



Winning Entries

The Price of the Great Wall

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If you listen quietly to the winds, you will hear a ghoulish voice whispering. But only if you stand still and listen, not with your ears, but with your heart, only then will you be able to hear the tale that has never been told. And only then will you understand the price your ancestors had to pay for this famous landmark. Only then...

* * *

So tired... so tired...

The hot sun streamed down from above, hot like hell fire. Even the dirt under Ping's feet seemed to burn. Sweat dripped down from his back. A drop rolled down from his forehead and he watched as it hit the ground, shattering like a million diamonds.

A cracking sound slashed through the air and Ping glanced behind him. One of the guards was hitting the ground with a whip in hand. He yelled at Ping when their eyes met. Ping immediately casted his gaze down and walked a little bit faster.

He looked at the line in front of him. Men were hauling big boulders onto their shoulders and started the long hike up the hill under the steamy sun. 'Pull,' shouted a standing guard slashing his whip. 'And heave!' 'And pull!' 'Faster!' The labourers struggled to carry the boulders up the uneven road of the Great Wall. Down the hill, where Ping was standing, stood a long line of men picking up their load. 'Move you insolent fools!' screamed the guard.

Ping felt something poking his shoulder and he looked up. A soldier stared him down and hissed, 'Faster,' while jabbing the handle of his spear at him. Ping knelt to pick up the boulder. He grunted and heaved until he got a good grip. 'Move!' and Ping started walking. The soldier shoved him and he nearly fell.

He steadied himself and kept walking. He'd learnt from past experiences to never ever look at the guards but to look down and you might just live to see another day. Ping took one step after another and tried to distract himself from the crushing weight of his load. His mind began to wander as he hiked up the hill. He thought of his younger days. It hadn't been easy, but it surely was much easier than the life he was enduring now.

Ping continued pushing forward, the boulder growing heavier with each step. He remembered the day when his mother fell ill after giving birth to his baby sister. He remembered the nights when his father spent hours sitting next to his mother on her bed, his face stricken. He remembered the night when his dad suddenly left their wooden house, disappeared into the night, and came back just before dawn.

Returning with a bag of jingling coins under one arm, he crouched and stared straight into Ping's sleepy eyes. Over the years, his father's voice had faded to nothing but a whisper, yet Ping remembered every single word his father said that night.

Use this, son, to buy medicine for your mother. Save the remaining coins for yourself. Look at me. I will be taken. The Ming guards will be hunting me down. Stealing isn't something I'm proud of, no matter the reason. Forgive me for what I did, son. Forgive me for bringing this kind of life to you. But for the sake of your mother and your baby sister, I have to do this. Life is unfair. I have prayed to the gods that you will live without the injustice of life. But the gods are cruel... as cruel as the emperor. Promise me, son. Take care of your mother and your sister. My son. I'm so sorry, my son.

His father planted a kiss on Ping's forehead, and disappeared into the twilight. That was the last time Ping saw his father.

A few days later, an official letter came and announced that his father had been sentenced for twenty years of hard labour to repair the Great Wall. Ping's mother sobbed uncontrollably as if she were reading an obituary.

Life still went on. Ping got a job working in a farm, providing for his family and caring for his mother and his sister. Ping worked hard on the farm, hoping that he could start a new life with the ones he loved. He could imagine his mother smiling at him when he came home from work with fresh vegetables, his sister running over to greet him and, one day, returning home to find his father waiting for him. The visions, the dreams, the wishes were so real...

Until one night when two guards came banging on his front door, crushing not just Ping's door, but all his visions, his dreams and his wishes. They dragged him away to the Great Wall. 'Your father worked off twelve years of his sentence. He died yesterday. You have to take his place as his son until his sentence is finished.'

Ping's mind suddenly jerked back to reality when he heard a loud thump and saw a frail old man fall in front of him.

'Get up,' roared the guard as he cracked his whip, 'Up, scum, on your feet!'

The old man grunted and climbed to his feet.

'Pick it up,' snarled the guard. The man looked down at the boulder, bent his knees, and grunted while lifting up the big rock. His knees buckled and he fell on his face. 'You useless little git,' the guard kicked the old man in the shin. The old man groaned.

As Ping watched, he recognised this old man. On his first day at the Great Wall, an old man peered at his face and whispered, 'you must be Ping. You look just like your father. He talked much about you. He was a dear friend to me. He died under the brutal beating of those guards, who didn't care that your father was injured and weak. My days are numbered too. No one can last too long here.' The old man had a son, Ping recalled, a son close to his age. Just a week ago, the old man had come running towards Ping, a big goofy smile on his face, waving a letter at Ping's direction. The old man announced that he would soon have a grandson, and he would be able to see his grandson in a few years... if he lived that long..

'Put your back into it,' roared the guard. 'Get up!' The old man moaned as he shoved against the boulder. It didn't even budge.

The guard growled and raised his whip. It came slashing down with a crack, so loud it

made Ping cringe. The old man gasped. Ping saw a river of blood flowing down the old man's back.

'Move!' The old man started thrusting the boulder with all his might. The guard raised his whip again. Crack!

"What are you looking at? Move!" the guard poked the spear at Ping. Ping forced himself to keep walking. He continued walking up the hill, with his eyes still fixing on the old man.

'You lazy little...!' Crack! The old man uttered a little scream.

'Please,' the old man begged. Crack! 'Please don't!'

'Please, have mercy! Please, argh! I... have... a... son... Please! I'm not... going to... let him... be dragged... to this... living... hell. PLEASE!' Crack!

The wind carried a very weak voice – the old man's voice, 'my son. I'm so sorry, my son.' Ping's heart skipped a beat when he heard it.

Tears swelled in Ping's eyes. He could see his father in this old man, being dragged away, being beaten to death. Crack! The old man cried out in agony.

Ping turned around. The old man was on all fours. His lips were mouthing silent prayers.

'Get up, old man! Or you'll have hell to pay for!'

And that's when Ping ran. He dropped the boulder and he ran.

The guard's hand rose to bring the whip down one more time.

Ping grabbed the guard's hand. And they both tumbled backwards. The guard was caught off guard.

'Run,' screamed Ping as he grabbed the guard into a headlock.

The old man raised his head to look at Ping. A deep appreciation shone in his eyes. He fled and blended into the crowd. That's when Ping knew he made the right decision.

The guard's outrage filled the air with roars. Several guards came running. Crack!

Ping bit his lips hard to stop from screaming. Crack! Crack! Crack!

The beating grew more violent, yet Ping didn't feel the pain anymore. He looked up into the heaven. Dawn was breaking. For the first time in years, Ping smiled because he knew somewhere a son would have a chance to live. For the first time, there seemed to be hope. And smiling, Ping closed his eyes.

New Tales of the Great Wall

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"Hey! I've got a Bilibie Dragon from the planet Biliba! That dragon's so fleshy and clumsy! How about you?" An alien boasted. Another alien moaned, "I've captured a Chibie Dragon from the planet Chiba. Unfortunately, it's a tiny one, isn't it?" 3,000 years ago, a gang of aliens kept looking for as many dragons as possible to sustain their planet Balagoo. One alien mumbled, "Bilibie Dragon, Chibie Dragon, Lalu Dragon, Sibi Dragon, Gala Dragon, Mala Dragon,... the amount was far less than all of us needed to catch! We have to work harder! Otherwise, our planet will die in 100 years!" To avoid this foreseeable disaster, the aliens spread this message all around Balagoo.

In response to this message spreading as fast as a gale on Balagoo, commander alien exclaimed with great determination, "No problem! Let's use our Super Dragon Detector to dig some more dragons out there!" So, the whole gang of aliens scampered into the Control Room of their space rocket, undertaking this important task. In no time, a bright alien spotted a powerful dragon from the planet Earth and yelled, "This dragon from Earth can make Balagoo survive one hundred more years!" A gang of aliens headed to Earth by a shortcut. Swiftly, they landed on the Earth with a loud bump.

When the aliens sauntered out of the rocket, a boy and his mother were completely stunned by the aliens with three eyes. The boy ventured, "Ahhhhhh!!!!!! Mom, look up! They have three eyes! They may be Erlang Shen and other assistants of Yu Huang Shang Ti, coming to save us from this mischievous Eartha Dragon! Is it right?" "Absolutely correct! Pray for them now!" His mother replied. They started praying for these aliens. Gradually, other earthlings mimicked what they were doing. Commander alien frowned and muttered to itself, "How come these earthlings are kneeling, pressing their palms, and banging their foreheads on the ground? What are these messages?"

In a moment of puzzle, commander alien gazed at what the mighty Eartha Dragon was entertaining itself with including some usual acts, which ended up with unusual happenings on Earth. Learned from the earthlings, Eartha Dragon sang in a thundering voice that set massive fire everywhere; stomped to dance, shaking all the things terribly like an earthquake;

and played in water wildly, triggering tsunamis one after the other. All of these faults put the earthlings in deep trouble with a lot of damages and deaths. "I feel like sympathising with these earthlings." Commander alien thought it over and over. Balagoons are used to capturing dragons for their own interests, but this amazing feeling drove commander alien to capture Eartha Dragon for both the Balagoons and the Earthlings, killing two birds with one stone.

A series of attempts to capture Eartha Dragon failed and Eartha Dragon escaped from them with ease. One alien came up with a marvellous idea and uttered, "Why don't we think of our skilful tricksters! They've succeeded many times using that trick." Commander alien appointed two aliens to this tough task. Two aliens cheered, "Let's do it straight away!" Just a second, they played a trick, turning into clouds of yellow smoke. No one could see clearly, including Eartha Dragon.

There were two handy weapons fixed onto the alien's arms - Ticky Wiggly Gun and Rock-forming Laser. First, two aliens shot their Ticky Wiggly Guns. The tickle bullets hit Eartha Dragon, and it started shaking with laughter. By the time it was wiggling all over, the aliens also burst into hysterical laughter. As planned, they started to shoot Rock-forming Lasers from their other arms. Unluckily, shaking with laughter distracted them badly. They pulled the triggers too many times. They shot too much laser to Eartha Dragon, transforming it into a chain of stones that would remain the same over 3,000 years. Instead of taking it to Balagoo, Commander alien announced to the earthlings, "We turned the dragon into the Great Wall that will protect you against attacks as compensation."

Commander alien kept a secret record of transforming Eartha Dragon into the Great Wall as a reminder. It said "In 2013, collect Eartha Dragon (the Great Wall) from Earth before transformation back to a dragon. On that day when the sun and the moon rise at the same time... Eartha Dragon will come alive on our planet Balagoo!" This new tale of the Great Wall sounds incredible. Do you believe it? I will wait expectantly this year.

Dark Mysteries of the Great Wall

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In a secluded forest in Xi'an adjacent to the Great Wall, there lived a pauper farmer named Bang. The forest was shrouded by mist and mysteries. It was believed that an abundant number of wizards lived there.

Farmer Bang worked diligently in his rice fields but unfortunately, his tenacity led to no avail due to the bitter harsh weather. One day, he ambled aimlessly, desperate to find food. In the acrid land, he managed to find two pieces of meagre yam. Overjoyed, he carefully placed them in his ragged jacket. Suddenly, a feeble old beggar appeared behind the verdant foliage.

The senile beggar held out his quivering hand and muttered. "Pleaaaa....se give me some food. I am famished!"

Bang was faced with a dilemma. He was reluctant to part with his precious yam, for he had no more edible food in his larder. However, the old beggar looked weary and drawn, and he couldn't bear to walk away from this pitiful man.

With much hesitation, Bang reached out to his pocket and replied. "Poor you! Take this yam! I hope this will relieve your hunger." He passed him his precious vegetable.

The beggar accepted the yam gratefully and devoured it in one big gulp. As he turned to Bang with a contented smile, the grey sky was ablaze with vivid orange and golden amber. With a puff of smoke, the feeble beggar transformed to a wizard. Mesmerised by the inexplicable magic, Bang took a few minutes to gather himself although he was tempted to turn and run for safety.

To Bang's amazement, the wizard spoke in a gentle voice. "You're a kind man. I shall repay you by revealing a secret only known by the emperor, Qin Shi Huang, himself."

The frightened farmer was in complete dismay. He cowered under the bush and waited for the wizard to continue.

"Many people thought that the wall was built for defence. But the truth is The Great Wall is more than a military infrastructure. It is a Feng Shui instrument." The wizard paused, clearing his throat as he pondered deep in thought.

The farmer was completely amazed, glaring intensely at the beggar as he waited for him to reveal the dark secrets and conspiracy behind the Wall.

The wise man lowered his voice. "Emperor Qin is very superstitious. He believes that the Great Wall can give him strength to rule the kingdom. It resembles a dragon twisting over the mountains. Beneath the Wall lies the tomb of our emperor's ancestors, buried with precious stones and jewels."

Intrigued, the farmer was no longer terrified but inched closer to the wizard, ensuring that he would not miss any key words.

"Unfortunately the entrance is guarded by a gigantic White Snake. If you can outwit the creature and get through the tunnel then abundant wealth and riches will await you!"

Just as the farmer wanted to ask more questions, the whole landscape crumbled. With a mighty bang, the wizard cast a magical spell and led him to the Wall. A thick, ominous fog engulfed him, making it difficult to navigate. Wiping his teary eyes, he vaguely saw a silhouette of an immense creature which vanished into a narrow tunnel. Bang was flabbergasted. Gasping with fear, he mustered his courage and followed the dark shadow, landing right at the entrance of the tomb. He groped his way in search of the lost treasures.

Taking a deep breath Bang scampered into the dank passage. The air carried a stale and musty odour and the ground was littered with sparkling jewels. They flashed alluringly as if cooing him, "Bring me home!"

Dazzled by the jewels' beauty, Bang bent down and retrieved them. Suddenly, a monstrous snake leapt out behind him. Her menacing eyes glared coldly at him. Her vicious fangs were snapping impatiently. She charged at him with his white, bulging muscles wrapped with scales that were as sharp as razor blades! He knew instantly that he was no match for her strength. He needed to outwit this creature to escape from this predicament. FAST!

"White snake! Don't you dare devour me," declared Bang. "I am very strong and I can crush a rock with my bare hands! I bet I can smash your bones with my little finger." Quick as a flash, he seized a "rock" from his pocket and crumpled it into pieces.

Stunned by his intense strength, the snake grunted. "You're sssstrong!" The preposterous snake didn't know Bang's stone was just a lump of old yam.

She began to conjure up a scheme to kill Bang. She hissed evilly. "Tonight I will come to your room and bash you on the head. If you survive, I will give you all of my treasures!" Smirking confidently, the white giant vanished into thin air, leaving only a lingering putrid scent upon the cool evening air.

That night, the shrewd farmer decided to fool the snake and stuffed the bed full of rocks that he collected from the chamber.

BAM! With all her might, the snake whacked the bed where she thought Bang's head was.

"That should kill him!" the arrogant snake smiled contentedly.

The next morning, the beaming farmer returned to the tunnel. "I have a little bump on my head," he muttered. "Perhaps a flea bit me in the night?"

Bang was much too ingenious for the gullible snake. Petrified, the snake relinquished all her treasures.

"Heeere", stammered the snake. "Ta..take it and go away!"

Delirious with joy, Bang carried his victory home. He used the treasures to set off a rebellion. After a long, gruelling battle, he overthrew the Qin dynasty and set up a new prosperous era.

Have you questioned the true identity of this man? His kindness and courage led him to unveil the dark mysteries of the Great Wall. Indeed, he was the witty and compassionate Liu Bang, the first emperor of the Han Dynasty!

Wedding of the Millennium

Jean-Baptiste Rioual, 14, French International School

She gazed into the soft glimmer of his lucid eyes passionately. "You came back!" she whispered lovingly, her eyes glistening in the moonlight. He set his hands on her waist and lifted her swiftly off the ground, her tulle dress twirling in the crisp night air. Just before the screen blackened and the closing credits began to scroll, the sharp-edged letters "Fin" were outlined skilfully on the screen, as if an intangible hand had drawn them.

For the first time of the voyage, a hint of a smile could be seen on the Kurun Princess' usually indifferent face. Gingerly, she removed the high-tech hologram viewer from her head with her perfectly-shaped nails, revealing her squinting eyes, which were the gleaming duskiness found on a beetle's wing.

The first gleams of sunlight peered through the battlements of the Great Wall, piercing the shrouding morning mist. The pilot of her hoverscooter, a young man of pallid complexion, yelled in an effort to overcome the deafening sound of the wind: "We have just passed Datong, Your Royal Highness; I reckon we will be in the outskirts of Beijing around the tenth hour of the morning." She did not respond. She could not respond. She contemplated the Chinese landscape, wondering if she would ever see it again after moving to her betrothed groom's palace in Vienna. In three hours, she would be at her Beijing palace. She would be marrying the handsome but vain Austrian Prince her father had chosen for her. She would be giving her life away. Had her father lost his mind? What had happened to the loving father who had elevated her to the status of a "Kurun Princess", although she was born to his concubine? We were not in the first millennium, when duchesses were forced into marrying dukes, and neither were we in the second millennium, when daughters of prominent families were arranged into marrying sons of even more prominent families. We were at the end of the third millennium for heaven's sake! Was her destiny really to be betrothed to a prince solely to form an alliance with Europe?

She lowered the drooping hood of her sea silk cloak, releasing her incandescent auburn hair into the morning wind, in which it flowed relentlessly, as if it was the tail of a fiery phoenix. Her ferocious impenetrable eyes fixated a distant object emerging from the dissipating

mist. She pointed at it. Promptly, the oval formation of titanium hoverscooters tightened around hers. She observed as her brawny escorts uttered incomprehensible words in their earpieces, their eyes shifting apprehensively towards the approaching object, which now seemed to be some kind of metallic parachute. After aiming his laser x-ray gun at the object, one escort at the front of the formation, to the relief of everyone, announced: "It's safe. It is a parcel from your husband-to-be, Your Royal Highness". Immediately, the intensiveness of the atmosphere faded. But she persisted to purse her lips that were painted black, and launched a despising look towards the solid gold casket attached to the parachute she had just mistaken for a threat. But now, it seemed to be an even more preponderant threat: he was rubbing her pre-arranged marriage in her face once again, and she could not take it anymore.

Abruptly, she opened the casket, divulging a red lacquered box in which she discovered a ravishing tiara comprising seven single pear-cut diamonds supported by pearl-encrusted oak leaves. The morning mist had dissipated entirely now, and the diadem's glint blinded her eyes. She gasped in horror at the lavish present. He had done it again. He had given her a present not from the heart, but a present for him to gloat of. Again. She took a long, deep breath. Slowly, a single tear, shaped like the diamonds of her diadem, rolled down her cheek, shining brighter in the peaking sun, than any of the tiara's stones. Nonchalantly, she reached her trembling hand to the box, and lifted the diadem from its velvet cushion, her polished nails delicately holding the flawless sides of the bijou. Gracefully, she propped the opulent jewel on the top of her head, her stern eyes cast frontwards, where the cluster of tall, smoked glass buildings known as Beijing was emerging from the grey shadows surrounding the city. She had to get out. She had to escape.

She threw an anxious glance at her unsuspecting escorts. They were already on the outskirts of Beijing, the sun rays filtered by the dusty grey clouds of acrid smog above them. In half an hour, they would be at the palace. But she wouldn't. She was clutching her improvised weapon tightly against her thigh, underneath her sea silk cloak, ready to pounce. She had prepared it beforehand, bending the precious tiara to form an arc wide enough to be used as a weapon. The Great Wall was coming to an end, and soon they would take on the main road, surrounded by fanatical patriots waving the two nations' flags. She had to act now.

On the spur of the moment, she jammed the sharp metal into her hover scooter pilot's jaw, forcing him to let go of the steering handle. Briskly, she elbowed him off the hover scooter, and took off as he plummeted downwards past all the limestone blocks, until he struck the ground's smooth slabs of black stone with a sickening sound. "And another corpse for the longest graveyard in the world" she thought, remorsefully. She had stopped following the Wall and had soared skywards, and was now enveloped in a thick layer of black clouds hung over the Plexiglas roofs of Beijing. At present, the dozen of escorts whom she had eluded were now on her heels, and she had to think fast. Without warning, she unfastened the ornamental gold clasp of her cloak, letting the luxurious vestment, taken hold by the wind, flick about, cracking like a silken sail, before wrapping around the first two hover scooters in line, sending their pilots earthwards to the labyrinths of streets and rails sprawling below.

By now, she could barely see the tiny ramparts of the Great Wall. She wondered how many people were forced into building it, like she was forced into marrying the Prince, unaware of the colossal royal helicopter hovering overhead. Just as she noticed the light beam resting on her shoulders, she was aspirated noiselessly into it.

A hushed, subdued clamour woke her up. A quick glance around her confirmed her fears. She was in the preparation room. She had been lain down on the neat bed, made flawless from top to bottom, in her sea silk wedding gown, a strange silver trailing gown trimmed with excessive red lace, as if it had been fashioned by two designers of different eras. On the agar

wood nightstand at the far right of the room, she found a sleek remote deprived of buttons. One touch revealed the tinted floor-to-ceiling window to be a mirror, a second touch revealed it to be a television showing the crowd waiting eagerly for the ceremony to commence. The digital clock on the glass surface of a skyscraper grabbed her attention. It was five to seven. Five to her wedding hour. Diligently, she arose from the bed and watched as a glass staircase unfolded from the window towards the speechless crowd. Slowly, as the glass screen slid up, the gusty evening air blasted against her blurred eyes, as if with tears. At the very moment she stepped on the vitreous stairway, an exact replica of the diadem she had destroyed earlier materialised on her elaborately groomed hair. Exquisitely, she walked down the unconventional isle, her train flowing in the gusts of cool evening air coiling around her, as the crowd gaped in awe. She reached the end of the flight of steps. Gracefully, as if she was gliding on the plush, silvery red carpet, she headed in the direction of a sculpted marble altar, where she was handed a gold encrusted nuptial cup. She cast her eyes down at the surface of the drink, smooth as black glass. A sole, salty tear streamed down her cheek to drip into the goblet, the moonlight catching the radiating ripples created. She did not dare look at him in the eye. She knew what was waiting. She knew she would see a smug, arrogant smile. A smile that meant that he had won her, like a mere teddy bear you would win at the funfair.

“With the exchanging of these cups, we shall unite not only two lives, but also two countries!” She looked at the roaring crowd, the palpable excitement buzzing through the air. The cup stared at her from her shivering hands, she took a sip. She had lost; she was married.

Sam Foy and the Cricket Emperor

Yan Mong Ho, 12, Ying Wah College

Prologue
"Dig!"

A deep voice shouted from a far corner of a beach surrounded mostly by cliffs. A short, fat man wearing an expensive suit stood in a dark secluded sandstone cave. He cried again.

"Dig! Dig Faster!"

The little fat man who just cried had a short moustache, probably an English man. Right in front of him, the sandstone cave extended to be much bigger, and wider, and wooden torches were stuck in the side of the cave. Then in people's fear, millions of insects were crawling slowly on the walls: crickets. There were shovelling sound of spades, crushed in wet sand. In the darkest corner of this strange cavern, a secret tunnel under the beach grew every day, larger and larger, by mind-controlled minions of humans.

"I will not fail," thought the fat man.

"I cannot fail."

1: Sunset

A sip of black coffee dripped into Sam Foy's mouth from a white tea cup. Soothing cool winds with a soft touch of seawater brushed lightly on his skin. Warm, blazing orange sunlight flooded into the outdoor café near a crystal clear golden beach at Yalong Gulf of Sanya. Opposite him was a casually dressed, white-haired man around his sixties. Below their bodies were high wooden chairs with soft cushions to lean on. They were silent for a moment, enjoying the beautiful sunset.

Sam Foy was a poorly dressed lad, well built, with a few scratches or bruises from side to side. You could see that he was not that poor, even though he was dressed in that way, as in an open menu standing straight on the circular table revealed high priced drinks. No poor, nor even average men, would purchase these drinks. It was a fine, quiet evening.

"Ahh...what a relaxing evening!" Sam said, with a rather deep voice.

"Yes." The old man replied. "I agree."

"Imere, you really have changed." Sam Foy said again after a pause, "I've always thought that the Eternal Amulet of Yangtze River can cure brain sickness, this proves I'm right."

Sam Foy was an archaeologist. Last year he and Imere went to the Yangtze River and found the Eternal Amulet, the elixir of life.

The old man, Imere, replied again with a thin smile on his face, "I haven't felt any better, I'm still in the same old freckled body. I'm getting old. That's what I think right."

The silence continued. The sun seemed to stop sinking in the calm sparkling sea.

Two men in black suits walked in a dark corner of the café, unnoticed. They sat down silently, then one of them with a pair of faintly triangular black glasses and an older looking man tapped his finger on the table. Strangely, the other one did it after a few seconds, in the same rhythm.

They talked silently for a while, and then the older man took out a case and took a piece of paper out of it. Then, Sam Foy noticed them for the first time.

"This is the case that was troubling us." The older one was Chinese, as evidenced by the heavy accent in his speech.

"We'll find help for you." The other one answered.

"Good luck." The older man said.

And then he left. Just as the older one left the café, the other one read the paper given to him.

Just stupid news, Sam Foy thought and then drank some coffee again just as he thought no trouble would come to him this evening. Troubles seemed to be attracted just as the thought came in to Sam Foy's mind.

The suited man came to his side. Sam Foy looked at him. "Can I help you?" He asked.

"Yes." The man replied, and then gave him the paper. "We want your help, desperately, in disappearing cases."

2: Manuscript

Thump, thump, thump...

The music of the train Sam Foy was taking rang faintly through his ears. After the unpredictable offer, what Sam Foy had to do was to go to the Great Wall immediately. Yes, it was a very quiet evening. Sam Foy thought again as a bowl of shark fin soup landed on a round table in front of him, which already was full of dishes Sam Foy had never tasted in his life. Trees and mountains raced past the train in blurs, the sun hung proudly over everything, and the beautiful sunset had already passed. The soft cushions under his legs seemed to glow with light.

Imere, opposite him, didn't seem to notice anything; he just ate all the dishes they were offering with a big smile. He would never grow up, Sam Foy thought. It was a private big room they were using, very grand: A TV there, a library here...it was spacious, with enough room for a dozen more people to dance freely.

Then, a slender waitress came in silently and asked Sam Foy in a soft voice, "Mr. Foy, Mr. Catthew offers books for you."

Great! Work! Sam Foy thought desperately. He received the three huge ancient manuscripts on a tray on the waitress's hand, thanked the waitress, and then flipped over the pages.

The first manuscript was mainly about the history of the Great Wall and other facts. The second manuscript was all about disappearing cases and kidnappings. Sam Foy turned over the third manuscript, which had a green cover and an old look, while Imere was eating dessert, which happened to be the red bean soup.

The manuscript was mostly about different crickets in different ages, strange. But then Sam Foy flipped to the last page, where neat notes were jotted down.

"The Cricket Emperor ...the lost palace...The Treasure Ship..."

"Interesting." Sam Foy muttered quietly. "There was once a legend. There's a legendary Chinese flute that could control all crickets in the world, which could also make mind control possible. It was said that the soul of the boy who died when trying to catch a cricket was trapped in the flute. Then marks were written and the words 'The way of trust is marked, only the patterns can survive were there too.'"

Sam Foy closed the book then thought, why would Mr. Catthew give this book to me? Millions of different thoughts swarmed through Sam Foy's mind.

"Mr. Foy," The same soft voice of the waitress cut through the millions of thoughts in Sam Foy's mind. "We're here."

Sam Foy looked out the window and saw the most magnificent view in his life.

3: Crickets

Grey stones with hints of old age stuck together to form the Great Wall, climbing through the spines of mountains and the sand of the earth. A watchtower stood tall, every place where the snake of stone turned. The walls were built to blend in the mountains, so they were not in a straight or any stipulated lines. It extended far and far over mountains, but it ended in the wavy sea. The Great Wall lay flat on the beach, swam in the Buhai Sea for meters, and then ended there.

Sam Foy had seen many different heart stopping things, but never as old, huge, or breathtaking as the Great Wall. The ode: "He who does not reach the Great Wall is not a true man," echoed in his mind.

The train stopped, and they, Sam Foy and Imere, got out of the tube shaped train, into a transparent tunnel to where Mr. Catthew was waiting for them. It was obvious that the train was made by secret, and it was a secret.

Mr. Catthew was a middle-aged man who seemed to be gentle and kind. He wore a suit and a black fitted monocle. Just like the agents who found Sam Foy in the café. He stood in front of Sam Foy, crossing his hands in front of his chest.

"Mr. Foy, nice to meet you." Mr. Catthew said, then shook Sam Foy's hand firmly.

They were surrounded by trees and grasses, and beneath their feet were sand and rocks. The air was cool, as it was near the winter now.

"It's nice to meet you too, Mr. Catthew." Sam Foy replied again.

"Have you read the books I gave to you?" Mr. Catthew asked.

"Yes." After a pause, "but why did you give me the manuscript about the crickets?" Sam Foy couldn't resist adding.

"You'll see when you get there." Mr. Catthew replied.

They got on a camouflaged jeep, then drove to the Shanhai Pass. After a bumpy ride, they were in front of the Zhendong Gate.

Although dozens of disappearing cases had taken place here, tourists were everywhere. "First and Greatest Pass under Heaven," was written on a white board that hung on top of the gate.

They parked on a side then all went out.

And they saw crickets.

4: Saviours

Chirp, Chirp, Chirp...

It was the third cricket shop Sam Foy saw on the way. It's quite strange, for so many cricket shops at the Great wall, Sam Foy thought. Imere was now looking at the little creakers at a shop in front of him.

The shop actually was just a small cart, with a shop-keeper and many crickets locked in cages. The shop-keeper would go around the fortification and then sell them.

Imere and Sam Foy walked near the end of the Shanhaiguan to the sea. Imere then looked around, despite the huge amount of tourists, he saw a garden of flowers at the end of the beach. What pretty flowers, Imere thought. It would be fantastic if I went there for a nap... Imere thought and thought again. Sam Foy is now looking at the view and it seems he is enjoying his time. He will not notice me if I slip away quietly... Then making up his mind, Imere quietly tiptoed away.

After a while, the sound of Imere's high pitched singing rang faintly in the dark night.

"Tralalalralalalala..."

The roses swung their heads while Imere danced around the huge meadow of red, yellow, and orange daisies. Imere lifted up his hand and ran wildly in the sea of flowers. He suddenly jumped high in the air and landed with a soft thump! He rolled on the ground and then stopped, lying flat on the blossom flowers.

Then, after a while of lying on the flowers, soft footsteps of quite a lot of people came thumping in the silent night with an extremely soft murmur of "Chirp...Chirp...Chirp..."

Imere felt a pang of curiosity as to what the noise was, so he poked his head out of the bunch of flowers.

Half a hundred of people who seemed to be tourists trudged along the beach sleepily, with unfocused eyes, making a huge trail of footsteps behind them. Their mouths were opening slightly, with drools of saliva drooling on their necks, making cricket sounds.

With them trailed a man in tattered jeans and an older looking man in a suit: Sam Foy and Mr. Catthew.

5: Truth

The small fat man stood just outside the cavern, with half a hundred men walking into it.

Another wave of new minions was delivered today.

With more minions, the faster we can dig...he thought.

"Dig minions! Dig!"

After this, no one could stop me...after this...he thought, nonstop.

"Dig! Dig!" He cried again.

A dozen more suited men came in while the little fat man thought. Who were they? Better asked them...

"Who are you?" he asked, pointing his short finger at them.

Then, the men answered together, "Secret Agents working for the government..."

"Why are you here?" The fat man cried again.

"To try to solve a case..." They replied again, dreamily, and then they went in.

Oh, someone noticed me, the little fat man thought.

6: Help?

The same little fat man stood, not outside the cave, but in a wet sand tunnel with scrap stones. He crossed his arms behind his back and stood tall looking straight forward. Dim red lights

flooded the ten metre wide tunnel from torches stuck on the wall. People of different ages kept on running through this tunnel, all just like dream walking.

Then one man ran quickly to the little fat man, and said, "Mr. Maverick, a strange man has just come..."

Strangely, this man didn't have the features of the mind controlled people. He was short, a bit stout, with his short legs, he was quite fast. Mr. Maverick (if that was his name) seemed not to notice anything, but then he said in a toneless voice, "Bring him to me."

Then the stout man shuffled away.

After a while, the stout man came in with an old man around his sixties, drooling with a silly smile, Imere.

"Who are you?" Mr. Maverick asked.

No reply.

"Who are you?" In the same tone, he asked again.

No reply.

Imere just kept drooling and shaking his head back and forth.

"He's one of the minions." Mr. Maverick said, "Bring him to the working place."

And they went.

After a few hours, Mr. Maverick still did not move, standing there crossing his arms behind his back, looking forward.

The same stout man came back, with a smile so wide it almost touched his eyes, "Mr. Maverick, we found something in the end of the tunnel!"

Mr. Maverick instantly sprang to life, he ran through the tunnel, which bent downwards then, crying, "Show me! Show me!" With his arms still crossed behind his back.

Then they met the end, hundreds of minions were digging, digging the tunnel, making it larger and much deeper. Then Mr. Maverick saw it: old lumber, dirt and mud in it. Mr. Maverick opened up his hand and raised it up and cried, "I found it at last!"

The same stout man came, cutting Mr. Maverick's loud laugh, "There's something else too, someone tried to wake up the minions."

Then Imere stepped out.

7: Leash

Imere stood on the wet floor, hands tied by thick ropes which hurt his hands and brought red scars around his waist. Unbelievable! Sam Foy had actually arrested him after he tried to help him! Imere thought fiercely while he stared at Sam Foy with his angry eyes.

"Who are you, old man? Who dares stand in my path of glory?" Mr. Maverick screamed at Imere, but he didn't lose his temper and it wasn't screamed in rage.

Imere said nothing.

"Are you one of them?" Mr. Maverick bellowed then pointed at the agents who travelled with Imere. "Working for the government?"

Imere said nothing.

"Answer me!" Mr. Maverick said.

Nothing.

"This fellow here seems to be having trouble speaking, come here this fellow, help him speak." Then he pointed his plump fingers at... Sam Foy.

Would Sam Foy do this? Imere thought. Imere looked blankly at Sam Foy as he picked up a sharp rock, Oh boy... I really don't think I will like it, not a bit, thought Imere. But strangely, it was not horror that haunted Imere, it was anger. Why couldn't Sam Foy come to his senses?

Sam Foy walked closer to Imere. Imere stared angrily at him, more closely, more angrily. When Sam Foy came and was ready to strike, there was only one thing Imere could do. He cried out.

“Sam Foy, wake up you stupid lump of head!”

The stone’s tip brought chilling air as sharp as knives to Imere’s eyes. Sam Foy’s eyes were cold as winter, skin as hard as stone.

“Wake up! You wool head! I’m Imere, your friend!”

The stone was millimetres away from the eyes, chills spread from the uneven tip to his whole body. It edged closer, light was almost lost now.

“Wake up!”

The cries pierced into the ears of Sam Foy, his eyes jolted, brighter, and widening. Just like a knife into soft wool. Sam Foy gasped. The stone shrank away from Imere.

“I’m your friend! Remember!”

The stone started to vibrate violently, it moved closer.

“Can’t you remember? The night you were close to death...”

The stone fell on the ground. Sam Foy stumbled backwards and fell down muttering, “What have I done?”

“Impossible! No one can break the leash of the spirit of the cricket, never!” Mr. Maverick yelled, “Tie them! This little thing will not stop me!”

8: Death

Sam Foy watched the little fat man, Mr. Maverick was his name, slowly walking in the ruins of some parts of a ship. But whatever the ship was, it was huge. It was finely made, probably the finest that Sam Foy had ever seen. Despite a few hundred years under the sea, the lumber was tough and it didn’t show any sign of breaking apart.

Imere, hands and feet were tied tightly, just like him, was pulled after Mr. Maverick. After a few seconds, Sam Foy was pulled next to Imere on a broken hole of the hull.

Mr. Maverick commanded hundreds of minions to dig at the wet mud stuck inside the hull.

Mud and sand began to fly out, some fell on them. Then groups of people moved the dirt to the side of the tunnel. Inca Gold, the copper Scroll, the Imperial Faberge egg, rubies, and diamonds...began spilling out. Inca Gold artefacts of every kind filled the tunnel, but Mr. Maverick, by the look of him, didn’t seem to notice. Inca Gold was treasure of the lost city of the Paititi. Each one of them was worth more than billions! But they didn’t seem to catch Mr. Maverick’s eye. So it seemed.

Sam Foy’s mouth hung open, so much...The whole tunnel was filled with light reflected by the treasures. More and more gold, rubies rolled in the tunnel, and out came Imperial Faberge Eggs, but still it didn’t attract Mr. Maverick’s eye.

Although Sam Foy was astonished, he was thinking. “If even these priceless treasures couldn’t attract him, what will?”

Suddenly, the trail of gold stopped running, leaving a big, empty room. Not entirely empty, there was a wooden stick held in a case at the very end of the room.

“Ha! Ha! Ha! I’ve found it! Just like what the book said. ‘Single soul in pools of light!’”

Mr. Maverick paced to it, but he soon stopped. “It is too easy for something so precious, let’s have someone to try first...you, go there and take it.”

A random minion walked in, without any fear or worry. Then when he went ten metres close the case, a cold sound went “Chunk!”

And “Thunk!” a head rolled in front of Sam Foy, without the body.

9: Test

"So, it does not seem to be an easy job," Mr. Maverick said. "How can we get in there? Let me send some more."

"You! Go there." Mr. Maverick commanded.

Another minion went in there. This time, it went slowly. Although the minions were mind controlled, they seemed to be able to fear death.

Chop!

Another head rolled next to Sam Foy's feet.

Chop!

And another.

These innocent people are dying! I won't sit here and do nothing! Sam Foy thought as another minion head rolled next to him. So he yelled.

"Stop!"

Mr. Maverick looked at him and bellowed angrily. "What? You dare stop me now!"

"No, you have mistaken me. I know the way in."

"You think I'll fall for that?"

"Trust me; I swear I'm not lying to you. By the way how can I get away, surrounded by so many people?"

"You're right." Mr. Maverick said after a while. "Release him!"

The ropes fell off. Sam Foy stood up and slowly walked to his death.

The deep brown wooden planks made soft slushing sounds as his feet stepped on them. Marks were left behind on the dirt where the boots were pushed in.

The book Mr. Catthew gave me...Sam Foy thought, the one about crickets...There's a strange marking in the end of the book, and there's a saying too. Something like, the way of trust is marked... Then what?

The five corpses lay just a few metres from him; he swung his head to examine his surroundings, dirt and mud, nothing special. Except...

There's a sort of pattern in these wooden planks, just like they were made of portraits stuck together. It's quite familiar...Sam Foy thought. Aha! The pattern on the ancient green manuscript matches the pattern on the ground! Let me see, where was the first pattern written on the manuscript? There!

"What are you waiting for, slave? Go on!" Mr. Maverick bellowed.

No use thinking and standing here, let's try something! Sam Foy thought.

Sam Foy looked at a square wooden plank with a Chinese calligraphy "One" on it. He stepped on it. Then a cold icy wind blew behind him, Sam Foy looked behind. A man sized saw was millimetres behind him. Wow man! That was close! He thought.

Sam Foy found the next one and stepped through, a huge club swung on top of his head. Then, when he was going to step on the third one, he realised it was a hole.

How can I go there, it's impossible! Sam Foy thought.

"Go on slave! What are you waiting for?" Mr. Maverick voice slammed in his thoughts.

Oh duh! A tiger behind my back, an axe on my neck, a grave under me...let's try! Sam Foy thought, then jumped into it.

Then his feet landed on something.

10: Lost

Fire spouted from the other wooden square planks, but not the one Sam Foy was standing on.

Relief floated to the surface of Sam Foy's feeling, replacing nervousness. The box was in

front of him, the extremely detailed bamboo flute stood still in front of him.

Sam Foy reached to it, Mr. Maverick grinned.

The wood touched Sam Foy's skin; the command rang in his ears. "Give me that."

Then pain rained through Sam Foy's body. "Toxic!" Sam Foy cried then dropped the flute on the ground.

"Just what I expected." Mr. Maverick said with a "No big deal" tone.

Mr. Maverick stepped next to the moaning Sam Foy and used a handkerchief to wrap around the flute. But not fast enough, Sam Foy's hand clutched the flute. "I will not give you that!"

"You want to stop me now! In this situation?" Mr. Maverick laughed. He kicked Sam Foy in the stomach but Sam Foy's grip didn't loosen. He kicked him again in the stomach, sending him flying through the room.

"I've spent years searching for it, you cannot stop me. At first I found this information from my father. Then it attracted my attention, I read steles, scrolls, even tombs! Then not for long, the secret of my identity was known by me, just before my father died. I, the heir of the Cricket Emperor, will make this family rise again!

"The hull you are standing was the treasure ship Admiral Explorer Zheng. He used in his seventh voyages, instructed for this voyage by the Cricket Emperor himself. But then, they, the treasure fleets, simply disappeared. Where did they go? Right here, in the Buhai Sea, near the Old Dragon Head. And the ultimate weapon in the world is here, this dizi.

"Do you know what this dizi can do? You don't, don't you?"

Sam Foy said nothing, Mr. Maverick walked to him slowly.

"It can bring all crickets under the control of who blows it, that means me; you'll wonder what good crickets are. The thing that made these people bow to me is the song of crickets, the high pitch is not easy for you to notice, but, it does the work. With many of these little crickets, I can rule the entire world."

A foot rammed into Sam Foy's stomach again. "Give me the dizi!"

Sam Foy cried. "Never!"

"What are you doing? Stop!"

"Say goodbye to your precious dizi." Then a crispy crack echoed in the tunnel.

"Noooooo!" The scream of horror pieced into Sam Foy's ear.

Mr. Catthew woke up from a bad dream about a lot of digging. He looked around himself, why was he in a cave?

People were everywhere and Imere was bound in a chair. Weird. The agents were with him too, what happened? Then he saw a little fat man crying, "Kill him!" to them no stop, who was he?

Then he saw Sam Foy lying on the ground with a heavily burnt hand and a broken stick or something at his side and he said. "It's over, Mr. Maverick, the curse is gone, and you're over."

"No! You're wrong! Kill him minions, kill him!"

"Good bye Mr. Maverick."

Sam Foy called to Mr. Catthew. "Arrest him."

"No! No! Stop them, minions stop them!" Hands bound, Mr. Maverick was carried out.

Sam Foy then called the people to go out, and then unbound Imere. "Let's go! The adventure is over, Imere!"

"Really? I missed it, I slept through it."

"Still the same old funny man!" Sam Foy laughed.

When the police cars came, Mr. Maverick was pushed into a car, still screaming.

But, while Sam Foy was looking at the cave, Mr. Maverick ran out of the car, yelling, "No!

I don't believe it!" then ran in back in the cave.

Sam Foy wanted to stop him, but it was too late. Mr. Maverick got in the cave and laughed crazily, "See! I'm correct! It's not over yet! It's not over yet!"

Sam Foy warned him, "Don't move! The tunnel is going to collapse any time!"

Mr. Maverick yelled, "You are wrong! I'm right! I'm right!"

Then rocks flooded in.

The cave was covered with sand and rock. Mr. Maverick was dead.

Sam Foy stared at it in silence.

"He could have survived if he wasn't so greedy." A voice boomed behind Sam Foy's back.

"Yeah, I agree." He replied.

The Great Wall of China

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Hi, I'm going to take you to the Great Wall of China. You will see a long, big wall and perhaps you may need 12 days to walk along it.

The Great Wall of China was mainly made of stone, bricks and wood. The Great Wall runs along the top part of China, in an east to west direction. The wall was built in many different sections, and only later were they joined all together. The workers had a very difficult time when building the wall. They had to carry up all of the building materials on their back. Sometimes, some animals like donkeys, mules and goats were used to help.

The Great Wall was first built between 220-206 B.C. under the direction of the first Emperor of China, Qin Shi Huang. It took many many years to complete.

There were many people who helped to build the wall, but the main three groups were the soldiers, the common people and the criminals.

The Great Wall can be visited at many places along its length of several thousand kilometres. The Great Wall's total length is approximately 8,851 metres. It is like a big, strong dragon that winds itself over the mountain, across the deserts. It is between 6 and 7 metres tall. Its width is between 4 and 5 metres. Qin Shi Huang used a large number of people to build the Great Wall of China. About 1 in every 20 people across China was used to help build the wall. There were no machines or anything that was powered by electricity. Workers used their hands to build this huge wall. Unbelievable, but true.

The Great Wall has the meaning "can't break" and "strength for the Chinese people". It was the pride of the Chinese people, and pride of all of the humans in the world. The Chinese people also knew that the Great Wall of China would protect the Chinese people in the wars. The Great Wall is the top wonder of the world and attracts many visitors from many different countries every year.

If you go to the Great Wall, you will need to prepare: a bottle of water, food, a bag and a camera because it has beautiful sights. You will see many amazing, spectacular and tremendous things.

The Mysteries of the Enormous Creation

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In the midst of the wondrous story of China there stretches almost 9,000km in length. This monumental fortification has been a symbol of power and greatness in China for many centuries. The unparalleled wall is so immensely large no other masterpiece built by human hands could be seen from the space and the moon. The creation of the Great Wall made a significant difference in the perspectives of the opposed country, Mongolia. The Great Wall, therefore, showed superiority, security and high financial resources. The Wall was seen to be an impossible task even today. Many researchers were astonished by this magnificent structure especially without effective machinery tools. Therefore, immense effort was put forth by hundreds of thousands of civilians to make the impossible possible. In the text, you will learn some of the most mysterious things that the Great Wall of China has to offer.

The Creation of the Great Wall

The idea of the great wall was first invented by Qin Shi Huang and after that many other dynasties did so as well to work as a defensive mechanism to block off the raiding Mongols from taking China for themselves. However, only attacking Beijing, the powerful empire of China was a great fear since it has been the core of China. At the start, most people thought the idea was unreasonable to waste so much man-power and intensive labour to create the wall to stop the Mongols from attacking the Chinese again. The materials used were the resources that could be found in nearly every part of China. The resources were mainly rammed earth, rocks, soil and many other local resources they could find in the mountains. All tools were non-machinery such as shovels, boards to hold materials and pulleys to bring the materials up to the top of the wall. Qin hoped that the Mongols would not penetrate the walls defence. Even though it looked impossible, the people of China still risked their lives in the hope that the impossible becomes possible. Therefore, in the making of the great wall, many were forced to construct the wall as soon as possible to avoid any unsuccessful outcomes like Mongols entering into their territories.

The Purpose of Building It

After the wall was built, the defensive strategies were commanded by the generals from each tower of the wall. The Great Wall had pathways for horses to commence into battle; there were some watch holes to see if the enemies were attacking. The smoke signals were to spread dangerous warnings coming before them and a shooting hole to hit the enemy with cannons to stop the attack. When the ground was lower, the walls were higher, and when the ground was higher, the walls were lower to save human and financial costs. The Wall raised security and helped protect their riches such as silk, gold and silver. It also stopped the Mongols from expanding their empire. Even though there were many different reasons why the wall was built, the main reason was because it was to block the Mongols from raiding China. Led by Genghis Khan, the Mongols raided China continuously and threatened the Chinese to give them their riches to prove that they were powerful. If the Chinese refused to give what the Mongols asked for, they would kill the hostages they kept. It happened again and again until the Great Wall was built. China also had used the wall to protect their food supply or there wouldn't be any living people in China. Most Chinese farmers were scared to grow their crops before the wall was made, because the Mongols would just take the food away. But after the wall was built, they were happily growing their crops to survive. Therefore, the food supply was increasing and more benefits and advantages had been offered since the creation of the Great Wall.

The Difficulties Faced by China

The Great Wall was a massive project that caused the suffering and death of many ordinary people. Even though there were millions of people building the wall, they still took nine years to build the wall in the North Qi's area. The wall caused many into forced labour, working intensively each day and it was nothing different to slavery. The three main groups who built the wall were soldiers, common people and criminals. Most of the criminals built the wall for four years as their punishment by the law but it was not enough. Therefore, thousands and thousands of people including the farmers had to sacrifice their agricultural practices and risked their lives to help complete the giant fortification. Furthermore, during that time, many families feared to have boys as they would have to join the build of the Wall which gave them no future and hope. Because of the severe loss of many farmers, food supply was inadequate and unstable which caused extreme famine. Due to the limited food supply, workers of the masterpiece were fed on grains provided by the government. However, most of them were under fed while working on the colossal structure which brought them to death. For all those wives who had lost their sons and husbands, life was very harsh for them afterwards.

Conclusion

Through all these years, the Great wall is still standing tall waiting for people to walk along the magnificent creation. If it wasn't for Qin Shi Huang, China might not be here today and the Great wall would never exist. Even when China was in slavery, they still built the wall for the sake of their country and despite the difficulties faced beyond their capabilities. Because of the slavery and the insufficient food supply many labourers were starved to death. All these years, the wall was built and rebuilt over and over again to protect them from the northern nomads. If we do not care and restore the walls, in a few centuries, all the hard work the ancestors put into it would be wasted.

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The Glamorous Stone-Built Dragon

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How invaluable has the Great Wall been? It has been toiling to guarantee the safety of Chinese in the past, and to contribute to the tourism of China in this time and age. This elongated dragon, with the length of over thousands kilometres, flies across an array of picturesque terrain of winding mountain chains, grassy-green plains, astonishing and astounding river valleys. If there had not been this sturdy and stalwart fortification, lives of Chinese in the past would have undoubtedly been in peril.

This dragon first showed its intriguing body during the Qin Dynasty for defensive purpose. With the relatively backward technology at that time, it was completely unbelievable for such a tremendous construction to be built. Therefore, it was also the symbol of civilization of the Chinese People. Despite the grandeur of the Great Wall, it costed millions of lives and the following dynasties like the Han and Ming Dynasty also made their own contribution to this majestic building.

From then until now, innumerable numbers of people have been considering the Great Wall as a kind of honour, a kind of glory, a kind of eminence owing to its prodigious scale and efficacy in protecting China from the annexation of other powers. Nevertheless, have you, dear readers, ever thought about what the Great Wall is made of? Common answers are “bricks” and “cement”. Instead, I would like to say it was built with hundreds of thousands of priceless lives and infinite tears, including fathers of uncountable families, sons of the old as well as heart-throbs of damsels. We can imagine, how depressed and desperate we would feel if we lost our family members or sweethearts. There was even a tale that a young girl cried in front of the Great Wall, where the body of her husband was buried. Eventually, she even broke the part of the stony Great Wall with her hysterical cry. Despite the fact that it seems impossible, it indirectly arouses our attention to this tragedy and reminds the current ruler and ruling party not to recommit the same error again. Not only should people contemplate this mistake, but a total review of people’s lives and development should also be carried out.

With the running of the wheel of time, this elongated dragon has been declining in terms of length. According to the historical records of China, the length of the Great Wall

has plunged from over six thousand kilometres to now no more than three thousand. This disastrous destruction mainly composes of misbehaviour of tourists, human exploitation and a lack of deterrent penalty and maintenance.

Browsing the Internet, it is not difficult to see photos about tourists eating, sleeping and disposing of rubbish on the Great Wall. Some even report that there have been tourists discharging their excreta while visiting this landmark. Not only do these activities spoil the breathtaking scenery, but they also encourage uncivilized behaviour to be done which may ultimately ruin this memorable and historically-valuable architecture.

Apart from that, human exploitation has also deteriorated the problem. Not only citizens but officials make use of the chance to make money by committing extraction, animal raising and various kinds of developments. Extraction first requires people to destroy the surface or even the main body of the Great Wall before minerals or substances can be acquired. Animal raising and developments also compelled people to completely devastate the Great Wall as a boundless area of land is needed for ranches and developments. All of these directly and severely cause wear and tear to the Great Wall.

Furthermore, the central government has also been neglecting the Great Wall, which further worsens the problem. Without constant monitoring, checking and maintenance, any destruction will not be able to be discovered and repaired. Additionally, due to natural factors like weathering and acid rain, the Great Wall is inevitably corroded and some buildings and soil may become loose. Since there is a lack of monitoring and repairing, the Great Wall is now disappearing at a rapid rate.

The fabrication of the Great Wall has costed an inestimable amount of money as well as lives. As a saying goes, "Let bygones be bygones". Consequently the lives lost cannot be retrieved. What we should and could do is to try our best to preserve and conserve the painstaking effort they paid, which is the Great Wall, so that their effort can be utilised.

On the contrary, you may then doubt, how can we save the seriously wounded Great Wall? There are a couple of ways to cure the present problems.

First of all, education can be set up to restrict the damage caused by tourists. Educational talks can be offered to tourists before they visit historical sites like the Great Wall. Tourists should be taught about what should and what should not be done during their journey so littering and destruction of buildings are not allowed. Instead, they should be prudent and cautious to those invaluable buildings.

Besides, laws should be enforced to alleviate the illegal exploitation on the Great Wall. More astringent money and prison penalties should be put forward in order to play a deterrent role. The government can also arrange appropriate land for the people to raise animals, and for mining according to their land, use planning. In this way, not only the people can make a living, but the Great Wall can be shielded simultaneously.

Last but not least, monitoring and maintenance should be done more frequently by the central government. A committee consisting of environmentalists and experts of culture conservation can be established so as to give precise and efficacious advice whenever encountering problems about the Great Wall. Monitor and maintenance should be carried out on a regular basis so that the damage of the Great Wall can be minimised. Moreover, constituting environmental protection policies like reducing the emission of greenhouse gases is also a sensible idea because it can limit the amount of sulphur dioxide and nitrogen oxides produced and thus the formation of acid rain. Regulations about inhibition of deforestation are necessary too. Since plants can act as a flawless windbreak, the influence of weathering towards the Great Wall can be dwindled. At the same time, afforestation is also effectual to prevent strong wind.

There has been a lengthy tale of the Great Wall, which started from the Qin dynasty, in which millions of people's lives were sacrificed. It continued in the following dynasties and still keeps on progressing today. It is unquestionable that we all hope that this tale will proceed so that this splendid erection can exist even in the future and act as persuasive evidence to show the civilization of Chinese. As a result, as responsible readers that cherish culture, we should try our very best to protect the Great Wall by supporting conservation of environmentally-friendly agencies on the Great Wall and treat it as our own property when visiting it. With the cooperation of all members of the global village, I am positive and optimistic that the enchanting and fascinating new tale of the Great Wall can be everlasting and eternal.

New Tales of the Great Wall

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For years China has been considered as a mysterious, weak and decayed country. After World War II, China had lost tragically in the war and underwent countless political reforms. Despite the fact that the world's eye had been looking down on this Asian country, China has become one of the strongest countries in the globe during the recent decade, and succeeded in several aspects with flying colours. How is it possible for a dragon to be reborn from its fatal failures and became one of the greatest modern legends? How strong is she? What role is she playing or planning to play in this international arena?

Before I started answering these questions, I had asked myself a quite simple question worth-investigating, "What exactly is China?" According to some research, most foreigners from Europe and the U.S. can only tell that China is one of the Asian countries. By definition in Chinese, China is the country in the middle of Asia. In her long history for the past three thousand years, the land of China has constantly been changing. Generally, under inspiration of Confucianism, Chinese physiologists tended to think that by convincing and teaching foreigners to learn the Chinese Han manners, foreigners can become Chinese, in terms of manners and ideologies. By that way, people from neighbouring countries can become Chinese as well. A Chinese-ideology-oriented society has therefore evolved.

In terms of Science, Mathematics and logic, China did not have a well-developed foundation, compared with Greece and England. Chinese did not stress these aspects. Yet, in most dynasties of China, the empire adopted an examination system which focused on poems and famous books about manners, literature and others. This resulted in a pile of literary creations including kinds of poems, rhyming and writing as well.

In the late 20th century, China fell into Manchu's hand. Man Empire did not make any progress on science, logic, philosophy or military. The Empress Dowager Cixi, spent most of the money on her private garden and believed in some tricksters who claimed that they could defeat the westerners' invasion, which turned out as a failure. Manchu's attitude towards war was compromising. China showed weakness to others. Such a weak empire ended up collapse.

Since then, reforms and wars were still on fire. People fought for what they believed in and parts of China were colonised or were under the control of western countries. After

long conflicts, a political party, the Communists, finally took control of the land of China. Nevertheless, it still took them years to figure out how to rule the country effectively, after being through countless famines, conflicts, and economic depression. Apart from that, China underwent Cultural Revolution and Economic Adjustment as traditional values and traditions were criticised and denounced. China stopped foreign affairs and isolated herself from the western countries, economically, socially and politically.

So we understand how China accumulated its culture and received its failures. But what exactly has China achieved? Does she really deserve such a place?

How did she manage to revive?

Economy

It all started from 'reform and opening-up'. The Communist Party of China (CPC) settled the land and its people, and set up the People's Republic of China in 1949. Under ruling of Mao Zedong, things stopped worsening, yet the economy, had not recovered. Political power and others were not yet restored back to the level it had once been. Things did not seem to work out, Deng Xiao-Ping suggested and launched 'reform and opening-up', and organised plans to strive China's situation. People at that time suffered from diseases and famines, due to backward medical treatments and slow economy. The reform aimed to resolve such critical problems of China. Deng at the Conference once said development was the only way, and the core principle to follow. By adopting the Four Modernisations (Industrial, agricultural, national defence and technology) and Socialism with distinctive Chinese characters, Deng hoped to achieve the goal of improving Chinese people's living standards, or to be more precise reaching a comparatively better standard of living.

Things changed drastically for China's economy. At the early stage of reformation, China took its first initiative by actively promoting agricultural reform. People's commune system was replaced by the household responsibility system, where all people needed to work for themselves in order to get paid. Under the People's Commune System, which gave workers their salaries no matter whether they had finished their tasks or not, would only bring down the spirit of Chinese workforce. The household responsibility system, however, did not encourage laziness among labourers. Farmers rented farmlands from the government and grew their own crops. After turning in a small amount of crops to the government, they could keep the rest for trading or their own use. The household responsibility system increased its flexibility in citizens' property management. Types of crops were free for each family to choose to grow. Most families would choose high-price crops to earn more. A more substantial supply of cotton and food were produced to support the huge Chinese population and economic development.

Knowing that farmlands were a limited source for all the people in China, the government decided to develop township and village enterprise, so as to support the surplus workforce. It was like a manufacture company formed by peasants, making kinds of products and gears. The Chinese government supported the enterprise by asking town factories to outsource certain processes to these townships and village enterprise. In addition, the government lowered tax rates, and gave special offers to support the running of the enterprise. State-owned enterprises expanded a setting up business system. The town and village enterprises not only tackled the unemployment rate, but also provided a spectrum of goods for Chinese citizens to consume. In 2008, 32.7% of village workplace population worked in the township and village enterprise. Midea, one of the mainland's township and village enterprises, was the first one listed in a stock market.

China's economy has strived for perfection by focusing on its secondary production. It highly stressed on production of factories. Before the reform, the politicians had to deal with both politics and business. Most politicians had no experience on running the business and lack of knowledge to run businesses. As for the state-owned enterprise, politicians were separated from upholding rights to manage enterprises. Adopting the style of the household responsibility system, employees were given a salary which was proportional to their work performance. Such acts could raise their spirits towards their duties. Restrictions on businesses were trimmed down. Lenovo, for example, was an enterprise of the non-public sector, which was the biggest Chinese computer manufacturer. It bought IBM to boost its brand.

Last but not least, China launched an opening-up plan to restore its economy.

To become stronger, China figured out that only by following the way of western countries and the trading model could China's economy develop steadily. To do so, China opened its market to foreign companies for investments as well, the so-called 'opening-up' attempt. Flexibility of market investment has hence been increased. Three types of businesses, including foreign invested companies, China and foreign countries co-invested companies and China western countries cooperated companies were developed under such policies. These three types of businesses created a lot of job opportunities, which decreased the unemployment rate and increased the average income of Chinese citizens. Over 20% of government taxation came from these three types of business.

Through taking these reactive initiatives, China successfully boosted up its economy. Ergo, a well-nurtured market was sown since the late 70s. For the past decade, China had received an uprising GDP trend, and for the first time, China's rising GDP had become the highest on the globe. To sustain the victory, it continued cooperating with other countries and expanded its land for industrial development and modernisation. Such breakthrough qualified China to join the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2000. Apart from GDP, it has also become the second biggest luxury goods market. Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou became the three most famous economic cities in China. Companies set up in these uprising cities.

As we can see, China has changed its role and attitude towards manipulation of the market. Before the reform, she adopted an all-round perspective, controlling role, and highly emphasised on the speed of economical development (based on the GDP value). For an all-round perspective, people's living, food supply, medical services were under control the control of the government. People were not given the chance to take care of their own lives. Whenever there was a problem, the Chinese government would deal with it. Little room was provided for citizens to make decisions, and therefore society lacked motivation. Learning from its mistakes, the Chinese government altered its plan and let the market take the lead, stating its main duty was to serve people. The government claimed that its duty was to maintain social order and harmony only. The government no longer supported businesses which involved high cost, high consumption, high pollution and low efficiency production. In addition, to become an environmentally-friendly empire, China signed the Kyoto Protocol, which was a promise to only release a certain limit of gases. To fulfil the goal without sacrificing the economy, China highly stressed on developing green GDP, the GDP value gained by the green industry. All these changes indicated that China was revived by wearing a brand new attitude towards its economy and the world. Its vision no longer sticks to its land but also the globe.

To sum up, China's economy has been thriving over the past forty years due to the efficient reform on economy and the alternation on the government's role towards market control. A fairly organised, all-round economy has developed. Not only companies were benefited, but citizens can also enjoy a better living standard.

Military and Technology

People's Liberation Army is the military unit of China. The government highly stressed its military force to secure the nation's safety as it invested RMB 480 billion. Liaoning 16, the first aircraft carrier of the Chinese People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN), secured the strength of China's military unit. It was called one of the strongest military forces. To collocate with the force, PLA prepared its first aircraft carrier, in order to strengthen the attack power of the air force and navy force. Neither the army nor the weapons should be underestimated. Other nations would not plan an attack ruthlessly as a result.

China is now one of the five countries which can control launching rockets to explore outer space. Even a developed country like Japan could not make such an achievement. Apart from astronomy, Chinese technologies on dams and other constructions make impressive breakthroughs. The Three Gorges Dam, for example, which is the largest water dam across the globe generates annual generation about 80TWh.

For transportation, high-speed rail is a new vehicle which helps development in China. The commercial trains have an average speed of 200km/h. Faster transportation facilitates the economic and technical interchange in China. It has the longest high-speed rails of the world, a measure of 6800 km.

Such renovations not only made renovations on technology, but also facilitate the transportation of goods between different parts of China. Economical development was boosted as a result.

Culture

Chinese language

It is undeniable that Chinese language is becoming more imperative in recent years. Confucius institutes are well-known among the globe. Students there are learning Chinese language and speaking Putonghua. In the USA, students may take Chinese as an elective. Via learning the same language, foreigners and locals can communicate on the same language platform, which can facilitate the co-operations among countries. As a result, most western countries offered Putonghua subjects for students to learn the Chinese language for future co-operation.

Cooking

You may wonder why I said Chinese culture played an imperative role in the global stage, contradicting what I said about China's cultural collapse, at the beginning of my text. To be precise, China's culture once plunged and revived in recent years. The long time of cultural nurturing has its meanings. Unique cooking methods including steaming have never been seen before in the western world. Spring rolls, Beijing roasted ducks, Yangzhou fried rice all became the most popular Chinese dishes. To suit the eating habit of westerners, Chinese-style restaurants in foreign countries created fusion dishes. Sweet and sour pork (Gu Lu Rou) served with rice or French fries, for example, has received great reviews from western critics. Chinese food reached a high standard of world-class cuisine, which can be an uprising for Chinese cooking culture.

Movies

Several movies filmed their scenes in China as well. Director Li-an successfully got into the Hollywood movie business. "Aftershock", featuring the earthquake in Tangshan, Asian films award for highest box-office performance in Asia. Martial art Actors including Bruce Lee and Jackie Chan aroused the kung fu craze across America. Hollywood movies used to be the

major lead in cinemas, but the introduction of Chinese elements has brought a twist which also attracts the taste of the global audience. Chinese films took a place in the film industry and received lots of global awards, indicating that these films receive recognition and welcome.

Sports

In several international sports games, Chinese athletes won with flying colours. In 2004, world record holder Liu Xiang broke the 110-m hurdle record with 12.88s in Athens Olympics, which shocked the world-wide audience and also broke track events. Other athletes such as Guo Jing-Jing, winner of 3m springboard, Lee Wai-sze, the track racing cyclist, Lin Dan, the badminton player, and Cheng Fei, the gymnast were all gold medallists who paid with painstaking efforts. Their victories contributed to development of sports of China and were of paramount importance to boosting the global profile of China culture. Table-tennis, female weight-lifting, diving and gymnastics are considered as winning fields of China. Such victories consolidated

China's sporty and dynamic image

Since 2008, China has successfully hosted numerous international sports events, including the Beijing Olympics, and the East Asian Games. The opening ceremony stunned millions of audience's souls. Hosting these events required lots of staff, translators, judges and other staff for those events. Venues such as the Beijing National Stadium (Bird's Nest) and the Beijing National Aquatic Center (Water Cube) needed to hold massive groups of spectators. Security had to be of high quality as well. All these advancements were the hard proof for foreign countries to change their views on China. The Chinese global profile has been ascending ever since.

Conclusion

All in all, China has changed over the years. It has become one of the strongest nations. Its revival proves that it is no longer a weak nation as before. It has made several breakthroughs which most countries cannot achieve, and plays an important leading role in recent global affairs.

Dragon in the Middle Kingdom

Charmaine Cheuk Luen Lai, 6, St. Paul's Co-educational College Primary School

I am the moon, all seeing,
I witness the Dragon, rising and growing,
I am all knowing.

From here I see the Great Wall,
In parts it may crumble and fall,
But mostly it stands strong and tall.

Sneaking and winding through blessed land,
Constructed from human bones, brick, water and sand,
The Middle Kingdom with a structure so grand.

Crawling over many mountains far and wide,
Protecting its people from enemy collide,
Under many starry nights, the Great Wall cried.

Thundered with hooves and arrows,
Soldiers fought, the defeated left families in sorrow,
The Great Wall offered hope for tomorrow.

Spaceships and satellites orbit the dark skies,
Men seeking a magical view of earth rise,
A sneaking white trail observed by astronomers' eyes.

People call the Great Wall their heritage,
Placed on the top of the world stage,
It opens up the Middle Kingdom to a new page.

Perched upon the dragon's tail,
Across troubled seas we have sailed,
Born into a new China, a new chapter, a new tale.

"You are the Dragon, all seeing,
You witness China, rising and growing,
You are all knowing."

The Mighty Wall

Charmaine Yuen, 10, Sha Tin Junior School

Is it a magical dragon that lies lazily on the floor?
Is it a string of rocky mountains, fierce and tall?
Is it a silvery ribbon of giants tied to the ground?
Oh! It is the mighty Great Wall.

Don't think it is just a crumbling old wall,
That stretches twenty thousand kilometres and more.
This is the mighty Great Wall,
From which legends and stories soar.

Is that a black crow singing tragic songs?
Is that the harsh wind sighing because of war?
Is that bare branches rustling while bending down in grief?
Oh! That is the weeping of souls trapped in the Great Wall.

Over all the dynasties,
Numerous builders worked to death and got buried under the wall.
Over all the kingdoms,
Countless soldiers fought for the sovereign with their blood staining the wall.

Like gigantic troops of guards running at the emperor's call,
Standing in line all around China, mighty and tall.
If you have never been to the Great Wall,
You have never been to China at all!

On and on

Amelia Harvey, 13, Kellet School

The start of the Great Wall.
I can't see the end, too short for that
Forts – checkpoints stretch out ahead.
I take the first step
The endless stretch, has pulled in its next traveller

I toddle along, to keep up with daddy
Getting my act together,
I walk towards him
The wall is hard to climb.
But I push on

On and On

Night is falling and the sunset is upon us
The dark, limitless sky
Open like a child's mouth to candy.
Then as we sat against the wall
Darkness swallowed us

I am taller now
I am sitting on daddy's shoulders
We talk about my teacher
We talk about my friends
We talk about kindergarten

On and on.

The wall snakes on
I can see the first checkpoint
I can walk on my own now.
I still can't see the end though
Don't think I ever will

Confidently, I walk on.
"How easy!" I think.
And there in front of me, lies a steep incline
I prepare myself, studying each step with great caution
Then proceed to walk up the rise
Daddy releases my hand.

On and on

Dad and I now stand eye to eye
I look across over the mountain
I can see birds flying high above
Dragons dancing beneath me.

I walk the last few steps
The first checkpoint is within arm's reach
I slam my foot down triumphantly onto the brick-laid fort.
I look out on the boundless stretch of land in front of me

On and on.

I know that's not it.
The wall is going to keep on going for a long time
The wall looks different.
More stairs
More people
Longer
Harder
Tougher.

Dad and I are still talking
We talk about exams
We talk about my new friends

On and on.

The wall rises higher
More stairs.
And higher and higher it goes

I ask dad which path he took when he walked the wall
I ask dad which path I should take
Dad says it's my choice.

I choose to take the higher path.

I meet someone along the way
A boy about my age
A man
We become good friends
We are inseparable. We join.

On and on.

She toddles towards me, arms aloft
Tugging on my skirt.
Asking for a ride on my shoulders
I hoist her up and she tells me she sees it
Sees what I saw.

Crying for joy,
She squeals with delight.
The mountains are close.

She asks me if when she is older, she will reach the next checkpoint.
You will touch the next one, but more will come.
One after the other and the wall keeps going

On and on.

I look at the wall,
It's starting to look a little old.
Bricks crumble here and there
The order of the bricks is different.
Light, dark, dark, light
Some worn, some surviving.

I am finding it hard to walk on now.
My knees shake
My skin wrinkles.

She is older too.

Will I look like you when I'm older?
I tell her yes.
Sadness takes me over as I see the next checkpoint
It is close – the end of the wall.

The last stop is in arms reach
The boy I met so long ago. My husband.
He clutches my hand with a desperate look as I gracefully touch my foot to the brick on the
edge of the unknown.

Tracing each brick, looking back at her,
I know the wall will go on.

On and on.

Men Unknown

May Huang, 16, Chinese International School

On monstrous mountains & hellish hills,
A million toil against their wills,
Bereft of pleasures of their own,
To please the man upon the throne.

These convicts, slaves and lonely men
shall never hold their wives again,
Yet brave fierce heat and savage rain
Sustain spiked sleet and permit pain

To build a mighty stonework giant,
Immune to wind, that stands defiant:
A sinuous snake nine metres thick
Of gravel gut and scales of brick.

Thieving crooks and honest men,
Who'd never see their sons again,
Suffered wild and bitter snow
To help this long snake thrive and grow.

So while this dragon's world-renowned
Its belly is a great compound
Of brick and bone and flesh and stone
– A great beast reared by men unknown.