspecting that the real Monkey King was absent. Xuanzang did too. After all, Monkey King was the second to join the team, so Xuanzang knew him pretty well. He had also noted how odd he was acting lately. It didn’t quite match up to the one he knew.

“Hey, Sha, come on!” Bajie was cheerfully calling to him. “Don’t look so moody. What’s wrong with you?” He wore a big smile on his fat pig face.

“I don’t know...” Sha muttered. He wanted to make sure no one could hear. “Have you noticed Monkey King’s behavior lately?”

“Nope!” Bajie interrupted loudly.

“Shhh! Quiet!” Sha hissed.

“Why?”

“Well I have,” he continued, ignoring Bajie, “and it doesn’t feel right. He’s been acting really weird.”

“What do you mean?” This time, Bajie lowered his voice, sensing that this was important.

“I don’t think that this is the real Monkey King,” said Sha flatly.

That night, a shadow loomed over the sleeping figure of Monkey King. The actual Monkey

King had come.

“Say goodbye while you can,” whispered Monkey King as he raised his heavy weapon, named Jingu.

The sleeping monkey suddenly leapt up and dodged the Jingu at the nick of time. He took out a lighter version of Jingu, and swung it hard at Monkey King. Amused, Monkey King simply blocked the hit with his arm.

“You’ll have to do better than that, fake monkey!” Monkey King sneered.

The others woke at the disruption.

“So I was right!” exclaimed Sha and Xuanzang at the same time. They glanced at each other in surprise.

“WHAT?” shouted Bajie, utterly confused by how he could see two Monkey Kings fighting.

“Can someone explain–,” Dragon Horse started.

“What!” Sha cut him off. “Is! Going! On!”

Meanwhile, the fight between the two skilled monkeys were intense. The fake monkey’s Jingu was pressed against Monkey King’s. Monkey King gritted his teeth and pushed harder. All of a sudden, the fake monkey’s Jingu snapped into three. The broken pieces tumbled down the blazing hill and caught fire, and were never seen again.

Upon the shattering of the stick, the fake monkey turned tail and flew away. Monkey King heaved a sigh and got back to his companions. “What a terrible actor he was,” commented Monkey King.

Many years had passed since the encountering of the fake monkey, and the journey was nearly over. They had passed dozens of different biomes, fought over two dozen demons, and encountered over three dozen problems and hardships. Over time, the group members had proved themselves physically and mentally. Whether it was fighting off multiple demons or figuring out a way to get across a fast-flowing river, they proved themselves worthy of a second chance at life.

All this was observed by the almighty Buddha. He watched and listened closely to their actions and conversations, and came to realize that he didn’t plan enough hardships for the strong team to face. So far, they had encountered and dealt with seventy-nine.

The team was carrying the precious scrolls back home, and they had to cross a wide river. Buddha’s plan was to have a turtle carry the team with their scrolls across, and then make the turtle flip over, causing the scrolls to get wet, making it eighty. Yet Buddha wanted to go with the saying, “When nine nines are complete, the demons are all destroyed.” “Nine nines” supposedly meant eighty-one.

Buddha’s eyes suddenly brightened. That was it! He could make the scrolls blank, and make them go back! But he had to be quick.

“I think that was the last scroll,” panted the Monkey King. “I thought we were going to lose them for good – oh.” A dismayed look came upon his face. “Why are they all blank?”

The others crowded around him. “What?!”

Xuanzang gaped in horror.

Dragon Horse started running around in panic.

Bajie fainted.

However, Sha just stood there calmly as he recited, “When nine nines are complete, the demons are all destroyed.”

Just then, a group of priests came running towards them. They were all laughing and holding bundles of scrolls. “We gave you blank scrolls to fulfill the old saying.”

Everyone recovered from their state of shock. At least the scrolls were safe.

New Journeys to the West

Singapore International School (Hong Kong), Wong, Gavin - 11

The journey has ended. 15 years of pain and agony – over. Finally.

Enjoying the sight of the pine trees leaning towards the East, blossoming, symbolizing the successful trip of the four courageous warriors overcoming thousands of difficulties, as they awaited to become disciples of the gods.

“Long live the Emperor!” they chanted, as they prostrated in front of the Emperor and the Jade Emperor.

“Monk Pig, you are to be sent to the Imperial Palace, where you will work as the general of our army!”

“Monkey King, you are to carry out a ministerial appointment...”

“What? I thought I would be made as a disciple!” The Monkey King was shocked by the holy decree of the Jade Emperor.

“This is for you to pay back for all the damages and trouble you have caused before the journey. Six hundred years ago, as the guard of the Peach Garden, you fell asleep during your duty, resulting in the lost of one of our magic peaches. I have looked through my Future mirror, and have located the peach in a Britain Zoo. Therefore, you are to set off to a new journey to the West, with Britain’s Montgomery Zoo, Europe as your destination to find the peach!” proclaimed the Jade Emperor.

“That shouldn’t be too hard, I know Seventy-Two Metamorphoses...” Monkey King thought to himself arrogantly.

It has been years, and Monkey King has been on his Nimbus cloud for as long as he could remember. Finally, he reached England.

He was also famished at the same time though, but his dream came true almost immediately as he strolled across onto the Main Road.

Food!

Or at least he thought it was food...

There! It was right there in front of him! A few monkeys snatching a banana!

“Yay! It’s my favourite TV channel!”

“TV? What’s that?” Monkey King thought to himself

He aggressively bashed through the shop door, and sent himself flying into the TV, smashing it into a million pieces!

“Wait a second... Where’s my food?” He shouted furiously.

His attire and actions left everyone’s mouth agape.

“Oh my gosh! Is that a circus monkey?” a shocked boy screeched.

“I’ll get so many more followers if I tag this on Instagram!”

As expected, a small team of police rushed to the scene, huddling behind their vehicles.

“What are these demons getting at?” He thought to himself.

Just then, he heard a black pellet brush past him with insane speed.

“Wow, that’s dangerous!”

He immediately turned around and caught sight of multiple black sticks with holes which were all pointed menacingly at him. “Well, you can’t beat this!” Monkey King exclaimed, taking out his golden-hooped staff. He spun the magnificent rod at bluned speed,

thinking it would deflect the attack. To his consternation, he felt a sudden shock wave vibrating through before his vision blurred and turned pitch-black.

“Wh - wh - what is that... even bet - better than my rod - ”

Monkey King finally roused, finding himself locked within bars. However, this wasn't his largest concern, as he could easily metamorphosis into a bee and escape. What he really wanted to do was to prove to the world his power, his strength, his ability! And not being mistaken as a lost creature!

Out of the blue, the conversation between two of the guards caught his attention.

“Truck leaves in an hour. Gotta grab those filthy animals to Montgomery Zoo!”

“Zoo? Montgomery? My mission! Just right! They're sending me there!”

Just as the guards have said, they were put into a dingy truck and it wasn't long before they were released into vague piece of land surrounded by barricades, and an eye-catching sign showing MONTGOMERY ZOO.

He realised that there were numerous monkeys all around the vast area. Some loitering around, cheeky ones playing pranks on others! It didn't take long for him to bond in with his new mates, and best of all, they were feeded with amazing food that has never touched his lips for the past century! It was as if he was back to Flower Fruit Mountain! Everyone were also tremendously impressed by his special ability of the Seventy-Two Metamorphosis. He has had a continuous supply of food from the visitors, just for performing a few simple stunts!

“This place feels awesome! Why not stay here and be chill like the good old days, as the king of Flower Fruit Mountain!” he thought to himself.

“Ouch! Ouch!” He suddenly felt a jolt on his head.

He thought it was one of those pranks again, but no, there was no one behind him.

He looked up to the sky and the Emperor's face appeared, “Monkey KING, you were sent here to accomplish a mission, and not to have fun!”

An annoyed sigh.

“Peach ought to be somewhere here...”

He scrutinized the surroundings, and spotted multiple animals trying to bash through their gate, and they were all heading to the same direction.

Bingo!

There the magical peach was, sitting on the tip of a tree branch, ready to be retrieved by Monkey King...

Without second thoughts, he brutally rammed himself against the fence, only bouncing back in pain.

“Errr... you know it has high voltage -”

“Shut up, plebeians! Noth... nothing... can... beat me!”

The intelligent monkeys immediately formed a ladder, stacking themselves on top of each other.

“Great King, now you can get past!”

Grunt.

But Monkey King knew he had no other choice and had to rely on his friends.

He cautiously clambered up the alpine tree, and finally seized the magic peach, clasping it tightly to his chest.

Suddenly, a beam of light landed on him, and he saw the Emperor smiling gratefully at him, “ Monkey King, you are special with great potential. You shall be crowned a disciple on the spot.

Monkey King prostrated to receive his bestowment, and flew back to the Heavenly Palace.

The Battle on Europa

St Stephen's College Preparatory School, Chan, Ralph - 12

Thousands of years ago, a mischievous monkey named Wu-kong committed a number of misdemeanours in the heavens, stealing and eating magical food that made him invincible and immortal. The heavens had tried to defeat him many times, but Wu-kong, along with his magical staff, made defeating him almost impossible. Then the heavens decided to ask the most powerful deity in the universe, Buddha, for help. Buddha was able to fully restrain Wu-kong by trapping him under a mountain with a single piece of paper. The piece of paper was actually a talisman that would stop Wu-kong from destroying the mountain and freeing himself. The Buddha told Wu-kong that one day a monk would come and release him and that the monk would become Wu-kong's master. Wu-kong longed for this day to come.

Since then, Wu-kong had waited for five hundred years, until one day he saw a young monk walking by. A voice in his head whispered to him that this monk was THE monk who would come to his rescue. Hence he shouted, "Master! Master! Please take this piece of paper away and stand back!" After the young monk, who was called Tang-zeng, did what he was told, Wu-kong successfully destroyed the mountain and freed himself.

It was at that time that the ground began to crumble, the cracks in the ground grew larger and larger, and the soil started to vanish. Eventually, there was nothing but air under their feet, and they kept falling into the unknown. As the master and the disciple were falling, Wu-kong tried as hard as he could to summon his magical cloud that could lift them up to the sky, but the cloud kept dissipating before he could reach it. After a while, strange things began to happen: coloured flashing lights appeared everywhere, and the temperature fluctuated sharply, making it scorching hot in one second and freezing cold in the next. Wu-kong and Tang-zeng became weak and dizzy, and their bodies felt so numb that they couldn't move or feel anything. Suddenly, an enormous force was exerted onto their bodies, knocking Wu-kong and Tang-zeng unconscious.

When the master and the disciple came to, they found themselves in a frozen world with very thin air. Wu-kong used his magical powers to keep themselves alive. When they looked up to the sky, they saw a huge planet covering a large portion of the sky, and on it were bands of different colours and a giant red spot near the south pole. Wu-kong was just about to fly to that planet when Tang-zeng shouted, "Look! There are two man-like creatures imprisoned there!" Tang-zeng and Wu-kong then walked over. "Who are you?" asked Tang-zeng. "I'm Ba-jie, and he is Sa-zeng," replied one of them. "We are held captive by the supreme ice-monster. Can you please free us?" "Absolutely," replied the kind-hearted Tang-zeng.

Without warning, a huge explosion occurred next to the four of them, and a ginormous devil-like creature in pure white appeared. It sent white shards to the direction of the four newly-made friends. Wu-kong immediately deflected the shards using his magical staff. The monster then grabbed Tang-zeng and tried to squeeze him to death. The other three immediately leaped towards the monster. Wu-kong then used his staff to pin down the monster's foot. In retaliation, the monster fired three enormous ice shards to the three. Wu-kong used his staff to block the ice shards, but two of them still managed to knock Ba-jie and Sa-zeng into unconsciousness. Wu-kong remained the only one left fit enough to fight the monster.

Wu-kong pulled as many strands of his hair off his head as he could and turned them into his own duplications. Hundreds of thousands of Wu-kongs charged up to the monster. Likewise, the monster turned the ice around him into hundreds of thousands of ice minions to fight the Wu-kongs. Wu-kong kept pulling hair off to make more copies of himself, and the ice monster also kept turning ice into more ice minions. At first, it was an even match between them, but poor Wu-kong eventually ran out of hair to pull, while there was still an abundant supply of ice from where they stood. The monster gradually gained the upper hand, and Wu-kong began to lose hope. Fortunately, right at this moment, Ba-jie and Sa-zeng regained consciousness. Hand in hand, they marched up to the ice monster. Brave though they were, it was clear that they were no match to the power of the ice monster. At the end, all the poor Wu-kong avatars were dead, leaving behind the original Wu-kong and his two comrades.

At this critical moment, Wu-kong suddenly caught a glimpse of something silvery in the corner of his eye, and he immediately ran for it. When he lifted it up, he found out that it was actually a small metal sphere with a bright glow in the middle. The same voice that told him that Tang-zeng was the monk who would free him whispered again, this time telling him to push the glowing part of the sphere, and Wu-kong did it without hesitation. Then, the sphere cracked, and slowly, a golden streak of light began to seep out, eventually forming into the shape of a dragon. The golden dragon said, “Master, you have released me from my captivity for one thousand years, and in return, I will grant you anything you wish within my power!” Wu-kong immediately said, “Destroy this ice-monster and rescue Tang-zeng!” “Roger that, Master!” replied the golden dragon. The golden dragon then sent a streak of pure gold straight at the ice monster, and the ice monster screamed in pain, struggling to keep himself alive but nevertheless eventually exploded into pieces of ice crystals.

“Master Tang-zeng,” exclaimed the monkey when he caught sight of his beloved master. “Are you alright?” “I am alright, dear disciple, but how are we supposed to go the West from here and complete our mission of getting the Scripture?” As soon as he said that, a portal opened up and the team of four were sucked into it.

It felt like they were inside the portal for ages, Tang-zeng thought they would be stuck in there forever, but when they eventually got out, they found themselves back on Earth in India. Then they realized that they were on the top of Vulture Peak! The Buddha appeared and said, “Congratulations! You four have passed the test! You will all be turned into gods, and Tang-zeng will acquire the Scripture to complete his mission.” The team helped Tang-zeng find the Scripture, and escorted him back to China. Tang-zeng became the wisest man in China and the other three lived happily ever after as gods.

--THE END--

The Second Journey to the West

St. Paul's Co-educational College Primary School, Koo, Cheuk Yu Kimberly - 9

This is 2017. It has been 1,372 years since Xuanzang, the Tang dynasty monk, travelled to the West to find the sacred scriptures. That journey was an exciting one. Monk Tang and his three apprentices, Zhu Bajie the 'Piggie', Sha Wujing the 'Friar Sand', and the famous Monkey King, Sun Wukong, battled against many demons and monsters, and Monk Tang was almost eaten alive a few times! Luckily, they made it safe to India, and managed to find the scriptures and learnt a lot from them.

After the journey, they decided that continuous learning is very important, so they separated and each went out to find the best teachers to improve their knowledge. For example, Piggie travelled around the World to learn from the chefs of the Michelin restaurants on how to cook mouth-watering dishes. Obviously, there is one dish that he would not cook - barbeque pork meat! Over the years, the four friends have been staying in touch using different ways of communication, from pigeon letters to telephone to the latest WhatsApp. To remember the good old times they spent together, they actually called the WhatsApp chat group 'Monsters Killers'!

One day, Monk Tang was doing his research on Google to look for new knowledge. He found a website which talks about a treasure in a cave located in the far West of the world. The one who finds the treasure will have all the knowledge in the world. To find this treasure, one must go with three friends. In addition, the website warns about the danger of the paths to the treasure, including traps and poisonous animal attacks. Monk Tang thought of his three friends, and hoped that they would join him for another great adventure.

The first friend Monk Tang called was Monkey King because he was the bravest of all. If Monkey King agreed to join, the other 2 friends would follow. At first, Monkey King did not agree because he was busy building a new banana kingdom with his pupil monkeys. Monk Tang kept on telling Monkey King the benefits of the treasure, and the knowledge may help Monkey King complete his kingdom faster with fewer bananas. Monkey King finally agreed to go. As expected, Piggie and Friar Sand also agreed to join.

Different from the first adventure, they now had the technology to help with this trip. They used paper map in the past to plan the journey, now they just needed Google Map to guide their way. For transportation, they had only one white horse, Yulong, for Monk Tang to ride to India. The others had to walk miles and miles over the mountains and deserts. This time, all of them decided to fly business class and take Uber rides to make this trip more comfortable and enjoyable. With the poisonous animals, Monkey King wanted to bring his heavy golden cudgel, but Monk Tang suggested to use new helmet and protective clothes instead which are a lot easier to carry. Finally, for the traps, Piggie and Friar Sand brought along shoes with suction cups so they could climb up from the traps if they fell in them.

After three days of travel, they finally arrived at the cave entrance. All of a sudden, there was a loud noise coming from the cave. "Quick! Wear your helmet and protective clothes! The bats are flying towards us to attack!" Monkey King cried. When everyone was busy putting on the clothes, Piggie realised that they were too small for him - he could not put his pig head through the hole! The bats were ready to bite on some pork meat. At this critical moment, all three friends already in the protective clothes formed a circle to cover Piggie and

protected him from the bats. The bats soon disappeared, and Piggie was glad that his life was saved by his best friends.

They kept on walking until they saw a boulder blocking the way. There were two paths ahead of them, one with the sign 'Shortcut' and the other all covered in dust. Piggie insisted to take the shortcut path to save him from walking. The gang agreed, but soon they realised that the shortcut path just led to a dead end. As they turned around, Friar Sand thought something was different: there were only three people and one was missing. Standing in front of Friar Sand was Monkey King, and behind was Piggie. Where was Monk Tang? "He must have fallen into one of the traps!" Monkey King exclaimed. They went up and down the path to look for Monk Tang, and saw two suction cup shoes next to a dark hole. "I am down here, please help me!" They could hear Monk Tang screaming for help. It was a very deep and narrow hole. Even if Monk Tang had the shoes on, he would not be able to climb up. Monkey King decided that he would save Monk Tang but going into the hole, and let Monk Tang grab his legs while Piggie and Friar Sand pull them up. It was very dark in the hole but luckily Monk Tang was able to hold on to Monkey King's legs, and they got out safely. "I understand now," said Monk Tang, "that all these challenges would take four great friends to overcome together."

They finally reached the end of the cave and saw a glowing treasure box. Everyone was so excited to see what is inside the box, and how it can give them all the knowledge in the world. Monk Tang went to open the box and only found a piece of paper that reads "मेरा नाम स्की है, मैं आपकी सहायता कैसे कर सकता हूँ?". Friar Sand recognised this as the Hindi language, and put it through Google Translate. To their surprise, the translation reads "My name is Siri, how can I help you?"

A Race to India

The Independent Schools Foundation Academy, Schrantz, James - 10

To: wu@newjourneytothewest.org
From: Xuanzang
Re: WHO Formula

Dear Wu Lao Shi,

I am going to India to pick up a formula for a cure to a new, menacing disease that is killing thousands of innocent citizens in China.

The WHO has requested that I retrieve the formula in person, since piracy is a concern in China. I will travel past the border by train and foot. I cannot tell anyone about my journey, as rivals are trying to steal the formula and sell it for profit. I dearly hope to succeed because my journey will save millions of lives. I am traveling alone, so that I do not attract unwanted attention. But, this journey frightens me, and I would very much appreciate a traveling companion.

I will keep in contact with you by regular emails, but you must not reply. My Iphone 9 has been installed with a program from the WHO, which is supposed to show that my phone is still in China, so that nobody can track me. Unfortunately, the program only works on my phone. ☹

Okay, I must leave now. Just remember, never reply to my emails!

Sincerely,
Xuan Zang

To: wu@newjourneytothewest.org
From: Xuanzang
Re: Stopped at the border

Dear Wu Lao Shi,

Today I got stopped at the border. They said that my visa was expired, which made me flip out. As the border guards tried to wrestle me out of immigration, a man walked up and said, "I'm sorry, this is my brother. I'm sure that his visa was renewed last month. You must check it again, please."

One of the border guards snatched my passport out of my hands and stared at it in astonishment. "But...It just..." he muttered. The mysterious man said, "Thank you kind sir, but we must go now." He grabbed my arm and pulled me past the border guards. The last I heard was "You forgot your passport!"

The man dragged me over to a cafe and said, "My name is Sun Wu Kong. The government has requested that I accompany you on your journey, yet they have not told me who you are or the purpose of your journey."

I replied, "My name is Xuan Zang. We must talk somewhere, more private, but first let's get going."

After explaining my journey and my destination, he told me that he was some kind of magician, a trickster, who was somewhat like Loki, which is pretty cool. He got my passport

back with a sneaky sleight of hand. Wu Kong is a tall, lanky man, with big ears and leathery hands, which make a sleight of hand look like monkey play. Sun Wu Kong and I rushed to board the train just in time.

Sincerely,
Xuan Zang

To: wu@newjourneytothewest.org
From: Xuan Zang
Re: ROOOAD TRIIIP!!

Dear Wu Lao Shi,

The next part of our journey was pretty worrying. The train car was disgusting and occupied by groups of chain smokers, making me feel queasy and scared that one of them would drop an ash on the gross carpet and burn up the whole train. I devised an escape plan, which I luckily didn't need to use. Sun Wu Kong and I took turns sleeping that nobody could steal our luggage. Sometimes he showed me how to do various card tricks, which helped take my mind off the dangers of the trip.

The journey was many hours. And at some point, a man walked by. He was short and fat and carried around a nine-tooth iron rake. He apparently noticed my concern. He approached me and said; "I know what you are thinking. This place is terrible, isn't it?" He introduced himself as Zhu Ba Jie, and soon we got to talking. It was a good thing he joined us because while we were talking, a pickpocket tried to steal my phone from my backpack. All I heard was a thud, and turned around to see the thief lying the floor with Zhu Ba Jie standing over him with the rake at his neck. The thief scurried away without looking back. Sun Wu Kong and I invited him to join us for the rest of the trip.

I'll be arriving in India soon and will email you again.

Sincerely,
Xuan Zang

To: wu@newjourneytothewest.org
From: Xuan Zang
Re: Mission accomplished

Dear Wu Lao Shi

When we arrived in India, I waited on the train platform for the doctor who was supposed to pass me the formula. I took out my phone and started to write a report to the WHO, but I was interrupted by the conductor. He grabbed my phone and started typing. I yelled, "Who are you?!"

The conductor said, "I've been tracking you and your companions on your journey. My name is Sha Wu Jing. I'm actually from the WHO, and I'm here to pass you the formula. We needed to get you out of China and make sure you weren't being followed in order to safely pass you the information."

He handed back the phone and said, "Take this back to China. The jet will be here soon. Sun Wu Kong and Zhu Ba Jie are waiting for you." As he turned to leave, he stopped and said, "Good job, Xuan Zang. You may have saved millions of lives."

Our jet will land in Beijing in a matter of hours. I'm anxious to start spreading the cure.

Sincerely,
Xuan Zang

To: wu@newjourneytothewest.org
From: Xuan Zang
Re: New Adventures

Dear Wu Lao Shi,

The Chinese government was so impressed with our work that Sun Wu Kong, Zhu Ba Jie, and I are being sent on another mission. But that's classified even to you! When I'm back in town, let's meet for tea. Perhaps we can catch up then.

Sincerely,
Xuan Zang

The Chinese Literature Adventure

Victoria Shanghai Academy, Sham, Valerie - 10

“Oh no! I can’t believe I lost my Chinese book!” Violet gasped as she ran through the hallway. She was rushing to Chinese history class when she discovered that her Chinese history book was gone. The torturing school bell was about to scream. Violet ran into the Chinese history classroom with a horrified face. “Miss, I... ..” Violet began. The Chinese history class teacher held up a book, Violet’s book. The teacher had just taken the Chinese book to mark.

“Class, today we are going to do some work on the ‘Journey to the West’ story that I promised you that I would teach. Open your books to page 105.” The teacher said. Violet’s book stared at her, waiting for her to open it. She did, and to her amazement, the book flipped to page 105 by itself.

“Wow!” Violet whispered. She touched the words on her book. It made her feel at home. Suddenly, a ray of light burst out of the book. It wrapped itself around Violet and dragged her into the book. No one noticed that Violet was gone.

Violet watched as golden words danced around her. The words transformed into trees and grass or any other natural thing it could turn into. Violet looked down and saw that she wasn’t looking at a white classroom floor anymore. She was looking at a grassy ground. As she looked around, Violet discovered a campsite nearby. She decided to spy on the campers. Violet crawled close to discover a group of two people, a pig and a monkey who were making notes. “So what are we going to do now?” the pig asked.

“I don’t know, Pigsy. Princess Iron Fan has gone way too far now.” the monkey, which Violet recognized as Sun Wukong from Journey to the West said. “You should do something with your useless pig brains!”

“Surely you should know something, since you’re so clever!” Pigsy said angrily.

“Boys, this is not time to fight.” One of the people spoke. The other person nodded.

Violet knew this was her time to speak up. “May I offer a suggestion?” She asked loudly so everyone in the tent could hear her.

Everybody jumped. How could a 13 year old girl sneak into a camp full of highly skilled warriors? “Speak, demon.” Sun Wukong said, pointing his stick at Violet. “Or we shall attack you.”

“Keep it easy, Wukong. She’s just a girl!” The person said.

“Okay, okay. Fine. I’m Sun Wukong. The pig is Pigsy. The person over there is Sha Wujing and beside me is our master, Tang Sanzang.” Sun Wukong said. “Now what’s your brilliant idea?”

“I’ll explain on the way, but first, we have to get moving. And grab as many sticks as you can on the way. We’re taking the forest path.” Violet declared firmly.

The little quintet journeyed through the forest, picking sticks and listening to Violet at the same time. “So we all know that Princess Iron Fan has magical water abilities, right?” Violet asked. The others nodded. “So we need to pick sticks to make fire. Fire is an opponent of water, so we can outsmart Princess Iron Fan once and for all. Then we just need to talk it out.”

“So all we needed to do was to just talk it out, so we didn’t need to fight?” Sun Wukong asked. Tang Sanzang shot Sun Wukong a look that meant, “I told you so!” The group soon reached Princess Iron Fan’s cave.

“So when I do the signal, you guys all pop out with your sticks, okay?” Violet whispered. The others nodded again. Violet knocked thrice on the princess’ metal door. The doors opened. “Hello? I’m here for a science project!” Violet shouted. A tall thin lady walked out of the door.

“Welcome to my cave. What is it that you seek?” Princess Iron Fan asked in a high, cold voice.

Violet counted to 3 before revealing her big surprise. When the gang popped out, they all shouted, “Surprise!”

Everyone rubbed their sticks together and made a massive fire. The fire knocked Princess Iron Fan to the ground. “And now, let’s talk it out.” Violet said. Princess Iron Fan gave up, and said, “As a young child, I was kidnapped by an evil buddha who took my magic. I have searched for power for centuries, so I started wreaking havoc on magical beings. I have never made a friend since because nobody liked me.” “My mother always said that friendship is the best magic. So maybe if you make friends with us, then you can have your magic back.” Violet explained. Princess Iron Fan was grateful for Violet, so she hugged her and apologize to the gang for causing them so much trouble.

“It’s fine. We’ve fixed it all.” Sha Wujing said. Suddenly, sparkles circled Princess Iron Fan. She had gotten her magic back. Sparkles circled Violet too, and before she knew it, Violet was transported back to class.

The class bell rung again, but this time, it rung sounds of joy. Class was over, and Violet had just done what she wanted to do most, escape a lesson. She’d have to thank her friends for it, because there’s no better magic than friendship.

The Pool's Trial

Ying Wa Primary School, Song, Yiding - 12

We must be crazy, Monkey King thought. Trekking through the desert for eight days, depending their lives on a single flask. Crazy. Going to the west a second time, just because of Gautama Buddha's unreasonable orders. Even crazier. Even worse, Tripitaka insisted on going there through the desert. That was...dumb. Monkey King secretly wondered if Tripitaka had changed since their first journey to the west, nearly a century ago. Could they still trust each other?

"Look!" Pigsy shouted on top of his lungs. "A pool! Finally, an oasis!"

The group of four surged forward with burning excitement. They arrived at the pool within minutes. All around the pool, palm trees littered, casting ghostly shadows on the lonely sands. The four friends settled down near it.

"You first, master!" Friar Sand pointed at the pool. Tripitaka thanked him and moved toward the source of water.

Meanwhile, Monkey King stared at the pool with a particular interest. Something was not right about it. He had a cold feeling running down his spine. The shadows on the sands, the ripples in the pool... He stared at it again, this time using his fiery-piercing-eyes. Sure, the water in the pool was acidic, and moreover, there was a snake-like monster looming below. He looked up, "Master, stop!"

Tripitaka stopped in his tracks, "Yes?"

"There's a monster in the pool, and the water is acidic!"

The expression on Tripitaka's face turned from confusion to anger then to bitterness, "Monkey King, how can there be a monster in the pool? Are you so cruel as to not grant your master even a single drop of water? Stop tricking me!" With that, he strode on, muttering a curse under his breath. The ring on Monkey's head tightened, making him groan in agony. Monkey King stared at Tripitaka with disbelief. How can his master be so suspicious of him? How can he not trust his loyal servant? Tripitaka muttered faster, the pain Monkey King beheld made him roll around in the sand, screaming, but Tripitaka didn't care.

Soon, Tripitaka arrived at the pool. He bent down, almost touching the water. As a last resort, Monkey King ignored his pain and sent his golden cudgel flying out like a boomerang. It sprang around in front of Tripitaka and knocked him off his feet. When he rose again, he was dead calm. It was the calm before a storm.

"Get away!" he roared. "I don't need your company to the west! First, you tricked me; now, you attack me. What you only know is to harm your only master! I want a follower with a kind heart, not you! Now get away, Monkey!" He stressed the last word heavily, like Monkey King was a merciless monster.

Monkey King didn't seem to register what Tripitaka was saying, "Please, master, I was just trying to save you, and I promise I won't do what I've done again! I promise..." His voice faltered. Tripitaka was staring at him like a predator staring at a prey. No mercy, no forgiveness, no trust, no sympathy. It even made Monkey King...afraid. Monkey King stood petrified for a moment, then vanished into the sky.

After making sure that Monkey King had truly left, Tripitaka sighed and bent down, taking a sip in the oasis. The water was sweet and refreshing, not acidic at all. “Fill in the flasks!” Tripitaka announced.

Meanwhile, far away, on the Mountain of Flowers and Fruits, Monkey King sulked in his Water Curtain Cave. What should I do next? He thought miserably. List out the possibilities, he urged himself. Hatred? Well, not the answer. Revenge? He shook his head, definitely no. Forgiveness? Monkey King paused on this option. Is this option great? Nope, he decided, but it’s the best one available.

When he went back to the oasis, his friends were already leaving. Monkey King landed beside Tripitaka. Tripitaka turned to face him, “Do I know you?” A hint of hatred in his voice.

“Master, I forgive you!” said Monkey King calmly.

“What do you mean by you forgiving me? I should be the one...” Tripitaka started, then stopped abruptly. A few meters away, in the pool, water began to churn and hiss. Then out came a majestic Buddha resting on lotus leaves.

Tripitaka and Monkey King knelt down, “Gautama Buddha, it’s a pleasure.”

Gautama Buddha smiled, “Have you ever wondered why I put you on this new journey to get new scriptures? It’s to see if you are all worthy of enlightenment! And what you’ve received today, is your very first trial among many others! Let’s start with you!” Gautama Buddha pointed at Tripitaka, “Tripitaka, you need to learn how to trust and forgive. Only then, can you be trusted and forgiven. Trusting and forgiving are the fuel that lights your life. Without trust, you’re hollow; without forgiveness, you’re already withering. Remember that. And you,” Gautama Buddha looked at Monkey King, “you’ve already learnt how to trust and forgive. You just need to know that one can never be judged from one’s appearance. When you found the monster in the pool, you assumed that its heart is the same as its appearance. But is its heart really monstrous? Think about it.”

Gautama Buddha was about to leave, when Monkey King stopped him, “Gautama Buddha, why didn’t Tripitaka die after I left? He drank the water in the pool, right?”

“He did drink it,” Gautama Buddha replied, “but I tricked you into thinking the water was acidic. It was meant to be part of the trial!” With that, he smiled and disappeared.

Tripitaka and Monkey King walked back to their friends, pondering what Gautama Buddha had just said. They shouldered their packs in silence. Up in the heavens, Gautama Buddha watched the four friends’ silhouettes as they disappeared beyond the sandy road. This was only the start of their journey; they still had a lot to face and learn.

Fiction

Group 3



Xuanzang's Dream

Diocesan Boys' School, Yeung, Thaddeus - 14

The boom of cannon fire echoed in the hills; for a moment, a fiery amber spread across the night sky, and then all was black.

"The Gokturks are trying to bring the Wall down again," the general explained. "Their efforts are futile – the Wall has been standing for four hundred years now, and it's not coming down anytime soon."

The general turned to the monk, who was standing in front of him in a corridor lit by torches fastened on the stone brick walls – the interior of a fortress. There were two giant doors to the side of the pair, latched shut by a giant wooden bar.

"I hope that you understand what I am saying," the general continued. "The Gokturks may not be able to penetrate the Great Wall, but we are still in a state of war. Leaving the safety of this side of the Wall means almost certain demise."

The monk remained silent.

"Even if you manage to evade the cannon fire, odds are you will not go far. Unlike us, the Gokturks are barbarians, and they will not hesitate to kill you for your belongings, or simply slit your throat for sport."

"I understand the risks, general," the monk said. "I have thought about this for some time now, and I know of the dangers I may have to face."

"You do not understand," the general said. "You are a monk who lives in a monastery and have never seen a pig slaughtered. As a soldier who has fought, I can tell you that what you plan to do is madness."

"I had a dream a week ago," the monk said, ignoring the general's last comment. "In that dream, the Buddha told me to trek to India to retrieve the Holy Scrolls. These scrolls will save mankind from sin – it is all the will of the Buddha."

"That was but a dream," the general retorted. "What happens in dreams does not happen in reality. Surely you can differentiate between the two?"

"It was no ordinary dream," the monk said, indignant. "The Buddha appeared to me in that dream."

"Don't they all say that?" The general scoffed.

The monk continued, unfazed: "In that dream, I was standing in a field. The field was barren with growth, and the soil of the ground was rock-hard – it had been abandoned for a long time. Around me were several houses forming a small town.

"I heard yelling and shouting coming from the town. I advanced to have a look, and I saw a woman with child wailing in a heap. A man lying in a pool of blood before them, and a man robed in armor – a soldier of some sort, a bloodied sword in one hand and a sack in the other, was sauntering off into the distance, unhurried. The bystanders seemed oblivious to the woman's wailing. I realized I had witnessed a brutal robbery.

"Then, I was whisked away into the clouds. I was pulled through a vast sea of blue, and soon before me was a great temple in the sky. I was then delivered inside by some invisible force, and before me was the Buddha on His throne.

'Xuanzang,' the Buddha summoned. 'Come before me – I have a task for you.'

I did as He commanded, but also because I was attracted by the Buddha's radiance, like a

moth attracted to light.

‘Man is corrupt,’ the Buddha said, resting his eyes on my face. ‘As you have seen, man has embraced a life of sin. People are willing to go to great lengths to fulfill their desires, even if it means the performing of horrible sins.’

Then, the Buddha instructed me to retrieve the Holy Scrolls: ‘These scriptures will enlighten man and purge mankind of its sinful ways. With their retrieval and translation into your tongue, mankind will be redeemed from its eventual undoing. They are located in a western land known as India, and you shall reach this land and retrieve the Holy Scriptures.’”

Having finished his narrative, the monk turned to the general, hoping to find approval on his face.

What he found was discomfort.

“About your dream,” the general inquired, “How much of it do you remember?”

“Every detail,” the monk assured him. “This adds to the reason why you should believe what I told you.”

“If that is so,” the general said, “Describe for me the appearance of the killer in your dream.”

The monk looked at the general, confused.

“Well, he was about eight feet tall,” the monk replied. “He was of very large statue, and had a beard. His face was red, as if drunk, and had a tuft of red strands adorning his helmet. Some sort of officer, I suppose.”

The general’s face paled.

“By the gods,” the general groaned. “What trickery is this?”

The monk stared at him, empty-eyed.

“I believe you,” the general replied. “I believe that you have indeed been chosen by the Guanyin, and that every word you have told me is true.”

The general paused. Perspiration was sliding down his forehead. He wiped at it, and continued:

“Do you know why I say this?”

“I do not,” the monk replied.

“The man of explicitly large statue,” the general said, “was the lieutenant who was put under my command a month ago.”

The color drained from the monk’s face.

“What you saw,” he continued. “Every last bit of it was real.”

“Quan Yu was a soldier with massive potential,” the general told the monk. “He was an abomination on the battlefield, a one-man army. It was thus no wonder that he was made lieutenant in only a year after joining the army.”

“He was a most enthusiastic soldier; the battlefield to him was as if water to a fish. His passion for war was unrivaled; he rose through the ranks so quickly he could have surpassed even me had he been given some more time.”

“His thirst for battle was unquenchable; about a while ago, the fighting on the northern front intermitted for about a week or two. And so he decided to look for sport.”

“He left for the village nearest the camp about a week ago, claiming to be wanting a drink. Even though this was forbidden, the soldiers under my command did not dare stop him. He had a drink at a local eatery, then went in search of what he was truly thirsty for.”

Beads of cold sweat cascaded down the general’s forehead.

“He was a monster,” the general said. “He saw a villager hoisting a meager little sack of silver to the bank, hoping to deposit it for interest. He strode forth, and snatched the sack

from him. It was a small amount to him, but a colossal sum for the villager. Not knowing who he was up against, the villager tried to retrieve his sack. He was no match for the lieutenant, and left in defeat. But the lieutenant was not satisfied – his thirst for bloodshed had not been quenched. And so he drew his sword, and decapitated the villager in one swift stroke.”

“We have tried our best to cover up this incident,” the general said. “We paid the villager’s grieving wife a hefty sum, and pleaded with the villagers not to spread news of the killing. I even had the lieutenant executed.”

Having ended his narrative, the general turned to Xuanzang.

“You could not possibly have known of this incident,” the general explained. “This is why I believe you.”

The general barked a command, and two soldiers stepped forward. With a great heave, they lifted the heavy wooden stopper, and gave the doors a big push each. The doors swung back to reveal a great horizon of green, and a fiery golden orb peeking out from the peak of a faraway hill, dyeing the lapis sky a shade of amber.

“The Gokturks assault the Wall at night, under the cover of darkness. It is almost dawn – this would be the optimum time for your departure, since the Emperor has banned foreign travel. You must not be discovered, so be careful.”

“May the Guanyin bless you, general,” the monk said, grateful. “You will not regret your decision.”

“May the wind be always behind your sail,” the general said to the monk. “I wish you good luck on your journey.”

And with that, Xuanzang stepped out the wooden doors. Very soon, the silhouette of the monk had shrunk into but a tiny black speck in the embrace of the rising sun.

The Story of a Cold-Hearted Beast Lurking in the Mountains

German Swiss International School, Chang, Andrea - 14

The sound of howling filled Sun-Wu Kong's ears as he trudged through the thick and heavy snow. The trio and their master had expected a blizzard, but nothing as dangerous as this one – snow and wind seemed to come at them from every angle, small chunks of sharp ice clinging to their fur or skin. The harsh winds howled and whistled with each step, trying to knock them over relentlessly. Each inch of the mountain they were climbing was covered in snow, so they had no sense of direction and could only depend on their master, who led the way.

With each step, the monkey could feel the harsh cold bite on his fingertips and toes. He couldn't even try to spawn anything now – his fur was too brittle, and even icicles hung off them. All they could do now was just walk.

Just when Sun-Wu Kong thought he was going to freeze to death, he bumped into Sha Wujing, who was standing in front of him. "Hey, watch it!" The monkey grumbled angrily, shivering. Peering over the man's shoulder, he noticed a huge, gaping hole in front of them. The sides of the hole were jagged and rough, and a steely, metallic scent rose from the center.

"Will this do as a temporary campsite, Sun-Wu Kong?" Xuanzang, their master, inquired. Wearing a weary look on his face, Xuanzang added, "We should wait for this blizzard to pass. I don't want to get lost."

Closing his eyes, Sun-Wu Kong tried to sense demons in the crater. "All clear." Bending down, the monkey proceeded to slide down the slanted side of the hole, the friction warming his cold hands ever so slightly. Landing at the bottom of the pit, he noticed that the only source of light was from the sky above them and proceeded to use a strand of his fur to conjure a ball of fire. Looking left and right for demons, the monkey confirmed that there were no enemies down in the cave.

As Sha Wujing and Zhu Bajie helped Xuanzang down into the cave, Sun-Wu Kong started to explore, breathing in the musty air of the cave. Nobody had been in here for ages. Pressing a palm against the rough walls, Sun-Wu Kong noticed that despite the warm head that came from the stick he held, it was still a lot colder in here than outside, where the blizzard still raged and screeched.

Xuanzang stared at the strangely smooth walls, running a hand against the rocky surface. Upon contact, strange markings suddenly appeared on the walls, glowing a bright, unnatural blue and illuminating the entire cave. Gasping in shock, the trio and the master watched as the strange markings continued to glow brighter and brighter.

"That's... kind of beautiful." Sha Wujing commented. As they looked around, Sun-Wu Kong felt something beneath his feet. Some sort of rumbling. With each second passing, he felt the rumbling get stronger and stronger, to the point where his bones felt like they were going to crumble.

"Guys, watch–"

Before he could even finish his sentence, a creature burst through the ground, sending large chunks of stone and rock everywhere. In the darkness and the heat of the moment,

Sun-Wu Kong couldn't see what exactly it was. The creature then roared, the sound echoing in the hollow and causing everyone's bones to quake. The force from the roar sent all of them flying out of the cave and back outside.

The weather pierced all of them like a knife, slicing through whatever warmth they had down there and causing them to shiver again. The snowstorm seemed to get even worse, with the snow more icy and hard than usual, almost like hail. The wind almost knocked Xuanzang over once they landed on the icy ground.

A burst of snow and ice rained down on the trio suddenly, accompanied with a loud screech. Just in time, Sha Wujing managed to shove everyone aside to avoid the falling debris.

For the first time, they managed to get a good look at the creature. It was a huge thing, around 5 meters tall, with gleaming, bold cerulean eyes that flashed when it stared down at the trio and their master. As chunks of snow rolled off its back, the creature exposed more of its' strange, crystal-like scales, each scale as big as a person's head. Bending down and sneering at the petrified guardians, the creature exposed its' long, sharp fangs, each black like tar.

"And who are the people who have awoken me from my slumber?"

Its' voice, low and gravely, made all of them shudder with fear. Only Sun-Wu Kong stood forward, trembling slightly. Raising his golden staff, he pointed it directly at the creature with a threatening glance. "We are the guardians of Xuanzang, and we wish to pass through to India."

Cackling with amusement, the creature's eyes flashed as he spoke. "Xuanzang. You're the one with the special flesh." Without warning, the monster slammed its' claws down, a few inches away from Sun-Wu Kong and the others. Snow and ice sprayed upwards, blinding the three guardians and startling the horse.

"Protect Xuanzang! Sha Wujing and I will get it!" Sun-Wu Kong summoned a cloud below his feet, Sha Wujing following close behind. Zhu Bajie stood next to Xuanzang, using his weapon to knock away boulders and chunks of ice.

Swiping its' thick, ice-covered tail, the beast tried to attack Sun-Wu Kong, who managed to strike back with his staff. The creature tried to knock the monkey into the wall, and the monkey tried to shove its' tail away at the same time.

"Sha Wujing, a little help here!" Sun-Wu Kong shouted, grinding his teeth. After a moment of grunting and shoving, the creature's tail slammed again the steep mountainside, causing the whole ground to rumble.

Taking advantage of the moment, both guardians launched themselves at the beast, wielding their weapons in the air. Sun-Wu Kong slammed his staff down onto the beast's scales as hard as he could, but the effort was futile.

"What can we do?" The monkey shouted at Sha Wujing, who was pounding furiously at the creature's neck. Before Sha Wujing could respond, the creature slammed its' tail into the two guardians, who were then launched into the air and landed by Xuanzang and Zhu Bajie's feet. As their bodies made contact with the ground, they both felt the air rush out of their lungs. Gasping for air, Sun-Wu Kong could barely hear Zhu Bajie's comment.

"Look! There are icicles above the lizard." Head still pounding, the monkey turned to look at the roaring animal. Indeed, hung above him, near the top of the mountain, hung some icicles, each as long and as sharp as the beasts' claws. "If you aim for the icicles, they'll fall onto the creature and kill him." Zhu Bajie said, using his rake to point out the sharp stalactite-like ice.

“Good idea, Zhu Bajie. Go with Sha Wujing to knock down the icicles. Sun-Wu Kong, distract the beast. I will be fine on my own.” Xuanzang commanded.

“What? Why am I the one distracting the stupid lizard?” Sun-Wu Kong demanded indignantly, his tail curling up in frustration. “Zhu Bajie should be the one distracting. I’m sure the lizard would like to eat a fat pig after all this fighting.”

Collapsing to his knees, Sun-Wu Kong felt something equivalent to fireworks going off in his head, pain sparking left and right. The monkey then reached up to his head and began clawing at the golden band that was wrapped around his forehead, screaming. “Stop! Stop! I’m sorry!” He cried out, rolling around the floor as if that could lessen the pain.

“It was Zhu Bajie’s idea, and therefore he should contribute to it. You are the strongest, and the creature would most likely go after you. Xuanzang said calmly. The pain in the monkey’s head died down slowly.

“Fine.” Grumbling, Sun-Wu Kong followed the rest of the guardians. Picking up a nearby rock, he threw it as hard as he could at the beast, getting its’ attention. “Hey, lizard!”

Darting towards the creature, the monkey brandished his golden staff and started swiping and attacking. Out of the corner of his eye, Sun-Wu Kong noticed Zhu Bajie and Sha Wujing scaling the mountain and starting to whack at the icicles that hung there.

Suddenly, the icicles above the creature fell onto him, piercing his scales immediately and digging into his body. Screeching, the beast abruptly collapsed, tail thrashing as the icicles impaled his body repeatedly. Sun-Wu Kong fell backward, arms aching slightly from their fight, and watched as the creature’s movements eventually died down.

“That was a little gory.” Sun-Wu Kong commented, eyeing Zhu Bajie wearily as he and Sha Wujing returned. “But... Good idea, Zhu Bajie.”

As the trio walked to their next destination, Xuanzang smiled at the fact that the trio wasn’t arguing anymore and would work together for more battles to come.

The Heart's Voyager

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Ho, Sophie -14

Reader, I'd like you to put this piece of writing down, close your eyes, and just think: if the world decided to take away the source of your happiness and your greatest love, would you choose to forgive it? Or, would you live your life in despair and choose to take revenge?

People say that they would choose forgiveness no matter what happens. But, when given the situation, why do they always choose the route of revenge, despite what they have said before?

A couple centuries ago, along the Silk Road, there lived a demon. A rather barbaric demon, she seemed. Her appearance, though somewhat polished, still bestowed an eerie air to her character. Along with her heartless nature and her selfish want for a certain man's flesh, it was no surprise that people hid away from her. Yet, on a blustery winter's day, with the whispery moans of the wind whisking past her ears, carrying away the dead leaves of autumn, Baigujiang's reverie was far from thoughts of the barbaric kind.

This barbaric demon once had a husband, one of pure heart and goodness, who passed away over four hundred years ago. She was so sure that she could change his death and tried to bargain with the spirits for his revival. Nonetheless, it led to her banishment to Hell, and as a result, her becoming of a demon. It was then where her thirst for feasting upon Xuanzang's flesh to gain invincibility began. And, if she did, she could finally conquer nirvana, break the chain of reincarnation, and bring her love back to life. Since then, she had spiraled into depression and was struck down with hallucinations, pushing her to the brink of insanity.

Baigujiang broke out of her trance and scolded herself for the distraction, whilst, though not purposefully, also reminded herself of the guilt she had stored up, rocking to and fro like a ship in a raging ocean. She willed her shape-shifting powers to transform her into an old man. Her back arched and her wrinkles ever so prominent, she hobbled out of her lair and headed towards the hazy shadows of Xuanzang and his crew.

"Hello there, good sirs!" She called out, dropping her voice to a low croak. Her first two disguises had failed, but she was determined for her third to work. "Have you seen my daughter? A young village girl, about fifteen, selling fresh fruits from our garden? Or my beautiful wife, who went off searching for my daughter?"

Xuanzang, perched on his white dragon horse, lowered his eyes. A deep flush overcame his cheeks, and he inclined his chin towards Sun Wukong, looking at him warily. The others, whom lacked the sophistication of their leader, glared overtly at the monkey as they recalled how he had brutally slain the two women.

"If you would excuse us for a moment, we would be glad to recall those we met on our journey." Xuanzang said as he turned to the group and began murmuring indecipherable phrases.

Meanwhile, things were going splendidly for the demon. It was too good to be true! They all fell for her disguise, with the exception of the cunning monkey and his supernatural powers. Using her inner voice, she decided to taunt the monkey, knowing just the slightest mention of harming his master would stimulate violence. And if the monkey proceeded, Xuanzang would tighten the magical gold ring around his head, trapping him in a world

where there were no boundaries but himself.

“They will not believe you. Shall you manage to persuade them – you will be dead already,” she thought as she mind linked to the monkey, pleased by the fact that only he could hear her.

As expected, Sun Wukong spun around, his beady stare striking directly into her eyes. With a shrewd smile on her face, she traced her path back into the cave. The monkey followed her, hot on her trail, leaving the rest of his friends behind, whom were still in deep conversation.

At the heart of the cave, Baiguojing changed back into herself, resisting the urge to gasp for relief. She hurled her powerful wand in the air and began to chant.

“O Powerful Spirits, pleasing than ever, hide from the truth and also the clever! Banish the ones who hunt and prey, destroy them to death at their very last day!” She cried out, creating a violent gust of wind and smoke, circling around her before a blinding light shot out.

Sun Wukong waited a second. He dodged, his agile movement quickly missing the missile of light thrown at him. Furious, the demon raised her wand again and pushed it at him, pounding her feet toward him one step at a time until his back was to the wall.

“You have ruined my plans, and now I will ruin you,” she whispered menacingly.

Alas, it was her innermost desire for revenge that unveiled when she paused. She waited for a reaction, but was unsatisfied at the drag of solemn silence. When she looked at Sun Wukong, she was surprised to see a look of not fear or even hatred, but a sort of sorrowness.

“What?” Baiguojing demanded, her voice raising a notch. “What?”

“Who did this to you?” He asked her quietly, seemingly almost unaware of the fact that she had the full power to kill him. “Who ruined you?”

There it was again. His presence always lingered around her, suppressing her, not leaving her alone. When could she possibly undo the hurt he caused when he left her? But, in her heart, she knew that time couldn’t be erased. And deep down, she also knew that she was jealous – a feeling so raw, so deep, digging away at her heart to the core. Not because he had passed, but because he was content without her; that he was content in Heaven, in the place he truly belonged, with a heart so kind and good.

“What if he’s not here? What if he left me?” She whispered, her voice cracking.

“Then maybe it’s time to let go.”

“But what if I can’t? What if I can’t let go? All these four hundred years, trying to break the chain of reincarnation, and I finally, finally, find the key! I have to do this,” Baiguojing declared, almost hesitantly..

“Does the key work? Does Xuanzang’s flesh really give you the power to bring him back to life? Maybe it isn’t revenge that you should seek, but redemption. Redemption of being saved from the hold he has on you! But if you do choose the key, you do know that doing so can perhaps destroy the cycle of life? It can destroy the world! The world that brought your husband and you to life! Why can’t you just forgive it?”

She sunk down. Watching her fingers, she let go of the fist she clutched each day. But as she spread her fingers apart, she felt as if he was slipping right through them, away from her grasp and away from her. She closed her eyes and contemplated silently, aware of Sun Wukong’s daggering gaze resting on her back.

He was the light to her darkness. He was the laughter to her tears. He was everything she wasn’t, and he brought out all the good in her. It was right, she decided. She could feel it. It was right to let go! There was just a string – just a small string, holding on to a part of her old

heart, the pure heart of the young maiden that was just in love. It was time, not just to hold onto the string, but to let him go as well!

Yet, just imagine, being back in her husband's arms, waking up to his gentle smile every day, pondering upon life with him waiting at each door! How often had she dreamed, each day and night, finally being back with her lover! It was a greed, a reward that she did not deserve. And putting up such a risk of breaking the cycle of death and rebirth, and putting the whole world on a dislocated axis - it was indeed not worth it!

Would it not be better to let go of the memories that catapulted her into misery, through forgiveness?

But, just to think of it, finally having her lover back once and for all, through revenge?

Her decision, albeit of much importance, is one not to be made by me. I'm afraid, dear reader, that is all up to you.

Among the Stars

Heep Yunn School, Tsui, Yu Hei Iris - 13

*We were originally grown from the same root,
Why should we hound each other to death with such impatience?
Seven Steps Verse, by Cao Zhi*

In the silence of Chang'an, Emperor Li Shimin stared up at the clouded night sky. Not a single beam of light lit the dark. In his mind, he could still hear the battle-song of the bows, the anguished cries of the victims, could still see the pain in their eyes.

Li Shimin stared up at the cold full moon.

The willow spray and sacred vase of Bodhisattva had come and gone, and the monk who was to journey to India and retrieve the Scriptures had been chosen. Xuanzang made his way to the Treasure Hall that morning.

Stepping into the room was like arriving at a dragon's cave. The silence was ominous. Li Shimin stood facing the wall, gazing at a painting.

"I come to bid farewell," Xuanzang said.

"I came to do more than that," answered Li. "Do you know who they are, the ones in the painting?"

Xuanzang stared at the portrait, depicting two young men, dressed in imperial robes. When he saw their eyes, his mind reeled.

Dark as night, shaped like leaves, completely identical to the ones in Li Shimin's face. Then the realization dawned upon him.

"They were my brothers," said Li, "Jiancheng and Yuanji."

"Were?" whispered Xuanzang.

"Jiancheng was my rival. He and Yuanji sought to slay me to secure their power. I ordered an ambush at the central gate." Li's voice trembled. "I fired the arrow which claimed my elder brother's life. Never have I been able to rid myself of the memory..."

"Now I never see them among the stars when I look up at the night sky."

Xuanzang's mind was blank with shock. Li looked at him. "That is why I am sending you on this quest. But perhaps...if you could retrieve the Holy Scriptures, Heaven will see and forgive me for what I have done."

Xuanzang, trembling, forced the well-practiced words to flow out of his mouth. "Ambitabha, good and dear... I-I hope that the scriptures will bring you peace." He tasted bitterness on his tongue.

The footsteps of the valiant monk traced mountain, sea and cave. The sweat poured from his brow and watered the earth, but he did not bear the agony and toil of the road alone. He took with him three disciples, all wanting to redeem their sins. Thus came into his service three: Sun Wukong with the Ruyi Jingu Bang, the Monkey King and the Great Sage; Pigsy with his nine-toothed iron rake, once a marshal in Heaven; and Sandy with his Crescent-Moon-Spade, once a general of Heaven.

Their quest was drawing nigh to an end, when a smouldering heat more terrible than any fire scorched their skin. Cries of villagers rang in the burning air as they staggered away from the heat.

Xuanzang halted one of them. “My friend, what are you running from?”

The villager’s sweat ran down his face; terror was in his eyes. “The Flaming Mountain, taken over by demons in the service of the Bull Demon King. The air is poison we cannot breathe, the fires of the mountain are light we cannot behold and heat we cannot endure. The darkness blinds our eyes and leaves our mouths parched. We have to flee; it is the only way to survive.”

“Why would anyone choose to live near it?” demanded Pigsy.

A wistful light came into the villager’s eyes. “The Flaming Mountain was once a place of beauty. The mountain had trees of white, their stalks slender and their leaves gold. We walked in glory and joy among the cherry blossoms and blooms of blue and green in the spring. Even if the King renounced his claim over our home, I doubt this place would be as it ever was.”

“Is there a way to quench the flames?” said Monkey.

“You must ask the Princess Iron Fan for her treasure,” answered the villager.

Sandy suggested, “I may be able to quench the flames with water from the rivers where I lived. Eldest Brother can ask the Dragon Kings of the Four Seas.”

This Xuanzang agreed to, but all they tried led to no avail. Sun Wukong gritted his teeth. “I will have to pay Rakshasi a visit.”

By the skill of Monkey – with his seventy-two transformations – and his brother Pigsy, and the arrival of the generals of Heaven, the Bull Demon King was thrown down before his throne and bound with the demon-binding rope. Leading him back to Palm Leaf Cave, Rakshasi surrendered the Iron Fan without hesitation when she beheld her husband’s capture.

Sun muttered, “How could a few ashes from Heaven set this mountain ablaze like this? I know I knocked them down, but how could they contain such power?”

The Bull Demon King snickered. “Tis I who set the mountain on fire, not my sworn brother. I desire the villagers to fall to their knees before me. I, the most powerful of all warriors!”

“You put the blame on my brother for this?” bellowed Pigsy, gripping his rake, as if desiring to smite him asunder.

“Peace, brother,” said Monkey. “I can’t let you or Sandy get caught up in this mess.”

Sandy swooned with relief when Pigsy and Monkey returned, but Monkey sought Xuanzang. “What king would rule his subjects the way the Bull Demon did?” he said under his breath, after he said all he had to tell.

“Only the cruel ones,” answered Xuanzang.

This is the word of the Buddha to Sun Wukong at the end of the quest:

“You have become wise, Wukong. You see with a clearer eye. You have now attained Buddhahood, and your deeds and valour shall be sung in every song.”

Their march into Chang’an, bearing the Holy Scriptures, received a hero’s welcome, for the Buddha had clothed them in a raiment of power, and in their faces were a shining golden light. Even so, Xuanzang was ill at ease. Pigsy and Sandy were euphoric, but Monkey sensed his master’s disquiet and shared in his restlessness. On the second day of their arrival in Chang’an the Emperor summoned Xuanzang to the Treasure Hall yet again. Unwilling to leave his master, Monkey accompanied him.

In great fear Li Shimin awaited the monk. When seeing Xuanzang he cried, “Hail, Hsuan-tang. I come to you in doubt; for the ghosts of my brothers still clamour in my dreams, and I do not see them among the innumerable stars. If the Holy Scriptures have been

reclaimed, how can this be?”

“*Ambitabha*,” said Xuanzang.

“One must reap what one has sown.

But, one good turn deserves another.”

But Monkey was silent, for Xuanzang had told him what Li had done and he alone fully understood his master’s will.

“Jiancheng, whom I killed by my own hand,” whispered Li. “I looked him in the eye as I drew the bowstring. Will no one tell me what I am to do?”

“Boundless is the sea of bitterness, yet a man who will repent can reach the shore,” Monkey said. “Never is it too late to do kind deeds.”

Li’s face contorted in anguish; his mouth opened in a soundless cry of agony.

A bird called outside the window, and then, quite suddenly, the tall figure of Guanyin breezed into the room, clad in a mantle of silvery white, fair as the break of dawn. In her hand she held her willow spray and sacred vase.

“Long have I watched you,” she said. “Have you not seen? Your brothers live among the stars. Alas for you, Li Shimin, for you are the kinslayer, and you have spilled your own blood in your kingdom. Heaven has bestowed its punishment – for as long as you shall dwell you shall live in guilt, and a shadow shall ever be upon your heart. Yet if your feelings of grief and remorse are true, and you rule China wisely unlike the Bull Demon King, then you shall see your brothers among the stars once more.”

His face glowing with joy and relief, Li bowed down before Bodhisattva. “Now I see the truth. My own royal blood has been spilt upon the soil of my home. I cry to my brothers, *Will you not forgive me for my evil deed and let me see you among the stars again?*”

Guanyin vanished in a wisp of smoke, and outside the window, the stars blinked into existence one by one, unveiling themselves at last. Among the stars, Li Shimin caught a glimpse of his brothers’ forgiving eyes.

In the hands of the emperor, wealth and joy were born in the kingdom that no other emperor has ever achieved in Chinese history. And so it was that he gave unto the vast lands the golden age of China.

My Own Way

Hong Kong International School (HKIS), Archer, Jack -14

New Journeys. That's what he told me. New ones.
What new things can I do when I'll always be in the shadow of his flying cloud. He was born from stone, exploding out of solid rock.

How can I top that?

I take another deep breath without opening my eyes, trying to expel all my thoughts with an exhale, but to no avail. What's the point of journeying west when everything I do will be nothing compared to the things he's done?

He wants me to do what he did, which is an insult all in itself. He already did it, and way better than I could, so why should I?

I have already spent my life in his insurmountable shadow. Everything I do, he did it when he was half my age. Everyone I meet will only tell me, "your father is a great man" "your dad, wow!" "You're so lucky to have him as your father!"

My father, my father, my father.

He is an immortal king, and I will always be one of his subjects.

My father is Sun Wukong, the monkey king, and I can never be anything like him.

Footsteps behind me. I listen to the steps. Light, but powerful.

He sits down next to me, cross-legged like I am.

"Son."

"Father."

"The monk has arrived."

I open my eyes, and gaze off the cliff top in front of me.

I look at my dad. I wonder how he'll respond to this.

Another deep breath.

"Dad, I don't want to go. I don't want to just redo what you did before. There's no way I could match up to the way you did it, so what's the point?"

I realise I am holding my breath, but I don't dare to let it out. My father's breathing stays level, no sign of anger and sadness. A few eternities later, his breath becomes choppy and ragged. I tense up. Is he... Laughing?

He turns to me. "Sun Wudi, this monk requested to be guided by you."

Still skeptical, I reply, "Why me? I'm normal. How can I protect him better than you?"

"You can." He says, "In your own way. Maybe you don't have powers like I do.. But you have your own strengths."

Anger flies through me again. "But everything I can do, you can do better."

"That's not true. There are things you are far better at than I am. The reason I want you to guide this monk across the country is because I want you to discover who you are., And I know you can't do that with me around, so I think going on this journey is the only way you can do that. Figure out who you are. Don't let me get in the way. Go."

I understand. Dad isn't trying to make me redo what he has done. He's wants me to do something that he has done before, but in my own special way. So that I won't always be Sun Wukong's son. So that I can be my own monkey.

I smile at my dad, and stand up.

“Bye, dad.”

He raises a hand, but I’m already tearing down the mountainside to get my satchel, now filled with eagerness and determination.

I head in the back door, grabbing my rusack without stopping, then tear out the front door, skidding to a stop to avoid running head on into a horse’s behind.

I head around the horse to meet the monk who I will protect in my own way as he makes his way to his monastery. I look up to greet him.

A grumpy face frowns back at me.

He’s bald, with a face permanently etched into a frown, with a long, pinkish nose protruding out of the shadow of his cloak. He looks down at me silently, a vulture eyeing its prey from above.

Deep breath.

“Hi... I’m Sun Wu-”

“I know.” he says, his mouth unmoving as he speaks.

“Um, I’m here to-”

“I know why you’re here.” He says again, his voice monotonous. “Now let’s go.” He turns his gaze to the lead rope tied to the horse’s neck. It’s as if he pulled a plug on my foot, draining all the vigour and excitement I had once had down onto the dusty ground below me feet. I take hold of the lead rope and guide the horse away from the small house my father and I live in, built with our own hands, wondering if I’ll see it again. As I’m thinking, I trip, stumbling a little before regaining my footing. I look back at the monk, expecting to meet his glare. Instead he’s looking over his shoulder back at the hut. Then he turns back to me, eyes wide and fearful.

Then I realise what made me trip.

The ground is shaking.

It rumbles again, a tremor spreading through the ground. Jostled, I look up at the monk, wondering if it’s an earthquake.

“WU DI!” The monk yells, frantic. “RUN!”

I don’t understand, but my feet automatically obey, and I let go of the lead rope and sprint forward with a quick glance backward to make sure the monk is galloping behind me. As a monkey, I can run on all fours, meaning I can almost match a horse. But as I look back, I see that the monk’s hood has blown off, revealing... What?

A pig’s head protrudes from the green cloaking, the pinkish snout I mistook as a nose scrunching up as it meets the wind.

“Run, Wudi, RUN!”

I push myself to go faster, my thoughts going as fast as my legs. There is only one pig this “monk” could be. But why?

The rumblings are coming more often now. Then one is truncated by a huge explosion. I have to glance back once again, only to see a column of fire shooting upwards, right where our house would be. I choke back a sob. My home.

The horse draws up alongside me, and I swing myself onto it, gripping the pig’s cloak as the horse speeds up even more.. I look up at the back of the pig. Could it be..?

“Bajie?” I ask.

“Who else, Wudi?”

Bajie the pig was one of my father’s companions as he made his journey west. Is he a monk now?

Just then, I hear a screeching battle cry, the one I know is my father’s, followed by

another explosion. My mind goes blank, and I bury my face into Bajie and close my eyes.

When I open my eyes again, we are on a desert plain, in the middle of nowhere. I hop off the horse to see Bajie sitting down on the sand, looking at me.

“What-what happened?” I ask him.

“One of your father’s old friends came back to pay him a visit.”

“Who?”

“The immortal Zhenyuan, your father’s most powerful enemy.” he says, looking back at me with something new in his eyes.

“But they parted friends! My father gave him back his tree of eternal life!” I exclaim.

“Why were there-”

“He was lying!” Bajie says, nearly shouting. “Maybe he really thought of Sun Wukong as an ally at first, but his dead brethren never left his mind. He came for me and my family first, with an army of troops. I escaped but I’ve lost everything now. I knew he would come for your father as well, so I contacted him. Zhenyuan didn’t know he had a son, so as long as he didn’t follow, he knew you were safe. So he asked me to get you, while he tried to face his old enemy. He never had any chance.”

I am silent for a minute, processing. “So.. he’s dead?” The word exits my lips hollow.

“No. he can’t be killed. But imprisoned. Trapped forever. Unless we get him back.” “us?” I say, unbelieving, still reeling with the relief that my father is alive.

“Well, no, we can pick up a friend first. Remember Sha Wujing?”

“Yes, but.. If my father can’t take him, how can we?”

“With surprise. And with you. Your father was powerful, but sometimes he let his ego get in the way. He’s observed you. He knows you are smarted. You have the ability to think fast, to find ways to do things better than anyone, just so that you could keep up with your father. You may not have powers, but you are stronger than any other normal human. With Wujing any my help, we can right this wrong. So what do you say? Do we get your father back?”

I should be shocked, I should be scared. But I’m not. I’m excited. This is my challenge, my journey. I will save my father. I will prove to everyone that I am not just his mortal son that will never measure up to him. I will make a new journey to the west.

I turn back to Bajie.

“Let’s do it.”

Origins of the One King

Island School, Wu, Evan - 14

It has been 500 years, 500 years too long that I have been away from my freedom and mischief. I do not remember anything anymore at this point. It was originally hate and anger towards the gods and the heavens, but now it is just plain emptiness, all my hate and anger has transformed into a bottomless void. I don't even know how much I hate them at this point.

I should have been the king of them all, with all the gods and the heavens under my feet. How dare they treat me as if I was some low-class warrior? I have defeated everyone in Heaven that was in my path towards godhood, the 10,000 Celestial Warriors, the 28 Constellations of the Stars, the Four Kings of Heaven and even the Lotus Prince Nezha. None of them even stood a slight chance against me. What could they have done against my Golden Jingu Bang staff, my 72 transformations and my army of Monkey Kings. I'm immortal and near-omnipotent, and they still think that I do not classify as a deity? I will get my revenge on that wretched Jade Emperor when I escape from this seal.

But what is the point? I will never be able to get my revenge. Because no matter how strong my powers are, no matter how powerful I am, I am still sealed here under the hands of Siddhartha Gautama. No one can stand up to the Buddha, no matter your strength, agility or intelligence, everyone and everything are nothing in comparison to the Buddha. There is no way for me to escape his grasp. I have tried everything. I'm going to be here forever in this cramped and dense space until the end of time. I will do anything for a second chance at seeing the outside world again.

That was when an outsider knocked on my mountain seal and spoke to me about some gibberish. I ignored the person for most of the time, because that is what I did to other outsiders who claimed that they would grant me "specialities" by obeying their orders. I don't believe in such trash that putrid mortals say. Then the outsider said something that really caught my senses.

"Do you want to have another chance at life?", the unknown person said to me. She changed her tone. I can recognise who the person was now.

That voice was definitely the goddess Bodhisattva Guanyin. She was one of the few people that worked under the Buddha's foot. Why is she here? But I will find out the answer to that another time. What she said 'Do you want to have another chance at life?', I thought about everything that has happened in my lifetime up till this moment in time. The monkeys that I have met with since my conception from a magic stone of the Elements themselves, the scavenging of my Jingu Bang staff in the deep waters of the ocean, the erasure of my name in the Book of Life and Death, the battle between what Heaven's forces and I, and my imprisonment under Siddhartha Gautama. This was my first and only chance that I am able to get out of this bottomless pit and make my return as the rightful king of the universe after I am done with whatever Bodhisattva Guanyin wants from me.

"Yes", I responded to the goddess on the other side of the wall.

"I will break the seal that the Buddha has placed on you 500 years ago and grant you your freedom, on two conditions", she spoke.

I winced when she said 'two conditions'. I should have known that not even a piece of

paper that mortals use as money comes for free in this world, let alone my freedom from this everlasting hell.

“The first condition is that, you will have to follow a pilgrim on a pilgrimage. A pilgrim is a person that is religious and a pilgrimage is like a holiday to enjoy religion. As his disciple and guardian, you will have to protect him in his journey to discover another world outside China. The second condition is that, you will have to follow his every order and wear this custom headband forged by the Gods themselves. If you want to find out what the headband will do to you, well you will have to find out yourself when the time comes. Do you still agree to these conditions?. Denial of this offer means that you will never come back to the human world and remain in this seal trapped forever.”, the goddess told me with this strange tone that made me feel uneasy.

What a shame. When I finally have the opportunity to escape from the seal that has put me down for 500 years, the only way that I can break the seal is to give away my freedom to this random person going on a pretty boring adventure. But what other choice do I have? This is an ultimatum. If I accept this person’s request, I will have to hand over my freedom and be forced to do whatever the person wants me to do. If I don’t accept this person’s request, then I will have to remain sealed under this mountain for all eternity, never to see the light again.

So after an unknown period of time in silence and reflection, I agreed. And with a loud crack, soon followed the destruction of the walls that have trapped me for five hundred years. It was beautiful to see the light again, I haven’t seen the light in what seemed like an eternity. I was surrounded by shattered rock fragments from the mountain seal, the lush green trees of Mother Earth and the wind. I was reborn. I could feel my body once more.

Then, in a quick flash of light with everything shaking and rumbling, the Goddess of Mercy Guanyin appeared in front of me.

“This will be the man that you have to serve in your journey”, she told me. Then with her hands, she created a hologram of this man on top of her right palm. “His name is Xuanzang, a person who studies Buddhism from China who desires to travel the West in order to obtain some knowledge a few men seek for themselves, the sutras of Buddhism, scrolls containing the secrets to his “enlightenment” or awakening.”

He wasn’t too tall, he looked as short as a Celestial Warrior back when I fought them in Heaven. He had grey hair, which was strange considering most measly humans either had black or brown hair and he was dressed in a grey robe. He also had lots of things behind his back, I don’t even know how he is able to carry all those things despite his frailness. It seemed that this man was really eager to seek whatever those Buddhist scriptures are that would lead to his “enlightenment”, even coming up to a god like me to help him with his journey. I don’t even know if enlightenment is even a thing. But I will have to thank this Xuanzang person for releasing me from this nasty “Demon Seal” that the Buddha has put on me, I can finally return to the mortal realm and plot my revenge against the Gods and the Heavens.

Afterwards, the hologram of Xuanzang disappeared and a few more words came out from Guanyin again.

“This man will change you. I can feel it. Should you ever turn back into the demon that you once were, the gods will strike you down again and this time you will not come back, imprisoned in an worse seal for all of your days. Will you take the challenge to kill your devilish past in order to be reborn divine?”

Instead of stuttering like the first time inside the mountain, I was confident.

“Yes, I am confident to serve this man in order to have my freedom.”

Guanyin smiled, then she calmly spoke to me.

“Then if you do everything as I have stated, you will be free to do whatever you want and maybe even possibly find your place amongst us in Heaven. Use your time wisely and don’t mess around. I will see you soon.”

She disappeared and I was back to being all by myself, but this time being surrounded by pitch darkness, I was surrounded by the nature that I have taken for granted before my rebirth. I no longer felt emptiness in my soul, instead something sparked within me like wildfire from the depths of Hell, my will to fight, boiling like the hottest magma that has existed.

I have been through five of the six realms of Existence before, as an animal, a mortal, a ghost, a demon and my current state, a demigod.

It is time to enter the last realm of Existence and begin my journey to become something even greater than a divine being.

A God.

New Journeys to the West

Po Leung Kuk Choi Kai Yau, Cho, Jessie - 14

He walked along the marble corridor, heading towards the hefty-looking doors at the end. They swung open at a small flick of his double-bladed spear. He then stepped inside and glanced around one of the Jade Emperor's many rooms of antiques; pots, vases, jewellery sat dull and lifeless in the darkness of the marble chamber, silently waiting for him to complete his duty. He strolled to the centre of the room and thrust his staff up towards the ceiling. At once, the marble dome above his head dissipated into fractals. The constantly-shining moonbeams stretched through the chamber's roof, painting the treasures inside the room with a kiss of silver light. Job completed, he lowered his spear and started to stroll back out of the chamber. However, he didn't make it so far.

Crash.

I remember the agony afterwards. Apparently, as I was retreating from the room, I accidentally knocked over one of the Emperor's precious vases. This awakened the guardian spirit of that chamber, who knocked the lights out of me.

The next memory I had was being chained in the dungeons. The punishment spirits took out a smouldering piece of rod and walloped me all over. I could vaguely remember the smell of burnt flesh before pain exploded in my head, and I was rendered unconscious once more.

A torrent of ice-cold water crashed down onto my head. I woke up with a yelp.

"General of Curtains," a booming voice thundered at me. "You have sinned." The Jade Emperor. I tried to sit up, but my marred body screamed in agonising protest. "As your punishment, you shall be condemned to the earthly world. You shall be transformed into a hirsute man-eating sand demon." I lifted my head with excruciating difficulty. The face of the Jade Emperor towered above me.

It was a face of justice and cruelty.

I watched the sand-scattered river move sluggishly down its path. This was my new home. I glimpsed my reflection in a stretch of semi-clear water. It was just as the Jade Emperor said—I have sprouted the tangled mass of a beard, which conjoined with my hair, also a knotted discord. My face was distorted into beastly features. I frowned, but quickly loosened my expression. Contorting my already distorted face led to abhorrent results.

"Greetings."

A mellifluous voice sang behind me. It was soothing, sweet. It washed over me like the cool trickle of a fresh stream. There was only one person with such a sound.

"Salutations, Guanyin." The bodhisattva of compassion.

"Look at me, child."

"But I mustn't," I muttered, a wave of emotion suddenly threatening to overtake my

voice. “I am a figure of shame to the galaxy. I sinned against the Jade Emperor.”

“Perhaps.” I felt the warm breeze that always surround her gently caress my face. “Young one, I have come with a mission for you.”

“A... mission?” Surprised, I felt my bushy eyebrows furrow as I turned towards her. Guanyin smiled at me. Her timelessly angelic face glowed with warmth and kindness. Is this a chance for me to repent of my wrongdoing?

“You must accompany a monk called Xuanzang and his disciples on their journey to obtain Buddhist scrolls from the west as his third student. Protect him, for these scrolls shall be treasured documents of our beliefs. Do you accept?”

I nodded vigorously. As a past general in heaven, offering protection wasn't that difficult of a task. Plus, this is my chance for a fresh restart. A clean river. No sand, no grit. Uncontaminated.

Guanyin smiled happily. She reached out a fair hand and touched the top of my head.

“From this moment onwards, your name will be Sha Wujing (沙悟淨). “Sha” from your sandy dwelling, “Wujing” meaning purity.”

I bowed my head in gratitude. “Thank you.”

I woke up the next morning with my heart hammering in excitement. I have not been this animated ever since my banishment from heaven. Feeling lighter than a feather, I whistled a cheerful tune as I quickly glanced at myself in the muddy river. A grinning, hairy sand-demon looked back at me from the brackish waters. How I dearly hope my future comrades won't judge me for how I appear. I grabbed my double-bladed staff and began my search for Xuanzang.

As a water mage, I specialise in controlling the currents and tides. I utilised my special talent to search for my master. I travelled swift and soundless in rivers, lakes, the sea. I used water as my senses, asked fishes to be my eyes. After two days of fruitless seeking, I finally located him in a barren wasteland, with a wide breadth sea ahead- I knew at once it was my cue to step in.

I shot through the waters faster than a bullet. Almost there... I was on my way to meet my master. On my way to help. To atone for my sins. I could sense the nervous anticipation of meeting them dancing in me.

“STOP RIGHT THERE, MONSTER!”

“What the-”

Something heavy clubbed my head. Stars exploded in my eyes. An attack! I shook away the pain and swirled around. I whipped out my spear and braced for the second blow, quickly surveying the area around me. I was still at a deep level of sea. Good. The second attack landed on my spear with a deafening clang.

“Eat this, demon!”

I snapped to attention. Angry beady eyes stared back at me, accompanied by a large nose, leathery ears and a gigantic pot belly. In other words, a pig stood six feet tall on his own two feet. He was pushing a rake against my spear. My eyes instinctively zoomed to the head of the rake. Each of its nine teeth glistened dangerously in the light ocean spray. If I took one

blow from that weapon, I may as well be a dead man. With a flourish, I pulled my spear from beneath his rake and glided to the side. I swung, he blocked. Soon, the air sang with the clangour of our battle. Yes, his strength is greater than mine. However, he is also relatively slow. I spun my double-bladed spear in one hand and dipped my other in the water. Just before his hit landed, I drew a ravaging tower of seawater up to the height of a mountain and hurled it at the human-pig. It snorted in bewilderment before the cyclone threw him against a nearby cliff.

“HIIIIYAAAAA!!”

I put my spear up just in time to block a flying attack from above. Blinking against the white light of the sun, I saw the shape of a furry monkey driving a golden-banded staff onto my spear. The staff glinted suddenly sprung a memory into my mind. I could still remember how heaven was tipped upside-down as the notorious Monkey King, Sun Wukong, challenged the Jade Emperor, terrorising every celestial being there was. What is such a perilous creature doing here? Master Xuanzang was in grave danger. I must rescue him immediately. Abandoning the battle, I dove into the sea, as Sun Wukong is unable to pursue me in water. Vaguely aware of the monkey flying over to the pig, I continued my search for master, swimming though I’ve never swum before. I must get to Master before these two do.

Just before I reached the shore, I was stopped yet again by a hooking sensation on my robe. In a split second, I was being dragged backwards and deep underwater. I was facing the pig once again.

“I can’t let a demon like you pass,” he said, voice warbling in the water. I gripped my spear tighter.

“Then I’ll just have to break through you!”

With a cry, I lunged at the pig, spear slicing through the water. He backed away, barely escaping my assault, and swiped back at me with his rake. Our weapons locked in a furious dance as we circled.

A horn bellowed at us from up above.

“Wujing, Wujing, come up!” That’s my name! Shoving the pig away with a whoosh of current, I began to ascend to the surface of the water as quickly as I can as he landed with a grunt on the sandy seabed.

Breaking through, I quickly reached the shore, where Sun Wukong, sitting on his cloud, was holding a gourd undoubtedly given by Guanyin.

“Hey,” the monkey grinned sheepishly. “So apparently, you are our master’s third disciple. Sorry about that. I’m Sun Wukong.” It seems like Sun Wukong was one of Xuanzang’s students. I can’t say that’s expected.

“I apologise as well. I may have mistaken you as a threat to my future master.”

He laughed. “Well, I guess I did too. Come, meet Master.”

“HOOOOOLD RIGHT THERE, MONSTER!” The pig suddenly broke onto the shore, swinging his rake wildly. “I’M NOT DONE WITH YOU YET!” Sun Wukong sighed in exasperation. “Piggy!” He flew over to the pig and whispered in his ear. The pig’s expression switched from anger to understanding. He walked over to me.

“Hullo, Wujing. I didn’t realise you were with us. Sorry. I’m Zhu Bajie by the way. Pleasure meeting you.” He extended a chubby hand, which I shook “It’s all mine.”

“Well, people, I think it’s time to return to base. Wujing, coming?” Sun Wukong somersaulted in the air, twirling his staff.

“Sure.”

As our trio walked, I couldn’t help but smile. This is going to be very interesting.

Journey to Hope

Renaissance College Hong Kong, Ho, Minhee - 11

A gunshot. The deafening boom, the feeling of dread as the bullet spun towards its target. A rip as it tore through skin. A crack as it shattered the skull. It took a moment for the pain to seep in. Then a high-pitched, barbaric scream, exploding agony, and spilling blood.

A heavy thud.

Another life lost. Another one dead.

Then silence. Nothing. The nothingness of life moving on, of time continuing.

Later, words would be spoken. Words that hurt. Words that wounded. Floating chunks of despair. Horror, violence, darkness. A crying mother. A weeping sister. A desperate father.

Infinite gunshots.

Bones cracked. Skin tore. Blood dripped. A hailstorm of bullets. Each shot brought pain, death, and more darkness.

Boom.

Thud.

Silence.

The cold bit Scimmia's bare flesh, covering her skin with goosebumps. The snow swirled around her, blocking her vision. Blindly, she staggered forward, trying to follow the sound of Monje's footsteps.

"When can we stop walking?" Piggy whined, groaning with each step he took. Piggy's real name was Hen Pang, but because of his portly figure, Piggy soon became his nickname.

"Stop complaining, Pig," Scimmia snapped, shooting Piggy a glare.

"It's not like you're so skinny!" Piggy retorted.

"At least I'm skinnier than you!"

Piggy was about to speak, but was interrupted.

"Stop bickering!" Monje snapped, turning around to scowl at both Scimmia and Piggy.

"Why is this stupid journey so hard?" Piggy moaned, switching the subject.

"Stop whining, you fat boar!" Scimmia barked.

Piggy pouted, his fat lips jutting out.

"Stop sulking!" Scimmia reprimanded. But secretly, she had to agree with Piggy. The journey was hard. It was long, dangerous, and difficult.

The snow was blinding, and many times, the group had to stop travelling, to wait for it to clear. Shootings and air raids were extremely common, and they were constantly having to find shelters to avoid being shot or bombed. They were also running out of supplies. It was the thieves. They were constantly taking the group's money and food, leaving them struggling for survival.

Piggy continued to groan. "How long do we have to walk?"

"Suck it up, hog!" Scimmia said.

But after a couple more minutes of Piggy's complaining, the trio decided to stop for the night.

Scimmia, Piggy, and Monje were all from the Tang Dynasty. The Tang Dynasty had been battling for decades, in fact, they were the cause for World War Three. The Tang people were angry. They wanted change.

But gradually, as the war bore on, the Tang people became weary of fighting. Too many deaths. Too much pain. Too much loss. It wasn't worth it.

Finally, after years of deliberation, the Tang King had decided to offer a peace treaty to the other country, and end the War. He had chosen three people to deliver the treaty: Scimmia, Monje, and Piggy.

With his incredible laziness and annoying nature, it was a mystery why the King had chosen Piggy. After breaking into the Tang Palace to try and steal food, Piggy was thrown into jail for ten years. If he completed the journey, he would be pardoned from the crime, and finally be released. Piggy hated jail. It had bad food, and that was enough to make Piggy desperate to gain forgiveness, which was why he had accepted the King's deal.

Monje was orderly, prudent, and kind. The King had promised Monje that if he completed the journey successfully, he could be the next heir to the throne.

Scimmia was snarky, sassy, and arrogant. However, despite these negative traits, she was somehow liked by almost everybody. She, like Piggy, was a criminal. A long time ago, she had been the King's secretary, but after being caught trying to steal the King's crown, she was fired. Completing the journey was the consequence of her crime.

The group had been travelling for years, and still had many more miles to go. Their job was to travel to Westopia and deliver the peace treaty to the Westopia King.

If the Westopia King signed the treaty, the war would end.

If he didn't, the War would continue, the Tang King too proud to accept defeat. The fighting would go on forever, until humanity destroyed itself - until not a single person was left alive.

That was why the Treaty had to be signed.

Years passed.

The journey was hard. It was cold, the travellers were running out of money, and they were in constant fear of being shot or bombed.

It was difficult and dangerous. It seemed impossible. But somehow, one day, they reached Westopia.

They had heard that Westopia was beautiful - bright and happy.

But Westopia was the exact opposite.

Like any other place in World War Three, signs of battle covered Westopia. Most of the houses were broken and damaged - bombed. The air was filled with screaming and sobbing. It was dark and dull - there was no laughter. Faces were empty of smiles. Humanity had drowned all the joy and beauty of the world.

Why are humans so evil? When had they turned so evil?

The travellers entered the palace.

Even the palace had been darkened by the war. Sadness lingered in the vast corridors. The rooms were filled with despair. The King looked weary, and much too old for his age.

Yet, when he studied the treaty, he did not hesitate to answer.

"No," he said. The travellers looked at him in disbelief. After seeing all the damage the war had done, they had expected the King to say yes.

Monje stepped forwards. “But your Majesty. The war is terrible. It has damaged Westopia, and its people. Please, think again.”

But the King shook his head. “No,” he repeated. “Go home, and tell the Tang King what I have said. I do not accept the Treaty. The war will continue. It must! We’ve sacrificed so much. We will not give up.”

The travellers protested. “Please,” Scimmia begged. “It doesn’t matter what you have sacrificed. You should stop the war before you sacrifice more than you already have! I came here thinking Westopia was beautiful, but all I see are broken faces.”

“Fine!” the King barked, startling the group. “I will think about it, if you are so stubborn. But my answer will not change. Return the next day, and I will give you my reply.”

Solemnly, the group left, leaving the Westopia King with the Treaty.

“At least we tried,” Scimmia said quietly.

Piggy nodded. “The journey was actually kind of fun, you know. Scimmia, you’re not too bad. It’s kind of fun arguing with you. I’ll miss it,” he admitted. “You know, we should all stay friends after the journey.”

“I think this journey changed us. It made us wiser and stronger. Even if we fail, I won’t regret this.” Monje said thoughtfully.

The night passed, and morning came quickly. After waking, the travelers immediately went to the Palace to hear the King’s reply.

They were surprised to find a whole line of people already waiting outside.

“Why are they lining up?” Piggy asked one of the guards.

“To list all the people who are missing. They’re just dreaming. The missing people will never come back. They’re dead,” the guard replied bitterly.

The group said nothing. There was nothing to say. Silently, they let the guard escort them to the King.

They found him in the throne room. He held the Peace Treaty with trembling hands. “You were right,” he said. “This morning, I remembered what you said. I remembered the past – of how wonderful Westopia was, of how peaceful my realm had been.” Quietly, he laughed. “And then I looked out the window, and saw a line of people coming to give me a list of the dead. I saw a dark sky, and dark faces. You are right. The war is damaging us. It’s making us evil.”

He handed the Peace Treaty back to the group.

It was signed.

The travellers returned to the Tang Dynasty, and gave the Peace Treaty, now signed, to the Tang King. They each received their rewards, along with money, and other treasures.

The travellers had returned late at night. Almost immediately, they went to sleep.

The next morning, when Scimmia woke up, her room was bright. She peered out of the window, and saw ... a blue sky and a sun.

It had been years since she had seen a blue sky. All of the nuclear battles in World War Three had made the sky grey and dull. Darkness had blanketed the world, like a black cloud that refused to leave.

Yet, here it was, back again. A blue sky. A sun.
Outside, there was laughter.
There were faces filled with smiles.
There were tears, but a different kind - tears of joy.
Words were spoken. Words that were lovely. Words that healed the wounds that had been made.
Love and hope filled the air.
The Journey to Peace had finally ended.

The Story of the Three Adventurers

Shanghai Singapore International School, Hegde, Sathvik - 12

The peaceful quiet of the night gave no indication to the actual mood of the townsfolk. After decades of cruelty and mistreatment of the people by the Emperor, they had had enough. Plows and hoes were exchanged for weapons of warfare and farmlands were cleared to make way for barracks. A meeting had been arranged in the middle of the night, and the townsfolk started for the town hall. Their chief, a wise old man, was nearing his nineties and wanted to give a final speech on his dream that he had the night before. The details were unknown, but the dream was apparently of great significance. The butcher, a man named Grim, was, well, grim. He was the first to arrive and did not look too happy about being rudely awakened in the middle of the night for some meeting. As the others began filtering in, the chief finally arrived. He wasted no time with pleasantries and promptly started. “As many of you may know, I had a dream last night. I saw the monk Xuanzang, the one who is getting the Buddhist scriptures, in grave trouble. We are the only ones who can help him and it is crucial that no one else gets word of this. They will surely kill the monk and end all hope for peace in this land. We need three people who are willing to go and sacrifice their lives if need be.” He coughed a bit then continued, “We have already decided on who will go on this quest. Liu, Ming and Sun, get ready to leave at the break of dawn. You have no time to spare.” The crowd started chattering as they cleared out of the hall. This was the most exciting news they had heard in decades and it gave them a light in these times of darkness.

Before we continue, I will have to introduce you to our adventurers. Liu was a rather brash young man who fancied himself as the greatest swordsman of the neighboring towns. He had little wits about him and was inclined to making rather moronic decisions. Ming, the one who had wits but no courage or skill in arms, was the exact opposite of Liu. Where Liu was brash, Ming was humble and cautious. The last member of this adventuring trio is Sun. The one word that would describe him is average. Average intelligence, average strength and average speed. These heroes do have their flaws, but heroism can come out of the foulest creature, as long as they do the right thing at the right place at the right time. But I am keeping you from the story, so let’s continue. They gathered their gear and sat down to discuss the quest and have a bit of wine. “Ah, my friends, let’s enjoy this last moment of peace before we go on our quest,” said Liu, “After all, we may never make it.” As he said this, lightning flashed in the distance, as though it were confirming his statement. Rain drops started pattering against the roof of their dwelling, forming a sonorous tune. Ming asked timidly, “Maybe we should go see the chief and have him give us more details about our quest. I mean we...” He was interrupted midsentence by Liu, who said ignoring Ming’s words, “Instead of sitting down here and drinking, we should go save the monk! We will save some time this way and we can come back here a little bit earlier.” Sun, who finally spoke up exclaimed, “That’s a brilliant idea!” Ming stuttered nervously, “But we don’t know where we are g... – “That’s it! You will not be speaking another word unless you wish to be bound in a rag!” said Liu. “But...,” Ming protested to no effect, as he was swiftly silenced with a foul rag in his mouth. “On we go!” shouted Sun with excitement distorting his voice, “We shall be back before we know it!”

Stupidity sometimes overrules prudence and common sense, yet some good can come

out of those deeds and take your opponent by surprise. As the trio hiked up the trail leading beyond the town, a shadowy figure could be seen trailing them from a distance. The figure would disappear as soon as someone looked behind and none of them noticed him. As soon as the quest had begun, their enemies had mobilized and taken up positions. They were ordered to shadow and harass the adventurers and then imprison them along with Xuanzang, which would kill two birds with one stone. Xuanzang was hidden away and when the three came, he would reveal himself. So, this particular night, the adventures were supposed to be attacked and have all their gear stolen, which would leave them demoralized and weak. As the sun creeped over the far horizon, the adventurers could go no further and plopped down in a deserted clearing, setting up camp. They had just realized that they did not know where they were going and would have to head back. Ming was right all along. Perhaps intelligence is really important. Maybe we should all be intelligent rather than being strong and brawny.

They all sat down in front of the bonfire they had made, already in a depressed state. Life has its ups and downs but we should all learn to face them. They will come back to bite you, when you most need luck. They had all decided to head back and get directions before continuing on the quest. But first, they decided to make the most out of the situation to rest and explore the area. Ming lay down to rest while the other two explored, heading their separate ways.

Liu breathed in the fine earthy smell and sighed in pleasure. Even though he pretended to be big and manly in front of the others, he in fact was a softie at heart. He thought about the dream he had a few days before the quest. He was quite disturbed by it, as it showed a world filled with metal sticks which spit out metal pellets and different colored monsters belching out black smoke with people trapped in them. Then, he had suddenly awakened in a bed with a book in his hand titled in strange letters. But he still recognized the name. It read “A Journey to the West: The New Edition.” Liu stumbled, a sudden pain in his side jerking him out of his thoughts. As his vision faded, he heard two screams of desperation and pain from his friends. He gasped, as images from his dream became clearer and clearer. For once in his life, he realized something on his own, but that didn’t help. No one would believe him and nobody was there anyway. He dropped unconscious on the ground as the shadowy figures picked him up and threw him on a horse. Two other horses emerged from the forest and all three rode away to the horizon, where they awaited certain death, or so they thought.

Robert gasped and woke up with his unfinished new edition of *The Journey to the West*. He ran to his desk and grabbed his pencil then wrote on a fresh sheet of paper, “They woke up, bound in smelly rags in the darkness. In front of them was a monk, not just any monk but the great monk Xuanzang. They knew now that they had failed already and now, the world would never be the same again.”

I suppose now that there must be a lesson to be learned. I think that lesson will have to be this. “Prepare and think through what you are doing before taking action.” Also, even though they made mistakes, they somehow did the right thing. Xuanzang was in fact the villain, with the chief being his henchman. The shadowy figures were trying to help all along and they succeeded. So, there is another lesson, “Innocents are always caught in the crossfire of the warring powers.” I should have mentioned the chief’s loyalties in the beginning but that would ruin this story that I am stuck in. Liu and Sun would tell me to shut up anyway.

In The House of The White Bone Demon

St Margaret's Co-Educational Secondary and Primary School, Tsang, Julia - 13

“I’ve said it once, and I’ll say it again!” Chun-kit half whispered, half screamed at his three friends.

“Miss Bai is a demon!”

The four children – Chun-kit, Xiaolan, Connor, and Kashiko – were of different nationalities, but they had one thing in common: bad luck seemed to follow them everywhere. It wasn’t until a month ago that they had been added to a mysterious chat group by an unknown person who informed them that they were the reincarnations of the four main characters of the famous novel, *Journey to the West* – the Monkey King, Tang Xuanzang, Pigsy, and Friar Sand – and to undo the karma that had caused their bad luck, they would have to reach a mysterious place in western China – the “West Mountain”. Of course, none of them believed a thing they were told, but they were so desperate to shake off their bad luck that they had met up one day and began their journey to the west.

They had passed by many places on their way and met many people, but Miss Bai – who had offered them food and lodging for some time up until now – had been the nicest. At least, that was what everyone thought, except Chun-kit, who insisted that she was a demon in disguise.

“She’s a shapeshifter, for God’s sake!” Chun-kit replied angrily as Xiaolan argued for the fifth time that day that what he had claimed was impossible. “I don’t know why you can’t see it. She’s fooling all of you with her disguise – and she wants to eat you, Xiaolan!”

“Someone who makes such great food can’t be a demon,” Connor said through a mouthful of chicken that Miss Bai had prepared for them.

Kashiko, who hadn’t said a word up until now, suddenly spoke. “Chun-kit, I think you might just be tired. We’ve been walking for days before we reached this place.”

“Tiredness does make the brain think strange thoughts,” Xiaolan agreed. She didn’t know it, but she was the cleverest of the group – and her friends secretly admired her for her ability to keep a cool head and a logical mindset even in the face of danger. “It’s getting late. What we should do is go to bed a while later – get plenty of rest – and set off for West Mountain first thing in the morning. We shouldn’t worry about Miss Bai that much – ”

“She’ll get us in our sleep!” Chun-kit yelled indignantly, having trouble keeping his voice down. “I bet she’s just waiting now for the perfect moment to – ”

The door to the room creaked softly and a rather tall woman dressed in white from head to toe entered. Seeing the surprised expressions on the children’s faces, she smiled and said, “I’m sorry if I scared you, children, I was just in the other room preparing some food and thought I heard someone shouting. Is everything alright?”

Chun-kit opened his mouth, but Connor cut him off. “Of course, everything’s fine, but Chun-kit here’s gone mad. He thinks you’re going to eat us or something, but of course, anyone knows a lady as kind as you wouldn’t so much as kill a fly, right?”

But to everyone’s horror, a disturbingly sinister smile started to spread on Miss Bai’s face.

“Your friend does have quite an imagination,” she said, eyeing Chun-kit. “But,

unfortunately, he's not wrong."

The last thing everyone heard before the lights dimmed and an overwhelming dizziness overcame them was Xiaolan's high-pitched scream.

When they finally came to, they were in the same place they had been before it happened - Miss Bai's cozy, tidy living room. But now that they knew what she really was and Xiaolan was missing, nobody felt like lounging around anymore. The first one to spring into action was Chun-kit. "I told you!

Thanks a lot for not listening to me - now Xiaolan could be dead!" He picked up a cushion from the couch and threw it across the room in frustration. "Seriously, 'there's no way she isn't a demon'...what a load of nonsense..."

"THAT'S IT!" Kashiko shot up, her voice seemingly too loud for her usual, quiet self. "I know you don't believe all that stuff about us being the reincarnations of the Journey to the West characters - but think about it. If we are their reborn selves, Miss Bai must be the White Bone Demon (everyone shuddered at the name) - and Chun-kit must be the reincarnation of the Monkey King, because in the story, he was the only one who was able to see through her disguise! Oh, and..." Her tone turned grave. "In the story, the White Bone Demon kidnapped the monk Xuanzang because his flesh was said to grant immortality... if Miss Bai took Xiaolan, then she must be Xuanzang's reincarnation..."

"So she is going to eat her!" Chun-kit's voice was shaking with worry. "If we don't find her, who knows what's going to happen? But where could she be?"

"In the story," Kashiko replied instantly, "the White Bone Demon took Xuanzang to her lair, a creepy, dank cave - "

"Sounds like my granny's basement," Connor butted in.

"The basement! She must have taken Xiaolan down there!" Before his friends could agree, Chun-kit made a beeline for the stairs, running so fast that Kashiko and Connor could barely keep up with him.

When they reached the basement, though, nobody felt like running anymore. It was so dark that anything was hardly visible, and they could hear the eerie dripping of water in the distance.

"Remember, this is hardly creepy compared to the cave in the story, which was said to contain piles of human bones," Kashiko reminded them.

"Thanks a lot, that's very reassuring," Connor replied sarcastically, but it was obvious that he was trembling violently out of fear.

They all stopped abruptly when two bright red flames materialized out of the darkness. Upon closer look, however, they turned out to be the malicious, glowing eyes of Miss Bai - in the form of the White Bone Demon.

"I seem to have underestimated you kids' intelligence," she sneered in a voice completely unlike the sweet one she had when she had first met them. "But I'll bet that it's not enough to beat this test.

That's right - to defeat me, and save your friend, we'll have to play a little game." She waved her hand, and three large boxes appeared, floating in the air. But none of the children seemed to be in the mood to play.

"Where'd you hide Xiaolan?" Chun-kit demanded angrily.

"I trusted you," Connor whimpered.

Kashiko was mumbling to herself. "Three boxes... in the story, the Monkey King attacked the Demon three times before she was finally defeated, and this must not be any different..."

“Two of these boxes contain weapons, which I will use on you - ” she seemed pleased at the look of terror on their faces - “if you unfortunately happen to choose them. One contains your friend, who - ”

Chun-kit cut her off. “She’s not in any of them. I know it.”

“The Monkey King’s Fiery Golden Eyes,” Kashiko whispered in awe. “They can see through any disguise!”

Miss Bai narrowed her eyes at him, though she appeared to be averting his gaze. “Of course she is. And if you don’t hurry, she might just die of suffocation.” Her lips formed into a sly smile.

“Not if you die first!” In a sudden motion, Chun-kit reached for one of the boxes and forced it open. In it was a long, gold-tipped staff (“The Monkey King’s Golden Staff!” Kashiko gasped in amazement), which he immediately swung at Miss Bai, who dodged it by millimeters; Chun-kit wasted no time and proceeded to strike her with the staff again, and it was a hair’s breadth away from hitting her head when -

“DON’T KILL HER!”

Xiaolan came running out of nowhere, surprising everyone for a split second. It wasn’t long before Miss Bai realized what had happened and lunged at her - and immediately fell back in pain. A radiant, golden light seemed to be emitting from Xiaolan, whose eyes were closed, mouth moving rapidly as she chanted something under her breath -

“Xuanzang was a Buddhist monk - he knew a lot of demon-repelling sutras in the story!” Kashiko exclaimed. Sure enough, the White Bone Demon seemed to be fading into nothingness as Xiaolan continued reciting the sutra - but when she finally disappeared, the basement evaporated into nothingness along with her.

“You guys were amazing back there,” Connor beamed, when they had finally recovered from the shock of what had happened.

“Maybe we are the reincarnations of the characters,” Xiaolan mused. “Our powers must be awakening.”

“Wonder what kind of cool powers I’ll have, then?” Connor wondered aloud. “Maybe,” he eyed Chun-kit, “I’ll have awesome X-ray vision like you.”

“Judging from how much you love food, you must be Pigsy’s reincarnation,” Kashiko giggled. “Yeah, of course you’ll have super-cool powers.”

Connor looked beyond disappointed.

A Puppet to Glory

St Paul's Convent School, Chan, April - 12

Justice will prevail in the end.

Karma is kind.

Everyone was born to serve a purpose for the greater good. Unless, of course, your name is the White Bone Demon.

I don't look back. I don't stop running when my chest tightens and my lungs seem to fill up with fire. I only stop running when I trip and fall on the cold, hard ground. Then, I get up, breathing heavily, and run some more.

I don't stop until I reach my 'lair', a small cave atop a lonesome hill. I enter, and collapse on the worn-down armchair that I never bothered to mend.

Stupid monkey. Stupid, cursed, wretched little monkey. Why did Xuanzang the monk have to have such a good bodyguard?

But I can't give up. I need the flesh of that monk, as badly as he needs...whatever those scriptures are called. I don't care.

My parents are the King and Queen of the demons, creatures of the night, bringers of destruction and misery. Our divine nature is literally bloodlust. We feed on flesh and gore, we hunt humans or one another for sport.

I once knew I was different. I was not a mindless brute, I was rational. I reasoned things out. I was different, but not anymore. Now, all I am is a savage, indifferent from the rest.

My first act of treason was caring for a wounded robin I found in the park.

That was back when I was six. Father told me to leave it be, but I refused. I could not bear to see it in agony. I treated his wounds and kept him for about a month. That is, until one of my brothers gutted it like a fish.

My second act of betrayal was not reporting a break-in, and not murdering the culprit.

I really don't know why travellers are so obsessed with my cave. Sure, I do keep my grandfather's dagger inside it, but that's the only thing that's actually worth any money at all, because last I checked, no one will buy an old, broken carpet on eBay.

Anyway, some archaeologist broke in, claiming that my modest little cave was the Lost Temple of Pu-Zao the goddess, and that I was keeping the priceless Goblet of Gidiar for myself. His friends came later to apologise and tell me that he was drunk. I accepted their apology, and offered them some tea, which I should have poisoned, according to Father.

The final blow was refusing to steal.

Once again, I do not know why my cave is so fascinating. I deliberately left rotting pig intestines outside it to ward off others. But people still came in.

A god paid me a visit. He gave me a huge bouquet of roses to 'block out the bad smell', but both him and I know otherwise. He flirted. He said that I was cute when I was angry. By the gods, I was thirteen, and I was completely disinterested in dating someone. Plus, he was a god, and gods tended to have more wives than you can count.

When he left, he left behind a short staff. I knew the staff was the source of his power, with it, I could gain powers way beyond my imagination. I could be powerful if I used it. But I didn't. I think my morals told me to return the staff, and I went all the way up to the

heavenly kingdom to return it.

When Father found out, he was livid. “Think of all the power!”

I did, but it didn’t matter. Mother started ignoring me because I could have made her immortal and eternally beautiful. And Father was worse. He’d found out that his precious, priceless little princess was a rebel. And boy, was he mad. He just didn’t believe that a demon could be so full of morals.

That day was the worst day of my life. That was the day he whipped me.

If you tell me to recount, I can tell the whole story, in full and merciless detail, how badly the beating stung. But it’s of little importance now.

I realised to impress my parents, I had to ditch my morals and forget anything about the world being fair. I had to get them something more valuable than the staff. And so I sought the flesh of the monk Xuanzang, whose flesh can give immortality and eternal youth.

Xuan is a clueless ike, accompanied by a naïve pig, Clueless Ike 2.0, and that Monkey King who’s evidently bananas (excuse my satire), on a quest to find...I forgot what those scriptures were called.

I tried two times to kidnap Xuan. First, I transformed into a village girl and offered the four poisoned fruits. The Monkey saw through my trick, and almost killed me with that staff of his. I barely escaped with my life.

Just now, I have tried a second time. I transformed into an old lady, claiming to be the mother of the girl I was. I’m not a good liar, I didn’t train like my brothers and sisters. I think it was obvious that I was lying.

And yet again, I almost got killed by that wretched monkey. I ran and left behind a corpse, to here, my lair, my cave, my lone source of comfort.

I stand up, ditch my disguise, and walk into the cracked mirror in the corner. I look, but flinch and turn away almost immediately.

I look...fierce. I don’t recognise myself anymore. The dark bags under my eyes have started to show under the thick layer of makeup I applied. Nothing hides my anger and frustration. I look deathly pale, and even though demons are supposed to be pale, I look like I could just fade into the wall that I hastily painted white. My hair is out of the elaborate bun I put it in, and is flying all over my face, my neck, my shoulders.

People used to tell me that my eyes shone, but I can’t find the familiar glint in my eyes any more. My eyes are like stones, jaded, dull, unpolished, utter black.

Is this me? Because this isn’t me. I am not a monster.

Or rather, I was not a monster. But I am as good as one now.

I was a sweet and innocent little demon. As pleasant as someone can get. A demon-child who tried to save a robin, protected small animals, and fainted at the sight of blood. And now?

I am a monster. I am sin. I am trying to kill a man simply because he is magical.

I can’t control this. I can’t change even if I wanted to. I will kill him. I will deceive that monk, and mangle him with my bare hands. I will make that monkey into a marionette and give it to my little sister.

I, the White Bone Demon, will accept the monster that I am, and embrace it with open arms. And no one can stop me from this kill, because no one can beat my determination.

Let him kill me. Let all this madness end silently and peacefully.

There’s nothing left. I loved and was loved by no one, no one will miss me when I go. Let him try to break me, because there’s nothing left to break. I honestly thought I could do it, but of course, I was wrong. I’m a failure. A wimp, a coward and a nobody. I accomplished

nothing but mistakes. No one will remember me. No one would give a damn if I died. No one.

The Monkey King raises his staff. “If you’ve got last words, you might as well say them now.”

“I love no one, I have no one to bid farewell to. Father, curse you. I hope you die a long and painful death. You too, Monkey King.”

The Monkey smirks. “Good.”

Small comfort rushes through me as he brings the staff smashing down on my head. This is over. This is finally over. After years of fighting, this is what I want...right?

There’s silence, only broken by my ragged breathing. Then, everything melts together and fades into nothingness.

Peace and calmness is all I register, aside from a small, echoing ring in my ears, and my heart, oh my heart, making blood surge through my veins slower and slower with every breath I take.

Hello, tranquility, my old friend. It’s been so long.

Justice will prevail in the end.

Karma is kind.

Everyone was born to serve a purpose for the greater good.

The Pilgrimage

St Paul's Convent School, Kumar, Kareena Kayla Ordonez - 12

“No mortal has ever survived.”

“I would rather die going to the West than live by staying in the East,” the monk said. “You can’t possibly be thinking about undertaking an overland expedition. Not with the ban against foreign travels issued by Emperor Taizong himself.”

“I need better translations,” the monk lifted a scroll of paper. “what they mean.”

“You mean to tell me that you are leaving the Jingtu Temple to obtain Buddhist scriptures because Guanyin commanded you to do so in your dream?”

“Yes, and I’m leaving tonight.” the monk said firmly.

The Sun descended between the mountains of Wuwei. Xuanzang looked down at the semi-deserted land of ruins and howling wind, waiting for the lit household candles and lanterns to be blown out. When it was dark, he fled into the shadows of the Silk Road.

It had been days since the monk set off for his quest. He soon came across a thick mist, blocking his path. He was about to turn around and head back home when he saw a faint glimmering light through the fog. Curious, he stepped into the haze and followed the light. It led him to a luminous mountain. As he approached the mountain, he heard a chant from underneath: Five hundred years, Buddha interferes, only a pilgrim can save me from here. “Who’s there?” Xuanzang called, but was met with silence. Suddenly, the ground began to shake, carvings appeared on the soil. I’ll make you a deal, and to you I shall kneel, but only if you redeem the golden seal. Having read this, Xuanzang hesitated for he had nothing but a walking staff but decided to climb up anyways. The air was thin when he reach the top. A golden seal sat on the mountain’s cap. Cautiously, Xuangzang walked towards it, reaching out for the seal. The plateau started to tremble as soon as he touch the seal. Stones and rocks began to fall into the ravine and he began to tremble himself. Cracks appeared from one side to another on the plateau ground. He looked up to the tip of the mountain and noticed it starting to fracture in half. A flash of light bolted from the mountain into the sky. The momentum of the light was so powerful, it knocked him unconscious.

The debris started to settle and Xuanzang began to regain his consiousnes. He struggled to adjust to the light but saw a silhouette of a figure twice his size facing him. “Where am I? And who,” he blinked his eyes a few times. “What are you?” A disembodied voice answered him. “You are in the Mount Huaguo, the land of flowers and fruits” As soon as the words were said, the fractured mountain restructured itself into a beautiful landscape. Flowers sprouted from the soil, and vibrant-coloured fruits grew on branches. A waterfall appeared from a gap in the mountain, flowing into the lake below. “And I am Sun Wukong. The Monkey King, the Keeper of Horses and the Great Sage Equal to Heaven.” Sun Wukong looked like he expected some sort of recognition from Xuanzang. But the monk stood there, with a shocked expression on his face, debating whether or not he should run away or kill the creature. But before he could make up mind, Sun Wukong said, “I have been banished underneath the mountain for the last five hundred years. And only a mortal is able to free me. You, brave and young pilgrim, have released me from my prison.” Prison? Only bad guys get trapped in prison. Did I release a fugitive? Or worse, a demon? Xuanzang thought to himself. “And to express my gratitude, I will offer you anything you wish to desire.” Upon hearing

this, Xuanzang reconsidered and said, “You will be my disciple to my pilgrimage to India.” The monkey agreed and the two set off for the journey to the West.

On their way, Xuanzang couldn’t help but ask a few questions that lingered in his head. “If you don’t mind my asking, why exactly were you banished?” “Half a century ago, I became guardian of the heavenly peach garden. The peaches bestow immortality to those who eat them. Since I was undefeatable at that time, I was greedy and ate all the peaches.” He continued. “The Buddha intervened and trapped me beneath the mountain.” “Is that who gave you that metal ring?” Xuanzang asked, pointing to his head. “No, it was placed around my head by the Goddess of Mercy, Guanyin,” he explained. As he said that, the clouds formed some writing in the sky. “Om Rim Jim, Om Rim Jim,” Xuanzang read. As he said the chant, the metal ring around Sun Wukong’s head began to tighten. He saw the monkey trying to resist the discomfort. When the ring resumed to its original size, the monkey told Xuanzang, “By chanting, you are able to tighten the ring whenever you must chastise me if I am violent or out of control.”

After a few hours later, the pair realized that they were running short of food. The bodhisattva, Guanyin appeared. “Go to the village in the west region. You will go to the house of a man surnamed “Gao” where you will find a creature of half-human, half-pig monstrosity. Then you will go further to Flowing Sands River where you will find a spirit. You two are to defeat both of them.” When they arrived at the village, they talked to the patriarch. “Three years ago, a good-looking man showed up asking for my youngest daughter’s hand in marriage. I agreed, but the man turned out to be a shape shifting pig demon instead,” the patriarch confirmed. “Even though the pig demon is a hardworking man, he is not attractive and possessive. All I really want is my daughter back, and for the demon to not be affiliated with me or his family anymore.” So they came up with a plan. Sun Wukong rescued the patriarch’s daughter and shape-shifted to look like her while waiting for the demon to return. When the demon returned, Sun Wukong revealed himself and defeated the pig. The pig was commissioned by Guanyin to join them on their pilgrimage. There was a long period of silence but the pig broke it by saying, “I’m Zhu Bajie, by the way,” he sighed. “Oh, how I wish being immortal, and Marshall of the Heavenly Canopy.” “What happened?” Xuanzang asked. “I was banished to the mortal world after a failed attempt of seducing Chang’e, the Moon Goddess.”

When they arrived at Flowing Sands River, they realized that they were unable to fight the river spirit underwater. At first, Zhu Bajie attempted to lure the demon out of the water. But when that failed, they called upon the merciful Guanyin to intercede on their behalf. She called the river spirit Sha Wujing and revealed that she had previously enlisted him as Xuanzang’s third disciple. Xuanzang and his disciples set foot in an eerie forest whereupon things immediately went wrong. Zhu Bajie went missing looking for food and Sun Wukong went looking for him. Xuanzang entered a pagoda to light incense and pray but woke up a sleeping demon and got captured and tied up. He saw a young lady walking towards him. “Hello? Who’s there?” His voice echoed. “I am the demon’s wife, he kidnapped me.” “Can you help me?” the monk asked. “I will help you in exchange for you delivering the news of my whereabouts to my family in the West,” she replied. She gave Xuanzang a letter and convinced her husband to leave the disciples alone so that they could continue westward. Soon they came across the kingdom where the young maiden was stolen from. They deliver the letter to the king, who asked for volunteers to save his daughter. Both Sun Wukong and Zhu Bajie set off to save the princess, leaving Xuanzang. A few moments later, the same demon Xuanzang encountered in the forest appeared in the king’s court. He transformed

himself into an attractive man and spun a story. “Your Grandness, before I married your daughter, I saw a shape-shifting tiger threatening the princess.” He proceeded.”So I saved her. I married her because she never told me she was a princess.” Suddenly, he pointed to Xuanzang and created an illusion around him to make him look like the tiger monster. With this, the king locked up Xuanzang and his disciples.

The four of them were imprisoned, hopeless, trapped. They did what the only thing they could do: Meditate. They sat in a circle with their eyes lightly closed. They began chanting and reciting prayers. Their souls were transported to the heavens, where they received enlightenment. Sha Wujing became an arhat, which gave him a higher level of exultation hat Zhu Bajiewho was relegated to cleaning every altar for eternity. Xuanzang and Sun Wukong were granted buddhahood. The scriptures appeared in front of them, slowly dissolving back to the East.

New Journeys to the West

St. Paul's Co-educational College, Lam, Justin - 14

A bell tolled in the distance as the rays of the rising sun bathed the hill in golden light. A young monk stood before a shrine, head bowed.

"I will finish what you started, Master Xuanzang," he said, face set with determination. He shouldered his bag and walked out of the pagoda, casting one last look at the tomb of the legendary monk.

Zhizhou was a fourth-generation monk in Xuanzang's temple. He had been personally instructed by Emperor Xuanzong of Tang to bring precious texts back from the West, and he didn't intend to fail. First, he needed allies, and he knew exactly where to find them.

A bedraggled monk was led into the throne room, ushered in by monkeys in armor. The situation would be funny if it weren't for the massive axes in their hands. A broad-shouldered monkey with golden fur stood in the center of the room, his back facing Zhizhou.

"You wished to see me? Why are you here?" the Monkey King asked, though it sounded like an order. The very words seemed to penetrate Zhizhou's being, wresting the answer from his mouth.

"I am Zhizhou. I'm here to ask you to join me in a new pilgrimage to the West," Zhizhou said, his voice shaking in apprehension. "The documents could provide new insights into stopping the mounting chaos in our empire."

Sun Wukong turned, eyes shining like molten gold. Zhizhou stepped back a little.

"The Tang dynasty is beyond help now, young one. No amount of magic or Buddhist texts can save it."

Zhizhou blinked in confusion. "I thought you went on the first Journey to the West! I thought you would -"

Wukong laughed hollowly. "Help? Decades of watching a nation fall to ruin can turn the most starry-eyed idealist into a cynic. Xuanzang is long gone. You will never save the dynasty. Take a leaf from my book and stay out of this. There's no point in risking your life for nothing."

Zhizhou left without a word. As he trudged down the mountain, even the birdsong around him sounded mocking and cruel.

The Gao village was run-down and dilapidated, the result of years of neglect. The distant sound of pots smashing could be heard. Zhizhou made his way towards the house at the far end of the road. He pushed the rotting wooden door open, ducking as a wine pot nearly decapitated him.

"Who is it?" An anthropomorphic pig stood up, swaying drunkenly, his speech slurred. "Who dares to disturb me?"

Zhizhou chose his words carefully. “Master Zhu Bajie, I am Zhizhou. I’m here to ask for your help in a journey to the West –” He stepped aside, narrowly avoiding another pot.

“I will not be bothered with earthly matters!” Bajie squealed in anger. “I have earned the right to relax! You are trespassing!”

Zhizhou lost his temper. “I thought you were supposed to be a deity!” he yelled, face red from shouting. “Instead, I see a pig that has no aim in life other than getting drunk! The fate of our dynasty hangs in the balance, and all you can do is indulge yourself. Very well. I will make the journey myself. You can stay here and wallow.”

Zhu Bajie watched in a stunned silence as Zhizhou strode away into the distance. He stumbled back into his house, tripping and falling flat on his face. For the first time in many years, he picked up his rake.

Zhizhou stood at the bank of a raging river, leaning back a little as the spray stung his skin. He was deliberating on what to do next. The river was too deep to swim across, and in any case, he would be washed away. It stretched for many kilometers, and there was no bridge. He stamped his foot in frustration. He was starting to wonder if Sun Wukong was actually right. After all, I am just a young monk, he told himself.

The murky water boiled suddenly, surging up the riverbanks. Zhizhou retreated to safety as the river parted, revealing a monstrous demon. A grisly necklace of skulls circled his neck, and a formidable-looking spade was clasped in the demon’s hand.

“What brings you here, young traveler?” the demon asked. He sounded kindly and sympathetic, entirely out of phase with his appearance.

Somehow, Zhizhou mustered the courage to answer, recounting the events of the past months. The demon laughed, shaking his head in amusement.

“What’s the matter?” Zhizhou asked out of curiosity, despite himself.

The demon grinned. “As luck would have it, I may be one of the most qualified people to help you with your mission. I am Sha Wujing, the third disciple of Master Xuanzang. Where do we start, young Master Zhizhou?”

Zhizhou was taken aback by Wujing’s generosity. He stuttered for a few seconds before managing to reply. “You... you want to help?”

“Of course! Why wouldn’t I?” He seemed genuinely puzzled.

“It’s... it’s just that Wukong and Bajie both rejected my pleas for help,” Zhizhou said. Hope flared in his heart. Here was someone who was willing to aid him.

Before he could continue, Wujing tensed. “Something’s wrong. The birds have stopped singing.”

“That would be because of me,” a deep voice boomed. Standing on the other side of the river was a gargantuan white bull, its eyes glowing like embers. Around its hooves, the grass smoldered and shriveled.

“Run, Zhizhou!” Wujing yelled. “Run! It’s the Bull Demon King! I’ll hold him off!”

Zhizhou turned to flee, but the bull took a running jump, leaping over the river effortlessly. It changed form in mid-air, landing in front of him as a horned warrior in elaborate black armor, which was ragged and torn in several places. Zhizhou’s heart skipped a beat. The demon sauntered over to him and gestured. Black cords whipped around him, sending him crashing to the ground.

“It’s been a long time since we last met, Wujing!” the demon called, his jovial tone

contrasting with the murderous glint in his eyes. “I thought I’d start with the weakest link in the chain.”

Wujing raised his spade and charged, but was knocked back with a sword thrust. The demon left a deep wound in his shoulder and kicked him down.

“Once, I could have taken on the armies of heaven! Now, I’m reduced to attacking river spirits, and my painful imprisonment in the Celestial Palace was all because of your little team.”

His speech was cut short when a two-hundred-pound pig crashed on top of him. Zhu Bajie straightened up, pinning the demon down with his rake.

“Sorry it took so long,” he said. “I got dragged into a fight along the way.”

The Bull Demon King snarled in rage and rose, backhanding Bajie and sending him stumbling away. Wujing struggled to his feet, hefting his spade. Though the two fought valiantly, they were no match for the demon king. Wujing was quickly dealt with when he got stomped into the earth, creating a meter-deep crater. Bajie swung his rake, but the demon turned back into a bull and rammed him into the side of the hill.

“You’re out of practice. You’re even weaker than the last time we fought, which really is saying something,” the bull mocked.

He changed back into human form, lightly resting his sword against Bajie’s throat. He threw his head back and laughed, a mirthless sound that sent shivers down Zhizhou’s spine. Before he could move, however, the demon was carried backwards into a thorn bush on the tip of an extending staff. Sun Wukong was holding the other end, eyes blazing brighter than ever before.

“Is it too late to join the party?” Wukong asked, his staff shortening to normal proportions.

The Bull Demon King roared in defiance, rushing forward with swords extended. He never reached Wukong. The monkey casually poked him with the staff, knocking him down, then again and again as the demon tried to get to his feet.

“It’s over. Surrender now, and I’ll spare you the pain.” Wukong said, contempt evident in his voice.

“You’re a fool if you think you have won,” the Bull Demon King said, his tone taking on an ominous certainty. “As the dynasty descends into chaos, forgotten evils will rise against the mortal world and heavens alike, and you will be powerless against them. The Age of Demons is coming. You cannot avert it.”

Sun Wukong raised his staff to strike, but the demon vanished into black smoke, which drifted away on the wind. Zhizhou’s bindings dissolved into thin air. Wukong helped him up, beaming broadly.

“Thanks,” he gasped, rubbing his back. “I owe you.”

“Don’t mention it. I’m indebted to you. You opened my eyes to my folly. It’s been a while since I saw someone with the kind of faith you possess.”

They smiled at each other.

Four figures could be seen heading off into the sunset, carrying the hopes of the Tang dynasty with them.

New Journeys to the West

St. Paul's Convent School, Tsui, Lok Shan Bridget - 14

The sun was beginning to rise. The golden yellow sphere peeked through the mountains, its amber rays illuminating the slowly brightening Nalanda. A silvery mist draped over the sky that was slowly brightening to a pastel blue. Streaks of light pink and blazing orange tinted the sky, stroke overlapping stroke, weaving together a mesmerizing picture. I panted heavily, exhaling swirls of white mist as I took a last few steps. As I stood on the top of the mountain, the soft ethereal light of dawn washed over me as the cold wind whipped at my face, wreaking havoc with my hair, I realized I had already arrived. A small smile crept onto my face, swiftly becoming a full-blown grin. “You did it! You did it, Lynn.” I turned around to see the panting brown-eyed boy beside me, grinning as his bangs fell all over his sweat-covered forehead.

I looked down at the Nalanda University ruins from on top of the mountain. Brick stacked on brick, constructing the dusty, reddish-brown building. If you got in close, you would have seen the intricate detail carved on the stones. It seemed ancient, even dilapidated, but I could see, as if very before my own eyes, scenes of eager students, hanging onto the teachers’ every word, quenching their never-ending thirst for knowledge. A sense of hiraeth suddenly overwhelmed me. I knew, deep down, not even a school, I never even had a home to turn to.

My childhood wasn’t exactly normal for most people. I remembered being shunned to the side in the orphanage, all because of my mixed blood – meaning that I was only half Chinese. Being a half Chinese, others looked down on me, people who adopted looked past me, and orphans looked away from me. The only one that accepted me was an old woman, a storyteller in the orphanage. I can still recall her appearance, as if it is a photo printed in my mind. She had greying hair, always tied into a loose bun. Wrinkles and scars on her face spoke loudly of the adventurous stories she had in the West. Her black eyes always twinkled full of excitement and vigor.

She treated me as if I was her granddaughter, and indeed I called her ‘Nai Nai’. She used to tell me extraordinary spellbinding adventures of journeys to the West, about the magical encounters of Xuan Zang the monk, and also how she disregarded her family’s disapproval and started her very own wild adventures of the west to the Nalanda University in search of pure knowledge. At that time, I was the happiest.

Then it all changed. One day, she was gone. I was already eighteen, an adult, and I knew what that meant – she was never coming back again. But I remembered her words – “Lynn, failure isn’t the end of the world. Giving up is. Go and start your adventure, and you will learn, much more than embroidery and women’s work.” I was lost. Confused. So I chose to escape, and escaped into the mythical stories and enchanting places I’ve had always yearned to go. I started my own new journey to the West.

It wasn’t easy. To get to Nalanda, Xuanzang encountered all kinds of bizarre yet treacherous magical dangers. I found that it was just as hard, except excluding the magic. For countless days I trekked through tedious paths, mud lands, dry areas, and forests, slipping and sliding, falling innumerable times. I seemed to always wake up on the same day: I wake up in the morning, full of energy to start a new day. Then I would walk on the infinite dry

and hard land until my feet hurt. Too tired to notice, I would accidentally step into a muddy pond, leaving my trousers wet. Walking through wet muddy lands, I would reach a point where I was too tired to walk, and sit down against a tree to rest. Thus the second, third, fourth and fifth day.

Just as I thought it couldn't get worse, I encountered thieves. It was actually a good day where no grimy puddles blocked my way. I was walking through the forest when I found everything very quiet. Very, very quiet. In fact, too quiet. Everything seemed to be holding its' breath. The wind even stopped. Cautiously, I took a little step forward and heard a twig break with a big snap. "Now, now, what would a pretty young girl like you be doing in a dirty forest here?" a rough, snide voice rang out behind me. I whirled around to see three sneering young men seemingly of about 20 years old, brandishing roughly hewn clubs. My originally fluttering heart began to beat thunderously in my chest. My hands full of sweat and slipping on my improvised makeshift weapon, a stick used for helping me walk after the slippery fiasco just the day before. They filled the gap between us in just a few large strides and before I could even react, everything was black. I woke up in an unfamiliar village. After a whole lot of explaining, I found out that the villagers saved me just about when they were going to snatch my belongings and brought me back to their village. Which was good. And the bad news that always follows is that now I was off track. In other words, I had to use double the time to catch up. I was utterly exhausted by now. I never seemed to see the ending of the path, the rising of the sun, the boundary of my destination. I started to feel despair, and questioned my decision. Then I met him.

I met him on yet another day of torturous journeying. I stumbled across a campfire and he was taking a rest there. We were like-minded, and soon we became fast friends. He... is quite the optimist. He always told me, "No matter what you encounter, what you meet; no matter how many times you failed, how many times you feel everything is lost, if you don't give up, you will succeed." I was about to give up when he asked me, looking puzzled, "Then, what did you journey so long for?" it seemed to stir something within me. Images of painting Xuanzang's journey to the West with Nai Nai flashed before me. "Go, and start your adventure..." her words echoed again and again in my foggy mind. I heard a sweet, childish voice saying loudly what I promised her. "A new generation, a new journey..." I muttered. My heart picked up pace again. "Yes..." I breathed, "Yes! Thank you, thank you!" He supported me, stuck with me through thick and thin – when I was tired, he would encourage me; when I felt down, he would support me. Slowly, I picked up hope again, and I finally reached my destination.

Looking at the soft glowing rays of the sun which cast on the dusty ochre paths, I finally realized that no matter wherever I went, no matter how many journeys I embarked on, I was no longer lost, no longer homeless. Because wherever he was with me, I would be home.

"Come on, you've been staring at the ruins for minutes now," gently, he took my hands, his chocolate brown eyes full of concern, scanning my face for any sign of something wrong. I turned to the brown-eyed boy beside me and smiled.

"Come on, let's go."

A Sacrificial Death

The Independent Schools Foundation Academy, Wong, Ariel - 11

The following passage is from a translated, recently uncovered manuscript. It was written in Chinese, and found under strange circumstances. It was found at the bottom of the Mediterranean, yet still, unexpectedly, intact.

Long jump, pole vault... Possibly the easiest sports ever created for monkeys. But leaping into a monster, killing it? Possibly not the easiest activities ever created for monkeys.

Even as a monkey, jumping 50 feet into the air and landing on a moving target is not as easy as expected. But since I'm the Monkey King, *of course*, I successfully did it. That is, if you don't count the breaking of every bone in my left leg...

Breathlessly limping, I scrambled up the trunk of Makara. Barely audible over the sea monster's screeching, Xuanzang tried to call on the powers of the gods as a distraction. I honestly don't think I would need a distraction though. I'm agiler than any of the other gods, even as a mortal! Also, all I *really* needed to do was jump on a 40 feet tall sea monster's elephant trunk, and not on the seal tail that is sloshing around in the water uncontrollably. Right? Oh, and did I mention that the sea monster had teeth that were the size of actual swords? I wonder if someone was attempting to fight it but instead jabbed in two double-edged swords in the place of where Makara's teeth should be... I'd ask Ganga later.

Focus. I scolded myself. Xuanzang is depending on you. Even if you don't want eternal revenge from Ganga. Hmm... I wonder if— FOCUS!

Eventually, I clambered up onto Makara's head. Wishing that monsters with elephant heads don't cross their eyes, I glanced down at Xuanzang. He began chanting. I chanted along with him. Immediately, the sea started churning all around us. Drops of seafoam splattered on our faces, the scent of the ocean drifted into my nostrils, yet we could not afford to get distracted. The ocean raised, creating a whirlwind. In the middle of all the swirling, sat Xuanzang and me, continuously chanting. The ocean shifted and shifted, shaping objects and ideas that happened to be in my mind, reenacting scenes from my memory, imitating my closest friends.

Now. Xuanzang signaled to me calmly. The ocean is prepared to move to every one of my commands. He stared chillingly into my eyes. For the first time, I realized that he had mismatching eyes. One red as blood, the other gold as... Well, gold. Though this time, his eyes were filled with mist. I knew what he intended to do.

No! Xuanzang! Don't do it! Don't transfer all your energy to me! It will drain you! You will... Well, die! I screamed at him through the mind desperately.

He looked back at me, calm as ever, as if this wasn't a life or death situation. *You know you need all that energy to defeat Makara. You know that defeating Makara always involves a sacrifice. You know that. Don't argue, Hanuman. Let it be me.*

"Right. Don't argue." I gritted my teeth and muttered under my breath. "I'll find a way, without arguing, to keep you alive."

I had won a BGA (Best God Actor) Oscar award before, and it's too easy to fool Xuanzang, so I pretended to sulk as I shaped the ocean into Kharga, the legendary sword of Kali. That's when Xuanzang started sending me his energy. I can feel my heart beating faster, my left leg mending itself, my blood overflowing with adrenaline. I've never felt like

this since I was born. I feel... I feel the mischief was coming back to me, returning to its birthplace. With all this energy, I can defeat anyone in single combat. With the control of the ocean, I can destroy the whole planet! With both, I can rule the world! All this power! And I can do anything, *anything*, with it! Tha— No. *That wasn't you. You were acting like a hypocrite who is overly enthusiastic about ruling the world with Michael Jackson dance moves. Quit it. I guess all this time with a "very focused" companion helped me focus too.*

Instead, I used all that energy to build a wall. To build a wall that stops other energy from coming in. Xuanzang realized what was going on, and forced harder. Yet the harder he pushed, the more energy I sacrifice for the wall. Unfortunately, none of us realized that, and none of us are willing to give in. We kept pushing. Until we realized. But it was too late. I'm drained of energy again. But this time, both of us are.

You know that defeating Makara always involves a sacrifice. I can't help it. I keep repeating what Xuanzang said as I drive the sword into Makara's forehead with my remaining strength, which isn't a lot. *You know that defeating Makara always involves a sacrifice.* I've decided that, even without energy, I'll still slay Makara. I need to protect humanity. *You know that defeating Makara always involves a sacrifice.* Part of me wants to argue back and say that he was wrong, nobody needed to die, but part of me knew he's right. Like always. *Just like he said, there's no point arguing. I do know that defeating Makara always involves a sacrifice.* The deeper I drive the sword, the more Makara struggles against me. It bucks and kicks and swings and spins, but I still held on against all odds. *Defeating Makara always involves a sacrifice.* Suddenly, Makara stopped struggling. He seemed to settle down. He seemed to just lie down on the ocean floor. Forever. Relaxing on the seabed. Just when I drove the sword deep enough for it to puncture the brain, Makara jerked up abruptly and bucked with his remaining energy. *Defeating Makara always involves a sacrifice, even when you don't believe it's necessary.* I couldn't hold on any longer.

I let go.

I sank deeper,
deeper,
deeper.

Flowing calmly to the ocean floor.

Dead.

Finally.

After all those millennia of living... Finally dead.

Well, not necessarily *dead*. More *similar to, dying*. Am I right?

Drowning to the bottom of the ocean, slowly choking and running out of breath. Ahh! What a wonderful way to die. Gradually, you'll get accustomed to inhaling sea water, and possibly, even enjoy it! If you didn't catch that, it was *sarcasm*.

You know how people say their life flashes right before their eyes right before they die? Well... it doesn't exactly happen for me. Or maybe because I'm not born a mortal, I don't die a mortal death. Depressing, as how no one ever expected the great god of mischief, captain of the monkey army to pass away like *this*.

Oh, wow! Xuanzang is still shouting, trying to find me! I've expected him to give up already. I guess, learning focus from a monk, forces a monk to learn resilience and grit from me.

Stop. It's no good, I mentally assure him. I've died to do a heroic deed and that's all I need. Hey! That rhymes by the way!

“NO! This is life! And death! How can you still joke around, let alone think of rhymes in a situation like this?!” He shouted. “You’ve h-helped me s-s-so much... You d-don’t d-deserve th-this! I’ll-I’ll make them p-pay!” His speech softened into a whisper. Tears streamed down his face as his knees buckled. He fell against the rails, his body wracked by sobs. He stared into the distance, the blood draining from his cheeks, the color fading from his eyes. He let out a wordless cry, awakening every soul in the heavens.

“That you would be dead...” His voice trailed away. He didn’t think that it was possible to cry so much, reliving all he had been through in his mind.

Xuanzang. Xuanzang. I said, shaking him from his stupor. No. Don't cry. At least I've slain Makara. And it's not life and death anymore, for I've chosen death. It'll only be a few minutes before my heart stops beating, my blood stops flowing, my lungs stop inhaling, my brain stops functioning, and my soul stops existing. I've been cast down as a mortal for a reason, Xuanzang. To aid you to success. Even if I die along the way, at least I've pleased the gods. Now go. Stay in Djibouti for another 2 days before sailing to Egypt. My spirit will aid you against the odds one last time. One last time, for you to finish your journey to the west.

Xuanzang half-hiccuffed, half-sobbed, “V-very well. I-I trust you. You will be the best Monkey King there ever was.”

As he sailed away, he stared at the spot I leaped, attacked, killed, and died. He would not look away. He would allow all the guilt, all the grief, all the anger, all the desolation to flow over him. He would accept fate. Just like I taught him to.

A Monk's Mistake

West Island School, Green, Leia - 13

Days away from Yu Lin monastery:

0

“No. I forbid it.”

The Abbot hobbled ahead of the monk, his bare feet calloused and sore on the stone floor. Ming exhaled a labored breath and paced forward.

“Superior. Please, let me do this. I want to follow in His steps. I must see the world.”

He glanced up to the sky, grimacing as he lied. He was a lousy monk, always breaking the rules.

A sudden loud burst of laughter broke the cloud of silence that had started to gather.

Ming turned to see the abbot chuckling, his wrinkles dancing foolishly on his forehead.

“Superior?” Ming questioned, puzzled by his amusement.

The laughter subsided. The Abbot looked away and clicked his tongue. His eyes soon met Ming's again,

“Fine. But travelling to India, Ming? Leaving your brothers and this monastery. It's just not like you, that's all. I wish you back in five years. Five years, Ming. One more thing. You are still young, so come back alive.”

Overjoyed, Ming clasped the Abbot's hand.

“I shall be gone by mid-afternoon. Thank you Superior. Thank you.”

The Abbot winked and gestured for the young man to leave.

As he walked to his room, Ming cherished each step. The sensation of the cold, stone floor under his feet was one he would never forget – after all, this had been his home for 20 years. Kneeling down, Ming clumsily rolled up his sleeping mat with his long, bony fingers. He was giddy with excitement at the prospect of the adventure that lay in front of him. ‘India.’ He thought. The birthplace of the enlightened Buddha and Ming's dreams. Ming gathered his sparse belongings, threw them into a woven sack and, with that, and that only, he left.

Days away from Yu Lin monastery:

235

The hacking thwacks of Ming's blunt blade slicing through the greenery, seemed to throb and echo in the still atmosphere. The vibrant colors of the jungle jumbled in his head and he collapsed into a nook of protruding roots, exhausted and weeping. His bald head shiny with salty moisture and his cheeks damp with tears, he sat there, soaking up the intense humidity. For the first time in a long time Ming felt a sliver of self-doubt and regret. He thought about the Abbot. Five years, Ming. At this rate his promise would be broken.

Ming closed his almond shaped eyes and rested his spine against the great tree, before

starting to mutter prayers. A sudden rustle disturbed his murmurs. Opening one eye slowly, he perceived a flash of dull orange disappear into the green undergrowth. His breaths distorted as he lowered himself up with quivering hands, his pupils darting from different points as he tried to capture a glimpse of the beast. He backed up against the tree and he waited. Nothing came and nothing happened so the monk let the snapped twig, indented from the pressure of his grip, slip from his sweaty hand. The stick landed with a pat in unison with the undeniable roar of a tiger. The striped animal jumped from out the jungle and crouched, admiring his prey. The monk's eyes widened in a combination of utter fear and shock. He knew there was one thing left to do. He spun past the tree and leapt over the fallen trunk in his path. The colorful cloths he was wearing flew behind him. The beast was gone. He inhaled and smoothed out his robe.

Yun nan province 2113 CE

Cries pierced the night air, as a mother carried her child through the dark. Blood dripped from deep gashes, painting the woman's face scarlet. A victim of an unhappy marriage in a village miles from her childhood home, she was accustomed to pain. She walked onward until they arrived at a worn building, the color of bad cream. The woman looked up and drew a long breath.

"Ming? My child, listen to me."

She stroked the soft outlines of the baby's face, as his eyes lit up at the sound of his mother's voice.

"I must leave you here, my darling. These are kind, good people. They will make you one of their own and comfort you. I need to," tears started to stream down her cheek, "I need to go. I love you baby boy."

Gently, she placed her straw basket on the doorstep, in it was the child. Kneeling down, she pressed her lips on Ming's forehead, marking it with blood.

"I love you."

She disappeared into the night.

Days away from Yu Lin monastery:

439

Ming's sandals slapped the hardened ground, which was cracked from the unrelenting heat. The sun spun blurry blemishes in Ming's sight triggering a migraine, and a wobble in his steady steps. "*I'm done*" he thought,

"I'm done..."his voice was a whimper, caught up in the spontaneous desert wind. He halted, looked up, and lied down, his back burning against the hard skin of the earth. His eyes stayed open, refusing to blink, wanting to capture every last breathing moment. Ming inhaled and exhaled, his hands clasping the Indian dust.

"I am ready," He whispered to the sky.

"I am here."

Days away from Yu lin monastery:

441

The smell of smoke clouded Ming's nostrils as he awoke. Resting a shaking hand on his chest, he watched it move up and down with the rhythmic beat of his heart. A tear rolled down his sagging cheek.

"I am alive."

He laughed. Loudly. He laughed the loudest he ever had in his life. It was agony, but he did anyway.

"I AM ALIVE!"

Joy pushed up against his insides, but he was shocked into silence when his eyes suddenly met those of a woman, whose head was peeking into the tent in which Ming found himself enclosed. She was the color of burnt earth, her flesh little, her skin blemished and scarred. Her hair was a thick, dirty black and her eyes, her eyes were the rare color of amber, stricken and vivid. She was ugly, hideous even, but Ming looked at her and saw nothing but pure beauty. She hesitated, then crouched in, crawling with one hand and knees, with the other hand holding a clay bowl. She placed the bowl in front of Ming.

"*Bhojan. Food.*" She said.

Ming's gaze did not lift from her as she made her way out of the tent.

Dazed, his thoughts stumbled upon each other. How had he arrived here? Had this strange woman dragged him from what felt like the middle of nowhere? He laid still, his lips ajar and his pupils shifting, the same thoughts shuffling through his head.

A wave of sanity finally fell over Ming, making him aware of his surroundings. Some sort of animal hide, held up by a trio of sticks, enclosed him. Pots, clay ones, and misshapen utensils decorated the clay earth floor which was partially covered with a woven rug. A very beautiful woven rug, Ming noted as his eyes finished scanning the small space enveloping him. Hunger drifted upon him and he remembered the food and the woman. "Food first," he thought, "then the woman."

Yun nan province 2113 BC

"Hush, boy." The voice belonged to the hard, broken down hands of the stranger that held the child.

"What kind of a mother leaves their baby on a stranger's doorstep?"

The voice was scratchy and quiet, almost a whisper. It belonged to another man.

"A stupid cow." The baby carrier says. "That's who."

"Are we taking him to the Superior?"

"Of course."

"Now?"

"No, not now! He's asleep. The child will sleep in the stable."

The monk holding the baby had an undesirable disposition, his lips permanently pursed and his mood forever sour. The scratchy voice belonged to a dim witted, but loyal young man.

“But I thought the stables were for horses.”

The baby holder rolled his eyes.

“Yes, horses and children of mothers who are STUPID COWS!”

Days away from Yu lin monastery:

441

Clouds drifted above, covering the sun. Turning his head, Ming squinted as he looked for the woman. Surrounding him was dried earth, stretching on and on, the occasional weed struggling out from its shallow cracks. He circled the tent with slow steps, and saw her, kneeling in front of some kind of pot. Exhaling, Ming walked towards her. He placed his hands together and gently bowed in her direction. A hesitant smile formed on her lips and she returned his bow.

Ming pointed to himself.

“Ming. I, Ming.”

Her mouth twitched.

“M-Ming.”

He nods.

She patted her chest.

“Aafreen.”

Holding out his hand Ming said,

“Aafreen.”

Grinning, she slipped her hand into his.

“Ming.”

Fiction

Group 4



New Journeys to the West

Carmel School Association Elsa High School, Xiang, Scott - 14

Chapter 1 — Inception: Isaac Solomon

I left our city thinking I was ready, fool that I was. Behind us, the silhouette of the city fades against the growing light: a forlorn outline sandwiched between an endless duet of land and sky. As the sun climbs its way to the peak of the sky, we drive past a graveyard of buildings, all of which are torn and heavily weather-worn, many reduced to ghostly frames, yet some with remnants of cement still clung to the skeletal-like structures of these former giants. It awes me to find signs of life clutched in the grips of these ghostly ruins, often existing in forms of gaunt trees or bristly weed. I could've sworn I saw flickers of movement behind crumpled walls and eyes peering from dark crevices as we drove by.

On my side, Adar's eyes were fixed on the road ahead, his arms propped against the steering wheel. Ajax emerges from the back quarters of the landmaster, landing on a seat behind me, tightly fixed on his arms were a set of compound utility armband. Ajax is a kid of fifteen – hot-headed and overly eager only as fifteen-year-olds could be; yet his skills in firearms and martial arts are unparalleled and furthermore, his natural strength and endurance make him a valued player in this game of success or oblivion.

Heading into my quarters located in the abdomen of the moving station (the landmaster), I soon drift off into a light sleep, only to be woken by a jolt in the vehicle. Turned out my 'light sleep' spanned over the course of six hours; I found my team engaged in conversation inside the vehicle cabin. Adar looked half-asleep as I reclaimed my seat beside him, his monotonous voice gracing the cabin for the first time of the day.

"We have arrived at the border of the Gobi desert, I suggest we perform a data collection out here."

"And leave the safety of the landmaster? No way! There is barely any worthwhile data that could be collected out in this wasteland!" Noah argued. Noah is the engineer of the landmaster, a boy of nineteen with extensive knowledge of engineering.

"I share Noah's concerns. The Gobi desert is treacherous with little data to be collected from the old era, there is no need to take unnecessary risks, we shall drive overnight," I told them. "We can collect data once we leave the Gobi."

"I'll take the shift, let Adar rest and continue the drive tomorrow," Ajax said.

"No, the Gobi desert landscape is rugged and treacherous, I will drive," insisted Adar.

"Then we rest through the night and continue tomorrow."

"Agreed."

We started early the next morning. The next three days were long and dull, the heat of the desert sun invading into even the comforts of our landmaster.

LOG ENTRY: Journey across continents

REGISTER: Noah Bolo

Date:	Day:	Statistics	Notes:
04/08/151	1	15:41 of driving Covered distance of current day ≈ 440 miles 440 miles from outpost city: New Mongolia 1345 miles to outpost city: New Tajikistan Terrain: Slightly mountainous	Adar is a resilient driver with adequate skills.
05/08/151	2	16:06 of driving Covered distance of current day ≈ 304 miles 744 miles from outpost city: New Mongolia 1041 miles to outpost city: New Tajikistan Terrain: Rugged and Sandy	Sand dunes and rock formations are all the Gobi have to offer, it would seem.
06/08/151	3	10:05 of driving Covered distance of current day ≈ 178 miles 922 miles from outpost city: New Mongolia 863 miles to outpost city: New Tajikistan Terrain = Rugged and Sandy	The day was cut short, allowing Adar more rest.
07/08/151	4	11:19 of driving Covered distance of current day ≈ 324 miles 1246 miles from outpost city: New Mongolia 539 miles to outpost city: New Tajikistan Terrain = Sloped and mountainous	Leaving the Gobi desert, we enter the flaming

Chapter 2 — Apocalypse: Isaac Solomon

Time melted into an agonizing obstacle, the Gobi desert stretched across over a thousand miles, and it seemed the landscape of monstrous sand dunes would simply stretch onwards to the edge of the world. It was by nightfall that we left the Gobi desert, into a mountainous region known as the flaming mountains.

Reading became my salvation.

I like to imagine this adventure as a saga scripting the journey of our companionship, similar to that of “Journey to the West” – a popular novel written around 700 years ago that lasted through different eras, with copies surviving the apocalypse in year 2052AC and making it into the world of today. The tale depicts the epic adventure of a fellowship comprised of a monk, a monkey king, a talking pig and a resilient friar, to a mystical place called Nalanda, into the Western Paradise of heaven. Coincidentally, Nalanda is located near the outpost city of New Tajikistan today.

Might we be too late to help out the outpost city of New Tajikistan? Nothing is certain.

No sources had exact corroboration with one another, but one thing was clear: the infrastructure of humanity met its end in the year of 2052 AC, just when society was at its golden age of prosperity, and machines and artificial intelligence served all basic human

needs. Lax was humanity, until the coming of the apocalypse.

Early Spring 2052 AC: A virus scientists were testing to genetically enhance the human body leaked through a slip-up and spread like wildfire into the world.

The virus infected the world population in mere days, altering the DNA of all infected hosts, whether the mutations be drastic or minuscule. The transmutation virus soon modified the human's bodily functions, in many cases, death was the result. Yet in some cases, the mutation changed a set of vital functions that triggered predatory instincts hidden within the human brain.

Enhanced predator-like humans were on the loose. Those infected humans became hypervores suffering from constant hunger, of which only marrow adipose tissue from bone marrow can resolve. The virus infected hosts and evolved, jumping the species barrier, resulting in the mutation of animals, slowly imposing unnatural impacts onto the hosts. Mass extinction took place over the course of weeks, with only the most resistant species surviving the virus, adapting to reject the delving effects of the virus. The only saving grace was how not all humans had a high affinity for the virus, most survivors suffering almost no mutations from the virus.

From the 9.7 billion humans that populated the earth, only a struggling 20 thousand survived without facing drastic mutations or death. Over the years 5 factions sprouted from the surviving human population, forming 5 major outpost cities over the globe. Miraculously, the initial apocalypse was halted, with the virus eventually neutralized itself to become docile. With the help of medication and drugs, the virus can be entirely rooted, keeping the host virus-free.

But that was 150 years ago.

A week ago, we received disturbing reports from the city New Tajikistan, stating several rangers have been found to contain an active virus causing aggressive transmutation to the metabolisms of the rangers: they needed urgent assistance.

This was the deliverance I have been waiting for – to fulfill a role destiny had for me. I believe in legacy, and to build an immortal legacy for myself shall I need to serve all of mankind, to ensure the continuation of humanity. I see it as my duty to free humanity from the chains of the apocalypse. The team stays unknowing of the true purpose of this journey, believing it to be simply a novelty of travel and expedition made in this new era. What they do not know won't hurt them. This journey to the west is a game of divinity or oblivion, and what a strange thought – Isaac Solomon, once the outcast and dreamer, might just become celebrated as divine.

The year is 151 After Apocalypse, also known as the year 2203 AC.

Chapter 3 — Boredom: Ajax Query

The fifth day of continuous driving: this journey is boring me to death. I begged in vain for Isaac to let me out of the landmaster for one night, just to explore this outside world I have never been in contact with. I was never even familiar with the city New Mongolia; I was raised and trained in a military camp close to New Mongolia, where I spent the first 14 years of my life. The days of my youth were chopped into blocks of training, eating, sleeping and then training again.

But training against what? As far as I know, the virus was stabilized, and no outpost cities were in danger. This era is yet young and full of dangers, but explorations such as this journey to the west will surely breed enlightenment for humanity, fueled by a growing sense of hope and confidence.

With my own eyes have I witnessed the horrors of the mutated ex-humans that yet conquer the planet: the gaunt shapes of these mutation-driven beings barely remind you they were once human. Extended spines and extraordinarily long limbs are the common traits shared between these creatures, whilst bulky tongues protruding from twisted faces only add to the features of alienation of these ex-humans. “They” all stood solid and frozen, unaffected by changes in space or time; The mutation not only enhances physical abilities but also extends the lifespan of hosts.

In a sick and twisted sense, this was evolution.

Noah says these mutated beings are simply in coma-like trances, waiting for set conditions to trigger them. Once awoken, the creatures will spring into their hypervore stances, fueled by hunger. The creatures possessed poor vision but strong smelling capabilities, fortunately was the landmaster coated with scent blocker to prevent any predatory arousal from these mutated beings.

LOG ENTRY: Journey across continents

REGISTER: Noah Bolo

Date:	Day:	Statistics	Notes:
08/08/151	5	12:32 of driving Covered distance of current day ≈ 505 miles Total covered distance ≈ 1751 miles 1751 miles from outpost city: New Mongolia 34 miles to outpost city: New Tajikistan Terrain = Slightly sloped	Getting close to New Tajikistan.

Chapter 4 — Macabre: Noah Bolo

It was obvious something was wrong when we approached registered territory of the outpost city New Tajikistan. There was signal yet no connection to the communications hub of the city. At first I thought they might have mistaken us for rogues. Gaining distance into the territory of the city, we could see the outline of the city due northwest, dark against the blood red colors of a sunset sky, slowing down the vehicle, we issue a docking report to the city requesting allowance into the city borders. Ten seconds... a minute ... two minutes ... five minutes... and no response came. Anxious, we sat tensely inside the driving cabin of the landmaster.

“I’ll venture into the city and register a docking permit,” I volunteered.

“Permission granted, Ajax will accompany you,” came the response from Isaac.

Armored in lightweight protection suits, Ajax and I step onto the dirt bikes set out for us by Adar, making our way towards the city. Ajax was clearly stoked as he raced his dirt bike into the leaning shadow of the city. I caught up with Ajax before entering the city gates, where we then proceeded to drive through a long tunnel into the massive dome of the city’s center. We were blinded by the bright light that graced us upon our arrival into the city, as a

thousand eyes instantly turned and gazed upon us.

Eyes – but not the eyes of humans. Peeking through windows and occupying the streets were twisted, bloodied monsters – mutated humans, and this time they weren't frozen in either space or time.

“Run!” screamed Ajax at the top of his lungs.

A thousand voices screamed back with the sheer force of doom. Ajax darted out of the city gates on his dirt bike, as the mutated creatures begun closing in on us. I accelerated my dirt bike to max speed.

I ran over an entire column of these creatures, but there were just too many. A parade of these demons blocked my path to the exterior of the city, as I sank into a state of trepidation. Something terribly sharp and terribly cold stabbed into my back, and all faded to black.

Chapter 5 — Divinity or Oblivion: Isaac Solomon

The pain on Ajax's face was terrifying to behold as he proclaimed the words: “He didn't make it.”

But that was a week in the past, nothing we do would ever change the past. My mind raced through the memories and events that occurred on the night of Noah's death:

As Noah and Ajax left for the city New Tajikistan, we intercepted a message from the communications hub to all of humanities' other outposts:

It is too late for me, soon shall I slip into oblivion, yet humanity must endure onwards. Our top secret missions have uncovered the truth of the apocalypse occurring in the year 2052 AC, and now I relay our discoveries to all of humanities' remaining outposts: 150 years ago the faction of Martell scientists have originally released the virus in hopes of destroying the world and forging a new era with themselves as ruler. Today their descendants have produced a newly developed virus, pursuing their ancestor's ploy of humanity. New Tajikistan was infected through a Trojan horse ploy which led the virus to the safety of our haven.

The Martell headquarter is hidden in a place formerly known as Israel, 2000 miles due southwest to New Tajikistan. God save humanity.

The message was sent by the leader of New Tajikistan just moments before his demise. As I reflected upon the reality of the apocalypse come again, I realized what perils Ajax and Noah were in. Noah! Ajax! I ran out into the opening, peering into the direction of the city, as Ajax maneuvered a sudden brake on his dirt bike just inches away from my face.

I yet remember innocently asking Ajax, “Where is Noah?”

Forwarding a week into the future from the night of Noah's demise, we discovered the Martell faction city along the coast of the Gaza lands, in a place formerly known as Israel. The Martell city actually remained unbeknownst to all the existing 5 outpost cities, until its discovery via top-secret missions conducted by the rangers of New Tajikistan.

Martell city consisted of a large dome with its interior tightly packed with buildings and labs. We decided to break into the city by force: the element of surprise was very much beneficial to us as we stormed the city with the blasters atop the landmaster, blowing through compounds of buildings as if they were made of dirt and wood. Before long, we demolished all the major infrastructure in the city, save one.

A giant of steel and titanium stand before us, blast resistant to the missiles we launched and resilient to the pounding of the battering ram on our landmaster. Knocking down the main entrance to the building, Ajax leads Adar and me into the massive expanse of a scientific laboratory within the stomach of this titanic building, face to face with the leading masterminds of the Martell faction.

As I burst into the room, the venom-green eyes of Abaddon Martell met my own, as a chill spread throughout my body. The supreme leader of the Martell faction and descendant of the Martell scientists who initiated the apocalypse in the year 2052AC – Abaddon Martell, is a tall, slender, broad-shouldered man in his fifties, with prominent golden side-whiskers, with emerald green eyes that seemingly penetrated my soul as he stared into my eyes.

“Warm welcomes and greetings to my city,” Abaddon’s voice was sharp and icy. “I trust you have taken a look around?”

Ajax simply couldn’t help but scream. “Monster! You damned devil! I hope you relish the ruins of your city and the death of your people!”

A man like Abaddon Martell never smiled, yet the prospect of him smiling here was terrible to behold. “Fools, in my hands lay the Pandora’s box of a new era, concealed within it the newly evolved Neurosis virus that shall wipe the earth clean of any opposition towards my rule.” The pleasure was dripping from his ice-cold tone, “One step forward, and I shall release this virus into your precious world, yet I believe you have more purpose to fulfill than becoming a mindless zombie. Join me, and your name shall be glorified as part of my legacy.”

My mind fluttered back to the original “Journey to the West”. What would the companions have done? What is the good of picking false divinity over oblivion?

Revelation.

In the original “Journey to the West”, the companions travel towards the west and into the Western Paradise, our journey has similarly brought us to divinity, and I know what must be done. Humanity shall endure and prosper, and my purpose of serving greater good shall be fulfilled.

“Leave the regions of this city now in the landmaster and do not come back for me.” I bid my two companions. “Godspeed, Ajax and Adar.”

There were tears in my eyes.

They understood.

As I watched my two companions drive off into the distance, I smiled, fingering the device hidden within my breast pocket: a vaporizer bomb capable of completely vaporizing all matter within a half-mile radius, with the ability to completely disintegrate a virus.

All I had to do was to pull the trigger, and the virus shall cease to plague humanity.

“Join and rule, or refuse and die. Divinity or oblivion?” Abaddon Martell was practically leering.

Divinity or oblivion? I knew the answer: sometimes, certain oblivion meant divinity, and certain divinity meant oblivion. Funny isn’t it?

Closing my eyes for one last time, I launched myself into Abaddon Martell, pulling on the trigger of the vaporizer device, as the heavens rushed in to meet me.

The White Bone Demon

Hong Kong International School (HKIS), Mak, Elanna - 14

The chill wind whipped past Monkey's face as he sped over the clouds. The tiger skin he wore created an orange-black blur as he flew across the azure sky. His teeth clenched when he remembered his master's last words, *"I don't need a murderer like you, Monkey! Just leave!"*

"I am going back home," Monkey told himself, *"I'm finally free."* So why did he feel so alone, racing towards his happiness?

He peered down at the mountains below, catching sight of a lake nearby a peach grove. Even for an Immortal, he had been travelling a long time and was beginning to feel exhausted. Perhaps he had fought too many battles with too many demons, or perhaps it was the weight of fending for fool friends too blind to protect themselves, or the constant questioning of his motives and character. Whatever the reason, Monkey felt too drained to continue his frenzied flight.

He flew down to the lake to take a drink. When he had quenched his thirst, he found a tree that provided fruit and shade. Resting his back against the tree trunk, he turned to ask his friend, Sandy, if he wanted to go for a swim together. He stopped himself when he realised that there was no one there. Monkey almost sighed, but he was not the sighing kind.

He closed his eyes. The setting sun's rays warmed his cheeks and gently soothed him to sleep.

"Monkey..." A soft voice was calling him. Groggy with sleep, he woke to see a willowy figure drawing near. He tried to rouse himself but his weary limbs felt heavy and lifeless. He couldn't be sure if he was awake or dreaming. His gaze cleared to meet the dark eyes of a beautiful girl. Her long, lustrous black hair was almost glowing under the moonlight. Her lips were cherry red against lily-white skin. Her sweet face seemed oddly familiar.

"Where are you going?" she asked.

Monkey struggled to his feet. Breathing heavily, he replied, *"I am going back home to Flower Fruit Mountain."*

"Why are you going there?" the girl inquired further.

"To be reunited with my loyal monkey subjects... To have fun, get very drunk, and have the grandest celebrations in my honour... Lots of... fun..." By now, Monkey's senses were coming back to him and a vague feeling of disquiet prickled down the back of his neck.

"Reunited? Why? Where have you been, Monkey?"

This time, Monkey glared hard at the girl who smiled back most winsomely. She had now almost reached his side and was unmistakably lovely and out of place on the lonely mountainside. He gripped his cudgel tightly and spat out the words, *"I was helping my former master, Tripitaka, until we encountered a White Bone Demon. She was a cunning and wily one. But I saw through her devices..."*

In a flash, Monkey lifted his trusted weapon, Jingu Bang, and shoved the iron cudgel at the throat of the young maiden. *"I know who you are,"* he growled, *"And I have killed you already... How can you be here?"*

"Did you miss me, Monkey?" Her girlish giggle deepened into a full-throated laugh that echoed down the mountainside. *"You remember this illusion, don't you,"* she tossed back her silken locks and her deep laugh rang out again. She winked at him, her pretty mouth twisting into a leer, *"A shame that Tripitaka didn't see through it and blamed you for slaughtering an innocent girl."* She

moved suddenly as if to strike. Like lightning, Monkey twirled Jingu Bang and brought it down to crush the skull of the White Bone Demon. But she vanished and his cudgel smashed the ground in a cloud of dust.

Suddenly a velvet voice breathed in his ear, *“Silly Monkey... What you are doing here? Do you really think that when you find your simian friends... you will be happy?”*

Monkey whirled around to face his invisible foe, *“Of course I’ll be happy! What do you mean by that?!”*

But she was gone.

In the distance, Monkey heard a cock crowing, welcoming the dawn.

Monkey raised his goblet to the walls of the vast, empty cavern. His shadows flickered on the torchlit surfaces of the unoccupied tables and chairs. *“Bottle number 53!”* he sang. Spilling the wine all over his fur and clothes, he stumbled and laughed out loud, calling out to no one in particular, *“Isn’t this fun?!”* His voice echoed around the lonely halls. Waves of fatigue finally overcame him and he slumped into a drunken heap.

He did not know how long he had slept for, but when Monkey finally stirred, he sensed that he was not alone. Raising his throbbing head, he faced his visitor – a kindly-looking old lady who greeted him with a pleasant smile.

“You again...” he murmured, reaching for his cudgel. *“Now you are dressed up in the skin of the girl’s mother... I thought I killed you too...”* Planting his foot firmly against the cavern floor he snarled, *“No matter. I am quite prepared to kill you again!”*

The old woman smiled and patted the seat next to her, *“Come sit down, dearie, and tell Auntie what’s been troubling you. I thought you told me that you were going to have a grand, drunken celebration with your loyal subjects?”* She chuckled in a conspiratorial fashion, *“I see you are already very drunk, but where’s the rest of the party?”*

Monkey snorted in annoyance, gesturing at the dark, barren halls, *“Well, clearly there is nobody here or else there would a party!”* He sat down again and reached for a flagon of wine next to him. *“But,”* Monkey smiled as he opened it and inhaled its heady fumes, *“I can drink enough for everybody!”*

“So where are your monkeys, Monkey?” the old woman persisted. *“How awful it would be if something had happened to them...”* Stroking her wrinkled chin thoughtfully, she said, *“I wonder what made them leave your precious cave?... Poor lost little Monkey all alone... I wonder what or who is going to make you happy now?”*

“Enough!” Monkey struck out at her. But she disappeared, leaving those parting words lingering in the air. Something akin to fear took hold of Monkey’s heart. Soaring out of the cave, he tore across Flower Fruit Mountain, calling the names of his faithful friends of old. Once again, he heard no response. He flew to the foothills of the mountain and continued calling until he eventually reached the villages on the plains far below. He landed when he heard two high-pitched voices calling, *“Master! Master!”*

“Topsy!” Monkey cried out joyfully. *“What happened to all the hair at the top of your head? We must call you Baldy now!”* he shouted, chortling gleefully at the sight of his long-lost friend. A young monkey stood beside Topsy, holding up the aged simian.

“Your Majesty!” old Topsy croaked in a quavering voice, *“It has been over 500 years since you left. We all thought you were dead!”* The frail, old monkey leaned heavily on his younger companion. His expression turned sorrowful as he said, *“In your absence, your loyal servants have*

been decimated, and we are now on the brink of extinction. Even our best fighters from the good old days, Boggo, Mugsy, Tin-Ear, even Fluffy have been taken..." The hoary grey monkey's tears fell as grief overcame his words.

The younger monkey, Buggy, took up the story, "Every day, hunters trap us for sport and meat. We hide out in the outskirts of the villages, far away from our ancestral home. Master Topsy and I are the only ones left here. The rest have been taken to the far north, where the barbarian hunters have their stronghold."

"How dare they mess with my subjects?!" Monkey thundered. Hungry for revenge and consumed with another feeling he could not name, he sped away in fiery pursuit of their captors. When he found them, the unfortunate barbarians did not know what hit them. Announcing himself as the *Immortal Monkey King, the Great Sage Equal to Heaven and Destroyer* of half of the same Heaven, Monkey took out his vengeance on the barbarians with swift and bloody dispatch. He made sure that many tasted the metal of Jingu Bang and all were so badly beaten that they swore never to approach the monkeys ever again.

Once he had freed his subjects from their enslavement, Monkey brought them back home to Waterfall Curtain Cave, in the depths of Flower Fruit Mountain. A most triumphant celebration was held in honour of their victorious king. But amidst the carousing and drunken merrymaking, Monkey caught sight of a cloaked figure at the entrance of the cave. Before he could get a closer look, his old friends had grabbed him and led him back into the crowds for more wild dancing and flagons of peach wine.

Many, many hours later, Monkey stumbled back into his royal chambers and fell into his bed. He woke with a start to find the cloaked silhouette sitting at the foot of his mattress. "Have you seen my wife and daughter?" the shroud moaned.

"Aaaaaarrgh!" Monkey screeched, falling off his bed. Fumbling to his feet, he grabbed his cudgel and swung it to meet the face of the old man in the cape. "Enough with the games! You are not the girl's father or the crone's husband. I have already killed you three times! Why can't you just stay dead?! Leave me alone or I will crush you like the bothersome bedbug you are!"

The grey-haired man sat still as a stone, unperturbed. Then he slowly started clapping, as if applauding Monkey. "Congratulations. You are a great hero, surrounded by adoring acolytes in the thousands. Are you happy now?" he asked. When Monkey didn't respond, he continued, "Did you find what you were looking for? Do you know your meaning and purpose now?"

Monkey drew himself to his full height and gripped his cudgel tighter, "Begone, Demon! I am perfectly happy here."

The old man chuckled, "I think you are a better liar than you are a fighter." He looked deeply into Monkey's eyes and whispered, "And the person you deceive the most... is yourself."

This time, Monkey did not attack the apparition. He was lost for words. Once again, the nameless feeling washed over him, and Monkey felt hot tears threatening to spill from his red-rimmed eyes.

The old man stood up suddenly. Dawn was seeping over the horizon. Turning to Monkey, he said, "It's good that you are not trying to kill me anymore... After all..." He pulled his hood over his head, as if to leave.

"After all what?" snapped Monkey, his voice suddenly hoarse.

"Why," he shrugged his shoulders, "I'm already dead."

Monkey's brow furrowed, "Then why do I still see you?"

"That's a very good question," said the figure, smiling mysteriously.

And with that, he vanished.

The noonday sun was already blazing when Monkey awoke to Topsy's raspy voice calling him, *"Please wake up, Your Majesty! A pig-like monster is at the entrance claiming that he knows you. He requests to see you!"*

Monkey bolted upright, *"Pigsy, my Brother!"* he cried, racing out of his chambers half-dressed to greet his former companion. *"Whatever are you doing here?"*

Pigsy, clothes travel-stained and dust-covered, was looking ravenous and dishevelled. Seeing Monkey's joyful face, he opened and shut his mouth like a goldfish, but the words stayed caught in his throat. They had not parted on the best of terms, and Pigsy was not sure what to say. However, he was glad to see that Monkey bore him no ill-will.

Monkey grabbed Pigsy's sleeve, *"Come eat and drink with me, and tell me all the adventures you have had since I left your company."* They gorged on a feast of roasted meats, candied chestnuts, jellied fruits and rice wine, while Monkey entertained Pigsy with very rude jokes. Pigsy laughed like a drain and tried to retort as wittily. However, he was not his usual wise-cracking and insulting self. There was a restless desperation in his small black eyes. He could only eat a large dinner for three - which was like a fast for Pigsy. When he could bear it no longer, the porcine fellow turned to Monkey and said, *"Well, it's been awfully fun being here, but we should be getting back to our master now. He will be wondering why we've been gone for so long,"* He picked up his shabby belongings and started to walk to the cave entrance.

The rascal king guffawed out loud and shook his head vigorously, *"Not me."*

Pigsy whipped around, looking horror-struck. He blubbered, *"You're not coming?! Whyever not?! Tripitaka really misses you!! Why, he needs you!! He can't do without you!!!"*

Monkey's eyes saddened, *"Tripitaka definitely doesn't need me anymore, remember? He said so loud and clear when he banished me."* Monkey stood up to say his goodbye, *"Say Hi to Sandy for me... Oh, and tell Tripitaka not to bother me again. Tell him I'm very happy doing my own thing here."* And just to emphasise the point, he brayed with laughter again. Stricken with fury and anguish, Pigsy was left bereft of words as Monkey strode away without looking back.

Monkey was biting into his peach when he heard a distant voice crying, *"Insufferable ape... dishonourable, disloyal, disgusting..."* A torrent of unrepeatable swearing ensued, bearing variations of Monkey's name.

Temper rising, Monkey sprinted out of the cave to find the culprit, and there he saw Pigsy, halfway down the mountain, profanities in full flow. *"He knows that I can hear him,"* Monkey muttered before yelling, *"Topsy! Get some monkeys and bring that pig back here!"*

When Pigsy was forcibly carried back by eight monkeys groaning under his weight, Monkey roared, *"You have no right insulting me, my Brother! I've saved your no-good sack of flesh countless times! Have you forgotten how I outsmarted the evil magician? Who cut off his own head and regrew it so that we could best the Tiger Demon, hmm? Who sat in a vat of boiling oil for days to outwit the Ram Demon? I've vanquished every enemy that has crossed our path! And yet none of you believed me when I said the White Bone Demon had tricked you! You're the ones who are insufferable!!!"*

"Stop being so self-righteous! It's not all about you!" Pigsy cried, *"I have been dragged from my home, from my warm bed, my loving wife, my peaceful livelihood. This quest has robbed me of everything that I hold dear!"*

"Oh ho ho!" Monkey laughed venomously, *"Do you think that you're the only one who has lost everything? At least you have Tripitaka. At least you haven't lost his trust. At least he needs you!"*

"Tripitaka's gone!" Pigsy shouted, his voice breaking. The whole cavern suddenly filled with

silence as the chattering monkeys froze to listen to his words.

“What do you mean, ‘gone’?” Monkey’s raging boom had dropped to a whisper.

Pigsy whimpered, *“He... he was captured by the Yellow Robe Demon. Sandy and I tried to save him. But we couldn’t get him out. We tried... we really tried.”* He gulped and swallowed his tears, before shooting Monkey a reproachful look, *“If only you had been there... We could’ve saved him if you’d been there...”*

Grabbing Pigsy by the ear, Monkey cried, *“Fool Pig! Why didn’t you say so at the beginning! Let’s go!”*

Monkey and Pigsy had been flying for hours. Sleep was beginning to sting and then numb their eyes. The purple dusk had melted into midnight blue when Monkey realised that someone had joined them on their levitating cloud. He elbowed Pigsy, but the swine was already drooling in deep sleep.

“So... Have you found what you were looking for?” the velvet voice purred, *“Or... perhaps you are still lost...?”*

Monkey turned coolly to look at the White Bone Demon. Her delicate features pale as porcelain, a smile playing on her lips. She floated gently beside him, her ivory silver hair streaking languidly across the dark canvas of the sky. *“What? No illusions this time?”* he asked.

“No need,” she gave a low peal of laughter, *“You see through them all.”*

Monkey resisted the urge to laugh alongside her.

“So where are you off to now?” She inquired conversationally.

Monkey stared at her. He was beginning to understand how she enthralled and entrapped her victims with her easy-going charm.

“I know what you are thinking...” her lips parted teasingly.

“And what am I thinking?”

“You’re wondering if I am really dead... If I am just a figment of your imagination... Or if I am actually alive and speaking to you...”

Monkey reached out to touch her. His fingers passed through nothing. His eyes widened in surprise. Would he have been more shocked if his hand had actually felt something? Chagrin, amusement, and bewilderment mingled confusingly in his chest. She continued hovering enigmatically in front of him, real yet unreal.

After a long pause, Monkey spoke, *“I don’t know who or what you are, but I know what would make me happy right now. I want to save Tripitaka, and I want to complete our quest. That is my meaning and my purpose right now.”*

“And what do you want after that?” she asked quietly.

“I don’t know yet,” he answered truthfully.

“Well, in that case, perhaps you will be seeing me again...” She lowered her voice to barely above a whisper, *“Will you miss me when I’m gone?”*

“I won’t miss you at all,” Monkey cried, affecting a contemptuous sneer, *“Just leave!”*

She gave him a slow, inscrutable smile, *“As you wish,”* she said softly, *“Goodbye, Monkey.”* With those words, she leapt off the cloud, soaring down an abyss of black sky. As he watched her leave, a nameless feeling surged through Monkey for the third time. He couldn’t be sure. Was it dismay? Sorrow? Or regret?

Of Dragons and Dreams

Island School, Foong, Katya - 14

It started with a dream. A dream of a serene place, unlike anything he had ever seen before. Rows of gleaming golden roof tiles, each end curling up towards the clear blue sky, sheltering sturdy brick-red pagodas. The faint smoky wooden smell of incense wafting out from behind the brass doors. Engraved into the middle was a swirling steel dragon, a staggering bright red ball stuffed tightly in its mouth. All of a sudden, the dragon leaped out from the doors. Fluttering its wings, it scooped him up from the ground and took to the skies.

Then... he was in the air, soaring through the skies. Cruising through the clouds. The wind gently caressing his face. Below him were mounds of sand dunes, carved into the sand were intricate patterns swirling in all sorts of directions. The dragon started scaling higher into the air. When he looked down again, the deserts had disappeared completely. Instead, there were snowy-white mountains planted on fields of luscious grass, stretching out for miles. The clouds below him merged together and the beautiful view of the mountains was gone. This time when he looked down, he saw not the home of nature, but the home of man. A golden castle, with shimmering silver crystals decorating the sides of the freshly polished walls. He shut his eyes tight. He felt the wings of the dragon being pulled from underneath him and he was no longer flying. He was falling. Falling all the way down. Into a vast, empty pit of nothingness.

Floating sandy plains stretching on for miles into the endless horizon, ripples of sand snaking across the barren land. The air was parched, dry and very hot as if in an oven set to the highest temperature. The desert, almost inhabitable, yet with the occasional cactus and a nearby oasis; life is somehow sustained.

An enormous shadow loomed over the dreary bleakness, interrupting the desolate landscape. There he stood, auras of light radiating off him, casting a beacon of life in this wasteland. Propped on his back was a towering bamboo rucksack that hung over his well-built shoulders. Xuanzang trekked grimly towards a nearly dried-up oasis, threw his pack to one side and collapsed on a nearby rock. He cupped his hands together and lifted the cool water to his chapped lips. Etching forward to drink the little water left. Xuanzang hadn't drunk in days. The water slid down his aching throat, soothing and cooling it. He continued drinking, hungrily, greedily, fearful that this could be his last.

Finally, feeling satisfied, he continued on his journey, aimlessly roaming the desert, desperate to find even the smallest signs of life, all to no avail. Suddenly, he saw something that made stop dead in his tracks. Squinting into the distance, he saw a shapely figure, seemingly floating through the deserted plains. It was coming closer towards him. He prepared himself for a fight. The sandy mist started to clear and the mysterious figure came into his clear sight. He was taken aback. It was a young woman. Draped on her back was a pure white gown, dancing on her back to the tunes of the wind. This woman was unlike anyone he had ever laid eyes on before. She was absolutely beautiful. She flashed him a nervous smile with her pearly white teeth in between her painted lips. His pupils dilated.

Without speaking, she beckoned him to follow her. As if in a dazed trance, he eagerly agreed. She took him to a nearby hut in the middle of the empty desert; the hut was made completely out of straw. The edges were frayed and torn apart; bits of straw were peeling off the sides. He followed her inside. The hut was cramped to the brim with unusual objects scattered everywhere. Golden chains, patterned wooden boxes, a large collection of watches and loose change of foreign money in odd places. In the corner of the cramped hut, sitting in a straw armchair sat a mysterious old man; presumably the woman's father. They both seemed incredibly welcoming, offering delicious treats everywhere in the hut.

The woman questioned him "What is a handsome young man doing out here alone in the middle of the Gobi desert?" Xuanzang smiled, "I am a Buddhist monk, I have been sent on a journey to Nanjing to uncover the true teachings of Buddhism." At the sound of this, both the hosts in the room perked up their ears. The woman raised her eyebrows and flashed her father a quick glance. He silently nodded. She continued, "I see, you must have been travelling for quite some time. Here, have some of this to help you relax." She passed him a flask containing a dark mysterious liquid. "It's Chinese wine. It'll help you... unwind. Drink it." She smiled her charming smile at him again. Dazed by her overwhelming beauty, he willingly drank the whole flask down. Both the woman and her father smirked. Xuanzang set the glass down on a nearby wooden box. He grabbed his pack and got up to leave. "Well, you both have been extremely welcoming. But, I must leave now, my time is running out. Thank you again." The women sprung up immediately, "But Xuanzang, you just got here. You can't leave now." He whisked around. "How do you know my na..." He didn't get a chance to finish his sentence. Before everything turned black. Pitch black.

When he came to, he was laying on the sandy floor. Everything was a blur. He tried getting to his feet, but the dizziness in his aching head made him collapse again. He was trying to remember what had happened. Fragments of his memory had been shattered. All he could piece together was an image of this beautiful young woman. She had a small cottage in the desert. He had gone inside. There was a man there and...the wine. He had drunk the wine. There must have been something in the wine. He suddenly remembered his pack. Looking wildly around for it, he spotted it laying a few meters away from him. As he tore through the netting, desperate to check for the contents inside, he was already aware of his fate. He had been robbed. The golden coins, the only form of money he had left, were gone. Yet fortunately for him, they hadn't taken the most valuable thing. The scrolls, each one wrapped in a silky golden cloth still remained fully intact. With a sigh, he hoisted his pack onto his muscular shoulders and set foot into the stark unknown, blissfully unaware of all the remaining dangers that were to come.

The air became noticeably cooler. A strong gust of wind caused the musty grey cloth draped on his back to violently flap against him. Xuanzang had hiked for what felt like an eternity. His stomach, growling with anguish and pain, the muscles in his legs tensing with torture. All the little energy he had left slowly oozing out of his shivering body. He tightened the cloth over his shoulders and desperately peered out into the horizon. In the distance, peaks of chalky white poked out from a hazy mist. The milky clouds in the glistening cerulean sky parted to reveal a heavenly sight.

Expanding over an infinite array of verdant meadows, stood immense mountains draped in blankets of pure snowy white. The mountainous regions were enriched with life in every

corner. A herd of mountain goats was obediently trotting through the grasslands. The pearly fur on their bulky bodies blending in with the vast mountains behind them. Xuanzang stood there speechless, marveling at the exquisite sight that lay in front of him. He was suddenly hit with a sense of *deja-vu* and was taken aback. Xuanzang had encountered these sights before but where?

He began the long walk towards the foot of the mountain. He was still in awe, shooting glances left and right as he passed through this picturesque haven. After plowing through thick bushes of grass, he finally reached the bottom. Gazing up, he spotted a small trail, chiseled into the middle of the mountain. He clambered onto the first of the unsteady rocks near his feet, using every free limb to tightly grasp onto anything he could take hold of. Xuanzang was about a few hundred meters up the side of the cliff when his arms began to tire. The heavy pack on his aching back was nervously creaking with every inch he climbed. He glanced down.

The mountain goats were now little specks prancing around in a blanket of green. His heart began pounding. Droplets of sweat tearing down his glistening face. “You’ve got to focus. Don’t look down.” He told himself. He swiveled his arm around to grab onto the next rock. He felt the rock slip out from under his grasp, making him lose his grip. His heart dropped. Xuanzang was desperately clinging on for dear life. The rock fell from underneath his arm right off the side of the mountain. It landed with a huge clatter, exploding into a million tiny pieces upon impact. With one final pull, he hoisted himself up onto the flat trail. He thrust himself onto his back and lay there motionless, panting with fear. Xuanzang heaved an enormous sigh of relief. He was finally safe.

For now.

The clear blue sky had now been completely engulfed by a thick jet- black quilt, interrupted by numerous twinkling stars. Xuanzang was halfway into the trail, which dangerously skirted on the edge of the mountains. The awe of the scenery from a few hours earlier had made him forget his starvation. Yet now, he was hungrier than ever before. He was salivating at the thought of a delicious roast duck, his favorite delicacy. Suddenly, the smell of the smoky crispy skin wafted into his nose. Could it be?

Was he dreaming? Roast duck? He could almost taste the juices in his dry, parched mouth. The smell was getting stronger. He looked up and realized he wasn’t imagining it. The narrow trail had opened into a luxurious space of land, carved deeply into the middle of the mountain. There it was. A golden castle.

The sounds of laughter and the faint clinking of glasses of wine could be heard through the thick golden walls of the castle. Xuanzang picked up his pace and marched over to the doors. He grasped the metal lion door knocker and pounded on the door several times. The laughter stopped. “Who’s there?” A deep gruff voice called from inside. “A fellow traveler,” Xuanzang responded. He could hear scuffling and then the stomping of footsteps, coming closer towards him. The door opened with a jolt and a large man, dressed in silky red robes shimmering with bits of gold, stood glaring at him. “What do you want?” “Sir, I am a Buddhist monk sent from Sichuan and I am on a journey to Nanjing to uncover the real origins of Buddhism. I have been traveling for days and I am extremely in need of some food. Would you please be ever so kind to spare me some?” Xuanzang pleaded. The man stroked his bushy beard, “A Buddhist monk, you say? Hmm, alright come in. You came at a perfect time, we’re celebrating with a big feast.”

Xuanzang bowed and entered inside. The golden palace was enormous. Crystal chandeliers hung from the decorated ceiling, which was patterned with paintings depicting the twelve Chinese zodiac animals. The marble floor was carpeted with a large silky bright red rug, stretching all throughout the enormous castle. Placed in the center of the rug was the longest dining table Xuanzang had ever laid eyes on. It was filled to the brim with steaming plates of hot food. All sorts of smells were swirling in the air. The loud chatter of a whole array of guests, dressed in formal silky red robes filled the atmosphere with joy and life. Placed at the end of the dining table was a gleaming golden throne, bejeweled with shimmering, shining crystals, alighting the whole room. Xuanzang was gaping in awe. The man who opened the door for him earlier, bellowed out to him, “It’s lovely, isn’t it? My name is Qu Wentai and I am the ruler of this kingdom. Come on now, let us eat.”

Xuanzang feasted on delicacies of utter perfection. From a sizzling roasted duck to the crispy skin of a ginger soy fish, all the flavors melting in his mouth, filling his empty stomach up to the brim. Qu Wentai was very hospitable. “You may stay here and enjoy my food for as long as you wish, on one condition... You must educate my scholars here, everything you know about Buddhism.” Xuanzang eagerly nodded. “Very well, my guards will take you up to your chambers.” That night, Xuanzang drifted into a deep sound sleep, the first time in a very long time.

The next morning, at the crack of dawn, he was rudely awoken by a loud constant pounding on his door. A guard had come to inform him of his daily Buddhism teachings, beginning in a few minutes. Xuanzang wearily dressed himself and glided down the carpeted stairs to a large hall where the scholars were awaiting him. He began teaching them all his knowledge of Buddhism, patiently answering questions. As night fell, the King invited him to dine with him and another ravishing dinner was laid out in front of him once again. He quickly scoffed everything down and went to bed satisfied and content. He was awoken early the next morning and the day began again. Days became weeks. Weeks became months. Xuanzang was getting anxious. He had a journey to complete. He couldn’t waste any more time in this luxurious castle.

Xuanzang made up his mind; that night at dinner, he announced his plans to leave the next day. Qu Wentai did not take it well. “How dare you! I offer you delicious food, a comfy bed to sleep in and you cannot even repay me with your knowledge! You will not leave, you must stay here and educate my scholars!” The guards shifted closer to the doors, clutching their golden spears tighter in their hands. On hearing this pronouncement, Xuanzang felt miserable, but he knew he had to stand his ground. “Thank you very much for your hospitality, I am forever in your debt. But I have a mission to complete. For how am I supposed to be a teacher of Buddhism, if I don’t even know the origins of Buddhism myself.” Xuanzang firmly stated. The King sighed, “Very well, I understand the importance of this quest to you. Stay for one more day, finish up your teachings, you may leave tomorrow night.” Xuanzang bowed gracefully and headed back up to his chambers.

The next day, Xuanzang left at nightfall, the golden doors slamming tightly behind him. With a wistful, final glance back, he set off on the trail to complete his journey once again.

A bright orange flare lit up the dreary sky with a warm glow. Xuanzang had hiked all the way through the night. Every step he took leading him further away from the comfort of the magnificent palace and its succulent food, in the distance, he spotted a glinting light through the bushes. Curiously, he tore through the thick shrubs and peered in. There it was. The sacred temple. Finally, after so many months of traveling, he had reached his destination. It was everything he imagined it to be, and more. Red pagodas stretching out for miles into the

warm horizon, the soothing sound of chiming bells echoing throughout the temple grounds. Xuanzang approached the wooden gates cautiously. Without warning, as if expecting him, the gates swung open and what he saw next stunned him.

Standing in the middle of the doorway was the same beautiful young woman and next to her was the mysterious old man, with an enigmatic look on his face. “Surprised to see us again?” The woman flashed him another one of her charming smiles. “What are you doing here?” He was speechless.

The old man smiled. “Xuanzang, welcome to the Buddhism temple of Nanjing. My name is Shi-Lujiang, I am the leader of this sacred temple. This is my beautiful assistant, MeiLeng.” Shocked, Xuanzang only managed to utter a few words, “ You were the ones who stole from...” But before he could finish, a flash of thought seared through his brain. “And Qu Wentai?” he whispered hoarsely, heart racing. ShiLujiang smiled at him again. “Ah yes, Qu Wentai. How is my old friend? Was he as hospitable as he always is?” These words hit him hard, his head reeling, spinning. But he finally understood. All those months of hardship, loneliness, suffering and, of course, temptation. It had all been a test! Everything had been a test, leading up to this very moment. In that instance, Xuanzang saw it, as clear as the beauty radiating from MeiLeng’s translucent eyes; the true meaning of not only Buddhism, but of life itself. Perseverance.

In the corner of his eye, he saw MeiLeng gracefully moving towards him with her brilliant smile. She took his hand in hers and led him outside the wooden gates towards the open ground. He shut his eyes, at peace for the first time in so many months. Suddenly, he felt himself soaring through the sky, the wind softly stroking his face. As if on the back of a beautiful dragon... as if in a dream.

Journey to the West

Maryknoll Convent School (Secondary Section), Chan, Annie - 17

Jinpa had never been to the airport until 16 hours ago when he boarded the plane from Bhutan to New York.

All his life, he had only known the tall columns in the monastery he grew up in – the vast halls filled with monks’ chanting every morning, the tranquil mountains where he sought solace before the break of dawn, and the four white walls of his tiny room, which was filled with his only possessions for the 20 years of his life: a bed, four sets of robes and a cupboard of books.

Jinpa hadn’t even stepped a foot outside the walls of his temple until 36 hours ago. And at that moment, he was surprised to find himself brimming with curiosity, a sensation unlike anything he had felt before. He knew he would be back soon, but he couldn’t contain his excitement when the Abbot’s stern gaze flashed in his mind. It reminded him of the purpose of this trip.

“Now, Jinpa, you are young and you’ve never been out of these walls. The outside world is an exciting place, but it is also dangerous and full of evil. Remember all our teachings, and do not be easily deceived by the magnificent skyscrapers in the dazzling city of New York, for most who dwell there are driven by their greed for riches,” the Abbot had warned. “Let us hope you can instill the selflessness and love that is so deeply rooted in our religion into the hearts of those who don’t appreciate the things around them, and perhaps you will understand why it is a blessing that Bhutan is still trapped in the past.”

Jinpa remembered everything the Abbot had said, but his young mind could not help wandering off to the fine weather and the iconic sights of the city that never sleeps. He knew it was only a short trip, but a part of him felt like he was finally set free from the confinement and tediousness of his life at the monastery.

As he stood in awe at the Arrivals Hall of the JFK Airport in New York, marvelling at the bustling crowds and all the activities that were going on around him, he couldn’t help but feel a tinge of sadness –over what he had missed in his life. It wasn’t as if life in the monastery wasn’t good – Jinpa felt content and fulfilled in its simplicity – but it could be boring sometimes, doing the same things repeatedly every day of his life. Now that he thought about it, he felt silly thinking that the most exciting moment of his life before today was when he discovered a bluebird residing in the corner of his room.

As Jinpa made his way towards the information counter, he suddenly felt very self-conscious about his attire and the speed of his walk. No one was wearing a yellow and red robe or carrying only a cloth sack as their luggage and everyone else around him was walking in a speed that was never seen in Bhutan except in the case of a fire.

“Excuse me,” Jinpa cleared his throat nervously, eyeing the sign that read “Need some help? We’re here for you!” on the counter. “Do you know how I can get to the bus station?”

Not one of the four ladies at the counter even gave Jinpa so much as a glance when one replied after putting down her phone, “Read the signs and follow them. You’ll get there eventually.”

Back in Bhutan, Jinpa had hardly seen any cars, let alone buses, around as most people preferred to walk.

“I’m sorry but I’ve never been on a bus before. I’m afraid I won’t be able to recognize them, do you mind describing one to me?” Jinpa found his voice getting fainter and fainter as he was met with the lady’s gaze, one was filled with contempt. He had never felt so insignificant in his life, and how he wished a hole would open in the ground and swallow him whole in that instance.

Jinpa’s heart filled with dread as the lady opened her mouth.

“Where are you from, sonny?”

“Bhutan, ma’am,”

“Never heard of that place. Now listen, young man, I’m very busy here and I can’t leave my post, so you’ll just have to figure out how to get there yourself. It’s that direction,” She jerked her head impatiently to her right. “Sorry,” she added after a split second and resumed her conversation on the phone.

“Thank you very much,” Jinpa bowed respectfully, trying to ignore the fact that the lady didn’t sound sorry at all.

Minutes later, after an embarrassing incident about not knowing how to use the Metro card, the young monk was finally seated on the bus, next to a middle-aged woman who took one look at him and wrinkled her nose in disdain. For the first time in his life, he felt relieved when no one attempted to make any conversation with him.

Jinpa sighed as he looked out of the window at the bustling crowd. So far, his trip hadn’t been as pleasant as he expected, and the coldness and unfriendliness of the New Yorkers he had met troubled him. Nevertheless, he tried not to let this upset him and reassured himself that not all the people in the outside world were like this. As he tried to make himself comfortable, Jinpa quietly observed his fellow passengers. Almost everyone was glued to their mobile devices and no one was talking. The bus was deathly silent except for the tapping on phones and the occasionally rattle of the bus. It couldn’t be more different than Bhutan, where everyone knew each other and stopped to say hello to even strangers; there would always be the sound of laughter and the sight of smiles whenever there were people. But not here in New York – Jinpa noticed as he looked into the streets.

A couple smiled into the camera as they took a selfie, but the smile was quickly replaced by a tight-lipped frown of the woman as she snatched the phone from the man. It didn’t take a genius to figure out that she wasn’t pleased with the photo. A second later, they were taking another selfie, a forced grin plastered on their faces. As the bus pulled away, the couple were already having an argument. It was as comical as it was sad, thought Jinpa.

When he had finally arrived at the hotel, Jinpa quickly went up to his room and started practising his speech. He had prepared something for the talk he was going to give later in the evening, but after the few hours he had spent in the city, he suddenly had a lot to add. As he stared at the towering buildings that seemed to stretch out for miles, he wondered why the city dwellers were so oblivious to the riches surrounding them, and so engrossed with getting what they didn’t have. He wondered how many of them would actually take the time to admire all the beauty around them. Money and fame. Do they really bring happiness?

After an hour of scribbling, Jinpa had finished putting together his speech. He stared at the words he had written, unsure if they could convey what he wanted to say without being too boring or too other-worldly. The talk was starting in fifteen minutes, and the monk headed out to the hotel lobby. Jinpa’s heart jumped to his throat when he saw the long queue for his talk.

He had expected around thirty students, but lining outside the auditorium were about

two hundred people, and some of them were reporters.

Five minutes later, the young monk was clutching onto his paper for dear life, trying to steady his trembling hands as a booming voice announced,

“Ladies and gentlemen, may I introduce to you, Jinpa, a monk who has just travelled here from Bhutan, the happiest country on earth! Jinpi will be talking about the key to finding true happiness as well as the lives of people in Bhutan. Without further ado, let us welcome him onstage!”

There was a round of applause.

Jinpa took a deep breath and walked up the stage, leaving his piece of paper behind.

“I began by introducing myself, of course. I was surprised to see not just students, but also businessmen, housewives and people from all walks of life attending my talk. A reporter asked me about our secret to staying happy. I think they were expecting something complex, but it really is very simple,” Jinpa chuckled as he poured more tea into the Abbot’s cup.

“Then what did you tell them?” The old Abbot gave Jinpa an affectionate smile as he sipped his tea. A bell chimed in the distance and a flock of birds flew in a pattern past the monastery.

“People in Bhutan don’t really care about money or things like keeping up with the latest fashion trend and owning a lot property. These are only materialistic desires and you will never feel satisfied if those things are all you seek in life. Quite simply, we are happy because we choose to do things that make us happy, and stay away from things that make us unhappy! Now some of you may be rolling your eyes now, but it’s true. Simple things like caring for others and caring for the environment make us happy. We don’t ask much and we count our blessings daily. Why compare ourselves to others and get upset when we can be grateful for the things we already have? Family, friends, a beautiful planet – these are the things we shouldn’t take for granted. And sometimes, we just need to slow down and get some rest. What’s in the hurry? Take your eyes off your phone, look around you and just live in the moment. And don’t fake a smile only for your selfie. What I’m trying to say is, you can be happy as long as it is what you desire. Just take some time off and figure out what you want to do in life, and then do it!” Jinpa bowed as the hall was filled with thundering applause.

A reporter raised her hand and asked, “Do you have any advice for those who have difficulty figuring out their priorities and their purpose in life?”

Jinpa smiled and replied, “Yes, people in the West may treat the subject of death as taboo, but we certainly don’t. Back in the monastery, we treat dying as just a natural part of life. If you understand death, you’ll understand life much better. My advice is to think about death and then ask yourself this: “If you were going to die tomorrow, what would you do now?”

Jinpa smiled as he left the hall. Just the look of wonder and realization on the people’s faces had made the whole journey worth it.

The next morning, Jinpa stepped out of the hotel with his cloth sack in hand as he prepared to start his journey back to the East.

“Had a good trip, sir? Are you sure you won’t be staying a bit longer?” Jinpa turned

around and saw that the cheery voice had come from the porter. The young monk returned the smile and said,

“No, I don’t think so. I’ve seen enough to know that what I seek cannot be found in the city,”

“Took you by surprise, eh? All the hustle and bustle of this place. Bet you don’t get much of that in the monastery. Say, where are you from?”

“Bhutan,”

“It must be freezing in the mountains, especially wearing only that robe of yours. The weather in here is much better, don’t you agree?” said the porter as he opened the door of the cab.

“Oh, you should’ve seen the look on the porter’s face,” laughed Jinpa.

“And what did you tell him? Wait, don’t tell me yet, let me guess,” the Abbot stroked his beard thoughtfully.

Jinpa got into the cab and hesitated before giving his reply,

“On the contrary, even the finest weather in New York can’t compare with the warmth in my monastery on the snowy mountains of Bhutan. No sir, not even close!”

And the halls of the monastery rang with laughter as the bells in the happiest country in the world chimed once again.

Wukong's Resolution towards Mankind

St. Paul's Convent School (Secondary Section), Cheung, Margaret - 15

It was a long time after Xuanzang and his companions, the Monkey King, friar and the talking pig had retrieved the numerous scrolls of Buddhist sacred texts from guardians, and a long time after the four had ascended to the Spiritual Mountain, where they were given several titles that marked them as gods.

Too long of a time, in fact, Wukong, the Monkey King thought, as he was one day lounging in one of the many gardens that the Mountain possessed, staring mindlessly at the lazy fluttering butterflies, and the blooming flowers, each beautiful on its own and therefore even more splendid grouped together. It had been more than a hundred years since he set off on that journey with Xuanzang and his companions. He was starting to get restless.

“What are you doing here, Brother?” A glance at the garden's entrance informed him of the arrival of another; his companion who had travelled with him to the Western Regions and obtained the sacred scrolls together, Zhu Bajie.

“Just relaxing in the garden,” He replied absent-mindedly. “You? Why are you here?”

The pig planted himself on the bench near the one Wukong was lounging on, and replied, “Master told me to look for you. He said that you seem restless these few days and it could be a sign of trouble.” He yawned. “He also said that you might ransack the palace sometime soon so I should watch you.”

“Liar,” Wukong accused. “Master would never say anything of that sort.”

“And if he did?” A grin spread itself lazily on Bajie's lips, and he, too, laid down on the bench in a fashion similar to that of the monkey's, eyes focused on the white clouds rolling across a bright blue sky but barely looking.

“If he did, then I shall confirm it!” In one smooth move, he sprang off the wooden bench and onto the stone that formed the paths weaving within the spacious garden. “Master wouldn't have said anything of that sort.” Wukong repeated, then nodded, as if affirming to himself such an idea, and set off towards the direction of the grand palace.

The pig merely stared at his old friend's retreating back, and did not reply. When Wukong finally disappeared from view, he sighed and muttered, “Since when has he not decided to stir up trouble? Master should not have worried that much. After all, that monkey is bound to come back sooner or later.”

And confirm it he did. Wukong stalked into the palace, ignoring the guards situated on either side that serves to ward off intruders – in which case, himself – and headed straight for Xuanzang's chambers, which were placed deep inside, so by the time he reached it, his anger had somewhat subsided, though he was ready to fly into a rage the moment he set eyes on the meditating Xuanzang.

“Master!” He exploded, throwing open the door with a force so hard it nearly flew off its hinges. Such an intrusion would have angered any other person in the palace enough to cast Wukong away without a demand for an explanation, and possibly exile him to the mortal realm, but Xuanzang merely opened his eyes and glanced sideways towards his pupil, who

looked as if steam would rise from the top of his head shortly. “Did you tell Bajie to watch over me because I may cause trouble?”

“That I did,” the man replied calmly, and ended his prayer. He stood up, and shut the doors gently, then beckoned the monkey into his quarters. “How about you and me have a chat together? I see you are rather agitated, Wukong.”

“Master, I – ” He started, impatient to draw forth a direct answer from him. However, another look silenced his protests halfway, and Wukong’s shoulders relaxed, as if defeated. “If you wish,” He said plainly instead.

“Excellent.” And so he sat, at the table that was placed in the middle of the room obediently, despite not really wanting to. Xuanzang placed two teacups made of fine china onto the wooden surface, and carefully poured tea into both. “Now, would you tell me the reason you came again, in a civilised manner?”

“The thing is, Master – ” Impatience rising inside of him like flames in a fire as he spoke. “Bajie told me that I needed constant surveillance because I seemed to be restless these days. The very idea of that pig! I shall punish him for you, Master,” Wukong finished eagerly, seeking for hints of approval from his Master.

However, Xuanzang answered calmly, “That’s true. I did ask him to watch over you, because you do not seem like your normal self, Wukong. The normal you would have knocked and walked in politely in a subtle manner, instead of tearing my door rudely away from the wall, and demanding explanations for baseless arguments.”

At this, the monkey grew silent. He had been quiet and patient at least two months ago, that was indeed true. Perhaps the arrival of summer had caused him to be restless again.

“Perhaps you can explain your behaviour?” Xuanzang prompted, and took a sip out of his own teacup.

“Master, I – ” Wukong started, thinking of excuses that could get him out of trouble but coming up with none. “I was feeling pent up,” He admitted. “I wanted to do something, anything. It’s so tiring to sit around and meditate. Not that it’s a bad thing,” He added quickly at the sight of the frown on his master’s face. “But I’m eager for adventure. Think of the sights that one can admire in the mortal realm below! It would be exciting to embark on a journey to discover what is different from our time in the mortal world.” He ended his speech in an enthusiastic tone, hoping to win his master over.

Instead of the reaction Wukong hoped to see, Xuanzang sat in silence, eyes closed. The monkey was impatient, eager to know what his Master would think. But he held his tongue, lest Xuanzang decided to disagree with him.

“What do you propose?” The man finally asked, breaking the long silence that had stretched between the two of them.

“Well,” He began, licking his lips nervously and picking out his words carefully, a habit he knew his former self would not have considered at all. “I wish to spend a few days in the mortal realm. I hope to observe the difference in behaviour and know how much the world has changed.” Wukong waited anxiously for the reply, hoping that he had not overstepped boundaries and accidentally said something offensive, for his Master was a sensitive man when it came to human affairs.

“On one condition. You mustn’t do anything reckless that would in any way harm the mortals.”

“The mortals I have assaulted were in fact monsters taking the form of humans, Master!” Wukong protested, his tone with a small note of whining, as if to plead his innocence. “I cannot ignore evil beings walking the earth amongst humans, waiting for chances to strike

and devour their flesh – as they had tried in many forms in the past with you, Master.”

Xuanzang stiffened at such mention of the unpleasant experiences in the past. “What if the evil beings you speak of are good in nature?”

“There will never be any one of them who have good or just reasons for whatever they do, Master,” He declared.

“What about you?” At that, Wukong stopped, unable to form an argument. Xuanzang took the monkey’s silence for agreement, and continued, “I see you have no reply to offer then. Now – ”

“I promise not to attack any evil being that has not yet harmed others in their mortal form,” He gritted his teeth. As long as Wukong agree with the terms set out by his Master, Xuanzang usually comply with what he wanted.

The man heaved a sigh. “You may go then.” Instantly, the monkey cheered, and was preparing to say words of gratitude before the monk cut across him. “Wait. You must wear your band, so I can exercise control over your impulsive behaviour.” As the monkey showed signs of interrupting, Xuanzang cut through. “Or else you’re forbidden to. It is final.”

“Alright,” Wukong sulked. “I promise.”

“That’s settled. But remember to keep yourself out of trouble.” For the first time in their conversation, the monk showed traces of a tiny smile stretching his lips. “And hopefully this shall cure your restlessness.”

“Thank you, Master!” The disciple beamed, and he rushed out of the room, excited to tell Bajie the news and to jeer at his ignorance at the same time.

Xuanzang sighed as he watched the monkey dance through the halls of the palace, whooping loudly, then shut the doors quietly. “You think this is the best choice, then?” Turning towards the back of the room, he asked.

“Don’t worry.” A deep voice replied from within the shadows casted by the pieces of furniture. “This is for the best. If Wukong stays, he will probably destroy everything and cause trouble. When he finally realises the severity of the conflict in the mortal realm, he will eventually lose the interest of visiting altogether.”

“I hope so,” Xuanzang murmured, looking down at the golden band that had once fitted around the monkey’s head, the golden band which had caused severe pain for his disciple. “And what if he decides to head down once more?”

A chuckle. “Why, you need not worry. As long as you continue to show him the ugliness of the mortal realm, he will soon stop seeking adventure and remain here quietly.”

The next day dawned, bright and clear, with no traces of cloud in the sky, and it was on such a day that Wukong decided to embark on his journey.

With one jump, he descended into the world below and soon found himself in a small forest clearing, seated on the back of a horse and wearing a long dark blue robe the colour of the night with sleeves that end at his waist and silk trousers, both of which had exquisite orange patterns weaving through the fabric. A quiver was slung across his back, completed with a bow.

“Young master!” His ears immediately caught the sound of something emerging from the thick trees, and he reached for the weapon on his back. “We have found the animal – what are you doing, young master?”

Realising that he was notching an arrow against what seemed to be a friend, he quickly lowered it, and said, “My apologies. I thought I’ve seen a deer the direction you came from. You were saying?” He cocked his head.

“A deer?” The other young man brightened. “Why, then, we shall have a feast tonight!

Madame would be delighted.”

“I said, I thought,” Wukong corrected.

“Right,” He straightened up on his horse. “Wei said he had found a young calf grazing near the lake.”

“Very well. Let’s make haste then.”

That evening, after Wukong and his hunting partners arrived back home, there was an uproar amongst the occupants of the house; apparently the youngest son had been sick for some time, and during the hunting trip, they had killed a young calf, which was said to be the host of the evil spirit that had caused his brother sickness, thus healing him.

The whole night was then spent frolicking with others, and instead of his original mission to observe the behaviours of others, Wukong was caught with enjoying himself in the party, for it was a number of years since such a large scale banquet or party was held at the palace or Heavenly Realm. He ate the food that was prepared by skilful chefs, chatted with high-ranking nobles of the Emperor’s court, and watched the dances with great interest, and that night, as he went to bed, he thought to himself, nothing could be better than this.

He was wrong to not have gone to the Mortal Realm earlier, Wukong reflected whilst he was lying on bed. That night, he went to sleep in bliss, stomach full and thoughts full of the party. Little did he notice the shadowy figure that lurked within his room.

The next day dawned bright and Wukong set off in pursuit of his master, resolved to make one more trip down the Mortal Realm.

“You cannot believe what I have seen last night, Master,” He wheedled the poor monk, who barely caught a wink of sleep the night before. “Please allow me to go once more!”

Blearily, the man waved him off, muttering something along the lines of ‘a spoiled monkey’, but in the end granting permission for another excursion. Delighted, Wukong then descended into the Mortal Realm immediately, once more dropping down through the clouds, and expecting the familiar woodland scene to appear before him.

Instead, what greeted him was something akin to a nightmare scene. A mass grave of numerous corpses, mutilated in some form or another lie on the grass stained with the blood. Wukong, out of reflex backed away from the horrific scene, and found himself stepping onto the rotten flesh of another.

“What is this?” He whispered, as if murmuring would lower the severity of such murder, of such a tragic event.

Wukong looked around, trying to catch sight of something that wasn’t dead flesh, but all he saw a sea of dead bodies. Horrified, he tried to use his powers to reach the Heavenly Realm, where he could escape this nightmare.

“This – is the result of human conflict.” A glance at his right showed a man walking towards him, as if he had materialized out of thin air. Wukong frowned, taking in the old-fashioned clothes that marked him as someone not of that era. “And this,” He indicated at the sea of the dead. “Is what happens when machines and humans go to war with each other.”

“Machines?” Wukong asked, mystified at such a word.

“Machines,” The older man repeated sombrely. “Destructive creatures that has no mind or heart, controlled by their creators to create chaos and disturb peace.”

“W-what era is this?” He asked again, though afraid of the answer.

“It is what humans call the modern age, an age of advanced technology and conflict.”

“How did this happen?”

“Ambition,” The man began to pace, walking around the dead bodies. “Mindless slaughter, only to end in regret afterwards. No one thought of the consequences that would befall them. Only continued action, and endless anguish.”

“Is there a way to change this?” He gestured. “Surely not all of them are bad.”

“There are, of course, as there are solutions to everything. However, good blends with bad, and it is not easy to find a solution that will resolve all conflicts. Therefore, this is where you come in, Wukong.”

“Me?”

“You,” The old man confirmed, stroking his white goatee. “For you are a link between the Mortal Realm and Heavenly Realm, bound not by rules but by your Master’s spell, and free to come and go as you wish. You have limitless freedom and you are held back only because of your restlessness. Since you have discovered this tragic nature of things, you desired to make a change. I admire that.”

A small pause. Then the man began pacing once more. “But of course, there was nothing to do about that. You are a spirited animal, and thus you must come out once in a while. Since you have seen everything, there are a few things you can do.” He met Wukong’s gaze straight on.

“And they are?”

“Serve your Master obediently. Stop teasing others and focus on your prayers, meditation and find peace within yourself. By doing this, you offer your sincerity and genuineness to the Jade Emperor. Once you propose your idea to save the foolish humans of this era, he will surely grant your wish.”

“Do you mean to say that I am powerless?”

“By your own,” The man acknowledged. “However, by turning to the Emperor, you are showing repentance and remorse, as well as care for humankind. This is what you came for, no? By fulfilling your purpose, the Jade Emperor will finally accept you, I’m sure.”

Wukong bit his lip, a sudden flood of unpleasant memories of him ransacking the Heavenly Palace invading his mind. “The Jade Emperor despises me.”

“He dislikes the manner of speech in which you use when speaking to him, and your reckless actions that cause trouble,” The old man corrected. “By doing this, you will save humankind, and also garner his sympathy and forgiveness.”

“...Very well. I shall follow your suggestions.”

From that day onwards, Wukong prayed and meditated obediently, focusing only on the images of the humans which ruled the modern age and his hopes of saving them, instead of seeking fun and amusement by going down to the Mortal Realm. He stopped seeking thrill. Instead, he chose to save others, like his master.

Speaking of his Master, Xuanzang was secretly relieved that his disciple no longer tear through the halls to find him and beg for small pleasures such as sweets and excursions to the Mortal Realm. As he watched Wukong meditate in his room, he turned to the man next to him. “You did change him,” He said, surprise evident in his tone. “It was thought to be impossible.”

“Nothing is impossible unless you think it to be,” The old priest who guided Wukong during the massacre now smiled at the monk. “Steering Wukong to the right path proves the point.”

“Thank you for your guidance, Your Majesty. It would not have been done otherwise.”

“No,” The man replied softly. “Thank your disciple. It was his wish to save humankind from collapsing, and I am only granting that wish. Therefore, be grateful to him.”

And as Xuanzang turned back to his meditating student, he knew, that the old priest's words were true.

Wukong had indeed changed, from bad to good, and even better.

feel a tinge of sadness -over what he had missed in his life. It wasn't as if life in the monastery wasn't good – Jinpa felt content and fulfilled in its simplicity – but it could be boring

A Realm Without Heroes

The SMIC Private School Shanghai, Chen, Jerry - 14

Dark clouds hang over the sky. It will rain soon. The streets of LuoYang city bustle with people. Customers haggle with merchants, packing hastily as they struggle to grab everything before the rain falls. Crowds start to disperse, hurrying to take cover. Women call out to children, beggars sit beside houses to count their money and the guards retreat to the safety of their camp.

I don't stand out in the crowds. A mere boy of 14, shorter than the others, not yet a man. Black hair like everyone else's, dirty cloths, dirty face. Sharp eyes, sharp nose. I'm not the strongest, nor the brightest. But I'm the smallest and the fastest, and it helps me run away in situations like the one I'm in right now.

I race through the streets with an angry, fat butcher chasing after me brandishing a knife. I've had worse.

I have to be fed, after all. And he had to be the unfortunate guy to be stolen from today. I didn't even take much.

Taking a bite from the beef jerkin, I survey my surroundings. I'm on MingHuo Street. Forward will take me to the Southern Gate. Going backwards will mean confronting the butcher. Nothing to my left, but a few meters off to my right, an alleyway opens up. Weird that I've never noticed it. Raindrops started to fall. The voice in my head urges me in the direction.

I look back as I jump over an empty fruit stall. The butcher is trapped in a tight mob rushing to go home, but he curses and waves his knife in the air. I hope nobody gets hurt.

I scurry into the alley before the angry man can follow.

The light seems to weaken as I step in. Rain-water falls in fat drops. The ground is slippery, and I misplace a step, falling over onto my face, and the world fades away.

\What I expected in heaven are cities built of marble and jewels, the things in our dreams.

I did not expect a mountain full of peach trees, barren rocks, and monkeys.

Was the fall really that bad? Slipping on the ground seems like an unlikely way to kill myself, but who knows. I recall that I hit the ground face-first.

I wake up and find myself at the top of a mountain, on a bare slate of rock, right next to the sky, and three monkeys peering curiously at me. One is prodding at my eye, another sitting on my stomach eating a peach, the last gnawing at my footwear. My awakening is accompanied by a cacophony of shrieking, jumping up and down, and running down the mountain screaming. I don't remember what happened during the mad scabble, but when my vision clears, the monkeys are gone.

I peer over the summit I stand on; clearly I'm on the tallest mountain around. There is no clear path down the mountain.

As I look for a way down that will not result in my death, I spot a small, humanoid figure at the base of the mountain. It looks like a monkey at first glance, but I realize it was too

big to be. Its limbs are longer than the average ape's, the body covered in fur but with the proportions of a man. The figure darts up the mountain with inhuman speed, leaping from ledge to ledge with ease. Within seconds, it pounces onto the slate I'm sitting on, and I get my first clear sight of the figure. I recognize him instantly: the figure in myths and legends, the hero of the Tang empire: the Monkey King.

His short fur is a light shade of brown, flecked with gold, covering him from head to toe. Leather armor of the finest quality coats his torso, sunlight reflecting off the golden plates of metal. Two feathers of cocktailed chickens are pinned to a head-piece sitting atop his head, the feathers dappling in the wind over his back. His eyes are gold ingots. He easily towers over me, a giant lanky figure near two meters tall. He stands up from his crouching position, snatches a peach from a nearby tree, takes a bite, and his face breaks into a wide smile.

"Wu! Come here, give me a hug!" He picks me up from the ground and pulls me into a tight embrace, tight enough for me to smell the sweat in his fur from who-knows how many days of not bathing. He lets me down after a long while of suffering, leaving me gasping for breath.

"Oh, no, no, no, you're not in heaven," he says after examining me. He'd answered my question before I asked it, and before I can respond he opens his mouth again.

"You're in the Mountain of Flowers and Fruit! Paradise! Wildlife! Much better than heaven!" From what I experienced the past while, I highly doubt his words. "Flowers and fruits grow best here! Here, try a peach!" He offers me the peach he'd already bitten into.

"No, thank you. But—" I didn't finish my sentence in time, and he cuts in again.

"You mortals never change. When we gods take you someplace, you always ask 'Am I in heaven?', 'Where am I?', 'Why am I here?'. No fun, you people. It'll be a nice change when someone asks 'What are the notable tourist attractions here?'. He proudly displays a book written in crooked Mandarin, titled "Site-seeing with SunWuKong." He forces it into my hands and pats my shoulder. "All for you, sonny."

I stuff the book into my robes. "Thank you, but...what am I doing here?" Other monkeys start gathering around the ledge, chattering and fighting with one another. I recognize the three from before.

Sun's face falls, sighing exasperatedly. "Another one of those questions! I guess I have to tell you." He scratches his head, and starts to speak.

"Seventy years ago, I accompanied the monk XuanZang on his journey. Fifty years when we came back from the West, which you should know. But do you know why?"

"The country was losing faith in the religion." At least that was what the imperial herald told us.

He bends over giggling. "Is that the lie they tell you mortals today? Well, boy, let me explain. A century ago, the doors to the Abyss opened, and the gods were so disunited to fight the demons. The monsters crawled everywhere, the stronger ones becoming king, and the weaker ones cleaning up for the big ones."

"Aren't you one of those kings though?" I ask. In the myths, the Monkey King had started out as a demon also, traveling between all four realms to wreak havoc upon all those who cross his path.

Sun looks offended. "That's not important. Anyway, the only way to fight the demons was to summon a holy artifact that contained a lot of magic. With the power of the manuscripts, the gods were able to banish all demons and close the doors to the Abyss."

His explanation sounds as crazy as the original. "And then?"

He glances around, scanning the horizon. He looks back at me. "A week ago, the

manuscripts were stolen from Changan.”

I was confused. “And what does that have to do with me?”

He looks me in the eye. “Yes, yes, well, hear me out. Demons are returning to your world. Without the manuscript, the gods are unable to maintain the barrier between the worlds.”

“You still haven’t told me why I’m here.”

“Patience! Is Confucius doing his job correctly?” The Monkey King shakes his head. I, who have never received formal education all my life, have no idea who he’s talking about. He sighs. “I’m a god. I can’t interfere with mortal business. So, you are...um...well...your duty is...” He sighs. “Kid, I’m not allowed to explain.”

“So you mean it’s not meant for my ears.” He bobs his head. I sigh. He seems to be frustrated also. “Never mind then.”

His grin reappears. “Good! Now that’s dealt with.” Suddenly, he surveys the surroundings, his face contorted into a frown. He sniffs the air suspiciously. One of the monkeys bark something at him, and his frown grew even deeper. “You have a visitor.”

I understand none of what just happened. Are all gods this vague? “What do you mean?”

Sun looks at me. “A demon has detected your presence. You have to go back, before it finds you. Quick, quick...how does it work again?” He scratches his head. A monkey helpfully offers a book, and Sun furiously flips through the pages. “Ah...I see...um...close your eyes.”

I do as he says. Following a large “crack”, the sound of monkeys fades away.

I open my eyes, and I’m back in the dark alley. Rain pours down in large quantities, and lightning crackle in the night sky, accompanied with the drumbeats of thunder. Sun is nowhere in sight, yet, I hear him clearly. A bit too clearly as he marvels at the world around him.

Incredible! The feeling of rain! The smells, oh, it’s so good to be back here again!

I look around. “Where are you?”

I’m in your mind of course. Literally. I can’t pass into the mortal realm any other way. But I can only see what you see, hear what you hear, and smell what you smell. So don’t go anywhere...well...don’t go anywhere you’re not supposed to!

I groan. I hate supervisors, and now I have one that can monitor me at all times. “Where’s this demon you talked about again?”

I hear him sniffing. *Behind you, I think.*

I look back down the alley. There is still no sign of the monster Sun talks about, but I don’t want to risk it. I run the other way.

Despair hits when I reach the end of the alley. It turns out to be a dead end.

Oh, no, oh no, um...can you climb?

“No, I can’t.”

Well...let me think...

The smell hits me before Sun can think up anything. The scent is just like an unkempt barn, except for the fact that the smell of sweat and blood has been mingled in. It must smell me too, for the ground rumbles with each step the monster takes.

Finally, it comes into view. Dressed in barbaric furs, he towers over any human being even in his bent over stance: a two and a half meter tall figure layered with meat, skin, bone,

hair, and his arm-span is as wide as he is tall. Built up of muscles, long, white hair covers every inch of the figure's body, unwashed and dirty from battles, feasts, and carnage. In his rough, large hands is the biggest battle-axe I've ever seen.

But it's his face that is most intriguing. More bull than human, his face twists back into a sneer, with sharp, razor-like teeth. With his squashed nose and mouth, his red eyes seem out of proportion. On top of the creature's head grows a pair of giant, magnificent horns, so large that his head swings while he walks. I hear Sun bite back a curse when he sees the figure, and the monster's snarl turns into a wide grin. Clearly they know each other.

"Sun! Long time no see! I knew it was you from the smell!" The monster's voice rumbles like the thunder above.

We have to talk our way out of this. He is my former brother, Demon Lord Niu Muo. You don't want to see him angered.

I attempt to imitate how people greet each other on the street. "Good day...Niu Muo..."

He roars with laughter. "Good gods, Sun, you've gotten timid!" He slams the axe into the ground, takes out a water-skin, and takes a swig.

I look around for any mortals. "You'll wake someone."

The bull finishes the drink and glances at me with his beady little eyes. "And what do I have to fear of mortals?" He laughs his rumbling chuckle again, and before I can reply, he pulls back and swings a mighty fist at the wall right next to him. Shrapnel and bricks tumble down with the rain, and screams erupt from the house.

When the dust clears, the bull demon is not moving. He is staring at something inside the wall, he starts to pant, and his red eyes glows with fury. I know exactly what is about to happen. I dart into the house close behind the demon, as he charges toward the red vase on the table. With speed born from desperation, I run past to pick up the mother and infant on the couch, and manage to leap out the window in time as the building crashes down. I land in the center of the city square, on top of the stone well, with the mother and child in my arms. How did I jump so far?

You are infused with my power now, explained Sun. It seems like all we're missing now is my weapon. Does this well lead to the ocean?

I set down the two behind the well. "Yes."

Good. You must stay beside this well for a while. Do not leave. I hear the Monkey King start to chant.

"What for?" He did not reply.

Off in the distance, the pile of rubble shudders, and the bull emerges. "You still haven't lost your edge after all these years." He stops and stares at something behind me. I look back. Why do architects insist on red roofs? When I look back, he's already charging.

What are the options? I can try to stop him, but by the looks of those horns, I cannot stand even one hit. But if I don't stop him, everyone behind me will be in danger. I charge up to meet him.

The impact is lighter than I expect. My hands lock onto the massive horns, holding him back. Although I am slowly backing off, I hinder his progression.

To my dismay, the demon starts to snort, and with every breath, he starts to grow. Within a few seconds, he'd grown to twice his size, and I am starting to lose my footing.

My legs push against the ground, my arms aching of exertion, I am now backing against the well. The Monkey King finally finishes his chant.

On the count of three, let go.

"Are you crazy? You'll get everyone killed!"

Trust me for this. I have an idea. I'm starting to tire anyway, so I have no other choice. The ground around me starts to crack.

Ready...it's coming...soon now...LET GO!

I let go of the horns and use his momentum to swing myself over the well and onto the ground. Simultaneously, the ground around my feet breaks open, and a great, golden pillar, some twenty thirty meters long etched with words of an ancient tongue, shoots up from where the well had previously stood. It catches the angry bull right under the chin, sending him reeling backwards in pain.

I grab the pillar and force it out of the ground. With a mental command, it shrinks until it's appropriately sized for me.

The Staff of the Golden Brace, said Sun. The same I pulled from the ocean hundreds of years ago. With this staff, you can go to all nine layers of hell and back alive, brave all dangers of the four realms, or even rival the might of the gods. This is my gift to you, kid, and use it wisely.

The bull lord picks himself up from where he has fallen, burning with fury. "How dare you oppose me, silly monkey. You will feel the true rage of a bull!" He extends his hand, and his axe returns to him. He roars, and suddenly lifts his axe and charges, bellowing. Pity that the staff has a red shaft. I feel the urge to run, like anyone would in front of a raging bull.

Instead, I tug off a strand of my hair and blow it away. Immediately, twenty duplicates of me appear in all directions, yelling and behaving like apes.

All twenty one of us leap forward, little monkeys screaming bloody murder. I manage to whack him on the skull. While he is dazed, I whack him on the side, and he topples over. The duplicates dissipate, and the staff shrinks.

I walk up, but he surprises me when he sweeps me off my feet with a hand. We both scramble up.

"You wove a mean stick, I'll give you that," the demon grins. "But you're not powerful enough to kill me! I will crush you, and I will eat you!"

I shrug. "You have to catch me first."

He's big, strong, but slow. I dodge his every blow, sometimes getting a free swing when he leaves himself open, but it isn't enough.

How was he defeated in the myths again? Sun had to summon a few gods to subdue him. I cannot.

He over-swings, and my staff elongates. I mean to hit him under the chin again, but it hooks onto his nose ring and tears it off. It's pretty disgusting, and the bull is really angry. I do remember how he's defeated, though.

I shrink my staff and grab onto the cleaner part of the ring as he barrels forward, howling with anger and pain. I dodge his cleave and sidestep his next attacks. I need the right moment.

Finally, he does a back-hand, aiming for my legs. It's now or never. I jump onto his axe, and using it as a jump pad, I flip onto his shoulders. Ring in hand, I cram it onto his head, and it slips over the horns and locks at his neck. He cries out in anguish, and suddenly vanishes.

The silence is broken by a sudden fit of crying. The child I'd saved is pointing at me, tears rolling down his face. The rain has stopped, and people are coming out of their homes.

Quick, to the right! Don't just stand there! I leap onto a near-by building before anyone else can see me.

Balancing Good and Evil

The SMIC Private School Shanghai, Deckert, Lara - 14

I sit in the blue plastic chair, gazing out of the classroom window and into the dark, dreary sky. The teacher is droning on and on in a monotonous voice at the front of the room, words muffled by the soft pitter-patter of the rain, which, at this point, is nothing but white noise. The students are either asleep or staring blankly into space, but Mr Jefferson doesn't seem to care. He's obviously as sick of us as we are of him.

I slump down further in my chair and sigh, crossing one leg on top of the other and tapping my pencil on the desk, as if doing so would speed up the time. My fingers trace my name, 'Raven,' that I etched into the desk and my gaze wanders to the clock that hangs above the door. Fifteen more minutes until the end of school. My pencil moves faster. The teacher speaks slower.

Tick. Tick. Tick. Tap. Tap. Tap. "Today's homework is-" Tick. Tick. Tick. Tap. Tap. Tap. "Pages twenty-three to thirty-" Tick. Tick. Tap. Tap. "Answer quest-" Tick. Tap.

That's when it happens. At exactly 3:53pm, May 11, 2015, the clock stops ticking. The teacher stops writing on the board. The rain stops falling. The students stop moving.

I blink, my mind taking a while to process what I'm seeing. When the hairs on the back of my neck rise and a feeling of dread pools in my stomach, I blink again.

This must be some kind of trick.

Then the classroom around me and everything in it starts vibrating and spinning, slowly at first and then faster, until all the colours in the room blur together. The ground and ceiling fade away, leaving blackness below and above me. The chair I'm in starts whipping back and forth, up and down in the middle of the air, in a cocoon of spinning, crashing, flying colours. The sound of nothing roars in my ears, driving all conscious thoughts out of my mind. I scream and squeeze my eyes shut, tears streaming down my face as I gasp for breath and cling onto the edge of the desk.

Suddenly, it stops. Far away a mass of light appears that's so bright that it burns my vision even through my shut eyelids. With a jolt of horror I realise that it's flying directly towards me. My eyes fly open, and my hands instinctively try to shield my face, but it's too late. The ball of light slams into my chest.

I explode, my mind and body caving in on themselves. Every pore in my body is on fire, every sense is amplified a thousand times. My heartbeat is as loud as if I was listening to it through a stethoscope. I can feel each blood cell that's speeding through my veins. I can taste the air, how its flavour is a tang of everything that exists in this world, from poison to sugar to metal. I can smell the alcohol in my nail polish and the chemicals from my shampoo. But, I can't see a single thing except blackness.

I'm paralysed, tongue glued to the top of my mouth, breath caught in my throat, heart hammering my ribs as this overload of information struggles to make it to my brain. But before that can happen, my head is snapped back, and everything goes black.

I open my eyes and shoot up, gasping for breath. My heart is beating furiously and I'm

covered in sweat. I squeeze my eyelids shut again and when I lift my hands up to knead them, I realise that my cheeks are wet. After a couple jagged breaths, I reopen my eyes.

I'm sitting, knees tucked against my chest and arms curled around my legs, on a white cot in the corner of a room. The walls and floors are spotless. There's a cluttered desk opposite me, and next to it is a plastic, grey door.

It's the nurse's office.

I'm in school.

I expel a breathy puff of air that I hadn't known I'd been holding in, and, full of relief, I grin. It was all a dream. I flop back down on the bed and cover my face with my hands, giggling. Thank God.

The voice comes from nowhere.

Sorry to tell you this, but it wasn't a dream.

I let out a yelp of surprise. "What the hell?! Who's there?" Eyes narrowed, I sit back up and whip my head back and forth to scan the room for any sign of movement. Nothing.

My name is Sun. Sun WuKong. Nice to meet you, Raven.

"What's going on? Where are you?" I demand. Although unlikely, my thoughts instantly go to Jonathan, the school's most notorious prankster.

I'm inside of you, Raven.

A sense of foreboding wraps itself around me and my heart drops. "This has to be a prank. 'You're inside of me?' What does that even mean?"

This isn't a joke. I became one with your mind the second that ball of light touched your chest.

My heart stops and I stiffen. "How do you know about that? This is ludicrous, and it's not funny. Come out. Now," I hiss threateningly.

Even as I speak the words, I know what I'm asking for won't happen. The voice I'm hearing isn't coming from anywhere. As crazy as it sounds, it seems to be coming from, well...inside me.

As much as I admire your tenacity, Raven, don't bother denying the truth. I can hear your thoughts; I know you believe me.

My breathing starts increasing and I and push myself against the wall, taking a few deep breaths. There's no way this is happening. It's impossible. Control. I need to regain control.

Calm down.

I burst out. "*Calm down?! You want me to calm down?! I just found out that there's a talking voice in my head, and you want me to CALM DOWN?!*"

Well you're going to have to, because you have a visitor.

Sure enough, the door bursts open, knocking against the wall with a bang, and Lisa, my current assigned caretaker, walks towards me, busily texting on her phone. I scowl as her sharp blue eyes meet my gaze.

"This better be good," she snaps.

"I'm fine, thanks for asking."

"Don't you use that tone with me, missy. I feed you, clothe you, and give you a roof. And what do you repay me with? Attitude and trouble. This is the *second* time I've had to leave George to come and pick you up. Is this how you treated your mom?! No wonder she killed herself."

I stiffen at her words. "She didn't kill herself." It sounds fake even to my own ears.

"Of course," Lisa smirks and walks out.

She doesn't care about me. None of them ever have. I hate them almost as much as I hate myself.

My heart pangs as I remember the one person who continuously loved me, no matter how I was. Mom.

Lisa seems lovely...

I snort under my breath and roll my eyes, stalking towards the exit. "You have no idea."

I pace back and forth in my room. The only pieces of furniture are my bed and the dresser. I never bother to decorate; it's not like I'll be staying here long anyway. They always kick me out after a month or two.

"So you were supposed to be trapped under a mountain for 500 years because of some stupid thing you did, but then you split into two different people? I don't understand."

I feel Sun sigh, a gentle vibration through my skull.

In existence, there are several universes that parallel each other. In mine, there are gods that rule. I served them; did their bidding. But, I was ridiculed for causing mischief, even though I cleaned up their messes. Eventually, a part of me wanted to punish the people that mocked me. Being cast under that mountain was the last straw. With nothing to do but wait 500 years, that part started fighting for control of my body. Then, one day, I just...exploded. My body couldn't take the struggle, so I ripped into two different beings; good and evil, you could say. Somehow, we tore open a portal and shifted into your universe, bringing us to now.

"And the headband?"

I'm sorry?

"Earlier, you said that your 'dark side' is looking for a headband," I say sarcastically, using air quotes.

Erebus-

"Erebus?"

Erebus means dark, the opposite of Sun. He has his own body, but not the power to use it. When we were still one person, we, I, wore a headband that the gods gifted me. It contained all of my power. But once we split, it did too. The right half is lost somewhere, and we wear the left.

"We?"

Your hand.

I look down and am startled when I see half a golden band wrapped around the side of my left middle finger.

"I'm guessing we have to find the other half?"

Yes. It contains too much power, and if Erebus got his hands on it...Imagine a falling sky. Imagine the ground beneath your feet crumbling into nothing. Imagine a world so full of darkness and chaos that even love doesn't exist. He's angry, Raven. Angry at world.

Sun stops and his sudden fear flashes through me. My tongue feels like sandpaper.

"So, where is it?"

Where is what?

"The missing half."

He's quiet for a few moments. *You don't understand. It's dangerous. Erebus will do anything to get the headband, and if you're there at the same time as him...he'll kill you.*

I swallow, hard, suddenly really annoyed. "Look. You just said that we have to find it, right? How are we supposed to find it if you don't tell me *where it is*? This entire mess *isn't part of my plan*. My plan includes a quiet, drama free life so that I can get *good grades* and go to a *good college* far away from this stupid town and all the stupid people the stupid government

thinks can replace mom. Is Erebus, you, or the *end of the world* included in this plan? No. So the sooner this is over, the sooner I'm back to my life. Otherwise Erebus will inevitably find us, and then we're *really* in trouble," I seethe. I don't want to be in this mess. I never asked for it. But here I am anyway and the only thing I know is to do whatever's needed to get back to my boring life.

I guess Sun finally realises that I'm right; that there's no other solution.

It's in your basement.

I choke. *"In my basement. This life-threatening, power-containing headband that someone who wants to destroy the world is looking for, is. In. My. Basement?! Why?!"*

Your home parallels the location of the mountain in my universe. So, naturally, it appeared here.

It's too much. I can't believe this is happening. I lift up my left hand and pinch myself, hard. When I confirm that I'm not dreaming, that this is real, I close my eyes, take a few deep breaths and accept it. I accept this absurd, illogical, insane situation and I accept what I have to do to get out of it.

Suddenly filled with a calm, I manage to ask, "What do I do with it, once I get it?"

You put it on, Erebus and I become one again, and I regain control over the good and evil parts of me.

I walk out my bedroom door, not caring that it's dangerous because at this point in my life, the thought of death isn't scary. I've been through enough to understand that.

Raven, stop. You don't understand. It isn't what you think. The basement changed as soon as the band appeared here. Erebus can get in! He's connected to the band so as long as he knows the location he can get in!

I ignore him as I face the door that leads downstairs.

I know that I'm moving too fast. I know that I should take a step back and listen to Sun. But that isn't how I function. When a problem arises, I solve it as quickly as possible, no matter what it takes, and go back to my regular routine, because denying a problem and dragging it on for months in an attempt to safely figure it out only makes the situation worse.

So, I open the door and tread silently down the stairs.

As soon as I step foot onto the ground, it's like I'm in another world. Sun was right. My basement has changed.

Instead of a compact space full of clutter and boxes, I'm in a room that feels like it goes on infinitely. Marble walls stretch on and on with no end, eventually fading away into blackness. I can't see a thing except for one circle of light that shines on a dusty marble pedestal and the blackness around it. The air is silent and stale, not a single sound except for my short breaths. Goosebumps appear on my arms.

My footsteps echo through the room as I straighten and start to walk towards the spotlight. With every step, my instincts scream louder for me to run. I should have, because when I'm a few metres away, I see that the pedestal is empty. The headband isn't there.

Which means that Erebus is.

I guess that somehow, I thought I'd be safe coming down here, because when the temperature around me drops and he steps into the spotlight, cold red eyes glinting maliciously and a broken, gold, headband circling half his head, I realise that I just made a mistake.

“Raven Waters. I knew when Sun chose you that you were unpredictable, but being stupid enough to come down here after just learning what was going on – well, you surprised even me. You just saved me the trouble of having to come find you.” Erebus chuckles and that’s when I know that there’s nothing I can do. Sun seems to have disappeared, and even just standing next to him, I can feel his power. I feel sick, my hands are clammy, but even though my body is paralysed with fear, I come to the realisation that mentally, I’m not nervous at all.

He stops suddenly and hisses, “Give it to me.”

“No.”

His eyes flash and a second later I’m flying across the room, slamming into the wall. I gasp for breath and roll onto my side, heart pounding and tears blurring my vision. Erebus appears in front of me, towering over my body.

“Insolent little girl. You’re pathetic. Give me the band.”

A sudden fury comes over me. “No.”

His hand shoots and lifts me by the neck, cutting off my supply of oxygen. And yet for some reason, I don’t struggle. Erebus’s face is a few inches away and I see in his cold eyes just how insane he is.

Just as I start to see stars, a sudden force slams him away from me. Sun. Erebus crashes into the opposing wall with so much strength that it crumbles directly on top of him, burying him in masses of marble. I fall to the ground, rasping. His headband must have been knocked off, because when I look up, it’s a few metres away.

Raven. You don’t have to put it on. If you do, you’ll die. Even half of the band contains too much power for your body to handle.

Sun doesn’t seem to understand that subconsciously, I don’t care. Growing up, I hated mom. I hated how we had no money, how she couldn’t afford to buy me anything and give me the life that I saw others enjoying. So when she finally saved up enough to give me an education, I ditched class. I smoked and drank and stayed out late. I made her life miserable, and she still loved me enough to borrow money from all sorts of people to try and make me happy. Then, she died, and my world came crashing down.

Maybe by doing this I can make it up to her.

So, I stand up, and taking one last, final breath, I put on the crown.

I’m standing over my lifeless body, looking down at it. I feel...content. At peace. I’m not angry, sad, happy, or anything else. I just am.

Looking up, I see Sun. He’s real, a real being with arms and legs and a face. He stands on the other side of my body, watching me. The golden half-crown that I saw Erebus wearing lies on his head, only this time it isn’t broken; it’s a full circle that wraps around Sun’s head and shines brighter than the stars.

He’s watching me and after a few seconds, his lips turn up sadly. “Thank you.”

It’s as if we’re still the same person, because I know the hidden meaning behind those words. He’s sorry I had to die; he’s sorry that he couldn’t do anything to help. I smile softly to show that I’m not upset, and I reach out my hand. He takes it and as we shake, his gaze moves to something behind me and he slowly starts to fade away, until all I’m holding onto is air.

“Raven?” says a soft, gentle voice. I gasp; I know that voice. I spin around, and there stands my mom. She opens her arms, eyes filling with tears, and I rush into them, sobbing. Burying my face into her shoulder, I hold on to her as if I’m drowning and she’s anchoring me to the shore.

“I’m sorry mom, I’m so sorry.,” I choke.

“Shh...shh. I’m so proud of you,” she whispers, stepping back and cradling my face.

“What now?” I mumble through my tears.

“Now, we go home.”

Eastbound

The SMIC Private School Shanghai, Goh, Mavis - 15

Early spring arrived on a light breeze, bringing with it the sweet scent of new blooms and the freshness of new life beginning. In the monasteries of Nalanda, two travellers were busy packing their bags and assembling their scrolls, which were to be bound together and strapped to the back of a packhorse.

One of the travellers was a monk. Astonishingly, he was not from the great monasteries of Nalanda; rather, he had come a great distance and over the flaming desert, all the way from China. He was Sen, and his traveling partner Wu was similarly far from home.

“Fine weather today,” Wu commented unnecessarily. He reclined in the shade and plucked a mango off the tree they were resting under, biting into it indelicately. “This tree is especially wonderful. Ha! I wish we could carry it back to China.” As he talked the mango slowly turned to pulp under his grip, and mango juice stained his chin and hands.

Sen viewed this blankly. “Soon we will be braving the scorching heat and sands of the desert,” he said, pointedly looking away until his sharp profile was silhouetted against the bright sun. He gathered his beige robes and shifted to sit further from Wu. “I want to leave by noon. Bringing these scrolls back to China will be an arduous task. We should leave as soon as possible.”

Much to the frustration of Sen, they departed two hours behind schedule. Wu, however, was carefree. He adjusted the scrolls strapped to his back and flicked the reins of their horse a little. As they navigated out of the bustling marketplace he asked delightedly, “D’you think they’re scared of my sword?”

Sen glanced at those who were eyeing the sword resting at Wu’s waist, then turned his gaze to Wu’s obnoxiously bulky figure, clad in stiff armor. “I don’t think it’s your sword they’re scared of,” he muttered. When Wu’s attention flicked to a stall selling fruits, Sen hurriedly walked up behind him and said, “Let’s focus on getting out of here.”

It was yet another two hours before they reached the city walls. “Beyond this,” Wu proclaimed dramatically, “is a vast sea of sand, waves of dunes rising threateningly over our heroes. The brave spirit of warrior Wu—”

“Stop talking,” Sen said, annoyed. “If you talk too much your throat will dry up, and water is limited as it is.”

“At least I have things to say,” Wu sniffed. “You’re really like a grandpa, even though you’re twenty.”

“And you’re really like a baby, even though you’re twenty six,” Sen replied without missing a beat. “Our horse is becoming restless. Let us proceed in our journey.” He shrugged a little to secure the straps holding his scrolls and took the first step into the desert.

Wu called after him, “If you keep treating me like this, see if I carry any more scrolls!” Then he tugged on the reins and a disgruntled snort, the horse followed after him in catching up to Sen.

Nightfall was like an icy blanket that fell upon them without warning. They tied the horse

to a small shrub, then set up a small cloth tent and huddled inside for warmth. Above them the inky sky glittered with infinite stars, dreamlike in its endlessness and absurd vacancy, and it enveloped them until they felt they were in a different world entirely. The chilly air pressed against them and set them shivering. Sleep was flighty and they slept in bursts, so when morning came they faced it with heavy eyelids and hazy minds.

“We simply need to adapt to this new way of living,” Sen explained optimistically. “Soon we will become accustomed to such drastic temperature change, and be able to sleep peacefully once again.”

Yet this cycle continued for the next week until they reached the mountain pass, where they were utterly unable to rest at all. Wu was particularly restless, running his hand through his mop of tangled brown hair. “I don’t like this,” he said uneasily. “This is a great place to be robbed. Sen, don’t trust these mountain passes.”

“Perhaps you’d like to climb over the mountain instead,” Sen suggested dryly. He massaged his aching muscles and forced his foot to take the next step.

“I can’t feel my feet,” Wu complained. “Or my hands, because of this horse. This is terrible. Why did I sign up for this again?” He kicked a rock and hissed at the resulting pain.

“I don’t know,” Sen said pleasantly, staring steadily at the next rock. When he resumed staring ahead, he noticed a distant figure shuffling wearily ahead of them. As they neared, the faint details of a well-worn, dark brown monk’s habit sharpened into view, and Sen said, “It seems we have encountered another traveller. Let’s ask him for his story.”

Wu gave the figure a once-over and said suspiciously, “Why do his robes have this weird tear down the back?”

“All sorts of strange things happen in the desert and mountains,” Sen said reasonably. “I guess we’ll find out.”

The monk’s skin was worn rough and tan by the sun, and he carried with him a small leather satchel slung across his chest. He was willing to accept their companionship, and they learned that his name was Jing and he was on his pilgrimage across the desert. Sen was delighted to learn that there was another monk taking the perilous journey, like him. “You should come with us,” he offered amiably, and Jing accepted.

“Hey Jing, why are your robes torn in the back?” Wu called from where he was leading the horse behind them.

Jing answered immediately. “During a gust of wind, my robes caught on a tree branch. In my terror, I moved too quickly and my robes tore.” He added, “It allows for quite a few icy drafts at night.”

Sen nodded in understanding. “Ah, the desert is approaching again,” he said, peering into the horizon. “The sun is about to set. We must move quickly.”

Wu was decidedly unhappy about having to fit all three of them into one cramped tent. “Just leave your sword outside,” Sen said exasperatedly. “Why do you even need your sword anyway?”

“Why don’t we all leave our things outside?” Wu glared pointedly at Jing’s satchel. “Not like there are wild animals waiting to bite into our food and water, or bandits waiting to steal all our belongings.”

They all glared at each other in some sort of three-way exchange of annoyance.

“Everyone,” Sen said with an air of finality, “Is going to leave their things outside.”

They did. Then they settled against each other to conserve heat and closed their eyes. “You’re really strong for a monk,” Wu said to Jing. “See, Sen, his arms are really strong and hard.”

Sen sighed, and silence soon fell over them.

Wu woke to a sudden draft by his legs. The tent entrance flapped in the wind and a cold gust of wind tore at his face, leaving him squinting at the stars. As he crept to the entrance, there was a quiet hiss of sand moving outside, and then a small clink. Wu held his breath as he reached for the sword lying just outside the tent. As his fingers closed around the firm leather of the handle and he lifted the sword, there was an unearthly shriek that pierced his ears and set every nerve in his body on high alert.

Behind him, Sen jerked sharply upright as his hands scrabbled for balance on the ground. Just as his mouth began to form words, Wu tossed a pillow at him and gestured to remain silent. Sen glared at him with eyes that demanded an explanation, and as Wu rolled his eyes, the tent fell into shadow.

Wu snapped around to see a pair of legs blocking the exit and he dived, locking his arms around the knees and sending both him and the stranger tumbling to the ground. With a vicious yell the stranger lifted an arm and the serene starlight reflected off the edge of his blade, sending Wu rolling to the side to pull the stranger off balance. As Wu kicked the other's head into the sand, he drew his sword to lop off the protective vest. Keeping one foot planted firmly on the stranger's back, he drove his sword diagonally through the man's chest until it pierced the sand, and he kept it there as he waited for the convulsions to stop.

A dark stain was spreading across the sand as Sen emerged from the tent. At seeing Wu standing, he breathed a sigh of relief. Then he looked down and his eyes widened in barely concealed horror and he admonished, "Wu, violence is never the solution." He knelt and muttered a short prayer.

Wu scowled. "Well, he certainly seemed to think it was," he said, nodding towards the corpse. "It was kill or be killed. Anyway," he continued hurriedly, as Sen looked as if he were about to begin a lecture, "Let's check for who he is."

He pulled his sword away, wiping it in the sand. Then he nudged the body with his foot and it rolled over with dragging limbs, revealing the bloodstained face of Jing.

"He must be a bandit," Wu announced disgustedly. He prodded the leather garments Jing was wearing and said smugly, "I told you he seemed unusually strong. Probably got those robes from a real monk he attacked. Stabbed him in the back — that explains the slit."

"Bandit or not, you shouldn't have killed him," Sen said reproachfully. "That's bad karma. It'll come back to bite."

"You think that's the worst thing I've done?" Wu laughed as he kicked the body away. They watched it roll down a slope with sickening thuds at every turn. "We gotta move. The scent of blood attracts wild animals."

As Wu disassembled the tent, Sen said, "He killed our horse."

"Probably because he has a crew of bandits following close by, who were gonna pick him up. Otherwise he'd have left it alive so he could escape on it," Wu explained matter-of-factly. "All the more reason why we need to start moving now."

Sen planted his feet on the ground. "No," he said resolutely. "We need to bring these scrolls with us."

Wu stopped in disbelief. "Are you crazy?" he exclaimed. "There's no way both of us will be able to lift all of those. Just leave them. Our lives are more important." He shoved the canvas of the tent into his bag with more force than necessary.

“We can’t let the word of all those scribes go to waste,” Sen declared. “There is so much information hidden in these scrolls. Can you imagine? The knowledge that our country will be able to gain? We must bring these back, Wu. This is my purpose.”

“Well it isn’t mine,” Wu spat furiously. His face flushed red with anger as he spoke, “Just returning to China with our lives intact will be good enough! You’re the most well traveled out of anyone in China, even the emperor himself. What kingdoms haven’t you visited? Isn’t your experience and knowledge enough? Who cares about these scrolls?”

The night air turned taut from tension and heavy with unspoken words. In the silence, the scratching sound of Sen untying the scrolls bound to the packhorse was particularly deafening. He worked on re-binding the scrolls to his own bundle, while Wu stood motionlessly on the sands.

Wu’s mind wrestled with indecision. Perhaps it was the war that awaited him back in China that left him so uncertain. It weighed heavily on his shoulders, as it had for the entire journey, and Wu’s back strained with the pressure until it finally snapped.

“Why,” Wu breathed, “do you have no sense of self-preservation? I can’t — I hate that you’re just gonna throw down everything trying to save these pieces of paper. You think we can just keep walking? You think we’re gonna survive the next few months lugging these dead weights behind us?” he questioned incredulously. Then he burst out, “Your prayers aren’t gonna save us from collapsing from exhaustion, Sen! We’re going to die if we do this! I refuse to sacrifice our lives!”

Sen blinked at him. “This is my purpose,” he repeated. “I believe you’re being selfish. We’re capable of much more than we think we are. Shouldn’t we at least try crossing the desert with this treasure trove of knowledge and learning? I want to help my home in the best way I can, and for me, it is by doing this.”

Wu swallowed down the words he was about to say. It wasn’t that he didn’t understand Sen’s situation — instead, he felt his priorities lined up differently from Sen’s. For it must be known that Wu was a warrior, ever since he was a scruffy kid picked off the streets of a dilapidated town. He’d grown up in a band of ragtag boys like him, who ran and screamed in a isolated temple somewhere in a vast rice field. More importantly, they had spent their entire lives being trained to become elite warriors who would serve the emperor on the battlegrounds of their war with the Turks. And Wu had long proven himself to be the best of them all. He was scheming, he was clever, he was fearsome, and when the other boys saw his dark, curly haired head around the corner they would shout and run to him for stories or advice.

When Wu became a true warrior he had taken his place as a general in the emperor’s army, yet in the days leading up to his first battle he’d become jittery and uncertain about his responsibilities and his military prowess. The battleground put his life at stake and he hadn’t been ready to take such a risk. At this point he’d seen Sen creeping out the city walls and, in a sudden bout of insanity, convinced the monk to take him as a bodyguard.

Even so, Wu couldn’t run away from the war forever.

“For me,” Wu began slowly, “What awaits me in China is most likely imprisonment or penalty of death.”

Sen glanced at him questioningly. “Does the emperor have something against you?”

“I sort of left my position as one of his generals,” Wu announced, his voice betraying him by wavering. “I’m not really in favor right now.” Then he announced decisively, “I’ll help you lug these back. I have nothing else to do anyway.”

The monk looked at him for a long moment. “You don’t see enough purpose in your life.” He ignored Wu’s sputtering and said, “You need to realize what you can do. Start by bringing

these scrolls, and from there you can gain more accomplishments.”

“That doesn’t help,” Wu grumbled. But he shrugged his smaller bundle off his back and handed it to Sen. “Give me yours.”

The sun beat down on the two travellers and scorched the sand and their skin and left imprints on their eyelids, shimmering marks that faded in and out as they blinked their eyes. The air was suffocating, as if they were being boiled alive in the humidity. The bottom of their feet had been rubbed raw from trekking, a steady plodding as they forced one tired foot in front of the other. Their joints ached, their heads throbbed and the blisters on their feet sent sharp spikes of pain into their feet very time they took a step. Their muscles screamed from the strain of holding the scrolls up or dragging them onwards, and their throats were parched beyond belief. They’d taken to drinking a drop each time to soothe their throats, and all conversation had been halted due to sheer exhaustion.

Nighttime was just as bad, if not worse. The winds bit at them and turned their exposed, numb skin into dry flakes that pricked with pain. Sleeping was, oddly enough, an arduous affair, as they were never certain of whether they’d wake up. If they did, standing to resume walking required tremendous mental and physical strain.

It was an endless trek, but then—! Then, in the distance, there was a splash of green. Hope bloomed, simultaneously warm and nerve-wrecking, in Wu’s chest. As they neared it became apparent that it was not an illusion or a fantasy made up by their rest-deprived minds. The oasis was real, and so was the food and water that it provided.

They rested and ate and drank with relish, so much that they began to feel lightheaded. Sen said confidently, “With this break, we will reach our goal. Wu,” and here he stood up, newly motivated for the next trek, “*We will reach China.*”

The wooden house was cool in the crisp autumn air. A helmet was hung on a hook; then a cape, then some gloves. “Another victory under my belt,” Wu sang. “Another one bites the dust!”

On his table there lay an envelope. A letter, from a province far, far away.

Dearest Wu [it read],

I’ve been translating, as usual, and I’m proud to announce that our library is nearly twice the size and full of texts from all over the world. It’s possibly the greatest collection we have in China, and I hope to expand it further. Even scholars from foreign lands have come to request an audience with me, which I never fail to be surprised and incredibly honored by. Here’s to success on my part — and I expect that there has been equal success for you. I hope to hear back from you soon.

Wu closed the letter and added it to the bundle resting on his bookshelf, full of letters from Sen. He sat and pulled out a brush.

Dearest Sen [it read],

The emperor appointed me general yesterday...

Journeys to the West

The SMIC Private School Shanghai, Mak, Milly - 14

High up at the peak of the East Mountains of China, above the clouds and out of sight, stood a solitary concrete house. There was nothingness for hundreds of miles but a single well where water was fetched at exactly six in the morning everyday. The inside of the isolated house was empty except for an aged wooden table, a single chair, and a miniature statue of the Buddha on the table. There was a bald man dressed in a plain brown ragged robe sitting on the chair, composed and eyes closed, and an excited monkey leaping around the house and chattering restlessly.

Xuan was a monk, granted immortality by the gods in the 800s after overcoming extreme hardships and completing the infamous “Journeys to the West.” He was a kind man. In fact, he was sometimes too kind for his own good. He always put others before him, with an altruistic mentality that he could surrender himself for the sake of others. This wasn’t beneficial to him; in fact, he offered to sacrifice himself to fulfill others only too many times in his lifetime.

That was why Sun was always by his side. Sun, a monkey granted with special powers since the 800s, was blunt and straightforward, always aggressive and ambitiously solving problems in a way that benefited him. He acted intuitively and did not think much about his actions; he would do whatever it took, as long as he could reach his final goal.

They were best friends, as they recognised their own flaws and realised that many times, their cooperation was required to be successful. However, with such extreme contrasting mindsets, these two could never compromise and, more often than not, fought over who’s decision was a better one. Sometimes it was in a problem of immense magnitude and importance, like decisions they made when completing one of their missions, and sometimes it was just a small daily decision, like deciding what to eat for dinner. No matter what it was, they always quarrelled.

Just as the two were arguing over something of minimal significance, the Buddha statue suddenly lit up magically. Curious, the man and the monkey immediately turned to the source of light. This meant that they had received a mission from the gods – finally. This hadn’t happened for decades – since the second world war, when they had prevented a major nuclear disaster from destroying the world completely. But that was another story.

A regal voice of authority spoke up from the statue and echoed off the walls of the tiny room. The sound seemed cloudy and unreal, but the words spoken were articulated clearly. “Greetings, Xuan and Sun. A terrible earthquake is foreseen to happen tomorrow in Crown Village of Sichuan...”

The clean room immediately started to transform into the scene of the village after the earthquake...

At first the immense amount of dust in the air blinded Xuan and Sun’s view as a dry dusty smell filled their nostrils and choked them. Gradually, as their eyes adjusted to their surroundings, a dreadful landscape of ruins appeared before them. No buildings or houses remained intact; rocks, bricks, and furniture from houses piled up, along with fallen branches and twigs from collapsed trees. Rubble from crumpled houses trapped villagers below them, and bloody screams for help surrounded Xuan and Sun.

The horrible scene around them dissolved away. However, what followed was even more painful and heartbreaking.

The broken and torn voice of a sobbing man, the polar extreme of the previous god's calm and clear speech, echoed in their ears. Rumbling and crashing sounds were heard just behind the voices.

"Dear gods, please... please save our village. My house has fallen apart, and I am homeless and penniless. My farmland has been ruined and I can no longer sustain a living. Please..."

This wasn't the end. Many others followed, of men and women, children and the elderly alike, all voices desperate and filled with pain, sorrow, and sheer horror. Xuan and Sun had never heard anything as terrible as these broken voices.

"Gods, please tell me where to go... My family is gone and I don't have a home. I'm only nine, I don't want to die. Please help me..."

"Save me, gods... I'm stuck under rubble and nobody is here to call for help!"

At the end of the series of foreseen prayers, the crashing sounds in the background gradually diminished, and the clear voice appeared once again.

"The country does not recognise this small and insignificant village and will not send enough aid. Over five hundred locals will die, thousands will go missing, and the rest of the population will be in turmoil. We, the gods, and Crown Village, rely on you to bring peace and safety to the villagers before the terrible destruction. I wish you the best of luck."

The statue returned to its original white ceramic state as the room reverted back to normal.

Even after the end of the god's speech, broken cries for help seemed to fill the room and echo in Xuan and Sun's ears. The image of destruction seemed to be imprinted in their minds. Xuan and Sun sat in silence for longer than a few moments, in shock.

Finally, Sun spoke up.

"We should really help them."

"But how?"

"I don't know. I don't know yet. But we can, before they are destroyed."

And so the duo left their house at the peak of the mountains and began their journey west, to the village of Sichuan.

Hours later, they arrived at Crown Village. It was a century-old traditional Chinese village, busy and full of life. Xuan and Sun could not believe that this place, bustling with activity, would be completely diminished into ruin within a day.

"So what do we do now?" Xuan prompted.

"The fastest and essentially easiest way would be to scare them away from the village. Oh! I can transform into a terrorist and threaten all the villagers to leave their homes," Sun declared.

"No! That is immoral, Sun. Why would you lie and threaten them to get your way? I suggest warning each villager, one by one, about the earthquake, and evacuating them immediately. We can do this in a friendly way; we don't have to be harsh."

"That's not how society works, my friend. I guarantee you, nobody will listen to you. They will only ignore you, or even kick you out of their village, for interrupting their busy lives. Don't be so naive. And even if they do listen, how long do you think it would take to evacuate the entire village? Two, three days, for five thousand villagers? They'll all be dead by the time you finish!"

"And what good will threatening do? That will bring them so much unnecessary stress

and terror. Think about their feelings, Sun.”

Their argument lasted longer than it should have, and their time was running out. They only had less than three hours before the earthquake started, and Sun was the first to point this out.

“We only have three hours, Xuan. Why are you so stubborn? Just do it my way.”

“No. I refuse to lie to the villagers. You can do it your way, but I will warn the villagers myself.”

This pointless debate between the two tenacious and headstrong personalities had no final solution. They both rolled their eyes at the other and proceeded in their separate ways, to carry out their plans individually.

Xuan, the peace advocate, quite literally started from the left side of the village and just walked from door to door to tell each villager about the disaster bound to happen. At each door, he made his kindly speech:

“Good evening, I am Xuan, the monk from the East Mountains. I am here to warn you about the terrible earthquake about to happen in three hours. You must immediately evacuate your family and friends from this fate!”

And at each door, he received a cold glare and a dismissive and sarcastic thanks before the door slammed at his face. He couldn’t understand why nobody listened to him; he was only trying to help.

He soon realised his efforts were futile. The more he continued his attempts at warning the villagers, the more he started to doubt himself.

Maybe Sun was right... Nobody will believe an old man that their century-old village will fall apart in a few hours.

After the 50th house, he left the village and sat down on the grass fields, defeated. He regretted speaking so harshly to Sun hours ago.

How’s Sun doing?

Then Xuan checked the time.

Oh no. Five minutes left before the earthquake??

Meanwhile, Sun, the aggressive and impatient one, carried out his plan at the right side of the village. Transformation being one of his magical powers, he transformed himself. He was now covered in black cloth from head to toe, body posed to look as threatening as he possibly could. He walked around at the right side of the village, holding a knife, and told everyone he saw that they must leave the village or else he would kill them. Of course, there were terrified screams and slight panic. However, unexpectedly, a lot of the villagers stood up against him. Even after using some of his magical powers to scare the villagers, Sun ended up being chased out of the village by a mob of angry men, all shouting, “you can’t hurt our families or take away our village! We have been here for generations and a man holding a knife will not scare us!”

Sun was shocked by the villagers’ unexpected behavior.

How would I have known that they are so protective of this stupid village?? Sun thought to himself, annoyed at his failure.

Maybe Xuan was right... Threatening will only cause unneeded panic and chaos. Wait. Is Xuan’s method working? Sun suddenly remembered his long-forgotten partner.

He checked the time.

Five minutes left????

Sitting at different sides of the village, the man and the monkey were dumbfounded, clueless as to what to do. They both regretted their argument, and yet they couldn’t

do anything now. And so they were forced to watch the destruction, identical to the premonition they saw just yesterday in their own house, play out yet again, but in a much larger magnitude. The clean and perfectly arranged houses collapsed into rubble within seconds, the smell of dust yet again permeated the air, and bloody screams of pain and terror filled the area. If they were mortals, Xuan and Sun's lives would have been in fatal danger as well.

Suddenly, both Xuan and Sun heard a voice echo in their ears:

“Your mission failed. What did you learn?”

“Cooperation and compromise,” the answer coming from the opposite sides of the village was the same.

The god hummed in approval. “I will give you another chance. This time, you only have two hours to save the village. Make good use of your time.”

In the blink of an eye, the village returned to its original undisturbed state, and Xuan and Sun were standing beside each other again. They eyed each other guiltily, each knowing that they were wrong to ignore the other.

Their time was short. They mumbled their apologies and started planning. This time, as Sun had suggested rudely a while ago, they decided that being completely truthful would not be effective at all, and so they agreed that they had to create a lie. But as Xuan had pointed out earlier, threatening would only cause chaos, so they would use a friendlier and more positive way to attract people out of the village.

Now, instead of being a terrorist that ineffectively frightened the villagers, Sun was a merchant selling magical goods and cheap merchandise on a hill at an open area a distance away from the village, where there would be no trees or houses to collapse on them in the event of an earthquake.

Xuan entered the village once again and advertised the merchandise in the village square. At the news of cheap and magical goods, the villagers became excited and gathered their friends and family to inspect and buy them. In a close-knit village like this, news traveled fast, and soon enough, all the families were rushing out to buy the mysterious magical goods.

With perfect timing, Xuan ensured that everyone left the village before leaving it himself as well.

When Xuan arrived at the makeshift street vendor's place, everybody was crowding around Sun curiously, unsuspecting of the fate of their village.

Then it finally happened, and Xuan and Sun saw the destruction yet again; the third time in the past three days. But this time, rather than feeling guilty and helpless, they were relieved. When the village collapsed before the villagers' eyes, Xuan and Sun could see the shock, fear, and despair on their faces. Five thousand villagers stood on the hill, looking over the village that had been their home since they were born and belonged to their families for many, many generations before them. They huddled together and sobbed as they realised that even though they lost a home, all their friends and family were safe and unharmed, and that was all that really mattered. A village could be built again somewhere else.

And that was exactly what they did. With the help of Xuan and Sun, the previous habitants of Crown Village built another warm and harmonious home together, a few miles west of the ruins.

“Thank you for helping us build the new village! Two extra pairs of helping hands are always useful,” the mayor of the village told Xuan and Sun, a wide grin spread across his face.

Little did he know, Xuan and Sun not only helped them rebuild their village, but also saved the lives of all the villagers. They glanced at each other and chuckled.

“No problem. We’re always happy to help!”

With the smiles of proud parents, Xuan and Sun stood on the hill just beside the village and watched as the villagers learned to treasure each other even more. They actively supported each other, and worked together cooperatively. Finally feeling satisfied and accomplished, Xuan and Sun, now understanding the importance of cooperation, traveled east to return to their home on the mountains.

Rising Sun

The SMIC Private School Shanghai, Xu, Hannah - 14

“Sol!”

Rudely pulled out of his peaceful slumber by a loud voice, a young male lurches upright in his bed. His forehead collides with that of another person – this one with a large, round face and small piggy eyes.

“What is it, Felix?” Sol mumbles, rubbing his forehead with a barely suppressed sigh. He swings his legs off of the bed – no point sleeping now that his head is throbbing, anyway.

“Oh. Uh...well there’s a robbery down the street,” Felix mumbles, already backing out of the room. “I think we should check it out. Also, on a more important note, there are pancakes waiting on the dining table. Just thought you might want to know.” With that, he dashes into the kitchen, feet thudding heavily on the wooden ground.

Grumbling, Sol pulls on a sweater and grabs his monkey mask. He remembers he had left his gun downstairs the last time he returned home from an early morning rescue. In the distance, he hears Felix slurping something and Mir, the third member of their little group, running down the stairs. In the room next to Sol’s, Axel, their ‘mastermind,’ snores lightly, eyelashes fluttering as he drifts off into dreamland. Lucky guy. He took the night shift, meaning he didn’t have to get awoken at five in the morning just to catch some common thieves.

“Let’s go!” Sol shouts, grabbing and slinging his gun over his shoulder. Felix shoves the last pancake into his mouth, running around and grabbing his pig-face mask and an ax-gun. Mir calmly walks toward the garage, nodding pleasantly at Sol on his way out.

“Good morning,” he says lightly. His weapon, a weird combination of a sword and gun, is in his right hand and his left holds a skull-shaped mask.

“Remind me again why we are doing this?” Sol says, almost sarcastically. Mir sighs.

“It’s for the greater good, Sol. It’s all for the greater good.” As Mir exits the house, Sol’s mind drifts off.

It began five years ago. It was a cold, snowy day, and Sol was just walking home from buying some groceries, the tip of his red nose peeking through his striped scarf as though scared to face the bitter wind whipping through the air. He climbed the stairs leading to his house, and set the bags down onto the kitchen counter with a loud thump. Crossing over to the opposite side of the room, he picked up one of his mom’s chocolate chip cookies and bit into it. Cookie in hand, he headed upstairs to his room, looking forward to a good long six hours of gaming time. Passing by his mother’s room – Sol’s bedroom was the last one on the second floor, behind his mom’s – he suddenly stopped and turned to face the white door. His mom never closed the door, not even at night, when she was sleeping.

“Mom?” he twisted the doorknob cautiously before he stuck his head in. An eerie silence greeted Sol, and he noticed with a jolt how cold his mother’s room was. All thoughts of gaming and relaxation left his mind as he took in the open windows, curtains flapping and casting frightening shadows onto the cream-coloured walls. He took another step into the room and stopped cold. There, lying on the ground in a puddle of blood, is his mother, eyes staring blankly at the ceiling. Sol’s half-eaten cookie fell onto the floor

and broke in half, crumbs spraying everywhere.

The rest of the night was a blur. Sol remembers only fragments – him calling the police, getting questioned, and then, sitting alone in the dark night, hugging his knees to his scrawny chest, Sol realized that he was, for once in his life, utterly alone.

Shaking his head as if to get rid of the memory, Sol follows Mir and Felix into the car and slips in. With a loud roar of the tires and headlights glaring harshly at the road ahead, the trio speeds off into the morning.

“Are you sure we’re at the right place?” Sol glances suspiciously at the seemingly vacant grocery store. Large bubble letters spell out “WHITE DEMON WHOLE-SALE STORE: FRESH FRUITS AND VEGETABLES ALL YEAR ROUND” on a faded yellow banner partially falling off its perch above the main door. The large glass doors seem locked, although Sol knows that a little thing such as a locked door is nothing to the three vigilantes.

“This is the place, I’m telling you!” Felix replies hotly. In his pudgy hands lies a tablet, currently emitting a low blue light in the dark van.

“Excuse us if we don’t trust you, you led us to the wrong place three times in the last week,” Mir comments from the driver’s seat. Sol lets out a small chuckle at the offended look on Felix’s face.

Felix opens his mouth to let out a quick retort, but Sol suddenly makes a “shhh” sound and peers around. He slips on his mask, which falls over his head to fit him perfectly. Mir and Felix follow his lead, immediately turning the trio into three unidentifiable figures.

Deep inside the fruit store, a large crash sounds, immediately followed by a terse moment of silence. Pointing at the store, Sol pulls open the sliding door of the van and his lithe figure steps gently onto the pavement. Felix joins him a moment later, and after a quick glance in Sol’s direction, Mir, driving the van, silently speeds away to guard the backdoor.

“Come on,” Sol jerks his head toward the door of the fruit store and starts to step toward it, freezing at every suspicious sound. Felix grunts and walks to the locked front doors, fits a small round device onto the lock, and lets it do its work. A second later, the lock clicks open and Felix tries to push the door open.

It doesn’t budge.

“It says *pull*, you idiot,” Sol hisses and, pulling the door open, steps into a large store filled with stacks and stacks of apples, oranges, and bananas. The back of the room splits into two dark hallways.

“I’ll go this way,” Sol hisses and points his gun towards the left hallway. Felix nods and soundlessly, the two separate.

The lights are turned off, but the rising sun shining through the windows provides just barely enough light for Sol to find his way around. Large cement walls rise from the ground, with small crates and boxes filled with what Sol supposes are more fruit leaning against them. The smell of fresh peaches waft across the long hallway, and Sol pauses to sniff the air.

Peaches. Yum.

The hallway gently slopes down toward a basement. Pausing suspiciously at the bend, Sol sticks his head out to check if there is anybody in the room below. A lone light-bulb floods the room with a yellow light, and in the corner are the silhouettes of two figures – one small and thin, the other large and round.

Then, Felix’s unmistakable voice reaches Sol’s ears. “Do you need any help?”

Sol rushes forward to see Felix kneeling down so that he is at eye level with a young girl. Her dark hair glows under the bulb, and her skin glows ghostly pale compared to Felix's tanned body. She looks frail and almost pitiful, standing there in a small pink dress and a basket carried on one arm.

Felix looks over the girl's shoulder to see Sol in his mask, and his face breaks into a large, relieved smile at the sight of his best friend and leader.

The girl notices Felix's straying eyes and turns her body, curious as to what he is looking at. With a start, Sol realizes that her eyes are the deepest, darkest black that he has ever seen, and her full lips are coloured the gruesomely dark red shade of blood.

"Sir! Would you like some apples?" she offers Sol the small wicker basket hanging around her arm – in it lies three beautifully shaped, bright red apples.

There is something off about her, but Sol can't quite place his finger on it. Felix looks very comfortable helping her, kneeling there on the ground. As if noticing Sol's suspicion, the girl smiles even wider, showing her pearly white teeth.

"Come, get some apples." The girl inches closer to Sol, and her words seem to ricochet through the large circular room. Felix starts to stand, looking a little alarmed.

Sol takes a step back, reaching for his gun.

"I said, take an apple!" the girl screeches and, as if making a split second decision, turns to launch herself at Felix. A knife appears in her hand as she leaps towards the older male, intent on killing him.

Felix screams (a surprisingly high-pitched scream for a man his size) and backs up against the wall. Sol stumbles back and slings his gun off his shoulder and onto his hands, firing it in quick succession. The girl slumps on the floor at Felix's feet, and with great effort, turns her head to look back at Sol.

"He will find you," the girl promises from the floor. "And when he does, he will bury you alive!" Her blood-drenched dress smears against the cement floor, painting a crimson smile with the oozing red liquid.

"Who?" Felix steps forward bravely despite his shaking legs, weapon in hand. "Who is going to find us?"

The girl just bares her teeth in a cold smile.

Although death threats are something to keep in mind, the three vigilantes are all too used to them. So, they leave the fruit store and pile into their van. The girl's body lies on the basement floor, left there by the three friends for the local police to find and collect.

Sol leans his head against the cool glass window as the world flies by, his bright amber eyes staring back at him. To his left, Mir hums placidly under his breath, seemingly unshaken by the entire encounter. Of course, he was standing guard the whole time, so he probably wasn't all too worried anyway.

The scene outside the window seems to disappear as Sol gets pulled back into his memories. In his mind's eye, he sees a younger version of himself, hands jammed into the pockets of his jeans, walking down the street with a furious expression on his face.

It had been three years since his mother was killed. The police still had not found the murderer – in fact, they had already given up on the case, something which did not please Sol at all. The streetlights casted harsh shadows on his already angry face, making him seem even fiercer. His face mask lay crumpled in his fist as he turned and stomped up the stairs to his house. On the couch sat somebody he had teamed

up with, for the first time since he started this vigilante thing, and he glowered at the back of the boy's head.

"Felix!" Sol barked.

Felix jumped to his feet. "Yes, Sol?" he hurriedly replied, pushing a bag of potato chips behind his back with a guilty expression on his face.

"Where were you tonight? You were supposed to meet me for training at that abandoned parking lot." Sol throws his mask down onto the kitchen counter – it landed in same place where he had placed two stuffed grocery bags that one fateful night, so many years ago.

"Oh." Felix looked down at his toes. "I'm so sorry! I forgot that we had training tonight."

"Forgot? You forgot?" Sol's voice rose furiously before he managed to get ahold of himself. "If you're going to treat this as some joke, something less important than your stupid chips and TV shows, then you can leave. Right now!"

Felix's head snapped up, and Sol saw a small fire ignite inside his dark brown eyes. "No. I'm sorry for leaving you stranded today – it won't happen again. But I made a choice to leave behind my life and become a vigilante, and I'm not going to leave, no matter what. My own brother was caught and killed by one of those petty criminals running rampant around this city. He was innocent – had never done a bad thing in his life. I promise, I am going to kill every one of those --"

Cutting Felix short, Sol held up a hand, although his eyes twinkled amusedly. "No swearing in this house, please."

Pulled back to reality by the van screeching to a halt inside the garage, Sol jumps out of his seat and strides into the house. It is not his old childhood home – Sol had left the house, and everything that came with it – when he started working with Mir and Axel. *This is a house filled with memories, he muses as he unlocks the back door, I would hate to have to leave it, be it because of death or the ever-increasing rental fee.*

That night, a thin sliver of the moon shines through Sol's window, and he rises out of bed to pull down the shades. As he does, the world suddenly silences and a tingle travels up his spine. Sol whirls around.

Standing in front of him is a long, lean figure dressed head-to-toe in black. His face is hidden in the shadow, and the only thing Sol can see are his luminous silver eyes, which stare penetratingly at Sol.

"Who are you?" Sol demands, his hand inching for his gun before realizing that he had – yet again – left it downstairs. He really should stop doing that.

The figure laughs – a low, raspy sound. He steps out of the shadow, and a long, thin face appears. A pale hand grips the handle of a small blade. "I am the White Bone Demon, Sol. I believe it was *your* mother I killed five years ago? Your mother – Luna – was also a vigilante, did you not know? Oh, I was so tired of her running around trying to stop all us criminals! Of course, I couldn't have anybody threatening me, I was just rising to power – so I killed her. I thought it would break you – but you chose to become a vigilante as well! Caused quite the uproar when you started killing my little team – not that you knew they all reported back to me, of course. You thought they were all separate little criminals, didn't you? Yes, yes. I couldn't have you follow in your mother's footsteps and overthrow *me*, not after so many years of scheming and planning! But that is why I am here tonight, of course."

Before Sol could answer, the Demon steps forward. A flash of silver, a brief moment of searing pain, and all that is left of Sol is a cold, bleeding body, glassy eyes gazing unseeingly into the heavens.

Journey to the West: Lost in the Jungle

Yew Chung International School-Secondary, Cheng, Serena - 14

Stars gleamed overhead in the dark night sky. Some shone brighter; some dimly. The only sounds that punctuated the jungle air were the crackling and spitting of flames in the campfire. A sudden, wild, breeze leapt across the jungle landscape and the tall plants rippled like waves of the sea. The trees whistled sharply as the flames danced, their sparks illuminated the dark. I sat motionless. As I scanned the star-filled sky, I realised I've been waiting for ages since blacking out... Then finding myself in the middle of a jungle.

Jerking awake, I realised I dozed off. The air felt moist and heavy. I needed water to prevent dehydration and to clean myself. The stains on my skin were making me itchy and smelly. These smells could have attracted predators. I continued to stay in my position, barely able to stand the grumbling from my stomach. After waiting for such a long time, the sky hadn't become a single bit brighter. The grumbling became louder, even painful. With the hunger came thirst. My throat was dry. My body screamed for food and water, I had a headache. The throbbing pain couldn't be ignored anymore. My body needed food and water. I stood up slowly because of numbness in my legs, like a thousand bees trapped inside these thin layers of skin.

Struggling to take steps, I wondered how to look for water. Bending down, I grabbed a long, thick branch and had one end catch fire. I waved my new torch around me and added more wood to my campfire. Walking around in extending circles, I listened carefully for any sound of water. To my left! I heard a quiet trickle of a stream. A rush of joy filled all of me as I ran towards the sound of the stream as if I found gold. My torch lit up the stream, the surface glimmered like thousands of diamonds disappearing and reappearing. Taking a big step towards the stream I knelt down and dipped my head into the water. I greedily gulped mouthfuls, almost choking. The entire stream was mine, I could gobble it all.

Drinking and drinking, I lifted my head. Something jumped out of the water towards me. Its dark deadly eyes stared menacingly. It opened its tremendous jaws and showed its claw like teeth; they were neatly stacked in rows. There were two rows of teeth inside its mouth. From inside, a fork shaped tongue came slithering and stretching towards me. Instinctively jerking backwards, the snake still managed to bite into my arm. I shrieked in pain and hit it with the torch I still held in my other hand, but all it did was dig deeper into my flesh, blood spilled down my side. Feeling faint, I continued to struggle — if I stopped, I would be devoured. It had started to wrap around my body and squeezed me hard. I was losing breath and the battle.

Suddenly, the sky became bright. The stars disappeared; it was noon... instantly. The snake that wrapped around me was startled and loosened its grip. At that moment I leapt up, hit its head with the torch, and fled. Getting back to the safety of my campfire, I stared up at the sky in awe — a giant hand filled half the horizon. It was pulling a massive curtain; behind the curtain was the never-ending darkness. The giant hand reached the horizon and laid the huge curtain down. Just before the lights went out, I glimpsed a grand mountain that sat right where the hand originated.

After escaping from the snake, I shook in fear by the camp fire and held my wounded arm tightly. Panting, I took deep breaths to calm down. Closing my eyes, I felt the cool breeze and the warm fire. Thoughts and confusion were put aside. Letting the fire fill me, I felt safe. Dreading to get plunged into darkness and danger again, I enjoyed every moment of the fire and safety.

Giving out a sad frustrated sigh, I thought, how am I suppose to get out of here? How did I end up here? I remembered going to the library looking for a good book to read. Scanning each book in the “new arrivals” section, I saw an eye catching title — “Journey to the West: Lost in the Jungle”. I flipped open to the first page of the book to see if it’s something that’d interest me. It described a jungle with tall mountains on one side and streams turned to rivers, and rivers poured into the ocean. I felt I wasn’t interested. Putting the book down, something pulled me forward, pitching my face onto the book; I blacked out. When I came to, I was in the middle of a jungle. The air was freezing, so I started a fire using the skills I learnt in scouts.

Thinking about how I got here, I tried to find a way out. “Am I stuck in a book?”, I said out loud.

Slumping to the ground next to the fire, I hopelessly flinched at the thought of getting out. What do I do? Suddenly the image of the mountain I saw when it was bright and the giant hand came to my mind like loud thunder. The hand must be the person reading this book. The huge curtain was a page. The reader lifted up the curtain therefore light came in. The mountain was tall. If I reached the top of the mountain while the hand was flipping the page, maybe I could grab the hand and get out of this book. Even though I had no certainties, it was my only chance.

Using help from the moonlight and stars, the tall mountain could be seen on the left. Determined to get out of here, I started walking towards the grand mountain.

The walk to the mountain was difficult, the least worries were the bugs and mosquitoes that caused big, red, itchy bumps. I dodged tree vines, got hit in the head by branches, tripped over tree trunks, and slipped over rocks. Sweat stained my clothes and made me sticky, but I didn’t care — I had to get out of here. My wound stopped bleeding and didn’t feel numbness, the snake didn’t look poisonous anyway. I read a book about snakes; according to that book poisonous snakes usually have elliptical pupils, triangular heads and two large fangs. The snake that attacked me didn’t seem to have these features — it had an arrow like head and its teeth were similar sizes and shapes.

Branches and leaves on the ground snapped under my feet as I stepped closer to the mountain. There was an uphill path towards the mountain. Staring at it, I hoped it was my way out.

At first, the mountain wasn’t steep. After walking for two hours, I sat leaning against a tree. I felt so tired. Looking towards the sky, I saw stars glimmering in the darkness. If what I had to reach those stars to get out, I would. If I read this book, I wondered would it have been easier to find a way out... Drifting to sleep, two fireflies glowed in the shadows ahead of me. The fireflies caught my attention; therefore I stayed awake looking at them. The fireflies were in perfect sync, when one flew left, the other flew left; when one flew right, the other flew right. Their shape was perfectly symmetrical. Suddenly, the sides of the fireflies tilted up and the middle of the fireflies shifted down. Then these fireflies stayed perfectly still in that position. How strange?

The fireflies moved at a steady pace towards me, then the fireflies roared! I snapped awake. These weren’t fireflies! They were beady eyes. Along with the eyes, claws gleamed in

the moonlight. The approaching beast bellowed again a long, guttural, growl and displayed its salient and razor-sharp teeth. Its nose snuffled as warmth steamed out of its nostrils and its whiskers were more like splinters. Its fur were as dark and atramentous as the stygian shadows of the jungle. Saliva dripped out of its mouth as it strided towards me. Moonlight lit the entire beast. I stood appalled — it was a panther!

An aghast expression instantly engulfed my face as the panther leapt with its claws surging at my throat. My entire body was overwhelmed with fear and terror — I couldn't move. Just when the panther's claws neared my shoulders, a carmine red staff with glistening aureate trim collided against the panther's exposed gut. The panther recoiled away from me. The panther crouched and leapt towards... Not me, but something besides me.

Looking to the left, stood a man with a brown hairy face and eye brows; most of the hair were on the sides of his face, surrounding his mouth, nose and mischievous eyes. His ears were obviously large on the sides reaching above his eyes. On his head was a gleaming gold ring that looped tightly like the trem of his staff. His nostrils flared up, so his nose were like caverns in the middle of his head. The skin under his eyes were very pink, as if sun burnt. He was dressed in a yellow tunic with matching pants. There were gold circular patterns on his tunic. His tunic hung around his legs, almost as a skirt. Over his tunic, he wore a leather body protector with a short red cape hung over his shoulder. His armbrace were like scales. He wore a carmine and aureate belt like his staff.

He leaned back and waited for the panther to reach him, then he swung his staff like a club lightning fast, smacking it on the head. The panther fell to the man's feet. Slowly it stood up in a daze, and the man held up his forefinger, wagging it left and right. I noticed his furry tail wagging left and right in time with his finger. I watched this scene in astonishment. Every movement he made was of a skilled warrior, flexibly dodged each and every one of the panther's attacks. The way he moved reminded me of... a monkey. Come to think of it, even his appearance was like a monkey... and his tail!

The panther turned and slunked away.

"It's safe now. You could breathe again!", he said with a light tone. That's when I realised I was holding my breath.

"Who are you?", I blurted out.

"I am Sun Woo Kong, body guard and guide of Xuanzang. This staff is my friend, Ruyi Jingu Bang, translated to "The Compliant Golden-Hooped...", said Sun Woo Kung.

He's rambling, I thought.

"But who ARE you?", I asked again. There was a whicker of a horse and a monk riding a white stallion behind Sun Woo Kung. The monk wore a big orange hat that had ribbons hanging down on the sides covering his ears. His cloak was made of simple yellow and red fabric; there were no patterns on his cloak. The only patterns he had were the wrinkles on his clothes. Behind the monk two more people appeared. One of them looked part human and completely something else. His skin was light pink and had gigantic floppy ears. A round enormous snout protruded from his face, but wherever he went first wasn't his snout, it was his even more humongous belly. I had to stop myself from laughing when I saw this ridiculous creature, so I shifted my gaze to look at the last member of their group. He looked like a tramp. He had a red beard, but his head was bald. His necklace was a loop of skulls that made him look both terrible and putrefying. They both looked so grisly they made everything else, even the bugs seemed nice.

"We are travellers from the Middle Land", replied the monk. "We're searching for the ancient Sutra text. We want to show everyone the Buddhist ways. The way of the Buddha, is

the way of Enlightenment. The way of the Buddha is the great hope. It will be the answer to all of our pain and suffering we have everyday. You know, what is the reasoning for our pain and suffering...”, said the monk.

The monk was rambling on and on like Sun Woo Kung, I realised. I had my own problems. He was so enthralled in his thinking I just stopped paying attention. Sun Woo Kung saved my life, I was grateful, but this monk was lecturing. Can I thank them then get going?

“What are you searching for?”, the monk asked while I wasn’t listening. I didn’t want to be rude, so I answered his question, “Hm? What? Nothing. I’m searching for nothing.”

“You’re searching for nothing? Nothingness... How profound!”, exclaimed the monk. “In all of this pain and suffering, could nothingness be the ending?”, he mused.

Sun Woo Kung said, “Master we must go. We must be on our way.”

The monk flicked his hand to stop Sun Woo Kung. He glared at me with a look that cut into me straight to my heart.

“I see you are indeed searching for something too. You are lost. You are truly lost. You are in the wrong place”, the monk said with wonder. “We have just crossed these mountains after the Middle Land. What you search for is not across the mountains, the door to your desire could be on the top of the mountain. Be careful of temptation, know yourself and be true to who you are”, he said nodding. He raised his hand to his chest, and chanted, “amitufo” bowing down slightly.

“Woo Kung, Bajie, Wujing! Now it is time to continue our journey”, commanded the monk. As they moved on in their journey, Woo Kung called out, “Good luck!” to me. I realised I had yet to thank him, therefore I yelled, “Thank you for saving my life! I don’t know how to repay you!” Then I only heard light-hearted laughter, “You will, you will!”

Continuing my way up the mountain, I couldn’t stop thinking about what the monk told me. The image of him saying, “Know yourself and be true to who you are” kept revolving around my head. What does that even mean? Why does it bother me so much? I haven’t been lying to anyone.

After walking for a couple more hours, I started to feel a little dizzy and drowsy. A shallow and dry cave was near; I decided it would be a good resting place. Before entering the cave, I checked my surroundings. No strange fireflies or snakes were around. It’s safe here. Sliding against the cave wall, I closed my eyes and quickly fell into a deep, deep, slumber.

“Power. Wealth. The world. It’ll be all your’s. The entire world will bow down to you!” whispered a soft voice.

In the darkness, fog covered my vision. A swirl of smoke swiveled around me lazily until it enveloped me in all directions.

Power? Wealth? The world? That sounds like something good.

“You have knowledge we don’t have here. You could use your knowledge to conquer this world. We could rule this world together!”, the voice whispered closer.

What knowledge? I haven’t even completed school yet.

“Your knowledge, the things you know... You know the world’s future. You could make big explosions and deadly weapons we’ve never seen before! Come with me, join me, the world

will bow at our feet!” whispered the voice in an urging tone.

Power? Wealth? And some people at school just dislike me.

“You will be loved! All will be devoted to you”, the voice intimated.

If I stayed here, I would be able to obtain all of this. Wouldn't it be fantastic to have power, wealth, and popularity? Then I thought of my friends, my mother and father. They loved me already for who I am. Plus, if I stayed here, I wouldn't be able to see them anymore.

“Stay! You must stay! In your world you are just an ordinary child, but here you are powerful and capable of many things!” the voice went from whispering to shouting.

Did I really want what the voice was offering? Shaking my head, I replied, “No. I don't want any of this. None of these are as important as my family and friends. I have to go back.”

The voice snarled at me, then the fog and smoke faded away.

Waking from deep slumber was not as hard as I thought it would be, as on school days waking up was difficult. This sleep made me feel refreshed and alive, like I did something fabulous.

My journey up the mountain continued. What the monk told me stopped resurfacing in my head. Although the way to the top became harder, I enjoyed it. The cool breeze and shining stars made me relax, it reminded me of a hike I had with my parents.

After less than an hour, I finally reached the top. The top gave me a grand view of the jungle below, and in the distance I thought I was able to see the four travellers.

The giant hand could come anytime. I watched and waited for the sign, the instant rising of the noon sun that would fill the entire sky like someone flicking on a massive light switch. Starting to get impatient, I fidgeted, but after all of the things that happened, I took a deep breath and relaxed. Staring off to nothingness, I felt calm. I didn't know how long I waited, but the sky brightened instantaneously. A gigantic hand swept through the sky. Not wanting to miss this chance, I vaulted and grabbed the lowest finger of the hand. Clinging on to it, I grew bigger and bigger until my hands were as big as the hand in the sky.

Nose-diving onto the carpet, my eyes burned from the bright lights on the ceiling. Looking around, my best friend was reading “Journey to the West: Lost in the Jungle” on a bench looking at me dumbstruck.

“What... what happened? Why are you covered in dirt and scratches?”, screamed my friend. Standing up to my feet, I walked over to hug my best friend.

Trying to push me off, my friend exclaimed, “Hey! What's wrong with you?”

I smiled and cried, “Oh my gosh, I'm so glad I'm seeing you right now!”

My friend replied, “what do you mean? I saw you yesterday! What's wrong?”

Smiling again, I said, “Nothing. Absolutely nothing... is all that matters in the world.”

End of <<Journey to the West: Lost in the Jungle>>

Fiction

Group 5



A Journey to the Unknown

Korean International School, Lo, Ting Ho Christopher- 17

My name is Cheung Guan and this is my Story on which I went more than 8000 km away from the only home I knew to the City of Rome, which fell after a thousand years. This is my account of how the city fell.

It was on the fields on Xi'an, that I tended to my rice crops in the afternoon spring. The Sun barraged my skin with its bright array. Cut, plow, rip, dig, those were several actions that were needed to maintain this little plot of land which provides me food and a home. For the last 2 years I have stayed on this farm and I just could not take it anymore. Without due hesitation, I put up my land for sale and sought a better, adventurous life. I gathered all the necessary belongings and left for the Huge City of Xi'an.

Days and nights went by as I trekked the path to Xi'an, dirt turned into stone and the people along the road became numerous. In the Middy, I trekked to see a monolith of such a city. The Gates of Xi'an, made with age old bronze, guarded by towers filled with archers. The City bustled with life with smoke edging across the horizon. Deep in the heart of the bustling sprawl, I knew that there were ways to the illustrious east. The streets were full of life, people going about their daily affairs, traders sought to hemorrhage as much coppers as they could. Bankrupting the naive traveller. I walked around this controlled chaos and very soon I heard the drunken cries from the Three Dragon Tavern. Mustering my feeble courage, I plunged into the fire.

The tavern was a hive of scum and villainy, filed with all kinds of shady characters all over the Middle Kingdom. Mercenaries from the northern steppes were confined to a corner, sharpening their blades. Smugglers played their board games, outwitting one another in the wooden establishment. There was however, one man that stood out from the crowd. He had a leather jacket, outfitted with a helmet from unknown origin. His sword was also from unknown make. Fuelled by my desire for adventure, I approached him carefully and asked him "Where do you get these antiques from?" Finishing his drink, the unknown man told me with just one word "Rome". Intrigued I asked again "What is Rome" The man became clearly incensed with my presence. "Ask me one more question and I'll make sure you will speak again". Shocked with the threat and his armed goons, I left immediately with a tail between my legs. I came out onto the streets again, blending in with the numerous faces. It appears I had to find another way to the West, I knew just the idea. The Markets facilitated trade between the unknown West with the Sassanids and beyond. Caravans would fulfill my thirst for adventure.

The markets were overflowing from goods all over China and the gateway to the west. Freshly weaved silk from the mulberry trees in Zhejiang, Finely decorated porcelain from the famous artisans of Jiangxi and exotic tea leaves from the fringes of the Kingdom in Manchuria. Traders endlessly haggled to get the best prices, which I only know too well as a farmer. I looked for stalls which dealt with exotic goods, I saw one dealing with a yellow metal, which was not gold. I asked "Is it from Rome?" He was stunned and he quickly rebounded with an answer, saying "Yes, how do you know?" filled with interest how I discovered this knowledge. I quickly replied "From a group of thugs in the Three Dragon Tavern". He frowned slightly with utmost scrutiny, stating that "That pitiful excuse

for a Tavern, filled with dangerous men, evil men. Better be quiet about Rome, especially in China.” “I want to travel to Rome.” I said with a steadfast reply. “What skills do you have which would provide for my merry company?”. “I have experience in haggling and experience in War.” I said. “There Is a lot of people who have these qualities, you can travel with me but what do you offer for a place?” with a silver tongue. “20 Stones of Grain should be enough.” The trader paused but for a moment and nodded. I am travelling to the East. “Oh, before I forget, my name is Darius.”

I prepared myself for the journey with buying the essentials needed, a leather bottle of water, worn lamellar armour from my service and a brittle short sword and a month’s worth of provisions for the journey. Very soon I was kitted out with the necessary items needed to trek out into the wilderness. Darius and his rugged company got ready for the journey, armed with various weapons and mounted on fierce stallions. Darius approached me with a chestnut coloured horse and handed a set of reins to me saying “It is yours, take care of him for the rest of the journey.” We set out from the gates of Xi’an to the western deserts at Dusk.

A week of travelling through the desert was the most gruelling, most dangerous and most uncomfortable during my rides through the Taklamakan desert. The sun bombarded us everyday endlessly without respite. Water became the most important good in this desert, sweeter than gold. The sounds of the yellow wasteland was nothing but the malcontent wind. The food on the march was nothing short of just bread and vegetables, laced with sand. The Desert offered nothing to its travellers, only a bystander and consumes those who fall. 6 Days and a majority of our water sucked out by our unquenched thirst and drooling with sweat, we arrived in area with arable land “We reached Hotan, the last major city in the Middle Kingdom.”

Hotan had weathered sandstone walls which stood out from the orange desert. As soon as the wooden gates opened, we saw numerous caravans stopping to resupply and trading of goods from the far west. “Guan, you might want to keep your sword close, I do not want to stay in this place longer than I have to” muttered Darius. We lurked around the markets, refilling our water and gathering more provisions for the journey. As we finished up resupplying, I smelt something with a musty smell. I followed the scent as a Cat followed a piece of string and there was a grill, roasting meat. Lured by the smell, I asked “What kind of meat is that?” The old lady, busy fanning it says quickly “Lamb”. I took out a few coppers from my purse and took a kebab. I bit into it awashed with multiple flavours, it was divine combined with a perfect balance of sweetness with salt and pepper. My moment was interrupted by Darius saying with a impatient voice “Are you done fantasising about being a gourmet?” I quickly finished my kebab and left Hotan as soon as we arrived and we finally left the Middle Kingdom.

Very soon, Darius said “We are entering the realm of the Sassanid Empire, one of the largest empires in the known world.” I asked out of interest “Are you from the Sassanid Empire?” Darius paused but for a moment “I will tell you in time, now come.” The mountains in the region were huge with the summit capped with white froth, with the mountain air soothing our nasal senses. The temperature grew colder and slept into freezing nights, covered with a mountain of wools and rags that the caravan offered. Nothing happened in our mountain route but suddenly, Darius seemed more on edge than usual. It went to the point he held his scimitar with his right hand constantly. “Wait here, I will check ahead.” Darius muttered, he galloped off down the path and the company of 30 men waited, all drawn from the Middle Kingdom and the Sassanid Empire and beyond. 30 minutes went by and he came back in due haste and said “There is a party of marauding bandits in

the region, numbering around 15, we must take them out.” “Why” I asked? “They pose no threat.” Darius quickly snapped a reply back at me stating “Travelling on the path for 15 years has made me experience rough things, terrible things.” Gasping for air and touching my shoulder “Trust me on this”. I smiled and the company readied for battle.

We followed Darius under the cover of darkness, we were in a loose formation and we spotted the bandits, sharpening their swords and eating their catch of the day. Darius ordered the men to stretch their bows. The wind howled and Darius shouted “Loose!”. Arrows whistled in the air and hit their intended targets and Darius swirled his scimitar and shouted “Charge!” and men shouted in unison and the fight began. I engaged a medium sized man, equipped with a club with a black jerkin. I lunged my sword onto his arm and successfully parried. He then dealt a series of blows, trying to knock me off my feet and he did. I dodged his mighty blows and got it and threw dirt in his eyes and screamed in agony. Using this opportunity, I stabbed him through the stomach with my trustee sword and he became lifeless. My heart was still pounding and the day was won, just. 5 of our company was killed during the hectic chaos that ensued during battle and I sat down with Darius on a fallen branch saying “How far is the next stop?” Darius still cleaning his sword from the bloodstains told me “3 days ride, as the crow flies. Do you want to talk about it?”. “I can never understand taking a life, missed opportunities, family and revoking the life to live.” Darius replied with his old wisdom “The hardest part is sparing a life, not taking it, some people who live deserve to die, some people who have passed deserve to live. It is a hard question which haunts me still, lingering on my mind.”

We looted what was useful and buried the dead. I found a new sword which could be a replacement and antique as well as chainmail armour. We then moved on to another City, being introduced once again to the irritant sand. The sand in my boots never seem to go away from the wasteland. My Horse grew tired, cantering over 5000 kilometers. On a quiet day, Darius stood in awe, he then said “We have made it to Baghdad, an important trade city on the Silk Road.” “What goods do they trade?” I said with a tired face. Darius said “Trying to get a Business Acumen eh? Well they deal in Dates and Lapis Lazuli, a rare blue dye.” Baghdad was a new city that I was captivated by, the people and the architecture of the market. Especially in the Merchant Quarter, with mosaics creating stories of how the Sassanid Empire came to be. Darius traded off Spices and Silk from China for thousands of gold coins that I could dream of not working ever again. “We are going to Rome next, rest up for 3 days and we will be on the road again” Darius said to the group. We stayed in nice accommodations, fit for a middle class member of the society. We rested, talked and feasted in the house we hired in and I got to know my group members. The people are very kind yet shy, staying away from unfamiliar ideas or people, loving the stability maintained after the countless wars waged in the region. Unfortunately for us, the days became shorter as we started enjoying ourselves. By the 3rd day, we left Baghdad reluctantly to Alexandria, a city near the ocean. We rode through the plains of Syria and south of it, filled with fertile farmland of swabs of wheat. Canals flowed with fresh water, enriching the land with nutrients. We galloped under the guise of the red sun, not burdened as hard as months before. The journey was filled with discovery, friendship and a bit of danger and hardship which I carved for all this time, but the crowning part was Rome, in which we take large boats to the City.

After a month, we reached Alexandria, a “scholarly capital” as Darius said. It had contained all the written work from the West, in a library, a great library in which Scholars all over the Roman Empire took a tenure to study the vast knowledge housed in such a city.

I was left dazed by seeing a huge expanse of water that I have never seen before, It seemed to never end and the horizon was met with mystery. “We will be taking all of our goods and horses in this Galley to transport all of our goods and horses to Rome, the journey will take 3 weeks at most, if the wind is good 19 days. Any questions?” One member asked “How treacherous are the seas?” Darius replied with a frank statement, “Pirates constantly patrol our route so be vigilant of black sails, I’ll give you 2 days to rest.” The City had stranger culture and architecture, It was more refined, with marble and white stones making up most of the buildings. The people wore simple tunics compared to those in Baghdad which adorned themselves with modest clothing. Food in Alexandria was also vastly different, with a different types of bread. Meats overflow the food market, ranging from lamb, beef and pork. Combined with Cheese made from milk, it is a proper Roman Feast. I asked Darius “Where are you from?” Darius with an empty face answers plainly, telling me that “I am half Roman, half Sassanid. It is a strange combination I know. My father was a legionary and my mother was a tailor. They both met in Constantinople, the heart of the Byzantine Empire.” I was taken aback slightly, as it was a strange combination. “Both the Byzantines and the Sassanid Empires were at war right as you told me?” I replied with inquisitiveness. “It is a strange combination but It helped me mould the person that I am today.” We looked out into the sunset and enjoyed the midday breeze and the incoming tide smashing towards the docks.

The galley took off from the port and we set out to the North West. Our Navigator, Horacles sailed the ship. I spent my days looking out into the sea, smelling the fresh fragrance of the salty sea, seeing fish swimming alongside our wooden oars and the gusting winds, which dried eyes without mercy. There was a hint of black on the horizon, very soon I realized it was a pirate galley, I rushed to see Darius, who was napping at the time. As soon as I told the news, he shook with shock and adrenaline and cried “Ready for Battle!”. My heart was pumping, I was not ready to die just yet. 100 crewmen of the ship, including our company readied themselves for battle. The pirates unleashed a volley of arrows which impaled some of our crew. Projectiles ranging from rocks, arrows and javelins were hurled at one another during the skirmish, but very soon, the oars broke as the pirate galley closed in and boarding action was taken. The fighting was not confined to martial ability, it was a battle against the sea as the waves disrupted any form of cohesive fighting. People were falling over from the strong winds and waves and cried as the amount of wounded piled up. Me and Darius fought alongside one another and performed the best swiftness and successfully dealt with each others opponents. However, the battle was not over, for we had to counterattack. We lunged towards the galley and fought several pirates. I had a cut on my legs and the Captain approached us, with a massive two handed hammer. Darius and I fought him together but his defence was impeccable. A minute of endless attacks proved fruitless. By the time we finished fighting the battle had been won but the Captain was not willing to surrender. Darius was struck down by his hammer and as he moved in for the finishing blow, I stood in front of his swing and passed out.

Slowly, but surely I opened my secreted eyes to the world once again with Darius at my side, though I felt massive pain from my chest. I muttered “Darius, you alive and where are we?” Darius chuckled “Still alive and kicking and we are in Rome.” I slowly got up and limped towards the balcony, finally seeing Rome and its wonders. The Coliseum was a monolith and the various houses dominated the area. The midday chatting of the markets can be heard from miles away and there is a smell of both stone and sewage beneath the house. I have made the journey to the Far West and now I am truly satisfied.

Fiction

Group 6



Journey to the White Demons

Korean International Springboard, De Groot, Leonardo- 13

Once upon a time there were four friends Tripitaka, Sun Wukong, Piggy and Sandy and one day they were walking down a road when suddenly they passed the cave of the White Demons. The demons in the cave could smell Tripitaka. They then planned to eat him. One of the White Demon's was a shape shifter, this meant that he could turn into anything that he wanted to. The white Demon decided to turn himself into an old man so that he could fool Tripitaka and catch him. The demon as the old man then went out on the road and called to the four friends. Sun Wukong looked at the old man, but could tell that something was not right. Then he picked up a tree and hit the old man. The old man fell to the floor and turned into smoke.

The White Demons then came up with another plan. This time they thought of a way to get all of the friends split up. They put some cookies on a plate and left it for Piggy, they pretended that someone was drowning in the river to distract Sandy and made a trap with a box of bananas for Sun Wukong. There was only Tripitaka left and they managed to get him to enter their cave. Tripitaka was defenseless and was easily caught by the White Demons. They decided that they would cook him on a big bonfire like a barbecue. They tied him up and went off to fetch some wood to make the fire. When they had wood Tripitaka was placed on top of the fire and the demons lit it. The White Demons waited happily for the monk to be barbecued. With all the smoke in their cave they had not seen the cloud that had arrived. On top of the cloud was Sun Wukong and he was not happy that his friend was going to be the main course. He leapt from the cloud and took out his mighty staff. Within seconds Tripitaka had been untied and was free. Then Sun Wukong beat up the White Demons and threw them on the fire until they were nothing more than smoke. The two friends ran out of the cave and found Sandy who was wet and confused and Piggy who was still eating a massive plate of cookies.

Journey to the Haunted Asylum

Korean International Springboard, Lee, Hae Chan - 12

Once upon a time Tripitaka, Sun Wukong, Piggy and Sandy were walking down the street when they saw an asylum, little did they know it was haunted? They decided to go in. When Sun Wukong opened the door there was a creepy creaky sound. The place was covered in cobwebs and was really dirty. They started walking down a dark corridor when suddenly they heard a spooky voice. It was a ghost. The ghost had blood coming down its body and was flying through the air. All four friends ran as fast as they could but soon got lost down the maze of different corridors. They had all split up. Sun Wukong then came to a staircase but as he walked up the stairs fell away and he dropped into a pit. Meanwhile Piggy was making his way down a winding corridor he looked through the window of one of the rooms and saw the most amazing food. He eagerly went in, but just as he was about to try the food it turned rotten and the floor gave way and he too fell in the pit. Sandy was more cautious, but he heard a cry for help and went running to save his friend. He fell and went down a hole into the pit. Tripitaka was the only one not caught and the cleverest of the friends. He knew that there was no point fighting with ghosts, so he asked the ghost to “come out and talk”. The ghost did come out and told Tripitaka that he was once a patient in the asylum and bad things had happened to him. He was just a bit lonely now he was a ghost and wanted some people to talk to. Tripitaka told the ghost that he and his friends were on an important quest and that they would come back and visit whenever they were in town. The ghost was happy with that and let the three friends out of the pit. Tripitaka told his companions after they had left the haunted house “Sometimes we have to stop and listen to people rather than fighting all the time.” Then they carried on their journey.

Journey to the Robot Wars

Korean International Springboard, Lin, Adrian - 12

One day, Sun Wukong, Xuanzung, Piggy and Sandy were walking along a road in Denmark. All of a sudden they saw a robot army. The robot army started running at them and attacked them. Sun Wukong, Piggy and Sandy started to fight the robots, but Xuanzung stood back as he did not like fighting. As the fight continued a group of evil robots kidnapped Xuanzung and put him in a rocket and took him to their space station. When he got there, he saw the robot leader who was called Zony. Zony was very ugly, he stood eight feet tall and had wires coming out of his face.

“I want to be a human” he said. “The only way I can do this is to eat the cleverest person in the world. You are the cleverest person, so I am going to eat you.” Xuanzung thought for a while and then said. “Who told you that eating the cleverest person in the world would make you a human?”

“My chief of robots” said Zony in a loud booming voice.

“Is your Chief of robots clever?” asked Xuanzung

“Well... he’s quite clever” Clanged Zony.

“But is he as clever as me?” said Xuanzung

“I... guess not” replied Zony.

“If I am the cleverest person in all of the world then I am the only person who can tell you how to become human. Nobody on Earth eats other humans so by eating a human everyone will know that you are not human”. Said Xuanzung quietly.

“So how do I become human then?” bellowed Zon

“The only way you can become a human is by fighting the monkey they call Sun Wukong” Said Xuanzung.

With that Zony and Xuanzung took a rocket back down to Denmark. When they got there they saw piles and piles of smashed in robots. Sun Wukong, Piggy and Sandy had beaten them all up. The evil Zony then saw Sun Wukong and his two friends and fired missiles from his hands at him. The missiles couldn’t harm Sun Wukong, who took out his magic staff from behind his ear and hit the robot so hard that the pieces of him ended up back in space floating around his space station.

“I’m glad you are ok” said Sun Wukong. “We were worried that you were going to be eaten or something nasty like that.”

“Don’t worry said Xuanzung, “I think he was a vegetarian.”

Then the four heroes continued on to find the hidden scriptures.

Journey to the Magic Forest

Korean International Springboard, So, Kristy - 13

Once upon a time a bad witch lived in a magic forest. The witch had a magic sword and wanted to capture the famous monk Tripitaka. It just so happened that Tripitaka was out walking through the magic forest when he came across an old woman selling apples. As Tripitaka was very kind he bought an apple from the old woman, but really the old woman was the bad witch and the apple was poisoned. Tripitaka fell down after he had taken only one bite and fell asleep. The witch took Tripitaka and locked him up in her house. A few days later Sun Wukong who was Tripitaka's friend decided to look in the magic forest for him. Sun Wukong came across a small house so he looked through the window. There he saw Tripitaka in a cage. Sun Wukong was just about to save his friend when out of the house came the witch with her magic sword. Sun Wukong tried to fight, but he was powerless.

The witch let out an evil laugh "Ha, ha, ha. Your powers won't work here. This is a magic forest."

Sun Wukong was defeated and ran out of the forest. He thought long and hard how he could defeat the witch, then he had an idea. He knew that all witches had a magic number and that if he could guess the witches magic number then he could get his friend back. Sun Wu Kong went back to the forest and knocked on the door. He told the witch that he wanted to guess her number and if he did then he could have his friend back. The witch agreed. But she said "If you guess the wrong number then you both must stay here forever."

"So be it" said Sun Wukong "Your magic number is 12"

"ARRRRGGGHH" screamed the witch, "You are right. But how did you know?"

"It is the number of your house, now you must let us both go."

The witch let Tripitaka go and they set off to go out of the forest. After a while they got tired and decided to have a nap. When they woke up something strange had happened. There were two Sun Wukongs! The bad witch had copied herself to look like Sun Wukong. Tripitaka was very confused.

"Follow me" said Sun Wukong,

"No follow me" said the bad witch.

Tripitaka decided to hold a test to see who the real Sun Wukong was. As they were at the edge of the magic forest he said "Go outside of the forest and fight. Whoever is the winner is the real Sun Wukong."

The two went outside, but because Sun Wukong had his power back he won easily and the witch vanished into smoke.

"Let's get out of here" said Tripitaka.

From then on they never did go back to the magic forest.

The Fight for Immortality

Korean International Springboard, Tang, Adrienne - 13

Once upon a time, there lived four super heroes named Tripitaka, Sun Wukong, Pigsy and Sandy. Tripitaka had control over special weapons. Sun Wukong had a magic stick to change its size and form to suit the situation. Pigsy had lightening power and Sandy had invisible super power. This is how they became powerful. They always helped each other as a team.

On the other side of the Island there live Lander, Lander was an equally Powerful and dangerous mortal. He was learning to be immortal. He found out that these four super heroes had such super powers that if he could take them from them, he would become immortal.

One beautiful sunny day our heroes were all resting in a peach garden and taking a nap. Suddenly they heard a noise. Pigsy got alerted first and said, “What was that noise? Sun Wukong:”

“It doesn’t matter” said Sandy

“Let’s go and check it out.” urged Pigsy.

Then they heard the noise again.

Tripitaka was worried and said “Let’s find out who is making that noise.”

So they all went off. They spent the rest of the day looking for the noise. Then Pigsy, shouted “Oh wow! What is that?”

Lander appeared from a secret cave and roared, “My desire is to become immortal and all of you are going to help me. How? I will be killing all of you to get each one of your super powers and then I will be invincible. Hahaha... Nobody will be able to defeat me ever...”

Sun Wukong replied very calmly, “You will not be the first one and won’t be the last. I will be the first one to start with you.”

So the mighty fight began. They all used their super powers. Sometimes the heroes were winning and sometimes Lander. After a long time they all got tired of it. They all decided to end the fight and call a truce.

Lander said, “The fight has been going on for too long. We all happen to have used up all our powers. I still plan to be immortal, so I will trick you again later. You can rest for now.”

The four heroes replied, “We will be ready for you with more super powers. You go now and get ready for the next fight.”

Hearing this Lander disappeared into thin air and so they ended the fight for the time being. The four heroes decided to carry on their journey to find the secret scriptures and more super powers.

And so the journey continues.....

Sun Wukong

Ying Wa Primary School, Tsai, Lon Hei - 11

Sun Wukong laid back in his bed of leaves, high up in the trees. He would not have the strength to climb back down – he was now too old for that. Once again he pondered about whether he had made the right decision to give up the immortality granted to him by the Great Buddha. He had wanted to feel life – all its curiosities, the struggling, the joy... not an artificial extended life. But turning back to mortal meant having to cut off his relations to his friends – although they had decided to turn mortal with him, they were forced to separate by the difficulties of mortal lives. It also meant having to face death and journeying to the western sky.

He was very, very close to death now.

He was both, in a way, excited and curious for the entirely new concept, but he was also terrified that he had sinned too much – stealing the immortality peaches, killing innocent spirits in his tantrums and rages, messing up the Sky Palace... he was afraid that he might be judged a sinner on the Great Judgement – a ceremony that every living creature had to pass in order to go to heaven – and punished by getting sent to hell. He sighed softly and yawned. His sleepiness finally overcame him, and he snuggled up in the leaves, falling into a sleep from which he never woke up.

Sun Wukong's spirit slowly departed from his body. The transparent apparition slowly floated towards the sky.

Sun Wukong's eyes slowly opened. He gasped he was truly amazed by what he saw. He was floating in a dark space, like the night sky. Faint purple clouds hovered all around him. Stars shot past him, drawing glowing arcs in the black background. Planets hung in the sky. It was a place of extreme wonder.

Then, suddenly, a glowing shape shot past him. It looked like a giant manta ray. Feathers laced its wing-flaps. A dragon's prickly snout topped the top of its kite-shaped body, complete with the long whiskers trailing behind.

The manta ray glided below Sun Wukong and gently touched his torso. It felt like touching a tub of cool water—soft and flowing, but somehow also solid. And all of a sudden, the manta ray accelerated sharply, flowing forwards just as quickly as any of the stars shooting past them. Sun Wukong instinctively grabbed hard onto the back of the ray, propelled by his monkey reflexes, and managed to hang on.

At first, he was terrified that he might lose his grip, but after a while, he got used to the speed. He gazed in amazement at all the views – stars clumping together, streaks of light like lightning crackling around him, galaxies with swirling arms composed entirely of stars; green planets full of plants, blue planets full of water, red planets full of minerals, even a few black planets with nothing at all... Sun Wukong gasped at the sheer amount of amazing sights, at the variety of objects in the macrocosm.

Finally, he saw where the manta ray was heading – a glowing ball of light that radiated warmth. A surge of fear arose in Sun Wukong's heart as the manta ray made to glide straight into the ball.

An intense heat scorched Sun Wukong's skin. The light became so blinding that he shut his eyes tight. The heat was just getting unbearable when a cool feeling washed over him,

comforting his skin instantly. He hesitantly opened his eyes. He took in his surroundings – he was in a spacious temple-like structure. Pillars, made of quartz, held up the roof. Gold veins glittered in the marble tiles. The manta ray had disappeared.

Sun Wukong looked upwards-and shock filled him. A bearded, white-haired old man stood on the tiles. His milky eyes seemed to pierce right through Sun Wukong. He seemed familiar... no, he couldn't be...

'Mas... master?' This man was actually the person who had taught him all his magical arts and all his fighting skills!

'Wukong, my dear pupil... I am not only your master. I am actually the Master of the Wheels.' the man said slowly.

'Wait, *what?*' Sun Wukong asked in disbelief. It was just plain impossible that his master was the legendary Master of the Wheel.' The Wheel of reincarnation? How is that possible?'

The Golden Wheel of Reincarnation was the magical device that possessed the power to transfer a spirit to different bodies, so the Master of the Wheels was basically the Master of Life. Sun Wukong's last image of his master was a frail old man, unable to fight at all. How could he be the *Master of the Wheel?*

Master smiled at Sun Wukong's disbelief, showing a toothy grin (with no teeth). Then he quelled his smile, and his expression became serious. 'Wukong, you have sinned much in your life.'

Sun Wukong felt like all his blood was draining out. Dread filled his body. Did that mean that he had to...go to...? He did not dare to think further.

Master smiled again. 'But your Journey to the West was so heroic that we have decided to give you another chance to live. I will give you another body to live in and send you away from the Western Sky.'

Sun Wukong barely had time to sigh in relief before Master waved his hand. The blinding light returned. His skin scorched. An image of a pattern made of golden circles burned in his eyes, and he shut his eyes in pain. He was no longer Sun Wukong.

The little monkey opened his eyes. What he saw amazed him. Impossibly colorful flowers bloomed on vibrantly green leaves. He would never have imagined this wonderful world in his mother's belly.

Faces swam above his vision. Two large, elder monkeys – his parents. A boar, a fish with sandy scales. An old hermit residing in the jungle with wispy white hair. These were his companions in his former life. His memory was completely blank. No traces of his past life still lingered. His body was ready for a new chance.

Fiction

Group 7



Sailing West

King George V School, Ashfield, Jamie -15

I went on a sailing journey to the west, from Australia to the United Kingdom
I raced the ocean waves to be the quickest sailor

The ocean waves have very big motions, we were under the thunder and lightning storm

We survived. It was the night

It was in complete darkness. It was scary

I went to sleep. It was bumpy

When I woke up I saw where I was. Suddenly there was a monkey in front of me, he was a bit lanky.

But then I started to like the monkey, I named him Sam, he kept me company.

I wanted to win the race. I wanted to be the first person to sail west. I wanted to be quickest.

The monkey helped me with directions to England. But then I ended up in Finland.

Diving in the West

King George V School, Pek, Maxx - 14

Joining the diving club was a great idea
On the weekends we have fun diving and planning sleepovers
Under the ocean it is warm, cool and wavey
Rice, egg, ham & vegetables give us power & energy to dive deeper
Neither of us are tired of diving in Sai Kung, we just want to
Experience diving in the west
Yellow trumpet fish are the Philippines, but we want to see Sea lions!
To make a wish come true we want to swim with sea lions in the west!
Our diving skills are getting better, will our mums let us go?
The Journey will be long, but it will be great
Hong Kong is where we practiced our breathing & sign language
Eventually we will ask and wish
So one day we will be allowed to make our diving Journey to the west.

Diving in the West Waters

King George V School, Shum, Lok - 14

Joining the diving club in Hong Kong was the best idea ever, thank you to my mum. On the weekends we have fun diving and planning sleepovers with the dive master and my friends.

Under the ocean it is wet, deep and cold. I like it. The fish are beautiful. I wonder what the fish are like near Spain.

At lunch times we eat rice with egg and drink iced milk tea, it's always very yummy.

The lunch gives me more power to dive with the fish in the deeper water. I wonder what the diving food is like in England.

I have a dream to swim with the big whales in the West. They are bigger than me!

I wish to dive in different waters, with different fish and different lunch.

I hope one day I will be a good enough diver to make my journey to the west.

Friends to the Rescue

Korean International Springboard, Mak, Arthur - 15

Once upon a time, there were aliens who were the worst enemies from another planet. They believed that the most intelligent being on earth was Tripitaka. So they decided to go and steal Tripitaka's amazing knowledge which was creating powerful weapons.

On earth, Tripitaka kept cruising on his journey, alongside his three powerful protectors, Sun Wukong, Piggsy and Sandy. Suddenly, they felt something that was really near to them. They saw a flying saucer.

Sun Wu Kong shouted, "Hey, what is that? What do they want from us?"

Piggsy who was observing everything replied, "Let's wait and see!"

Sandy started to reply to Sun Wukong and Piggsy, "Guys, I have a bad feeling about this!"

Tripitaka said loudly to his protectors, "We better get out here now!"

They tried to get out of there immediately, but it was too late.

The aliens attacked Tripitaka, tortured him and he fainted. Only by using special chemical combination they could steal his powerful knowledge. They talked to each other with their evil laugh, "Hahahaha, bingo! We finally stole his precious knowledge. Let's get back to our planet."

Now the aliens went back to their planet in the speed of light.

Piggsy and Sandy asked Sun Wukong, "What are we going to do, captain? They stole the knowledge from our master! We can't let these guys get away." This gave Sun Wu Kong a special idea and reply, "I think we need to call the others for help!"

Back to the aliens' evil plans, with Tripitaka's knowledge they could easily take over the universe. They became unstoppable. They started with taking over the earth. They then took the next planet but suddenly the three protectors of Tripitaka appeared. The protectors brought other gods for back-up. All the gods with the three protectors defeated the evil aliens with their powerful cosmic powers. Sun Wu Kong flew straight forward to save their master and said, "Don't worry, I'm coming for you!" They restored Tripitaka's knowledge. Peace on earth was restored. Then they continued their journey. Tripitaka started to think, "There will be more evil ones on Earth who would want to get their hands on my knowledge." He told his protectors about his thoughts. They replied to Tripitaka, "Who knows, maybe? We will keep and protect you, because we will always be by your side, master."