



Winning Entries

The Paper Boats

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A few years ago, when I was still a freelance writer, I decided to broaden my horizons and get some inspiration by taking a trip down the Yangtze River. It's the third longest river in the world, snaking its way across nine provinces. They always say that the sheer majesty of the river is enough to make anyone gape in awe, so I decided to try it out myself, and got myself a vacation on a scenic tour down the river.

It was on the tourist boat where I met the old man, a few hours into the journey. The old man strolled along the deck, looking at the river and murmuring to himself. He folded up a piece of paper into a boat then looked at it intently, deep in thought. He looked like a nice old person who had a story to tell, so as a writer, I figured that I should go ahead and talk to him, and get some inspiration from his story.

He seemed tremendously happy when I approached him. It was as if he was longing for someone to listen to his stories, and before I knew it, he was telling me about his background.

"I used to live in a village near this river," he said. "It was a nice little village, but we were quite poor. Luckily, we still had a very small school to attend. My class had about 12 students, give or take a few." He twirled the paper boat around with his wrinkly and stubby fingers. "We rarely have new students in the class, but the one time we did, it changed my life forever."

The girl that entered the classroom gave him such a shock that it stopped him right in his tracks. Her attire was old and dirty, much like the other students from the village. Her shoes were muddy and worn down, seemingly ones that have been passed down for generations. It was her eyes that caught the boy's attention.

They were sparkling before him. It reminded him of the river, how it sparkled under the sunlight. To him, it was as though the beauty of the river was presented to him right there in front of him.

The girl was introduced to the class, and was then assigned to a seat. To the boy's delight, it was right beside him. He introduced himself to his new neighbour, with a slightly shaky voice. The girl smiled and nodded, and then turned to listen to the teacher. As for the boy, he just couldn't pay any attention anymore.

"If you don't mind me asking," I interrupted, "How old were you when all this happened?"

The old man mused over the question for a moment. "Oh, I suppose I was 15 or so," he said. I was surprised.

"Isn't that a bit ... well, young?"

"Oh, I wouldn't say so," he replied. "There's always a time for everyone. The Yangtze River has always told dozens of love stories; I guess I wanted to be one of them." I nodded to show my sign of approval, but I wasn't too sure about his decision.

"Tell me how you got to know her well, then." The old man looked down at his paper boat again; it was getting a bit crumpled after his constant mindless twirling.

"I was just getting to that, actually. For a long time, I didn't have the courage to tell her what I felt about her."

Months had passed, and the two had grown to become good friends. They would often talk with each other, and at times they would help each other with their schoolwork. When the weather was good and the water was calm, they would take strolls down the river.

The part of the Yangtze that was near their village was a shallow section of the river, where the water flowed by at a relaxing and comfortable pace. At some parts, it could be as calm as a lake. Listening to the splashing of the water as you walked by brought about a wave of tranquillity that was unlike anything else. The water, as clear as crystal, sparkled under the sunlight, like a million diamonds embedded in the riverbed.

The boy liked taking the strolls with her, and sometimes they would just paddle their feet in the cool water and make big splashes. They would stay until the sun set, and they would sometimes play games along the river.

He taught her how to throw stones that skipped on the water's surface. She taught him how to fold paper boats that floated peacefully down the river. Sometimes, they would just fold paper boats all day long, and then release them onto the river. The long stretch of boats would form a formidable squadron, flowing down the river like a fleet on a mission.

"They're beautiful, aren't they?" sighed the girl, as the boats made their way down the river. "Yes," replied the boy. "Beautiful."

But he wasn't talking about the boats.

"So, after all that," I commented, "She still didn't know how you felt about her?"

"I supposed not," the old man said. "We were both quite young then, and she probably just treated me like a playmate; someone to talk to and play with after school. I didn't have the courage to tell her anyway."

"Wait, so that was it? You just let her go?" I asked with utter bewilderment. That cannot be how it ends, I thought. The old man smiled, showing the few crooked teeth he had left.

"Of course not, you silly little man," he replied. "This is something a friend told me about girls: they only come to you when you keep your distance." That left me even more confused, and I wasn't sure what to say. The old man, observing the perplexed look on my face, chortled, "My dear boy, you have much to learn." He lowered his head and scratched his scalp, as if he was trying to recall something. Then, all of a sudden, he raised his head and continued, "Have you ever heard of the rock of Kongling Shoal? It's just along the river in Kongling Gorge." I shook my head. "It's a very intriguing rock," he explained.

"In some seasons, when the water is low, boats often crash into the rock. You see, the water currents in Kongling Shoal are quite enigmatic. The only way to manoeuvre your way past the rock is to aim directly at it. Then the waters will surely guide you past the rock. However, if you intentionally steer away from the rock, the currents will bring you to the rock, and you will certainly crash. This is why the rock has the words 'come to me' written on it."

"That's interesting," I remarked. "So what does this have to do with anything?" Once again, the old man let out a little smirk, like a bad comedian who's trying not to laugh at his own joke.

"Well, in a way, this rock is a metaphor for girls. When you try to get close to her, you end up driving yourself away from her. However, if you take it easy and keep your distance, she will then try to lure you closer."

"Of course," he said, now grinning from ear to ear, "When this happens, I can assure you, there's going to be trouble."

More months passed, and for the two, the walks along the river became more and more frequent. The paper boat releasing had become more like a custom for the two of them. Every week, they would bring their decorated paper boats, tie a thread of string and then release them together down the river.

"Where do you suppose the boats will reach?" she had once asked.

"That's the beauty of it," he had replied. "They can go anywhere they want. The most important thing, though, is that no matter where the boats go, they never, ever separate."

The girl smiled, and her eyes gave out that familiar sparkle. "I surely wish they don't."

The boy turned to look at the girl, and his smile matched hers. For him, that was the moment that lasted forever.

"That was the happiest moment of my life, I would say," the old man said. He was smiling again, and I could tell he was having a good time reminiscing about his memories with the girl.

"Did you get married in the end?" I asked, and then almost instantly regretted it. The old man's smile had vanished with the question, and grief overcame his face. He didn't answer the question; instead he went on with the story.

"I'm leaving the village," he told her. "Father said that his brother has found a job for him in the town, and so the whole family is going to move. It's a big town next to the river." This was the moment that hurt them the most. Nothing else was said for a while; nothing else was needed to be said. Then, she broke the silence, saying, "We can still keep in contact."

The boy said nothing. She knew that there was virtually no postage service, or telephone lines. Nor would he ever return to the village again, he supposed. He just didn't want to tell her that it was not possible.

"We can remember each other," she explained in soft and calm words. "We have the boats. Release your paper boat down the river every week, and it may come to join mine. Then we can always remember each other, when we release the boats." The boy nodded silently. Together, they walked along the river together for one last time.

"I told myself, this river will always carry a special meaning for me. Maybe I was immature back then, maybe it was just a passing phase; but when I look at the indescribable beauty of the Yangtze River, I will always be reminded of hers." He gazed at the river, which stretched into the horizon. I followed suit, trying to grasp the beauty of the river he had repeatedly extolled with awe.

I couldn't.

The water bore a mildly sickening green colour that slithered down the current. The river glittered faintly with the occasional occurrence of plastic bags and tin cans. I cringed at the sight, while thinking why I had not noticed all of this until now.

"You can't see it now, can you?" the old man chuckled at my grimace of disgust. "That beauty which I spoke of, how I wish it could stay. Back when I was young, this water was as clear as crystal. You could practically see the bottom in the calmer parts of the river." He let out a sigh of grief and helplessness. "Those officials said they would clean up the river. They said they'd catch those people who're dumping chemicals into the river too; but those factory owners are a crafty lot. They just put the sewer pipes where no one can find them."

He went on staring at the river. "This is why I never came back." He said. "The river may still be here, but the memories have been erased long ago. It's just not the same to me anymore. I don't release the boats anymore, either. They call it 'littering' now; but just for old time's sake..." He threw the paper boat off the ship, which drifted along the wind, finally landing peacefully on the river.

I decided that it was best to leave him be, to stay with his memories. I bid him farewell, and walked down the deck, and hoped that the paper boat would reach its destination.

The Yangtze River – Growing Pains

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A long, long time ago, I was the young, playful Yangtze River. I spent my days splashing along the sandy banks and creating gentle waves. What I enjoyed most was playing with the friendly but energetic Yangtze River dolphins. They were my best friends, always jumping up and down on my back and diving into my depths. One look at them made me instantly full of playful energy and happiness.

As I flowed steadily through the green landscape, I wore a long, flowing robe with blue and green swirly patterns, which shimmered in the sun. I started to learn about the land around me: I smelled the pungent fragrance of the plants; I saw the rich colours of the shrubs, bamboo and trees, rocks, boulders...

At night, the moon bathed on my chest, forming a rippling, lunar brooch. I listened to the whispers and the lullabies of the rivers and the lakes that I passed on my journey. They talked to me and told me that when I grew up, I would grow into a strong source and become the most important river in the history of China...

How much I wanted to grow up!

Hundreds or thousands of years have passed – finally I grew up to be the responsible and respectful Yangtze River. My days were spent helping the local villagers clean themselves. Everybody who lived near me relied on me to help with daily chores. The people took my water in buckets to water their crops. All around me was healthy harvest. Because of me, the land was getting fertile. Because of me, the people were getting rich.

However, my heavy flow and fertile earth flooded the riverside every year. Hundreds of acres of land were flushed by me.

Do I really want to grow up?

I also miss my dolphin friends dearly. I do not see them so much anymore. I wonder where they have all gone. Did the whizzing sound of fishing boats scare them off?

I cannot recall when – but one day, heavy machines were placed around me and someone started building dams within me, blocking my flow and cutting all my smaller rivers and streams.

I am getting slower and more tired every day. I am no longer the deep, rich blue I was before. I am now a yellowish-brown mixture, with slime and slick on the surface. The villagers are long gone. Now factories and machines surround me instead. They empty smelly oil and diesel into me, making it difficult for me to move and breathe.

With my shallower water, I can see the corpses of my dolphin friends near the riverbank. The dam construction and pollution from the factories have killed them!

I am no longer the young and playful Yangtze River I used to be.

I am no longer wearing a long, flowing robe with blue and green swirly patterns.

I am no longer who I used to be.

Now, I don't want to grow up.

The Yangs and the Tzes

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Once upon a time, there was a river in China that divided two kingdoms. The Yang camp resided on its south side while the Tze people lived on its north shore. These two peoples had been living a peaceful life until two young emperors came to the throne. They each thought that the river and its resources belonged to their people alone, and recently, they had started fighting. Up above, the River God, through the mist of clouds, had been watching them with keen eyes.

“Forward march!” shouted Emperor Yang, as the Yang soldiers advanced towards the river. While they were marching down the slope uniformly, the sun was gently setting into the horizon, dressing the sky in layers of orange and red. The freshness of the green grass and the shimmering river gave them hope. The emperor had promised them that if they defeated the Tzes, there wouldn’t be any more wars and they could all go home.

Meanwhile, in Emperor Tze’s castle, a special meeting was going on. “How dare Yang claim that the river’s theirs! We must teach them a lesson!” Emperor Tze was furious, so was everyone in the room.

One general suggested, “Maybe we can bomb Yang’s castle and...” But General Lin interrupted him. “We must attack them when they’re least prepared. We need to sail across the river at night, and take them by surprise!” “What a great idea!” said one of them. All the generals gathered closely to detail the plan. “I’m sure it’ll work!” said another. “A marvellous plan and a plan it shall be!” snickered Emperor Tze.

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Night had fallen. Emperor Yang and his soldiers reached the bottom of the valley and were about to cross the river. His men boarded the small fishing boats prepared by his people, each taking only six to eight soldiers. And quietly, hundreds of them set sail in the dark. A Yang general asked, “What are we going to do now, Emperor Yang?” The young emperor replied in a low voice, “Once we reach the other shore, it will soon be dawn. We must go up to Tze’s castle and attack them at once.”

The River God had heard all their vicious plans of annihilating each other and was very upset. He decided to teach both the Yangs and the Tzes a big lesson.

Soon after the Yang soldiers reached the north shore, they waited silently in their boats. The Tze soldiers, wearing their armour and carrying their weapons, began to stride down to the river as well. Each one was waiting for their commander’s order. But no one knew a powerful but angry god would soon punish them.

Seeing the Yangs and the Tzes act so foolishly, the River God said, "It's time to show them my power." He began by gathering clouds, so the morning sun was now completely hidden. He then gave the river a stir to create waves that were strong enough to rock the boats back and forth. The Yang soldiers were startled by all these sudden changes in weather. With a wave of his hand, the River God wrecked all the Yangs' boats, dropping all the Yang soldiers into the river. With another strike of the river with his hand, he made waves mountain high and washed all the Tze soldiers, stationed nearby, into the river as well. The winds howled, and all the Yang and Tze soldiers, including the two young emperors, were all struggling, trying to cling on to the wooden planks of the broken boats. "What's going on? What's going on?" they asked. None of them had experienced such weather before and they were scared to death.

"Help!" cried Emperor Yang. "Help!" screamed Emperor Tze. The two of them and their soldiers swam as hard as they could, but they just couldn't reach the shore. The waves were still high and strong, and any minute they could all drown. In their terror, they forgot the attack, the killing and the hatred they had for each other. They helped one another swim to the nearest wreckage. They helped save one another from the unexpected turmoil.

Seeing that, the River God stretched out his hand and calmed the river. Everything quieted down immediately. "Look! Look! That's the River God!" some soldiers cried. In his watery gown, the River God had risen from the river.

"Yang and Tze!" the River God said in the most solemn voice one could ever imagine, "This river does not belong to any one of you. It's a gift from Mother Nature for everyone who lives alongside it to enjoy it." Upon hearing that, Emperor Yang and Emperor Tze were so ashamed that they almost submerged their heads in the water. "I'm very sorry, River God," said Emperor Tze regretfully. "Me too," said Emperor Yang. "From now on, you will be friends with each other, just like your ancestors. You will treat all people as your family and care for all of them. You will share the river and its resources with all. And I shall not see wars again! Do you hear me?" "Yes, River God!" said Emperor Yang and Emperor Tze together.

From then on, both kingdoms worked together. And, as commanded by the River God, the river was named after the two peoples – Yangtze River, so as to remind them that the river that divided them belonged to everybody. They are one big family and should always share with each other and care for one another.

The Ruin of Dimen

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A chilling breeze swept through the tiny settlement of Dimen, signalling the coming of winter. Children skipped home from school, adults trudged to and from the rice fields and the respected elderly women, the *za*, walked across the bridges while carrying and leading small children alongside them. This is Dimen, home to a Chinese ethnic group called the Dong, where there is always the hint of a song floating through the alleys of the villages, speeding with the breezes that attack the rice fields, and rippling along the river that passes through the settlement, fittingly named the Dimen River.

On this particular day, a woman came running into the house of the village healer. It wasn't an abnormal sight, though. People ran to him all the time, weeping the whole way. The healer, after listening to their troubles, would then calmly lead the way to the patient's home with the villager struggling to keep up. Like a hurt child struggling to keep up with his laughing friends, the villager straggled behind as the healer breezily floated on ahead of him.

The healer's diagnosis varied, but often involved *anyu*, traditional raw fermented fish that were offered to the dead. The man would declare that the sick person was possessed by a ghost who had unfinished business and that they should prepare the spirit food, the *anyu* and the wine to satisfy it and stop it from haunting the patient any longer.

Songs were also a very important part of Dong culture. Every day during school, one could hear the singing teacher teaching songs to children during school.

"Now sing after me! **Dong fang hong!**" the singing teacher would say.

"**Dong fang hong!**" the children replied.

"Now I need four children for a solo! Who wants to sing a solo?"

Most of the children's hands shot up eagerly. "I'll pick you, you, you and you," the singing teacher said after a moment of thought. Those picked glowed with pride; others that weren't picked hung their heads in shame.

They could only use songs to tell their stories and history as they didn't have a written language, so the people of the Dong minority were careful to memorize their songs well.

But if people stopped singing, where would their past go?

This is Dimen. A village dependent on songs.

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The only person in the village who knew the entirety of Dimen's history was an old, partially blind *za*. Every day, she got up at first sight of dawn and walked to her rice field to weed and

water, her singing rousing people from their homes. Early-rising children stood in their doorways, waving to her as she walked by, carrying her farming tools and straw hat. Her clear plastic raincoat swept behind her as she walked up the steps toward the rice paddies outside the village. She taught the children songs when she was not in the fields and she was well-respected around the village. The only song no one would learn was the song of Dimen's history.

"But it's very important! If no one learns it then who will know of our history?"

"It's so boring! Who wants to learn 120 repetitive verses of song?"

No one would learn it, not even the singing teachers. Though they may know fragments of the song, the old *za* was the only one who knew it all. But she knew that she was fast approaching death. She was old and tired and worked all her life. The only problem was that Dimen couldn't imagine her dying. Lots of villagers had lived their whole lives with the *za*. She was one of the most hard-working villagers in the settlement. They thought that she was immortal, a guardian goddess of the village. Because only she knew the entirety of Dimen's history, the peace of Dimen rested in her hands.

The old woman let out a long sigh. Someday, they would have to do without a history if they kept going on like this.

This is Dimen. A village forgetting their roots, albeit slowly.

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That winter day, the children continued skipping to school and adults continued going to the rice paddies to take care of their crops. The old women continued walking their grandchildren across the bridges. Songs floated through the alleys of the village. Something was amiss though. One could sense the tension just walking through the streets.

The old *za* was sick. And everyone was panicked.

"What do we do? How could she get sick?" exclaimed one young man.

"Everything's going to be OK. She's not going to die," a mother comforted her child.

"Someone call the healer!" screeched a woman.

"Oi, move over! The healer's here!" shouted a boy.

The healer's usual calm facade had all but vanished as he ran into the home of the old *za*. The brown pouch he was carrying was wide open and contained many herbs, berries and grasses. They were messily organized, as though he had been skimming through them while running through the village. A few blades of grass were hanging on the edge and some of them had fallen out and all but disappeared, trampled into the ground by worried villagers.

"How are you, ma'am? Where does it hurt?" said the healer.

"It hurts everywhere. And I feel really cold," mumbled the old *za*.

The healer muttered a prayer under his breath, then rubbed the old *za*'s forehead, hands and feet. He then rummaged in his pouch and brought out a faded old text, presumably for interpreting sicknesses, which he consulted. He then stood up and announced the verdict:

"She has been possessed by a ghost who froze to death!"

The crowd gasped.

"Someone help her and get their *anyu* and wine to placate the ghost!"

Villagers started running back and forth through the alleys and streets to their homes, grabbing anything they could to help the old *za*. Some took blankets and tea to warm her up; others grabbed their rice wine and *anyu* to placate the ghost; still others ran around to spread the news. The village was filled with worry and grief.

For the first time in ages, not a sound of song was heard throughout the village.

This is Dimen. A village that cannot see beyond the borders of tradition.

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That night, the people, led by the healer, chanted blessings to the old **za**, while the healer used his herbs to make medicine and villagers laid the **anyu** and rice wine out for the ghost. A carefully controlled bonfire was situated in the middle of this community event; the villagers hoped the warmth from this fire would reach the old **za**'s soul and warm her up again. Except for the old **za**, not a single person was left at home, not even the children.

To round out the ceremony, the healer made a speech directed at the old **za** and her "ghost", wishing her well and leading the village in songs of encouragement, happiness and strength. At the end, they sang one of her favourite songs: the Communist classic, **The East is Red**:

Dong fang hong, tai yang sheng, zhong guo chu le ge mao ze dong!

In the lonely little house, the old **za** smiled in her sleep. She knew, though, that her life was coming to an end. The foolish healer did not know that the old **za** was suffering from diphtheria, a disease with a mortality rate of 20%. And at her age, she was pretty sure she would pass. She did worry about the village's history with her disappearance, though.

And during the night, the old **za** let out a long sigh and closed her eyes for the last time.

The lonely little house was silent. So were all the others. Not a sound was made; not one person noticed the death of their guardian. The stars above the village glinted as the village fell asleep. They glinted as a cool wind passed through the village, chilling the people ever so slightly. And they glinted as the old **za** fell into the deepest sleep possible, unaware of the chill of the wind.

All was calm. At least for now.

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The villagers buried her in a grave overlooking one of the most scenic views around; it was on a hill near rice paddies, and you could see a magnificent mountain range just above the village. It was truly the best place to be buried, though the view was blurred with tears.

It's just that now, no one can remember their history.

Through a mask of grief, no one can remember anything.

All the villagers could remember of their history was the part about the barefoot ancestors in the very beginning. They regretted refusing the old **za**'s offer when she was still alive and healthy. Now, they have to start rebuilding their history brick by brick, plank by plank.

This is Dimen. A village with the chance to restart.

Sam Foy and the Eternal Amulet

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Chapter 1

THE TANGGULA MOUNTAINS

An archaeologist walked down the brown painted stairs, he wore rather dirty clothes, and dark brown hair which had not been cut for almost a year, flowed down his head. The dirty poor man walked two steps and made coffee in the kitchen. His house was surprisingly small and full of rubbish: books about the Earth, and nature lay open on his small table.

The archaeologist looked at a sauce-covered calendar and said to himself, "A rock mountain to climb this day."

He was fit despite his poverty. Muscles flexed while he wore the expensive climbing gear. He took a booklet full of weird looking words and opened the metal door in front of him.

Outside was the famous Yangtze River, not exactly the river but the source, the glaciers of the Tanggula Mountains. The ice cracked while he stood, still looking at his booklet with the weird words. The sparkling ice reflected the sun. High mountains stood still behind the thinking man.

The archaeologist closed the book, and on the cover was written 'Sam Foy', that was his name. Sam stopped thinking and started to climb the highest mountains of all. The mountain was steep and sharp, every pull made Sam gasp. He climbed until he saw a cave, with ice dangling inside; it was the most frightening cave Sam had ever seen. He checked everywhere while gasping for his breath, collecting rocks. When he had finished, he made sure everything was collected, and ticked his booklet. He cracked his neck and began to hike again.

After hiking for some time, he found a bigger cave on top of the cave he had just visited, and went into it, checking stuff as usual. When everything was collected, he started hiking back to his small house.

While opening the door, he heard a shuffling noise beneath his feet and "Bang!" a large v-shaped snake burst out of the ground. It started curling up around Sam's foot, his chest then his neck, and started choking him with its long body. Sam was now helpless and hopeless, the big force pulled him off his feet, he tried to pull his way out but the snake was too strong for him.

As the snake was ready to deliver a lethal strike, Sam found a pocketknife between his fingers and jabbed the venomous snake's belly. The icy-blue snake struggled but still looked fine, its head shot straight at Sam's neck and started to eject venom at the poor man. A necklace in the shape of dragons chasing a ball flew onto the floor.

While the snake bit viciously on the archaeologist's neck, the archaeologist was trying to

ignore the pain and starting to stab fiercely at the wound he made before. With his last strength, he chopped the vicious snake into two.

He got to his house and wobbled through the kitchen. He tried to grab the bottle of yellow liquor on top of a shelf, but his vision started to blur, he fell down on the wooden floor, gasping for life and breath, but he could not give up.

His wobbly hand cracked the bottle of the yellow liquor, the liquor burst out the mouth of the bottle and into the archaeologist's mouth. Then he blacked out.

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Chapter 2

A VILLIAN DECIDES TO CATCH AN AMULET

A high-pitched laugh echoed through the dark basement. A man in a purple robe turned around. The sight of his face could scare an elephant. The man's face was half-android, one of his ears was gone, dry blood surrounded the metal tube; his eyes were full of red lines. A long scar was still visible beneath the mechanical face.

He walked around the room still laughing. "Butlerbot," he cried.

A huge armoured android marched forward.

"Yes, sir," a deep, emotional voice said.

"Pack up my things and put them into our best ship, twenty droids are needed, and arm yourself, we have an amulet to catch."

The mad scientist pushed a button in his electronic arm, and a huge container ship floated up until it was high enough to board.

Butlerbot came back with a small bag and twenty small different types of droids. The mechanical butler opened the door for the mad scientist and got on the ship, which was heavier than two hundred tanks, followed by twenty metal droids.

The container ship was huge even for an aircraft carrier. It was like a container ship from the outside, but inside was like the biggest warship in the world.

The mad scientist slid into his telepathic seat and began to flip through the switches.

"Butlerbot, sail to China ... Shanghai!"

A glowing screen shimmered to life in front of the half mechanical man, "Mr Avoc, welcome onboard."

The new-tech computer reported in a lively voice.

"All systems checked?" Avoc called out, tapping on a touch-screen keyboard.

"Yes, Mr Avoc."

"Good, start engine."

A humming sound vibrated loudly in the ship, and then a huge lift pushed down the container ship until its whole body floated on the sea. They were in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, gliding loudly on the blue sea.

After a few moments, red lights flashed on the big video screen, and then the computer warned Avoc.

"Mr Avoc, we have two aircraft carriers blocking our way," the computer boomed out.

"Ready our anti-ship missiles. I don't want a war here. Ready, fire?" the mad scientist commanded.

"Yes, Mr Avoc, fire when you want to."

"Now."

Three black, evil-looking missiles flew from the side of the ship. They glided smoothly

and noisily to the visible aircraft carriers. Then there was a silent explosion, and the aircraft carriers were gone.

"You like my upgraded version the US anti-ship missiles?" After the explosion, Avoc asked his butler.

"It's very good, and evil, my sir."

"Thank you. Now stop that chit-chat, let's go to full speed, I'm bored."

"We're accelerating, Mr Avoc."

The computer replied, "Full speed now."

"Okay," the mad scientist commented and started humming.

Suddenly a loud bang shook the ship. Red lights alarmed them along with loud noises.

"The ship's left engine is heavily damaged," the computer reported strictly. "A frigate has attacked us; they're well-armed, return fire or escape, Mr Avoc?"

"Well, return fire with the mini missiles," replied Avoc casually.

"Mini missiles are ready, Mr Avoc, but the frigate has already communicated with other attack ships and five more will come."

"Oh, good, let's have some fun."

After two minutes, Mr Avoc questioned, "Is the mini missile ready?"

"Yes, it's ready."

"Okay then, shoot them and turn to full combat mode."

"But...Mr... "

"Now."

"Okay, Mr Avoc." Hesitatingly, the computer obeyed.

After a few moments of silence, the huge ship began to transform. The deck became wider, and every metal box unfolded, and inside them were different cannons. After the transformation, the old ship was now a shining battleship.

Meanwhile, six frigates had surrounded the battleship, firing missiles at it.

Inside the battleship, nothing bothered Avoc. He waited until the firing stopped and then pressed a red button with a skull on it.

Millions of lightning bolts swarmed the six helpless frigates. Every corner of the ships was covered with blue explosives, then ... Boom! The whole surface of the ships turned to ashes. All that was left on the sea was black smoke.

"Bravo, my sir, your invention was incredible, amazing," Butlerbot said with a kind of pleasing tone.

"You like it?" the mad scientist asked delightedly.

"Yes, indeed."

"I really don't want to wait. How fast are we going? It's like, taking me a year to get to China."

"We're moving at 180 kilometres per hour, and besides, we're in China now, Mr Avoc," the computer said automatically.

"Great, where?"

"Shanghai."

* * *

Chapter 3

A LONG LOST SOUL ON GELANDANDONG PEAK

An old man wearing an animal skin watched Sam Foy with his large pupils. His white untidy moustache swayed when the wind blew. His hands were skinny and full of bug bites.

Beside him burned a weak fire.

Sam lay on a bamboo bed, the snake wound was purple and dry blood covered it. After a few minutes, Sam's eyes opened without power or focus.

"Yes! Yes! You're alive!" the old man yelled. His voice was childish like a three-year old.

"Whuhh," Sam muttered in confusion.

"All that carrying, it's paid off," the childish old man sang while jumping up and down with happiness.

"Yeah, you know you are very heavy. It took a lot of time carrying you piggyback from the metal house to my house. I couldn't go and eat my snakes, and I couldn't play with snow..."

The old man talked for so long, Sam got up, "Wait, you saved me from the snake bite?"

"Not really, I was trying to catch the snake for lunch, but I saw you. I thought it was better to eat you. You cannot say I saved you. But ...yes, you can say so..."

Along he went, Sam waited for him to stop babbling, but the old man could not stop. He now talked about his life and then about food. Finally, Sam yelled at him.

"Stop! You're so annoying. So you carried me here?"

"Yes." The old man thought for a moment and continued, "But not really, that's only half-true. I actually pulled, and pushed you at times. So it is not an actual yes, as you know you're quite heavy and..."

He started talking again without reason continuously. Sam sighed. "The weirdest person I ever met." He began to limp towards the table with a tattered sheet of paper on it.

Suddenly, he yelled with surprise, "Wow! You are Professor Imere! All this time we thought you were lost. So you're actually living here?"

The man turned around slowly and sighed, "I was a famous and lucky man before but I've lost all of it, because of this." Imere pointed his crooked finger at the yellowing map, "That is why I have lost everything – the map for the eternal amulet, I have been seeking it for so many years, and it has fried my brain."

"You ... you ... too want to find the amulet the emperor Qin Shi Huang wanted? The amulet containing the medicine to make whoever eats it immortal?"

"Oh, yes. However, there is a lot you do not know. When Xu Fu the court sorcerer sailed out to find the elixir of life the second time, he escaped to an island."

"So you're saying that that medicine doesn't exist?" Sam cut in fast and with a little bit of disappointment.

"Wait for me to finish." The professor's voice had suddenly become normal.

"Actually, Xu Fu had hidden in an underwater cave, which I perceive is somewhere in the Yangtze River. Do not be mistaken, Xu Fu had really found the elixir of life. But he was too old to control his army from getting it. At last, someone really ate it but was eventually killed by the poison. Legend has it that only a person who is not greedy could have it, so it is true. With his last breath, Xu Fu put the elixir of life in an amulet, and hid it somewhere that no one knows."

Sam was now standing on the floor, waiting patiently for the old man to finish.

"So, the point is, I want to find it. But I do not know how to find it. I need your help."

"Ok, you know what? I want to find the amulet too, that's why I came here, I need your help since you know so much. I can help you," Sam agreed.

"Deal?"

"Yes."

"And by the way, this thing lay fallen beside you when I saved you." Imere gave Sam a dragon shaped necklace.

"Thank you so much."

They shook hands for a while. Sam broke the silence by asking, "So ... umm ... What do we do now?"

"I don't know," the professor replied childishly again. "What do you do when you've lost your candy?"

"Uh, go find it?" puzzled, the archaeologist answered.

"Yes! So let's go find it now!" the old man said joyfully.

"But uh, we don't have any water or food ... umm, shouldn't we go get ready first?"

"Don't worry, you will find your answer someday, okay? Let's go."

"Umm...." Sam hesitated but followed him.

They went out of the cave and on a journey that no one had ever had before.

* * *

Chapter 4

AVOC NEEDS A GIRL TO SOLVE A PROBLEM

Again, the gigantic warship transformed into a container ship to avoid being captured by the police.

"Computer," the mad scientist said.

"Yes?"

"Where's our fake passport?"

There is a silent pause, and then the computer said, "We haven't prepared it."

"What?" frightened, Avoc yelled.

"How long do you need to make a false identity?"

"About ten minutes," the computer tremulously replied.

"Oh no!" When he was scared, Avoc's face twisted in weird ways. He thought for a moment. "Everyone in the world knows about my criminal activities; the police will recognize me without a second thought."

"What about a decoy? Here the police aren't very smart; they wouldn't search our ship."

After some quick thinking, Avoc said calmly, "Butlerbot, did you bring the decoy droid?"

"Yes, my sir," Butlerbot replied.

"Good, I have a plan. Give it to me to make up."

After a while, Butlerbot gave a jelly-like thing on a freezer trolley to the mad scientist. The liquid-like thing turned to different colours in seconds, just like a fast-forwarded movie. The freezer trolley kept the decoy droid from hardening.

"Butlerbot, make a copy of me," commanded the mad scientist.

The bodyguard poked a few buttons on the trolley and a green beam scanned Avoc.

After a second, a globe-like shape started to form, it grew human-like hands and then a tall faceless human body, at last details were added.

A clone of Avoc appeared in front of Butlerbot, standing still, waiting for a command.

Avoc said to his other self, "You'll need to take me hostage in front of the police, but do not really shoot me. When they attack you, try to fight back, but let them catch you, but not easily."

The other Avoc vibrated a while, and then he started walking just like the real Avoc.

"Good. Butlerbot, can you please give me the 'mask maker'," Avoc said to the huge robot.

"Yes sir," it replied.

He began sliding it towards the mad scientist, and soon a large tube-like machine stood in front of Avoc.

"Make up whole body: Susan Lewis, a phone, T-shirt and jeans with flip-flops, and long brown hair." Then the mad scientist stepped into the tube, waiting.

"The make-up will begin in three seconds. Three, two, one," a female robotic voice said from the tube.

Avoc held his breath while a body jacket covered his body. Twirling metal brushes painted and added the details on the body jacket. An 18-year-old girl's naked body was now Avoc. Then clothing was put on the body: jacket, T-shirt, jeans ... just as Avoc wanted. After that, a phone was put by a mechanical claw into girl-Avoc's pocket. Finally, a voice changer machine was pasted on the back of girl-Avoc's head beneath the hair. Girl-Avoc stepped out of the tube and a hole appeared next to her; she jumped in and re-appeared on the bridge just before a police officer came in.

The clone-Avoc dashed out of the ship visibly for the police officer to catch. It grabbed the young girl and seized her as a hostage with a gun in his hand.

"Stop," it yelled. "Or she dies!"

The police officer froze for a while, and then five more police officers came and guns pointed at clone-Avoc, sweating in fear.

Clone-Avoc started backing away from the police officer while the passengers screamed, running away. However, unfortunately, it tripped and although it eventually held its ground, but it was already enough time for the police officer to catch clone-Avoc. One of the policemen grabbed its leg, and another one handcuffed it. That did not stop clone-Avoc. It opened fire wildly at the police but failed to escape. A huge muscular body slammed at it. It staggered and fell on its knees. The big policeman lifted up clone-Avoc onto his shoulders and walked away.

One of the policemen took care of the girl, and asked, "Are you okay?"

"Yeah, I'm more than fine. That was so cool!" girl-Avoc cooed in delight. With the voice changer, her voice was no different from a normal girl's.

"Follow me; we have some questions to ask you."

* * *

Chapter 5

RESCUE MISSION

Hiking slippery land in Lantern Shadow Gorge made Sam pray to the gods. Imere had not even moaned after ten hours of hiking, Sam wondered if he was a ghost.

Sam walked for a few steps, then he couldn't stand it – he collapsed on the slope and blacked out.

Imere didn't realize Sam had fainted, so he kept on walking until he saw a cliff blocking his way. Imere thought hard, then started looking for a trunk, but no tree or grass were growing on the land. He looked at the cliff again and then a container ship passed by just below his feet. It honked loudly as it went.

Suddenly a big black titanium arm hit Imere in his stomach. The black figure made Imere unconscious then threw him in a bag. The figure then jumped onto a ship with a great bang. After that, the mysterious man took off his hat and ... it was Butlerbot.

Sam woke up and found himself alone in a deep canyon. After he blacked out, he could not find the professor.

He got up, lost on a cliff. The map had been in Imere's hand. He was totally lost.

A dark figure sprinted by. Sam quickly asked. "Hey, do you know where I am?"

The black figure turned around, but then ran away.

“Hey!” Sam yelled again.

He ran, following him. However quickly he ran, the black thing ran faster. However, a few moments later, he came back with a bag on his shoulders, and then ran away before Sam could say anything.

Hopeless, Sam crouched down on the rock. Suddenly he found an old paper, yellow and torn. He kicked it away, frustrated, but then he realized it was Imere’s treasure map.

“But how could Imere drop this?” he thought. “It’s very important to him.”

He tried to recall. “But no, its impossible Imere had dropped the map; no one had even walked past him.” Unless...

“The dark figure, duffel bag... he must have caught Imere, so he hid him in a bag, but accidentally forgot the map.” He gasped with fear, and then started running towards the figure.

He passed through several mountains, and then the cliff that had stopped Imere stopped him. He wondered, “Where did the figure go?”

He looked around, and saw a huge ship moving through the river, with the figure on it.

He quickly climbed down the cliff, and then spied on the ship, waiting for the right time to jump on it.

The ship was now at his right, middle. Jump! He launched himself in the air.

The wind whistled by when he jumped off the cliff. His hair stood straight. He landed on the ship with an unhappy ending. His ankle sprained in a bad way. He collapsed moaning. He tried to stand up, but could not.

A robot thing floated towards him, Sam tried to get hold of something to help him walk, but there was nothing for him to hold on to.

He struggled and crawled through the containers, finding some sort of a stick. The robot was now close, he needed to be fast. A long sniper hung loose in one open container. Sam spotted it, and then crawled faster. The archaeologist pulled it out and without thinking, shot the robot in the middle of its eye.

The robot clicked and buckled, then fell on the ground lifeless.

Sam sighed with relief, and then started to walk with the sniper held between his shoulders.

* * *

Chapter 6

A ‘SHOCKING’ CURSE

The professor sat, facing Avoc with an expression that could not be read. They used to co-workers a long time ago on a science research project, but a serious chemical explosion had blown Avoc’s head apart. Fortunately, with advanced technology he had healed himself, but had become mad as a result.

The accident had made Avoc a mad criminal, wanting to take revenge on Imere. Avoc hated him so much, he sent a bomb to Imere’s home. It damaged Imere’s brain, but failed to kill him. Imere escaped to the Tanggula Mountains, hoping that Avoc would not find him. After this, Imere had found the map to the eternal amulet, and then he had rescued Sam.

“Hello, Imere,” Avoc said with ease. “We meet again.”

“Hello, Avoc! How are you?” replied Imere, smiling.

“Good to see you too. Your brain fried?”

“Yes! How do you know?”

“I can tell from your eyes, they are gaping without focus.”

“How about you, why is your face gone?”

"An injury from your stupid move."

His face twisted in ways so strange it made him uglier, he was filled with hatred, sadness and disappointment...

"Oh, that one, Poor little guy. God bless me, I got away." The professor started to laugh.

"Now it's my turn to laugh." The machine and the burnt face couldn't hide the happiness on the mad scientist's face. His mouth was smiling. He pressed a button on his chair slowly, with anger and happiness.

Two handcuffs gripped Imere's wrist, a metal helmet was placed on Imere's head by a steel claw and a metal suit with holes in it was put on him too. Then electrical lines were plugged into the sockets.

"What is this? Avoc, I can't move!" Imere cried out, panicking.

"Nothing, It's just a video game." Avoc was now laughing crazily.

Yellow lights ran through the power lines through the metal suit. Shocked, the poor professor screamed with rage. He struggled, but could not move, because the metal chains held him. He tried to get away from the suit but failed.

Electricity continuously ran through the armour, torturing Imere. Imere kept screaming, but Avoc did not care.

The mad scientist turned a dial. On it were the words: "Torture", "Pain", "Worst" and "Insane"

Avoc turned the dial until the arrow pointed to "Worst".

Sam looked around the flight deck, checking for clues about where the professor was. He limped towards the bridge.

Sam opened the door to the bridge. He limped in, seeing if there were any guards.

Suddenly, he spotted a surveillance room; he hid behind a rubbish bin. Then he spotted a monitor showing Avoc torturing Professor Imere in the control room.

Sam gasped with fear; he slowly walked out of the surveillance room, and then quickly ran upstairs.

Imere bellowed in rage. His eyes poured blood. He felt more and more pain. His whole body flexed uncomfortably. Saliva flew out of his mouth like water guns.

A crazy laugh filled the room. Avoc twisted the wheel to "Insane", hands trembling. A red button appeared on the chair, just beneath Avoc's hand.

He pushed the button hard, and blue electricity ran through the power lines, and the armour was injected by it.

Imere felt the high power electricity, he screamed for a second, then collapsed.

Repeatedly Avoc pressed the button. Every time the blue light went into the armour, the professor trembled.

After some time, the professor's skin was black, burnt. Eyeballs nearly popped out from his sockets. His hair was straight, pointed to the sky, but just a few strands were left.

"One more should do it," Avoc said finally.

He raised his hand, ready to press the button.

Sam tried to hurry up but always ended up falling to the bottom of the stairs. He decided that using an elevator would be faster. He limped to the elevator and waited.

Ding! The elevator door swung open, but there was a droid in there.

Sam dropped down to the floor without thinking.

"What the..." the droid said.

Before the droid could react, Sam slid into the elevator and closed the door. Sam sighed with relief; he pushed the fourth button on the elevator wall, and then waited impatiently.

Suddenly, the elevator stopped on the second floor, and without warning, the doors swung open.

Sam tried to hide but there was no place. Another droid floated towards Sam, and then it said with frustration, "Uh ... Who are you?"

Sam replied, "You should know me."

Then he punched it in its most important part.

During the fight, the elevator had come to the fourth floor – the control room.

He raced to the door, and yelled, "Stop!"

Sam raced to Avoc, and punched him in the face.

While Avoc flew off the chair, Sam unlocked Imere with a push of the button on the chair. He lifted Imere, and ran towards the deck of the ship, and then he drove a powerboat off the hanger, away from the ship.

Avoc climbed back into his chair.

Butlerbot stood still on the ground beside him. "Sir?"

"They can't go far, let them go," the mad scientist said.

* * *

Chapter 7

A DAM EATS AVOC'S SHIP

The ship sailed to the famous Three Gorges Dam in two hours. They stopped and waited for the ship lock to lower the ship. They waited for a while, but nothing happened.

"Computer, check the ship lock," Avoc said, annoyed.

"Mr Avoc, the security guards were playing QQ games on the computer, we cannot download any information."

"Stupid guards," the mad scientist comments angrily, "Butlerbot, see how you can help me," continued the mad scientist.

"Yes, sir," it replied.

Butlerbot jumped through the window and sprinted to the control tower.

After a while, Butlerbot came back and reported, "There's no electricity in that dam now and the guard is checking it."

"I will not waste my time on this stupid dam!" Avoc yelled.

He pressed a few buttons on his chair and a screen floated onto the floor.

"Computer," Avoc asked.

"Yes?" it replied.

"Is it possible to shoot through this ship lock?"

"Yes, it is possible, but it will collapse and the rocks will heavily damage our ship. Since we are already damaged by the frigates, the rocks can sink our ship."

"I don't care, blast them."

"With what, sir?"

"All of our ammunition!"

"There's a great risk."

"I said blast them!" Avoc commanded fiercely.

"Yes sir." Unwillingly, the computer obeyed.

"And don't forget, turn to battle mode, 1.2.3 ... accelerate!"

The ship changed while it glided faster towards the dam.

"Shoot!" Avoc yelled.

Guns and cannons sprouted out from the deck, jets, tanks slid out from the side, just for the weapons to fire.

Millions of cannons fired at once, the noise was so loud that the glass covering the warship cracked.

They kept firing, until the first ship lock collapsed. The huge warship tried to get away from bigger rocks, but it was no speedboat. Rocks, scrap metal, fell on the warship, shattering everything on the deck. A huge rock cracked the whole satellite dish on the control tower, making screens darken.

The warship raced through the first ship lock, and then the second ship lock exploded to pieces.

The cannons tried to blow away bigger metal or rocks before they reached the warship, but could not. Rocks, shot from the sky like missiles, destroying everything; the whole elevator sank in the sea.

They shot the third ship lock crazily, but the most powerful ones ran out of bullets. The third gate had not really collapsed; it was broken into two. The two huge gates fell on the warship, making the whole landing deck explode into flames.

Inside the ship red alarm lights blinked crazily. Avoc got hold of his seat, but an alarm frightened him.

"The bridge is collapsing!"

Avoc quickly ran out the door, and sprinted down the stairs, crying, "Butlerbot!"

The stairs were breaking, Avoc limped down the stairs but it was too late. The stairs started to collapse, splitting in half.

Avoc stopped; he looked around for an escape route.

Suddenly a window caught his attention. He climbed up until he could get hold of the window.

He shook the frame very hard, trying to break it, but it held strong. Suddenly, the whole bridge fell sideways, making Avoc fly through the stairs.

He stood up, gripping a metal bar. A steel wall started to fall, and Avoc was trapped. Nothing to do, he shut his eyes, waiting for his death.

Suddenly a black thing flew to the mad scientist, grabbing him, and jumped through the window just before the whole bridge collapsed in the water.

It was Butlerbot. He grabbed Avoc and sprinted behind the air search radar.

"Sir, are you okay?" it cried.

Butlerbot suddenly realized the ship was nearly touching the fifth ship lock; he grabbed the radio and cried.

"Fire!"

However, it was too late; the ship crashed into the fifth ship lock. It tried to crush it, but the steel gate pushed back. A huge back wave pushed the ship until it touched the mountains. It turned upside down while falling over the cliff, and the whole deck cracked into two, leaving a huge pile of scrap metal.

Suddenly a small speedboat burst through the waves, with Butlerbot on it. It had broken an entire arm, but it was still protecting Avoc.

It drove the speedboat in front of the Three Gorges Dam. Then it checked Avoc's heartbeat. It sighed with relief, not realising that a huge rock was falling onto him and the speedboat.

The rock slid down the cliff, crushing the speedboat, Avoc and Butlerbot.

* * *

Chapter 8

Devil's Test

Sam drove the powerboat to a nearby cavern, and then heaved Imere's half-dead body into it.

The archaeologist and Imere could barely get inside the cavern. He shivered.

The temperature was low. He saw a number of skulls scattered everywhere. The passage inside the cavern was a small classic tube shape with mud covering the ground. Instead of limestone, its walls were made of gypsum. A picture of dragons chasing a ball was carved on the wall.

Sam shook Imere's body, and cried, "Imere! Are you okay? Wake up!"

No response came, and he tried again. However, Imere did not even move an eyebrow.

Sam cried out loudly, full of sadness and hatred. He knelt down, and started to sob.

Although, they had just met for a short while, Imere was already like his brother, he meant a lot to him.

Sam looked again at the dying professor, suddenly Imere said in a low voice, "Amulet..."

Sam jumped up, frightened. Nevertheless, he bent towards Imere again.

"Imere?" he asked.

Imere did not respond, but he kept saying "Amulet ... amulet ..."

Sam thought very hard, "What is he trying to tell me?"

Then he figured it out.

"The amulet! The elixir of life! That could save Imere!"

The archaeologist unfolded the map; it was stained with water, making it hard to understand. The arrows and pictures were disappearing because it was soaked, but then a dragon sign and a horseshoe under a triangular form at the end of a line appeared. He gasped with astonishment; he was in the cave that he was looking for.

Sam followed the path and found the triangular gypsum, and he removed the limestone. However, instead of the amulet, there was a bunch of sparkling diamonds instead. Each of them was as big as Sam's fist.

Sam really wanted to take them, one of them could change his life, he could go on a trip to the moon, he could control the whole Earth, everything would be his... Every thought pushed him to take them, so he raised his hand, ready to do so. Suddenly, Imere's warning flashed in his head, "Only a person who is not greedy can take it..."

Sam woke up from his dream instantly; he pushed away the diamonds, and discovered a notch. The notch looked like a keyhole to him. He paused for a moment, then pulled out his pendant. The pendant was his family heirloom. He put it in the notch, the pendant fitted in the notch perfectly. An old and rusty amulet rose up in the air. Sam grabbed it and raced to Imere, then put the amulet onto his neck.

Imere's burnt face slowly turned young and healthy, the wound and scar faded.

Finally Imere's eyes opened. "Worth it," he said.

My Yangtze River Trip

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

I am a little raindrop. I come from the sky. One day, I fall into a strange place, it is a river. I ask the raindrops, "Where am I?" They tell me I am in the Yangtze River in Qinghai. Yangtze River, what is it? I am so scared. My friends then tell me many things about the Yangtze River.

"The Yangtze River is the longest river in Asia."

"The Yangtze River is the third longest in the world."

"The Yangtze River is 6,418 kilometres long."

"The Yangtze River starts in Qinghai, ends in Shanghai, and then goes into the sea."

"Sea! I want to go to the sea."

"Let us go together," my friends say to me. Then I follow my friends to take a trip, a Yangtze River trip.

During my Yangtze River trip, I pass through many deep valleys and I make friends with many other raindrops, they come from other rivers and lakes.

"Hi! I come from Dongting Lake, which is near Hunan and Hubei. Nice to meet you!"

I don't only meet raindrop friends; I also meet other friends during my Yangtze River trip. Boats are also my best friends. Boats take food and clothes to other places and carry people along the Yangtze River. Boats also take people and cars across the river. Some boats have many rooms. People can stay for a few days. They can look around the Yangtze River.

If the people want to cross the Yangtze River, a boat is not the only way. They can cross the river on a bridge. The Wuhan Yangtze River Bridge was the first bridge across the Yangtze River. It is a bridge for cars and trains. It was built from 1955 to 1957. By 2005, there are 56 bridges across the Yangtze River. During my Yangtze River trip, I see different bridges at Jiujiang, Yichang and between Nantong and Suzhou.

I have also made some new animal friends. They are the Chinese alligator, the finless porpoise and the Chinese paddlefish. There are not many of them left, so I love them very much.

From Qinghai I flow with my friends for a long, long time along the Yangtze River trip. I pass many cities, such as Chongqing, Jingzhou, Wuhan, Hefei and Nanjing. At last, I reach Shanghai. I like Shanghai very much. There are many beautiful high buildings and I can see many lights on the buildings.

Now I leave Shanghai. I go to the big sea, the East China Sea.

"Bye-bye, Yangtze River."

The History, Development and Wildlife Status of the Yangtze River

Lo Tsing Sum, 11, St. Paul's Co-educational College Primary School

The Yangtze River has long been one of the world's most famous rivers, with an amazing history. It shelters many precious and critically endangered animal species, like the Chinese sturgeon, and protects many other kinds of wildlife, such as many rare water plants, with a delicate balance of nature that is both fragile and unique. Apart from its wonderful wildlife status, the Yangtze River has also developed swiftly, with new dams and bridges being built constantly. More importantly, it possesses a great history: a history of helping people thrive and farm and flourish since prehistoric times.

The Yangtze River is a mysterious, enigmatic and immense body of water with treasures anxiously waiting to be dug out; a drawer full of secrets. The legends of the Yangtze River are its biggest secrets, with tales of every kind, from dragon fables to mermaid lore. Ancient tales tell us that many, many years ago, the part of the Yangtze River that ran near Yangzhou was called 'Yangzi Jiang' locally. Some time later, Westerners heard the name and applied it for the whole river. This resulted in the modern term "Yangtze River".

Of the many interesting things about the Yangtze River, the three most important and interesting are history, development and wildlife. All three of these have been studied for a long time by historians, architects, scientists and many other people. The flabbergasting courses of its history, its quick development and its precious, irreplaceable wildlife have all been greatly treasured by most people.

Let's start with history. Many studies reveal that the Yangtze River had contributed greatly to the ancient Chinese, providing them with fertile soil, food and water. Human activities were found in the Three Gorges area 27,000 years ago. Starting from the Han Dynasty, the Yangtze River became even more important to the Chinese economy. It made agriculture very stable and productive. By the Song Dynasty, the areas around the Yangtze River were among the wealthiest in China. In the Qing Dynasty, certain areas along the Yangtze River already contributed to a third to half of the nation's revenues.

The Yangtze River has been used as the political boundary between northern and southern China more than once on account of the difficulty of crossing the river. It has facilitated trade between China and other countries, and has been charted by the USA in times of conflict between the United States and France (on matters of Chinese trade). On the negative side, it has experienced degradation, and many lakes have been cut off from the main river for reasons like land reclamation and controlling disease vectors such as blood flukes that caused schistosomiasis, a parasitic disease.

Moving on to development, being an absolutely perfect place for both building and trading, the Yangtze River supports many dams and important bridges, and provides space for shipping and trading between China and other countries. The famous Three Gorges Dam is one of China's biggest sources of electricity. Other dams, like the Gezhouba Dam and the several unfinished dams on the upper portions of the river, have also contributed greatly to the nation. As for the bridges, including one of the longest in the world, they help China in many ways like attracting tourists and increasing convenience for traders, as the waters of the Yangtze provide a good environment for shipping goods.

Last but not least comes wildlife. The Yangtze River is home to at least three critically endangered species: the Chinese alligator, the Chinese paddlefish and the Yangtze River dolphin. It is the only place in the world native to an alligator and paddlefish species, excluding the United States. In 2006, the **baiji**, also known as the Yangtze River dolphin, was declared functionally extinct after a six-week search failed to find any in the river. However, and also fortunately, one was sighted soon after. In 2011, around 20 **baijis** have also been sighted, although it is not sure whether those were merely a similar species or really a group of **baijis**.

Besides the Yangtze River dolphin, both the Chinese alligator and the Chinese paddlefish are critically endangered. Both of these species reside only in the Yangtze River, but their cousins – the only other kinds of alligator and paddlefish species – live in the USA. They are both extremely scarce, with the Chinese paddlefish possibly extinct. Apart from the above, the Chinese sturgeon is also critically endangered, and the numbers of the finless porpoises, which are also threatened, have alarmingly declined over the past few years. All of these endangered species have been deeply affected by water traffic, and their breeding habits have been greatly disturbed due to the Three Gorges Dam, as it blocks the way for the fish and aquatic mammals to swim upstream.

The Yangtze River has a wonderful history, a swift development and a rich natural habitat that provides rare and precious species with a place to thrive. Development is good for economy but bad for ecology. We have to learn to respect and know more about this river's great history, but most of all, we must try to balance development and wildlife. The future of the Yangtze River – in all respects – is up to you.

The Guizhou Road

Katherine Ko 13, Hong Kong International School

Everything was a shade of brown; from the mountain that cradled one side of the road, to the basin on the other that swooped in a gentle, aesthetic curve towards the dusty trees way downhill.

I trudged, all alone, down the rocky, dust-covered road, breathing in the dusty air, listening to the echoes of my stiff, solitary steps, and feeling nothing at all. It was as if someone had vacuumed everything out of me, leaving me empty, like a book expunged of all its content. The emptiness numbed my body, and froze my thoughts, so that I could only concentrate on the vast expanse of road that lay before me, lethargically curling around the massive brown face of the mountain.

Sitting now, I listened to the dull, rhythmic thuds of my heart, swung my legs over the jagged edge of the road, pulled out my half drained water bottle and took a long sip. The water had a miraculous effect: instantaneously, my mind cleared, and my body, tense and aching from hours of hiking relaxed by a fraction.

I scanned the two ends of the road with my eyes, hoping and dreading at the same time to see a sign of life. I knew there were people from my PEAK group in front of me and behind me, but the feeling of anxiety did not recede. I was in Guizhou, China, a place I'd never been to before; anything could happen.

I hadn't always been so alone; we'd all started out together, as a group. Hours before, the basin had echoed our excited chatter, and the sound of footfalls had bounced off the road. However, our group had begun to spread out. People better at hiking had pushed on at the front, leading the group, whilst those who were less proficient had lagged behind at the back. I remained in the middle of the group, sandwiched between them.

Another hour had come and gone. Now we had begun to feel tired. Weariness had crept over us and inundated our bodies as we walked; yet we carried on together, sure that the end was near. After all, our PEAK trip leaders had explicitly stated that this was going to be an 'easy' hike, right?

However, as time passed, and we saw no sign whatsoever of the bus that was promised to be there waiting, we had separated. Our PEAK group had spread out along the road, so that by the end of the second hour, we were all either alone, or with only one or two other people. I'd liked this at first, enjoying the rare chance of freedom as much as an early bird enjoys the taste of its first worm. But as the hours went by, apprehension had begun to grip me. Freedom turned into loneliness as I stared desperately at the desolate scene that lay before me.

The road was a sea of brown, dusty rocks. These rocks stretched from one end to the other without any pause or interference, and seemed to extend forever. I had no idea when and where the hike would end. My PEAK leaders were wrong. This hike may have been relatively easy on us physically, but it was hell on us mentally.

The murmuring sound of a truck's engine pulled me out of my thoughts. I fought with the panic growing inside of me. Suddenly, I felt more alone than ever. Fear stirred in my stiff body as paranoia took over me.

The truck was right behind me now. I could hear music blaring out through the speakers, and see a cigarette hanging out the window. I felt a rising urge to move, hide and get away from this road of torture, but I couldn't. It was as if some invisible force was holding me down, pressing me onto the dry, cracked earth, forbidding me from getting up. I sat there, frozen with fear, but not able to do anything at all. The truck seemed to halt, right next to me. The desolate road seemed to be even bleaker than before.

Dread. All I could feel was dread. It trickled through me like a dark, polluted river, washing out all the emptiness that had inhabited my body before. I stared nervously at the truck, sure that it would stop and I would be abducted.

It didn't. It sped on down the road as fast as before. Relief flooded through me. I managed to drag myself to my feet, resisting the pain shooting through my body, and walk on, laughing at the absurdity of my paranoia.

It was then that I saw the bus, parked squarely on the road directly ahead of me. I rubbed my eyes, thinking that I was hallucinating. I wasn't. The bus was really there. And at that moment in time, the bus meant everything to me; it signified the end of my torture, and was practically my heaven. Resisting the urge to run, scream and hysterically fling my exhausted body into the bus, I walked, trembling with hope, into the air-conditioned space, as someone informed me that I'd taken eight hours and was the ninth person to arrive.

As I settled down, cleaned myself up and waited for the others to arrive, I turned and looked out the window. Instantly, a tingling feeling gushed through me.

The road had ended. It was truly over. But it wasn't just the road that was over; through this experience, I had changed too. The part of me that used to whine and complain about enduring hardship was also over, and I knew I would never revert to my old self again. Though I had not realized it then, I had grown much stronger in the process. In the situation that I was put in, I could not give up. I had wanted to – multiple times – but I **couldn't**. If I did, I would be stranded in the middle of a road, all alone, without lasting supplies or any other resources. So I got up, and kept going – until the very end. With this new realization in mind, I took one last grateful look at the road and watched its long, winding body curl around the corner, retreating back into its peaceful shell.

The Decline of the Yangtze River

Waylon Chan, 17, St. Joseph's College

The mild breeze was gently blowing southward, with the lush leaves from nearby trees rustling softly. The picturesque landscape was a rare treat for the eyes. Barely a few places remain where such luxurious greenery is left unspoiled and unscathed by human presence. The misty green river was interspersed with rays of dazzling sunlight, sparkling like polished emerald. The river was surrounded by ragged riverbanks overgrown with plantation, with some barren cliffs and boulders distributed randomly and unevenly across the landscape, adding to its veil of mystique and primitiveness. The sounds of flowing water, coupled with the occasional clear, high-pitched chirps of birds, concerted a pleasant symphony of nature itself. Swarms of fishes were swimming just barely below the water surface, moving swiftly and deftly despite the undercurrents of the river.

This amazing, breathtaking scenery represents only a tiny section of the Yangtze River, which spans an incredible 6,418 kilometres across China, making it one of the biggest and longest rivers in the world. This unique river has been described as the cradle of Chinese civilisation, and its history stretches back almost as long as its length. It has been the focus of myths and legends, where powerful deities and spiritual beings resided inside the mighty river. The ancient tales about the Yangtze are too numerous to be counted. It has been the inspiration of poets, artists and philosophers alike, who in turn inspired the masses with their works.

Described as magnificent and boundless, the Yangtze River has been at the centre of China's economic and cultural developments and advancements throughout its history. It made land fertile for farming, making it possible for our ancestors 7,000 years ago to survive and thrive. Most of the early settlements in China were located near the river, providing ample food and water for the inhabitants to feed themselves and grow. Capitals of dynasties were often located near the mighty Yangtze, allowing easy access to the enriching waters of the river. The different tribes of China grew strong and expanded as a result.

As those tribes fought against each other to rule over China, the Yangtze became a location of strategic importance. Many fierce battles occurred there, and some of the most brilliant battles engineered by the geniuses of their era made their way into the hall of fame, earning their permanent place in history. One of the most recounted battles was the Battle of Red Cliff, fought close to the Yangtze in the Three Kingdoms Era. It was a fierce, large-scale engagement, with none matching its size and importance in centuries to come. A battle of both wit and strength, its decisive outcome shaped the course of China's history, and many works of classic art and literature were derived from this epic historic battle.

The Yangtze River also served as an important boundary separating Northern China from Southern China, acting as a natural barrier at times. It created cultural differences between the north and the south, diversifying the unique cultures of China. It helped mould a harmony of various cultures in China, which continue today. At the pinnacle of China's developments, the Yangtze became an important source of inspiration for many great poets, philosophers and politicians alike. Reflecting upon the majestic river's strength and intricate beauty, lasting pieces of literature acclaimed by modern academics were written. The Yangtze was truly an integral part of China, leaving behind tales of greatness and glory.

But those tales of greatness and glory are, sadly, tales of the past. The snapshot of nature at the beginning of this article is quickly fading away. Perhaps within a few decades, that place will no longer exist in China. Since the 20th century, China has undergone a revolutionary change. To catch up with the unprecedented pace of advancements forced upon it by the powers of the West, China painfully underwent modernisation. In the latter part of the 20th century and at the start of the 21st, brand new tales of the Yangtze River were being written. Those tales were not of grandeur and brilliance, nor of breakthroughs and advancements, but were instead woeful tales about its own imminent and impending destruction.

The once clear streams of the Yangtze River have unfortunately been turned into murky, polluted waters. Since the opening up of China in 1979, massive reforms have taken place. Existing systems were completely overhauled, and rapid industrialisation took place. Although that created a lot of job opportunities and economic benefits, most ignored the industrial pollution factories caused. In order to maximise profits, many businessmen in China ignored or overlooked environmental regulations, which were laxly enforced, if at all. As a result, tons of toxic pollutants are indiscriminately being dumped into the river, making the water undrinkable for the lower streams, as well as killing the fish in the vicinity, upsetting the marine ecosystem. The river is home to a wide variety of species, including three critically endangered species, and a continued decrease in water quality would cause these species to become extinct.

Currently, over 35% of the water in the Yangtze is regarded as below third class – water that causes aquatic life to die and is unfit to drink. Experts say if the percentage increases to 70%, the Yangtze will become a dead river without any living organisms, painting a dark and bleak picture for the river's future. 40% of China's entire waste water output goes into the Yangtze, with a staggering 80% of it untreated. As the usage of water continues to spiral uncontrollably upwards, the problem at hand will only be exacerbated. Besides affecting marine life, it also threatens the millions of residents in China who depend on the Yangtze to get drinking water. 47 cities near the river, including Shanghai, currently suffer from a water shortage crisis. Up to 170 million residents are now finding themselves short of water despite measures to reduce water consumption. Meanwhile, to the woe of nearby residents, the Yangtze is becoming more mercurial and volatile, with intermittent droughts and flooding, seemingly to taunt and harass the residents with its immense power. The Yangtze, once famed for being able to provide fresh, drinkable water to nearby inhabitants, now finds itself unable to perform the role it has been performing for thousands of years.

The sad thing is that the decline in water quality is only one of the numerous problems plaguing the Yangtze River. The loss of wetlands and lakes connected to the Yangtze is also a problem we can hardly afford to ignore. Within the last few decades, we have constantly been recklessly taking resources from the Yangtze to fulfill our own needs, without even acknowledging its need. For better irrigation and flood control, many poorly designed dams were built, cutting off lakes and streams from the main river. To create more living space,

the government authorised land reclamation projects without a second thought, substantially reducing the size of the river. It exacerbates seasonal flooding along the river, as well as creating potential hazards when flooding. These measures have had severe, sometimes lasting, consequences on inhabitants living near the river.

Due to these actions, coupled with the siltation of the river caused by years of pouring industrial pollutants into it, the Yangtze's health is now at a critical level. Yet many are still wantonly destroying the Yangtze, disregarding concerns over the potential damage this will cause. What most people tend to ignore, however, is that the more damage you cause to Mother Nature, the harder She will strike back at you.

Where the Yangtze River once brought prosperity to neighbouring areas, it now brings death and destruction. On 11th June 2011, in Yichang County, Hubei, where the Yangtze passes through and where the Three Gorges Dam is located, the streets were unusually quiet. An uncomfortable silence hung in the air. There was an unnerving stillness mixed with a tinge of sombreness. The air was clear and refreshing; a stark contrast to the days when the entire city was covered in a thick blanket of photochemical smog. Cars were lying on the pavements, overturned, their windows shattered. Some had their pipelines damaged, with slick oil slowly dripping to the ground. Trees were uprooted and lay randomly all over the city. Traffic lights and signs were nowhere to be found, knocked off by the force of the waves. Stores were closed, and the electricity was out.

The water level of the pavements had now receded to a couple of dozen centimetres from more than a metre high just hours before. Pedestrians were few and scattered, some wearing military uniforms, with their clothes and belongings soaking wet. They were wading through water, either to rescue those trapped under the rubble of less sturdy structures or to evacuate to higher ground. Sporadic cries and wails of grieving friends and families could be faintly heard. The flooding has led to over 30 deaths, displacing more than 450,000 residents and causing over 1.5 billion yuan of damage in Hubei alone.

Along the Yangtze, the flooding has inundated considerable portions of nine provinces, affecting over 31 million people. The facts are grim. Nature has had enough, and it is now fighting back. Although the flooding cannot be blamed entirely on human interference in the river, we cannot escape responsibility of amplifying the severity of the flooding.

In this recent decade, the Chinese government has decided to undertake one of the most daring and ambitious projects ever attempted – the Three Gorges Dam Project. It was an effort to wrest control of the Yangtze River and harness the powers it has to offer. The project began work in 1994, and after 14 years of laborious effort, the dam body was completed. Although still partially completed, with some turbines not fully operational, it is already the world's largest power station. It currently supplies electricity to 12 neighbouring provinces, and is a large step taken towards curbing pollution and carbon emissions. However, blocking the flow of the Yangtze might not be an entirely wise move. The Three Gorges Dam has made areas downstream unstable, causing frequent major landslides. In the first few months of 2011 alone, there were 108 cases of reported major landslides. When the dam was not yet built, there were virtually no major landslides in the vicinity. Wildlife has also been affected, as the dam guaranteed the destruction of their habitat. With the Yangtze River being an ecologically diverse area, serious repercussions might arise. Whether the Three Gorges Dam project is beneficial to China in its entirety, only time will tell; but it is certainly taking a heavy toll on the well-being of the Yangtze.

To make matters worse, the water source of the Yangtze River is now being polluted. The Yangtze gathers most of its waters from the famous Tibetan Plateau. The waters then flow

eastward through Central and Eastern China to Shanghai, where the river finally converges upon the East China Sea. The Tibetan Plateau has always been a semi-sacred area relatively untouched by human presence, making it one of the most spectacular natural landscapes in the world, with its high altitude, glittering ice glaciers and unique animal species. But as modernisation barges its way onto the Tibetan Plateau, its surroundings are no longer natural. Dozens of development projects are currently underway, with large slabs of concrete now a common sight on the Tibetan Plateau. The ice water nearby is predictably not spared from pollution, pushing the Yangtze one step further towards destruction.

Cries of help by the Yangtze River are being ignored by government officials and the public. Pleas of desperation are being drowned out by the skyrocketing economic developments. Tons of industrial pollutants from factories are still being dumped into the river with tacit approval from local authorities. Hundreds of aquatic species living in the Yangtze face the threat of extinction. Millions are now deprived of safe drinking water originally taken from the Yangtze River. More are in constant threat of natural disasters, which are, ironically, exacerbated by human acts on the river. Thousands have lost their lives. Hundreds of millions have been forced to leave their homes. Trillions of dollars have vanished into thin air. Yet, under these dire consequences, business owners are still given a free hand in damaging the Yangtze. Environmental regulations are still not enforced. Government officials are still giving the green light to land reclamation projects. And the Yangtze is still in critical health.

Facing these accusations, some government officials have defended their actions by stating that the factories causing the pollution provide the public with much-needed jobs to improve the economy. They bring livelihood to impoverished citizens struggling to make ends meet, providing brighter opportunities for those trapped helplessly in intergenerational poverty. They argue that the additions made to the Yangtze River will improve citizens' quality of living. They claim that their actions are in the public's interest. But is this the whole truth?

Factories do indeed bring money into cities, offering jobs and chances to the unfortunate. What officials ignore is that the factories produce sizable amounts of toxic water, and with the lack of water treatment before it flows back into the main river, it causes considerable harm to the river. The treatment facilities will raise the cost of production considerably, making factory owners unwilling to abide with environmental regulations. To maximise their profits, they often approach government officials and strike a deal with them under the table. Some cities compete with others to make their districts most appealing to potential investors, lowering the environmental requirements and rules, sacrificing the Yangtze River for truckloads of banknotes. However, these gains are anything but a reason to celebrate. The short-term gain of wealth by citizens will be dwarfed by the long-term harm caused by the wrath of the Yangtze, as more severe flooding and water-shortages are expected by experts in the near future.

Despite all this, there is still a glimmer of hope for the future of the river. The damage done is not yet irrevocable, and we have fortunately not yet reached the point of no return. In recent years, the government has started to realise some of its errors, and has put effort into reconnecting lakes to the Yangtze River. Although this is a significant step taken by the government, it remains inadequate in fully solving the problems of the Yangtze River. Tougher laws and regulations on water pollution have to be drafted, passed and enforced by governments. Additional projects on the Yangtze have to be vetted by experts and extensively discussed before the go-ahead sign is given. Cleanup methods have to be proposed and enacted by provinces to rescue the dwindling numbers of aquatic species in the Yangtze. Many efforts will have to be exerted before the Yangtze can be healed of its numerous deep wounds.

The Yangtze River has accompanied China throughout good times and bad, through hardships and prosperity. This faithful companion witnessed the rise and decline of China's dynasties, silently observing the remarkable events it has been through. Defining works of arts and literature throughout the millennia has made the Yangtze an iconic figure of China, an embodiment of the Chinese culture. The Yangtze's importance to China cannot be understated. Now that the past is behind us, engraved on stones or written in obscure books hidden away, it is time to turn a new leaf, and look to the future. With the support of the public, I am sure that better and brighter tales of the Yangtze will be told before long, when the magnificent Yangtze River is proudly and rightfully restored to its former glory.

A Superlative River

Clare Wong Yin, 9, St. Paul's Co-educational College Primary School

From Shanghai to Tibet where the glaciers melt
Into me – like my sisters, the Amazon and the Nile,
I am a superlative river,
The Yangtze.
Known by many names, I have a long history.
Ships snake and slide across me,
Travelling through the Heavens River, Ten Thousand Li,
To know China you must know me,
The plate on which the sand scatters.

I used to feed the Land of Fish and Rice –
Now hydroelectricity blocks my path
But brings rapid progress,
And the five Tigers roar fiercely and
Claw
At my shores.
The earth's spin slows as my dam turns,
I am a superlative river,
The Yangtze.

Sometimes I am tired and bitter sadness lingers in my heart,
Where dazzling emerald green water used to flow,
And the question no one will answer is:
Where did the dolphins go?
Sometimes I am teary and the golden maples try to soothe my soul,
Sometimes I am restless and I flood because I have nowhere to go.

Shanghai prospers and the Tigers grow.
I am proud to be the Yangtze on which the sand
Scatters – but where did my dolphins go?
I want my jade green water to be
Cleansed so it can flow
Freely
And I can feed the Land of Fish and Rice.
I am the heart where the rivers meet and the glaciers
Melt into a beautiful emerald green mirror,
People still come to marvel and
Ships still snake and slide across me,
I am
The mighty Yangtze.

Dear Yangtze River

Tiffany Wu, 10, St. Paul's Co-educational College Primary School

Oh, Yangtze River, you are the one –
Long and slender, mighty and elegant,
Ancient but ever so energetic,
From West to East thy aura glimpses.

Oh, Yangtze River, you are the heart of China –
Defining yet uniting
The border from Qinghai to Shanghai,
You paint the colours of eleven provinces.

Oh, Yangtze River, you pass on splendid stories –
Of how the Three Kingdoms fought
The battle to greatness
To how the Three Gorges Dam killed
Our fear of floods.

Oh Yangtze River, you are the witness of our growth –
When the first wheat grows in spring,
And when the rocket shoots up the sky,
You sing and roar to applaud our deeds.

Oh Yangtze River, we are eternally together –
Your ever flowing water will milk our generations
As we march through centuries
Tall and strong.

The Yangtze River

An Gie Kong, 12, Sha Tin College

A glittering dragon,
China's renowned,
From the Kunlun Mountains
To Shanghai eastbound.

It snakes through the mountains,
Through forests deep,
To towns of rice paddies
And cities that never sleep.

Yangtze, Chang Jiang,
An age-old legacy,
Forty-five million years,
This passage to the sea.

Through it to Europe, Africa, and
even America
Zheng He's Treasure Fleet, they went.
Out the mouth of the Yangtze,
The world to circumvent.

Every stop along the way
Has something new to add,
The hides, wool, copper and salt,
Aboard ships of nomads.

Sichuan, passing by,
Live produce galore,
Trading silk for **jinyin**,
A cache of folklore.

Six thousand three hundred kilometres,
Spans across the nation,
All this fertile soil,
A gift, nature's creation.

Then used for irrigation,
Now for sanitation,
Steeped in history,
Worthy of preservation.

Enemies of the dragon mighty,
Factories, exhaust and waste,
Once beautiful; now sewage,
It is to humans this crime is traced.

Why would we let jade waters
Morph surely into fawn,
Wouldn't it be better
If pollution would be gone?

A glittering dragon,
China's renowned,
From the Kunlun Mountains
To Shanghai eastbound.

Into the Depths

Ella Davidson, 15, Elsa High School

Soldiers march around us as they entrap us in this cave,
For a second
All is quiet
Only our pounding heartbeats,
And the rhythm of our breaths
Pierce the still air like knives

Outside we hear the eternal pulse of the river flow
As it carries the history of our people
Out to sea

The lifeblood of our nation for thousands of years
Swept away in a single wave
Vanished, erased

The shouting begins
They have found us

The river cries for our loss
It bleeds our blood
And carries us home

Behind the mountains
I can hear her
Where she screams from the depths of the ocean

I close my eyes
Float down the river one last time
And head out to sea

Killed By Humans

Tam Wing Hei, 16, Hong Kong Juvenile Care Centre Chan Nam Cheong Memorial School

My whole family was killed by humans
But they are not all fishermen
I tell you what
There is only one reason

People from places that are urban
Have come to destroy the environment
Rocks, sand, rubbish, TNT
Million friends dead in an instant