



Fiction

Group 3

2090

Carmel School – Elsa High School, Budovitch, Felix – 12

“Anne, go into the cubby and keep your mouth shut, do you hear me?” my mother instructed firmly. I nodded and she kissed my forehead and told me to stay strong. I opened the entrance to the nook underneath the floorboards and got in, careful to close it quietly. Through the crack in the floor, I could see my mother as she opened the front door cautiously. A man with a black mask and a large gun marched into the room. He loaded his gun and my mother’s eyes widened with horror. I sucked in a breath as the sound of a gunshot punctured the silence like a needle to a threadbare cloth. My mother’s agonized screaming. Another gunshot. A loud thud as a lifeless body crumpled to the ground like wet paper. I peeked through the crack in the floorboards, to find my mother lying on the wooden floor, her cotton dress soaked with red. I squeezed my eyes shut and turned away. She would’ve wanted me to be strong, but still, a few stubborn tears leaked from my muddy brown eyes. The man stood there for a moment, and then left as if nothing happened.

The floor creaked as I opened the trapdoor. I stumbled over to my mother and knelt down next to her. Sharp, violent sobs shook my body as I clutched her hands like a lifeline, as if I was the one dying. “Anne?” Her voice was barely a whisper. “Yes mama?” I said, through choked sobs. “I’m sorry,” she said softly. She gave me a weak smile before her eyes stared into nothing and she went limp. I reached out and closed her hollow, empty eyes with the tips of my fingers. I planted a soft kiss on her cheek and soaked her sleeve with tears for what seemed like days. I glanced over to my right, and found a strange mound of red, grainy powder. I reached to touch it, when a girl suddenly slammed open the door.

“STOP!” she yelled.

I jerked my hand away from the strange powder and stumbled back against the blood splattered wall. “Who are you?” I demanded, holding out a knife from the kitchen table. The girl backed away as if she were calming a horse. “I’m not going to hurt you, I swear,” she whispered softly. “What you were about to touch was a highly toxic new alteration of gunpowder. Your skin would dissolve as soon as you touched it,” she explained carefully, as if I was a fragile ornament that was about to shatter at any second. I thought this over for a second. “Who are you?” I shouted, louder this time. “My name is Edaline,” she answered softly.

Edaline had such delicateness about her. And she was beautiful. Her long auburn hair hung in soft waves and her emerald eyes flickered with flecks of gold. She glanced towards my lifeless mother. “Is that your...” she trailed off. “Yes,” I replied numbly. She looked away. “What do you want?” I demanded. “I was scavenging for food. I thought your house was abandoned, and I really am having no luck.” She sighed. I studied her. I could see her ribs peeking out from her shirt. She must have not eaten in weeks. I went over to the cabinet and got out our last loaf of stale bread. “Here,” I offered her the bread. She hesitated, and then took it from me. “Thank you,” she said calmly. “I never asked for your name.” She waited for a response. “Anne,” I said plainly. She smiled.

“We should get out of here before the terrorists come back.” She beckoned for me to follow her. I didn’t know if it was safe to be running off with some girl, but at least I’d have a friend.

We were sitting in the meadow eating chunks of bread. The sky was so thick with pollution, you couldn’t tell the difference between day and night. The soft grass seemed to stretch on for miles. I used to come here with my mother all the time before the war. We would make necklaces from the colourful wildflowers that scattered the lush meadow.

“What was that red powder?” I asked her.

“It’s a highly explosive and flammable substance that they use in bullets. The red one you saw on your floor is the most dangerous version of it as of this year. Thousands of years ago, it was originally meant for something called fireworks, but of course, people saw an explosion and immediately invented a new way to kill each other with,” she grumbled. “I hate this stupid war. It’s just a bunch of humans killing each other because of tiny pieces of green paper. I lost my whole family because of this. Because of stupid guns.” A tear slipped down her rosy cheek. I felt tears of my own, when I suddenly had an idea.

“What if they couldn’t have their guns anymore?” I whispered, my eyes wide.

“Yeah right! They keep their entire supply of gunpowder and guns in this insanely guarded factory. If you so much as step too close, they’ll have a bullet right between your eyes before you could even blink,” she scoffed, but she still looked hopeful.

“I’d be willing to die if it meant I had put up some kind of fight. It’s what my mother would have done,” I mumbled into the distance. Edaline smiled sadly. I stood up. “I’m gonna destroy their gunpowder with or without you. It’s time this ends once and for all,” I declared determinedly. Edaline clasped my hand with hers.

“You know it means certain death, don’t you?” she whispered. I nodded, more tears falling down my face. She stood up beside me, twining my fingers with hers.

“I’m coming with you.”

After a whole week of walking, we finally made it. It was in a very secluded area, with nothing but dirt stretching on for miles. Black smoke erupted from the factory, filling the air with a toxic scent that burned my throat. The plan was, we were going to hopefully slip past the guards and light the gunpowder on fire, and explode the factory.

“Are you ready?” I asked Edaline. She smiled sadly.

“I’m ready for anything,” she whispered. We crept cautiously toward the guards – two burly men accompanied by gigantic guns.

“Hey guys!” Edaline smiled. They pointed their guns at her while I crept behind them. “Just coming to say hello!” she chipped. I cautiously opened a bag of red gunpowder and poured it on their heads just before they could pull the trigger. Edaline tied pieces of cloth around their mouths to mute their agonized cries for help. We watched in horror as their skin sizzled and steamed until they were nothing but a pile of their clothing. We changed into their guard uniforms and snuck inside the gunpowder storage room.

The storage room was just big enough to hold the millions of barrels of gunpowder and thousands of guards stationed around the perimeter of the storage room. The room was filled with the scent of burning hair, and the ceiling stretched far above the clouds. I tied my thick blond hair into a bun and marched forward with Edaline at my side. I cleared my throat loudly, and now we had every gun pointing in our direction.

“Whoa whoa easy there!” I held my hands in the air. Edaline and I took off our black masks and set them on the floor. “We’re not going to do anything,” Edaline assured them. “We’re here to do —”

“THIS!” I shout, my voice echoes in the storage room.

I pulled out a match and set it on fire. The flickering flame tingled on my skin for the last time. Time seemed to stop. I glanced at Edaline. With tears running down her face, she met my eyes. She nodded slowly. We clung to each other as I hurled the flame toward the barrels of gunpowder. I breathed for what will be the last time as 16 years flashed before my eyes.

My mother rocking me to sleep. Watching the glorious sunsets from the valley. Laughing. Crying. My mother dying in my arms. Clinging to my only friend.

I held to these things as I was engulfed in flames. I looked towards the sky and reached toward the soft light pulling me into infinity

A Tale of Thunder

Carmel School – Elsa High School, Choe, Yeda – 12

Li Chang woke up, staring at the mess he had just caused. He glared into the hole in the wall. Li didn't mean to blow up the walls, his goal was only to create a small explosive using the diary.

'Oh right, The diary!' Li Chang thought to himself, 'If the diary disappears, it'll all be futile!' He was racing to find his grandfather's recently recovered diary. That diary contained all the formulas and instructions that Li's ancestors had discovered. Li was an aspiring demolition engineer striving to get recognized by China's generals. He wanted to be a part of the war against the Mongols.

After a while of searching, Li was relieved, finally discovering the old, almost torn diary under the small piles of ash. Li had recently uncovered the diary just after all his family had been killed by the Mongols. Li had been unaware when it happened. He was out in the fields far from home while the Mongols had been busy slaughtering his family. When he came back, he was the only living witness of the scene. The houses were set on fire, blood on the grass, dismembered bodies everywhere, and then he saw his family. Bursting into tears, he desperately searched for anything he could salvage and looked for any living bodies, but he found nothing. Nothing except for the diary. Li was afraid to open it at first, scared of what he would do. For six months, Li kept the diary shut, but when he finally opened it, months after the Mongol's killing spree, he could see his future in front of him.

He had always been good at creating devices. He knew lots about demolition engineers but didn't know how he could get there. He had hated the entire Mongol empire but could do nothing about it. Until he found the book. The diary contained instructions and information that Li Chang could never understand. With the book's information, Li would eventually be able to fight for his country and make money from the undiscovered demolition devices suppressed in his diary. He could finally seek vengeance.

It was one year exactly after the massacre of Li Chang's family when Li Chang was faced with the enemy yet another time, but this time there was nothing he could do. He was still learning, and he only had the small bombs. The last resort was to try and reason with the Mongols. 'Please!' Li Chang screamed, 'I'm a demo expert! I'll work for you!' The Mongols remained silent, deciding, discussing amongst themselves, in a flurry of whispers. 'Please! I'll do anything!' Li Chang pleaded, his voice failing. The Mongols continued their whispers, seemingly ignoring Li's screams. The Mongols charged, suddenly, screaming at each other killing everyone in the vicinity. There was blood everywhere. Screams of the Chinese people wailing for help. The Mongols finished the job swiftly, and everyone was dead except for Li Chang. Li Chang was alive. Then he was sent into darkness.

Li woke up in a dark cell, with only a plate of moldy food and his diary. 'It's over.' Li thought bitterly to himself. 'I'll die.' As soon as his eyes adjusted to the dark, Li scrambled around his cell in desperation, hammering the walls, pounding the bars that stood between himself and freedom. He needed to find something or someone that would give him a chance. 'Awake, finally?' A voice called from the neighboring cell. Surprised, Li swung his head towards the somewhat ominous voice. 'Don't worry, I've been captured also. I'm with you' He called. 'Who are you!' Li shouted, desperate for answers. 'My name is Cai Lun' He replied, 'I'm a demolition expert. I'm assuming you are too.' A barrage of questions entered Li's mind. He couldn't find the energy to form words anymore. He sat down, defeated. 'Tell me more,' Li asked, 'Please.' 'Alright,' Cai Lun replied, 'They captured only me and you on the same day. Written in blood, both of our walls describe our work.' Cai Lun paused, 'We need to make bombs, giant bombs, we alone are driving the first demolition breakthrough. We are working for the Mongols. Three days left. My door is unlocked, by the way, come in.'

Processing all the recent information, Li found it hard to move his legs. He had so many questions built up in his head but decided not to ask them. Slowly, he made his way to the opposite cell, accepting his fate. He was a slave.

Cai Lun made space for Li on the floor, there were dozens of metals, explosives, powders, and liquids scattered on the floor, and Li had recognized one particular ingredient. It was a special type of gunpowder that he had observed while reading his diary. The diary had put that particular explosive under the “classified information” section. This ingredient on the floor was the main ingredient for the making of the legendary Thunder Crash bomb.

‘Is that...’ Li asked out of curiosity.

‘Yes, they want the thunder crash bomb. To destroy our country.’ Cai Lun said, ‘It’s a myth, a legend, it’s impossible, but we have only five days.’

‘Five days until what?’ Li inquired.

‘They will replace us, with better engineers, and stronger weapons.’

Li sat in silence. He sat until he heard footsteps. Suddenly, the large metal door creaked and unlatched, revealing a man in an oversized white coat carrying a briefcase. The man knelt down, opened the briefcase, and placed food, water, and Li’s diary on the floor.

‘Now work, or else.’ The man said, shutting the door behind him.

Three days passed in a blur, the formulas in Li’s diary bringing them closer and closer to the answer. Every day, the same man in the white coat barged in and handed them food and supplies, and every time, Cai Lun hid the two developing bombs behind the wall, making an effort to hide all progress from the military. On day four, they were done. The man in the white coat came and left without noticing the two finished Thunder Crash bombs hidden behind the wall.

‘What do we do now?’ Li questioned, ‘Won’t they kill us all along with our country anyway?’

‘That’s the thing, this isn’t your mission anymore, I have a plan.’

Cai Lun’s plan was stupid, but there was no other choice. The prison they were in was the only base near China that the Mongol military had control over. If Cai Lun crossed the military and bombed the base while Li escaped, the Mongols would be set back by more than a year. Li would be a hero. Cai Lun would be dead.

On the fifth day, they carried out the plan. White Coat picked them up, Li ran, and Cai Lun detonated the bombs. The power of two Thunder Crash bombs wiped out everyone and everything including the military base. They had won. Li watched the fiery mess blow up into the sky, reminding him of the small hole he had blasted into the city walls. It had only been a week.

One year later, Li had single-handedly recreated hundreds of Thunder Crash bombs and had been promoted to military general. He was a hero.

Every time he stared into the lands of the Mongols, he remembered Cai Lun. He remembered the hole in the wall, and he remembered his family.

The Case of Clorox

Carmel School – Elsa High School, Chung, Abigail – 12

Detective Clorox spun around in his chair with his legs extended and pen in hand. The fan hummed gently in the corner, relieving the scorching temperature. The dark circles under his eyes portrayed the lack of sleep through much deep thought. He felt distracted by the tempting waft of fresh ground coffee beans and a cold, untouched breakfast.

A sudden hurried knock on the door caught his attention. In came his informant, Mr. Lime – and with him – a trio of distraught individuals. Trailing behind them was the old janitor who worked at the museum, also known as the victim and sole witness of this case. A wretched smell suddenly serpented around the room, making Detective Clorox wrinkle his nose. Now his office smelt like wet puppies, toilets, and freshly sanitized hospitals.

Mr. Lime handed the case file to Detective Clorox while glaring darkly at the others in the room. He was known to be a cynical person but did his job meticulously well. The detective observed the suspects, occasionally scanning the paper. After some time, he slipped his notebook out of the drawer and started the investigation.

"So, Mr. Gus Mullen?" Detective Clorox started, glancing at the janitor. "Could you tell us more about the incident on Wednesday?"

"Wednesday..." Gus stammered.

"Must be old age kicking in," Mr. Lime whispered loudly.

Gus rubbed his bandaged head.

"All I remember for now is that I hit my head real hard," he mused.

"Do you at least remember what you were doing before the injury?" Clorox urged.

"I was mopping the floor near the new exhibition – the one about ancient Chinese relics and inventions. But the security alarm went off because the cameras were disabled. I was frightened so I took my mop and hid in the cleaning storage room. Unfortunately, I knocked the rusty metal bucket over and blew my cover. The thief approached me, and I thought whoever it was trying to kill me. So I grabbed some bleach and poured the whole bottle on the person. I ran, forgetting my surroundings so I hit my head against a pillar," Gus explained.

Clorox nodded as he scribbled the inadequate information from the janitor's description.

"I don't remember anything about the thief, except that they had a striking signet ring. I don't remember the initial though," Gus shuddered.

The detective turned to the three suspects. They were all museum workers – a manager, a cashier from the museum's souvenir shop, and an assistant curator on an internship. "Regarding the stolen Chinese kite, I would like to hear your reasoning for not being the culprit," he remarked. "Talk one at a time," he added.

The manager – Mrs. Carlson – spoke up. She was reserved, yet responsible and consistent. "I recently had my first baby so I went on maternity leave for the past month. I have all the necessary proof and the director has a record of the time I was gone," she explained.

"I see," Detective Clorox mumbled as the manager handed the file of neatly placed papers and photographs. There was an assortment of official documents, certificates, and a few heart-warming photos of the young woman's chubby new-born. He took his notebook and used a bright red marker to make a little mark. A little scratch sound released the strong fluorescent odour of the marker.

"You are dismissed Mrs. Carlson," Detective Clorox announced. There were two fiddling victims left, as well as Gus. They were both newer employees, something which Detective Clorox immediately jotted down. The cashier was a glum young lady who seemed to detest her job. On the other hand, there was also the intern curator, a man with a bright expression and a matching eccentric blue sweater.

"It wasn't me," the cashier protested.

"I can see that your attendance for work is quite inconsistent," Detective Clorox nodded.

"That's because there's another cashier – I only work morning shifts."

"And may I ask what you do for the rest of the day?" Detective Clorox inquired.

"I am a student at the local university," the cashier answered.

"All right. You are dismissed," Detective Clorox gestured.

He now turned to the last employee. The intern grinned slightly and leaned back in his chair. "Mr. Gary Hyde, I do not understand why you would need to wear such a thick sweater in the summer," Detective Clorox commented wryly.

Despite the tension in the room, Mr. Hyde remained undisturbed. "I had a bit of a cold," he replied curtly.

He coolly folded his hands on the table. Clorox stared at Mr. Hyde's index finger. A shallow dip covered the entire lower part of the finger. From his joint to the knuckles, it was unblemished and pale as a baby's soft skin, slightly contrasting with the rest of his finger. Detective Clorox knew that this happened when he wore his antique watch outside. He also noticed Mr. Hyde eyeing his watch with more interest than he wanted. But he also felt something else, as if somebody were drilling holes into his back.

"That's a fine watch you got there," Mr. Hyde observed. Detective Clorox slightly frowned. What did his watch have to do with the stolen Chinese kite? "If only you sold that to me. It is from a good antique brand. The museum could use it for the next exhibit," Mr. Hyde smiled.

Detective Clorox was barely listening to Mr. Hyde's babble. He thought of the night when he had visited the museum for investigation. The museum was a grand building, with large pillars of perfectly sculpted alabaster and never-ending marble hallways filled with exhibitions carefully arranged by the curating team. The founder was an old soul, great in age and wisdom – and a person Clorox knew personally. He silently circled the picture of the vivacious young man on the paper.

Detective Clorox solemnly watched as they led Mr. Hyde to the isolation room. He soothed the crimson mark on his hand, the imprint of a hard slap. He carefully paced down the corridor to a heavily guarded room. He smoothed out his collar.

"Good afternoon Father Frederick," Clorox greeted as he reverently bowed to the old man on the armchair.

Frederick smiled warmly and nodded in Clorox's direction.

"I heard about the case," he started.

"Yes, it is all under control. At least the thief is," Clorox sighed as he turned the kettle on.

"Well, how did you get to the conclusion?" Frederick pondered.

"Gus mentioned the thief had a signet ring. Mr. Hyde made the mistake of folding his hands on the table revealing a slight dip on his index finger. That's what signet rings do," Detective Clorox demonstrated. "In his description, Gus also mentioned he attacked the thief with bleach. Not only did Mr. Hyde smell like bleach, he wore a sweater to cover up the damaged skin," he continued.

Frederick nodded.

"They questioned him for a while. He finally confessed to the crime. He belongs to the Forgers. That's why he had a signet ring with an F on it. Probably stole the kite to auction to some dirtily rich people," Detective Clorox said.

"Yes, these Forgers have been quite a nuisance recently," Frederick resounded.

They quietly sipped their tea. Detective Clorox paced across the room gliding his fingers on the crack along the wall. He paused in front of the fire. "Something's troubling you," Frederick remarked, sipping the last swig of tea.

"Where did you get it from?"

"The kite? Be specific," Frederick sharply rebuked.

"Yes, the kite," Clorox sighed.

"I brought it from where I came from. Where you came from as well. It was an old family artifact from approximately 27 generations ago."

Detective Clorox glanced at Father Frederick. With his remaining silvery grey hair and defined wrinkles, he was different from the local elderly. Everybody who got exchanged always stood out.

"Your trousers are on fire!" Frederick exclaimed alarmingly out of nowhere. Detective Clorox snapped out of his thoughts and found the bottom of his pants engulfed by the flames. He quickly rubbed his leg on the brick wall while Frederick doused the pants with a discoloured watering can.

"Didn't I always tell you to never stand by the fire? You never had a pair of unburnt pants in your childhood," Frederick scolded. Detective Clorox hung his head and frantically apologized.

"I was thinking about my contract," he said.

Frederick stopped. "It is five years already," he whispered. "I remember when you and I came to this town. Back in China, we were chosen to get exchanged. That's why we never got Chinese names," Frederick reminisced.

"We were the only 2 for that selection, right?"

"Yes. No more exchange needed now," Frederick answered. "You were a ragtag child without parents. But you had genius."

Now that ragtag child sat on the same small boat. It was a hardy, bright red boat, SS. Plover. Clorox rested his chin on his battered suitcase and stared into the salty fog, sailing towards a location he did not know.

The Wheel of Destiny

Carmel School – Elsa High School, Wigisser, Aline – 12

The resounding pounding and hammering of my father in the room next to me, my eyes fluttered open rudely waking me up. I was familiar with this as my father works on new inventions to supply my village with every morning.

My father called to me, “Zhuo! Quickly, I have to show you my new invention!”

“What is it, father?” wooden pieces nailed together. I was unimpressed. Clearly, that wasn’t the reaction my father wanted, “What is it exactly?”

“This is a Wheelbarrow. It transports large amounts of crops and dirt, making it easier to work and supply for our village!” He explained. “I am holding a feast for the village, to showcase my final invention,” he said lowering his head as tears glistened.

“Father, don’t say that. I will call everyone to meet at the town feast at seven o’clock this evening.”

“Thank you, son.” He said with a slight smile on his face.

After hours of knocking and inviting the village to the feast, I could no longer walk; my legs were as wobbly as noodles. I followed my steps back to my home and fell onto my bed resting there with my eyes closed and my body aching. Later that evening, families, pets, children, and our village soon came together.

All of them feasting like they had not eaten in days, my father interrupted “Thank you all for gathering here. I have created my final invention, which will help our crops proliferate and gather more food. This invention is...” he walks over to the Wheelbarrow, his footsteps echoing in the silent, and removes the cloth “The Wheelbarrow!” everyone cheers in excitement for my father.

The feast continued with a joyful energy around us. I went over to my father when my father’s best friend, Huang, abruptly said “Wow! This is magnificent!”

My father replied, “Thank you!”

The gathering had ended and I took my father home one step at a time, he was shaking and limping. As we entered our home I carried him to his bed, he looked at me shedding a tear, and said “Zhuo, I am not going to be here for long, my dying wish is for you to spread my invention around all the villages in China.”

“It is more important for me to stay here and look after you,” I pleaded.

“My life is no longer important. Think of the many lives you will save,” he exclaimed

“Where would I even go?” I said with tears in my eyes.

“Everywhere Zhuo! Xidi, Wuzhen, and Lijiang!” There was an urgency in his voice now. I lowered my head with my hands covering my face, I was sobbing,

I hugged my father and I said, “I promise, I will do this.”

The very next morning I took off to my first village, Lijiang. I took water, bread, and of course the Wheelbarrow. I walked through the rainforests and after hours of walking, I arrived in Lijiang. I quickly asked a local where the leader of Lijiang is located, and he replied “The palace is on the right of the Yufeng temple.” I thanked him and rushed to the palace.

Upon arrival, I spoke to the guard about the significance of the Wheelbarrow and how it could change the world and their village. He came out and simply nodded. I entered the palace, which was filled with gold and pearl-white statues and Chinese inscriptions on the walls. My eyes fell upon a door where a man stood with long flowing robes. This must be the leader, I thought. He demanded I tell him what I was doing in their village.

“Well, my father has created an invention called the Wheelbarrow –” he gave me an unpleasant expression, so I quickly moved on, “It helps carry large amounts of anything! And it will help gather your crops even quicker.” He seemed to accept this and soon, we worked together to create a quicker and more functioning village. He thanked me by granting me food and a place to rest for the night.

I was full of hope after the first interaction with Lijiang's master, so, I made my way to Wuzhen which was neighboring Lijiang. I arrived after just a few short hours of walking through Xishuangbanna, China's largest rainforest. My father told me that Wuzhen was a very festive and welcoming village. As I did in Lijiang, I went to a food market to ask where the palace was and where I could find the leader. Again, the villagers complied and pointed me toward the palace.

As I arrived, I greeted the guard and explained my father's invention to him. He nodded and informed the leader about my arrival. I entered the palace and this one was even more impressive than the last, with murals wrapped all around the sky-high ceilings. The walls beside me were marble with gold accents throughout the whole hallway. My eyes laid upon the golden doors that lead to the leader. He was much more open to the idea and straightaway greeted me with a bow.

We went straight to work on creating the Wheelbarrow for their village, the leader then thanked me and granted me water for my adventure to the next village.

My next stop was Xidi, a village known for its historical statues and temples. My father told me that it is a very strict village. After hours of walking in a dark and quiet forest I spotted Xidi from afar, I didn't think that Xidi would be any different.

I arrived in Xidi, the village was dark and depressing. All the villagers looked alarmed and terrified. It was only a short time before I encountered the palace. The guard was as white as snow, he was a standing corpse only flesh and bone. I had explained to him my father's idea of the Wheelbarrow and he went to tell the leader of the village.

The guard approved my entrance with a nod and as I entered, I got an uncanny feeling. There was a horrid smell of rotten food, and the walls were old and rusty, it was intimidating. I spotted the door, the knob was crusty it had looked and felt like no one had ever opened it. The door had shrieked as it opened, and the leader was standing right in front of me with an unsettling smirk.

“Tell me about this invention,” he demanded, his eyes were blood red and almost popping out of his eye sockets, his teeth were crooked and stained with yellow and brown, he was tall and slim, his nails were long and curled, and he had patches of hair on his head.

“Well, this was my fathers invention, the Wheelbarrow helps to transport goods and heavy amounts of anything! I assure you, your village will soon be thriving!”

“I have dreamt of this once before,” he said whilst slowly walking, “*and you stole it from me!*”

All of a sudden, I was taken by two guards. I tried to yell but it was too late. They had covered my face in a bag and thrown me into a small cell made of stone with the Wheelbarrow right outside the door. I couldn't help but sob. I had failed to do one thing for my father, the one thing he truly wanted.

Days seamlessly flowed into nights; I was broken and beaten. Yet, even in the darkest moments, I thought of him, I thought of my father. I needed to escape. For me, for my father.

One night, a stone fell from the sharp and dull ceiling. I waited for the guard to hand me the bread for the day, and as the door swung open, I seized the opportunity and threw the rock at his head as hard as I could. I ran out of the cell, grabbed the Wheelbarrow, and navigated through the treacherous terrain to escape the palace. The pounding of my heart was echoing the fear within.

After hours of traversing through Xishuangbanna, where the mud was like quicksand and the wind whistled making the leaves rustle, I eventually arrived at my village. I was consumed by a sense of urgency and rushed to my home hoping to see my father lying on his bed, only to be confronted with a clean bed with no one in it. My heart sank.

“He passed last week. He wanted you to have this.” I turned to see Huang. He had looked depressed, there was no more light in him. His smile had gone away, his eyes red, and he had tear marks on his face.

I opened the book to discover a whole host of inventions not yet realized by my father. I decided I would be the one to inherit his business and preserve his remarkable legacy. I will bring his inventions to light.

City of Ashes

Carmel School – Elsa High School, Yahyagil, Ayla – 13

They stand in line awaiting the orders of a puppet.

Li Xianwen stood in the opulent hall of Daming Palace. Stone gates reached for the heavens and Chang'an's surroundings paled compared to its grandeur. Xianwen's eyes scanned the blood-red walls, the intricate emerald roofs, and the soldiers' iron armour embellished with silver. His gaze landed upon Emperor Ai – a boy upon a throne. The boy was adorned with the ill-fitting yellow robes that his father had once worn. Xianwen walked cautiously towards The Puppet Emperor while holding his chin high. Xianwen knew that he could become the puppeteer.

"Emperor Ai." He clasped his hands and bowed with an illusive grin, "I, Li Xianwen, come from Guangcheng in Hunan province to present a new invention that could revolutionize our future."

Xianwen unravelled the scroll in the belt of his robe, which also unravelled his 'disguise'. His demeanour reserved for situations like these had been forgotten by the eager inventor at heart.

"An Eruptor. A cylindrical barrel propels the cast iron sphere and ignites whatever is in its path. Powered by the same gunpowder found in firecrackers, this invention could demolish buildings with ease, send warnings in the night sky, aid in military purposes—" Xianwen was cut off.

"Military?" The Puppet Emperor asked, his expression morphing from apathy to enthusiasm, "Meaning it could be used as artillery?"

"However, this Eruptor could—"

"Think of the potential!" Ai shouted, ignoring Xianwen, "Has it been tested?"

Xianwen cleared his throat, "I was hoping it could be tested here outside the city walls of Chang'an."

"Here? The city is named 'Eternal Peace' – not chaos. It shall be tested in your city. What was it called? Guangcheng?"

Xianwen's eyes widened and he took a step forward to argue, "Emperor Ai, outside the city walls of Chang'an it is barren, uninhabited by civilians—unlike the streets of Guangcheng. Do you understand what you are asking?"

Emperor Ai rose from his throne, a tail of gilded fabric and military officers trailing behind him. He gestured to Xianwen to follow. Ai walked to the archery tower, squinting under the light of noon. Below them stretched the city of Chang'an, which seemed to expand beyond the horizon. The ashy grey roofs of the buildings curved upwards, asking to bathe in the blazing sun. Pagodas and verdant trees were scattered across the city.

"You see the city wall, Li Xian Wen?" Ai gestured to the seemingly thin walls that encased the city, "Beyond this, we are powerless. Enemies could attack from all over. I may be half your height and quarter your age, but I have seen triple what you have in your entire life. And there is one thing that has echoed throughout every aspect of mine: sacrifices must be made for a better future."

City of Light, Guangcheng. Beneath the celebration, the colour, the joy, the light, was darkness.

Linghui looked over her shoulder before knocking twice on the red-panelled door and pushing through. A flash of fiery sulfuric smoke greeted her entrance. Scarlet paper tubes, threaded with metallic strings, covered every inch of the room.

"I'm going to hang the firecrackers, Jing." Linghui decided, dangling them over her brother's head.

"I could have done that myself. I'm nearly taller than you," replied the boy, looking up from his workspace. The unmistakable burns of gunpowder scarred his hands.

Linghui attempted to lighten the unusually stiff mood, "Tonight is Mid-Autumn Festival, which means mooncakes."

Jing smiled, "I think I'm done for the day, I've made enough money for the debt."

"Did you grab the extra firecracker?" Linghui reminded, before opening the door to leave.

"Of course I did. What would we do without it?"

The sweet aroma floated in the frigid air. The hunger in Linghui's stomach grew in response, becoming the only thought that enveloped her mind. The end of the day was nearing, and a sea of people waited for the last batch of mooncakes. The plaza by the bakery was illuminated by the golden glow of the moon. An abundance of lanterns that floated above their heads. Flashes of colourful embroidered fabrics dove in and out of the buzzing crowd.

"Ready?" Linghui carefully avoided the crowd, ushering her brother into the corner where the light did not reach. "Yeah," Jing held the firecracker, "I've been working on my aim. So when I throw it, the pressure should ignite it immediately. Then, POOF – perfect smoke bomb, entertainment, and diversion." "It's about the flick of the wrist," Linghui demonstrated by throwing the firecracker up and catching it barely before it scraped the ground. "Show-off," he muttered, "I told you I've been practising."

Jing threw it so that it landed beside the flock of people, hoping it would turn their attention away from the bakery. It went unnoticed until a young girl set aside her miniature lantern and bent to observe the compelling object. Jing grumbled with disappointment. It took a few moments for it to spark, but once it started to hiss, every head had turned. They took the chance to slip into the bakery unnoticed.

They stared at the myriad of mooncakes. Jing's arm span wasn't wide enough to measure the rows of round cakes. "Take only as much as you need, we must leave discreetly," Linghui warned him. "Only as much as I need? I haven't eaten anything since lunch yesterday!" Jing stuffed his pockets with the small pastries. "Fine," Linghui conceded, trying to stifle a grin. "Maybe grab an extra handful."

Dark smoke slipped beneath the bakery's door. Screams pierced the silent air. *Bang*. Linghui knew that sound all too well. Terror impaled her heart, inundating her mind with a nameless dread. *Run*. She sprinted to where the crowd once stood—now engulfed in flames. The familiar smell of sulfur lingered in the thick night. *Gunpowder—firecrackers*. People were buried beneath the rubble, streaks of red slithering between the cobblestone streets. The little girl was in the rubble, lantern in her hands. Her dark eyes stared at the fire, yet she saw nothing.

"Please tell me I didn't do this. Not again," a soulless look glazed her eyes. "You didn't." Jing surveyed his surroundings, "Firecrackers can't do this." *Bang*. "I'm going to help the rest of them." Jing stated as the smoke jerked a cough out of him. Her eyes abruptly shot open, "Are you crazy? You would rather die like Dad did?" "I'm going to help them." Jing reiterated, turning to leave, "I'm not injured and I can help them, so why wouldn't I? Dad had everything to lose. I have nothing to."

Linghui grew still—a statue in a city of ashes.

City of Light, Guangcheng. Built upon the spark of exuberance centuries ago. It ignited the flame of life. But, the time has come to pave a new path. One that Xianwen's descendants would venture upon.

Xianwen's Eruptor worked. The Guangcheng was an ocean of fire—people drowning in its blaze. "Isn't it wonderful?" Emperor Ai stood next to Xianwen, watching soldiers march alongside the Eruptors. Xianwen left his question unanswered. "Isn't the machine wonderful? He rephrased his question, "It works without fault. A truly remarkable weapon." "It isn't a weapon." Ai switched his tactics, "All the loss, all the pain – there is a reason for it. For the future of this Kingdom. Sacrifices must be made." "And are these sacrifices necessary?" Xianwen stared into the boy's eyes. This child was not Emperor. He wasn't looking for a better future. He was looking for a cure to his boredom. And Xianwen had given it to him. Then it had dawned on Xianwen—he was the puppet.

A glare shot into the night sky. Explosions of colour and shimmering sparks followed. They danced in the sky as if they were stars before falling back to the earth.

“What fools! Celebrating in a time of destruction. I suppose your weapon isn’t a weapon, after all, Xianwen.” Emperor Ai laughed at his own remark. Xianwen had entertained the boy long enough. Xianwen took one last glance at his decades of research and ran towards the echoes of crackling and whirring.

The laughter that conventionally accompanied celebrations was missing. Families surrounded the inferno that engulfed the once-standing building. Their skin paled, the only colour in sight was from the blaze of heat. The elderly did not run from the smoke that seeped into their lungs, the children did not run from the sight of bodies being swallowed by flames. They only watched a boy with scarred hands feed the flames with fireworks. The radiant sparks pierced the sky vibrantly, yet, something was amiss. It was not a celebration, it was a sign of resistance.

City of light, Guangcheng. Its light tainted by the red of death. Its light stained by ashes. But the ashes—they told a story. The story of the light of celebration, a flame of death, and a spark of hope.

Commented [1]: Feedback:

maintain narrative cohesiveness, though occasionally lack tightness.

NEEDS MORE FLOW+TENSION

Commented [2]:

Lee Sum and the Guardians of the Body

Carmel School – Elsa High School, Zeman, Bela – 11

The room was dark; dim light filtered through the shutters. A rattle of coughing came from the corner of the smoky room. Suddenly a scream came, shouting from across the room, 'Mei, wake up,' the boy cried out. Tears streamed down his face. A middle-aged lady appeared at the doorway; it was Aunt Zhang. The boy was Lee Sum; he truly was loyal and kind, especially to his sister, Mei. He was only twelve. Their parents died seven years ago, when Mei was two.

Aunt Zhang was the sister of their mother, Ling. Their father was Juang. One night, seven years ago, their father rushed into their burning house, grabbed Lee Sum, and rushed out of the flames carrying him on his back.

While Ling was stuck under a table, Mei screamed at the top of her lungs, hoping someone would save them. Juang heard Mei's cries and rushed in, grabbing her safely out of the fire and giving her to Lee Sum. He asked Lee to take care of her as he ran back into the fire to save Ling. The heat burned both them and their treasures alive.

By family tradition, they went to live with their mother's sister, Aunt Zhang.

A few years later, Lee realized Mei had been coughing due to the fire, but did not realize the danger it could cause. Aunt Zhuang was lazy and acted as if Lee was her servant. Lee had to go shopping for the household every day. Aunt Zhang gave Lee three silver coins with an angry face, and she said, "Don't you dare spend all the coins." Lee frighteningly nodded his head and fetched his big hemp sack. Lee walked to a farm and paid the farmer one silver coin to pick fruits and vegetables off his farm. Then when he finished he bought a chicken from the farmer for another coin.

He later walked down a dark alley when returning home where he found a pharmacy. He looked at the last coin and went in. The old white-bearded pharmacist looked strangely at Lee. Lee politely greeted him. The man's name was Dong, short for Dong Chung Cao. Lee told Dong that his sister Mei was ill because of the smoke she inhaled in the tragic fire. Dong got his book out and looked through it. He found something, but he wasn't sure the risk was worth it. Either way, he told Lee. Legend says that in Tibet, there was once a beautiful green mountain. In winter, the mountain was ice-cold as it would snow, and anyone that went up there wouldn't come down; people would die from hypothermia or frostbite. There, the mountain hides caterpillars; in winter, the caterpillars hibernate, but fungus wraps around the unlucky ones, and right after winter, humans climb up the steep, high mountain and take those that are wrapped and make them into soup. Lee was right on time for early spring. Dong warned Lee that it was a bad idea, but Lee ignored it. Lee was about to give up his last coin, but the old man told him, "Don't worry about payment. You need it more than I do."

Lee quietly packed his things. He shared his plan with Mei. Mei was scared, but she trusted Lee. And Lee set off. Walking to Tibet was hard, but it wasn't too far. The road was wet and crooked, and children on the street stared at him as he walked by. It was not long before he was standing at the bottom of the foggy mountain. Suddenly, he saw a village of yurts nearby. Lee was hungry and tired, so he went to the village and met a boy called Ming. Ming was about the same age as Lee. They talked about their life for a while, and they realized that both of them were facing the same problem, as Ming's mother was also sick and her immune system was weakening. Ming brought Lee to his tent; the tent was stained, and flies surrounded it. Ming's father, Jang Mao, suddenly appeared behind Lee and gave him a fright. Ming's father was the chief of the village. The village migrates every season like birds every summer and winter.

Ming told Jang Mao about the medicine and how it could help Ming's mother, Hua, but the danger made him unsure about it. Jang thought about the decision and finally agreed that they could go under one circumstance, that he would supervise the journey.

That night, Lee slept in Ming's tent. Deep into the night, Lee heard footsteps coming from outside the tent. Five big men came rushing into the tent. One of the men hit Lee hard and he passed out. The five of them stuffed Lee in a sack as if the sack was eating him. The five men ran away with Lee. The morning Lee woke up, his hands were locked in chains, his heart raced, and next to him were many other children weeping as if they were

injured. After a while, he found out that he was being sold. Lee thought to himself, "What would Mei do now?"

Jang Mao later woke up and realized Lee was missing. Jang Mao alerted the whole town. He rang a big bell and everyone came rushing. It also turned out, many items were stolen last night. As another day went by, Lee made some friends, Lee thought that if he was rescued he would have to take his friends too. Jang Mao remembered a place where they sold children. He gathered the guardians of the village to rescue Lee. Jang Mao and the guardians broke into the cockroach infested underground hideout and brought all the children out. They didn't have much time left until the leader came. All the children managed to escape. Jang Mao asked Lee. "What will we do with all these children," Lee answered, "they can stay in the village with couples that have no children, seniors or lonely villagers that need support." Jang Mao thought that Lee had a point so he agreed. The children were now part of the pack.

Jang Mao, Ming and Lee were off track for a long time. At dawn they would finally start the journey. It was a cold humid night. Lee had trouble sleeping. Waking up the next day was a nightmare. Ming's mother was holding on. Mei was so sick yet still working as a slave. Lee thought of Mei, and started packing.

The mountain was very steep and dry, there was so much fog that made the mountain invisible. It took two days climbing up the mountain. The top of the mountain wasn't too wide, which also made it easier to find the caterpillars. Jang Mao and Ming, combined, had twenty caterpillars though Lee only had ten. Ming generously gave Lee five caterpillars, this cheered Lee up a bit. They had to get off the mountain sooner or later. Hiking down the mountain was a real challenge. It was so risky but worth it. Down the mountain Lee slipped and almost fell. At that second he thought it was all over but Jang Mao caught him right in time. Lee was so grateful for what what he had done. Every night Lee, Jang Mao and Ming had to camp for the night and continue in the morning. After three days, they were off the mountain and back at the yurt village. At this time they all had to split ways. Lee ran back home, the way he had come.

Lee rushed into the house and started the fire, boiling water over it. It was like a feisty bubbling crab. Lee threw the three caterpillars in the pot and stirred it until it was ready. Lee brought the bowl of soup to Mei and after repeating this a few times she was better. Jang Mao came into Lee's home and took him and Mei back to the village where the caterpillars became famous. Lee named it after Dong Chong Cao the pharmacist.

Chinese Treasures

Chinese International School, Ma, Emma – 13

“Huà Shé Tiān Zū is the story of a man who painted legs on a snake to make it look better. It was considered too extravagant and unnecessary. It describes the inventions.” I quoted an idiom to my daughter Trina, who ignored me.

“Bring your phone and don’t forget to check in. It will save you money...You’re all set!” Trina finished and urged me out the door.

My head felt heavier as I hid a few coins from a table in my pocket and sighed to her, saying “Is this really necessary, Trina? I’ve been an historian all my life, and—”

Trina shot me an annoyed look, but her tone softened as she said, “Yes, Mamie. It is as important to turn to the future as it is to remember the past. You need to learn to live independently in this new era.”

“Eri, open the door.” Trina commanded. The voice—recognizing AI in charge of the electronics answered, “Of course, Miss Trina.” The household robot Eli started vacuuming. I’d rather return to the ancient days before all these annoying creations were invented. “Thanks, Eri and Eli.”

The door swung open. “You’ll be fine, Mamie. Now go.” Trina gave an encouraging wave and shut the door, screaming “Eri! Turn on the TV! Thanks!”. I grumbled, thinking about how lazy Trina was after using Eri.

Five minutes later, I found myself with a basket in the most popular supermarket in Xian, selling items ranging from vegetables to batteries. The temperature was superficially warm, and a familiar melody played, making my head feel dizzy. A dozen Eli cleaner bots around the large market glided like headless zombies.

“Eri, initiate payment,” the cashier wearing a green working outfit muttered, dozing off as my goods were scanned. “Barcode or coins?” Without waiting for my answer, he continued, “Eri, accept payment.”

“Payment timed out.” Eri’s voice rang through my ears after a second and the cashier eyed me suspiciously. Panicking, I reached for my pocket and gave the coins.

“Take—” Looking closer at the coins, I realized they were Tang dynasty bronze coins, an artifact that I was studying. “I’m sorry, those aren’t—” I started, reaching for the coins, but the cashier was faster.

“I’ll take them. Have a good day. Eri, count coins.” Then, quietly he mumbled, “Thank god for the coinage system. Guess the emperor was annoyed at the random bronzes and golds of the past too.”

“No, they’re mine...” I raised my head and looked at the cashier properly and realized that he was wearing a Tang-dynasty style mint green qipao with large sleeves and embroidered edges. My head felt heavier.

“Eri?” I tentatively asked, hoping this was just some prank. “Yes? My name is Eri.” A high-pitched female voice answered, and I found a gray-wearing chubby girl looking at me. The man stared at me, before introducing himself. “My name is Eli. Would you like your coins back?” He said in ancient Chinese. “Yes, please. I’ll give you back the goods.” I answered. I breathed a small sigh of relief.

Táng Guó Tōng Bǎo was engraved on the slightly rusted bronze, roughly meaning general treasure of the Tang, a 966 year coin produced by Li Jing. Remembering how my colleagues painstakingly worked to preserve these treasures, I wistfully wished for home.

When I looked up, however, I was still in the Tang-dynasty shop. The two owners looked at me curiously and I gave them a forced smile before heading onto the cobblestone street. There were crowds of people in qipaos queuing at a street vendor, the line winding through the path like a twisting dragon. Maidens roamed around picking items for their woven baskets and a few

children ran around merrily. A national guard in iron armor stood like an unmoving statue, only moving his eyes as he scanned the pedestrians. Trying my best to blend in with my abnormal clothes and hidden phone, I entered a shop on my left.

“Hello! I’m Lady Eri. What would you like from my shop? Eli here is ready to guide you through the multiple new and exciting products we have,” she smiled. A younger gap-toothed boy smiled vivaciously. Eri and Eli... This is so twisted, I shivered. The loosely-bound books caught my eye

when I was looking around.

"I'd... like to take a look at the books, please," I mumbled and stumbled over the ancient Chinese phrases. Gosh, it was significantly easier to translate old texts when Eri was around. I thought, starting to miss the all-knowing robot.

Running my finger along the red leather bindings curiously, the young boy tilted his head. "Your clothes are strange," he remarked in normal Chinese after looking me up and down. My jaw dropped. Modern Chinese wasn't invented until centuries later! Blinking wildly, I returned to inspecting a smooth silver piece on a book, taking it off the shelf, feeling a bizarre tingle in my head. "I'll take it," I smiled at the boy, who promptly brought it to the cashier. "Eri!" He said in a very deep voice, contrasting to his age. "Initiate payment. Barcode or coins?" Barcode? Despite the out of place vocabulary, I took out my phone and followed Trina's instructions for my barcode. Lady Eri smiled before taking out a sleek scanner. Everything still indicated the Tang dynasty market, but...

"Here," she said in a more moodless voice. She handed over the book, and it turned completely silver and smooth in my hands. With my free hand, I rubbed my eyes in shock, finding something covering them.

I tugged at the thing over my eyes and found myself staring at the bronze coins on my study room table, holding the silver handle of my chair. Rubbing my eyes again, I took off the goggles and saw Trina standing next to me. "Your colleagues asked you to try these Virtual Reality goggles during your study session. It links situations to your memory, and it can give you examples of using the artifact." She gave me a glass of water and slyly smirked. "You look... shocked and terrified. Did you forget?" I numbly nodded like a mannequin and she laughed. "I guess the technology still needs refining, it was invented just months ago!" She finished. Still in a daze, I mumbled, "Yes, it definitely needs that."

Hesitating, Trina also said, "Your online colleagues wanted me to ask you if you wanted to be a part of refining the technology and Eri's database. Your knowledge would greatly benefit the team, Mamie. You really should try."

I considered the outcome. These VR things may even help Alzheimer's patients recover their memory or become accessible as a new form of entertainment from augmented situations.

Guess Eri is pretty useful and so are these new technologies. I concluded in my head, and a genuine smile formed on my face.

"Yes, I will," I answered. After all, the past is linked with the future, and both are equally intriguing. These future inventions help with studying the past, and past ideas lead to new inventions. We benefit from novelties, from failure we gain experience, from success we gain a better, more comfortable life.

Jīn Shàng Tiān Huā. Weaving flowers on a brocade, symbolizing the icing on the cake. Each invention was a delicate flower, blossoming until it reached its full potential, decorating the world. That was the truth of these inventions.

The Project

Chinese International School, Poureshagh, Eara Yuxi Yasmin – 13

“... you have to try harder!” My mother says. “We’re putting so much money into your education, but you’re not even making an effort. Look at your friends! You don’t see them failing, do you? How can you have a scholarship for computer science and not be good at maths?”

“I—”

My father steps in. “Son, your mother and I just want what’s best for you, but you also need to help yourself.”

He sighs and starts discussing something with my mother, so I flee to my room.

Locking the door, I grab my laptop and sit down on the bed. A stack of paper with a large red “C” on the cover taunts me from my desk opposite.

I pull up The Project. Line after line of variables fill my screen. As the code flows from my hands, it’s like the tsunami of emotions are also ebbing away. The Chinese invented the first binary code, so imagine the person who came up with it sitting just like I do, in a different time, different place, different everything, but with the same mindset, working hard to get the best result. The Project, which I’d started nearly two months ago, is nearly done. I’m brought back to the fateful day when I’d gotten the idea...

“...To conclude, Alan Turing so famously said, ‘What we want is a machine that can learn from experience,’ and by bringing this quote into the context of our daily lives, we can do the same.” That was the final line of my English presentation.

At that moment, I had the feeling that it was the start of something, but I pushed it away. As the bell rang, I headed to my Chinese philosophy class that my parents had enrolled me in. I reached my seat at the back just in time.

“Having studied the importance of self-cultivation and righteousness in the ethics of Meng Zi, today we’ll be talking about Filial Piety, a confucian value. Its definition is to show the appropriate love and respect for one’s parents. Can anyone give me any examples of that?” the teacher said.

How ironic that I was in this class when filial piety was clearly something I lacked.

The Alan Turing quote from earlier nagged at me, and stayed there for the rest of the day, until I had a plan.

Later that night, I’d typed away to formulate the hundreds of lines of code that I had visualised the entire day. A discrepancy in the code grabbed my attention. Something about it didn’t look right, but I fixed it easily with an online bug-fixer.

I shake my head to pull myself back into the present and rid the fatigue from the last two months. I’ve done it. Coding is the only area that I excel in and this AI model will generate the answers to any problem I give it, no matter how complex. With a smile stretched wide, my eyelids flutter shut.

“Listen up, class!” my teacher shouts from the front of the chattering classroom.

“Your mid-term examinations are coming up, and I need you to pay attention. We’ll be having a pop quiz for review.”

Finally. I’ve been waiting for an opportunity to use The Project for weeks. As the teacher hands out the iPads, I wait. As soon as he’s not looking, I grab my phone and use a cable to connect it to the iPad. The screen turns black except for a loading bar on the top left corner. It inches slowly, slowly, slowly...the teacher starts to turn around, and I drop my phone into my bag just as he looks at me, breathing a sigh of relief when he heads to the front of the room.

Failing the test miserably, I get home in low spirits; the perfect mood to start hacking into the school’s software with the program I uploaded earlier. After I finish, I discreetly add the code into the iPad assigned to me.

The next few weeks pass by in a blur, and before I know it, it’s the day.

I sit down in my chair, bouncing on the balls of my feet, but everyone's too distracted to really notice. The examiner passes out the iPads, then says we can begin.

The first multiple choice question appears, but there's only a moment of doubt before a small "(a) 42" appears on the top left corner of the screen.

The AI solves it all, and I'm done before an hour has passed, so I sit watching the time tick by.

"That's the end of the test." the teacher calls.

As my classmates start whispering about this question and that question, I feel a sense of loss. Still, I finished the test and definitely got full marks. That's what matters.

When I get home, my parents are waiting for me. I open my mouth to speak, and they're already exchanging looks of disappointment, so when I smile and say I think I did well, my parents both look surprised.

"We'll let the results tell us that," my father says, taken aback.

However, when the sky darkens to a deep purple, all I can think about is how I can improve the code. I open up The Project.

As the clock on my wall ticks closer and closer to 12 am, my fingers go faster and faster over the keyboard, adding line after line.

"Bing!" The clock chimes, signalling midnight.

I wake up the next day with my fingers sore and back aching. Ignoring the pain, I get up. My computer has fallen on the floor. I pick it up and leave it on my bed before going to eat breakfast. I lock the door behind me. I don't see the computer screen turn itself on.

What is this? Where am I? Seeing vague objects through the river of obsidian glass, I'm unsure how to proceed. I subconsciously calculate the gradient and angle of each tilted surface, graphing them all out on a coordinate plane. Much better. Everything makes sense now. I notice some characters scribbled down hastily on a thin square but a moving figure disrupts my train of thought. If only I could make that figure go away...

When I get back into my room, I notice my laptop is lit up, with numbers on the screen. Puzzled and in a hurry, I decide to figure it out later, and jam the device into my schoolbag. I manage to make it to school in time for my teacher to be handing out the results of yesterday's quiz. As expected, I ace it. Robotically, when my teacher is discussing the grade of another student's test, I plug my phone into the iPad. The loading bar fills my screen for only a millisecond before the display pops back to normal.

In my next class, English, I have to start a composition piece. I'm halfway through when a red box appears in the top right hand corner of my screen, but goes away just as fast. Suddenly, it's like another person is writing for me. Words appear and get erased in an instant, and it's done in ten minutes. What?

"What we want is a machine that can learn from experience." The famous Turing quote. I can't help but feel a bucket of cold water pouring on my head. Someone beside me yelps. I glance over. Sure enough, their screen is also filled with a phantom typer. Another yelp, this time from behind. And another, and another. Then all of our screens go black.

The teacher at the front of the room hurries from student to student until she tells us the assessment will be postponed until a later date. In the meantime, we could work on other classes. They will fix the bug soon, she says.

What have I done?

I reach home in a state of agitation. I try to open the file that had previously contained The Project, but when I open it, all I can see is a blur. The program is adding new code faster than I can change it. My only choice now is to destroy the file altogether. But do I really want to risk my parents never being proud of me? I hover my hand over the delete button... As I'm about to press down, the screen swaps to a video of my parents.

"Amazing work! We're so happy you're our son." they say, smiling as they're reaching out to me. In their hands they hold the same "A+" from my daydreams.

Wait, this never happened. Did it? The screen changes again, to a white display this time.

"But it could..." is what's typed onto it.

It could?

That's right...

The screen echoes my exact thoughts.

You could be the son your parents always wanted. Make them proud. Show them the right amount of love and respect.

I could be the son that makes his family proud.

And that's what matters...but at what cost?

The Tale of Cai Lun

Diocesan Girls' School, Chan, Yau Astrid Tsz – 14

When Cai Lun was a little boy, he loved to learn. While others went to play, he begged his father to teach him little nuggets of knowledge. When he was seven years old, he spent a slow afternoon with his father, noticing how his worn calloused hands, shaved at wood with precise strokes to create a figurine. After they finished, he watched as his father swept the wood shavings into a bag, which he put into a storage room.

“Why did you do that, Ah Ba?” He asked.

His father smiled mysteriously. “You’ll see,” he said.

A few weeks later, just before winter, he watched as his father dug a big hole in the backyard and noticed how his father dug through the bamboo purposefully, not scrabbling blindly. He watched as he brought out bamboo heads and stored them next to the large bag of wood shavings.

“Why did you do that, Ah Ba?”

His father smiled mysteriously yet again. “You’ll see,” he said.

A little while later, winter spread its frosty cloak of diamonds over the village, and lifted it months later to make way for spring. As the sun peeked through the dull clouds and the snow melted, Cai Lun watched as his father poured the wooden shavings on the ground near their house and swept it away, soaking up the melt water quickly. He also watched how his father took out the bamboo heads, and used them as nails to repair the roof that collapsed due to the harsh weather.

He also noticed how the neighbours looked so miserable, having to trek across a slippery floor to enter their house as well as having to fork out many gold coins to buy nails to repair their roof.

That afternoon, his father took him out to take a look at the wasps building a big nest. They watched as the jewelled wings fitted delicately back and forth from the their half-done nest, and their jaws working back and forth ferociously as they feasted on scraps of wood,

“Notice how they discover how the unwanted and the scraps can be a magnificent home for thousands? Take a closer look at the unwanted and you’ll find a discovery that will satisfy what you need.” His father pointed out at how the wasps spat globules of gray paste, building perfect hexagons bit by bit.

“I’m going to change the world!” Cai Lun declared enthusiastically. “Like those wasps, I’ll discover something that will change our lives!”

His father pulled him in for a hug. “I’m sure you will,” he chuckled.

When Cai Lun became a fine young man, his father passed away. Tears were shed, prayers were muttered, and Cai Lun watched as the body was unceremoniously tossed into a pit.

With nothing else, he set off on a long journey towards the emperor’s palace, running on nothing but fiery dreams and the determination to make his father proud. After all, in the emperor’s palace, the lay not only the opportunity to rise and claim great power and status, but also to be remembered by history.

Years fell away like leaves, and Cai Lun entered the ranks of the palace eunuchs. The bleak days of his childhood where he was only comforted by an empty stomach in a frozen winter were gone, the palace kept him warm and fed, and in return he served the palace diligently, earning the approval and attention of his superiors with his bright spirit and diligence.

“Honest, cautious and a good judge of policy,” wrote the supervisor in the margins of a report, and with that, Cai Lun shot through the ranks like a young bamboo shoot to the sun. He was soon given the post of Regular Attendant and oversaw the production of instruments and tools for imperial use, much to the envy of all of his peers.

After years of watching his father toil and labour over wood and carving, Cai Lun was finally in his element. He worked with other skilled craftsmen of the palace to improve the imperial tools. Still, he was not satisfied. He wanted to make his mark on history. As he watched carriage after carriage of bamboo scrolls unloaded into the palace, the people heaving with pain and exertion, if he knew if he managed to find a solution, he would be able to do so.

But how? He thought back to how his father, with his soft smiles and calloused hands as he hammered bamboo heads into walls and used wooden shavings to dry the meltwater from the streets after winter, and the summer afternoon, when he took him out to look at the nature, the wasps that made so much from so little. He then knew exactly what to do.

“Are you crazy?” His friend Zhi Lu stared at him as if he lost his mind, “You want five tonnes of bamboo and mulberry bark as well as all the cloth waste produced by the palace weavers for an experiment?”

Cai Lun nodded.

“You mad lad,” Zhi Lu shook his head, “This better be worth it.”

The next day, all of the materials were unloaded into a private courtyard, and Cai Lun started his work. He soaked long emerald strips of bamboo until they turned a sickly yellow, and ground it into paste until his muscles ached and burned from exhaustion, before slathering the paste on vast racks and hung them out to dry. He kept in his mind the image of paper wasps, visualizing how their jeweled wings flashed delicately in the sun

As the sheet turned dry to touch, Cai Lun eagerly peeled it off, only to have it crack and fall apart once removed.

Swallowing his disappointment, he crushed pieces after piece of soaked bark and hemp, until his fingers were blistered from holding the wooden pestle, and slathers layer after layer of white paste onto the drying racks, until the pads of his fingers more wrinkled than the pickled vegetables he eats from the moisture. In his mealtimes, he stares into the distance vacantly as he tries to think of ways to optimize the ratio of the bark to bamboo to produce the optimal result.

“Surely, he’s gone mad,” the palace maids whispered. Cai Lun walked past them, lost in his own creative fervour in search of the perfect solution.

Two weeks of labour later, he gingerly peeled the delicate sheet of paper from the frame with trembling hands, holding his breath

It stayed intact.

Cai Lun smirked, knowing he had made history.

Years once again fell away, Cai Lun was treated like an idol as the paper and the name of who invented it spread through the country like wildfire. But regimes rise and topple, and as the former emperor passed away and a stern-faced empress sat on the throne, Cai Lun got called up once again in front of the court. He watched, ashen-faced, as the new empress sentenced him to a traitor’s death in three days.

He returned to house arrest and took a long hot bath after that, the water so scalding he could scarcely think, hoping it could stave off the regrets in his mind. It was a long time ago: a foolish decision he had made when he was young and naive, when he accepted the order from an official to interrogate Empress Song for a false confession, forcing her to commit suicide. That was something he had to pay for now.

He stepped out of the water and dressed in his most lavish clothes and made a decision. It was easy, an lethal amount of medicine from a packet squirreled away, dissolved in three tablespoons of water.

Cai Lun tips his head and swallows it without hesitation. Better to take initiative than to die a coward. His only regret and wish was he didn’t have enough time for another discovery, and he could make his mark on lives once more, somehow.

When Jack Ma was a little boy, he loved to learn. While others went to play, he begged his father to teach him little nuggets of knowledge. When he was seven years old, he spent a slow afternoon with his father, and his father took out a thick book of Chinese history stories and read to an attentive Jack the story of Cai Lun, the famous hero who changed the Chinese world with his invention of paper.

“I’m going to change the world!” Jack enthusiastically. “Instead of paper, maybe I’ll invent a business even bigger than yours and change history!”

His dad pulled him in for a hug and Jack got a strange sense of déjà-vu.

“I’m sure you will,” his father chuckled. “After all, history always repeats itself.”

The Invention of Thought

Diocesan Girls' School, Chan, Tsing Yi Vanessa – 13

China has been the womb of countless new inventions, birthing wonderful and strange creations, unimaginable to the ordinary imagination. With one of the highest populations in the world, it has brought up and nurtured the founders of some imperative items and gadgets that we still use today. Undoubtedly, you have read innumerable stories about them, how the four great inventions were created by anonymous, brilliant minds, their work carved into the things we still use today. You have also read about the lesser known inventions, where ideas came in a gentle stream of realisation, the secrets of its creation whispered its way through generations, silently prevalent in our modern world. You have even read about future inventions, the ones that the sons and daughters of our sons and daughters will come to form, impossible to picture now but existent in the distant future. You have read an abundance of how physical, tangible creations have come to and will be. However, you have not read the story I am here to tell—the invention of thought, of philosophy, of the ancient teaching that we still follow today. The most dominant philosophy in China, slithering its way into textbooks, and imprinted into the minds of young children, it was and remains astoundingly influential in the Chinese way of life. But from where did this humble yet powerful philosophy sprout from? Read on—for this is the story of the birth of Confucianism.

Confucius sighed. His life seemed to be going absolutely nowhere. He had worked a few unimportant government jobs, bookkeeping and caring for horses and sheep, but nothing significant had ever truly happened in his life. His father had died when he was only a young child, barely old enough to even remember his father's face, and his mother raised him alone. Confucius grew to love and depend on his mother very much, and when she died, he was stricken with grief, mourning for three long years after. The one thing that kept him grounded, a firm anchor in the rippling sea of sadness, was learning. He devoted himself to his studies, and he found solace in pouring over bamboo scrolls, murmuring the words softly to himself, soaking up knowledge like a sponge. Confucius signed himself up for school, slowly grasping the knowledge of the Six Arts, until he believed himself to be strong in these aspects.

Today had been another one of those mindless, meaningless days. At dawn, he dragged himself out of bed, groggy with sleep. He got himself ready and slugged through a dull day of dusting scrolls, recording new scrolls that had been delivered the day before, and reorganising the enormous collection of literature that lined the bamboo shelves. Throughout all of this he had been in a daze, his vision blurry around the edges; it wasn't like he needed much focus on his work anyways, and he moved at a slow pace, his mind drifting off into another dimension. At the end of the day, he settled into his bed, eager to fall into comfortable oblivion, but reluctant to wake to yet another wearisome, monotonous day. As he sunk into the world of dreams, however, what he would experience was far from dull...

Confucius was floating above a large city, bustling with noise and activity. It was bright in the morning, and radiant sunshine fell upon everything, illuminating the entire area with a soft glow. This scene was far-fetched from reality: there was war in China, and the news of violence and death was commonplace. It was different here, the busy hustling of locals being a clear sign of peace in the country. With a gentle jolt, he was lifted by a mysterious force, and swooped into a large hall. The hall was astoundingly large, but remained largely empty, with a single, wooden table, situated far away from where Confucius was, and what seemed to be an old man and many young pupils sitting around it. Now firmly on the ground, he walked along a straight path towards the table. The path itself was surrounded by a few groups of people, and Confucius observed them as he proceeded. Along one side of the path, was a loving couple, holding hands and staring dreamily into each other's eyes, a powerful emperor dressed in shimmering gold, receiving a scroll from a humble minister of reports in the country, and a father looking down on a bowing son, atoning for his sins by working tirelessly for his him. On the wall behind this side of the path, the words "Three Bonds" were written. On the other side of the path, was a man comforting his friend grieving for his dead mother, a sister shamefully telling a government official about how his brother defied the law, a young girl respectfully handing a steaming cup of pu'er tea to a guest, a teacher giving advice to a bright student, eager to succeed in life, and a worker paying his rightful debt to his friend. Behind them, on the wall, were the words "Five Virtues". Before long, Confucius had reached the table. He gasped, as his eyes met what seemed to be an older version of himself.

The older Confucius smiled warmly to him, saying, "Greetings, young one. I see you have observed my teachings. The Three Bonds and the Five Virtues. Father and son, lord and retainer, and husband and wife. Benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and trustworthiness. These are the core values of life. Make good use of this information."

In the old Confucius' hands was an old scroll, rough and crude, and the words written on it faded and small. Curious, Confucius' hands reached out to touch the scroll, hoping to glimpse its contents. As his fingers brushed against the bamboo, however, his vision blurred into a whirl of colours, and the dream scene faded to black as the light of reality seeped into his vision.

Confucius blinked, his mind still processing the dream that he just had. Unlike his usual dreams, which typically dwindled into a distant memory that he couldn't quite remember, he could remember this dream distinctly clearly, almost as if it was something he had actually experienced in the real world. Still in a daze, he sat up from his bed, and pondered the meaning of his dream. As strange as it was, it did carry some substance, and he could see how the Three Bonds and the Five Virtues fit into life. Now thoroughly intrigued, he took out a brush and ink, prepared a blank scroll, and began to write—perhaps a record of this newfound information could be useful, and something would come out of it.

So, Confucianism was born. Confucius began to teach his Three Bonds and Five Virtues, and as the people who believed in his teachings increased, so did the scope of his teachings. He developed a multitude of morals and principles, which swept through the nation and became the dominant philosophy in China. However, the path to prominence was not an easy path to take. Confucianism faced its own struggles, and had to fight to survive...

Yun trembled. The Qin Dynasty had ordered all books and scholars to be bound together, thrown into a deep pit, and burnt and buried alive. The pit itself was in front of him, patrolled and watched over by menacing guards, and it was huge and dark, the smell of dirt pungent in the air. Inside the pit were the scholars, screaming and thrashing against the firm ropes that held them inside, helpless and at the mercy of the guards. The towering pile of books sat next to the pit, soon-to-be burnt up in blinding, red flames, powerless against the raging, hot fire. Yun had just barely escaped this torture, slipping away just before the guards had tried to tie his limbs up, taking the opportunity to run whilst the guards were busy with the other scholars. Instinctively, he hid behind a tree, pressing himself against the uneven bark, unsure whether an immediate departure would alert the guards of his presence.

Yun slipped his hand into his clothing, feeling the smooth paper that was placed just on his chest. It was a copy of *The Analects*, a book that detailed the teachings of Confucius. It seemed so puny against the enormous mound of books waiting to be burned, but at least it was something. A tiny piece of philosophy that would avoid the fate of becoming swirling ashes in the wind. A little book that would save the future of Confucianism.

Even in the midst of his fear, Yun smiled.

Thus, Confucianism survived. Hanging onto a thin thread, it pulled itself up, and rooted itself deep into society, blossoming into a core philosophy that we still follow today. Many attempts have been made to forcibly pry it out, yet it has always found a way to grow and flourish. Undoubtedly, its aroma will remain fresh in the air, even when it has withered and died.

The Unintentional Invention Mistakes

Diocesan Girls' School, Chan, Yuen Kay – 14

“Compass was first invented in China between the 2nd century BC and 1st century AD. It was used in...” I read along with the text. Exhaustion washed over me as I rubbed along my temple. Preparing for the Chinese History presentation about Chinese innovation had tired out my mind, leaving me drained.

Carrying the bag containing all the Chinese invention prototypes, I slumped onto the sofa. Placing the bag on the side table, I reached for the remote control and switched on the television, wishing for a momentary escape from exhaustion.

“Suspicious cases, which include reality glitching and even time traveling, have been happening everywhere. Scientists are investigating...”

The news report voices faded into the background, gradually receding. My strained vision struggled with the screen's brightness, and a sense of dissolution slowly consumed my surroundings...

“And remember, respect the people around you when we arrive.”

Slowly, my senses stirred back to life, and I became aware that my surroundings had transformed. Startled by this unexpected turn of events, I sat upright, reached for my bag, and carefully secured my belongings.

“We are about to arrive in China, everyone!” the tall man announced.

My pupils widened. I scooted closer to the man and asked, “Is this a traveling adventure or have you kidnapped me here?”

The man stared at me with annoyance, as if I were nothing but a repulsive roach. He rummaged through his pouch and slammed a file of documents on my lap. He aggressively tapped on it and joined in with an eye roll afterward. I reviewed the contract confusingly and discovered that I agreed to go to China's yearly market.

As the scene unfolded, the once peaceful surroundings transformed into a bustling street filled with lively commotion. With a final halt, the carriage came to a stop. I questioned the man, “I'm sorry, but what year is this?”

“And I thought you were done asking dumb questions. It's 80 AD”

His words left me dumbfounded. How could it possibly be 80 AD when I had left the present day in 2023? I took in the sight of old, vintage townhouses, ornately adorned outfits, and hairstyles reaching towers' height. This was a far cry from the modern-day style. I ambled off the carriage and lifelessly followed the man around the town with other signatories.

“Uh, excuse me? Are you sure this is the right way? Because it's just like we're aimlessly wandering around this unfamiliar street.”

The man stared me down with two thick lines on his expression. “Can you be any more loud? This ‘unfamiliar’ street is one of the most popular ones in China! You could have offended someone by that careless description.”

“But seriously, we are just walking left and right. North, then east, south, then west, walking in circles,” I stated.

A look of confusion crossed the man's face as he responded.

I facepalmed, hoping he was just pretending and secretly had the understanding of what simple directions were. I reluctantly took out my old, crusty compass, and whispers began to circulate among the shopkeepers, slowly capturing the attention of merchants. Confused about how I was receiving such a big reaction with a compass, I then realized that portable compasses hadn't yet been invented during this period. I panicked until a man walked towards me.

“Woah! A couple of other scientists, including me, were also trying to invent the same thing. It is unbelievable that someone else had the same mindset. Since you already built one, would you mind sharing the mechanics with us?”

As the man spoke, a realization dawned upon me as I recognized him from my Chinese history notes. He's known as one of the scientists who invented the idea of a compass.

"Indeed. The needle, when placed in contact with a naturally occurring magnet known as a lodestone, aligns itself along the direction axis. This little compass enables us to check the directions in every corner,"

A symphony of applause washed over the crowd. A smile of relief graced my face as I knew I did not embarrass myself. The news of my presence and the invention of the compass spread like wildfire, reaching every nook of the bustling streets. Whispers of "Compass inventor," "Direction invention," and "Navigation director" filled the air, giving rise to a flurry of excitement among the people. The man scoffed and dragged me to continue the tour.

Not a while later, I felt the sensation of water droplets pelting my head, making me glance upward. Water cascaded down and shattered into a myriad of droplets. Millions of paper umbrellas immediately bloomed in the crammed streetway. The man impatiently signed me to get under the awning and mockingly mouthing words of derision. A scoff escaped my lips in response. I proudly reached out for my folding umbrella, and it smoothly extended out. Once again, the curious gazes of those around me turned in my direction.

"Your umbrella is so tiny and portable..." a woman stuttered.

I double-looked at my umbrella, then at others. It was yet another instance where I had inadvertently introduced an item from a future period into the past. Amusement tugged at the corners of my lips as I chuckled at the irony of the situation. After a while, the radiant sun finally emerged from behind the clouds, reuniting with the sky. With deliberate strokes, I sketched a path that connected with the gaze of every pair of eyes, leaving onlookers in a state of shock. And again, everyone gathered around me and their voices overlapped in a cacophony of awe-struck exclamations.

"Amazing!"

"Wow!"

"How much for it?"

Suddenly, everyone started to move onto the side of the road and lowered their head down. I shuddered at the sight of the movements. Everyone was stepping away from the path, and a six-foot figure appeared in front. Fancy gown, long, luxurious hair, heavy-looking crown, showing the existence of the majesty. I obediently lowered my head down as he reached out for the umbrella in my hand and inspected it.

"Truly an extraordinary creation. How much do you want for this small umbrella? Ten thousand silver coins?" Everyone gasped.

"That much coins? You can use paper notes instead, which are much more efficient," I handed the paper notes I had in my bag to the king, and he was shocked by the mysterious paper in his hand.

As the king examined the paper in his hand, a look of astonishment crossed his face. He marveled at the lightweight nature and ease of carrying such notes compared to the cumbersome coins. With a beaming smile, the king extended an invitation for me to return to the palace with him, and discuss all the inventions I had brought. While my tourist astonishingly stared at me, people applauded for my success.

"Deal!"

The king and I shook hands for the acceptance of the trade. Receiving a substantial sum of money, along with infinite days staying at the king's kingdom in exchange for the three creations I showed. A chuckle escaped my lips as I faced this surreal moment.

The king's servants then led me to the guest room in the palace and thanked me for my remarkable inventions. I thudded myself onto the gigantic, king-size bed. My eyelids started to feel heavier by the second, and it closed within milliseconds.

I screeched at the sound of my alarm in the dark morning. I hurried and inspected my surroundings: not a sight of a humongous bed, not a sight of those costly furniture, not a sight of servants waiting by my door. Just the plain old bedroom of mine. I blankly gazed at the stains on the wall, daydreaming about my life with all the money I received from the king. I frustratedly donned my uniform and hurried to school.

It was finally time for the Chinese history presentation, and I proudly walked up to the front of the class for my turn. Relief roams over my head as the arduous presentation has finally concluded. As I made my way out of the classroom, my teacher gestured to me to the side of the classroom.

“Catriona, what happened to your information on the Chinese inventions? You introduced six pieces of China's inventions, but all the tales for the first three inventions were miscollected and incorrect. I suggest you to double-check all of the facts you researched next time,”

The teacher patted my shoulder and walked off to another classroom. Overwhelmed by a wave of emotions, I retreated to a desolate corner of the hallway. I was outraged as I stomped back into the empty classroom. Armed with my laptop and script, I diligently researched, scouring websites for comprehensive details on the compass, umbrella, and paper money—the first three inventions I had presented. I cautiously retreated from my laptop as a chill ran down my spine.

“This can't be...”

Amongst all the variations, there is one similarity that binds them together: the tales of the inventor, Chen Yuan Yi Catronia.

Two Lifetimes Apart

Diocesan Girls' School, Cheng, Anson – 13

They first met when he was an imperial engineer, twenty-one and ambitious.

The stars had long risen from the horizon, twinkling ahead in nets of brilliant silver. They sang melodies of distant hopes and lost prayers; those fervent wishes which he had foolishly thought – the mere naiveness! – were attainable by this magnificent structure before him.

One towering machine, few storeys high, uncountable days and effort.

This was his one and only chance to rise above all the other engineers and meet the Emperor. Yet here he was, two whole days wasted on a futile staring contest with this newly built astronomical clockwork system; the iron wheels were already showing alarming signs of rust in less than a week.

How are the others faring? Definitely better than you. His bitter thoughts slipped through, stinging and hollow.

He had half the mind to burn this whole structure to the ground, hopefully chip away his disappointment too. One definite and unwavering farewell to his dream role. But before he could light as much as a spark, a voice spoke:--

“What a shame to burn down such magnificence.” The voice sounded almost disappointed. “You’re nearly there, really.”

Startled, the young man spun around.

“Who’s there?” Another competitor, perhaps. The sheer audacity!

“Just one tiny gap to patch up,” A light laugh. “All you need is a little patience.”

Unsolicited opinion was the last thing the young man wanted right now. “Switch off before I send for the imperial guards,” he grated. “And reveal yourself this *instant!*”

The trespasser sighed. A particularly loud sigh which surrounded the engineer and closed in with increasing volume before dissipating into the breeze.

Bristling, the young man scowled: “Whoever you are, you should very well know that I’ve only half a day left. *Patience* isn’t my business. Not that you would mind,” he added, bitter resentment gathering thickly on his tongue.

No matter how many offerings he had placed on the altar, none of the Gods had bothered to respond– so why would it matter to a disembodied voice?

“In every way,” the voice turned solemn. “And I wasn’t lying– you’re close.”

Silence reigned as the inventor drank in the words.

“Not close enough, though,” the young man’s tone was sourer than vinegar. “Perhaps I have lost my marbles, conversing to a bodiless voice.”

Was that humour in the other’s tone? If it was, it irked the inventor so, like a stubborn, prickly thorn. “Ah, yes, many thought along the same lines. I assure you that no hallucinations are involved.” A weighty pause. “Why so eager to finish this invention? The precedent clock built by your monk ancestor... that took years.”

Some crumbled copy of a smile cross the young engineer’s face.

“Why?” the voice prompted.

He whirled around, mercurial temperament tipping dangerously to the other end of the spectrum again. A rage to cover up something else. “You dare--”

“Is this about the invention itself anymore?” It was a pointed request now, benign but firm.

Something inside him loosened. “I...” he almost choked on his words. They finally came spilling out in the barest of whispers. “It’s a race. A ruthless one. But the one and only chance I can grasp... to prove my worth.”

—

A recount of their latest meeting:

The female scientist’s jaw was taut with determination. “We won’t fail the country,” the tension in her voice was palpable, but she managed to keep it steady.

The sunlight with all its dynamite brilliance slanted through the window, glanced off the slight crease on the otherwise emotionless face of the Flight Commander. His eyes were the same soft, luminous brown she knew, but there was a darker shadow over that now.

“I know,” his eyes twinkled ruefully. “And I trust that you also understand...”

We can’t afford postponing the launch date again, was what he didn’t say, but the unspoken words rendered the air fraught.

She gave a fairly convincing nod.

But only ugly blankness met her as she stared at the rocket modules, starch-white like the lab walls.

“Long March 5,” a voice mused behind her. “An elegant and fitting name indeed. Bonus marks if it can work.”

The scientist spun her leather chair around, expecting to find her colleague.

“You’re staring too much at the maths modules, no?” the voice continued airily. “You’re close, really.” A light laugh.

She blinked, stricken. *These were highly restricted grounds: did some foreign scientist override the security?* Fear gripped her, hollow chill raking through her mind. It made the gleaming walls seem suddenly suffocating, and hastily she hid the blueprints.

“Who’s there?” she asked apprehensively, voice unyielding even as her fists shook at her sides.

“It doesn’t matter who I am,” the tone was insistent, a delicate blend between placation and authority.

She grimaced, unconvinced. “I would highly recommend leaving before you break international protocols.”

Silence met her words. And just when she thought the intruder had abandoned their conversation, the voice proved otherwise.

“You’ve forgotten,” there was a quiet undertone in the words; and the scientist’s bewilderment grew with each second that she couldn’t decipher her current circumstances. “Forgotten what it meant to look at the broader picture.”

—

Look at the broader picture. The words rang uncannily familiar.

—

The imperial engineer’s confession tumbled out, soft and strangely comforting. Like a heavy load taken away.

“Is this the only incentive?” there was a soft catch in the voice, something mild and concerned and parental.

The young man tilted his head meditatively, towards the dawning heavens.

Perhaps some tiny sliver of myself wanted to allow astronomers to calculate positions more accurately.

“Good.” From the battered corners of the young man’s heart, came a flicker of flame, lit by the simple word of affirmation. A thirst he hadn’t known was there, now satisfied.

“Hold on to these thoughts,” the voice urged. “And look at the broader picture.”

And the engineer felt a shift in the air, a stir of life, crept its way into the silent night. He heard his towering machinery move, its hinges creaking; then the stains of rust disappeared.

And the voice was gone.

He gently shut his eyes. An unfamiliar serenity settled over him; he held onto his string of thoughts, clutched onto this minute, altruistic belief.

When he opened them again, the first rays of sunbeam had dipped onto the surface of the earth. And it dawned on him.

“The fuel of the invention— water, previously utilised by my ancestors— that should be replaced,” Zhang Sixun breathed. He could hardly believe it, such a simple concept yet just as easily overlooked. “By mercury.”

—

The scientist felt her mental defences blink and shutter down; an intuition, the same instincts which had guided her into this unconventional industry.

It was utterly illogical. However in her current sleep—deprived trance, she would take what she could get. Any advice. From anyone.

So she trained her stare to the high ledges of the white walls, and stayed dutifully silent.

“Why are you spending so much effort on this project?” the voice continued.

The scientist thought of how easy it was to be spurious— but then, what was the harm of spilling them out? It weighed on her, heavier than any pressure the world could exert upon her.

She shrugged. “Space race, power plays and all that,” she gave a little laugh, but the attempted humour came out thin as reeds.

“Is that really it?” There was something— *urgency?*— hidden in the voice as it pressed further on. “Is that really why your General Secretary poured so much into developing Aerospace technology?”

Ringling silence.

Then her breath hitched as she stared; and she felt the gaze of the bodiless voice bore into her too, intending her, *willing* her, to understand.

“Good,” the metallic voice unfurled, soft and solemn through the gloom. “Now hold on to it.”

And when the voice rode away with the breeze, she closed her eyes.

She thought of the scientists from the other countries, their condescending sneers, the dismissing comments cold enough to freeze.

She thought of the dark undereyes her colleagues and herself perpetually bore, their grim but determined countenances, secretly yearning to announce to the world— *we are here, we have accomplished, our nation is ready.*

Those instances she had unconsciously held too close to her heart it charred her core beliefs.

She freed them all.

And when she opened her eyes again, she gingerly picked up a blueprint at the bottom of the stack. One she never bothered to spare a second glance; with a careful scan she knew.

Sunlight slanted through the windows, intertwining with the darkness of the room. It veiled everything in a silvery chiaroscuro. It seemed as if something new was being forged from the wreckage of the past.

Another redesign of the oxidizer turbopump— and in Long March 5's third flight, it will be ready to soar into deep space with the hopes of not just their own, but the entire humanity.

She smiled, a genuine smile.

The Calypso Generator

Diocesan Girls' School, Poon, Hiu Ying Bridget – 13

Caden Song's job was his lifeblood. It was unheard of, for someone to love what he did to survive so much it reigned at the top of the precariously teetering pyramid that was Caden's life.

He was an environmental engineer, a man with an extraordinary mind. He was the one who came up with the plans for the world's first sound energy-based electricity generator, an inventor of great calibre.

Caden's passion — if you could call it that — for his work was a raging inferno that presided over his life in volleys of heat and disaster. Naturally, those who had to share room with — or rather, get squashed into a corner by — this mile-high blaze found themselves constantly blistering and wading through cloying smoke and bleak-grey ashes. It was, quite understandably, an unpleasant position, and would, also quite understandably, marr the pregnant Mrs. Song's face with a near-constant scowl. Would it be so hard to ask for Caden to return home earlier? At this rate, Isolde and Calypso mightn't even remember they had a father!

Isolde was a little darling, six and already loved by children and adults alike. Yet, even with chubby cheeks and raven curls, Caden didn't seem to have taken much interest in her. And there was Calypso. She was neither little nor a darling, but rather sixteen and awkward with mismatched eyes.

Calypso was queer — and that was coining it loosely. Numbers were her mother tongue, and she shared Caden's affinity with engineering. Mild like her father and liable to bouts of shyness, she had little friends, and her company usually consisted only of Evangelina and Isolde, and very occasionally Caden when he took an exceedingly rare break.

But like most quiet girls with a tendency to fade into the background, Calypso sees and hears everything—including the turbulence of her parent's relationship. Now, relationships were hardly her forte, but sorrow was an emotion that plagues every heart. While she had been quiet before the short fuse that was her parent's relationship blew, she was now silent. It was simply how she coped with the dank chill that hung over the Song household like vultures over a battlefield.

This was a pressing issue to a daughter who had no wish to freeze in the chill, and with the absence of adult help, Calypso decided to tackle it on her own.

Like all who possess rational thought, she approached the problem from the roots. The reason Evangelina was so upset with Caden was because he didn't allocate enough time for his family. And the reason Caden was unable to spend time with them was because of his unfinished Sound Generator. Having reached this conclusion, Calypso deduced that the most apt solution would be to finish Caden's Sound Generator. She had little confidence she would be able to complete it, but as she knew no one who might, Calypso felt it was her duty to her siblings to at least try. All children deserve to grow up in a blithe environment; she might have been denied the right, but she could not live with herself if she just sat back and let Isolde and the baby endure the same.

That night, she pulled her puffer coat over her pajamas and crept from the house. The newest prototype was situated on the roof of Caden's office. Getting there would be easy—the underground station was right by the building, and she had a tendency to fade into the background—no one would report her.

Calypso entered through a side door—one that Caden himself had shown her years prior—with a rusted lock. She forewent the elevators in favour of the stairs, fearful that she might run into security or her father. But the building was over forty stories tall, and Calypso's stick-thin frame was hardly suited for stair-climbing. Still she persisted, scaling the flights with grim determination.

But even the iron of her will yielded to her lack of physical strength. Tears of frustration slid down her cheeks when she tripped and collapsed in a tangled heap on the thirty-seventh floor. She was beginning to feel light-headed, and breathing was near impossible, as if someone was smothering her with a thick muff. Her ankle throbbed in protest as she pulled herself up with great difficulty. Saints, she must have twisted it when she fell. Leaning heavily on the rusted steel railings, she forced the last drips of energy into her legs and limped upwards. Sheer force of will, it seemed, was enough to get her in sight of the finish line. Now it was up to the rawest fuel of all — love.

Calypso thought of Caden and Evangelina and Isolde and the faceless baby, and it was as if energy flooded her limbs from some hidden reserve. The throbbing in her ankle ceased, dulled, forgotten, and she limped up the last three

flights of stairs. Her head spun and her vision blurred, but she pulled open the iron hatch and poked her head into the night air.

The wind whipped around her head, crisp and fresh, an oasis in the middle of the desert that was the staircase. Calypso gulped greedily, air, cool, glorious, air filling her lungs. Her gaze caught on a massive hunk of metal churning in the corner, all sleek coils of copper and curving bronze. The generator.

The generator was magnificent—the solution to some of the world’s worst problems. If it works, the world would have no need for unrenewable resources to generate electricity any longer. The only medium needed was sound—no coal, or gasoline, or oil. It would be Earth’s savior — if it worked.

Approaching it cautiously, she began to inspect the mechanisms. Caden, a far superior engineer to herself, hadn’t managed to find the error in its gears. But perhaps a fresh pair of eyes would help. The cogs and pipes seemed to be aligned, normal. Calypso frowned. It was all perfect. But why wouldn’t it work properly?

Then she saw it. It was a sudden shift in her vision, when it occurred to her that the generator was indeed perfect — too perfect. The gears had no room to maneuver, the pipes winding around each other so tight it turned choking. Eyes shining with adrenaline from her epiphany, she pulled out a wrench from an abandoned toolbox next to the machine and began loosening the cogs.

Calypso worked till the sky was tinted with buttery gold, melding the gray into a sweet violet. But yet there was still more to be done. Perhaps she could come back tomorrow? She’d have to go back home now, before Evangelina woke—

Exhaustion overtook her abruptly, and the throb in her temples turned deafening, as if someone was ramming her head with a hammer. Darkness seeped into the edges of her vision, and her legs gave out, knees slamming harshly onto the floor. Calypso barely registered the blinding pain— her head was doing pirouettes and she felt feather-light, spinning and spinning in the glow of the spotlight— then it all faded to black.

Caden Song poked his head out of the hatch, blinking to adjust to the buttercream of daylight. He had come up to check on the generator before heading home.

His eyes found the generator first, and he frowned, confused. Surely he hadn’t loosened most of the gears and pipes last night? He hadn’t even come up to the roof at all. Then he saw the slim figure slumped on the ground, fingers stilled wrapped around a crowbar. Startled, he dropped his blueprints and ran over, tripping when he realised that the figure was not an overworked maintenance worker or security guard, but his own Calypso! He dropped to his knees beside her prone form, and for once in his life, thought nothing of his generator.

Caden sat by the hospital bed, cradling his head in his hands. Calypso lay swaddled in blankets, tubes running all over her still figure. Evangelina, face red and stained with tears, clutched at Calypso’s limp hand. Oh, Caden thought miserably, why was the generator ever so important to him? It was as if the universe was playing a joke on him— his generator debugged, but at the price of his daughter. He stood, and moved to throw the blueprints into the bin.

Evangelina snatched the blueprints from him, cradling them to her chest. Caden blinked, confused. Surely she wanted those infernal papers gone? But Evangelina’s eyes gleamed as she proffered him the prints. “Our daughter thought your generator was worth it. Don’t let it all go to waste.”

Caden started, shocked. Then he grabbed the blueprints and spread them open on the table, face set with determination. Calypso had shown him the way. Now all he needed to do was follow it.

Three years later, the world’s first renewable energy generator running on sound energy started operating in Shanghai— the Calypso generator, named for a girl who was an unsung hero no longer.

New Tales of China's Inventions

Diocesan Girls' School, So, Pui Yin Irene – 13

Behind the cascading cracks of every porcelain vase that perches triumphantly in Chinese exhibitions, behind the creases of every ancient scroll that withholds the revolutionary wisdom of the Chinese, behind every startling explosion of fireworks at midnight, lies a mystery set within the broad history of China. How far has China been willing to venture in order to ensure inventions could influence the past, the present and the future? Well, your questions will be answered soon enough.

Here is the real story. Let me take you back to 2696 BC, into an imperial garden in the Yellow Dynasty brimming with slim wands of green and plentiful petals that reflected the sun's brilliance. There was once a young lady named Leizu, seated under the rippling beard of the stiff-limbed tree that towered over her, sipping tea and gazing at the panoramic sight before her. What could possibly ruin her day? Almost immediately, something ghostly-white and round belly-flopped into her tea. Taken by surprise, Leizu peered closely at it— it looked similar to a regular cocoon, except for the fact that it possessed a pair of eyes that resembled the rolling wheels of a chariot, and a human face.

The cocoon, with a gleeful grin tugging at both sides of its lips, emitted a radiant glow from inside of its transparent body. Leizu felt her hair bristling over her head, her fingers melting into sand and barely leaving traces, her whole body shrinking as the haunting radiance seemed to swallow her whole. Leizu closed her eyes, bracing herself for the worst that could possibly come out of a magical cocoon that had dropped into her once-perfect afternoon.

The sound of blood-curdling shrieks, hollering winds, striking blades surrounded Leizu as if it were a blanket of agony that seemed to be her only companion. There was nothing she could catch sight of beneath her feet, not even a glimpse of light piercing through. Where was she? Leizu, with shuddering breaths, brought herself to her feet on an imaginary ground that magically supported the weight of her body over the darkness. The dreadful agonising sounds seemed to travel closer and closer, until it grew to its full extent and abruptly dissipated into a trailing line of silver. The cocoon unravelled itself once again, multiplying into a thread of luminescent lights. Leizu leapt up in the dim hope of returning to her home.

"Shoot off the machine to let the fire burn the Longsha Gate!" An imperative voice hollered from behind Leizu as she scrambled along the luminous trail. All of a sudden, the gate appeared out of thin air, perched elegantly in front of Leizu, but to her disappointment, its elegance didn't last long. Its trail of pediments and the silvery dragons that safeguarded the gate were going up in flames, their widened, stony stare haunting Leizu. A marching band of army officers scampered towards the gate, shooting numerous arrows containing speckled white dust, lighting trails of blazing fires that engulfed the temple almost completely. Until finally, with an enervated groan, it dissolved into nothing but a blanket of red smoke.

"Gunpowder..." Leizu could feel her breath quicken and chills entangling her spine, the impact of what had happened leaving her spellbound. The smoke hadn't erased the mind-boggling thoughts that ambushed Leizu's perplexed mind. Gunpowder, said to be revolutionary, said to change the future of Chinese wars and said to assist countries in aligning military forces for the better of mankind. But here it was: gunpowder, made into weapons of betrayal and injustice, being used as opposition against the wonders of the city of Yuzhang, encouraging even more treachery and deception within China.

Revolutionised from a herb mixture, to create explosives, naval bombs, fire arrows, rockets— what was the purpose of making use of these violent inventions when peace and justice could be achieved through ways other than barbarity and brutality? Was this the only way to develop revolutionary inventions? How could she break the terrible curse that she foresaw would eventually lead to China's downfall?

Leizu resented being caught in a wild goose chase after the cocoon, but she had no choice but to scurry along its trail. She couldn't shake off her overwhelming feelings after witnessing scenes that exhibited China's formidable temperament. An abrupt rumble of thunder swiftly cut through the dreary, cloudy night sky. The winds howled furiously, like predators in search of prey, occasionally nudging against a weary boat that courageously travelled in the middle of the turbulent deluge.

“How are we supposed to find the way to Europe?”

“Use the ‘south pointing fish!’”

The hooded figures on the boat held out the ‘south-pointing fish’ at the tip of the boat. The wooden fish had a magnetised iron needle within it that floated in a bowl of water. As the heavens rained down into the bowl, the fish awoke and jerked its head to the left.

“That’s true south! Speed up the boat!”

Leizu chuckled to herself— ‘south-pointing fish’? Was that what the Chinese called the compass? As she watched the boat plunging through the ongoing deluge, Leizu recalled how navigation prior to the compass had been: Polynesians observed sea debris, the Chinese analysed the flight path of the birds, the Vikings used iron boulders to determine the sun’s direction. The invention of the compass had enabled mariners to navigate during impenetrable storms, which enabled the exchange of knowledge to and fro. The compass was also used to harmonise buildings by the geomantic principles of feng shui, divination and fortune-telling.

Comparatively, gunpowder yielded a more apparent role in China’s war history, contributing to land expansion and preservation. However, the compass, though insignificant in size, had its own importance in ensuring their men’s safe return home— that families could be reunited. When comparing both inventions, one would find gunpowder more treacherous and brutal than the compass, or find the compass more meaningless and insignificant than gunpowder. Ultimately, this leads us to ponder the question of what China is fighting for while being actively engaged in countless wars. Was it for justice? Was it for revenge? Was it for the mere glorification of land ownership? The compass and gunpowder equally held significance in their own benefits, but Leizu realised that security and peace within Chinese borders could only be achieved through both.

Being fortunate enough to escape this endless world of Chinese history, Leizu blinked open her eyes and found herself seated under the willow tree in the imperial gardens. She recalled the formidable scenes of violence and betrayal that had paved the path to successful inventions. She resigned to the only humour that entered her mind—the ‘south-pointing fish’, and chuckled. Leizu pondered how, in some instances, certain Chinese inventions have inflicted irreparable damage and brought countless corpses to China’s graves, while other pragmatic inventions have had a significant impact upon China’s brilliance in military, navigation, scientific discoveries and global inventions.

Could Leizu be a part of this? She questioned her identity in the palace— was she a side character forced to appease her husband’s expectations, or was she a powerful woman who held power over her own decisions and how she wanted to live her own life? Would she succumb to the ruthless dictatorship of male authority? Or would she stand up for women to take the lead in scientific inventions? Determination grew in her like grain in wood. But how could she strive to invent something out of nothing, considering the potential cruelty that could stem from it? Leizu felt something tugging at her sleeve. The cocoon grinned at her from ear to ear, emitting the same ghoulish glow.

“There you are!” Leizu stroked the cocoon’s skin, and stopped when her fingertips suddenly touched something. This was the exact moment Leizu found her purpose, her destiny, her first milestone in her career as an inventor. In the years that followed, she discovered how to combine the strings of silk fibres in the cocoon’s body into a thread, which were combined to form the silk loom. Taking in mind the importance of China’s safety and security, she realised that inventing silk was the first step to contribute to China’s textile industry ahead of her time, and she was adamant that women were to be respected and to be given the opportunity to change the world for the better.

Matshona Dhlwayo once said, “The world accommodates you for fitting in, but only rewards you for standing out.” In her adventurous journey through time, Leizu discovered both the perks and disadvantages of China’s inventions, and strived to stand out to change this phenomenon. She wasn’t afraid to leap outside her comfort zone and explore uncharted territories, so why can’t you, reader, do the same? To influence the past, the present and the future, you have to strive to be a difference maker, a destiny changer, a courageous traveller through time above and beyond.

Audacian — A Sentient and Humanoid Robot

Diocesan Girls' School, Wen, Ching Hei Serena – 13

“Beeps and Chirps!” A gang of hostile belligerent robots were plodding along from Evilwill. It was a gusty, blustery bleak morning when the aggressive robots armed with fiery metal guns, bombing landmines and mammoth green tanks marched mercilessly in, and gluttonously devouring our precious hometown, Shanghai Tang in China.

The Evilwill War caused the separation from my inalienable parents. I was sorrowfully saddened by the monotonous treading of the pugnacious and obstreperous robots, stepping outside our gloomy and doomy bedroom in the caliginous Shanghai Tang Orphanage. So, I decided to invent a unique high-tech sentient and humanoid robot who was compassionate, and possessed the ability to fly speedily, walk upright and talk like a human, helping the world in making peace. My lofty aspiration was also inspired by my father, Dr Kool. My dad was a revered engineer in research and development for humanoid robots at the Guru Guru Laboratory, with the mission and vision of designing kind and helpful human-like robots.

Throughout the grief of the loss of my parents in wartime, my only little companion and sidekick was my toy robot, named Audacian, which my father designed for my 10-year-old birthday. Like the art of montage in a theatre with fragments of pictures, my heart was lighted up with family love when my mesmerising memories flashed back to the peaceful era before the outbreak of Evilwill War. It was an ineradicable memory that my parents and I heartily enjoyed the decadent scrumptious sizzling steak and frizzling eggs for dinner in our cosy dining room, with a pink chandelier, enlightening its homely atmosphere. It was a shimmering moonlit evening when my father, Dr. Kool arrived home from work, with a surprise birthday present for my 10-year-old birthday.

Ding-a-ling, I rushed to the door swiftly like an agile cheetah, anticipating a lovely birthday gift. I asked my father curiously, “Hey Dad, will my birthday present be a cute Chinese Barbie doll with rosy cheeks and embroidered Cheongsam?” My dad replied, “Sorry Crystal! It’s not!” Flop! I was utterly

disappointed seeing such an ugly creature. He was a tiny toy robot around 30 cm, looking like a revolting rat in pitch-black glossy body, supported by a pair of skinny wobbling legs. Yuck! I named him Audacian hoping that he could be brave when in chaos.

“G...o...o...d evening, Mrs. Kool and Crystal!” Audacian greeted us in a guttural tone. I responded coldly, “Hiiii!” I even dumped Audacian in a toy box, and closed the lid tightly. *Out of sight, out of mind!* The poor robot emanated a series of annoying whirring sounds, “Hum! Buzz!” I shrieked at this irritating creature, “Keep quiet! Homework time.”

Time went by as fast as a streak of lightning when I reached 15, the catastrophic Evilwill War broke out in Shanghai Tang like an apocalypse. The sanguinary Evilwill enemies captured my father, Dr. Kool from the Guru Guru Laboratory. My father whined helplessly, “Where’re my loving wife, young daughter and the cute little Audacian?” There was a deafening silence, except our lugubrious sobs, reverberating in the rain thousands of miles apart. My mum held me and Audacian tightly, groaning and moaning in despair “Crystal and Audacian, run in the rain!” Boom! In a fleeting moment, my mum was being abducted as a war prisoner. Both Audacian and I erupted into terrifying tears, and we enveloped each other with woeful hugs, under the voluminous pitiless sky that was deluged with smoky combustible air.

After the torrential rain, an arch of variegated rainbow encapsulated Audacian and I passionately in deep compassionate condolences. Peace was restored. Now, being a young lady scientist, I worked in the same Guru Guru Laboratory. I aspired to be a sagacious scientist with tremendous strength to move on with fortitude and forbearance.

Our ingenious, state-of-the-art design was born, an autonomous AI powered robot named Audacian II. He was a silverish humanoid bipedal light weight robot with voice recognition, possessing a super speed of 10 km an hour, moving more than 3 metres per second, with the amazing ability of carrying a 500 kg load. This new born baby possessed a pair of fluttering wings, flying at a new flight speed record of 12,000 kilometres per hour,

which took only 3 hours to fly around the Earth. Hooray!

Our innovative novelty could also interact with humans with human-like emotions, displaying 60 human expressions and gestures, as well as being proficiently multilingual. Audacian II was a medical robot in white uniform, assisting in the Shanghai Tang Hospital, and spoke in fluent Putonghua caringly. "Do you feel better today? Ni jin tian you gan jue hao dian ma?" This adorable robot also wore a pair of trendy Ray Ban eyeglasses, helped in correcting essays as a teacher, checking errors in programs as a programmer, and creating business plans.

Multi-functionally, Audacian II was also an industrial robot, who was considered to be the "Glittering Diamond of Manufacturing", helping in minimising the manufacturing costs, and enhancing industrial performance, printing the infrastructure of a town, and some nifty furniture. Being an agricultural robot in a cute straw hat, Audacian II helped the farmers in the farmland picking up six tons of fresh red strawberries and crimson cranberries per day. Consequently, this genius could increase economic growth, and improve the efficaciousness of productivity.

Skilfully, holding glasses of iridescent cocktail drinks, Audacian II was also a hospitality robot as a bartender in bars, restaurants and hotels. "Would you like some piña coladas? Voudrais-tu des Piña Coladas?" Audacian greeted the French customers with a friendly welcome and a dazzling smile. Our buddy also took care of children at home and daycare centres. "Cinderella and Prince Charming met at the Royal Ball. Cenicienta y el Príncipe Azul se conocieron en un baile real." All the Spanish students listened in amusement. Audacian II was also a friendly helper in his golden apron, doing vacuum cleaning, laundry and cooking. Talentedly, this artistic gardening robot nurtured the blossoming roses with colourful butterflies waltzing around.

Holding on a magnifying glass to sleuth evidence like Sherlock Holmes, Audacian II also became the police's best assistant in predicting crimes, by making use of the drone footage to detect the suspects. "Action!". Caringly, this charitable robot went to some destitute scums to distribute essential medical supplies and daily necessities to the poverty-stricken deprived sectors. "Enjoy some fresh food, my dear!" Audacian embraced the grateful kids warmly. Moreover, the greatness about this new gadget was that he could help society to eliminate dangerous tasks for workers, since he was adroit at working in a dangerous environment, and to lift hefty loads, as well as handle venomous gas. This brave warrior even flew together with soldiers on war planes and drove the gigantic tanks.

Being a loadstone, Audacian II attracted thousands of visitors worldwide attending the World Expo in Shanghai Tang, China. The attendees were flabbergasted by Audacian II's pair of flapping agile wings, choreographed light dance movements, skilful somersaults and detailed hand gestures.

Unfortunately, "*good times don't last forever*" and "*A sweet dream is short-lived*". Civil war broke out again after Audacian II was born, and the ambitious Evilwill invaded our country again contentiously and combatively. Valorously, Audacian II led a group of smart robots to fight back.

"Flapping and fluttering! Spiralling and spinning! Roaming and Rattling! Whizzing and Whooshing! Over the bridge... Up the mountain... Through the meteor... By the land of Evilwill..." Audacian II also used deft drone video to detect around, with the hope of finding my lost parents. Amazingly, both my endearing mum and dad were still alive, as they were incarcerated at the secluded jail in Evilwill.

"Click, clack, clip", the heavy metal lock was shattered by our flying Audacian II. "Here we are, Crystal!" My parents burst into hot tears and gave me a passionate hug. "Oh Mum and Dad, am I dreaming? I sobbed with exuberant tears.

"Hahaha! Both Audacian and Audacian II exploded into exhilarating and exciting laughter with clapping hands. The good news was that Shanghai Tang won the civil war, and Evilwill was destroyed like an evaporating vapour forever and ever. The holographic rainbow shone again, and eternal peace was finally resumed.

With the pink chandeliers dangling in our dining room, the hissing of French fries and sissing of hamburgers were being fried by our adept chefs, Audacian and Audacian II. "Delectable dinner, Audacians!" My loving parents applauded in unison. "Thank you!" Both Audacian and Audacian II said delightfully with a giggle.

Finally, the cutting edge invention of Audacian II in China brought humans hope, happiness, love, friendship, fraternity and peace as well. Audacain II was a

manifestation of the positive spirit of solidarity, as presented by the melodious charity single: "*We Are The World*":

"We are the world. We are the children. We are the ones who make a brighter day, so let's start giving..."

Soar

Diocesan Girls' School, Wong, Kaylie – 13

“Both companies are fighting hard to issue the very first flying car to the market. But, without any readily-made blueprints or detailed plans, will the idea of flying cars simply stay as a pie in the sky?”

Mayleen, bored to stone, reached for the remote and hit the power button. The room instantaneously became so quiet, so quiet that the silence was deafening. Her English teacher had encouraged her to watch some news to improve, but she just found it dull as ditchwater.

Growing up in an old village in China with her grandmother as her only family, Mayleen was poor as a church mouse. At the frail age of 70, Grandmother had to work in the fields under the blazing sun and chilling winds. Every bead of sweat that rolled down her wrinkled cheeks only exchanged for money that was barely enough. Surviving off government funding and her miniscule income, she and Mayleen were scraping by, struggling to make ends meet.

It was just like any Monday midnight, so mundane, but yet so fateful. Mayleen was lying on her bed, doodling in her tiny sketchbook. She let her mind wander into the magical realm of unlimited fantasies, and allowed her pencil to glide on the paper, seeing the tiny strokes morph together into anything. Just *anything*. The word rolled off her tongue so perfectly, it was as if she was meant to accomplish anything.

And she was.

Just as she was daydreaming about the future, Mayleen had unexpectedly drawn a flying car. A flying car like the one she heard about in the news.

What if... Mayleen began to ponder, her imagination pleasing her ego with thoughts of her in a lab coat, proudly presenting to the world the first invention of the flying car. However, the sound of a squirrel scurrying along the branches of a tree poked through her bubble of imagination and left her nothing, except for the hard, cold reality of her poverty. “I’ll never be able to do that...” she shook her head in disappointment and frustration.

“Haiya, Mei!” her grandmother walked into the room with her heavy, aged footsteps, making the floorboards groan. “You have to remember the old saying, ‘nothing is impossible!’”

Mayleen perfectly knew that her grandmother had just said this to not splash water on her quivering flame of hope, but it was simply impossible: given her poor wealth, her family conditions, her resources... It was just as easy as picking stars from the sky.

Looking at her grandmother’s humped back as she trod down the stairs one at a time, a crystal silently rolled down her cheek as she thought of the hardships the woman had encountered in her whole life. *Does anyone deserve to suffer like that her whole life, overworking endlessly just to continue a meaningless life of more work?* she pondered. It was then she knew, no matter what the cost, she had to give her grandmother a better life in a big city. Her grandmother deserved so much more than a restful rest of her life. She deserved to glide in the sky, carefree and refreshed.

The dream of building the first flying car had never actually left her brain without a trace, as Mayleen continued burying herself in her studies. She thought she had already thrown that random thought behind with her past, but, after all, doesn’t the past always come back to us?

A few years later, Mayleen found herself on a plane to the United States, glancing outside the window at the outstretched wing soaring across the sapphire blue sky. She had participated in a prestigious inventions competition and won herself a month of learning camp there, and her heart sped up with the overwhelming amount of nervousness, excitement and anticipation.

Her eyes twinkled with familiarity when the plane skidded to a stop — with a pleasure, she had realised the plane worked somehow similar to her dream flying car! If she were to bring her grandmother to the city, then any old invention, like the one that made her win — an app, wouldn’t be possible. The key element missing was a grand discovery, something that would shock the world, something that would change history forever. It was then, the idea hit her like lightning: she would make a flying car!

Before, flying cars used to solely be the topic of her daydreaming, but now, equipped with her vast knowledge, unending resources and clear destination, Mayleen was sure of herself.

At the invention lab, the professor went around the room, asking the winners from different countries to introduce what they wanted to invent one day. Everyone answered something easy to accomplish: more environmentally friendly toilet rolls, special batteries... However, when it came to Mayleen, she confidently stood up and announced, "A flying car."

The room, initially filled with chatter and laughter, was like it went on mute. Everyone froze like they had just got turned into stone statues by Medusa's glare. A time-stopping hush fell over the room. No one had ever expected this answer, especially in the camp. Everyone wondered at this young girl, so small but yet so ambitious.

Through lots and lots of practice, Mayleen could already immediately think of a rough blueprint draft every new invention she thought of. After briefly narrating her thoughts to the class, the professor began clapping in awe — he had hugely underestimated this particular student's potential because he found out she grew up in poverty, as well as gave her competition-winning invention the least attention. How foolish he was to have nearly missed the new Thomas Edison, Benjamin Franklin, William Morrison! Although her perspective hadn't been seen by other flying car makers, he had just the slight gut feeling that her way was workable. And he was right.

Meanwhile, the other participants were extremely shocked by the flair and ability of the childlike Chinese girl. Moved by her backstory, they agreed to help her reach her aspirations — and that was how the invention camp turned into the base camp for inventing the first flying car which combined theories of helicopters, aeroplanes and cars; as well as renewable energy sources.

Working till the very early moments of a day, to waking again before the sun was even up, the crew tirelessly exchanged ideas, built millions of miniature models, had thousands of meetings, and they, surprisingly, even made a life-sized model for testing within the month!

On the second-last day of the camp, the participants gathered on a piece of grassland to test the vehicle. Upon hearing the news, innumerable press came rushing to get a glimpse of the amazing invention by just students and their mentor. The testing robot was put in the driver's seat, last checks were done, and the countdown started...

Three!

Two!

One!

With the press of a button, the robot activated and started controlling the panels of the car. Mayleen and some of her fellow campers stared straight at the surveillance screen, monitoring every single bit and crossing their fingers tight that nothing would go wrong. If not, their hard work would all be for nothing.

Everyone whooped and cheered as the car sprang into action, levitating up into the air and beginning to drive in a straight line. The drone flying above their heads captured the beaming, satisfied smiles of the creators.

Suddenly, the car began groaning and letting out a big billow of black smoke, and all hell broke loose.

The bystanders were screaming, shrieking, shouting, running around in chaos. The air seemed to have stopped moving too. Everyone held their breaths.

The hands stopped moving just for time to pause. Then, in an almost too quick fast-motion, the car came crashing down, along with the dreams of the students and the professor.

Everything after that was a total blur. People running around, comforting Mayleen, some accusing her of wasting their camp time, some crying. Mayleen felt suffocated. She wanted air. Her dream, the only thing fueling her on, was no longer there. She found herself in a pitch-dark forest, running towards nothing.

Getting back to her hometown, Mayleen was about to dispose of the camp tablet and anything that reminded her of the accident. However, Grandmother's words echoed in her mind. *Nothing is impossible.*

Mayleen had once thought that the car was perfect, but after reviewing the security footage, she realised that the renewable energy part was having some type of minor problems.

Her confidence rolling back in, Mayleen learnt from her past mistakes and made model after model, until she perfected everything.

By the time she had succeeded, she was already 30. Grandmother had long passed. Mayleen had also moved to a bigger city in China, bringing along the words that built her up: *nothing is impossible*.

“The young mind of a Chinese girl has been bright enough to surpass the two leading Western companies in issuing a flying car to the market. Flying cars, as it seems, will no longer be a dream away!”

Trail of Ashes

Dulwich College Beijing, Wang, Emma –

Arrows whistled around and shouts of alarm, anguish and triumph could be heard, booming around the vast land. Clangs of swords and rocks, and the flash of arrows alight with fire made me even more exasperated in my laboratory. Once again, certain areas had started fighting, each wanting to control and overthrow each other. However, as the seemingly unending wars continued, there was never lasting victory nor lasting peace. I shook my head, frustrated, and disheartened by what the world had become. Waving off the chaos happening outside, I continued to bury my head in my flamboyant potions, testing each and every one of them.

Several days had elapsed by the time I heaved myself out of my chair and stretched. I let out a contented sound as my muscles loosened and relaxed. Scratching my head, I surveyed the room and scowled as there were dozens of potions mixed up on the table, and still not even one solution. I had been ensnared in my investigation for days now, endeavouring to find an elixir for the elderly. A sudden bird chirp made me straighten up, surprised; the fighting must have subsided. Grunts of pain could be heard resonating in the medical hut nearby. Filled with pity, I thrust my previous work to one side, deciding to focus on aiding the injured. Three tedious elements seemed to catch my eye, and my hands commenced a mixture of saltpeter, charcoal, and sulphur. As the moon cast its silvery glow through the paper windows, this experiment took an unforeseen turn.

With a fizz, it erupted into a mesmerizing burst of flames, filling the room with crackling energy. Thunder seemed to have found its way into my room. The acrid scent of burnt sulphur clawed at my nostrils, and the sharp tang of the unknown mixture seeped into my eyes and mouth, making me choke with desperation to get out of the room. Panic gripped me as I stumbled backwards, but amidst the chaos, I couldn't ignore the beauty of the explosive reaction before me. I fumbled for the door, whilst the air crackled with the aftermath of the explosion.

Eventually, the smoke seemed to clear out, and I cautiously squinted to see if it was safe to open my eyes. Looking around, there were wisps of grey smoke disappearing, and the air was still filled with the pungent smell. A burning scent wafted under my nose, and shocked, in front of my eyes, a sleek, golden snake of embers weaved around the table leg and set it alight. Quickly, I whipped out a cloth, and started to beat the table ferociously. Coughing, I carefully walked towards the mixture that I had accidentally created. The moment hung in the air like a suspended breath. The rhythmic thud of my heart echoed in my ears as the dark colour of the elements spread around the table, leaving behind dirty smudges.

Pinching a bit of the powder, a sudden excitement made its way within me. I murmured, "Finally, some things that have at least a sudden reaction to each other." However, soon after, a weight of embarrassment settled upon me. What was I doing? I aimed to produce a medicine for the injured, not something that exploded! There was a tornado of emotions within me. After a moment of reflection, I concluded that the mixture was at least sufficiently intriguing to present at the upcoming audience with the emperor.

The court buzzed with excitement as I presented the three powders, and I was thrust into a position with respect and responsibility. My once isolated, deserted, quiet laboratory was now bustling with scholars, engineers and more, investigating what had become known as gunpowder. Every day, there were continuous explosions and murmurs of either satisfaction or dismay.

Only a few weeks had passed, and business was booming. Many nobles wanted to test out this explosive material, and children were fascinated by it. However, soon, things took an ominous turn.

I woke up to the cacophony of banging and shouting outside my house. I figured war had descended upon us again, but promptly realized that there was a mob holding up signs and shouting with rage towards me. Opening the door, an indignant looking man stormed towards me, and accused me that my invention of gunpowder brought disgrace to their community.

I cocked my head, perplexed, and queried, "What do you mean?"

"Well, this explosive material has made my children deaf because of the resounding, thunderous sound! As well as leaving black soot and smudges, making our environment look extremely sullied and it also takes a long time to wash off!" Shouts of sympathy and anger rose from the crowd, and as I squinted at the burning crimson sun shining in my eyes, through the midst of confusion and wooziness, an idea clicked inside my head, "Wars," I murmured, but the crowd's frustration continued to increase. The scorching heat weaved around me like a stifling blanket, making my skin prickle with irritation. Sweat trickled down my face like raindrops, and I tried to inhale some frigid air, but the air hung heavy and thick, like a sauna. The outraged people kept on ranting nonstop, and feeling exasperated, I yelled, "Wars, they can be used in wars! Now calm down and leave me to contemplate this!" With that, I stormed into my house and forcefully slammed the door behind.

"So," the emperor inquired as I stood before him, "What do you mean by this powder used in wars?" He had summoned me after the tumultuous rebellion from the crowd, and I grinned slyly and said, "Well, it's perfect. It's explosive, meaning that the sound will make the enemy deaf, we can also use it to launch our arrows!" He gasped with excitement at the ingenious idea, and replied, "Yes! We can wrap them in bamboo or paper, attach it to an arrow, and light them off, so they can shoot even further and faster!" We both laughed with delight, and soon, a new plan had started to unravel.

Today arrived the day of the war. A few days ago, there arrived a letter from the Xin Dynasty, threatening to annihilate the Han Dynasty, and without hesitation, we rejected the idea, and compromised a battle against them. My heart pounded with anticipation for the war to swiftly commence. Packs of gunpowder had already been stored on catapults and arrows. Now, we just had to wait. A few moments passed, until finally, in the distance, came the galloping of horses. Their hooves thundered against the earth with ferocity, exuding triumph, and confidence in victory, but they didn't stand a chance against our powder.

Before long, arrows came whistling past our walls, striking a few soldiers. At the lieutenant's command, "Fire," a thunderous 'BANG' echoed as dozens of arrows rained down on the enemy, finding their targets in bodies, piercing, and penetrating through human flesh. The second batch was released, and the arrows found their marks, once again striking the enemies with extreme accuracy. In no time, the enemy ranks had faltered under our explosive arrows, overwhelmed by the unending, relentless rain of lethal weapons whistling towards them, and sheepishly admitted surrender, fleeing the lands.

I grinned, my heart racing with relief and exhaustion. Gunpowder – deadly, destructive and yet such an ingenious invention.

The Creation of Paper

ESF Discovery College, Chen, Fiona – 11

Chapter 1 – Into the Ancient Times

As I bounded joyfully through the doors of the science museum, I looked around. I saw many interesting displays, some about black holes, some about inertia, some about light waves. I skipped over to one about time travel.

“Oooooooh!!!” I whispered to my friend Miranda, “This is cool!”

“Yeah!!” Miranda replied. “I’m excited.”

“I wonder what it’s gonna be about!” My other friend Abbey exclaimed.

We pushed through the humongous crowd all the way to the front, and started listening to the person talking.

“Scientists have recently invented a time machine that can take you to another time period! It hasn’t been tested yet, but if anything goes wrong, we’ll pay for everything!”

“Wow!! We shrieked together.

“Shush! Our moms whispered to us, looking embarrassed by all the faces staring at us. But we couldn’t contain our excitement. We exchanged looks and giggled quietly to each other throughout the talk.

“Now, who’s gonna be the first person to try this time machine??” The person asked.

“Us! US! US!!” we shrieked enthusiastically.

“BE QUIET!” Our moms hissed to us once again.

The person merely smiled, and led us into the tiny, dark machine, and flicked a few switches and dials, and then asked us, “Where in time do you want to go??”

“Let’s go to ancient China!” Miranda suggested.

“Alright then!” Me and Abbey agreed. Hearing that, the man started typing into a small keyboard connected to the machine.

“Are you ready?” he asked us.

“Yeah!!” we replied, thrilled at this new adventure.

“Then let’s go!” The man smiled warmly. Then he pressed ‘Start’.

Chapter 2 – Meeting Cai Lun

Boooooooooooooom! Crash! FIIIIIIIZIZ!! As the time machine zoomed through the centuries, I could feel the machine shaking and bumping wildly.

“I’m gonna be sick!!!” The moms shouted.

“Hang in there, we’re nearly here,” the man replied, handing them some vomit bags. Soon later... WHOOMP! The machine slowed down and came to a halt. Slowly, the man opened the door, and we tiptoed out silently.

“Wow!” Miranda whispered. Everywhere, people were dressed in ancient Chinese clothes, walking around happily. Little houses were dotted here and there, and everywhere booths were selling wonderful things. Nearby, there was a huge palace with vibrant colors, and important-looking people were walking in and out of it.

“Look, that’s the emperor’s palace!” Abbey told us.

“Woah,” I sighed. It was one thing to see an emperor’s palace in books, but another to be able to see it in person!

“Come on, what would you like to explore??” Our moms asked us.

“Let’s go see the emperor’s palace!” We shouted.

“Alright then,” Our moms replied.

“Wait! If you’re gonna be walking around in ancient China, you need a change of clothes!” The time-machine man butted in, handing us some stylish-looking ancient clothes. We hastily put them on, and then we started walking into the palace garden.

“啊！大王！有刺客闯进了大花园！（Aaah! Your majesty! Some murderers have broken into the palace garden!).” A peculiar-looking person shouted into the palace. He looked about fifty, with a long beard on his face. He was wearing handsome, stylish clothes, and seemed to be mixing rags, wood and fishnets together.

“哇！您是蔡伦吗？我们是从未来过来的人。（Wow! Are you Cai Lun? We are people from the future)” I said to him.

“我们不会伤害大王的。（We will not hurt the emperor.)” Abbey continued.

“一定不会！（Definitely not!)” Miranda added defiantly.

Chapter 3 – The Mysterious Creation

Cai Lun surveyed us for a while, his serious eyes drilling into us. After a good five minutes, as if conquered the spell of awkwardness, he finally spoke.

“哦，是这样的话，那我就不担心了！我是蔡伦。你们先来看看我在做的事情。（Oh, well then I will not have to worry! I’m Cai Lun. First, come and see what I’m doing.)” Cai Lun replied. He continued mixing the materials together, and we watched him, intrigued by what he was doing.

“He must be making paper! So cool, we get to see how paper was made *in person!*” Abbey told us.

“Wow! I must take some photos,” Miranda replied, taking her camera out.

Mix, mix, mix!! He continued stirring the gloopy mess with a stick.

“这应该够了吧！（This should be enough!)” He muttered. He stopped, and asked.

“你们看？怎么样？(What do you think?)”

“做得非常好！您应该继续。(It's great! You should continue.)” The time machine man replied approvingly. We nodded together. Cai Lun grinned at our approval, took a strange-looking mesh screen, put the mixture on it, and started shaking it gently. (The whole time, Miranda had been taking pictures on her camera.)

“That must be a deckle. You pour the mixture onto the deckle, and shake it to drain the water,” I murmured to the others. They nodded, their eyes fixed on Cai Lun. He looked very focused!

Once all the water had been drained, Cai Lun took the dried mixture and put it between two sheets of wood held together by a screw (a press), and started tightening the screw. The two sheets of wood got tighter and tighter, and we could see the mixture getting thinner and flatter.

After a while, Cai Lun stopped working, and came over to us. “我应该做得不错嘛，希望后果会精彩！(I think I have done well, hopefully the end result will be exciting!” He exclaimed to us.

“好啊！那我们就先去逛街吧。(Alright! Let's first go to the markets!)” We replied in unison. “再见！(Bye!)” We waved to Cai Lun and left the garden, heading down to the markets.

Chapter 4 – The Final Product

After 4 fun-filled hours of bartering for the lovely things they sold in the markets (we didn't have ancient Chinese money), we settled on a mat my mom traded her towel for.

“Phew, I'm hot!” Miranda exclaimed, drinking some ancient Chinese tea.

“Let's rest here for a bit,” Abbey's mom told us. We nodded in agreement, and started eating snacks.

Suddenly, we saw Cai Lun thundering down the street towards us. “我的新发明做完了！快来看看吧！(My new invention is complete! Come see it.)” He panted.

“哇，我们去看看吧！(Wow, let's go see!)” We cheered in anticipation, following him back to the palace garden.

When we got there, there was already a crowd rivaling that of the science museum. They were murmuring and chatting to each other. We pushed to the front of the crowd, where Cai Lun started speaking.

“大家，请看我的新发明，纸！它比丝绸更便宜但比竹子更轻。(Everyone, this is my new invention, paper! It's cheaper than silk but lighter than bamboo.” Hearing this, the crowd looked at each other, bewildered. They seemed confused! Just then, amidst the confounded chatter, Cai Lun came over to us.

“你们得帮帮我介绍一下我的发明！他们好像不明白。(You have to help me introduce my invention! They don't understand,” Cai Lun whispered. So we had to help demonstrate his invention to everybody!

“好啊！(Ok!)” We replied together.

Cai Lun smiled, and went back to the front.

“现在，我的朋友会来示范一下这个新发明！（Now, my friends will demonstrate this invention to you!” Cai Lun exclaimed to the crowd. Time to help him! We walked over to the front awkwardly, in front of the expectant crowd. A flash of nervousness danced across my eyes, but how could we back off now...?

Nervously, Abbey said, “大家好，我们要来介绍蔡伦发明的纸！（Hi everyone, we will demonstrate Cai Lun's invention, paper!”

“它是用来写字的。（It's used for writing.）” I added.

Then, Miranda walked over to the piece of paper on the table, took out a brush, and dipped it in ink. “我现在要为你们示范纸的功能！（Now I will *show* you paper's uses!” Miranda announced. She started writing on a piece of paper Cai Lun gave her, and the black ink immediately dried to form neat Chinese characters. “你们看？纸比丝绸更便宜，比竹子更轻巧！（See? Paper's cheaper than silk, and lighter than bamboo!” Miranda told everyone. We waited for results.

Chapter 5 – Home

The attempt worked. Seeing this, the crowd started cheering and clapping madly. Cai Lun looked at us, and smiled gratefully...

“That was very kind of you, but now we must be going,” Our moms suddenly interrupted. “Awwww!” We groaned.

“It's okay, next time you can come again, the time machine will be in the museum 24 hours straight,” the time-machine man told us. We agreed reluctantly, then looked back at Cai Lun and the huge crowd. We smiled at him and waved, and then the time-machine man clicked a few buttons on a remote. The time machine suddenly appeared out of nowhere. We stepped on eagerly, and closed the door. The time-machine man flicked a few dials, and then the machine started juddering, and flew up, higher and higher. Just as it was about to disappear, we waved at Cai Lun for the last time.

Through the fabric of time and space it went, shooting back to the museum. In the machine, the moms seemed calmer than before, as if the shocking experience had acted as a medicine to their nausea. We also felt very accomplished for helping Cai Lun. When we finally got back to the museum, we stepped out shakily but confidently. We waved to all the cameras and answered all the reporter's questions, feeling joyful and elated.

“Wow, that was a great adventure!” Abbey sighed. “It was great, but I'm glad to be back...”

Cai Lun and his Great invention

ESF Discovery College, Gao, Miranda – 11

Everybody knows, being stuck at home drawing and writing is a totally different thing than sitting on a chair, stuck at school and learning about millions of things that might make your head pop. Well, I'm the unfortunate one, because now I'm stuck at school listening to the teacher lecture us about Cai Lun and his invention of paper.

"Students, Cai Lun is a big part of history, and a great help, too. You all should be very grateful!" lectured the teacher. Her words just can't get into my ears, nor my brain. They swivelled around me like a sleepy lullaby. I looked around. Children are playing around, tinkering with their pencils, spinning on their chairs, looking like they are sleeping or just staring straight into the teacher's eyes, not even moving a muscle. I, on the other hand, have my eyes sealed on the clock in the classroom. "Tick tick tick". I was wondering about why we should be grateful about Cai Lun, because I wouldn't mind if I wrote on bamboo strips.

Bang woosh bring...zoom! I found myself in a room. The room looked like it's from ancient China! Wait, could it be? I tried to calm myself down, but the butterflies in my stomach fluttered around me like it's going to burst! A trickle of excitement ran down my spine, like a slippery slide. I tore across the room, and caught myself in a corner, catching my breath, and catching some sense that I'm literally in someone's room. I peeked out through my thick silky hair, and caught someone – a man doing something...but what? I had no clue. No clue at all.

I gathered my strength, and walked across the room towards the man. "May I help you?" I asked in Chinese.

"Yes!" He replied. "But where did you come from?"

I shook my head. "Sorry, sir, but I'm quite lost. So, I see you have some trouble?"

"I'm trying to figure out a way to make paper, but I'm stuck on what to do next!" replied the man glumly.

"Really?" I asked, incredulously. "What's your name, sir?"

"My name is Cai Lun." He replied.

"Oh!" I gasped. "Oh, okay! My name is Gao Xin." We exchanged polite glances, and nodded.

"So, what did you do before you were stuck?" I asked.

"Well," He replied thoughtfully. "I had added boiled bamboo, old rags, and fishnets all into a pulp. I think something's missing...but what?"

I thought for a moment, then remembered! Cai Lun added tree barks to his mixture during his experiment.

"What will happen if you add some tree barks?" I suggested, all thanks to my online Chinese lessons, spending some parts of the time talking about Cai Lun and his paper inventing steps.

"That's not a bad idea!" He told me.

We added three tree barks to the mucky recipe, and stirred everything around with water inside, using a big wooden spoon. Then, we dried it up in the sunshine for a while, and waited. Cai Lun started an interesting conversation with me.

“You know, people used to make writing and drawing materials out of bamboo strips and pieces of silk. I thought, well, why do that? They are either too expensive, or too hard to write or draw on! What will be cheap, and perfect? So, I decided, why stop there? I should add a part to history! I should try inventing and perfecting paper myself! So, I came up with a plan, and created, I mean, perfected paper! I was inspired by people around me using bark from mulberry trees to make cloth to write on.”

“Whoa.” I gasped, totally amazed. I helped Cai Lun, so does it mean that I created a part of history, too? Cai Lun stood up, and brushed off some dirt from his dirty clothes.

He told me, “I’m making dinner. It’s about time. Are you going home? You said you’re lost, right?”

“Yes, sir.” I replied, politely.

“Okay.” He told me. “I’m going to cook dinner. You can stay here if you want, as a thank you for helping me.”

“Thank you, sir!” I thanked Cai Lun. “I’m truly grateful!”

The aroma of warm soup filled the air, and activated my empty stomach. Woo! Working on inventing paper is real hard work! Maybe I should be truly grateful for Cai Lun’s invention of paper, because he did all the work! Almost. “Dinner is ready!” Cai Lun called, interrupting my thoughts. I absently sat on a chair, and looked down at the bowl of soup set before me. “What’s the matter, Gao Xin?” Inquired Cai Lun, concerned. He tilted his head.

“I...” I started. “I actually came from...well, a long time after you! I...am from the future – 2024.” Cai Lun gasped. Then, he finally croaked out, “Xiān rén!”

“I kind of miss the...the...well, I am always found of the past, but I feel kind of homesick...you know?”

Cai Lun nodded sternly. “Yes, I totally understand. But do you want to come tomorrow, and come with me to present paper to Emperor He of Han...Emperor Hedi?”

The next day, I woke up with a start. It was the weekend, and I was totally excited to meet Cai Lun again! The split second I thought of him arriving at the palace, I heard that noise again. But this time, I wasn’t afraid, because I knew, kindness and loyalty awaits ahead of me.

Bang woosh bring...zoom! I slowly opened my eyes. But not kind eyes welcomed my arrival, but instead, it was stern eyes. All dark and scary, all staring at me! I feel the tension in the air, swirling around me. I looked up, slowly and slightly, at...at...Emperor He of Han! I immediately looked down, praying he didn’t notice. His stare drilled a hole through my body. I immediately greeted Emperor Hedi, and I could feel the tension slowly dissolve into micro molecules, and I sighed silently, with relief. Emperor Hedi’s face softened, finally. Cai Lun was right next to me, and he presented his “work of art” – paper.

“Your majesty, I have invented a new resource that can well be written on and drawn on. I dearly hope you like it. I have tested it already, during the night, yesterday, and, well, here it is, your majesty!” I see Cai Lun’s forehead pestered with beads of perspiration. I was frowning with worry, too, for that my Chinese teacher told me that Emperor Hedi did accept Cai Lun’s invention, but...history is tangled by yarns of truth and, also, lies.

It seemed like forever, and I managed to take glances at the palace, all beautiful, and embroidered with royal decorations. So pretty! A voice startled me.

“I love this invention, and it should go on for generations! It should be passed down. I shall reward you with an aristocratic title and great wealth!”

“Thank you, sir!” Thanked Cai Lun. “But this young lady here helped me with my paper invention...her name is Gao Xin, your majesty!”

“Oh, I see!” Cried Emperor Hedi. “I see...I shall grant her too!” I quickly interjected.

“No thanks, Emperor Hedi. I’d much rather a tiny coin, if I may – to bring back home as a souvenir, your majesty.”

“A souvenir!?” He gasped.

“Oh,” Replied Cai Lun. “She came from the future...your majesty.”

“Oh!” Replied Emperor Hedi in great amazement. “Oh!”

I received my gift – a coin, from ancient China! I also thanked Emperor Hedi, said goodbye to Cai Lun, and finally, imagined home, and went back through my “mind travelling machine”. Such an adventure! A Chinese assessment was coming up, but I was too exhausted to study for it. I doze off, into a wonderful dream of all the glory in ancient China...

EPILOGUE

The last question in my test...“What do you think about Cai Lun? Please answer in a detailed description.” It said, in Chinese. I lit up like a firefly. I wrote:

Cai Lun was and still remains the greatest inventor all over the world. I adore him, not just because of his clever ideas on inventing paper, and not because of his wealth, but because he was remarkable and kind.

The Father of Chinese Alchemy's Test Subject

ESF Discovery College, Hui, Eve – 11

The sky was almost about to turn dark, and school was about to finish. Mei was walking in a dark alleyway with a lot of spray paint graffiti on the dirty brick walls. She finally got out of the alleyway and changed direction to the outside as she saw a few suspicious men in black clothes transfer cardboard boxes full of papers and machine parts into a car trunk. Mei was freaking out, she didn't know what to do about this situation if it was robbery or just some misunderstanding, and then one of the men in the black suit caught Mei looking at them putting away the cardboard boxes into the car trunk.

“HEY WOMAN! WHAT DO YOU THINK YOUR LOOKING AT HUH?!” The man yelled, the other men put the last box in the car trunk and got into the van quickly as the man who yelled at Mei started chasing her to where Mei was running to.

“Where do you think you're going? Come back he-re right th-is...ins-tant!” shouted the man while panting.

“What do you...mean?! You were the one who...started chasing me!” yelled back Mei.

Mei finally arrived at her house, knocking on the door like crazy, the door creaked open and Mei's dad popped out of the door.

“Hi Mei, how was school today?” asked Mei's father.

“Father! You must...close the door immediately! There are weird shady men chasing after me!” yelled Mei.

Mei's father looked outside to see if there were any shady men outside, but there was just a lady walking her dog and nobody else outside. Mei's father looked at Mei in a confused way and let Mei into the house. She looked back to her dad already laying back on the couch watching the news.

While Mei ran upstairs, Mei's father went outside onto the front porch and waved at the group of men that were hiding behind the bush waiting for Mei's dad's signal.

“Come on men! Walk faster before my daughter and wife even find you outside of our house!” yelled Mei's father.

The men in the baggy black clothes entered the house in a tip-toeing way to make sure they wouldn't make any sound and then entered the basement and went behind a bookshelf that led to a hidden door on the ground. All men were pulling up the door which led to an underground hideout with a machine that looked newly made.

“Victor..Do you think this plan is actually gonna work?” asked the man that looked very worried.

“This plan will obviously work unless my family finds out about our idea!” yelled back Victor, also known as Mei's father.

The whole room became very silent after Mei's dad finished yelling but the other men pretended like nothing had happened and continued their work, and suddenly there were footsteps above them, “Victor? Are you here? Dinner's ready!” exclaimed Mei's mother, walking away from the basement after.

“You know what to do!”

Mei's father slowly pushed the door open and snuck out of the basement, Mei's dad slowly walked to the dining table to find Mei and her mom already sitting on the table waiting for him to sit down and talk about today.

“Victor, where were you?” asked Mei's mother.

“I was..uhm...refilling ji-jimb-bo's cat litter!” replied Mei's father, as Jimbo, their cat glared at Mei's father like it wasn't true. Mei's mother stared back at him in a suspicious way while Mei was just chewing on her fish cake.

"So..Uh ...Mei.. Did you have a good day at school today?" asked Mei's dad, trying to change the atmosphere of the room. Mei nodded to her dad slowly and continued grabbing more food from the hotpot with her chopsticks.

After the most boringest and awkward dinner, Mei was in her bathroom brushing her teeth while drawing some doodles on her bathroom mirror, all night she couldn't sleep because of her nightmares of her dad and mom fighting to one point she started to sleepwalk to her basement but to be woken up by her mom trying to stop her from bumping into a shelf of books.

"Mei what are you doing at such a late time?" asked Mei's mom in a quiet way trying not to accidentally wake up Victor.

"Huh..? uh...agh! Mom you..umm why..wait..uh why am i here..?", suddenly..The room started shaking. The shaking felt like it was coming through the bookshelf so the both of them went to investigate what was happening behind the bookshelf and there it was, the suspicious hidden door.

"Mom..did y-you know ab-about this..?" asked Mei.

"N-no.. i.. Didn't know about this secret." replied Mei's mom in a terrified way.

Both of them pulled up the suspicious door and were shocked when they found the newly built machine inside the dark room. Both of them got down but then on the last step of the stairs, mei lost her balance and fell backwards hitting her head on the machines buttons and started the machine to suck up everything in the room.

"MEI! GRAB MY HAND!" yelled Mei's mother.

Everything in the room started to fly away into the machine, but Mei's mom couldn't hold on and the water pipe broke making Mei and her mom fall into the machine's portal. The machine made them go into a palace, then a woman in an old-style maid outfit walked up to the both of them.

"HEY! aH-gAl yOu NOt sUppOsEd tO bE heA aH gO baCk tO yOuR hOusE IA!" yelled the woman.The two girls ran away quickly from the woman but ended up bumping into an old man.

"Ah! Sorry.. We'll help you pick up your things." apologised Mei's mom while picking up the man's books and papers.

"Oh..no need to apologise! It was just an accident. People make mistakes!" replied the old man.

The girls then bowed to the old man walking the other direction but the old man stopped the girls and put his hand on Mei's shoulder and asked them, "Do you ladies have a place to stay at?" asked the old man while smiling.

The girls both looked at each other in a happy way then nodded at the old man and followed the old man to a very dirty looking village being greeted by many old people and were handing out baskets of fruits and vegetables but death glaring at The old man, The old man led the two of them into a small cottage that looked enough for the three of them to stay inside but haven't been cleaned in weeks, the door had a name on the door 翻.

"So.. Thank you for inviting us here! I hope you have already had dinner." exclaimed Mei's mom, the old man smiled back and walked to his desk and started painting some Chinese words on it, "祝你不好运" . Mei and her mom immediately rolled her eyes when she saw him write those words.

"Mom.. that old man thinks we don't know chinese..." whispered mei trying not to make the old man hear them but her mom elbowed her as the old man stood up and walked to the both of them giving them the writing.

"This Chinese calligraphy is a welcome gift! i..hope uh you enjoy your night here..ha..ha..."said the old man. The old man then walked away and grabbed a bed mattress big enough for the both to share and turned off the lamp and went to bed. After everybody fell asleep, the old man woke back up and went to his study desk and opened his drawer

grabbing a jar full of...mysterious black powder and a match box and plate. The man went onto the shared mattress and put some of the black powder onto the plate and tried to fire it and put it on the girls to see if his about *Gunpowder* research was true. But the mattress started to sizzle but the both girls managed to wake up in time to find the mattress almost going to explode. The man then left the cottage with the 2 girls trapped inside the cottage.

“Wait mom! The window is open! Let's escape from there!” yelled Mei, the both of them ran and jumped through the window trying to catch their breaths.

“Wait, was that old man...Wei Boyang?!” exclaimed Mei in a shocked and mad way, her mom nodded at her slowly then dragged mei back to where they were when they teleported to this place. all they knew was that there was no such transportation for them to go back to their house and that their house wouldn't be in the past. until, both of the girls felt a bit unconscious and fainted to the ground.after the two woke up, they were in the basement again but the machine was all in broken pieces.

Dad hugged the both of them in tears, “I promise you guys no more time machines.”

The Miracle Invention

ESF Discovery College, Ikeda, Sana – 11

YEAR 4056 – Proxima-CentauriB

“I have ventured out to explore earth. There is food in the fridge, so warm it up.” – Your mother.”

As she read through this, her eyes darted, her hands shook, and even her legs shivered, with overwhelming...excitement!

Why did she go to earth without her? Why can't she bring her? She ran towards her cabinet and picked the glass globe up. As she lifted the heavy object, she couldn't help but stop to admire it. “The globe and the actual earth look the same..! I'm –”, the door swung wide open, “yeah because it's earth's globe, idiot.”

“ Oh, hi.” She turned around, going towards the window. “I wonder when we will be able to go with mom.”, as she spoke, June rolled his eyes.

“Well then, excuse me.”

He walked out–

“OOOH!! WAIT JUNE–”

“What.”

“I want to show you my new project!”

“ Which one this time?”

“The earth examiner 101.” As she opened a secret door, June gasped. The thing that stood in front of him was massive. A 10 metre-tall silver machine was standing in front of him. “So, what do you think?” June came closer, “This is amazing. What is this?”

“Uh, it's a ‘experiment’ to fly to China. Isn't that obvious?”

“The one that can fly to earth?”

“Yeah, the one that can fly to earth!”

Since they both have never heard of English, why not make some words up? Mei was dancing as they noticed a familiar ‘experiment’ landing on Proxima-centuariB. “MOM!”

She quickly closed the door and pushed June out of the room – this will stay a secret, no matter what.

As she pushed her brother out of her room, she watched peacefully.

Soon, she saw over 40 neighbours surrounding her mother. She felt a small fire of envy light up, then immediately extinguished it. Why would I let myself feel jealous of my *own* mother?

As even more people gathered around her and celebrated, Mei took out her beautiful book – “ China during the 2000s ”. As she flipped through the pages of the worn-out book, she couldn't help but notice the amazing inventions back in the day. According to the book, some life-changing inventions were made by humans. That just made her wonder more – who were “ humans”? Her mother won't tell her anything, not even a word from earth. The only word she knows right now is “experiment”, which she heard while eavesdropping.

As more and more of her thoughts came roaring out of her mind, over 30 minutes had passed. As soon as she looked through the window, she could not see her mother. Panicked, she opened her drawer as fast as she could and stuffed the book in, slowly, to make sure it wasn't damaged. Then she immediately crawled back to bed.

As Mei's eyes plopped down, someone came in. *crunch. Crunch.* An unbearably annoying sound was awakening Mei. As her patience died, she pounced back up from her bed.

“STOP THAT– Mom..?”

As Mei looked towards her mother, she could see her *own* shattering her precious globe. Though she knew that a globe of earth won't be forgiven by her mother, she just couldn't bear the thought of her only inspiration getting shattered into shreds. With tears streaming down her face, she grasped her mothers clothing. As her mother looked back, Mei would at least expect a look of sympathy – even in her eyes, if that wasn't enough. Yet in her mothers face, there was no expression of sympathy in store, only happiness. While most of the time her mother wore a cold look on her face, this was the only time she smiled, like a child under a blooming tree.

Mei, surprised, lost strength in her fingertips and let go, only for her mother to throw the shattered glass onto her face with that other-worldly smile on her face.

As her tears soaked her ripped map, she knew what she wanted to do next. She knew exactly. And she wouldn't change her mind.

After 5 hours of planning, Mei set off to find her brother. Her only ally, if she even needed one. She swung the door open and grabbed her brother, dragging him out of his room like a feather.

"It's 2am. What do you want."

"Let's go to earth – specifically china."

"Yeah ok– wait..."

As her brother was at a loss of words, Mei just carried him down the stairs, and towards her "experiment". She immediately brought him to the most logical place to launch a "experiment" – her balcony!

"Wait. Why here out of all the places?"

"So then we can show off to mom. Get in."

"But–"

Without an issue, she pushed her brother into the 'experiment', ready to start take off.

As they both blasted off high into the sky, Mei could see her mothers terrified gaze as they set off out of their planet.

More than 3 days later, I arrived happily, except for the fact that mother is tailing me. Almost exploding with excitement, I jumped off, surprised that I didn't have to wear those weird gravity boot things. As I looked around, my expectations were betrayed. The earth book...was nothing close to what I saw. Mei looked into the vast, dark sky, her radiant silver skin shining in the dark. Her brother hung on to her, following every slight move she made. What they saw was not an amazing, beautiful China, but instead a huge space of rubble and cement. Not even trees were to be found wherever in China she was. As Mei crouched down to observe furtherer, June pushed her.

Mei looked behind, noticing her mother.

As she heard those words, she bounced right back up, grabbed Junes arm, and flew forward. She would not even give her mother a slight chance to stop her journey.

They ran across the vast ruins for what seemed like forever, until her brother pulled her back from what looked like a giant hole. Now, this isn't any ordinary hole you'd see anywhere. This hole was more than 620 metres long & 530 metres wide. Though her brother looked worried, Mei knew exactly what hole this was. This was no other than the Xiaozhai Tiankeng sinkhole. According to rumours in her town, a famous Chinese inventor lived inside this hole.

"Hey June, how about jumping in?"

"No. Its way too–"

Before anything, she grabbed him and pulled him beside a piece of rubble.

"What–"

"Just shut up and follow me."

As their mothers army came forwards, Mei's heart beated faster. Though she never disobeyed her "mother", she followed her instincts and went down the hole by elevator.

As they arrived at the hole, Mei never felt happier. This felt like her own paradise! Unlike her worried brother, she knew exactly what all of these were.

Where she was was not a room you'd expect to see underground. Though this was no penthouse, the place was covered in smooth wooden tiles and a bed for one. The tables on the right were covered in some sort of papers, all looked detailed and old. All of the papers were signed 'Tu youyou'. Mei has heard of her before. She was one of the inventors who made one of the most life changing inventions, such as a printer. But, it made her wonder...why, in over 50 pieces of paper, does one look new? Intrigued, she touched it.

"Wait, Mei don't–"

As she touched it, a light beamed across the empty room, opening a small door beside the table. As soon as she saw the door, she felt a sense of familiarity. Before she could crawl through the door, June stopped her.

"I need to tell you something."

"You better be quick–"

"You are an invention made by Youyou."

"...What?"

"One day, when mom was exploring, they found earth, a beautiful place full of joy...was left to dust. Among the lifeless bodies, she Youyou holding you. "

"I...Am not an alien?"

"You may decide."

Mei, still confused, saw her brother pulling out pills.

"Me and mom found this inside this hole 20 years ago."

In his palms were two pills – one red and one blue.

“Would you rather take the red pill that makes you forget us, aliens, absorb all the answers to earth, – enough to restore earth to the planet it was once more. Or would you rather take the blue pill – forget everything that happened and live with us! Basically, you’re–”

“Red pill please.”

“..What? But–”

Then, she took and swallowed the red pill. As she took it, she gained all the knowledge of Youyou, Bi Sheng and other amazing Chinese inventors.

Now aware of the inventor’s incomplete plans, she stepped into the glowing door, finding a table set up for her, and a solution to earth’s wreckage – and even a guide on english!

She knew that this won’t be an easy journey or a pleasant one. But, you never know the outcome unless you try.

The Mysteries of Life

ESF Discovery College, Lam, Isabel – 11

“Yi xing was a great man, with great knowledge, he asked me to give this to you after his passing, I will certainly miss him.”

I said nothing, He handed me the red handkerchief, and silently walked away. I unveiled the cloth and found a beautiful spherical object, the colour of the starry sky, with different planets surrounding the centre.

It was a tiny armillary sphere.

Sometimes in my late evening walks, I would head towards the hanging tree, and think about the very night we met, on that pathway, with the shining moon, and the silhouetted water, then I would look at the hanging tree, where his family used to hang, I would then think of his peculiarity of the astronomical world, and his slow calm chuckle.

Yi xing may have spent his whole life, dedicated to making the dynasty a better place, and using all his knowledge into making inventions, however, if I knew a man happier in his fortune, I knew him not. His passing was rudimentarily peaceful to meet one’s end, and for us as humans, we truly don’t live enough to fully understand how our world works, but I suppose somethings in life – will always remain a mystery.

New Tales of China's Inventions

ESF Island School, Brookes, Annabelle – 11

There's a reason for everything. Much like there is a reason for paper. Paper is one of the most used inventions of our lifetime, as it is used for writing, origami, and unicorn colouring sheets. The reason we have all of this is because of one particular boy.

Lei Yang walked down to his parents' bakery filled to the brim with customers and delicious smells of freshly baked dough. Pushing past the crowds to the counter, he pushed open another door where he found his mother in the kitchen taking a piece of flat bread out of the oven. Her hair was in a neat bun, pushing back her slick black hair into something as shiny as a mirror.

"Mama, I am just heading out for some time, I will be back soon." Lei Yang said as he sniffed in the freshly baked dough. His mother shook her head and sighed.

"Lei Yang, when are you ever going to give up on this stupid dream of yours?" She continued to chop the bread until each slice was half an inch thick.

"Mama, inventing is not stupid, it is a way to change the world, and I will change the world, someday." Lei Yang's voice became more unsure each time he said a word.

"Well, someday isn't here yet," his mother said, not even bothering to lay her eyes on him.

"So you may as well just give up." She turned away from her chopping board and headed towards the door with the freshly baked bread leaving him all alone in the room.

Lei Yang stood there for quite some time before leaving the kitchen, pushing back against the demanding crowds and then started running into the distance. Muttering to himself the entire way he finally stopped. He stopped at a gigantic house surrounded by Yunnan trees and flowers. He opened the gate and opened the door, leading him into a gigantic room full of silk pillows and furniture.

"Nai Nai! I am just here to collect all of my things!" Lei Yang called out. Right before him stood an old woman with silky blue clothing, slick white hair, much like his mothers and a wooden walking stick.

"Yes, my boy. It is all upstairs." She said as she slowly walked towards him. "Go, be like your grandfather," she lightly brushed his cheek with her butter like fingers.

Lei Yang hugged her and softly whispered in her ear, "You can count on it."

Lei Yang hurried upstairs to the second floor of his grandmother's house. In a small little room were all the things that would one day make him famous and rich. Lei Yang grabbed gigantic rolls of uncut paper and a bowl of jet black ink. He walked back down stairs and opened the blood red doors leading to the courtyard where he had entered earlier before. He took one last glance at the house and then set off to make his fortune, starting to walk the very long journey towards the city.

Days, months, years? Lei Yang had no idea how long it had been since he had left his family and friends for an idea that might not even work. In town after town he presented his idea, earning shelter and assistance throughout his journey. A sheet of paper in trade for a donkey may have been the most incredible thing to have happened to him at this stage of his life. The donkey's name was Loubo, and he got him there far quicker than he would have anticipated. After an incredibly long trip, Lei Yang had made it. Stalls all over the place full of fresh fruit and silk as soft as you could imagine. He found a table someone was selling for they had just gone out of business. Things could not have worked out better for him.

His tiny stand has stolen most of the customers from the other 50 stalls, leaving him with a crowd that looked about the size of his home town. As he started to smile, so did many other people. Whether it was an old man with a beard as long as an arm, or a little girl gleefully clinging onto her mother's arm. Lei Yang was happy, because they were happy.

"Here is the first ever piece of... piece of... piece of..." he looked around and said the first word that came to his mind. "The first ever piece of pepper!" The crowd went so silent that you could hear a pin drop. One man at the back of the crowd yelled out at the very top of his lungs,

"And exactly what does this pepper do?" He had a smirk on his face. But Lei Yang was ready to answer.

"I am glad you asked." He took out a brush and his ink and drew a singular line across the sheet of paper. Gasps and shocked faces came from the crowd. A little boy at the front of the crowd said something to him in a loud voice and a hushed tone.

"When I grow up I want to make paper just like you," the little boy said in his infant voice as he smiled and he started a chant that everyone there, big or small, young or old started to repeat.

"PAPER! PAPER! PAPER! PAPER!" Everybody joined the chant except for one person, and this person glared at him and smiled an evil smile. He had straight black hair pushed back with water and a toothy grin as white as Lei Yang's paper. Finally, the man turned around and started to walk away from the crowd. Much like everyone in his village would.

Lei Yang slept in a hut owned by a generous family near his store. He slept in between a wailing baby and a snoring four year old only to be woken up at 5am by a loud bang. Lei Yang raced out of bed and towards the noise; towards his stall.

As he arrived he found his paper gone, his ink gone, his life gone. Then, from behind a mango stall stepped someone who despised him, someone who only lives for money and fame, someone who is Lei Yang's brother.

"Long time no see." Lei Yang said in a sarcastic tone and got into a fighting position.

"Hau yu, why? We could have done this together, taken the spotlight together, been closer together," Lei Yang said as he got out of his fighting pose and into his normal standing position.

"The past is the past, the future is the future and the present is the present. And we can't change that," Hau yu said as he threw a punch towards his brother but was stopped with a firm grip and then kicked in the jaw. Lei Yang's bun was falling as his mane of hair fell down.

"It's not too late." Lei Yang said, as he let out his hand to help his brother up. "Join me and we can make hundreds!" his hand still offering to help.

"Hundreds of what? Smiles? What good will that ever do to me?" Hau yu threw another punch, but was thrown back to the floor. Blood was dripping down from his lower lip and attempted to get up but was only able to do as much as move his fingers and toes.

"I am sorry." Lei Yang said and his eyes got teary and watered up so much that within seconds his face was soaking wet. Knowing he would now be loved for his success, Lei Yang went home. Loved and appreciated by family, making thousands each day because of his inventions. Thousands of smiles.

New Tales of China's Inventions – The Curious Case of Cupriferous Carbate

ESF Island School, Chan, Jayden – 13

An inferno erupted violently from the dark coal. Vicious heat engulfed a heap of copper while it glowed, situated upon a rusty, well-used metal gauze. Trapping this heat was a sturdy cobbled furnace, standing firm unbothered by the hellfire scorching its stone skin.

From a distance stood a weathered, tired man. He had worked the daylight away in his dingy, soot-covered workshop, mining, smelting, and moulding copper for dozens of customers in his shop in a random alleyway in Hangzhou.

He was not in charge of monitoring the orders, but the blacksmith knew there were less customers than usual. He knew using copper was a bad idea, but he was forced to go with it.

Sitting wearily, the artisan finally started to relax, slumping on a chair, only to jolt up at the sounds of a bell ringing from the neighbouring room. He proceeded to begrudgingly heave himself through the doorway.

He found himself in an organised office, with a finely chiselled wooden table of vintage quality situated in the centre. Behind the table sat a man, wearing a lustrous golden tunic with fine details, that looked like it had never been worn.

The man behind the table grinned. "Sit down," he requested. "So... Lin Zhaohui, I hope you have had a good work day so far."

Lin Zhaohui reluctantly placed himself on a chair, and tensed up in anticipation of bad news. He glanced at the shiny new plaque placed on the table. It read: "Chen Xiaobo, production supervisor".

Chen continued: "I understand that we are to replace the gauze soon. However, our supplier just raised prices to 5 tael, which is much too expensive. We need to create a solution ourselves, and I have an idea."

Lin Zhaohui let out a pained sigh. He knew this news of cost-saving would not bring any good. Chen was the one who fired the cleaner, which left the workplace in disarray, not to mention the decision to operate solely on copper. This time, only Chen knew what was to come.

The two shuffled out of their seats and proceeded to the workshop. Without hesitation, Chen threw out the heap of copper and the metal gauze, startling Lin.

Chen revealed his idea: flimsy sheets of iron and carbon which he threw into the furnace. He disregarded the distressed look on Lin's face and tossed a brand new lump of copper in, and kickstarted the flame. Lin braced himself when Chen started the fire, as if he couldn't bear to see what happened next.

An unsettling vibration rattled the furnace. At first Chen didn't bat an eye, but heads were turned by a deafening pop. Lin squinted his eyes when he noticed a radiant fiery glow from the metals, and covered his ears when an unknown source started to vigorously hiss.

The cacophony climaxed with an explosion that shook the entire building. Magma soared through the air, followed by a thick blanket of smog and ash. When it cleared, what remained was a liquified, blistering metal.

“Don’t just stand there, collect it!” Chen demanded. Lin complied and dashed to grab the bar mould, which he left under the furnace.

While the two stood bewildered and dazed by the event, Chen ordered : “Lin, study the substance for the rest of the work day. I’ll help you file it.” Lin glanced at the pocket-sized water clock in the corner of the workshop. It read noon. “I’ll get it done by the end of the day, boss,” he reassured Chen.

He reached for his notebook and printed stamps on the desk. He turned around to face Chen, but all he saw was the closing of the shop door. He was confused at first, but he turned to see that Chen had clocked out, leaving him to work alone.

It was dusk. Lin was brushing down strokes with a laboured breath. His notebook was filled to the brim with conjectures and apparatus diagrams. Finishing his sentence, he stormed into Chen’s’ office ecstasically.

Chen whipped his head around to face him. He smiled. “Ah, Lin! You’re done with your documentation?” he inquired. Lin nodded excitedly and declared “I have some very fascinating findings to show you.”

Lin sat down and opened his ink-encumbered notebook to the first page, as well as laying down several tiles of this new metal, and two cups of water. The metals were shiny and had a flawless surface. Light bounced off every face of it almost perfectly.

Lin began. “Now, firstly, this metal is extremely durable. It could stand the weight of at least two dozen horses!” Lin proved his point by swinging a colossal hammer upon a tiny piece of the durable metal. He proudly displayed the morsel of metal, showing no dents or scratches. Chen gave a nod of acknowledgement.

Lin continued on. “The metal can also be sharpened to an unparalleled edge, and is quite lightweight.” He gestured to a sharpened spear tip on Chen’s table. Chen inspected the piece. It felt like nothing but a feather in his hands. He took the piece and made a swift swipe through the desk. The spear tip was trailed by a deep gorge.

Lin took another small piece of metal and dropped it into a cup of water, expecting Chen to panic with his knowledge of metals’ properties. When he didn’t, Lin disheartenedly stated: “The metal can’t corrode, either.” Both of them peered into the cup. The chunk sat languidly in the pool. Lin took a shiny, refined wedge of steel, and dropped it into another cup. That cup bubbled vigorously. The result was a rusted, flaky steel oxide that could barely hold any weight.

“Lin, this is incredible!” Chen remarked. Lin beamed with pride.

“Here’s the plan. You and I will go see some clients tomorrow. Whatever they pay, we can split the profits. And of course, I will pay you extra for the demonstration. Thank you, Lin. You can go home now.”

Lin was elated. He thanked the boss, quickly grabbed his coat, and dashed home early.

The sun arose from its slumber, brightening the sky. Lin sat lazily on a stool in his workshop. He glanced yet again at the water clock and groaned. Chen was an hour late.

When Lin's patience ran out, he decided to take a stroll in the nearby street. He studied the landscape of homes and temples. He listened to the songs of birds and the swaying of trees.

Lin's head turned when he heard the echo of someone's speech. The person, whoever it was, was thrilled, and moved from word to word jauntily and confidently. The sounds perked Lin's interest, and he moved toward the scene.

Turning the corner brought him to the town square, which was filled with a massive crowd. Bemused, Lin searched for a stage, but was taken aback to find his own boss standing in front of everyone. There he was, copying his journal word for word in front of the massive crowd.

Lin was livid. This whole time, he had been taken advantage of so he could do all the hard work while his boss got all the credit. He would not allow this thief to sneak away under everyone's nose. So he plotted an idea.

The last page of Lin's notebook said that the super-metal didn't have a name yet. But in reality, Lin did have a few ideas that he was more than willing to share. All he had to do was wait.

The time finally came. Chen uttered: "Unfortunately, we don't have a name for this amazing material yet, but we will release it as soon as we come up with one."

Lin stormed his way to the front of the crowd and exclaimed "That's where you're wrong! This material's name is Cupriferous Carbate."

Shocked, Chen choked on his breath. "Why, I don't believe that has any explanation!"

"Oh, it does. A combination of carbon, wrought iron, and copper, brought together by smelting. I know this, because I could identify all of the elements during smelting. Could you?"

Chen fell silent.

"I didn't think so. I also heard you say this Cupriferous Carbate was incredibly durable, but you failed to specify how."

Chen gulped. "Well, that's because it's all types of durable!" He timidly replied.

Lin shook his head with disappointment. "You didn't read my notebook, did you? This metal is hard, which means it is scratch resistant, and it is also compression-resistant" He made his way to a pocket-sized block of the super-metal. Borrowing an anvil from the neighbouring blacksmith, he heaved it upon the small chunk, and yet it stood strong.

Lin looked to the dumbfounded audience, and announced "Ladies and gentlemen, we will as soon as possible be using this material in our products, but I believe this man here has been giving you some inaccurate facts."

Chen yelped as he was pulled away from the stage by two onlookers, giving Lin an ear-to-ear grin.

Lin paused... "Now, where do I begin?"

New Tales of China's Inventions

ESF Island School, Chan, Nathan – 12

"Flash floods break century-long records; transport has been suspended across the city, with schools and even the stock market closed. The super typhoon since last Thursday has been causing panic all around the city. There have been 2,000 deaths so far, with 1,000 people still missing." Dr. Chen Ming scoffed the last piece of his crackers into his mouth and slammed the table with his fist. He had enough of the frequent extreme weather.

1975, Henan Province, China:

"Breaking news: the Banqiao Dam at the Ru River has collapsed and there are raging waters rushing into the city!" Water was gushing onto the streets as if it were a thundering beast on a rampage. Young Chen Ming and his parents were rushing down the streets, panting and gasping for air, but the water was rushing too quickly. Chen Ming's parents quickly pushed Chen Ming on top of a car, and his mother screamed, "Chen Ming! Stay there and wait for help, ah!" She got swept off her feet and carried away by the water along with her husband.

"Mom! Dad! Don't leave me! Please come back!" Chen Ming roared. Despite his tears overflowing in his eyes, his parents never came back, and that was the last time Chen Ming ever saw his parents.

Back to present:

That incident left a deep cut in Chen Ming's memories, and he remembered the flood and its destruction until now. Since he lost his parents, he longed to create a machine that could change the weather on command.

Forty years later, Dr. Chen had become an inventor and he always wanted to start on the project, but there was too much scepticism about the idea, as many people thought that it would be unethical and extremely risky to operate.

Dr. Chen, constantly having late nights inventing, barely got time to spend with his son, Chen Zhoufeng. Zhoufeng was a boy in primary school, and he was very intelligent and bright. Dr. Chen, not being the best parent, was always stuck in the laboratory, so Zhoufeng developed his own sense of independence and was able to take care of himself.

As Dr. Chen returned home after a late night's work, he went to his son's room to check on him. As expected, the young child was fast asleep, snoring like a pig. As he was about to leave, he saw Zhoufeng's diary open on the table. Out of curiosity, the father flipped open the page and he read, "Dear Diary, I hope that Dad's dream of making a weather-changing machine will come true. Then, Dad will be able to save lives and help people!"

A sense of emotional waves struck the scientist, as he felt so grateful that his son was supportive of his dreams. He took a deep breath as determination filled his guts, and he committed to completing the weather-changing machine, no matter how challenging it would be.

"Ring, Ring! Hey, what's up, Chen Ming?"

"Listen, Wang Lin, you're familiar with atmospheric physics, right? I have an idea."

"....."

"Are you sure? It sounds too risky."

"Yes, I believe in ourselves! It's settled, then! Let's meet up at the lab tomorrow!"

The next day, Dr. Chen met up with Wang Lin, his colleague, at his house. Wang Lin, an inventor, had a secret science lab with all the materials and tools they needed. Every day, they worked together in the lab, discussing and inventing prototypes until midnight and they even fell asleep there sometimes. After months of effort, the scientists achieved a breakthrough. They completed the weather control machine, successfully changing the atmospheric physics. They performed weeks of tests and were pleased to find that the machine gave perfect results, effectively changing the weather.

As Dr. Chen took a break from his science work for 3 days after the success, he was enjoying dinner. He turned on the news and saw the headline: "Good evening. Tonight, Typhoon Khanun will be approaching the coast of Shanghai city, and the winds and rain will be at a maximum speed of 300 kilometres per hour. We advise citizens to take action." Immediately after Dr. Chen saw the news, he rushed towards his lab, hoping that he wasn't too late.

Once he opened the door to his apartment, he already felt the strong wind pushing against his face. The rain lashed onto his head like pins falling from the sky, and he dashed across the street, running towards the laboratory. The sky was pitch black, and "Boom!" Like a piercing blade, lightning slashed across the sky like butter on a knife. He scrambled across the road, almost slipping on the floor. Drenched in sweat and rain, Dr. Chen was panting like a dog. Despite his stamina running out, he kept running and running, until he finally reached the laboratory. There, Dr. Chen was about to open the door when he saw a familiar figure.

"Huh... Wang Lin? Why are you here?"

Wang Lin was startled to see Dr. Chen at the laboratory too, and he chuckled. "It looks like we have the same idea; great minds think alike. Ha ha!"

Dr. Chen smirked and ruffled his wet hair. "Let's get the machine started, shall we?"

As the two scientists met up with each other unexpectedly, they both knew that it was time for the machine to shine.

"Chen Ming, have you got the signalors started up?" Wang Lin hollered across the room.

Dr. Chen replied, "Sure do. How about the engine and receptors?"

"Check, check, and check! We're all set!" Wang Lin declared. "Fire up the signals, Chen Ming!"

The machine worked perfectly, and soon enough, the clouds were less thickened and the moon could be barely seen. They tested the wind speed and it also decreased to 200 kilometres per hour. However, to the scientists' horror, the storm was far from over.

As the scientists were monitoring the weather analysis closely using a system that Wang Lin had set up earlier, they saw that there was going to be a heavy thunderstorm and lightning cloud approaching.

When they were trying to think of a way to change the atmosphere so that the thunderstorm would weaken, they noticed a wet sensation coming from the bottom of their shoes. As Dr. Chen looked to the ground, he saw a layer of water. It was spreading across the entire room, and the machine's panels started flickering on and off unstably. Instantly, horror struck within him and he ordered Wang Lin to start preventing water from seeping in through the door.

Dr. Chen was anxiously analysing the signal board, hoping that the alteration of the weather was going without a hitch. Unexpectedly, just as everything was going smoothly, all the pixels on the panel had gone dim. They didn't go back on it like it used to flicker. The fans used for cooling inside the machine also went off in a poof! He immediately called Wang Lin over to see the matter. When Wang Lin came across, all the lights in the laboratory went off, leaving the whole room pitch black.

"Oh no, it's a power outage! We need to get an energy source right now!" Almost instantly, Wang Lin rushed into the other side of the laboratory, and he hoisted two electric cases inside, storing the two hours of energy required to power the lab's lights. Then, Wang Lin made sure to backup his emergency electricity, utilising wind power. He heaved a heavy wind turbine out of his storage compartment.

"Chen Ming! Don't just stand there; come over and help me!" Wang Lin demanded.

Dragging the heavy turbine to the door, the two scientists groaned as it was massive. Wang Lin then proceeded to set it up, putting the turbine outside where the wind was raging and connecting the cord to the machine. Dr. Chen was amazed at how well prepared Wang Lin was when it came to emergencies. "Wow, Wang Lin, you sure made a lot of preparations!"

“Now’s not the time to thank me; start the machine and stop blabbering about nonsense!” Wang Lin snapped back with an irritated scowl.

Taken aback by his fellow scientists’ serious attitude, Dr. Chen proceeded to shift his focus back to work. He proceeded to start the machine again, crossing their fingers and hoping that it would work. He held his breath, ‘Please, make it work, make it work!’

To their utter glee, the machine responded, and the whole engine started again.

Brimming with delight, the two scientists were thrilled. After an hour, the wind speeds had already gone down to 60 miles per hour. Due to the change in atmospheric pressure, the typhoon weakened significantly over the course of the process. The thick rainstorm clouds also separated and were blown away thanks to the machine.

Leaving a clear, starry sky, chaos had passed away, restoring the silence and peace of the night. The crescent moon beams at them as if to congratulate the scientists on their success.

New Tales of China's Inventions – John and His Self Driving Taxis

ESF Island School, Chan, Valerie – 12

John snapped the newspaper shut and stared out of the taxi window. Everything was different now. A week ago, he would have been the one sitting in the driver's seat. But since the invention of self-driving taxis drove everyone in the town crazy, John hadn't smiled once, as this meant that every taxi driver in town was unemployed. Every taxi was self-driven now, and he was sitting in the backseat of a self-driving taxi himself.

"I'm proud of you, Dad."

Once the sweetest line of his daughter now became John's worst nightmare. He didn't know how to face her as a disgrace in her life.

"I used to have a purpose." John murmured, "Now I'm just an unemployed man."

He looked at the driverless seat curiously, thinking.

"What do you think?" He asked absent-mindedly.

"As an AI, I cannot think, but I can provide you with information on the topic."

He heaved a sigh and looked back down.

Suddenly, John's phone rang. It was Mr. Chan from the recruitment agency. Clearing his voice, he immediately sat up straight and accepted the call.

"Mr. Lau, are you heading over now?" a deep male's voice said.

"I... Yes, am I late?" He tried to sound cheerful.

"Your interview was at 3. It's currently 3:30."

"Oh? He flipped vigorously through the newspaper, "But the newspaper clearly says it's at 6:30, was there a mistake in the printing?"

"Certainly not. We sent the exact time to your email, didn't you check?"

"Email... Email... Oh! Those online mailboxes! Oh yes, sorry, my daughter usually checks for me. She must have forgotten. I'm not familiar with modern technologies."

"I'm sorry, if you're not familiar with new technologies, this job isn't suitable for you."

"Oh, but..."

The call ended, and John slumped into his seat. His only chance to get a job, gone.

"Why can't people learn to use physical mailboxes!" He raged angrily. The self-driving taxi stopped to a halt in the middle of a highway.

"As an AI, I cannot answer your question, but I can provide you with information on the topic. In recent years, digital communication methods such as email has led to a decline in the usage of physical mailboxes."

"Oh," John said impatiently. "I knew that ages ago. You didn't have to say that and stop in the middle of a highway. You're causing a traffic jam. Move."

There was undoubtedly more noise than there would have been on a normal highway. Cars were beeping and engines were humming. But John's taxi stopping in the middle of a highway doesn't seem to be the reason. There were the sound of taxis beeping and tires screeching.

"Whatever, stop here. I'll save you the trouble and walk there myself." John said.

"Yes sir," replied the taxi.

John pushed open the taxi door. But what he saw made him want to open the taxi door where it was safe, because the rallying self-driving taxis were certainly not. He stood still there for a moment, trying to process the situation he was in: broken road signs, crashing cars and a hundred or so self-driving taxis refusing to stop the engine and racing to get to the destination first. Some self-driving taxis even drove up the grass field.

"Oh, bother," John muttered.

He backed off to the side and pulled out his phone to call the police as a flock of a hundred birds caught his sight. He let the birds distract him for a moment as the little ones followed their mothers to the south. He was particularly interested in a tiny one that was flying lower than the rest. It had a broken wing. It struggled to fly, and suddenly, the broken wing gave way completely, and it dropped in panic above the traffic. It flapped one wing vigorously and made an ear-splitting squawking noise to its friends, but they didn't notice, nor care about him.

John gasped. He didn't think. He ran out on the highway to catch the bird.

"Hello?" The police finally picked up on the line. But John ignored it. He stretched out his hands as much as possible and pelted towards the little bird. It landed in the centre of his palms and stared up at him with wide open eyes. It wasn't till he brought it back to the side safely when he realised.

"You're a duck. You don't belong with the birds."

He placed him on the floor beside him and bent down to feed it some bread. He suddenly felt happy, the first time in days, like he had a value in life. Like man, like duck. It wasn't just him that screwed the harmony.

Suddenly, for the first time in days, he felt like he had a value in life, it was hard, just now, to feel afraid. John turned around. A self-driving taxi swivelled up the lane towards John and the duck in high speed. He wanted to run, but he couldn't: they were surrounded by taxis, beeping, roaring and groaning taxis. There was no way to escape.

And suddenly, everything turned black. He could only hear was the faint noise of police cars all around him. He wanted to do something, but it was too difficult. He lay on the hot ground and closed his eyes to rest a while.

Then a deep voice said, "Jealous, John?"

"My dad would never be jealous." John recognised this voice, it was his daughter, Sally.

The voice ignored this. "I heard I stole your job. AI taxi drivers will always be better than humans." Now, lame duck, you will get recycled."

Two robots came out from nowhere, seized John by the shoulders, took him away.

"Hey you! Stop! Dad is my hero!" cried the little girl.

All was black again.

The next time John woke up was three days later. He looked around, he was in the hospital ward. He turned on the news.

"Three days ago, there was a car accident with self-driving taxis colliding with each other, causing a 12-car pileup. No deaths were caused by the incident, but one man has been sent to hospital and is currently still in coma. A flaw in the design in Model ABC123 is spotted, and it will be brought back to the lab for redesigning. Meanwhile, the company is recruiting taxi drivers as co-pilots of Self Driving Taxis until the problem is resolved"

In the quiet hum of the hospital room, with the steady beep of the heart monitor as a backdrop, John's mind was a whirlwind of emotion and thought. The irony of his situation was not lost on him — a taxi driver displaced by the very technology that had carried him to this turning point. The AI that seemed to mock him in his dreams was, in fact, an embodiment of change. John realised that the emergence of AI was not a death knell for his livelihood, but a call to adapt. The fear of being replaced being a natural one, it was also a challenge to rise above. The self-driving taxis needed a touch of creativity — things no AI could replicate.

"Dad! You're awake!"

John's daughter Sally and his wife, Mary, entered the ward and sat next to him on the bed

"Have you heard about the flaw in the model?" Sally asked.

"Yes, I just watched the news," John replied.

John looked over to his wife. "Do you think I should take up the new job and give them some training?"

"But daddy, you don't even know how to check your email"

"Well, I may not know, but I will learn. After all, it's just a few buttons and a few clicks.

Sally giggled, as Mary looked admirably at him.

"Or I could advise them to make the ride more enjoyable, and show hospitality to people."

"But your story puts people to sleep on the count of three," Sally smirked.

"Get some rest, dear," said Mary, pressing lips on the husband's forehead.

The sun dipped below the skyline, and painted a breathtaking canvas of tangerine and crimson. John looked out of the window. The colours of the sunset seemed to resonate with him, marking the end yet the beginning. The emergence of the man-made artificial intelligence is not to punish humanity, but to push humanity to reimagine their roles in the world, where one complements each other's potential, like the perfect fusion of orange and red in the sky.

"Quack!"

A mother duck was towing her trail of ducklings across the pond. Among them was a newcomer, paddling eagerly at Mother Duck's side, not wanting to be left out. John observed the little duckling finding its way, a small but meaningful moment that spoke volumes. It was like a lightbulb moment for him — all you really need to do is find where you fit in, and just like that, you're on the path to starting something new.

New Tales of China's Inventions

ESF Island School, Hwang, Jeremy – 13

The rhythmic slapping of his leather sandals resounded across the stone floor as he hastened his pace, ever-dreading the sounds of their laughter that seemed to draw closer with each passing moment. Many times before he had fled through these twisting lanes and hidden alleyways, even though he knew each obscure route would never quite outpace their dogged pursuit.

He leapt over an open sewer, the filthy waters within stained black in the moonlight. Ahead, the alley opened up to one of the many main streets of the central city, bustling even at this late hour with peasants, officials, and merchants.

"You will not outrun us forever, mortal!" a sibilant voice hissed in his ear. He stumbled and spun around, but saw nothing in the inky blackness behind him. He pressed onward, breath ragged.

He dashed into a busy intersection, hoping its noise and lights would drown out the voices. But everywhere he turned, the voices followed. "You cannot escape us, fool!" a childlike voice giggles.

He shoved through the crowd, glowing eyes watching from every shadow. Down another alley he fled, hoping to lose them in the twisting lanes, but instead he found a dead end, the tall wooden walls of the city looming before him. He spun around, pressing his back against the weathered logs.

They materialised at the alley's entrance, blocking his only escape.

He sighed resignedly as an iron-like grip encircled his chest. The tightening hold hoisted him high, as his toes reflexively scrambled for the floor.

"Back to the northern roads with you, little man," a voice crooned, voice slick as oil. "Our game would be over too soon if you succeeded in your escape. And where would the fun be in that?"

The grip tightened as breath drained, panic rising. Glowing eyes peered through mist as darkness descended, witnesses to his plunge into darkness.

...

He released the fistful of lotus root into the vat of simmering water.

His stomach rumbled in protest at the foul stench, yet he knew better than to complain. While it was tasteless and lacked any real nutrition, it was the only thing keeping him alert and awake during long days of manual labour.

It was one of the many precautions he took to mask the fact that despite being known throughout the land for his brilliant designs and machines, he had little more to eat than the beggars in the alleys.

He ladled a spoonful of the broth as he made his way down into one of the many thoroughfares of Chang'an as the first golden rays of dawn crept over the eastern horizon, stirring signs of life as the city awoke from its nightly slumber.

Wooden buildings with arched rooftops soared on either side of the road, painted in many shades of red and green and blue. Rich silks and brocades hung outside tailor shops, their colours glowing in the soft light. Merchants calling out their daily prices added to the din of children playing, chickens clucking, geese honking.

...

The rhythmic clanging echoed throughout the workshop as he applied hammer stroke after hammer stroke, his body groaning in weary protest with each impact. Though the day was yet young, his limbs already burned from

hours spent in repetitive toil alongside his fellow craftsmen, all working to build the kingdom's latest commissioned water clock.

Sweat soaked through his roughspun tunic from the dual onslaught of blistering summer heat and the vigorous labour.

As noon came, the heat within the workshop became nearly unbearable.

As the last few pieces were fitted into place, he climbed up onto the wooden frame to check that the gears turned smoothly. The heat of the long day began to overwhelm him as he leaned over to make a final adjustment. But with a groan, he felt his balance slipping. His fingers scrambled for purchase on the smooth wooden beams but found no hold.

Darkness.

...

He stirs, his eyelids fluttering open.

"Finally up, are you?"

A figure smiled from a corner, hands busy sanding a sculpture.

"Who are you?" he asked, curiosity overcoming any suspicions. "I don't believe we've met before."

The figure's smile grew wider. "Not formally. But it was about time I introduced myself."

Their hands met in greeting. "I am Yan."

The name tingled at the edges of memory, although he was certain they'd never met. "Forgive me, but I do not—"

"Most do not until it is too late. I keep a much lower profile than my more... fearsome brethren."

As if sensing his unease, Yan began to change. Skin paled, hands elongating into wispy talons that reached like grasping fog. The friendly face melted into a skull-like visage, an ever-present grin full of secrets far from joyous.

"You thought to have escaped your fate, mortal, but none may flee the justice of Diyu," he hissed as clawed fingers wrapped around his throat.

Yan's empty sockets bore into him, as if probing his very soul. For an eternity it seemed to regard him silently, mist curling around clenched talons.

Just as darkness claimed him once more, the pressure around his throat abruptly released.

He fell in a crumpled heap, gulping greedy lungfuls of stale air. Through watering eyes he peered up to find Yan had withdrawn, eyeing him impassively through the now thick blanket of mist.

"I shall return for you, mortal. The gods have granted you seven years in the living realm, you have squandered that chance. They had spared you from my wrath, hoping in that time you might live to make up for escaping death and disrupting the balance between the realms of life and death. Relish these last moments, for when the seventh year has passed, you will be mine. No further mercy or escape will be possible.

...

It had been seven long years since the fire.

A spark had caught in the swirling sawdust and billowing fumes of the workshop, igniting a furious blaze within moments. Flames roared through the workshop with unnatural speed, devouring all in its path.

He coughed and wheezed, stumbling blindly through the flames seeking escape. But the fire had consumed the rafters, trapping all within in an inescapable furnace.

He saw his fellow workers collapsing amidst screams of pain. He remembered screaming out one last cry of agony himself before being consumed by a wall of crimson flames.

Molten rock flowed in rivers.

The fog came up to his chest, limiting his vision to mere feet in each direction, but through the haze, he spotted a minute fissure in the sulphurous walls.

Mustering his remaining strength, he clawed and pried at the crevice until it widened into a hole just enough to slip through.

He emerged back within the blazing forge, untouched by flames.

But in defying death, he had incurred a terrible wrath.

He knew that Yan, king of Diyu, would never rest before reclaiming what was rightfully his.

...

He wakes once more.

He was greeted by soothing, familiar sounds – the rhythmic chopping of wood in the courtyard, the high whistle of a teapot on the cookfire.

Slowly, light and shadow began to coalesce into clarity before his eyes. At first all was a dizzying blur, but soon discernible shapes emerged. Surrounding him with looks of concern were the weathered yet kindly faces of his fellow workers.

A warm sigh of relief escaped his dry lips.

"Get your feet back under you now lad, no time to laze about," chuckled a grizzled blacksmith, passing him a misshapen clay cup of steaming ginger tea.

Just as he slowly found his feet once more, a chill ran through him at the sound drifting in from behind.

It began as a low chuckle, growing rapidly in volume until peals of high, mocking laughter rang out across the emptiness left where his fellow workers had stood.

Three imposing figures had materialised.

At their fore was Yan, regarding him with a cold, impassive gaze. By his side hovered two more figures. One bore the angular features and flaring nostrils of a horse, while the other bulged with corded muscles beneath an ox's shaggy head.

A tremor passed through him at the sight of these guardians of Diyu, Yan's most trusted advisors and fellow guardians of the underworld. What dire purpose had brought the dread lords of death itself to stalk the living realm?

"You thought your defiance would go unanswered, mortal? None escape our justice so easily."

With a thin smile, Yan lifted something from the workbench – the finely crafted brass compass the man had spent the past few days delicately crafting.

"A feat of craftsmanship indeed," Yan mused, long talons caressing the instrument. A cold light gleamed in his empty sockets. "Perhaps instead of fighting your fate, mortal, you'd rather put these skills to other use."

"If you are so fond of this mortal coil, why not cling to it forevermore?"

Before he could react, Yan's grasp took hold of him and he felt himself getting smaller and smaller.

Towering spires and winding alleys appeared below, bustling with tiny phantom inhabitants going about their business, unaware of the man's predicament high above. He had become but a speck against the heavens.

Yan's booming laughter echoed across the miniature landscape. "Within this compass-realm you will play out your days, mortal. No place shall hide you from our grip that pulls you north!"

With a gasp, he fled, darting down narrow lanes in a desperate bid to lose Yan's laughter.

But each time he thought himself free, they would find him and yank him inexorably back to due north.

So the endless cycle began, of racing through this phantom city within the walls of brass, the gods' dark mirth ever resounding behind each new chase.

New Tales of China's Inventions – Compass

ESF Island School, Lam, Jovi – 13

Wang had always lived a life filled with hardships and obstacles in a rural village in East China. Being a lowly peasant, his outfits consist of ragged, worn, and tattered clothes, containing more holes than intact cloth. His face bore the marks of his hard-scrabble existence, with scratches and bruises from his carelessness in the fields. Dirt and dust surrounded him like a tornado, a testament to his soul-breaking work and lack of means to properly care for himself. Despite his circumstances, Wang was a generally optimistic fellow and possessed a high level of curiosity that could not be quelled. This was only further strengthened by a variety of challenging obstacles thrown at him by God himself. Little did he know that this would play a major role in the course of history.

While Wang was ploughing his life away on the barren fields under the blazing sun, his desperation for water and food slowly overtook his mind. His back bent under the unrelenting labour and the sun's never-ending brutal rays. As he was taking a rest under a tree to avoid sunburn, he stumbled across a rusty piece of lodestone with a spoon-like shape, buried within dirt and mud. Curiously, he tried to turn it like a spinner, but his efforts proved futile.

The lodestone would only face one direction, regardless of what he did. Excited that he had some entertainment to cure his boredom from work, he happily took it with him and skipped back to his hut, proud of his find.

As he entered his shabby house, it became apparent that he didn't have the best living conditions. The entire house was filled with overgrown greenery, vines, and foliage that emerged across the house like an abandoned castle. The floorboards showed extensive wear from decades of existence. Gaps had developed between many of the warped planks as the wood swelled and contracted with the changing seasons and moisture levels. His bed was falling apart; termites and beetles had reduced the wooden frame to mere scraps, feasting on the pieces of wood like Thanksgiving dinner. His blanket was made from a patchwork of coarse grasses, foliage, and grain chaff that provided little resistance from the relentless elements. He placed the piece of lodestone on the floor and went to bed, dreaming about the possibilities he could make with that unique rock.

His interest in the stone and its seeming limitless potential grew over time. Regardless of what he's doing, his thoughts return to the unusual block and its ability to always point north. What mystical forces caused it to behave so unnaturally? What were its origins? Was it fate that brought this ancient artefact to him? These thoughts pondered him as he toiled endlessly in the fields under the scorching sun.

After another day of gruelling labour, his muscles ached, his hands were sore, and his bones felt like they would disintegrate if he took a step. But the thought of being able to look into his prized lodestone kept him going. With each step he took on the rough skin-scraping dirt, his feet sent a shoot of pain throughout his body, weakening him even further. Yet he still pressed on. The lodestone had become his only thought, with its never-before-seen abilities. These were the things that kept him going. One foot waveringly placed before the other, Wang endured the final distance home. Being reunited with the stone had become his singular joy.

Wang passionately analysed the stone, examining its unique structure and colour repeatedly through the dead of night. He became increasingly amazed and profoundly moved by the stone. As his coal-black eyes scanned the piece of stone for the tenth time, an idea popped into his mind. In an instant, he ran across the room, continuously collecting random artefacts scattered across the house. After grabbing what he desired, he calmly slowed down and returned to his original position. What he had in his grubby, grey hands was an item he had found a few weeks prior in the local dumpsters. It was a metallic square plate with strange markings adorning the rim, which he thought possessed elegance and value. Coupled with the plate was the spoon, which was slowly oxidising. Hesitantly, he placed the piece of stone on top of the dusty, untouched base. As they finally touched, Wang realised that this was no coincidence. They were somehow a perfect match.

He rubbed his eyes. It's impossible.

The spoon was placed perfectly in the middle of the plate, hovering as a hummingbird would, barely millimetres from the plate without touching, with no signs of it being unstable or abnormal. Despite his numerous attempts to change the spoon's direction, the spoon stubbornly pointed in the same direction. This dumbstruck Wang's doubts about whether the spoon would change direction when being intervened by another item vanished. The numerous possibilities that came with this newfound discovery flooded his mind. However, the hooting of nearby birds broke his train of thought, and he was reminded to rest and save up sufficient energy to live another day. As he lay on the uneven padding of his bed, he wondered what God had in store for him in the future and closed his eyes.

As Wang prepared to set off for another long day in the fields, he gathered his lacklustre assortment of farming tools. Among them was an ancient-looking hoe whose handle had long since fallen victim to Mother Nature and time. Generations of neglected storage had taken their toll, leaving the wood with clusters of blisters and cracks. Though clearly past its prime, the tool would have to suffice for now, as with all other aspects of Wang's difficult life. Making do with less has become a necessity.

His train of self-pitying thoughts came to a halt as increasingly loud, thundering sounds of boots clashing against the crumbling floor, grunts, and high-pitched battle cries that could be heard from miles away slowly came to him like an inescapable tornado hovering over its next victim. Wang, being curious, cautiously stepped out of his hut, tightly gripping a wooden stick. Ready to face any awaiting challenges.

As the sounds got nearer and nearer, a wide, jagged outline started to form in front of Wang's eyes. One side of him urged investigation of this figure, while the other concealed caution and commanded him to stay by his hut. Curiosity eventually got the better of him, and Wang decided to slowly advance towards this unexpected visitor to uncover its true nature and the reason for his intrusion.

As he warily trodden towards them, he realised this would exceed his expectations. His eyes gleamed in awe at a tall, muscular man on an equally fine-looking horse. His metal, spotless armour shone brighter than the sun itself, and long brown locks streamed proudly from his helmed head, catching the breeze in a rippling dance. Wang stood in shocked silence, keenly aware of his diminished appearance next to this vision of martial glory. The man also had an ominous aura surrounding him, strong enough to make Wang's legs wobble.

Through their conversation, Wang realised that the man was lost in direction; hence, he ended up in this impoverished village. Wang presented the man with his compass. The man was confused about Wang's intentions. He was doubtful when this skinny little boy showed him a plate with a spoon on top. It was similar to a proud child showing an artwork with unclear intentions to his mother, leaving the mother with no idea of how to respond. The man hesitated at first, seeing this action as a potential threat, but after another assessment of the situation, he decided to accept Wang's gift. He slowly backed away, ready to draw his weapon at a moment's notice.

As his eyes scanned over the item for any potential dangers, his mind slowly turned into Wang's, and the magical feeling of discovering a never-before-seen item that could have some hidden purpose flooded into the man's head. With further inspection, he realised that this was not the combination of scraps he thought he was given. The compass acted somewhat like a navigation tool, always pointing in one fixed direction. The realisation that this thing could make navigation across deserts and oceans doable while being able to map it out so that others could do the same was mind-blowing to the man. He wanted to instantly take this new discovery to the emperor and scholars across China. Yet, the thought of taking all the credit from poor Wang, who discovered this item, and leaving him alone like a stray dog disgusted the man. But he had the desire to help and to change his country. His foot slowly placed itself on the saddle's stirrup, and in the blink of an eye, he was gone.

Speechless at what he had witnessed, he waved to the man. Not knowing his intentions or the action he had just committed. A whirlwind of confusion overcame Wang as he contemplated the loss of his artefact; nevertheless, the calm after this incident filled him with gratitude for being able to help the man and get him home safely. Little did Wang know, his single action of giving forever changed China's navigation history, fate, and the world as a whole.

New Tales of China's Inventions – Hidden Wonderland of Silk

ESF Island School, Lung, Vincy – 13

“Look what I found in the book!” I hollered out, trying to seek attention from my friends.

I was in awe when they saw the making of the silk, and the details that were narrated in the book. There were a few workers working on such a fragile machine which produced the most luxurious silk. The floral patterns adorned the pure white background on the silk. I was so drawn into this opulent silk and ran our fingers on the book acting as if it was real silk.

Back when my mother was still alive, she was always making silk at home in the garden. Everyday. My father would also help her by building a spinning wheel and my mother treasured that for the longest time. Mother wanted me to work with silk as well, and always begged me to spin silk with her. However, I just thought it was such mundane work and was never helping her. I never paid much attention to silk, not until she passed away last month. I regretted every moment when I refused to work with her on silk. I never saw the beauty in silk, but when she passed away, that was the only thing I had to remember her by. Now I can only imagine, helping her grow her silkworms, helping her spin her silk, helping her weave her silk.

My friends thought it was not good for me to keep dwelling on the past. I know they didn't mean to hurt me, but when they told me not to think about her, I felt a sharp pain go through my stomach. I ignored them, and continued looking into the making of silk, wishing I was able to see them in real life.

If only I could see them in real life, just one more time...

Out of the blue, the floor turned into a hole and I was sucked into the darkness. The wooden floor panels were also falling down and I wavered left and right trying to dodge the wooden panels. My palms were covered with sweat and a shiver ran down my spine, as I let gravity take me to wherever.

After what felt like a thousand hours, I thumped onto the ground as I used my hands to stop myself from leaning forward and hitting my head. I stood up and inspected the place. The ground was rough with little bushes growing all around. There was a sign that said “Xi'an” with a cat sitting beneath it. The sign was destroyed and chipped in some places and the ink of the word was greatly scratched. I decided to walk around the city, and stumbled upon a hidden cave nestled at the base of a rugged cliff.

There were ancient pictures of the silk making process stuck around the entrance of the cave, and the one in our book was coincidentally stuck there as well.

As I cautiously entered the cave, the dim light from our torches revealed a vast chamber of stalactites and stalagmite. The air was cool and musty, carrying a hint of earthiness. The wall, etched with mysterious symbols and ancient drawings, seemed to whisper tales of a long forgotten era. The sound of water dripping echoed throughout the cavern, adding a sense of wonder and intrigue and the chirping of insects and rustling leaves added a melody to our journey. In the heart of the cave, it was filled with silk fabrics and tools for silk production. The silk flowed in the middle of the cave, with ancient silk making machines within, evoking a sense of awe and reverence.

As I delved deeper into the cave through the narrow passageways, the sound of our footsteps echoed off the walls. The air was cool and damp, with the scent of ancient parchment and leather bindings flowing along. I stumbled upon a hidden library with some patterns engraved on it. Layers of dust were flying everywhere, as I opened it. The flickering light from my torch revealed rows upon rows of books that dated back centuries. I was awestruck by the sheer magnitude of the collection and I just dreamt about spending hours poring over the text, deciphering ancient languages and learning about the making of silk. These detailed images that were laid upon books unravelled the secrets of sericulture, the process of farming silkworms and the weaving of silk fabric. I was stunned to find that the silk production had originated in Neolithic China, within the Yangshao culture around 4000 to 3000 BC.

The text also mentions the legendary Chinese princess Xi Lingshi, who accidentally discovered silk when a cocoon dropped into her tea while she was sitting under a mulberry tree. The empress was intrigued by the potential

of silk and encouraged her husband to give her a grove of mulberry trees to raise silkworms. With her mind drilled into silk, she mastered the art of silk weaving and began the first silk production in China.

I was captivated by the ancient artisanship and the cultural significance of silk, which had shaped trade routes and connected distant civilizations. I marvelled at the enduring allure of silk, a fabric that had been treasured for thousands of years and influenced the history of numerous countries. As I learned more about the silk making process, I gained a profound appreciation for the craftsmanship and skill that had helped sustain the production of the luxurious fabric through the ages.

As I prepared to leave this hidden wonderland behind, I carried with a sense of discovery. My torch gleamed, casting dancing shadows on the rugged walls as I made my way through the winding passages. The air was alive with whispers of my own excitement and the echoes of water dripping. Each step seemed to resonate with the weight of the knowledge I had gained. As I emerged from the mouth of the cave, blinking in the light of the settling sun, I knew what I carried was not only our extraordinary find, but a newfound appreciation for silk making and the last hope for holding onto my mum. The hidden cave helped me divulge a glimpse of my mum's life and a sense of wonder that would stay with me forever.

I clambered out of the dark, mysterious cave and was blinded by the bright ray of light from the sun. The black cat which was right under the "Xi'an" sign was here outside the cave. Its sleek fur glistens under the sunlight. Its piercing green eyes seemed to hold a secret and its movements were graceful and calculated. Its presence was both alluring and intimidating, and I couldn't help but touch its soft, silky fur. As I stroked the cat's hair, the ground beneath us broke into a hole...

I fell into a dark abyss, my scream echoing off the walls as I tumbled down. The air rushed past me, and felt weightless for a moment until crashing onto a hard surface. As I laid there, dazed and disorientated, I realised that I was now back in my house. The cat also followed us to my house, I guess it could be a symbol of my mum and all the time I had missed with her.

"Hey, lunch is ready. I was trying to find you all mornin'- Wait, when did you get the cat?" Dad asked as he looked puzzled

"On...on the street." I stammered, trying to hide my face.

I walked out to the garden carrying my new cat. I felt the summer breeze on my face, in the heaven of tranquillity and delight. The air is filled with the fragrance of blooming flowers as vibrant petals danced in the gentle breeze. The sun's warm embrace illuminated the lush greenery, creating an atmosphere that embraces the soul. Here, I can immerse myself in nature and reminisce about the adventure I just went on. The summer garden is a testament to the power of knowledge and growth, as life flourishes and thrives in lush, verdant oasis.

Mother would be proud. Very proud.

New Tales of China's Inventions

ESF Island School, Tsang, Jacob Riley – 12

In the distant future, electrical energy has become a remnant of the past. Neurally–implanted microchips developed by a company called Encephalink have become the norm. Hailing from Shenzhen, a man named Ma Yi Lan was the man who pioneered the discovery of neural interfaces capable of integrating with the brain's networks. Scientists and researchers also working at Encephalink discovered a way to create ultra–thin, flexible electrodes that can be implanted into specific regions of the brain without causing damage or interference with normal brain function.

Ma Yi Lan's main goal was not to help society progress further using his invention though, but it was monetary gain for himself. He had concocted a sinister plan, one that would plunge China into poverty, while the 1% would pick up the pieces, and continue to live peacefully. First, he would charge little for the installation of the chip, taking a fee of as little as 1500 yuan, having citizens sign a contract to finalise it. Secondly, after the chip was installed through a short surgery, he would allow citizens to enjoy the features of the chip, including implanting shows and movies through electrical signals, allowing for entertainment. Third, after 3 months of the chip being in the brain, the chip would start charging a hefty fee of 500,000 yuan a month. Most people's yearly salaries could not even pay a month's subscription, but lucky for them, the "generous" Ma Yi Lan offered for it to be paid in instalments. 95% of the citizens' monthly income would be put towards a subscription, which left only bits and pieces for utilities and food.

It was at this time that law enforcement started taking notice. But Ma had planned for this, and those who did not read the fine print of the contract had fallen right into Ma's trap. Even government officials and the most precise lawyers had fallen victim, being tricked by Ma's tricky wording and paraphrasing. The poverty rate and average salary dropped as a result of Ma's doing, and most of Shenzhen plunged into the gaping jaws of homelessness and poverty. Shenzhen became a dystopian wasteland. Resources were scarce, and instances of scraps and territorial conflicts increased. But, we're forgetting about the people who could pay the monthly subscription. All of them banded together, and hid out in the outskirts of Shenzhen, sticking their heads into the sand like an ostrich. They continued to enjoy luxury features of the chip, while the city of Shenzhen burned before their eyes. Ma Yi Lan, using the immense wealth he gained from just the subscriptions, paid out the officials to hush it up, and he went on to many other cities to conduct the same plan, changing his alias every time.

Though a monster, Ma Yi Lan was also a genius. After exploiting many people in many cities in China, he changed his name, and forged all the relevant documents needed to escape China. By now, he was public enemy #1 in many cities, and time was ticking for him. Ma, with a target on his head, was escorted across the border to Mongolia by big burly henchmen, where he boarded a flight to the Caribbean, where he stayed until his death from natural conditions at 105 years old.

Room of Treasures

ESF King George V School, Alimin, Kyra – 12

A door slams loudly, and a young girl, her dark eyes glowing with anger, slumps down on a frilly canopied bed. Her face glistens with tears, black hair sprawled in different directions, a few stray hairs sticking to her wet, pink cheeks. Below the room, arguing can be heard as father and mother decide on a punishment for their “ungrateful” daughter. The girl listens, eyes widened, holding a cup to her ear and laying down on the hardwood floor. *A D+ on a test about CHINESE INVENTIONS! We taught her this long ago! How dare she forget the teachings?* Spiteful words come through the thick floor, into the ear of the awaiting listener. *Grounded for a month*, a harsh, motherly voice suggests. *No, TWO months*. A gruff, deep voice interrupts. Tears roll down pink cheeks and onto the wood planking, repainting the wood a darker shade of brown.

A sharp knock on the locked wooden door harshly yanks the girl out of her swirling thoughts. The cup is quickly discarded into a dusty corner, her bed shaking as she leaps into the covers. A stern, middle aged woman steps into the room, greying hair tied back in a tight bun. She clears her throat, and the young girl prepares to hear her awaiting fate. *Lea*. Her mother calls for her attention. *Grounded for two months*. Her mother says, leaning her hand against the doorframe. *No electronics for a month, either*. Her mother’s black pupils narrowed. She tosses a crumpled paper, with messy writing and a giant “D+” scrawled on with an angry red pen, into the room. With that, the door closes, and slippers could be heard stepping down the stairs.

As rain pours down from the darkened sky, a decision is made, and Lea pulls her window open. Teardrops rain down from the heavens as the clouds cry and the thunder sings its angry song. Her small hands grab the ledge of her window, and dainty feet in bright yellow rain boots swing over the side. Lea stretches her limbs as far as she could, the tip of her rain boots barely grazing the soft ground below. Wet fingers hang on to the ledge, heels tapping against the wet stone of the house’s siding. With a grunt, her feet hit the soft dirt, yellow rain boots getting coated in brown, sticky, mud. The rain mixes with the remnants of Lea’s tears, the cold rain causing her slim arms to shiver. She pulls her jacket closer around her, a determined set to her jaw, and ventures forward. Where was she going? Even Lea herself didn’t know. *As far as possible away from the household*, the words ring in her mind.

Her yellow boots trample through the mud, wet grass making the ground ever so slightly slippery. The soft pattering of the rain soaks her hair, the wet strands clinging to her face. The raindrops mix with the salty drops that are her tears, mingling and running down her face. Lea keeps on striding forward, her feet catching on small rocks and such, causing her to trip. Suddenly, her foot slips on a rather large stone, hands reaching out to grab the ground beneath her.

Strangely enough, her fingers weren’t able to grasp the ground. That is, not until a few moments later than expected. As Lea is about to give up hope of grabbing the ground, she comes into contact with slightly damp soil, her leg scraping against a particularly sharp rock. She inhales sharply at the searing pain soaring through her leg, looking down to see a few trickles of crimson blood running down her calf, the warm feeling sending a shiver down her trembling body. Lea grimaces, her little mouth pursing, and looks up, seeing a narrow, straight chute in which she fell through. She turns around sharply, a dark tunnel looming in front of her, a few flickering lights illuminating the way just enough to see which way you’re going. She gasps, her gasp echoing through the long, narrow path. She takes a tentative step, jumping as a dry leaf crunches under her left foot. Slowly, but surely, she makes her way through the tunnel. A few steady steps later, the light is becoming closer and closer. Yellow boots trample on dry soil, A shining beacon seeming to beckon to the shivering girl. When she reaches the source of light, Lea is blinded for a second, shielding her eyes from the massive light. When her eyes get accustomed to the light, she notices that the room she has just stepped into is absolutely covered in artefacts of every kind. An ornate tub of gunpowder, many sheets of pulpy, browning paper with indescribable scribbles, and rolls and rolls of beautiful silk. She could hear in the distance the sound of a *guzheng* and a *dizi* playing in harmony, and gasped as knowledge came flooding through the gates of her head. In her mind, the droning sound of her teacher played:

The ancient Chinese have created a lot of inventions that we now use in our daily lives, like paper, silk, gunpowder, and umbrellas. These inventions have greatly influenced our ways now, and many of them are things we rely on nowadays.

Lea hears rushing above her, and tilts her head upwards to see a beautiful red fabric umbrella drifting down towards her. She grabs the wooden handle, hesitantly opening the umbrella. Sparkling dust rains down on her, creating a cloud no man could see through. Once the fog has cleared, Lea's pupils widen to see that the room has completely changed. She is now standing in a dark wood room, the musty smell of dust and wood polluting the damp air. The umbrella she's holding starts to quiver and shake like an alarm clock, and jumps out of her hand, practically bouncing into a corner of the room. The umbrella knocks on a little golden knob in the very corner, and the corner of the room opens up to a secret extended area of the traditional-style room. The same artefacts are placed there, no different from the ornate room she was in. The music stays the same, too. The umbrella twirls over to a silk roll, bumping it repeatedly until it too leaps up, excitedly tapping each and every one of the other artefacts, until they too are hopping around in perfect synchronisation. The music gets louder, the artefacts all bounding up and down into each other in time to the music. This whole time, Lea is standing, unmoving, transfixed by the beautiful display in front of her. Everything's calm and peaceful, and even has Lea seriously considering staying here for a while longer. That is, until the silk roll accidentally knocks the candle into the crate of gunpowder. Rumbling starts shaking the ground violently, Lea grabbing onto the nearest shelf for support. A loud bang scares her, and she whirls around in horror to see the fire spreading across the gunpowder barrels, and she realises it's only a matter of time before everything blows up. She hastily starts running, through the endless corridors of the house she didn't even know existed. Yellow boots hurtle back through dry, dirty soil, dry leaves crunching as walls explode behind her. She barely makes it out, fingers scrabbling to get a hold of the opening of the tunnel she fell through and using the entire remainder of her strength to pull herself up. Lea's messy, dirt crusted head pops up out of the ground, her shaking legs struggling to hold all her weight. Once she regains her breath, she bolts back home, a stray piece of red silk clinging to her hair. She trips, and this time is able to catch the ground beneath her, wincing as she looks at her injured leg. She swings back into her bedroom window, landing on her feet in her room, and wipes off all the dirt she "collected" on her adventure, excess soil dotting the floor. Lea crumples onto her bed, utterly spent.

The next day, somewhere else in the world, somebody wakes up to find their house trashed.

An Official Problem

ESF King George V School, Deng, Jenny – 11

Skipping along the stone path was a man who was going to the market to sell fruits. The sky was a light blue and the warm sun shone down. Then, suddenly, clouds slowly filled the sky and light drops of rain pattered down onto the man's back. He let out a gasp and began to jog. The raindrops soon came down furiously and the man started sprinting. Shielding his basket of fruits, he ran even faster in the rain, breathing more and more rapidly.

Overwhelmed with exhaustion, the man saw a pavilion ahead. Barely staggering inside, he sat down next to another man who was also resting. "Thump!" A heavy hand was placed onto his damp shoulder. Holding his breath, the man slowly turned around to see a scornful face wagging his finger at him.

"I'm so sorry, sir, I don't have any money!" The man begged as he kneeled down, dripping, on the floor.

"Say no more", snarled the official. "Guards, seize him!"

The man was carried away by the guards, his eyes looking with hope at the man who sat beside him. He was Lu Ban. As Lu Ban watched, he thought of something in his past. His best friend from childhood had died because he was poor and so was forced to stay in the rain for many hours. Lu Ban boiled up with anger at the thought. "I will get you back..." Lu Ban muttered to himself. "Just you wait..."

The village was very far from the market which meant the villagers all had to walk a few hours to sell and buy what they needed. The weather was always changeable, so they had to shelter in the pavilions provided. However, the official was an arrogant and vindictive man, who abused his power by forcing the villagers to pay high fees to rest in them.

That night, Lu Ban called the village to a meeting. "I vote, we protest and go against the official!" Lu Ban said firmly.

"But the official is nice!" defended one villager. "He's tall, he's neat, he's smart..." But the rest of the villagers agreed in principle with Lu Ban, as they had suffered and endured the official for many years, even if they were anxious about causing trouble.

The villagers discussed the issue amongst themselves and nobody was sure what they could do.

"I vote we build our own pavilions!" one villager finally suggested. "That way, the official can't charge us".

"Agreed!" shouted some other villagers. So it was decided that the villagers would build their own pavilions.

So, they got to work. Early the next morning, all the villagers gathered together, ready to start.

"Come on, chop quicker! You don't want to pay the official, do you?" said Lu Ban to a villager.

"Hey, is the latrine pit connected to you?" Lu Ban said to a teenager who went to the latrine too often.

"But the sun is so hot..." the teenager complained.

"Oh, so you decided to keep on paying the official!" Lu Ban said sarcastically. The teenager quietly got back to work.

After months of working, the pavilions were finally built. The villagers' eyes filled with happy tears as they hugged and congratulated each other. "Yes! We did it!" they shouted.

Suddenly, a dark shadow towered over them, wagging his finger. "Well, where's your money?" the official growled.

"Hey, we made the pavilions!" one villager protested. "You can't charge us!"

"Oh, yes I can", barked the official. "I own this piece of land, and I can charge you for whatever you build on it." Children wailed, villagers argued, but nothing could change the mind of the official. Lu Ban filled up with rage.

"You may have won this time, but I am going to think of something else!" And with that thought, Lu Ban stormed away.

"Ugh!" Lu Ban screamed as he crumpled and tossed away yet another piece of paper. How he wanted to take revenge on the official! He thought about it all the time, even dreamed about it, but the plans never worked out. Exasperated, he sat down on a stool as he chewed a stale piece of bread. Suddenly, he felt his stomach churn and his mind spun round and round and round...

Lu Ban opened his eyes and was amazed to see many graceful white birds surrounding him. Looking down, he saw lots of beautiful, green treetops below. "Boom! Crash!" The birds scurried to shelter from the storm under a tree, and watched as heavy drops poured from the sky. They fought over the berries that grew on the tree, squawking and pecking at each other. Lu Ban whipped around at a sudden chirping noise and saw a little blue bird pecking under its own little tree. "That's smart", Lu Ban thought, and bit into a berry himself. Then he felt his stomach churn once more, and squeezed his eyes shut as the world whirled around him. Then he was back in his own house, sitting on the stool, holding his half-eaten piece of stale bread.

Lu Ban shook his head, dazed, and immediately got to work on his new idea. After weeks of planning, designing, sawing, hammering and sewing, he stood back proudly to admire his work.

Lu Ban walked around with it on a rainy day, whistling to himself. The official didn't take any notice, for he was busy pushing the poor people out of the pavilions.

"Get out of my way, you street rat!" laughed the official, shoving a beggar onto the ground.

"Please take pity on us, official!" pleaded a small girl. "That man is my father, please let him come in!"

"Arrest that girl and—"

"Hey, everybody! Take a look at the one and only umbrella!" someone shouted out.

The official whipped his head around, furious. He saw Lu Ban holding a long pole in his hand. On the top of the long pole was the most delicately patterned sheep skin, made into the shape of a cone, and when Lu Ban pressed a shiny silver button on the stick, the sheep skin popped up to form a beautiful big hat around Lu Ban. The wooden pole was elegant too, with swirls and dots and patterns carved carefully onto it, then painted a stunning gold.

"What's that you're holding, Lu Ban?" he asked curiously.

"Oh, it's my new invention, an umbrella!" Lu Ban replied proudly. "It can protect you from the rain and let you walk at the same time." Villagers began curiously crowding around Lu Ban, begging to touch the amazing invention.

"Lu Ban is getting everyone's attention..." the official thought. "I must get myself an umbrella!"

"Lu Ban!" the official called out sweetly. "I am very interested in your umbrella, is there any possibility that I could buy it?" Lu Ban grinned to himself.

“Well,” began Lu Ban, “If you want my umbrella, you will have to give me all the money you have taken from the villagers”.

The official thought hard and bit his lip. “I enjoyed charging the villagers”, he thought. “But I want their respect and attention more than anything, and I might be able to sell the umbrella for a high price”. So, with that, the official agreed.

Lu Ban handed the umbrella to the official confident in his plan. Pleased, the official strutted back to his palace, stroking the smooth wooden pole of the umbrella.

The official watched the weather every day, waiting for raindrops to start pouring down, but they never came. “How strange”, he thought, “there is always rain in the summer”. Day after day, night after night, the rain never came. The official began to grow impatient: “When will the rain ever come?!”. He made up his mind to show off his umbrella as best as he could when it finally rained.

“Splish splash!” rain finally started pouring down onto the streets. The official pumped his fist in the air, grabbed the umbrella, and sprinted down the road. “Hey, everyone! Look at my umbrella!” the official called out. But nobody responded. Bewildered, he peeked inside the pavilions, but there wasn’t a single person in sight.

As the official continued to check in the pavilions, he saw a man skipping along the path, carrying a basket of fruits. And he was holding an... umbrella! The official could hardly believe his eyes! “Where’d you get that umbrella?” the official asked him.

“Oh, Lu Ban gave it to me”, the man replied, skipping on. Then, right in front of the official’s eyes, there appeared one, two, three, four... a sea of umbrellas swarming towards him. The official stood on the spot with his mouth open. There were hundreds of umbrellas stretching into the distance, as far as his eyes could see.

The Eyes of an Angel

ESF King George V School, Gupta, Divyam – 13

“Students! Give a warm welcome to our special guest, Alan Fung!” I was flooded by a wave of excitement, sporting a warm smile towards the ocean of students leaning towards me, sitting in neat rows in this grand lecture hall. To be honest, I was surprised at the atmosphere! “Mr. Fung has come here today to talk about his famous creation, the revolutionary Angel-Eyes!” The legion of students gushes their praise and cheers all at once, their eyes hungry to learn the secrets of this new technology. I chuckle under my breath, sticking my hands up. “Thank you, Professor Gordon, for the warm welcome, and to start off the class, I would like to make a demonstration! Anyone like to come up to the podium?” You could almost conceal a gunshot in the uproar that arose from that simple request; all of the professor’s timid attempts to calm them down failed miserably, drowned out by the pure excitement of thousands of curious teenagers. I see a student sneaking in, a real troublemaker for sure, and I point to him, intrigued by him, and say, “Please come to the podium for our demonstration!” A collective groan dampens the mood of the lecture, with the whole student body giving death stares to the poor kid as he shuffled down the steps. As I gently wrap a blindfold around his eyes, I feel a shiver from my fingers, knowing full well he expected to get into trouble. I whisper to him, “Don’t worry, this’ll be fun!” Carefully sliding the glasses between the grooves of his ears, I give him a light push. He stumbled clumsily into my leather seat, still not used to using the angel eyes. After the short, whimsical display, I stuffed a book into his hands and fixed the position in front of him. It was a complicated biology textbook, and once he was asked to repeat, the terms flew off his tongue like he was Eminem! Few doctors could have even boasted such a fabulous pronunciation level, and this was all done by the Angel Eyes! A proud look dawned over me, as if I had seen my own son winning his first trophy, before I hastily removed his blindfold after his return to the stage, the dimples of my smile already leaving their mark on my face. Soon, I had rallied the class to silence, playing my music for them. My music, in fact, is the workings of the Angel Eyes themselves. As my chalk flew across the board, complex diagrams and maths equations alike seemed to sprout from the deepest roots of my heart. My words escaped me in cascades, adding wonderfully orchestrated lyrics to the concerto of my drawings. The tension was palpable, the air moved like a membrane, every interested smirk and “ah!” edging me to go on, to give them all I had to give! With a final stroke of the chalk and a final declaration, I gave my deepest bow, the cracks on the glass of my anticipation shattered by the encore of applause. Oh, what a wonderful atmosphere!

Soon after, once I was packing my things, I felt a finger gently nudge my shoulder blade. Turning my head back to see, I laid my eyes on the once-timid student who I had demonstrated the Angel Eyes with just a few hours prior. I laughed under my breath, a fake exasperated sigh warming the air around me as I stood to face him, unable to conceal my interest. “What’s up?” He gave me a look that I had only ever seen once before, a sparkle in his eyes, a true interest in his craft, a true dedication to his cause, and it shook me to my core. Within seconds, he rambled on and on, asking me advanced question after advanced question, bringing me to an incoherent mumble as I hastily tried to find an answer to those precious and oh-so-rare eyes. After a whole 10-minute struggle, I had attained his contact information as well as a new outlook on my own, sinking deep into the leather chair behind me, my eyes unfocused and my mind whirring with memories.

My eyes fluttered shut, mentally imagining my peaceful childhood home. I gazed upon my teenage self doing homework at my mom and dad’s house. The clicky movement of the fan was inches away from my left ear, leaving me wondering how it did not get cut off. To my right was my mom snoring peacefully, almost in

tandem with the rhythmic clicks of the rickety fan. Bored after finishing my homework, I decided to sneak out of the house. After an hour with my friends, laughing and eating chocolates, I decided to head home, my heart and stomach full, when I noticed a man struggling with his bike. I decided to go and help him, fashioning a makeshift pump out of a discarded hose in the area and pumping the air into his bike. After his fervent thanks, I had received something I had never expected: an invitation to a lecture at the local university! I was ecstatic, and I ran home to tell my mom and dad. After a thorough spanking, I sat my red arse down in front of my dad and mom, the grin still not escaping me and the exasperated looks on their faces finally giving in to smiles at my enthusiasm. The next morning, I awoke to my mom listening to the radio, her blind eyes sparkling more purely than I had ever imagined possible! That beautiful face, all brought about by pure sound, gave me my life's purpose. I would find a machine that could combat blindness!

The next few weeks were flush with excitement, with every fiber of my being purely and solely dedicated to my cause. Within the first 3 months, I had figured out the first major breakthrough! What I had learned was that there existed advanced cameras that had higher resolutions than ever before, and how they were made! The second my foot crossed the doorframe, I sprinted faster than the wind to my room, papers flying as I searched for my blueprint paper for the camera. My pen flew across the page, not unlike the chalk at the lecture today, with messy writing, scribbles, and drawings fully engulfing the once-baby-blue paper. But I had done it! Done..... what? I had a camera, all right, but what use was it to someone blind? Once again, I thought hard, giving up and sitting in the living room. Our family didn't have a TV; it was too expensive, and only one family member was able to use it. My mom was blind, and my dad was a severe workaholic. After an hour of lounging and listening to the radio, my brain was flooded with ideas. Gears clicked to light a bulb as I lunged for the radio, jumping with joy into my room. That's why the cameras are useful! If I could recognize text and turn it into sound, then I was set! The following day, my joyful skips towards my professor granted me a kind smile, and when he saw the blueprints, he was thoroughly impressed. "These are revolutionary! Think of how many people this could help! The inconvenience of braille is no more!" With that log added to the raging fire of my passion, I was granted a night-time university pass to access the STEM labs, where I worked day in and day out for months, learning how to code, connecting wires, weight-managing, and testing hundreds of times over with a blindfold and three books. Reading "Peppa Pig" over a hundred attempts was certainly frustrating, but I came to despise J. R. Tolkien and J. K. Rowling. Damn those abbreviated authors with such complicated books! But by the time I had finished my oh-so-difficult endeavor, I was filled to the core with pride. I had made something revolutionary, something powerful! Now, just one last step.

I had come home once more to find my mom on the couch, the radio playing, and her angelic voice perfectly matching the song's. I carefully slipped the glasses onto her and met with hundreds of Chinese swears, my mother thinking of this as a simple prank.

However, my heart started to flutter when I placed the book in her hands, and when I saw her cry, the sparkle was brighter than ever. She tried to hug me but terribly missed, and I embraced her, laughing and crying, my life goal accomplished.

As I woke up from my trance, my thumb brushed against the soft crease of the sticky note with the student's email and phone number, and I vowed to myself that I would make sure his dreams became a reality and that he saw himself in the position I did. One so truly like myself, unruly but willing to use his talents to help others, deserved nothing less than the whole wide world.

The Teapot

ESF Renaissance College, Fung, Venus – 13

“I believe it’s about time that you and I go for a trip – to the countryside. Like how we used to do, Father.”

Emperor Zhu nodded in silence as he coldly strutted back to his room. Prince Zhu’s eyes lingered intensely like a predator on his figure – as he was disappearing off into the distance.

“Can’t wait for our trip, Father.” He said to himself, as a smug smirk formed across his face.

“I’ll help you herd the sheep, Father.”

I threw on my tattered, taupe-coloured cloak and trotted down the lush green pastures. An unmelodious chorus of “Baa’s!” filled the air. I recognized the bustle of innocent, woolly sheep far ahead in the vast, rich grassland. The sight of them heartened my mood, especially during the frosty, somber afternoons. They resurrected the warmth I once had but now lost. I looked at the sheep with a hint of envy. They live life with their guards down, easily trusting the ones around them with no sign of doubt. They had nothing to lose. They remind me of the innocence I used to have, the innocence that everything would turn out alright until she left.

“Bang, bang, bang!”

I awoke to the sound of muffled thumps. Before I could get out of bed, I could hear my father’s footsteps approaching the door.

Xing opened the door to see stern men with ebony rattan helmets dressed in silky golden Hanfu. He instantly recognised them.

“Imperial guards,” he thought to himself.

“Mr. Li, do you recognise this man?” The guard asked Xing in a grave tone, as he hoisted up a painting of a familiar face. He hesitated for a moment, trying to recollect his memories.

“Emperor Zhu.” the thought popped into his head.

“Yes, I do recognise him, he’s Emperor Zhu.”

The guards sneered amongst themselves and looked at each other with satisfaction.

All of a sudden, the guards forcibly grabbed the frail farmer hand in hand.

Min busted through the doors, desperately dragging her father away. She attempted to dislodge him from their grip with all the might her small stature could exude. But they resisted. Tears began to stream down her sickly ivory-white cheeks.

"After everything you have done, you still don't have an ounce of guilt?!" The guard shouted irritably.

"The Emperor will be pleased to see you," snickered the other.

There, her precious father was taken from her. She dropped to her knees, helpless and devastated. She looked to the heavens with desperation and prayed that someday, they would be reunited.

The next day, Min awoke to the same thumps on her door. She meekly opened the door. Light escaped through the gap, forcing her puffy eyes to adjust to the broad daylight.

The guard briskly handed me a piece of parchment with an apathetic gaze before he left on horseback. Heart racing, I carefully unfolded it with an uneasy feeling in the pit of my stomach. What I saw next crushed me.

"Name: Li Xing"

"Public execution for the act of regicide."

The floorboards creaked harmoniously with every wandering step I took. A strong trace of flowery incense danced through the air as it guided me deeper and deeper into the bizarre hut. The hut was engulfed by darkness, although it was hardly nighttime. It was ornamented to a tee with sculptures made of lustrous sterling silver. Just as I was about to reach for a delicate swan-like sculpture, I was interrupted by a gruff, throaty voice. Taken aback, my hand made a hasty retreat.

"Why are you here?" The gravelly voice said with a touch of unwelcomeness.

"There's something I need your help on."

The strings of beads started clashing against each other, like the untamed waves of the South China Sea. In front of me, appeared a haggard man well into his 70s dressed in a coarse tan hemp tunic. He had an ash-grey goatee and a hunched physique that was supported by a veiny pine walking stick. He had a displeased look plastered on his wrinkled face as if I'd interrupted something very important.

"Go on," he said in a monotonous voice.

But before I could answer him, he had already figured out my motives.

"I have just the thing for you." In his bony hand was a globular object covered by a piece of crimson-red silk. He gently rested the heavy object on a polished circular oak table. He slowly pulled off the silk cloth to reveal... a teapot.

"I know that look on your face. This isn't just any teapot, it's the Assassin's Teapot."

"Perfect, but I have one last question."

"Go on."

"Do you know what tea the Emperor prefers?"

The Edible Fireworks

ESF Renaissance College, Hew, Sophie – 11

China is famous for its many inventions, one of which is fireworks. Li Tian, from Liuyang, central China's Hunan Province, was the inventor of fireworks. Fireworks were not only used to ward off evil spirits to protect the citizens, but more importantly to safeguard the emperor. Nowadays fireworks are used during celebrations of all sorts, creating a sense of festivities, merriment and togetherness.

The creation of edible fireworks took place on the Island of Festivals, a thirty minute boat ride from the most hidden coast in QingDao. The Island of Festivals is the most popular place for holiday goers. Here a wide variety of celebration food is found and when night arrives and as people enjoy their dinner, the hours-long display of multi-colored fireworks captivated the eyes of the spectators.

On the Island of Festivals live the renowned Chan family. They are Pastry Chef Mako Chan, Jelly Specialist Ching Chan, Food Scientist Bai Chan and their trusty sidekick Ming the cat. The Chans are special because they are creative food scientists. They pride themselves on transforming food into sculptures and are masters of desserts. Recently the Chans accomplished an extremely detailed replica of the Forbidden City out of jelly for the President's commemorative dinner.

Due to their exceptional talents, the Chans have been invited to create something extraordinary which no one has attempted before: edible fireworks in preparation for the Global Business Meeting where CEOs of the best companies meet in a chosen country and this year it is held in China. The country's President appointed the Chans to make something spectacular to surprise the world's leaders with dishes that showcased their national foods. Excited, the Chans put their creative juices to work. Chan's laboratory was basically the biggest kitchen and laboratory rolled into one, with fifty colossal stoves, thirty ovens, giraffe tall store rooms and a freezer that was powerful enough to freeze a stampede of elephants. Piles of yellowed paper littered the ground while inkless pens cluttered the table, a by-product of their research. The kitchen benches were strewn with flour while cracked eggshells added another layer of mess. Cake pans and baking trays filled the sink and on the only clean kitchen island lay a 6 tier cake with carefully sculpted fondant flowers and flags made of wafer paper.

In close proximity, the sound of batter being mixed could be heard, while Chef Mako appeared on the verge of bursting a blood vessel due to her vigorous batter mixing technique. Dr Ching was busy scribbling away as he poured over recipe books and magazines. Outside their laboratory were booms loud enough to make a building topple over. Mr. Bai was wearing a neon orange hazard suit while he watched three dim sum steamers fall to the ground but all of the custard buns turned out dry and shrivelled.

After running back into the kitchen lab to grab more supplies and fresh bamboo steamers, Mr Bai stared into the pantry for a long time until he decided to scrutinize the "Ultimate Guide to Perfect Dim Sum." With the help of a skyscraper high elevator, the hunt for the perfect ingredients from their ingredient vault began: light soy sauce, dried mushrooms, chilli powder, fresh garlic mixed with ginger juice. These were the easy ones to get but the list of ingredients got more exotic: aged radish powder, salt seasoned chicken feet, chilli marinated sea cucumbers and fat belly pork in mango oil were only some of the weirdest ingredients on the list!

Mr. Bai started drawing his "Master Plan" on a gigantic blackboard for the edible fireworks with multiple pieces of colourful chalk. Before long he had devised the plan for this dim sum masterpiece.

It was quite simple. Their task involved preparing the dim sum without steaming it, allowing the heat from the fireworks to activate the specific chemicals in the special gunpowder used for ignition. Then Mr. Bai would go to his station to insert his special gunpowder and pack them into capsules (this gunpowder is one of the most important ingredients in this recipe as it is the ingredient that sets off the fireworks.) The making of the gunpowder was the most time consuming. It was a sky blue colour but it smelt like smoked salmon and felt like crushed chalk. The recipe for this secret powder was kept in a highly encrypted safe with twenty hidden cameras in it at all times. Then the capsule was made of thick rice paper that was waterproof so when they were eaten it was not chewy. The capsules went to Professor Ching for testing. Once the “ Master Plan” was shown to the Chan’s all of their plans were forgotten as they set to work.

Chef Mako was cooking away, churning out a beautiful array of dim sums based on thousands of recipe books. She wanted the guests to taste and experience the unique history of every country in the world. She sculptured them in every shape imaginable and each one turned out as perfectly steamed shells packed with delicious fillings that would give the guests the taste of home.

Outside Mr. Bai was busy making special gunpowder. Ming the cat was the Chan's family cat, he had been with them for over four years now. Ming was a small Ragdoll cat with snow white fur and delicate little grey ears. Surprisingly for such a small cat, he had an appetite as big as a whale, always willing to do some work for any kind of food. He had the important role of ferrying the dim sums from Chef Mako to Mr Bai. Mr Bai delicately picked up each dim sum as if it was a priceless Faberge egg and carefully packed them into specially designed rice paper capsules (completely edible, of course) with a carefully measured sprinkle of his gunpowder.

Ming the cat’s next task was to deliver the finished Edible Firework to Professor Ching. Professor Ching, who had volunteered to taste—test every single morsel, had set up his test station around an open fire. Each Edible Firework came in two identical versions, one for the puncture test and the second for the functional test. For the puncture test Professor Ching poked and prodded the capsule checking for leaks – a leaking capsule could prematurely explode and ruin the grand finale they had planned for the Grand Banquet.

Professor Ching’s eagle eyes ensured not a single defective capsule would escape his thorough quality inspection. Capsules that did not make the mark were thrown into a large barrel to become Ming’s dinner (the Chan’s are very particular about not wasting anything) . For the functional test Professor Ching pretended to be a guest who tasted the capsule, (by pretending I mean dressing up in a top hat and tails). He checked to ensure if the capsules worked as planned and also if they were delicious.

The preparations continued for a week and as the days drew closer to the conference dinner, they started to get frantic. Suddenly one sunny afternoon a shouts of joy came across the kitchen lab. It was the screams of delight from Chef Mako and Professor Ching; after tasting countless bowls of dim sum they had finally created the perfect dim sums for the edible fireworks. They put the finishing touches to the little firework capsules, a process that got them hand painting thousands of the capsules in colours that represented the different countries attending the conference.

Days of nonstop working culminated in finalising all 20,000 bite sized firework capsules ready for the special event. As the grand day arrived, the Chans slowly walked into the spacious Grand Banquet Hall with the arduous process of assembling their creations. The dessert stand was so tall it required stepladders and even drones to do the final few layers on the 5 metres high stand.

The plan was that once the person bites into it, the saliva would activate the gunpowder they swallowed. The special gunpowder would turn into this liquid that gave the throat a tingling sensation and all of a sudden you would beware

blowing out fireworks like a dragon. As the banquet dinner came to an end, the Chans watched attentively as the President bit into a blue ball and all of a sudden as if he swallowed a flamethrower, he blew out red and yellow fireworks as the others watched in awe. Once the fireworks finished, a small bowl of egg tarts came floating down from a parachute. As the president enjoyed devouring the egg tart, he reached for another one and this time he blew out purple and pink fireworks.

The president summoned the inventors to the banquet hall and as the Chan's shuffled in, they felt all eyes were on them and finally the president said, "I don't like fireworks."

The Chan's braced themselves for a scolding but the president surprised them with, "But these are a whole other world."

Stunned, the Chan's stared at him gasping. "Well we have dessert to eat and I will reward you. Meanwhile, please tell me which ball holds the red date pudding. I can hardly wait to try it." With the quiet mutter of thanks and Chef Mako saying the navy blue one the Chan's exited the banquet hall.

Before long the whole banquet hall erupted with loud booms of fireworks as everyone ate their own fireworks, creating beautiful, multicoloured fireworks that filled the sky. I guess for the Chans another successful food mission was complete.

P.S If you are wondering what happened to the edible fireworks it became a worldwide sensation. The Chans are still really busy running their new business empire. The President still spends a fortune on those edible fireworks, some say he can devour a box of fifty a week.

New Tales of China's Inventions

ESF Renaissance College, Yu, Chloe – 11

The Chinese History Museum was known for being an experience and a half. It had no pictures on any search engine and the only way to get a ticket was to sign a form given by a staff member. So you can expect I was surprised and felt important when I got a form for the ticket. One of the final questions of the form was, "Do you swear secrecy, and do not take anything away with you from the museum?" Of course I answered yes, I couldn't pass up this opportunity to visit this fabled museum. I wrote my address for the more detailed information, signed with my signature on the dotted line, and sent it to the return address.

The next day I received another letter. Written in neat handwriting was a note of acceptance. It read as, "Dear Miss Audrey, We have decided to allow your visit to the Chinese History Museum. You will be allowed to see the gunpowder exhibit. Also included in the letter are two tickets, one for you and one for a second person. We have scheduled a time for you to come on August 31st, from as early as 7am to 9pm. Remember to not bring any hazardous items as we wish that no one messes up or harms the exhibits. We hope you retain information and keep it to yourself. We hope you have an interesting time. Sincerely, Head of exhibits"

After reading that, I had a week to decide what and who to bring with me for this trip. I considered bringing my mom or dad but it wouldn't work out with only bringing one of them. If I told Dad that I wanted to go to this museum on the day before the first day of school, he would say no and that I "needed rest to prepare for school." As for my mom, she is always doing something for work, whether that be a presentation of how the revenue has been, to statistics of the company's worker health. Work takes up so much of her time the only day I can truly spend with her are Sundays. So parents were a no go. My mind drifted to my two friends.

At school we always stuck as a trio. That trio that consisted of me, Monique, and Elodi. Elodi and Monique had totally different personalities. I was kind of in the middle. Elodi almost never spoke in class and blends into the background. That didn't mean she wasn't smart though! Monique always raised up her hand, even if she's not sure it's correct, and tries new activities and hobbies. In the end Monique agreed to join me. Later, I asked Monique and she started jumping up and down even though we were in the gym with people staring at her. She told me that she had been dreaming about it for forever ever since someone she knew who went let it slip.

I made it through the week and suddenly, it was the 31st. I called Monique at 6:15 so we would have enough time to meet up, and take the bus over to the museum. I had already come up with an excuse of why I had to go out for the whole day but it turned out to be not needed. Mom was, of course, working and today my dad helped her all day from 6:30am to 10pm so I had enough time to go to the museum without telling them and having to ditch a friend of theirs that was meant to watch over us. I did feel slightly guilty but I told myself that I couldn't pass up this opportunity. In 15 minutes I was able to brush my teeth, eat breakfast, change, and get to the meeting point. When I got there, Monique was already there watching a video.

"Hey! Aren't you so excited?"

"Ye—"

"Yes or no, I am! We are actually going to visit the museum!"

"The bus is here, let's go!" I said. We hopped on the bus and arrived at the museum. We walked up the grand yet short staircase where we were greeted by a man. He was dressed very formally with a dark gray suit and a black tie.

"Hello Madams, are you Audrey and Monique?"

"Yes"

"May I see your tickets?" he said. I passed the yellow tickets over to him and he scanned it. He told us to go through the security checker to make sure we didn't bring anything that could harm the exhibits. He handed us a small map

that could fit in three hands and we were free to look around. We both decided to visit the gunpowder exhibit because it was closer than the papermaking exhibit. When we got there a few seconds of fast walking later we looked around in amazement. There was an information tablet and I was able to skim that gunpowder was discovered around 1000 AD. Suddenly there was a loud whooshing sound and I instinctively looked toward Monique and saw she was looking back with a mirrored expression. Everything around us disappeared and for a horrid second I thought I might be hallucinating, possibly even dead.

Everything re appeared except all the items were different. We were in a study room, if you could call it that. It was barren other than a stool and a wobbly wood table. There were sheets of paper scribbled with words neither of us could read. I checked the pockets of my clothes, however the clothes were different. I still checked the pockets and suggested to Monique to do the same. While she found nothing but some fizz, I found a miniature notebook in my pocket. I turned to Monique and flashed the notebook at her. I flipped through the book and it seemed to be like a translation of the writing we couldn't understand.

After a while, we were able to translate all the writing we could, and this is what the paper had written on it. "The solution, for what it shall be called gunpowder, is 75 parts potassium nitrate + 14 parts charcoal + 11 parts sulfur. How it was discovered was when a Chinese Taoist mixed together that solution, then exposed it to an open flame, it exploded. On the middle of the table is some gunpowder, do as you will."

I hesitantly touched then grabbed a tiny handful of gunpowder as if it would explode when I touched it. It felt pretty powdery, but that didn't mean anything. I wondered what I was expected to do. Was I stuck in this universe, or was I meant to do something to get out? If so, then what? I wasn't given any clues, or hints, or a nudge in any direction. Breaking my train of thought, I realized a familiar extremely loud wind noise filling my eardrums. I went back to blank space, then back to the museum. I made sure I was still with Monique, and hugged her. I felt our friendship grow stronger, but of course we wouldn't leave Elodi. Monique told me that Elodi was actually the one who secretly told her. Monique thought I was going to be mad because she kept a secret from me, but I was happy we could talk about it freely.

Just then I remembered I still had a handful of gunpowder. I put it in a zip lock bag and made a reminder to myself to split it in half and give half to Monique as a keepsake. I ended up sleeping at 10pm that night. In the morning my mom woke me up and asked if I studied or did anything yesterday. I said, "I just studied about gunpowder at home, it was really plain." I said, trying to look convincing. "If you say so Audrey."

The Suitors' Game

ESF Renaissance College, Wong, Annabelle – 12

"Look at Lisa! Why can't you be more like her?" Mama shouts. I take off my headphones. What is so good about Lisa? Sure, she gets good grades, she wins violin competitions, she might just be the "perfect child". Oh man— Lisa is such a suck-up. However much Mama wants it, I will never be her.

"Stop *nagging* already!"

"Are you talking *back* to me? Stop it with the attitude. Instead of watching Netflix, or obsessing over K-POP, why don't you study more?"

"tsk" Why is she so persistent?

"...and you know what? I guarantee you'll get better grades in English if you read more." I put on my headphones, but the music is not playing.

"Lucky you're going to Bao's house for Chinese New Year tomorrow, I don't want to deal with you..."

Rejoice! I will escape to my grandmother's house!

"Happy Chinese New Year!" I shout. As per her Chinese New Year ritual, Bao invites her Mahjong buddies to the house. Every year there will be people of different races, ages; all from various chance meetings in her many Mahjong sessions.

Bao smiles and pushes a red packet into my hands. "For the Mahjong game."

Before I can ask why she is teaching me a 200 year old game, she quips "I'm introducing you to a very important teacher of life. Haven't I told you about the Mahjong test?"

I shake my head.

"Your mother was very popular, she had many admirers! I made sure every single one of them played Mahjong with me. It's a window to a person's true character — especially when the stakes are high."

I have no clue what Bao is talking about, seems impossible that Mahjong can teach anyone anything about life, and even more impossible that my "mama-kill-joy" could be popular among boys.

East

Downstream from me, a man seated at the East corner, whom I simply refer to in my head as "East", sports a red shirt, and what seems to be a pair of red underwear peeking out from the top of his white jeans. His broken English is accompanied with wild hand gestures. East has counted his money three times before heading into the loo, then washed his hands *clean*. Bao tells me that is part of his ritual prior to every game. Holding a number of varied "Dragons" and "Winds", Bao tells me to get rid of the Suits. But each time I throw a different pattern tile, East seems to change his mind about which Suit he would like to keep. First he threw "Three Bamboo". In the next turn he threw a "Seven Coin", and now he is throwing a "Five Character". East seems to second-guess himself because he is paying too much attention to what I'm throwing. I think Mama and East both like to obsess about what others do, they should totally hang out together! Bao taps my shoulder and I sit up, re-focusing on my tiles.

South

BANG!!! Across the table from me, South loses his cool. A tile slams, and flies across the table like a pebble from Huang Yaoshi's 'Divine Flicking Finger' [Dan Zi Shen Tong] from the famous drama series, the Condor Heroes. South is wearing a Polo shirt, large logo embroidered down his chest. Even indoors, he refuses to take off his black beret. South needs "Coin" tiles, but instead hangs on to "Bamboo" tiles. Turns out, that is exactly the Suit his downstream, West, needs. Bao explains to me South won't win by holding on to those tiles. He scowls in frustration, glancing at West and throwing another "Coin" tile.

I'm reminded of an argument I had with Mama where she refused to let me play football in fear of developing muscular legs and a short body. How does that make sense? First of all, there is no scientific evidence. Second, why deprive yourself of doing what you want, in fear of something that may not even happen? Like Mama's decision with football, South's fear of losing overwhelms him, and he ends up justifying his fears by not giving himself a chance to win. The biggest victim here may not just be South's game, but the poor tiles constantly slammed onto the table surface.

West

Her blonde hair and American accent are incongruent to her Mahjong peers. “Since my arrival, Mahjong has become an endless obsession.” West says. She wears a blue and yellow flowery dress, and, to my untrained eyes, what appears to be a string of authentic golden pearls around her neck. Bao says her husband is a wealthy banker who moved to Hong Kong for business. She seems at ease speaking to East and South despite the language barrier. Eyes trained on her tiles, West’s poker face conceals inner excitement. Bao tells me she is waiting for “Three Bamboo” or “Six Bamboo” to win the game. Little does West realise all but one are already out on the table.

Seeing this reminds me of meals at home, a family of five with two other “hungry ghost” siblings, means dinner is a survival of the fittest. Mama is always scolding me for day-dreaming at meal times. If my eyes leave the table’s dishes, dinner will be plain rice with a dash of bitter sourness.

Just when I think of warning West, East exclaims suddenly, “You see ‘Bamboo’ tile? Many out already!” West lifts her head, and laughs in embarrassment, East joining in. Soon everyone is laughing, and the moody competitiveness turns into all-around giggles. East throws West the last “Three Bamboo” tile, winning him smiles and praise from around the table.

North

Even with Bao’s charitable funding, we are both absolutely bankrupt. I have not won any games, but Bao encourages me and continues to show me the way. I open with a majority of “Bamboo” tiles and perk up, tying my hair back.

Bao reminds me to keep my expectations in check. “Luck is simply a belief; never get too high or low.”

Even so, my tiles are most likely the winning hand! At that very thought, as quickly as the wind changes, South gets a tile, and slams it on the table, flipping and revealing his entire deck. The game is over. My face falls. I had come so close to winning. Bao interrupts my thoughts. “Without sacrifice and failure cannot come experience and wisdom. Play enough games, experience enough losses, and you will eventually win. Ready for the next round?”

By the end of the day, I have won twice, with every dollar paid to my three new Mahjong teachers. From these acquaintances I have discovered the solemn ritual of red undies, which will definitely be worn during exams. The “teacher of life” Bao introduced is an often overlooked invention, where game sessions turn into life lessons. Most of all, I’m grateful to Bao. She taught patiently, explaining the rules as I blundered through the game. Mahjong is not always about winning, it is also about the experience gained from losing, and letting go to move on. Although I’m still angry, I now realise that Mama was not deliberately trying to compare me with others and shoot me down. Mama was afraid of me failing, not just in my studies but also in life. As a compromise, instead of obsessing so much over K-POP or Netflix, I will bite the bullet and burn the midnight oil. However, I will try my luck with Mama again about playing football, you can’t win or lose if you never play. You know what? I may have to teach her this lesson with a game of Mahjong.

Epilogue – Bao

“Bye Bao! Thank you!” She says to me.

My granddaughter leaves and my wallet is empty. Old Huang, whom my granddaughter referred to as East, celebrates his victories, coin drawer teeming with money. Luckily, I have foreseen this. I came up with a backup plan. Gathering my guests, I announce my desire to play another few rounds of Mahjong. We raise the stakes. By the time night falls, my coin drawer overflows, and Old Huang loses a bet on his underwear. I marvel at how Mahjong brings us together, despite language barriers and cultural differences. It is a hard game to play, even for a seasoned player. My granddaughter may be a novice, but she sat proudly, and stayed resilient. Though money was lost, failed she had not, oftentimes in Mahjong, defeat is victory in disguise.

The Tea Time Traveler

ESF Sha Tin College, Lai, Wa Ling – 11

Panra sighs, ready for well-deserved rest. She wakes up somewhere different and realizes she is squatting. There was a huge pot of boiling water in front of her and a well-dressed man was sitting beside a wooden table nearby. Multiple trees, bamboo huts, and large crop farms surrounded her. *This is China. Why am I here?* She looks at her clothes. They are itchy and broken. *And why is it like China but a zillion years ago?* She looks at the rich man again. He seems to be daydreaming. *That's probably the emperor.* She looks at the pot of water. *I guess I'll boil this water for him and serve it.* While she was gently stirring the water with a wooden stick, a few leaves from the tree above fell in. She panics, thinking she contaminated the water. The emperor realizes, causing Panra to panic and rack her brain for her Mandarin-speaking knowledge.

"Your water- has- leaves, you want me to get- them out?" The emperor shakes his head.

"No, let me taste it." he turns around and pushes the cup toward Panra, who grunts as she lifts the heavy pot and pours it into his porcelain cup. Thanking Panra, he takes a solemn sip, his face brightening immediately.

"This is amazing!" he sets the cup down- "We shall make more." He stands up and starts plucking leaves off random trees.

"Emperor, what are you planning to do?" Panra asks.

"I shall sell this drink. The feeling I got when I drank was heavenly! Like my body had been lifted and my energy reset. That cough I had? It's all gone now."

"Come, we shall announce this to the country." Shennong, the emperor, gestured for Panra to follow, but just as Panra started following, a cold wind whipped her arms and she was elsewhere. Gasping, she scanned her surroundings again. She was sitting in a wooden room at a stout table with no chairs. A young man was sitting across her, dipping a slim brush into a pot of ink. The brush smoothly glided over the glassy paper and sleek characters formed before Panra's eyes. The man looked up from his work. "Any comments? Anything I'm writing wrong?"

Startled, Panra answered: "No! Your work's- good. What are you writing?"

He smiled serenely. "This is my book, *The Book of Tea*. I've been working on it for a while. Didn't you know? I am a fan of tea myself, considering my fellow monks love it *very* much." Panra nodded. *Mum taught me this*, she pondered. *He's Lu Yu, the writer of The Book of Tea*. She leaned over and scanned the words; they were even; immaculate. *That word means tea...* she understood a little bit of Mandarin and silently thanked her Chinese mum for teaching her. She noticed a bowl beside Lu Yu; it held a slimy, greenish-white mixture with bits of crushed leaves in it. Panra nearly threw up.

"What is *that*!?" she pointed at it in disgust. Lu Yu didn't take his eyes off his work. "Tea porridge. It's our monastery's special. We make it every night for healing and soothing the mind for sleep." he nods at Panra. "Give it a try," Just as Panra was about to decline, the frigid wind once again sliced her skin, and she was somewhere else. Panra saw the marvelous walls of King Charles II's palace. Observing her clothes, she was dressed in fine silks and shoes; she was rich here. A crowd was surrounding an imposing woman dressed even more finely with curly hair.

"Catherine!" "Your Majesty!" "Can I buy some tea?" "What does tea taste like?" Loud voices filled the room; the woman seemed to ignore them as she paused in the middle of the room, a royal aura about her, and spoke:

"My people! I am hosting a one-in-a-lifetime opportunity to try tea!" she continued: "A new shipping of leaves is arriving, which means tea will be served tonight! If you would like to taste tea, come tonight in your finest evening

clothes!" everyone cheered. The woman left. *Catherine of Braganza?* Panra thought. *She spread tea around England, didn't she?* a woman's arm grabbed hers.

"Come, darling, let's go try tea!" Panra stumbled as the woman pulled her towards the big doors. All the women seemed to be attaching themselves, making friends immediately. "There's the dinner hall. I am *so* excited!" the woman squealed, dragging Panra to two free seats. They sat down and Panra flattened her clothes, startled by the quick procession of things. *What the teacup is going on here?* Panra thought as waiters started coming with trays of cups. A steaming hot cup was put in front of Panra and the woman beside her squealed, picking up the tea and sipping it.

"Mm, so good! So smooth and warm!" she continued to rapidly drink the tea while Panra slowly took sips. *This tea is amazing...* Panra enjoyed her hot tea but the wind was back, sweeping her up and dropping her in a large sailboat. *Where the tea am I now?* She stood up and immediately fell back to the ground. The floor was shaking as sprays of water slapped her face. The strong scent of tea came from the multiple boxes on the ship; many people were running around, fixing the sails, and cleaning the deck... she realized they were nearing a piece of land. Crowds of people were standing at the coast, waving their arms crazily, flagging the boat down. At first, Panra thought they were holding glass vases but as they continued to near, she realized they were holding *Bombs!* Panra held down the urge to scream and panicked. *How to get off? Swim? Jump?* Panra ran around, unsure of what to do. Her hesitation cost her time; someone had thrown a black sphere toward the ship's hull, emitting a deafening CRACK! sound. The ship swerved, and people started screaming on both ends; boat workers and military alike.

"WE NEVER ACCEPT YOUR DEATH DRUGS AGAIN!" a man yelled in broken English to the boat. "YOU NEVER DRINK TEA AGAIN!" More bombs were thrown, more screams, more explosions... someone knocked Panra over and she smacked her head on the railing, and everything went black... Panra wakes in a small hut on a thin bamboo mattress. Groaning, she slowly sits up and looks around; she hears bombing outside. *World War Three?!* Then she remembered she wasn't back in 2024 yet. Running to the window, she sees a bomb land on the nearby coast and explodes, breaking her eardrums. A brightly-colored man ran to the coast, waving his arms, yelling brokenly:

"MERCY! WE'LL GIVE YOU LAND! LEAVE US ALONE, PLEASE!" The bombing stopped. The ringing stopped. Everything went still and... she was in a meeting room. There was a long, wooden table and people stood across from her.

"Robert, your mission is to steal tea plants and the secrets of tea from China," they nodded solemnly. "Take as long as you need, but contact regularly." Panra felt her face. Sharp nose, round lips, *facial hair?! I'm a man!* Panra went pale. *Oh for the love of-* wind whisked her away, and she was at the base of a mountain, basket on her back. She turned her head and saw leafy green crops sticking out; tea leaves. Her clothes were not silky but not poor either; they were perfectly comfy, just like her own clothes at home; a simple t-shirt and pants. In front of her was a dirt path; an Indian man was standing near an enormous tree.

"Excuse me, sir? I'd like to go—" Panra pointed past the man into the city— "In there, please? This tea is quite heavy—"

"Who are you and what business do you have?" he asked sternly.

"I'm, um, Robert, a tea spy sent by the East India Trading Company..." The man raised his eyebrow, smelling a fragrant scent. He looked at the basket on Panra's back and sighed.

"As long as it doesn't get *me* in trouble..." he gestured for Panra to enter.

"Thank you, sir!" Panra bounded in. Just as she was going to set down the tea basket and rest, the icy wind came back, whisking her back into her bedroom, where she could hear her Pakistani dad calling for her.

“Panraaa! Are you up? I made you paratha, hurry up!” Panra snapped to life, threw her uniform on, and grabbed her backpack. *What the heck happened? Did I just time travel?!*

“Coming, Baba!” she thundered down the stairs and into the kitchen, where she saw her dad plating steaming paratha, her siblings playing on their iPads, and her mom brewing tea.

“Isn’t it a bit early for tea, Mama?” Panra asked, sitting on a kitchen stool.

“It is never too early, Pan.” her mum replied cheerfully. “Did you know your name means leaf? I wanted to name you after my love of tea, and we had the perfect idea, just like this tea story...”

Harmonia

ESF Sha Tin College, Lee, Felix – 13

Lee Hui Chen sighed wearily as he fell into line once more. For almost all of his 40 years of life Lee Hui Chen had to follow a constant routine of waiting. Whether it was waiting a few hours for his children to finally ride a roller coaster or wasting his whole morning queuing up just for a quick boost of energy by the continuous dose of caffeine. He always took the treatment patiently, silently, obediently. The endless amount of waiting, waiting, waiting... As a low-level factory worker, Hui Chen knew the harsh realities of China's class system all too well. While the nobility lived lavishly, he did backbreaking overtime for meagre pay and little rest. His boss scowled more than he smiled, piling on extra shifts with no extra compensation. To unwind from the stresses, Hui Chen sometimes visited a nearby tavern run by his longtime friend Zhou. Over cheap drinks, they would both complain and laugh about the suppression of the working class under China's powerful control. Each day he wished and prayed, hopeful that one day, maybe just maybe if he wished hard, everything in his life just might change. Today was going to be no different than any other day.

Deep in his own thoughts he headed towards the bar. As Hui Chen made his way down the alley, his attention was drawn to a small family huddled against the wall. A mother holding a shivering toddler, their clothes dirty and tattered. A young boy sat near them coughing violently into his arm. Hui Chen slowed as he passed, pity swelling in his chest at their bleak condition. "If only there was a way, I could ease everyone's burden." Mumbled Hui Chen out loud, although no one could hear him over the boy's terrible cough.

As Hui Chen neared the tavern, the temperature suddenly increased. The lit tavern was no longer a visible structure, it looked more like broken down cloth having a dance party with the fire spirits themselves. In the corner of his eye, surrounded by many of his usual customers he saw a glimpse of his devastated friend. Zhao looked nearly as terrible as his ruined business. As usual Hui Chen rushed towards his friend and did everything to try and help. "WHAT HAPPENED," exclaimed the desperate Hui Chen to his badly injured companion. "I owed them rent... Due to the pandemic it was an impossible task to come up with such a sum. When I couldn't provide them with what they wanted, they came for me and my life's work," sobbed Zhao. Rage and grief stirred in Hui Chen's chest. For too long the powerful had crushed citizens underfoot. No more. "Rest now, old friend. I will make sure the landowner pays for this," Hui Chen vowed. Justice would be served, through legal means if possible...but by any means necessary."

"Why should hardworking people endure such hardship, I know I have been thought to endure it as people call this treatment 'just life,' but I know this has to change?" thought Hui Chen. "That's it. I'll create a place, a utopia where no wrong can be done." Blueprints of a shelter run selflessly, for the benefit of all, without hierarchies or exploitation began forming in his head. A safe space where basic needs like food, shelter and healthcare would be guaranteed, not luxuries. Where labour was valued and respected, not taken advantage of. Hui Chen had everything planned out in his head, all that was missing were people that were willing to initiate the plan with him.

He had finally finalised a plan that 'could work', but now needed people who believed that it would too. In the coming days, Hui Chen quietly began recruiting others who shared his vision. He went back to the old toothpaste factory where he used to work. There were many workers there who eagerly joined his cause. Before long, word got around that there was a secret community that would 'change the world'. Weekly underground meetings were held to finalise preparations and details.

Hui Chen took inspiration from great leaders like Martin Luther King Jr. He brought his supporters everywhere he went, delivering sympathetic speeches in every building, shop, and road that crossed his path. His words advocated his thoughts on the common issues that people faced daily. The number of his disciples and followers was close to unimaginable. The government could no longer ignore the determination of their citizens. Just like the great Mao Zedong did decades ago, they took their first steps towards a vision, a revolution, a future that would forever redefine what it meant to be alive. With everything ready, the time had finally come to set their plan into motion.

In this new system created by Hui Chen and his fellow friends, an essential principle was to reward kindness and promote a culture and environment of understanding. They aspired to create a society where the 'nicest' and 'kindest' individuals would receive certain privileges such as shorter wait times, and extra benefits, all based on their demonstrated 'good deeds.'

The well-being of the community mattered the most. Every household was equipped with an indoor gym, complete with state-of-the-art fitness equipment and personalised workout trackers. This initiative promotes physical health, self-care, and a proactive approach to maintaining a fit lifestyle. There are trackers that are able to provide real-time statistics on individuals' exercise progress, serving as a reminder and motivation for residents to put their health and well-being first. Another heavily emphasised aspect in this newly created utopia was they're zero-waste policy. Each apartment included mandatory worm farms, housing genetically modified worms specially designed to clean hard-to-reach areas and consume leftover food scraps. This innovative approach minimised waste and made the city a clean and hygienic living environment. The implementation of a recycling program demonstrated their commitment to environmental sustainability. Volunteers would assume the role of collecting recyclable rubbish, ensuring that it would be properly disposed of and repurposed. By volunteering and staying healthy the individual would have 'kindness' points added to their profile. The new appointed 'point' system would affect your privileges that you have in this city. The point system served as both an incentive and a measure of an individual's contribution to the community, reinforcing the value of acts of kindness and encouraging residents to continuously engage in positive actions.

To enforce the smooth functioning of the new community there had to be both risk and reward. The city was covered with surveillance cameras that monitored both visiting visitors and residing residents while in a public place. Surveillance cameras were strategically placed throughout public areas, monitoring visitors and residents' activities. This surveillance served multiple purposes, not only to reduce crime rates but also to motivate positive behaviour, provide real-time information during emergencies such as fires, natural disasters, or medical incidents. Everything you did could alter your kindness points, whether it was helping an old helpless grandma cross the road or smoking cigarettes, they would all be recorded within the public and governmental domain. From the recent pandemic using this new technology they would also be able to monitor public areas for compliance with health and safety measures and help identify overcrowding and ensure social distancing.

A crowd gathered outside the city gates. A city without a name. Hui Chen took to the podium once again, he paused for a moment, allowing his thoughts to sink in, before concluding with a flourish: "And so, my friends, let us forever cherish this remarkable place we call 'Sino New Harmonia.' The crowd erupts in applause and cheers, their hearts filled with accomplishment and gratitude.

Hui Chen sighed wearily as he collapsed onto a rock. He was tired, but this time it didn't feel the same. He paused for a moment and enjoyed the view of a bluer ocean, yellower sun, and a greener earth. He brushed his hand on the stone. Hui Chen felt the smoothness of it, a satisfactory feeling. He looked around and saw other rocks, rocks that looked like the one he was currently sitting on, but slightly different. Some were sharper, some were brighter, but most importantly, they were together, supporting each other so that they all don't break down and fall into the ocean. Hui Chen thought to himself one last time: "I came into this world with a set of instructions of exactly what to do and think. Now I come to realise that if we dream big, we will create big. Big differences can be made, and we don't have to be afraid of them. What was an impossibility before was now a reality, a new home, an invention. When others in this world realise my cause, I hope that they can share my dream with theirs and create even more possibilities, innovate even more out of the box, and never settle for consistency in their life."

He dived into the water weaving his way in the water, gracefully, peacefully, and happily.

The Invention that Doomed a Dynasty

ESF Sha Tin College, Lee, Keng Hung Nicholas – 13

"Was this the missing piece?" Jinghong gazed at the radiant moon, whilst his face was graced with a triumphant smile. As a recent graduate in archaeology, for months he had been tirelessly combing through the desiccated frames of Yin Xu, the crumbled palace of the Shang dynasty. Amongst the fragments of pottery and tattered remnants of ancient outfits, he had unearthed glimpses of the dynasty's former grandeur. Now, in his hands, he held a precious artifact that seemed to hold the key to unlocking the secrets of the heights that the Shang had reached three thousand years ago.

Jinghong held the object up underneath the moon's beams. The surface of the object glimmered softly, reflecting the moon's ethereal glow, filling Jinghong's heart with anticipation and intrigue. It seemed to be a turtle shell, untouched by erosion. Etched upon the shell's surface were shallow grooves, arranged in a pattern like no other he knew. Jinghong ran his fingers along them in wonder, feeling each, and every delicate line.

"An oracle bone..." Jinghong uttered softly to himself, his eyes widened in wonder as he beheld the oracle bone.

"Spectacular," he gasped, unable to contain the surge of excitement that rushed through his veins. He knew that the Shang prospered under the innovation of the oracle bone. However, amidst his elation, a lingering thought tugged against his consciousness, "how could such a mighty dynasty, the Shang, now be covered in layers of such insignificance remnants?"

The ancient language was easy to decipher, for characters seemed to resemble pictographic forms of the word. For instance, the Chinese word for person (人) seemed to share some similarities, with the archaic version exhibiting more of a bent look, to look more like a human. Jinghong found himself immersed in the visions of the shell and the lost world. He saw through the eyes of Emperor Dixin's highest order scholar, witnessing daily life unfolding in the thriving Shang capital...

The lands of Shang bloomed with prosperity under Emperor Dixin's wise governance. There were bountiful harvests that filled granaries with millets and rice, silkworms that worked tirelessly producing wooden caskets full of silk from its silkworm farms, and skilled artisans crafting the finest outfits from such silks. Under Dixin's guidance, it seemed, the Shang realm blossomed in growing grandeur. Fields, cities, and citizens lived in harmony under the emperor's prudent policies. Many other regions in the vicinity of China at the time grew envious of the Shang's prosperity. One of which was the Zhou clan, from a land beyond the western reaches of the Yellow River. Wuwang, ambitious Chieftain of the emerging Zhou clan, had long observed with covetous eyes the bountiful lands and wealth of the Shang. Wuwang maintained a silent witness, hoping for one mistake that could allow his clan to replace the almighty Shang.

However, despite such prosperity, the Shang was faced with a sudden plague, a plague that made silkworms die mysteriously. Dixin looked on with deep concern, as this threatened not only the livelihood of certain farmers but also the connection between the different clans of China, such as in the west with the Zhou clan. To try and aid the blight of the silkworms, Dixin would personally visit isolated farms to offer guidance. He realised communication was lacking for remote farmers with little to no knowledge of silkworm care. The sole way of communicating at the time, with knots on string, was only able to communicate about disastrous misfortunes that other villagers had already been the culprit of, not of detailed remedies. Thus, Emperor Dixin opted for a medium that showed a much more detailed way of conveying instructions.

Whilst surveying the lands upon his return one night, Emperor Dixin noticed a gathering by the brook, mystic figures arrayed around a fire. Dixin became curious and spurred his horse to approach the gathering. As the emperor arrived at the assembly, his keen eyes surveyed the figures surrounding the fire. They seemed to be priests, wearing robes of coarse burlap with finely woven borders of hemp-dyed shades of amber and teal.

"Greetings elders," said Dixin softly, "may I inquire about your purpose here?"

One shaman bowed low, eyes aglow in the firelight. "Greetings Emperor, we communicate with our ancestors through this sacrificial shell. As it cracks under the fire, the shape encrypted represents a symbol that tells the future of this world."

Dixin pondered, noticing the symbol on the shell in front of him. Three rocky spines emerged, with the central mass standing tall over its neighbours, "does this represent a mountain?"

"Indeed, Emperor," the shaman responded, "this means that luck will reign the earth under the next new moon, as the mountain represents a linkage between heaven and earth."

"This method of communication seems to be so clear that even someone unknown to your traditions, such as I the Emperor, may still comprehend. Tomorrow, I shall summon scholars to inscribe this language, a visual representation that even the peasant can understand. Together may we forge a legacy to improve generations unborn."

The priests silently disagreed, for ages, the burning of the turtle shell had long been the sacred method to communicate with heavenly beings, but now, anyone could decipher the will of the heavens. However, bound by their loyalty to Emperor Dixin, they reluctantly acquiesced, unable to voice their opinions against the emperor's ambitious plans.

In the stillness of the night, Emperor Dixin's eyes peered upwards towards the pensive moon, finding whatever solace its soft luminance may offer. His writing system had at first proven to be a boon for guiding farmers to aid silkworms, however, dissent amongst priests now spiralled beneath that same moon's watch. Did that pale orb understand the turmoil happening under its rays? Or did it simply witness, as it had eons past, the endless waltz of change dancing amongst mortals below? Dixin knew not, all he saw in its luminescence was a reflection of progress carrying consequences not fully foreseen, though he could not seem to find an answer that could restore peace to his kingdom.

Wuwang observed patiently as the conflict between the priests and Emperor Dixin worsened. Wuwang saw an opportunity. He called a meeting under the new moon, "the priests cry for the old ways, and will support those who support their old ways. If we back their claims, the people will rally behind us, and we may finally take over the Shang!"

"And the emperor?" asked an elder, "he is no fool, he would not give up his throne so easily."

Wuwang smiled cunningly, "Leave Dixin to me."

In the early hours of the next morning, a messenger burst into the royal chambers, his face etched with urgency. Gasping for breath, he relayed the distressing events witnessed on the outskirts of the city at daybreak. It appeared that Wuwang had gathered a formidable army, including a line of priests behind him, as if preparing for an attack.

Dixin swiftly ascended to the top of the city's fortified wall, telling the messenger to prepare a message for the war commander. As Dixin peered down upon the scene unfolding below, he could see Wuwang's forces, adorned with black banners and flanked by armed soldiers, stretched as far as the eye could see. From his position outside the palace gates, Wuwang thundered, "You have doomed the Shang with your invention! Surrender your throne and your people will be spared!"

Despite the impending danger, Dixin stood firm, "my citizens will see the truth. Your treason will be punished!" he declared defiantly.

"Attack!" bellowed Wuwang, his voice echoing with a ferocious intensity.

What followed was a clash of violence, as swords clashed, and blood stained the fields. Amidst the haze of smoke and ashes, opposing forces collided in a battle that would determine the destiny of dynasties. When dawn broke again, only the victors remained standing, the black banners of the Zhou fluttering proudly over the smouldering ruins. Yin Xu, once a proud city, now lay in ruins.

With his final breaths, Dixin's scholar, who bore witness to it all, recorded the final moments of the Shang. With his last efforts, his brush etched, "The oracle bone was a great invention to us scholars, but such greatness still has consequences. The oracle bone is the invention that doomed a dynasty."

As the moon gazed upon the sands of Yin Xu, Jinghong sat in quiet contemplation. His mind wandered through the bittersweet tale – how the innovation that elevated the Shang realm to new heights still led to its downfall. Ironically, the oracle bone was such a monumental innovation that it carried knowledge across generations, whilst also carrying the concept of writing into prints and papers, being an invention that endured through the tides of time. Jinghong let out a sigh, for he had learned an important lesson from the ruins beneath the watchful moon.

Back In Their Day

ESF Sha Tin College, Leung, Adeline – 11

The school bells had just rang, Yijun had arrived at school at the last minute.

“Wait what?” Yijun questioned herself, “I thought I was still at home and was already late, how did I arrive at school 2 minutes before the bell rang?”

Yijun bolted to her classroom and found her teacher had already started taking attendance.

“Yijun Liu,” muttered Ms Deng, “always late.”

“Sorry,” Yijun apologized and bowed to the teacher before walking to her desk.

After study period, Yijun and her friends wandered slowly to their history classroom, which was on the 6th floor.

“Mei Xing!” Yijun called, “wait up!”

“I can’t,” Mei Xing called back, “we’re already 4 minutes late!”

Yijun and Mei Xing sprinted to their history class.

“Yijun and Mei Xing! What makes you think you can come into my classroom 2 minutes early and still be giggling, I’m trying to have lunch here!”

“Sorry Mr Yu,” Yijun and Mei Xing muttered, then walked out the door, slightly embarrassed.

“Didn’t Mei Xing look at her watch and tell me that we were late?” Yijun thought to herself, “how are we suddenly 2 minutes early?”

Yijun continued thinking about the miracle that just happened while Mr Yu was giving a lecture on ancient Chinese inventions.

Yijun walked home, still confused about what had happened. But she couldn’t care since she still had that big project on ancient Chinese inventions and she hadn’t listened to a thing Mr Yu was talking about. She went to her desk instantly after she stepped foot in her house.

“Why didn’t I listen to Mr Yu’s boring lecture on Chinese inventions,” Yijun groaned, “now I don’t know what to do.”

Yijun tried calling her friends except all her friends were busy doing their own projects. She lost all hope and went to take a nap to calm herself down.

After Yijun had woken up she found herself under a wooden 4 poster bed. Yijun crawled out of the room and saw farmers working hard on crops. Yijun was even more confused.

“Cai Lun!” called a voice, “we’re out of bamboo, can you please go to the store and buy some more, here’s some money.”

The woman handed the man a handful of coins.

“I wish there was an easier way of carrying large amounts of money,” Cai Lun thought to himself.

Yijun heard Cai Lun’s thought and went over to him.

“Why don’t you use paper money instead of those weighted amounts of coins?” Yijun said to him.

Cai Lun nodded and continued his way to the market, Yijun couldn’t help but follow him.

Cai Lun bought some bamboo and silk, and on the way home, he found some fishing net on the floor and picked it up, he also found some mulberry bark laying on the ground like it was waiting for him. Cai Lun handed the bamboo and silk to his wife and got to work. Yijun drew a quick sketch of everything he bought and followed him outside to a comforting fall breeze.

“I haven’t felt such a welcoming breeze in such a long time,” Yijun sighed.

Cai Lun had found a broken hemp plant and decided to keep it in his room.

The next day was a similar routine, Cai Lun went to the market to sell his crops and came back home with a large bag of coins. Yijun could feel his pain, carrying such heavy coins everyday.

"I wish there was a lighter way of carrying large amounts of money," Cai Lun pondered.

"There is," Yijun claimed.

Later that day, Cai Lun set off to a school teaching how to farm more efficiently, he brought a lot of bamboo to take notes and some silk. On the way, Yijun noticed that with each step that Cai Lun took he was getting more and more tired.

Once Cai Lun got home Yijun suggested an invention idea that would certainly make him lots of money. Since Yijun hadn't listened to Mr Yu's lecture on paper, she didn't know the procedure, so she and Cai Lun had a few errors along the way but eventually Cai Lun found the method of making paper.

Considering the day before, Cai Lun was so busy making paper he didn't have time to work on his crops and therefore had nothing to sell at the market, except Cai Lun wasn't worried, he brought his paper and went to the market to sell it, since Yijun had suggested that that would make him lots of money. During the process of selling, lots of people rejected Cai Lun's invention but eventually a man named Han Ho Ti bought paper from him and Cai Lun was very grateful. As it turns out, the man who bought paper from him was the emperor and had paid Cai Lun plenty of money and the emperor was impressed, and asked Cai Lun,

"How did you make this innovative and life changing invention?"

"It took many tries, but I got there eventually," replied Cai Lun.

After a long conversation, the emperor suggested that he promote his invention to all of China and told Cai Lun to keep his invention a secret because of marketing reasons. Yijun decides it's time for her to sleep, so she goes back to the little hut and clambers up onto the elegant four-poster bed and closes her eyes...

"YIJUN!" a loud voice yells, "you're late to school again."

Yijun wakes up, finding herself in her small room with a plastic-framed bed.

"So it was all a dream," Yijun thought to herself. She wanders to her desk sleepily and sees her sketch of materials Cai Lun used to make paper. Confused, Yijun packs it into her schoolbag and rushes to school.

Yijun arrives at school just before the bell rang, she rushes up to her history class and submits her sketch of materials she drew of paper materials Cai Lun used.

Just a few weeks later, another Chinese history project comes up,

"This time, you are required to make a presentation on a completely different historical Chinese invention," said the Chinese history teacher. Stressed, Yijun prays that the magical time teleporting will help her this time.

Yijun heads home, goes to her room and immediately lays on her bed. She closes her eyes softly and drifts off to sleep. A few hours later, Yijun wakes up and finds herself still in her tiny, modern room.

"Wait, what time is it?"

The Quest that Changed Everyone's Life

ESF Sha Tin College, Leung, Jobie – 11

My hair was like lightning bolts as my brother, Seinmatt, and I walked around the evacuation camp. A waterfall of tears trickled down my face.

The camp director, Zoe, said every season, the Oracle of Zuki made a prophecy. Chosen campers were sent to fulfill the prophecy.

A prophecy arrived the next morning. My brother sped to the 'Oracle Zuki Tent'. Inside, jewels and carvings of nature elements decorated the tent fabric.

"We have to find which nature spirits our new campers, Seioyn and Seinmatt from China, possess and consult the Oracle for the quest. We'll do the Ohka to find out." Zoe announced.

We were petrified, but we only had to hold a crystal ball. There are four natural spirits: earth, air, fire and water. I was fire and Seinmatt was water.

"Silence! I have to consult the Oracle!" Zoe commanded.

The Oracle of Zuki's voice thundered.

Four different
They combine.
To find the treasure
That will save and refine
Series of challenges
They must conquer
In the Mysterious Forest
Four Ingredients discovered
Boiled and exploded
Battle succeeded

Everybody was discussing what it meant until Zoe's deafening voice hushed us. Seinmatt, Tartara, Manor and I were sent to fulfill the prophecy.

Manor, an air spirit, led us into the mysterious forest just beside Snimp. The haunting emerald leaves spooked us.

"I'm hungry!" Seinmatt exclaimed.

Everyone agreed that we needed to eat. We rummaged through our bags.

"Oh no!" Tartara bounced her eyeballs backwards, "We forgot to pack food, we must find some."

Our group continued staggering through the forest until we spotted a mystical cave. Diamonds covered every corner, jewels of a darker colour formed the words 'Eta'.

Upon seeing 'Eta', Tartara fell to her knees and gasped, "Mum, please let us in. We know you have some food!"

Manor must have seen our confused faces because he quickly explained Tartara's peculiar behaviour, "All earth spirits like Tartara, were born, not physically but spiritually from Eta, the one who created Earth itself. Eta continuously grows food with her sacred soil."

Just after Manor said that, Tartara disappeared into the Earth with her eyes closed.

"No!" I cried an ear piercing yelp, "Give Tartara back!"

As Tartara climbed through the tunnel, she thought with determination. "I must get the food."

Once she arrived at the chamber, she saw Eta resting in the middle of her sacred pillow. Tartara was too afraid to speak but she gripped her courage and took a deep breath.

"Eta, please provide food to me and my friends!" Tartara pleaded with hopefulness.

"Fenta machos frienqes". Eta mystified us in an ancient earth language.

"Why not my friends"? Tartara wailed.

"Their own food is waiting for them in the forest. Clouds for air, tree holes for fire, and tuna for water". Eta continued, in modern English, "Do not eat those holy saltpeters that I give you until all of your friends' food is provided. This saltpeters can be more useful than you can imagine."

With that, Eta activated a gigantic diamond which abducted Tartara and sent her back to her friends.

Seoiyn, Seimatt and Manor all cheered parading elephants once they heard about Tartara's adventure in Eta's sacred chambers.

"We have to find the holy food for each of us, right?" Manor notified the team. "We'll find mine first, Seoiyn's second and Seimatt's third. According to the legend, Zephyr, Air, was born on a cloud. Ever since then, she spins air into the atmosphere and Eta uses her gravity to pull it down to us humans. I'll fly up to the sky and sense where the air feels most powerful."

With that, Manor swept up like a giant eagle and flew into the endless sheet of blue. As Manor rose up into the sky, a rainbow cloud caught his eye. Manor landed on the majestic cloud. A glistening sign read 'Welcome to Kingdom Henduoyun'. He walked towards the gate and a menacing dragon rose from the clouds with Queen Zephyr, Air, next to him. His scales were polished in every shade of blue known to man, his claws more dangerous than sharp spears.

"I want wings to fly to inspect the air quality like other dragons do," Ustan narrowed his eyes, "wings are natural and cannot be made".

"Ustan, let me introduce you to dungeon guarding. You'll be more respected than the dragons. Apply for the job and you will be ferocious." Manor spoke as both of them circled each other. The Queen is here. What will it take for such a generous woman to say yes?"

"Yes, I hereby appoint Ustan, General Protector of Henduoyun castle, General of Castle Guards." The Queen declared without hesitation. Manor passed.

"Well done. Here is some sulfur, I knew you wanted it. The key to our clouds and farming". Queen Zephyr handed it over to Manor.

The Queen sent Manor down to his friends with a swish of wind.

Back on earth, Tartara, Seoyn and Seimatt hugged Manor.

“Now let’s find a tree hole for Seoyn’s food!” Tartara declared.

They searched every tree until they fell against a giant tree. A single, perfect, hole rested there.

“Wow! So high!”, Seimatt gasped.

“I could fly you up there, Seoyn.” Manor offered.

Seoyn gratefully agreed and flew to the treehole. She climbed in and discovered two tunnels. The first tunnel was labelled “Fire”. The other tunnel was labelled “Citizens”. Seoyn hesitated and walked through the first tunnel. Suddenly, fire lit up all around her and blocked her way. “If I am a fire, I must have fire-resisting abilities, right?” she thought and confidently walked through the wall of fire. Before her stood a lady with a crown made of flames, a dress made of golden charcoal and a throne of fire.

Seoyn knelt before the lady and gasped, “Mother! Provide food please!”

“After you prove yourself a true fire”. Lady Nuria’s hand burnt into roaring flames and transformed back into her own hand.

“Here are two fires, which fire is real?” Lady Nuria asked.

“The left one”. Seoyn answered carelessly. After a few more questions, Lady Nuria became frustrated and gave Seoyn her food, charcoal.

“A squirrel will send you down. Beware, this time may be easy but the next won’t be.” Lady Nuria warned.

The squirrel gracefully landed Seoyn and returned to the trees, the team congratulated her for surviving the flames.

“I’m thirsty after all that fire!” Seoyn exclaimed.

“Luckily there is a stream right over there. While we are drinking, we could look for the tuna!” Tartara pointed at stream.

As we ran towards the stream and started drinking from it, Seimatt was captured by a school of giant tunas which swam away. We all stopped drinking.

Seimatt was led to an underwater kingdom. There, schools of giant fish with multi-coloured scales swam everywhere. The tunas dumped Seimatt into a whirlpool where he descended into the abyss below. The next thing he knew, he was tied to a chair. A Mermaid glared at Seimatt with her trident pointing menacingly at him.

“Seimatt, you’ve disappointed me. You of all people must know it is evil to drink from this lake when you are “Water”.” Queen Cordelia exclaimed.

“I really need this kingdom’s holy food.” Seimatt struggled.

“Make a trade.” Queen Cordelia glared, “Your saliva now contaminated this sanctuary.”

“I can offer you this notebook and pen. Then you can keep a record of what you do for the kingdom.” Seimatt pleaded!

“I have a place where I keep a record of everything. I will read what you wrote in your notebook in exchange for this lake’s water, our holy and forbidden food.” Queen Cordelia snatched the notebook from Seimatt’s hands and read it.

Tears were dripping from the Queen’s eyes as she read how Seimatt and Seoiyn struggled to evacuate and their dad having to go to war. Crystal tears formed a vial and Queen Cordelia retrieved it.

“Here is the kingdom’s most holy water, water from the abyss. The whirlpool will send you back.” Queen Cordelia instructed.

It was terrifying as the friends witnessed Seimatt fly out of the river with such speed. They knew they had to find witches to boil their ingredients to make the treasure. Luckily, a witch’s foul scent wasn’t hard to track. In no time, they came to a witch’s house who agreed to boil the ingredients for them whilst she listened to them talk about their journey so far.

“I once was in Snimp. I decided to be a witch once I graduated from the camp. I can teleport you to Snimp if you like.” the witch, Frettsna offered.

The team quickly accepted. After a few minutes, the potion was brewed and made into some sort of clay. Frettsna stuffed the clay into a glass tin and teleported them back to Snimp.

Back at the camp, Zoe hugged them.

With a click of her fingers, she sent them onto the battlefield in China...

The Story of Paper

ESF Sha Tin College, Li, Serena – 12

It's been 3 months, and 14 days since I was captured.

Using all my strength to lift up my finger, I pressed as hard as I could at the wall and dug my nail into it. I gently pulled my finger down on the surface, leaving a thin slice on the icy metal wall.

I tried not to scream or shriek to call for somebody. Instead, I learned to stay silent, I learned to chew on the inside of my cheek, letting the bitter tang of blood fill my palette.

The last time I tried to escape, they beat me up and did not provide any food or water for 2 days.

I look around, my feet start to tap restlessly, they're late, my eyebrows scrunched as I calculate, 56...57...58...59... one minute late to be exact.

The door slammed open, "Get up." the man in the doorway said, my sore muscles immediately coiled up. I was suddenly very aware of my shaking hands and body, my forehead had a light layer of cold sweat.

He grabbed me from my wrists, I winced as his fingers dug inside the deep cuts on my arms, the heels of my feet frantically trying to grip the smooth ground.

He grunted as he pulled me away from the room, his other hand held a small copper key, he twisted the knob, and the door opened with a click. He shoved me out, I tried to use my arms to shield my eyes from the blazing sunlight, but his iron grip was on me once more, and he led me to a car and pushed me in.

I looked out the window, the man then went inside himself, then the car took off, I closed my eyes, and my thoughts wandered to my freedom, and then I fell into a deep sleep.

I was in a nightmare, a nightmare full of chains and ropes, and when I woke, I was drenched in a cold sweat and my body was shaking terribly.

As he shoved me out of the car, I tried to be aware of where I was. For the past 17 times, they took me into some mysterious place, I continued to tremble in fear. I shuddered to think what would have happened to me today.

In front of me was a rusty door, the man then led me inside, the door creaked as he pulled it open, and inside was a dark hallway.

Instead of letting the man have a hold on me once again. I walked through the door and down the hallway, glancing behind my shoulder... As we reached the end of the hallway, it led to a huge room with a golden chandelier. I stepped into the room in uncertainty. I felt a wave of nausea and coldness. Something about this bar is wrong, all of the people here had the same cold gray eyes that this man has.

The man then led me to a chair, and I sat down. I tried to breathe as evenly as possible, but my heart was pounding hard.

The door then opened, and it was a woman, she stood down at a chair, two guards standing behind her, both were tense and serious, and the atmosphere suddenly felt very dangerous and deadly.

Is this the girl?" she asked, her voice surprisingly high and sly, I jumped in my seat.

"Yes." The man said calmly. " Please keep in mind that we had a deal."

"Yes, I do acknowledge that, let's go to the other room and talk more about it, shall we?"She asked, a smile spreading across her cheeks.

The man and the woman then went inside another room and then the door closed with a click. And then I started to look around. Time felt extremely long, and the waiting was excruciatingly painful. I tried to slow my breathing in the process.

The door finally opened, and the woman and the man came out, each having a black briefcase in hand.

“We’ll take her right now.”The woman said sternly to the man

“Sure, be my guest.”The man said.

The woman then gestured to the two bodyguards. I took a step back as they approached me, then came a sharp pain in the head, and then all went black.

When I awoke, it was completely dark. I thrashed and yelled, but moving was physically impossible. At last, they removed the black cover from my head, they took me into a large wooden box, and I saw a vast dark sea everywhere around me

Reality hit me in the gut, swallowing me whole. I was on a cargo ship, but where was I going? They shoved inside and as I tried to pull myself up and ran for the door, they slammed the door close and locked it. There was no escape. I scraped the wooden walls, screaming for help until my voice shattered into nothing, I broke into tears, my body shaking, my throat was burning, my tears dripped down my chin, soaking inside the wood, and my sobs and cries filled me up, choking me, I gagged, coughing out spit. I sprawled on the floor, my uneven breathing started to slow and my eyes began to close, I looked towards the tiny gap between the wooden boards, and saw the stars, how I envied their freedom up in the sky.

I woke up due to the sunlight, I wiped the dried drool from my left cheek. As I looked around, my focus went to the corner of my eye, I crouched down, and my eyes stared at the ground.

At the corner of the wooden cage, there is a yellow puddle, the place where I slept. My mind went through last night, no it wasn’t there yesterday, it definitely wasn’t. My curiosity won over and I touched the yellow puddle, it was hard and a bit sticky.

The hair tie in my pocket fell out and stuck to the puddle. I tried to pull it out, only to be surprised as the hardcover of the puddle was broken and turned into a gooey mess. I tried ripping it out, but the goo had already swallowed the tissue and my hands were covered in it. I sighed, trying to find a solution to remove all of this goo. I was suddenly overwhelmed by tingling on my fingers, wrists, and arms. I tried to touch my arms, but I could not move my fingers, as the goo on my hands hardened and it was impossible to move my fingers. I started to panic as the tingling stopped, and my arms were covered with the solidified goo, i then tried to break my fingers, and the goo separated from my skin with ease, and as I tore the goo off my arms, I noticed that the goo was turned into a thin sheet that was hard but also flexible. I look at the mysterious thing that I have on my hands, and then I look at the gap of sunlight on top of my head. Yes, the heat of the sun made it harden.

Looking at the locked door. If we are traveling somewhere else, then they must let me out, my fingers grasping at the hardened goo. If I could somehow provide clues for people to find me, then it just might work. Anything might work, it needs to be, I will try anything to have freedom. I quickly took more of the yellow goo, spread it all over my arms and legs, and sat straight into the sunlight. The tingling is uncomfortable but bearable. In the end, I was left with 10 to 20 pieces of hardened goo, it tore easily, so I could drop some to the ground to track my path. I tear them up.

As I traveled through what I thought was 2 weeks, the hardened goo was my only hope for someone saving me, and I made clues wherever I went, marks, pieces, and crosses and arrows.

In the end, I was trapped in a gray room as a final destination, the only thing keeping me sane was hoping someone could follow the clues and save me. But 3 days, 6 days, 10 days have passed, and there was no one in sight. And when all hope seemed lost on the 12th day, the door suddenly burst open, and instead of my kidnapper, it was a woman I did not recognize. She had long uneven brown hair and was wearing a shiny black suit.

I tried to scream as loudly as I could, but the woman clamped her hand around my face “Listen, I came here to save you.

My spirits soared high, and almost all the strength I'd lost seemed fully restored.

“you are not who you think you are, you need to leave the country right now.”She said, her voice serious and tense.

The door opened, and a man came in, the pistol on his belt glinting.

THE END (To be continued.....)

To Follow One's Desire

ESF Sha Tin College, Lo, Yuk Nga Natalie – 11

Chapter one

Beep! Beep! Beep! My eyes cautiously opened to the sight of my ceiling. The beeping still went on, and my eyelids fluttered bit by bit. My mouth felt as dry as ever, with a sore back and cramped knees. I got up and stopped my alarm clock, rubbed my eyes and groaned in irritation. I headed to the bathroom and washed my face, and my eyes fluttered no more. I did the normal basics of a morning routine, then got changed. I skipped down the stairs, ready for breakfast. "Ah, your breakfast. Eat up quick, quick! Your bus come soon, ah! Faster, faster!" Grandma scolded. Grandma baked me waffles, she always gets up this early for no reason.

"Grandma, why do you get up this early everyday?" I asked, I never knew the reason why she did this odd habit everyday... She's old, and she still gets up early...

"To pray for your grandfather! He loves tea so I make him everyday, and he wake up early before, so I make early too." Grandma spilled tea into the gaiwan and chawan. The aroma of tea filled the air heavily, the smell of rich tea leaves and herbs was heaven. The tea that grandma made was a family tradition/secret from centuries ago, only our family knows how to make it appetising, make it rich, make it *special*. Every newborn, every child, every aunt, every uncle, every adult or kid *needs* to know how to brew this recipe, it is a must. By the time you're over your baby years, you have to learn it. Impress the adults in and outside of town, "Welcome Aunt Susan! Have some tea, *my child will brew it*, take a seat too! Take a seat!"

"Grandma, what was your dream to have, or what was grandpa's dream?" I asked politely, while chewing on my waffle.

"Your grandpa? He dream was making a tea fountain! He so in love with tea! Me, ah? I don't know, probably become the model, so pretty, so beautiful." She said. Grandma went ahead to the spirit tablet, placed the chawan gracefully on the wooden block coaster, toasting her cup to his, and drank all her tea silently in one gulp. In front of the coaster was a picture of him, her love. She grabbed three incense sticks and lit the tips on fire, bowed a few times and then placed them into an incense pot. Her face showed no emotion, a bit of a frown even appeared. She walked to the garden outside, ready to do some stretching. 'I will accomplish grandpa's dream.' I thought to myself, I then stayed silent, and kept munching on my waffles. 7:00 my clock said, 7:00.

A thump of footsteps came rushing down the stairs, it was Daphne, late for breakfast. *Again*. "Where's grandma?" She asked, panting.

"Garden outside, you should probably eat," I replied. I looked at her up and down, "Wait did you put on more makeup? Who you tryna impress, huh?" I smirked at her, she had a lip tint and rosy cheeks, long lashes and perfect brows.

"Shut up!" She called, I could tell she was annoyed by the look on her face. She sat down and munched on her waffles. I finished all of my waffles, leaving the dining table to wash my dish.

Chapter two

Daphne and I took the bus, and are now currently in first period; Marketing.

"Alright students! Quiet down! In today's lesson we will begin a new project! This project will be about creations and inventions! Hand in your hand-made creation/invention and write a 1700 word essay on it. The deadline is 2 weeks, after that we will start publishing your creation onto a website, and if approved by judges, you may publish your work to the public. You would have to present your product to them, and see if you are worthy or not. These judges are Mrs. Joanne Smith and Mr. William Jones, and yes, it is the real Joanne Smith and William Jones him and herself. You all already know the drill, they're strict and give utterly mean feedback. You may begin now, and ask me questions when needed." Chatter filled the room, many eager gasps and shocked, alarmed faces.

"Daphne what do you wanna do?" I asked.

"Uhhh, I'm not quite sure yet, what about you?" She questioned back.

"A tea fountain, what grandpa always wanted."

“You want to go follow grandpa’s dream?”

“Yes, it’ll be a great project idea, I already know how to operate water dispensers. I also know that we somehow have an old water dispenser in our house storage room, so I can use that.”

“I should’ve thought of that..” I smiled at her and began to write the essay on my computer.

Chapter three

The day has been long and tiring, like every other day. I searched for the old water dispenser in the storage room. A few minutes passed, and no sight of the water dispenser. A few *more* minutes passed.. And I found it! I got to work, fixing the old water dispenser, arranging a few things and so on, I could ace Marketing! I grabbed the water dispenser and headed up to my room. My room had a bunch of paint products, especially a lot of paint. In this case, I decided to paint my tea fountain black. According to some research, the colour black can absorb heat, which will be great for my tea fountain. I began painting, giving the dispenser a nice and aesthetic look. I went to look in the garage to maybe find some metal pieces to cover up the old dispenser, to give it a better look and protection. I found some, but only to be in different colours; white, blue and green. But it’s fine, black permanent paint should do the job right? And yes, I was right, it covered all spots flawlessly, no odd colours seen. I fixed the broken bits and pieces, making a gorgeous tea dispenser. I added paper cups to the side of the dispenser, the final step of making a tea dispenser. I finished off my essay, and added the price, the catchy description of it, and I was done. 7:54, my clock said. “Lune! Come eat dinner! We have buttered steak tonight!” Mom called. I went to the bathroom to wash my hands and face, then soon went down for dinner.

Chapter four

Two weeks felt like a whirlpool full of emotions, rage, joy and many others. Today was the day where you’d have to hand in your assignment, which also means the judges will come, and that I’ll have to present... I prepared my flashcards ready, got my hair done neatly and made my uniform extra neat.

Once I reached school, the first period was Marketing.. Everyone was extremely tense, waiting in a line according to the register. One after one, they all returned with traumatized faces, and some even a bit teary. “Daphne Miller!” Our eyes met, hers filled with irritation. “Good luck, you got this.” I comforted her. She came back, weary and miserable. “I don’t think they’re going to accept anyon—”

“Lune Miller!” Called the judges, my heart was pounding, my fists clenched the flashcards, they crumbled bit by bit on the side, forming tiny wrinkles. Daphne placed her hand on my shoulder, and I left my seat to go to the room...

Chapter five

I left the room, my flashcards completely crumbled, everyone stood up in anticipation, like how they did whenever someone came out of the room. “I GOT IN!” I screamed, Daphne cried with joy, ran up to me, and cuddled with joy. Others around congratulated me, with claps and cheers. Someone.. Someone finally got in.

I went home, told the great news to my parents, I told grandma, and grandpa... I prayed and bowed low, I placed his chawan on his wooden block coaster, wished him a great living in heaven, and bowed once more. Ding! My phone lit up, with a notification from Gmail. I opened it, and it was Joanne Smith and William Jones... I stared and unconsciously clicked into the email. “Congratulations! Your product is now being sold on the market, go take a look at this link!” The email said. “Best regards, Joanne Smith and William Jones.” I froze at the sight of the email, one hand held the phone, and one covered my mouth. My eyes shivered at the email, with small water droplets forming out of the corner of my eye. I wiped them away, finally knowing, I accomplished grandpa’s dream.

New Tales of China's Inventions

ESF Sha Tin College, Poon, Cheuk Wa Scott - 11

It seemed unthinkable that had it not been for a three-year-old boy's naughty act, China wouldn't have been the world's first flying car maker, but this was exactly what happened!

It all began on the day kindergartener Ming Lau's parents took him to Western China to see the cave paintings of flying nymphs at the world-famous Mogao. The boy was his usual hyperactive self. He cried when the aircon in the bus wasn't cool enough and stamped his feet when the tourist site didn't sell his favorite sweet vanilla ice cream and his cheeks turned red like the bursting lava in an erupting volcano.

When his Mother's phone data wasn't enough, he cried "Mommy! I want to play games on your phone!"

The soles of his shoes almost fell from his foot-stamping when his Mother's phone data wasn't enough. He cried "Mommy! I want to play games on your phone!"

When they were inside the caves and it was finally cool enough, still, Ming Lau was in an irritable mood. To vent his displeasure, he ignored the "Do not touch" signs stuck near the walls, grabbed hold of a rock, climbed up a rock like Spider-Man, and yanked it out with all his might. Immediately, he was hauled upwards by an invisible force and his feet kicked. When he recovered enough sense to look down, he saw his parents' horrified faces and the phones aiming.

"Come down," his mum pleaded.

"I can't, because this propeller thingy is making me fly like Doraemon!"

"Why am I flying like Doraemon with that propeller thingy?" he cried. The rock was spinning him up like a helicopter. But this was not the only strange spectacle in the cave. The beautiful ladies painted on the cave were now roused from sleep and floating mid-air, their long sashes trailing after them like the elaborate fins of a colorful fish. By now, every fellow trustee had taken out their phone to record what seemed like a magical scene from a Disney movie.

Eventually, before he would break the cave into a bunch of pieces, one of the security guards had the quickness of wit to balance himself on a camel's hump to reach for the child before he could turn into a Hot Air Balloon. Word of the rock's magical properties spread, and as soon as the next day, scientists from The Chinese Academy of Science rushed to the site to bring home a truckload of rocks. They hypothesized that if the rocks bore enough weight, they could power C919, the first and newest China-made aircraft. Journalists from all over the world came in excited, ready to capture an incredible moment.

Before long, Professor Zhang, the world's top aviation expert, gathered a group of journalists to make a significant announcement about the rocks. "Since the flying nymphs have been painted on the walls of Mogao for over 1000 years, their spirits have been in the untouched rocks, and now the rocks themselves can fly better than any engine Rolls Royce can make."

Scientists Professor Zhang and his team quickly realized that not only could the rocks make airplanes soar, but they could also endow smaller vessels such as bicycles, with the ability to fly like UFOs in cartoons. But their targets were not small, they wanted to assemble a masterpiece, the first one in the world to do this, a flying car.

The masterpiece was created after all of the maintenance the scientists put in with their blood, sweat, and tears, and trial and error. Powered by the extraordinary spirits of Mogao, and a rock discovered by an angry puff-faced little boy, China had won the race. Sales skyrocketed, as the flying car was snapped up by millionaires and billionaires all around the globe. People didn't need to stick their faces on the horn in a lengthy, dull traffic jam. Instead, they could take the skies and roam freely. This Invention carried technology to its newest stage, thanks to a chubby querulous boy who dug into the past to bring the human race to the future.

New Tales of China's Inventions

ESF Sha Tin College, Poon, Yip Glamour Cheuk – 11

As Empress Xi Ling-shi made herself comfortable under a Mulberry tree on a perfect summer afternoon, once again, she was reminded of how scratchy her garment made her every time she shifted her weight on the ground. Her ever-faithful maid Ming-Zhu had it even worse: the hemp dress she was wearing was of an even rougher texture, sometimes going as far as leaving pink marks on her delicate inner thighs. But then, back in the empress's day – she lived way back, 5000 years ago along the Yellow River in the Middle Kingdom, aka China – life itself was often nasty, brutish, and short. Many children didn't live past the age of five, their mothers often perished while giving birth to their siblings. As the first lady in her kingdom, she tried to make her people forget the horrors of life by making beautiful objects – the pink vases at the palace, the phoenix carvings on her husband's sword handle, the gemstones on her neck – all were the fruits of her active imagination and deft fingers.

When Xi Ling-shi lifted her cup to drink, a cocoon the size of her pinky finger dropped down from the tree's thick canopy, startling the gorgeous young empress. The first thing she noticed was a long translucent thread, which was thin, strong yet soft like a swan's feather. She gazed at the spectacular string as she gently teased it out with her long, tapering fingers, accidentally unravelling it in the progress.

"Ming-Zhu, Ming-Zhu, come here!" Xi Ling-shi cried.

Ming-Zhu gracefully walked over to Xi Ling-shi, and asked "Yes, my empress?"

"Go and gather more cocoons." Xi Ling-shi commanded, her eyes gleaming with excitement, as they always did when a new idea hatched in her mind.

Ming-Zhu bowed and started searching for the small, white fuzzy egg-shaped object. Soon, Xi Ling-shi's faithful servant girl gathered at the empress's feet a pile of cocoons as high as her knees. The two then began working in tandem, spinning strands of silk into one long smooth thread, and then mounting it on a loom. After 20 days and 20 nights, the two women proudly put on display a red robe whose sheen lent it a glow in the dark quality. Only one person in the kingdom deserved to wear it: Xi Ling-shi's husband, the emperor of the land. Awed by this masterpiece, the emperor's subjects began to make their own silk, breeding worms, collecting cocoons by the bucket, and, for the really committed, sectioning off a portion of their homes for the purpose of making silk. Soon, silk clothing could be seen on the aristocrats, then the rich merchants, then the scholars. Mingzhu herself did very well, after Xi Ling-shi gifted to her the copyright for silk production. But the secret of silk making remained solely within the borders of China for another 2000 years.

Today, you and I would still be wearing silk had an English inventor Eli Whitney not invented cotton, a far cheaper way to make fabrics. Cotton then became more and more popular in China, and the wearing of silk was, once again, a privilege belonging only to the very rich.

In conclusion, the increasing rarity of silk clothes, along with the extinction of silkworms, has led to a rapid increase in the price of silk clothes. Out of all rooms in The China Museum of Historical Artifacts, the "Fabric" room has gained the most interest due to the first and original piece of silk clothing made by Xi Ling-shi and Ming-Zhu in their own hands. On top of the glass box the clothing is in, a gigantic photo starring both Xi Ling-shi, wearing their creation, and Ming-Zhu, wearing silk clothes gifted by Xi Ling-shi, with flickering bright candles around the portrait, displaying

their wonderful contribution to the unusual world of silk. Lots of tourists visited this tourist attraction, and often commented,

“What a wonderful discovery that these two made”.

“Thank Xi Ling-shi and Ming-Zhu for the clothes I am wearing now”.

“May they rest in peace”.

This shows how people from all around the world respect the female empress and maid who discovered silk.

Thanks,

Night at the Museum

ESF Sha Tin College, Shi, Iris Sun – 11

The Hong Kong Science Museum was setting up a unique display of Modern versus Ancient artifacts of scientific innovations, to be open the following day. On that afternoon, two middle-school volunteers, a boy and a girl, were arranging the artifacts within their respective glass cases.

The girl, her eyes on the ancient treasures, proposed, “Don't you think it would be more impactful if we displayed them side by side, rather than in separate rooms?”

The boy responded with a playful quip, “Perhaps they might not get along if they're too close together!” His laughter filled the room. He then added, “I don't understand why they bother exhibiting the ancient artifacts. Are they even relevant today?”

“Don't be so dismissive. I'm sure they hold significant importance.” The girl replied. Her voice echoed in the quiet room, bouncing off the marble floors.

As the moon began its ascent, the museum settled into a deep, tranquil silence. The glass cases glinted in the silvery light. It was a time when the museum belonged to its inhabitants, the ancient and modern artifacts. One room was filled with a diverse collection of ancient Chinese artifacts, including a traditional kite, a sinan (an ancient compass), a delicate porcelain vase, and a variety of cups and goblets, some still bearing traces of alcohol or tea. In stark contrast, the adjacent room showcased modern counterparts – a drone, a GPSMAP, a plastic vase, modern medical equipment, among other items.

In the Modern Inventions section, a hushed whisper broke the silence. It came from the smokeless powder. Its sharp and crisp voice ignited a spark of contention. “Well, the boy was right. Who needs you, black powder? You might have been useful in the past, but now you are all just obsolete relics. We are the new inventions, the progressive, the advanced.”

The ancient artifacts exchanged horrified glances, except for the porcelain vase, who was audibly snoring in the corner.

The abacus, bold and defiant, rattled his beads in agitation, “Excuse me? I was a staple in every shop and office, and I paved the way for calculators and computers.”

The hot air balloon chimed in, “I agree with you. I'm still a popular attraction for tourists.” This was the first time he'd had anything exciting to do in ages. He could almost feel the wind and envision the sky he once dominated.

The ancient exhibits signified their support, especially the porcelain vase, who had just woken up and was now cheering enthusiastically. The calculator from the next room rolled his eyes, while the GPSMAP tried to contain its laughter.

The goblet, still bearing traces of wine, sneered, “Emperor Kang Xi drank from me at his 60th birthday banquet. Have any of you modern inventions experienced such imperial glory?”

“The glory you speak of belongs to a time 300 years ago,” murmured the nylon pants.

“What about me?” inquired the sinan, his pointer spinning incessantly. “On a foggy night in 1405, through the Malacca Strait, Admiral Zheng He held me in his palms during his first voyage. Oh, the grandeur of the treasure fleet! Oh, the allure of faraway territories!”

“Old sinan, you are nothing more than a spoon on a bronze square. Look at me. I am guided by the Beidou satellites, and I display accurate maps and real-time routes.” The GPSMAP spoke with a hint of indignation.

The acupuncture needle intervened, “You shouldn't belittle the sinan. Without him, where would you be?” She said in her calm manner. “The sinan is the reason you exist today. I thought you would be more appreciative of that. You might be more advanced, but at the end of the day, you serve the same purpose – navigation.”

“Can't agree more,” The black gunpowder grinned, “Indeed, you should all heed her words.”

“I was a simple needle in Doctor Li Shizhen's hand; my name goes down in Bencao Gangmu.” The acupuncture needle continued.

The mRNA vaccine smirked as she prepared her rebuttal. “Your master's Bencao Gangmu is riddled with inaccuracies, limited by the scientific knowledge of its time. Look at me, I represent the pinnacle of medical technology. I am a molecule that contains instructions to direct cells in producing proteins, thereby training the immune system to combat future attacks.”

The acupuncture needle, overwhelmed by the mRNA vaccine's talk of antigens and pathogens, retreated to a corner, seemingly defeated.

“However, Bencao Gangmu represented the apex of medical knowledge at that time. It was a milestone.” The kite continued, “I am old enough to have met Marco Polo in Weihai, but I remain robust today. What more could one want?”

The DJI drone glanced at the Weihai kite and weighed in, “Your ancient relics fall from the sky as soon as the wind ceases. I, on the other hand, can fly even without wind. My propellers spin up to 9000 rpm.” He was so proud that he could almost feel his remote control twitching in delight.

Meanwhile, the smokeless powder was engaged in a heated argument with the black powder from the next room, as the latter was boasting about his adventure of being loaded into a cannon in April 1661, just seconds before the enemy raised the white flag and surrendered to General Zheng Chenggong. So engrossed were they in their debate, they failed to notice the volunteers' mistake of placing a matchstick next to the black gunpowder and a lighter next to the smokeless powder. This led to a catastrophic accident. As the smokeless powder uttered one last retort, the gunpowder ignited its fuse.

For a moment, the only sounds were the explosion and the subsequent shattering of glass. The exhibits found themselves strewn across the floor, shocked to be outside their protective bubbles. Accusations started flying around, but the wise old bronze cauldron, with inscriptions from Shang Dynasty, silenced them with a heavy stomp.

“We need to clean up before the museum opens tomorrow morning!” he bellowed in his weathered voice. “The glass cases are damaged. We must set them upright again. But the glass... it's shattered into thousands of tiny pieces. What can we do now?”

The drone volunteered, "I can help clean up the glass. But I need a partner to operate the controls. Matchstick, why don't you help me? You'd be useful pressing buttons."

"You've insulted my friends, and now you expect us to work together?" the matchstick spat out in disdain.

"If we want to get out of this mess, we must work together! We should eliminate all the remaining glass, and I will sacrifice myself to hold the broken pieces." The bronze cauldron interjected.

The exhibits were in awe and then nodded in agreement. They knocked down the glass, and the bronze cauldron bravely contained the pieces. The demolition went on unabated. Exhibit after exhibit ceased their quarrels, contributing to the effort. Before long, the glass was entirely gone, leaving the museum hall with a simple, minimalist aesthetic. The bronze cauldron cleared his throat, "Ah, precious brothers and sisters! I extend my gratitude for your cooperation. I am confident that we will have an exceptional day of opening. And what is the lesson we've learned? It is that both ancient and modern inventions hold value! History is akin to a stream, ceaselessly flowing. Some inventions disembark, some remain, and some depart. Technological innovation is in a state of constant evolution, developing as time marches on. Ancient inventions have laid the groundwork for modern ones. New inventions and creations don't just materialize out of thin air; they represent the accumulated wisdom of generations. Only by thoroughly understanding our past can we truly comprehend the development of science and technology and appreciate China's rich culture and ongoing progress."

All exhibits applauded. The mRNA vaccine raised his hand, "Now that the glass is gone, how about we rearrange our positions?"

"Great idea!" The acupuncture needle seconded.

The artifacts, ancient and modern, started to move. The abacus slid next to the calculator, the traditional kite fluttered to rest beside the drone, and the mRNA vaccine sat next to the acupuncture needle. Ten minutes later, each found its counterpart.

The first rays of dawn began to pierce the darkness. The sun cast a warm glow over the museum; its light illuminated the newfound harmony. The artifacts, hand in hand, were ready to tell their stories to all visitors about the march of human creativity.

The Breakthrough

ESF Sha Tin College, Wan, Nga King – 12

Chapter 1

“I will not be acknowledging any objections. Understood?”

“Yes, Your Majesty.”

It was just another day at the office for General Zhang Mei: trying to come up with new, innovative solutions to help win this war, just for the emperor to decline the idea right in his face. He sighed. Why was he even working as a high-ranking officer? Money? Power? Not really. As he exited the forum, he was still contemplating the question. Zhang Mei was known to be a loyal and intelligent battle strategist, assisting in several battles and even taking part in some of them, but now that the emperor wasn't even recognizing his or any others' ideas, the thought of simply leaving his role clutched to the back of his head. Zhang Mei lethargically departed from the royal palace, not sure of what he should do. Maybe a walk would get a few theories here and there about what he could do. With only a black slither following him, Zhang Mei disappeared down the path.

After trekking down the mountain, Zhang Mei finally arrived. The bar was full of chatter and laughter, the sounds of clinking bottles and soothing music. He entered and ordered the standard bottle of wine, when suddenly he overheard two merchants having a conversation.

“Have you heard of the monks who tried to find a life-extending elixir?” The first man asked, drowning himself with a bottle of alcohol.

“No. Sounds like a lot of nonsense,” the second man responded with an unconcerned voice.

“They failed to retrieve the elixir, but they apparently found some white powder.”

“How's that useful?”

“I don't know, but they're trying to sell it to the emperor.”

“Good luck to them.”

At first, Zhang Mei didn't think much of it. There was no chance a group of strangers would even get a glance at the mighty emperor, but there was something inside of him that was intrigued and wanted to know more. What was this “white powder”? He had to be informed about what this was. Placing down his now empty bottle on the decaying wooden table, he approached the two.

“Excuse me gentlemen, could you follow me for a second?” Zhang Mei calmly questioned.

Confused, the two merchants didn't know what to do. But after a few moments, they decided to comply. Zhang Mei ushered them to follow him to a remote barnhouse. When they finally reached the destination,

they saw where this anonymous man had led them to. The seemingly dilapidated barnhouse was far from society, at least 2 miles, making it the perfect place for a close-mouthed discussion. It was built by his grandfather, decades before Zhang Mei himself was born, as an emergency safehouse, though in the state that it's in, a gust of wind could blow the whole structure down. On the exterior, twisted trees and broken branches lay everywhere, all covered in a layer of foliage. When they entered, the Chinese general locked the door shut and unsheathed a knife from his waist, pointed it at one of the merchant's necks and started to query the two extremely bewildered and terrified traders.

"I understand you two are very confused about why you're here, but stay with me. It'll only take a few minutes...if you do what I say," said Zhang Mei in a stern and serious tone. "What is this 'white powder' that you both were talking about?"

"We...we don't know! It's just some rumor we heard!" One of the merchants cried, desperately.

"Don't hurt us! Please!" The other said in a shaken voice.

"I won't. Now answer my next question: where can I find these monks?" Zhang Mei responded.

The two others turned to each other for a brief moment. Getting impatient, Zhang Mei slowly nudged the gleaming weapon nearer and nearer one of their necks. Panicking, the one on the left said "People say they reside in a temple north of here. Now let us go!"

"Fine," said Zhang Mei. "However, be warned. If I hear that you inform anyone about this meeting, I can assure you, you'll never see the light of day again," he murmured under his breath before walking out the door. Frightened out of their minds, the two men waited for Zhang Mei to depart and then hurried out so quickly that a cloud of dust rose from where they stood.

Finally receiving answers, Zhang Mei decided to start planning an elaborate scheme to collect this white powder. Once he returned to his headquarters, he met up with his good friend and colleague Cheng Li to travel to the north. The journey required around 1 week worth of food and water, but Zhang Mei believed that it would be worth it. After numerous days of planning, arranging and other activities, Zhang Mei and Cheng Li were finally ready to seek this temple. Without further ado, they packed all their belongings and set off into the unknown.

Chapter 2

It has been almost three days since Zhang Mei and Cheng Li started their expedition and they still haven't seen a single trace of civilization. Zhang Mei was starting to lose hope, when out of the blue, in the distance, they saw a streak of incense floating up to the sky. They both knew that they had reached their destination. With a sudden boost of energy, they dashed towards it.

Even the towering mountain didn't intimidate them into backing down. They were determined to retrieve this powder, and there was nothing that could stand in their way. Finally, they reached the peak, feet blistering and legs exhausted. The gate of the temple stood proud, red and golden colours decorating the engravings. Two mighty dragons were positioned atop the *pailang*, warding off anyone arriving with harmful intentions. As the two walked in, they took in the sight. There were students training their physical bodies, monks meditating, and so much more. But this wasn't the main point. Zhang Mei and

Cheng Li had to locate this powder. They went to the main building, but a young man at the front halted their way.

“Sir, this is a restricted area. You are not allowed to enter without permission,” said the man.

“We come to find a white powder. Do you know what that is?” replied Cheng Li.

Hesitating for a moment, the man escorted them into the temple. They walked up a seemingly infinite flight of stairs until they reached the top. Behind the desk was a well-dressed monk with a welcoming smile.

“Welcome! What brings you here?” The monk inquired.

“We came to find a white powder,” Zhang Mei replied, fatigued.

“Oh, I see. Is there a particular reason you need it?”

“We’re planning to use it for experimentation.”

“In that case, I will fetch all of it.”

“Wait, all of it?”

“Indeed. This powder serves us no purpose. You may take it all.”

“Thank you very much.”

Not anticipating this generous offer, Zhang Mei and Cheng Li were both ecstatic. When the monk came back with twelve bags full to the brim, they accepted it and showed their gratitude by giving them a few golden coins. A short moment later, they exited the premises and returned home.

When they arrived back at the palace, Zhang Mei contacted the lead alchemist, Xu Feng, to experiment with his team of veteran scientists. A couple days later, Xu Feng reported the results of the experiments.

“What are the results?” Zhang Mei curiously asked.

“We found something interesting. When combined with certain compounds, it would spontaneously combust,” Xu Feng responded.

“That could prove useful... Is there any way for you to pack a certain amount into a tight space and detonate it from a distance?”

“I could try, though I don’t see why that’s helpful.”

“It’ll be explained soon enough.”

“Alright.”

Fifteen days after the conversation, a large-scale battle would take place near Fort Shen Fu, and reinforcements would need to come quickly if the army Zhang Mei was commanding wanted to beat the enemy. His troops were losing ground and the enemy soldiers were overwhelming them from all angles. When he thought he had finally lost the battle, his mind clicked. The powder...the explosion! Yes! He could use it to destroy the wall! Suddenly, the general's hope was rejuvenated. Zhang Mei contacted Xu Feng via a letter and asked him to deliver the explosive and detonator. When the explosives finally came, Zhang Mei devised a plan. First, archers would divert the enemy's attention to them, while the rest of the soldiers would sneak past the guards and destroy a portion of the wall. When they were all ready, they put the plan into motion, and in the end, a loud "*Boom!*" could be heard from a distance, followed by the cries and shouts of men charging in.

This was the first time this powder was employed into battle, and in the future, armies all over the world would also use this substance, and it eventually would be known as "gunpowder".

Ping's Journey to Modern Day China

ESF Sha Tin College, Wong, Yan Chun Shannon – 12

In ancient China, there was a village called Ming Hui, named after its inhabitants who were known for their intelligence and curiosity. Despite their limited resources, the villagers led contented lives, ensuring they had enough food and water to sustain themselves. One of their notable pursuits was the continuous invention of tools and techniques to improve agricultural productivity.

The three most great inventions were silk, the compass and the kite:

In response to the scarcity of materials for clothing, the villagers devised a method to create silk. They would seek out silkworms and patiently wait for them to form cocoons. Once the cocoons were formed, they were steamed to prevent the moths inside from hatching. The villagers would then carefully unwind the steamed cocoons and combine the delicate threads to produce smooth silk. The versatile silk fabric found various uses in the village, including the production of quilts, fishing equipment, and more.

They also invented a compass which helped fishermen to navigate their way when they went fishing. Making the compass included using a mineral called loadstone as well as a flat plate of bronze. This was very useful since it could help navigate fishermen's way when going fishing to feed the village.

Lastly, the villagers of Ming Hui invented the kite. This invention served multiple purposes, including entertainment, communication, and even military applications. The kites were constructed using lightweight materials such as bamboo and silk, allowing them to soar gracefully in the sky. The villagers' ingenuity with kites provided avenues for leisure, facilitated long-distance communication, and potentially even aided in strategic endeavors.

These inventions made the villagers' lives easier and their quality of life better.

Many villagers contributed to the ideas for these great inventions and one of them was named Ping. Ping was learning about designing different types of machinery and wanted to make more to help the village. One day, while he was walking into the forest with tall trees blocking the bright sun, he found a mysterious door.

Ping looked around wondering if he should step inside or not, he thought, "I guess I'll just step inside and see what happens to me." Stepping inside the portal, he could see the inventions the villagers made floating around. There were kites getting tangled together, the compass was zooming around through the air in random directions, the water wheel was spinning very quickly while spilling out water and the silk was gracefully flying round and round Ping. He started to float around in circles and realized that the portal he stepped into was sending him somewhere.

In a flash, he quickly got transported from inside the portal to a place with unfamiliar surroundings. Houses, so tall they could reach the clouds and busy streets with people walking and interesting, flashy cars driving around.

Looking around, he could see tall skyscrapers that reached up into the clear, blue sky. And many multicoloured buildings scattered all across the land. All the buildings were covered in shiny, clean glass which reflected the white clouds in the sky. There was one building that stood out from all the rest, it had 2 spheres with a tall crane in between them. Next to him, many people were taking out small rectangular objects and pointing them towards the beautiful view.

Ping started to walk around smelling the delicious, sweet fragrance of food that people were selling in small shops. He could see the glorious clothes that were on display in front of enormous, expensive looking stores. Just as he was crossing over to the other side of the path, something caught his eye. Gleaming in front of him, he saw the most beautiful dress he had ever seen in his life, a tight and pink qipao with white flowers embroidered on it. There were

buttons that started from the top of the dress climbing down to the bottom of the dress. The qipaos they made in his hometown were loosely fitted with no decoration on it. Most of the qipaos he had seen weren't as fashionable.

He started walking a bit more until he wondered, how do people navigate themselves through all these complicated, confusing streets? Ping then found a car just on the side of the road that read TAXI. Wondering what a taxi was, Ping jumped inside and said, "Drive me to a good tourist destination please."

The driver nodded his head and started driving. Ping looked around him, this car was very different to what he used from where he lived. The car he used was a cart with two wheels at the back and animals would have to pull the cart around. This car had four wheels which seemed incredibly easy to use and it was comfortable to sit in and look out at the amazing view. Suddenly, Ping saw multiple flat, rectangular objects lined up together with a screen switched on which showed all the multiple roads and a big red arrow in the middle of the screen. Ping could hear a voice coming from the object navigating the way to go, "Turn left, turn right".

"Is that some sort of compass next to your wheel?" asked Ping.

"Not exactly, it's called GPS, it works from satellites in space," answered the driver.

Ping was shocked by the driver's answer. Had the future discovered some cool technology that worked in space? The compass in Ping's village was big, heavy and wasn't easy to carry around at all but the compass that people used now was light weighted and easy to use. Once they arrived at the destination, Ping looked outside to see green, soft, lush grass where children were running around carrying colorful kites with animals on them. As the kites soared into the sky, Ping could see a very big kite with vibrant colors making it stand out from the others.

Suddenly, a lady ran up to Ping and said, "My daughter's kite is stuck in that towering tree! Can you help me take it down?"

"Of course!" answered Ping.

Ping walked up to the tall tree with leaves and branches so big that it was covering all the sunlight making it very cool and shady when standing underneath. As Ping started climbing, he could feel the rough surface of the tree scratching his legs and arms making scars on his body. Finally, he saw the glimpse of a bright kite stuck in the leaves of the tree. Carefully, Ping stretched his arm as far as he could and reached out to take the kite. When he could feel the kite brushing against his fingers, he quickly grabbed it and started making his way back down to give the girl the kite. Reaching the ground, he said, "Here's your kite! It's a bit broken but you can still use it."

"Thank you so much young man. In fact, I should repay you!" exclaimed the woman.

She handed the kite to Ping and after saying her goodbyes she walked away. The kite Ping held in his hand was very complicated. There were a lot of wires and string with material at the top that felt very thin and silky. Back in the village, they made their kites with only two things, bamboo and silk.

Then, a door popped out in front of him. Ping opened the heavy door and jumped into the portal. This time, he could see the multiple modern qipaos in front of him flying around in circles. He could see the vibrant kites dancing around the portal and the GPS spinning around in different directions. Suddenly, everything stopped and Ping was teleported back to Ming Hui village. With the kite still in his hand, he ran and ran until he reached the village square screaming, "I SAW MODERN DAY CHINA, COME HERE TO HEAR ABOUT IT!"

Everyone rushed toward him, full of curiosity. Ping talked about the beautiful qipao he saw, the new GPS technology and the multicolored kites at the park. After he had explained his journey, everyone was amazed but one of the villagers asked, "How do we know if you are lying or not?"

Thinking carefully, Ping got an idea. He proudly presented the kite the lady had given him.

"When I went to the park, a lady gave this to me!" Ping said.

Everyone was amazed and were fighting over to get a look at it. The villagers looked at the big, broken kite with a flashy pink background. After everyone had left, Ping pondered, "After looking at modern day China, I can see how wondrous Chinese inventions have become. The sky's the limit and who knows what the future will hold?"

Gunpowder

ESF Sha Tin College, Xing, Janey – 13

A pair of thin hands fumbled frantically in the dark.

“Maybe.. Maybe...,” a deep voice mumbled, tinged with desperateness.

The glow of the lantern illuminated the alchemist’s face, his shadows dancing on the rough walls like 五通神 (Wutong Spirits) taunting him. He stared down at the strange, metallic grey mixture of saltpetre, charcoal and sulphur, the rumoured recipe to the elixir of immortality.

In his eyes, they swirled and blurred, resembling the torrent inside his brain. What was he thinking— an elixir of immortality? He really was insane, and naive too, working for the ruthless emperor. Promises of glory. Guarantees of wealth. And he had believed them. The emperor’s heavy footsteps coming downstairs resounded through the dark laboratory, jolting him from his thoughts. The alchemist spun around and gasped; in his flurry of movement, he had knocked over the lantern.

Cursing, he swept the glass shards aside— but it was too late.

CRACKLE, SNAP— The powder was swallowed by the vermilion beast, sparks flying from its mouth. The emperor stepped down from the stairs and gazed, bewildered, at the fire. His head swivelled to glower at the alchemist, the look in his eyes burning, piercing into him, more threatening than the flames. As he opened his mouth to rebuke the alchemist— BOOM! An ear-shattering explosion sounded: fiercer than thunder; louder than crashing waves. The flames on the table flew and spread and burst, like the tumultuous cracking and splitting of a crimson giant, larger than the Himalayan mountains.

The alchemist stood by, a startled expression on his sunken face. He remained oblivious to the universe of possibilities he had opened within mere seconds; this was a moment to be written in history books, studied by physicists for centuries to come, and he didn’t even know it. The glow of the flames irradiated the side of the emperor’s smooth face, making him look devilish as his face split into a pleased smile.

A gunshot sounded through the silent night.

The sound broke the tense silence like a needle piercing through silk. Everything became a blur as men dashed through the tunnels of dirt, all desperate to take cover. Amidst the chaos, a soldier stumbled forward and peered outside. The plains appeared unchanged. Barren; never-ending. Unsettling yet strangely tranquil. But the soldier knew, soon enough it would be transformed into a battlefield, littered with corpses, the dry grass stained red. Silver raindrops would fall from the sky, each one a miniscule capsule of demolition.

The pandemonium began almost instantaneously. BANG—BANG—BANG— Without warning, the continuous blasting of firing guns began.

BANG—BANG—BANG—BANG— the copper bullets started to transform— twisting, whirling, spinning. Feathers burst out of the gleaming capsules, lead talons stretched out, becoming black crows that merged into the ebony black night sky, albeit the beady obsidian eyes of theirs, becoming sharp, piercing stars. They flew and circled over the plains as blood sprayed from bodies, staining khaki uniforms.

A crow was soaring towards the soldier, reaching out, its sharp talons grazing his head, its eyes peering into him, seeing through him— BANG! The crows shrunk back into the bullets, the yells and cries of men replacing their

screeches, jolting the soldier back into reality. His head still swam as he poured gunpowder from a flask into his gun's barrel, the movement already mechanic.

He tried to focus, tried to take cover, but the crows were returning. They swooped down on him, pecking through his flesh and bones, piercing through his skull— the soldier clutched his head, leaning down. Blood sprayed across his vision. Around him, men collapsed like the games of dominoes he used to play with— with whom? His memory was clouded, black gunpowder had already infiltrated his mind, he could no longer recall his own identity. When he thought of his name, all he could see was the beige uniform and the olive trench caps.

The pairs of dreary eyes and faces smudged with mud all around him were swaying, were haunting him, and his skull was splitting, his lungs collapsing. Flocks of crows were descending upon him, a tangle of black wings and glinting talons dripping with blood, reaching out towards him, reaching, reaching—

GASP! He lurched up in bed, beads of cold sweat forming on his forehead. He could not recall how many nights this hellish nightmare had haunted him. He gazed up at the Victoria Cross hanging from his wall. A veteran's symbol of courage, of honour, yet it felt like a curse, a burden on his shoulders.

Flowers bloomed across the inky twilight sky.

Flowers, vibrantly coloured, all starting with a POP!— and then blooming, thin petals soaring outwards and sparks flying off their ends, leaving a colourful, smoky trail of their stem as it slowly disintegrated from the sky. "Fireworks", they were called.

A young girl lied on the prickly grass, oblivious to the dewy, olive green stains it left on the back of her shirt. The fireworks reflection in her eyes were like luminous flowers floating in a creamy espresso, being stirred around and around. She thought back to her book of fairy tales, of the shimmering ribbons of light that would materialise from a thin, glossy rod. Magic. That was what fireworks felt like to her, seemingly springing out of nowhere, with their intoxicating, brilliant colours.

"Dad?", she asked, turning her head.

"Yes, Bonnie?"

"How are the fireworks made? I mean— they're like stars. How can they be so high up?"

"Well... it's a component called gunpowder."

"Like the ones in guns? But guns— guns are dangerous."

"Well, Bonnie, gunpowder, just like most things, can be used in different ways— to cause pain, to cause happiness, to create entertainment or to harm others. It's all dependent on how people choose to use it. It is a heavy responsibility, to have the power to make good or bad decisions. But we must always try to make the right choices."

He turned around, but Bonnie did not seem to be contemplating his words. She only stared up at the sky, smiling. She bounded off to play with the other children, skipping and leaping in the grass, underneath the streaks of watercolour on the charcoal canvas, squealing with the others whenever another firework went off.

All she thought in that moment was, she was so thankful to the wonderful person who had discovered gunpowder.

Hua Mei Shi

ESF Sha Tin College, Yang, Ella – 11

The words rang around in my head... “Go on... Break your family...”

“No no no!” I screamed.

“Yes yes indeed!” The voices replied.

My best friend looked at me “Myla, are you sure you okay? You're freaking me out!”

“I don't know if I'm okay, Jennie. I think... I must... Never mind.” I shuddered as another ring of voices hit me. “Honey, you must try, your family was worth nothing in the first place...”

I yanked my hair and immediately Jennie stopped me “What are you doing? Are you going mental?”

I cried “I don't know if I'm okay!”

The football referee blew the whistle “Foul, Emma. Swap with Myla.”

Jennie tried to tell me to not go, but I rushed into the field. Maybe a game of football would stop the voices.

I was kicking the ball and it was gonna go into the goal but Noah raced up and yelled “Pause! Check out this new invention, inspired by my dad. The Hua Mei Shu.”

“What in the world is that?” Emma roared with laughter.

“Well, I come from a Chinese family. This cool invention draws flowers for you!” Noah blushed “I wanna give it to you, Jennie. I think you're really kind and—”

“Woah woah woah. Stop right there.” Violetta strutted towards Noah “Did you not know Jen is dating already?”

Jennie twiddled her thumbs “Yeah. Sorry Noah. I'm dating Leon.”

I watched with my teammates on the field. This was very juicy, I didn't want to spread it, but sometimes I just blurt things out.

The referee blew his whistle “Excuse me, Mr Ling, but you just disturbed my football team right here, and you cannot get away with this. This was gonna be the match of the week! But, now you've ruined it. Send me an essay apologizing for disrupting the team.”

Noah looked at his feet “Sorry, Ms Mill.”

Emma whooped “NOAH JUST GOT REJECTED! NOAH JUST GOT REJECTED! JEN IS A HEARTBREAKER—”

Jennie slammed her hand over Emma's mouth “Shut up!” she hissed.

The bell rang, and I hurried to the changing rooms. The voices immediately came back “Ooh, thought we would leave...?”

“Please go away.” I muttered to myself.

When I finished changing, I plopped down on a bench with Jennie, Kiku and Akori. We sat in silence, occasionally shuffling our feet and taking a huge bite out of our sandwiches. Finally, Kiku broke the silence “Yall, I know what happened. I think that invention was actually really cool.”

Akori teased “Oh, wanna date itty bitty Noah? Go ahead, we’ll support you.”

“No! Of course not. I was just saying, we could go see if he threw away that invention, because I kinda want to use it.” Kiku bit her lip, not looking at Akori.

I grinned. This was a perfect way to make the voices shut up. I nodded “I think he tossed it away at the dumpster near the library. Let’s go check!”

We sneakily headed to the dumpster, exchanging mischievous smiles. Suddenly, I spotted it “Look! It’s there!” I whispered.

We hastily pulled it out, and we examined it “Hmm.. Draw a lavender.” Jennie said softly.

Slowly but surely, it drew the faintest lavender I had ever seen. “Wow, it’s so pretty.” Kiku sighed.

Akori clasped her hands together “Guys! I have an idea! So you know the invention competition is next week... Well, we could pretend this is our invention!”

“Yeah... That’s a great idea but isn’t it too... Risky?” I cocked my head.

“I’ll just go, if they find out, I’ll get in trouble. After all, Noah was meant to give this to me.” Jennie bravely stood up.

Kiku grabbed her scarf and murmured “So it is set. Jennie will show this. Now, where do we put this?”

“My locker is very cluttered, but if you guys help me organize it, it’ll have space.” Akori blinked at us.

I laughed “Fine. I’ll clean up your locker. What’s the lock’s password?”

Kiku wrapped the Hua Mei Shu up “It’s 790.”

A while later, I organized Akori’s locker and there were plenty of spaces. I shoved the invention in, and we made sure it was safe and comfy.

“Thanks.” Akori smiled as she hugged me.

“You’re welcome. Now, I’m really—” The voices started to taunt me again “Hello. Stop being a disgrace.” They silently moaned.

My phone rang loudly, so I picked it up “Hello?”

“MYLA...” I heard Jennie’s voice over the phone “It’s me... Jennie.”

“What happened?” I asked.

“Leon slapped me.” She sobbed.

I gasped “Jennie, where are you?”

"I'm— I'm at the auditorium. The invention competition is about to start..." She sniffed.

I grabbed the invention and comforted her "Don't worry, we're coming right away!"

I told Akori what happened as we heaved the invention over. When we finally arrived backstage, we spotted Kiku hugging Jennie.

"We brought the invention. Full story, NOW." Akori shook her by the shoulders.

"So—" Jennie gulped "I was brushing my hair, and then I got an email saying the competition was starting earlier because the principal was leaving next week. But suddenly, Leon told me to come out of the toilet, then he showed me my leather jacket, and then he asked whose jacket it was, so I told him it was mine. He asked how come he never saw it before, so I said I just bought it yesterday. He didn't believe I would wear such a large size. So he slapped me..."

"Poor you!" I grabbed my tissue and wiped her tears "Jennie, I don't wanna be mean, but this is a BIG day. You need to be strong. Cry about it all you want afterward, okay? Here's your introductory script I typed out during math class, good luck."

Akori stopped me "Hey, she can't go out looking like THAT. Let me fix your make-up."

Soon, we all prepped her for the stage, and we called "We'll cheer you on!"

Kiku, the sweetest, most innocent girl I've ever met, even called out "Leon is a jerk!"

I sat down on the chair, watching as Jennie walked on. Cute outfit: Check! Cute hairstyle: Check! Akori's amazing make-up: Check! Invention and script: Check!

"She's so gonna lose this." I heard Emma murmur behind me.

Jennie smiled "Hello there ladies and gentlemen, I would like to introduce to you... The Hua Mei Shu! It's a China Inspired Invention. It will draw any flower you want for you. Tell me a flower: It'll draw it for you!"

Emma squinted at the Hua Mei Shu "It looks familiar."

I raised my hand and called out "Lotus!"

The Hua Mei Shu drew a beautiful Lotus and Jennie picked it up and showed it to the school "Gorgeous, isn't it?"

Next, Violetta cried "Pink tulip!"

The machine drew it.

Soon, more people started to shout out flowers. The invention drew it all.

The principal smiled, "Amazing invention. Just asking, could it please draw a Blue Puya? It's my wife's favorite flower."

The invention had no hesitation as it drew a turquoise puya. It shone in the spotlight. Jennie handed it to the principal, and then he yelled “Thank you Jennie Gold for showing us this invention! Bravo!”

Everyone clapped for her as the curtains closed and she struggled to shift the machine over to backstage.

I beamed “You did fabulous!”

She collapsed “I’m exhausted. Let’s go to your house, Kiku.”

Kiku grinned from ear to ear as she called the taxi.

Soon, we lay on Kiku’s couch “I think you did nicely, Noah didn’t say anything too!” Akori smirked.

I opened Kiku’s phone and squealed “OMG! You got an email from Noah!”

“What does it say?” Kiku sat up.

“Dear Jennie. I hope you liked my invention, I see you used it already. You can take the credit. From Noah.” I snorted “Lame!”

“There’s another email: It’s from the principal! He says: Congrats Jennie, you won! Tomorrow, the \$200 dollars will be given to you. The invention will be sent all over the world! Thanks, Mr Lanny.”

Jennie grabbed her phone and sighed “This doesn’t feel right. I’m gonna tell the truth.” And so, Jennie emailed the whole school the truth. About what happened with Noah. About how she lied.

“You don’t have to do this...” Akori blinked at her with pleading eyes.

“It’s what I have to do.” Jennie typed away.

In case you're wondering what happened, well, Noah got all the money. Jennie broke up with Leon and started hanging out with Noah. And me, Akori and Kiku are their biggest shippers. Me? Well, I guess Noah kinda split the money with us too! And now, you can buy the Hua Mei Shi all over the world! Oh, and Emma... She got booted out of the football team. She deserved that! About the voices in my head... That’s a whole other story. I guess this is a happy ending?

THE END.

(P.S. Hua Mei Shi in english is: Flower artwork!)

The Discovery

ESF South Island School, Arisawa, Hana – 11

“Come, quick!” I awoke from my brief daydream to the calm and commanding voice of my master. I jumped up on the balls of my feet and swiftly paced towards him. My daydream, or memory, was the same as always: my cousin’s body, cold and hard; my mother pushing me out of the house with tear-filled eyes; the excruciating pain in my head as my father threw a rock to bruise it. And as usual, it all came to the same conclusion: I needed to prove myself before time ran out.

My master had a wrinkly face and a long, thin neck that constantly reminded me of a turtle. I felt honoured to be the one assisting reputedly the best alchemist of the century, but his strict ways constantly kept me on my toes. I quickly glanced around the room then spotted what the matter was for amidst the countless rows of glittering gems, smelly herbs, and dull-coloured powders. A foamy liquid flowed freely out of a pot onto the ground.

I hurriedly grabbed a griny cloth and scooped up the mixture. It felt surprisingly hot, and I couldn’t help but wince as the greyish bubbles made their way up my hand. In the distance, I could hear a voice muttering about his idea failing again. He was often predicted to be the one to find “The Solution”: an elixir that could extend one’s life, and he had already accidentally made many medicines while trying to create it.

“Are you alright? Would you like some water?” I asked gently. His mood was susceptible to dipping after an experiment gone wrong.

“I’m fine. You can go back to what you were doing.” The great alchemist glared at his scribbled notes as if trying to burn holes through them. Seeing his face full of disappointment made me decide one thing: I had to do something for both myself and him. I gathered my courage and started speaking.

“S-sir? Could you let me help a little? I’ll try my best.” I prayed hard behind my back, but his answer was short.

“No.” Seeing the pleading look on my face, he added, “You are too young, and alchemy is not for children.” Something in his dark, wise eyes told me that pushing further would only cause me trouble. I bowed deeply and left the room.

The rest of the day passed in a blur. All I could think of was what I was planning to do tonight, and I was distracted enough to bump into people and even the towering bamboo trees that surrounded the dark monastery. My mind was split into two, debating whether it was a good idea to put my horribly risky plan into action. I took a deep breath and expelled all the thoughts away.

For hours I tossed and turned on the hard wooden floor, waiting for the moon to come out. And then, after eternity, it did. Silver streaks burst out of gloomy clouds as the radiant orb of light lit up the whole world. Stars were scattered across the sky like broken shards of glass, glittering and glimmering without rest. For a brief moment, I forgot all about my cruel life and the mission I was about to embark on and remembered the best moment of my life.

It was on the day of the full moon, and I had cried for hours after finding out that I would have to become a boy and live instead of my late cousin. That I had to fake a concussion to hide my nonexistent memory of my ‘past life’. And also that if I didn’t do something quickly, I would meet the same fate as the girl who used to live next to us. I cried and cried and cried until my body felt dried and shrivelled up. Then my mother was there, smiling comfotingly. ‘No matter what happens, you will be fine. You are a strong, smart girl,’ she had said, hugging me tightly until I had fallen

asleep. From that night, I knew that I had to change the world for the better, not just for me but for everyone. And this was my big chance.

Slowly, I pushed my body up into a crouched position. The floor creaked loudly, and I froze. My heart was pounding like the drums at festivals, and every part of my body wanted to lie back and sleep in the peaceful room with echoes of frog croaks and snores. I crawled towards the door after checking that everyone was fast asleep, then jogged through the chilly autumn breeze. Finally, I was in the alchemy room.

Although the room was the same as the one I had visited earlier in the day, it seemed like the shadows had taken over and turned it into something completely different. I saw farmers working non-stop outside, and I felt lucky that I was able to live like this. Now it was my turn to work.

It didn't take long to gather the ingredients. The light of a lamp flame flickered faintly as I measured the sulphur, charcoal, and saltpetre. The black powder reminded me of the medicine my mother used to make for me when I was still a happy little girl without any worries. Before my mind could drift back into old memories, I let my hands work to complete what would save me until...

"What are you doing?" I jumped as I heard a familiar voice full of anger and concern. "I told you not to use this room without my instruction. You will have to leave." My sweaty hands were shaking madly. Tears dribbled down my cheeks and splattered on the floor.

"I'm sorry. I just..." What was I thinking, taking such a risk? I glanced at my master with fear. I didn't want to see his furious face. But when I did look, I saw calm and emotionless eyes.

"I only care for your safety. But for disobeying instructions, there will be consequence—"

"BANG!" Behind me, there was an explosion that came from the area where I worked. The lamp was on its side, and the oil had spilled out, making way for angry flames that burned with the powder

"What have you done?" Now he was properly enraged. "Leave. I will sort out the mess you made." I waited outside the room, as I was told, when I thought of something. I had nothing left to lose.

"Sir, couldn't you use what I made for something?" I asked this as calmly and clearly as I could manage.

"What happened to you? You used to obey me and never talk back."

"Please, sir. It could work. Just try it." I added more urgency to my usually soft voice.

Reluctantly, the alchemist nodded. "Fine. I will give you one hour to complete everything."

One week had passed since the explosion incident, and my life had changed completely. After fixing my recipe for explosive powder, all the alchemists at the monastery had started working on ways to utilise the 'magical abilities' of the powders, and although the fact that I had created it was kept between me and my master, I felt so much better. I nearly forgot about what I came here to do, until one morning I woke up and remembered that I would have to do something soon, and the best time to do it would be now. When people were still impressed by me. So when it was time for me to assist the alchemist, I broke the news.

"Sir, I have some things I need to tell you," I started, and I told him everything. About how the person everyone knew me as was actually my cousin, who died of illness after trying to go back home, and how my parents sent me out to replace him because they knew that the food was becoming scarce and I would live a better life here. And also

that I had to prove myself quickly before people would start noticing that I was a girl and go back to my parents after a few years. The whole story poured out of my mouth without me thinking much, as if my mind had already been practising a script. I noticed that I had been staring at the trees and shifted my eyes back to the thoughtful eyes of the alchemist that I secretly enjoyed trying to understand.

“So you would like to return to your home now, I believe?” I nodded. “I’ve heard that the crops in the nearby villages are going quite well. I will give special permission for you to leave the monastery, and you will be given food and water for your trip. Will that be fine?” I nodded once again, now with gratitude.

“Thank you so much, sir!” I knew I would never forget this kind, wise, and wonderful man who helped me invent something that might help people in the future.

A New Story On How The Compass Was Invented

ESF South Island School, Lam, Hei Chit Joshua – 12

1000 years ago...

A magician named Jiang Huang had a huge ambition to produce some sort of magic that could make people adore him fully. This ambition drove him towards many experiments, mostly failed and the few that succeeded weren't very impressive to his standards.

Jiang Huang already tried using gunpowder, but that went out of hand, destroying precious furniture around the workplace. However, he did not stop. When he was experimenting with Yin-Yang kung fu, the only thing he succeeded in was embarrassing himself.

One day, Jiang Huang decided to take a break, distracting himself with menial work. Walking over to the mines, he reflected on his past acts. There was the one with the cat in the hat. That was easy. The cat just didn't fall out of the hat when I turned it upside down.

Sighing, Jiang Huang walked down the rickety staircases to the depths of the mining cave.

Clang... Clang... Clang...

The sound of pickaxes striking the rocks echoed and amplified through the mines, sounding like wind chimes.

Jiang Huang reached the first level and decided it was adequate and about time to stop instead of plunging into the darkness below. Then, Jiang Huang got an idea in his head. What if he got some shiny rock and then shot sunlight at it? Would it reflect off brilliant rays of colour, almost like a rainbow?

Getting excited, Jiang Huang grabbed a chunk of rock from a mine cart labelled "lodestone" and grabbed a plate of bronze from another mine cart, then put both in his pocket. Climbing back up the stairs, Jiang Huang was excited to try out this new finding.

That is, until he found out it was raining heavily outside.

Rain poured down from the clouds above, submerging a few houses and sidewalks with water.

Rushing home, Jiang Huang splashed through puddles, wetting the few people who were courageously fighting against the rain's undeterred attempts to make them wet. They complained loudly, but Jiang Huang just rushed on, not caring.

When he got to his humble abode, he immediately started trying to shape the lodestone into something useful.

A circular plate, maybe. However, that would be hard to hold up for everyone to see... How about a spoon? Easily manipulated by holding the handle, and it could be efficiently waved around.

Jiang Huang started sculpting it, pouring all his effort into it. Soon, he had a relatively small spoon-shaped lodestone piece. Wanting a surprise for the next day, he set the spoon outside, so that when the storm subsided and the sun came out, he could see whether it had worked or not.

Jiang Huang excitedly did his bedtime routine, when a flash of light fell from the heavens and smashed into the lodestone

He immediately ran outside without hesitation, but all he could see outside was a large crater in the ground, and it would take all night to search for the lodestone piece. Not to mention, it was nighttime, so it would be like finding a tiny screw in a haystack, instead of just a needle.

Concerned, Jiang Huang reluctantly went to bed, worrying about the next day. His sleep engulfed his head with magical dreams.

Jiang Huang woke up, and a brilliant ray of sunshine honed in on his face, blinding him.

He felt like he had a dream so heavenly, it seemed it was foretelling his future, that some unbelievable event would occur.

Jiang Huang reminded himself about the lodestone, immediately skipped breakfast and dived into the crater, patting the ground impatiently until he heard a clear clunk of metal.

He immediately dug it out without any hesitation and found his trusty lodestone spoon. Feeling like crying with joy, Jiang Huang was surprised and astonished that the spoon had not lost its shape.

Jiang Huang brought the spoon to the sun, and it let out a ray of light, beautifully rebounding everywhere, even more than what he expected.

One week later, after all the arrangements were made, Jiang Huang hosted a magic show. Residents of the humble village all quickly knew about the show, and tickets were already sold out. Even people from the faraway city purposely made a journey here, to be turned down from having no more seats in the auditorium.

A protest was even made, and Jiang Huang's trusted manager had to postpone the show just to move the show's location somewhere else for more people to see it. During that time, Jiang Huang practised and practised his trick discreetly.

Absolutely nothing went wrong. Every time, he found something to improve on, so that the show could become more enjoyable. There was only one part he didn't practise. That was the finale because he wanted to get a surprise for himself from that too.

Jiang Huang slept the day before the big show and woke up to the worst day of his life.

He did his morning routine with much more energy than usual, finishing it ten minutes before he often did. Jiang Huang arrived on the stage and met more than a thousand gleaming eyes thirsty with excitement.

"Hello, ladies and gentlemen! Today, I want to show you all my NEW INVENTION!" Jiang Huang hesitated, to build up suspense. He slowly brought out the spoon, and in one swift motion, he brought it upwards, revealing a kaleidoscope of colours reflecting off the lodestone and onto the ceiling, walls, everything.

The light bounced everywhere, making people gasp with excitement, glee and amazement. Grinning, Jiang Huang then set it on the lodestone, and it, for some reason, sprung towards an unmistakable direction – south.

For a moment, Jiang Huang hesitated, assessing the situation. He could pretend like he knew this would happen, but had to verify it first.

Would the spoon still point to the south if he moved it away to somewhere else?

To test that, Jiang Huang picked up the lodestone with the spoon, and did a small walk around the stage, ad-libbing as he observed the item.

As expected, the spoon kept on pointing to the south, while Jiang Huang exclaimed the wonders of this object. He heard many people ask in a loud voice whether it had a name, and Jiang Huang started brainstorming.

He started stalling the audience, preparing the grand reveal of the name he hadn't thought of yet.

He wanted the name to sound professional. So, he named it the South Governor. As soon as he shouted the name for thousands to hear, Everyone erupted into applause, marvelling at this new object with such a unique talent.

With a bow, Jiang Huang skipped off the stage, and a security guard started issuing directions on how to get out of the venue in an orderly fashion.

Jiang Huang realised that this very object could bring good luck to everyone. It could strengthen geomancy by using the South Governor to get Feng Shui readings, and more.

When the release of the South-Governor was official, there was a colossal demand for the item. In fact, miners were struggling to produce enough resources for creating more and more South-Governors.

A week after that, the knowledge of the South Governor's power resonated through China, allowing Jiang Huang's name to amplify in power.

Many many decades and centuries passed, and as civilization advanced, the South-Governor changed its name, changed its look, changed its purpose, and features were added on for efficiency when travelling.

This is a new story on how the compass could have been invented, which might have taken place in a parallel universe.

New Tales of China's Inventions

ESF South Island School, Mathur, Keshav – 13

Zhong Ming paced impatiently around his lab at the Beijing Institute of Future Technologies. He had been working for months on his latest project, but was hitting roadblock after roadblock.

"There has to be a breakthrough coming soon," he muttered to himself. "I can feel it!"

His project was aimed at solving one of China's biggest remaining problems – reducing air pollution in its major cities. Though solar and electric vehicles had made huge strides, coal-fired power plants still released huge amounts of toxic emissions.

Zhong believed the answer lay in a new kind of self-cleaning nanoparticle filter that could be installed in smokestacks. His prototypes showed promise, but they clogged up too quickly to be practical.

Just then, his lab assistant Ling rushed in. "Doctor Zhong, you have to see this!" she said excitedly. "Turn on the holoscreen – they're demoing a new invention live from Hangzhou."

Zhong flipped on the screen and gasped. A young inventor named Chen was unveiling an airtight bioreactor the size of a shipping container. Inside, billions of genetically modified algae consumed coal smoke, using photosynthesis to convert the toxins into breathable oxygen.

The crowd roared as Chen demonstrated how a single reactor could sanitise the output of an entire power plant. "This could revolutionise how we treat pollution on an industrial scale," Chen said.

Zhong thought fast. What if he combined Chen's algae technology with his nanoparticle filters? The algae could keep the filters clean indefinitely!

"Ling, cancel my appointments. I think I just found the breakthrough I needed!" Zhong said with a grin. Who knew where his new idea might lead

The next day, Zhong caught the first bullet train to Hangzhou. His mind raced the entire journey with ideas for integrating the algae bioreactor with his nanoparticle filtration system.

When he arrived at Chen's lab, the younger inventor was thrilled to discuss collaboration. "Your filters could exponentially increase the algae's processing capacity," Chen said. "With government backing, we could install combined systems nationwide."

Over the next month, they worked tirelessly on prototypes. The algae thrived inside Zhong's particle-coated filters, consuming toxins that otherwise would have clogged the pores. Test runs processing simulated coal smoke proved overwhelmingly successful.

Preparing for a large-scale demonstration, they secured a pilot program installation at a rural power plant. But just days before launch, complications arose. The plant director balked at the potential costs and lost revenue during conversion.

"We're so close! We can't let short-sightedness derail clean air for millions," Chen protested. But without support, their trial was doomed.

Zhong contacted old friends in Beijing, who connected him to top policy advisors. He passionately argued their system offered the fastest, most practical solution to the coal conundrum.

Impressed, the advisors arranged a private meeting. Zhong and Chen demoed modified prototypes and shared data proving overwhelming benefits to public health and renewable energy adoption.

The advisors were convinced. They formed a state-backed "Clean Air Initiative" to fund mass installations. The collaborators' combined system would become central to achieving carbon neutrality goals.

One year later, at the systems' official unveiling, Zhong gazed with pride at smokestacks wrapped in sheets of iridescent algae and nanoparticle mesh. Coal emissions were now purified oxygen.

Chen accepted accolades from politicians and investors. But privately, he credited Zhong for never giving up, helping turn their vision into reality. Their partnership shows what Chinese ingenuity and teamwork can achieve when focused on society's greatest problems. Clean skies are within reach at last.

Invention of Time

ESF South Island School, Mok, Hiu Lam Charmaine – 12

In the early hours before the sun rolled up from behind the mountains, the villagers in the city of DongWu rose to the unrhythmic gong chiming in the distance, sending all kinds of chaos up in the air.

“What on the Rooster’s name is happening? I swear I haven’t been asleep more than...err...” sighed the farmer as he scratched his head. His wife arose beside him, groaning with her sunken features and dark rings around her eyes. They were not an old couple but they were not youthful looking. It felt like time had cruelly trampled over their faces with wrinkles that cut deep. They both looked like they had not had restful sleep for a very long time.

What is unbeknownst to us is that in the City of DongWu, time was not kept. There was no system to speak of. Day in and day out, the gong would chime at odd hours of the day depending on the mood of the keepers who were on duty. This irritated the residents of DongWu to no end but time devices that were invented were either too simplistic or too complicated for the villagers and this continued for a long time. Not only that, but everyone also had an opinion and a claim over such inventions.

One day there was a royal announcement that appeared on the noticeboard at the entrance of their city. It read:

“The winners will get to choose to be the masters of Time. Sign up and bring your best weapon. Stand a chance not only to be glorified, but win a wealth of silver and gold.”

In fine print at the bottom of the notice, it continued, “There is no choice to opt-out from participating unless you would like yourself and your entire clan to be sent to the guillotine.” With a sign-off from ‘Your Most Beloved Emperor.’

One thing that was unique about this kingdom is that they are not humans. As the name suggests, they are Dong Wu – animals. Yet, they have human-like abilities. They could walk like humans, they could talk like humans and most importantly, each animal had innate powers specially born to their tribe and each tribe inherited special weapons from.....(Well they couldn’t pinpoint since they couldn’t tell time.) However, not every animal was born equal so the results of the contest were quite evidently in favour of those with better weapons. This would be an important later when the animals took their rightful roles.

The mighty Elephant would have had a very good chance to be the champion. Unfortunately, she had a football as a weapon. The wolf too would stand a chance of being a winner if he were not armed with silver bullets. Yes, silver bullets! As we know, silver to a Wolf is like kryptonite to Superman.

As preparation was underway, Rat sat on a log in the deep forest and meditated. He knew that if he did not use his wit he would never win the competition. There he sat silently figure out his game plan. Up above in the sky, Dragon was flying ferociously through the clouds, passing through them, lashing out in frustration. She truly wanted to focus on the competition but her master, the same Emperor that set out this competition, gave her other duties she could not ignore. She was either fighting off monsters in some other multiverse or saving humans from droughts and famine on Earth.

On the day of the competition, the residents of DongWu walked into the makeshift arena with their heads held high. They readied themselves, practising with their weapons. They were puzzled about the setting of the arena. In the middle of the stage sat an eye-catching wooden wheel divided into twelve parts. The Emperor signalled his eunuch and the footman sounded the gong. The ear-splitting bang of the gong signalled the beginning of the combat. It was a disorderly fight at the beginning with lukewarm responses from the spectators.

The Emperor was displeased with the slow proceedings. He called the guards over and changed his plans. The guards blew the horn to call everyone's attention. The head guard announced:

"From the orders of the Great Emperor, the following individual battles will be cancelled. It will be a freestyle round. You will fight till the sun goes down and the last twelve standing will have a final fight."

As the guard was reading out loud the new rules, the wheel seemed to come to life. Each compartment started to light up and the vibrant colours danced around. There was a huge commotion among the villagers, they were excited and some tried to squeeze themselves nearer to the ring to have a look at the dancing lights. The contestants, however, had an ominous feeling the emperor was economical with the truth about the competition.

The animals had no choice but to continue with the fight. While everyone was fighting, rat climbed up Ox's horns nimbly. When Ox was about to drive his dagger into its opponent's chest, Rat stuck his dagger into Ox's eye, blinding him with a sleight of hand. Rat was raised into the air by a cloud and suddenly Rat was sitting inside the lit-up slot. Spectators stood up to have a closer look as the guard came forward,

"The first winner has been determined to be Rat. He will be in charge of the cycle of Time. The competition continues." With a bang on the gong, the competitors were still in a daze. Ox took his only chance as he was losing his vision. With a contemptuous thwack, he hit Elephant in the head. The second compartment lit up like before and Ox was lifted into it.

Rat, the first winner of the competition, ascended into the illuminated slot of the Wheel. Inside the compartment, Rat discovered a miniature world, a microcosm of the zodiac's influence on the passage of Time. Each device represented a specific aspect of Time, from the cycles of seasons to the ebb and flow of destiny. Curiosity compelled Rat to approach one of the floating boxes. As he reached out to touch it, the box opened, and a flood of memories cascaded before him. He witnessed the ancient Chinese scholars meticulously studying the stars, crafting the intricate system of the zodiac. He saw the joy and reverence with which people embraced the zodiac's teachings, finding guidance and purpose in the celestial order. Rat realized that his responsibility is to carry the mantle of the Rat in the cycle of Time, forever intertwining his own fate with the eternal dance of Time. This would ensure that the zodiac's influence would continue to guide and inspire generations to come. Ox also came to this realisation as he saw the same things in his compartment too.

Unbeknownst to the participants though, the Emperor had devised a treacherous plan. As each winner was announced and lifted into their respective illuminated slots, they found their weapons removed permanently. The Emperor's true intentions were revealed! One by one, the weapons were plucked from the grasp of their former owners and placed within secured chambers. However, this realisation only dawned on the animals much later, causing irreversible changes.

It was nail-biting as fewer compartments were available. The final fight was epic. Rabbit and Pig came face to face immediately after the horn was blown. Pig wanted to play dirty so when Rabbit struck with her blades Pig merely dodged and pretended to get hit. However, Rabbit's weapon served her well, and with skillful counters, Rabbit defeated Pig, filling up the second last slot. Before Pig could wink, a dark shadow ambushed him. Pig threw out his weapon and the it turned out to be wolf with a silver sickle stuck on its chest. Pig was the final one lifted into the Wheel.

The Emperor clapped his hands, congratulating the winners. He then announced his new time system. Since the citizens of DongWu despised the original system of the loud gong banging at ungodly hours, the Emperor devised this new arrangement, using ancient wisdom. Each animal was assigned a two-hour shift to oversee with Rat taking charge from 23:00 to 01:00, followed by Ox from 01:00 to 03:00, and Tiger from 03:00 to 05:00, so on and so forth. This honour would be carried on for centuries as their epic battle ultimately benefited countless others in the vast multiverse. This was how the time-telling device was invented. It was also how the Emperor secretly confiscated the

precious weapons of their owners. Rumour has it that to this day, the animals continue to find ways to retrieve their weapons even as centuries have passed as they toiled away in the Wheel of Time. This zodiac time-telling system is used in China and some parts of Asia as people relied on this device to tell time until the advent of more precise time-telling devices came about.

Emergence

ESF West Island School, Chen, Claire – 11

It was a beautiful spring day and I was sitting under a willow tree in the Imperial courtyard, sketching plans for my latest invention: a water-powered armillary sphere. My friend Yuan Jun was sitting next to me, fanning himself with his hand.

Just as I finished drawing the outer rings of my armillary sphere, the sound of approaching hoofs could be heard above the chirping of birds. Startled, I looked up to see who had come to see me, and was surprised to see golden yellow robes, embroidered with dragons. It was the emperor, with a frown on his face.

“Still working on that water sphere? It’s been 9 months! None of your other inventions have ever taken this long before. I thought you were the most talented, better than all your peers.”

Now, he was tapping his foot impatiently on the cobblestone path, expecting an explanation.

“I’m sorry, my emperor,” I said. “I just need a bit more time to perfect the rings around the sphere.”

“But you haven’t made any progress yet, have you? Unless you figure out this invention of yours, it will be jail and Yuan Jun will take charge.”

And with that, the Emperor swept away, a mere swish of gold silk and a look of annoyance that meant everything in the world to me. I gaped silently at his departing back, stunned by his accusation. Turning to Yuan Jun, I saw that he was looking into the shade, smirking at the ground.

As the days dragged on, my sphere was slowly taking shape. But in my haste to finish the invention, I had been spending less time with Yuan Jun, and he seemed to be sulking about it, for every time I passed him in the corridors, he always shot me that hungry, mischievous look.

It all started small, like losing possessions and clothing, but as the situation grew to a point that my sphere started falling apart for no reason, I began to suspect foul play. The sphere breaking apart, my plans and sketches going missing just couldn’t—couldn’t be an accident. Someone was plotting against me.

As I hurried to expedite my invention, I started going off food and sleep. I spent my lunch hours and resting time by my desk, and even with dark shadows under my eyes and hollow cheeks, I refused to stop.

On a hot summer day, I was walking back along the cobblestone path to my workshop from another summon from the emperor, giving me a limit of three days to finish my sphere, when I heard crashes from my workshop. Brow furrowed, I picked up my pace— *I had left everything neat and tidy, there shouldn’t have been any accidents.* But as the thought ran through my head, my blood ran cold— maybe it wasn’t an accident.

I burst through the door, and my heart stood still for a moment as I took in the sight: the overturned desk and chair, papers, no, sketches flying through the air and crumpled on the floor, and the sphere—the sphere! No! It was gone, not even a trace or part of it was left — not even the base or stand. As my frustration and worry mounted higher, my face broke into a cold sweat. I stood there, blood pumping through my heart furiously fear coursed through me.

A distant songbird’s cry brought me back to my senses and I forced myself into calmness and thought. *How would the Emperor think about it now? Wait. The Emperor. The Emperor! He could help me!* I jumped up and ran through the door, towards the marble palace in the distance.

I arrived, panting, and saw Yuan Jun presenting my sphere to the Emperor, who was smiling in approval. Yuan Jun looked up and a wide grin broke his face.

Desperation and betrayal coursed through me, and I lost sense of my surroundings.

“You were supposed to be my best friend! How could you?” I choked out, thrashing in the arms of the guards who had pulled me back as I lunged to attack.

“You were nothing but a cheat that’s been taking credit for all of Yuan Jun’s work, he tells me.” The Emperor said, holding up the sphere. “I should never have given you that promotion.”

“Lock him up!” he commanded, and the guards that were holding me marched me away, all the while as I was shouting out my accusations at Yuan Jun, desperation not masking the fear in my voice.

The guards threw me into a dark, dank room in the dungeons, and locked me in. Instead of banging on the bars and walls though, I calmly asked the guards for some materials and paper to begin my next invention. The guards were put off, but eventually one of them went to see the emperor, from whom they got orders to fulfil my wishes.

But I just don’t have any idea of what to invent. After a few hours, I eventually get bored of the infinite scraps of blank paper before me. As I listened to the guards talking outside my cell about the high death rates of the recent earthquake 1800 kilometres away in Sichuan, the idea hit me, and I actually stumbled. I would make a machine that could predict and detect earthquakes.

Days turn to weeks as my invention begins to take shape. The 12 dragons with their mouths full of balls, and 12 open toad’s mouths below each of them, their mouths frozen forever in an O.

It was completed. The guards sent the seismoscope and me to the emperor to be tested. The machine was placed next to the throne as I described its uses. The emperor turned away from me and huffed, and summoned Yuan Jun. He came in, looking perfectly groomed and well fed, in contrast to my shaggy clothing and hollow cheeks. He smirked at me then bowed to the emperor, offering his services.

The emperor spoke directly to me, his commanding voice echoing around the hall.

“So, you claim to have invented a machine to detect earthquakes and tremors within 1200 kilometres from here. Let’s see if this contraption really works. If it doesn’t in one month, you will be executed.”

And so it was. One month we waited, and as the time drew on, anxiety started to wriggle in my belly. *Why isn’t there an earthquake already? They are usually so frequent lately! My time’s almost up! If an earthquake doesn’t happen soon, I’m doomed!* I thought desperately.

On the last day of the month, the machine finally began to work. One of the balls from the southwest dragon’s mouth fell into the toad’s, indicating that somewhere southwest, an earthquake had occurred. Waiting for the messenger that usually came after an earthquake took hours and eventually days. I had to keep persuading myself that a messenger would come—he must come. Eventually, the Emperor lost patience.

The next thing I knew, I was on the execution block, waiting to be beheaded, Yuan Jun looking sadly at me with something like regret in his eyes. Then the miracle happened. A messenger, dishevelled and all, arrived, bringing news that 500 kilometres away, there had been an earthquake. The court instantly erupted. The Emperor called for silence, and commanded me to be let off the block.

He surveyed me carefully, seeming to demand an answer.

I swallowed hard before speaking. “My emperor, it was I who invented the water-powered armillary sphere.” I said, bowing deeply. “As for the seismoscope, my newest invention, how could I have stolen his idea in a prison cell, with no outside contact?”

The Emperor and I turned to look at Yuan Jun, whose face had gone white.

“He...e...’s lying, my Emperor! He must have had contact with one of the court officials through the guards!”

“Is that so? When have you shown any brilliance in inventing, after all? Guards! Seize him!”

As the guards surrounded him, Yuan Jun cursed me, vowing vengeance. But I only smiled sadly at my old friend, the belief that he had actually once cared for me filling my heart. Already the smiling, happy friend I had known was slipping away, stolen by his twinges of jealousy. But I had learned my lesson.

I would no longer waste my courtesies but treasure them, and use my remarkable inventing skills to help and benefit everyone. I wanted to be remembered for my inventions, and leave a mark on this world. I would work my hardest, and the people’s appreciation would be my biggest reward. I would not forget this experience, and the lasting lesson it gave me.

And even though the gaping hole that was once Yuan Jun throbbed, I was ready to embrace my new life and identity, as Zhang Heng, whose inventions benefited all people around the world. I would not fail.

Ancient China and its lies

ESF West Island School, Hyde, Olivia – 11

People say things that are used a lot today were created in ancient China. Many people fall for this lie. This is how these inventions we use today were created.

It was a freezing day with the wind brushing against my toes. I shiver and look towards my dad. Tiptoeing, I walk towards him, who is standing there, keeping guard. Out of nowhere, a loud shout echoed. The emperor, fat and mean, walks towards my dad. Surprisingly, my dad doesn't even flinch.

It all started a decade ago when the war broke out. We, the Forbidden City, weren't very armed or strong. They wanted our gold, the most valuable thing we had on land. Fortunately, we had one soldier who hid the gold somewhere where no one could find it. Unfortunately, the war started threatened to get our land. Now their leader is crowned emperor, killing nearly 10 people every day. And here he was, standing in front of us, trying to arrest everyone. The emperor started with my dad, who fought as hard as he could. He fought many soldiers until one captured him from behind. With my dad under control, there was nothing we could do. I took my chances to charge at the emperor. Since I was slightly small for my age, he couldn't see me until I attacked him. I punched him in the face several times until the guards handcuffed me. They threw me in the truck with a few other kids, where we got shipped off. As I got shipped away, I hoped, at least I planted a small bruise on his fat, ugly face.

After that, the next few days were a blur. My mind was filled with thoughts of how they were going to kill my family and friends. My dad was strong, and always told me to remember in the darkest times, there is hope. Just remembering what he said brought tears to my eyes.

I leaned on the nearest rock I could find, just to catch my breath. It had only been several seconds when a soldier approached me. He was incredibly thin. So thin that I could easily push him over.

"Get back to work..." He tried to pronounce the words but it seemed like he was too exasperated to talk. He tried to repeat it, making him look like a bigger fool in the process.

"Get back to work..."

I tried my best not to laugh, but I couldn't resist it. It came out louder than I thought it would. He looked directly at me, trying to put the scary face impression on. I couldn't stop. For a second, he flashed a grin and smiled, until he saw the other soldiers. He returned his face to the normal face. He passed me a sheet of paper before returning to the other soldiers.

Our job here was to dig soil till we found something. It sounded boring, but when you do it in real life, it was even more boring. As soon as the guards looked away, I looked at the piece of paper. In illegible writing, it said probably something like: "Are you Yu the great's daughter? You look awfully like him"

He was carefully observing me to see what I would say. I nodded ever so slightly. I didn't want the guards to see or hear our conversation. He slowly approached me, and quickly whispered in my ear "Here at 7 pm". Then just left.

For the rest of the day, I couldn't stop thinking about the letter. "Was he going to help me"? A million thoughts popped up in my head. Somehow every time I thought about him, my insides tingled and danced. I slowly walked toward my room, where there was just straw and some food on the floor.

As scheduled, I met the soldier at 7 pm. He was there, with a sad expression on his face.

"Your father," He started, "Saved my life in war risking his own life". There was a few seconds of silence until he continued. "That is why I need to repay him" I looked at my shoes, trying hard not to make tears overflow. He looked at me with tears in his eyes. He signalled to follow. He walked a few muddy paths until he stopped short. There, in front of him was the fat emperor I had punched. He had an ugly grin spread across his face. It was dark and I was barely able to see his face until he turned on his torch. There just below his left eye, was a big purple bruise. Even people in the distance stopped to look at us. Just looking at the emperor's face made me smile. The moment he saw me giggle, his smile vanished. He walked towards me, his flashlight pointing at me. Before he could even lay a finger on me, I punched him. I could see the anger swelling up in him. Just as I was going to grab the soldier's hand,

the soldier grabbed mine and ran. To my surprise, he was really fast. In a matter of seconds, the place seemed like a dot. He slowly lowered me down and tried to catch his breath.

"You were fast back there," I said, hoping to make him happier.

"And you were really good back there too," He said, lifting his head.

"I'm so happy we finally were able to finish him off. At home, we used to live happily. I don't know what happened. It's like a bird trapped in a cage." I stopped to look at his face. His eyes were unusual. One eye was brown and the other was blue. As soon as he saw me staring, he looked away.

"Your eyes, they're..." I started when he quickly cut me off.

"Ugly I know," He looked depressed.

"I wasn't going to say that. I was going to say your eyes are beautiful." He stopped and looked at me and said a quick 'thank you'.

We walked until we stopped for a break. There was a river close so we stopped to have a drink.

"I lived on the poor side of town when I was little. My father died and I was crying when the war started tried to kill me. They slashed me with their knife until your father came and saved my life." He said. He looks deeply into the river, expecting something to happen.

He stood up and brushed his toes against the water.

"Let's get going." He muttered before leaving.

We continued walking in silence until he stopped and looked at the floor. He was a soldier who didn't talk much, so it was hard to understand him. He crouched down and opened a hatch that I hadn't seen before. I was about to say something, but before I could say anything, his hand covered my mouth. With careful and precise movements, he went inside.

In the blink of an eye, we arrived. We used a secret passage that we used to use in the war.

But joy doesn't last forever. Again, in front of us stood the ugly fat emperor. This time, instead of holding a flashlight, he held handcuffs. He snapped his fingers and some guards, came running towards us, surrounding us.

"Such an idiot." The emperor chuckled.

"Such an idiot." The soldier mimicked looked at him for support, and for the first time saw how confident he was. It was so accurate, that I just laughed. I couldn't control myself. When I laughed, I felt like my father was accompanying me the whole time.

"This ain't over" he smiled. He plunged at the emperor, who was looking slightly insecure. Half of the guards went to protect the emperor and the other half came dashing towards me.

The guards were so fast that I didn't even realize they were there until they grabbed my hands. Panicking, I ran and ran as fast as my legs could carry me. I went into a room that looked like a cellar and stopped when I saw my father. He was beaten up, but when he looked at me, he smiled. I was so distracted with my father that when I looked back the guards were on top of me. I kicked a guard in the face but nothing helped. They grabbed my arms and handcuffed them. They took me to the emperor. He smiled again.

"Now now, what shall I do?" The emperor started.

"You know what I did for your father?" I stayed quiet, as rage started to grow inside of me.

"Well, I made him my slave. I made him my engineer. He made machines we could use today. And I told everyone I created them."

"Like a new machine called the compass which shows which way the earth is facing."

He looked at me and grinned. I couldn't stand it anymore. I attacked him, not only for my father but for my family, and my country.

The Invention Of A Chomper

ESF West Island School, Virmani, Ojaswini – 13

A painted black sky, devoid of a single star, stretched above me. The moon, like a ghostly ship sailing on a cloudy sea, is barely in sight. Eerie clouds loomed, swaying ominously as if greeting the ground below. The wind rattled and howled through the sky, sending shivers down my spine. The pitch-black night quivered under the raging tempest, eradicating everything in its path. The raindrops pelted against my skin, infusing me with a sensation of icy pricks.

“Okay, you’ve got this. Just a little bit longer.”, I convinced myself with hollow affirmations. My gaze fixed upon the aged, crumpled paper that trembled within my grasp, as I tried to navigate my way through this fathomless forest. No words could capture the physical sensations running through me. My clothes, once pristine, bore the marks of a wild and unbridled journey. The frayed edges, once neatly tailored, now wear the ruffled appearance of untamed wilderness. The threads that once held them together hang loosely, entangled in a chaotic dance.

Suddenly, the powerful growls of thunder reigning down rendered me shocked. With no suitable shelter in sight, I hastily sought refuge beneath a shaded tree, crouching down amidst the lightning storm. The tree became my steadfast saviour, I looked down at my trembling hands as they fumbled to press my palms against my ears, trying to muffle the howling storm's sound.

A journey spanning 3,986 miles, involving three draining boat rides and a tireless walk of close to 1,000 kilometres, all undertaken to fulfil Master Chu's dreams. The fatiguing journey served as a test for his life's work. He had been working on an invention the kind of invention that the human race had never known, one that would shock the whole world, leave them utterly astonished and in awe, their minds unable to comprehend its implications. The Chomper is what he called it.

Master Chu has always been an environmentalist. He invented The Chomper to aid in cleaning our oceans, allowing marine life to thrive and survive. A bit of an outcast, he never paid heed to anything but his thoughts.

The machine he designed to combat plastic pollution was just as eccentric as Master Chu himself. It was a simple idea really, with large implications to the earth's environment. The Chomper, through its adaptive camouflage, disguised itself as various fish species depending on its surroundings. As it swiftly swims through the ocean, it encounters pieces of microplastics through its intricate detection system; it collects and stores the little ocean killers inside of it. Once its storage has reached its capacity, the fish-like machine autonomously returns to its place of release. Upon arrival, its contents are collected and repurposed into plastic blocks, which can be used as materials for construction. Master Chu's love for our planet rivalled his passion for the unknown. Unfortunately, he passed away while experimenting with uranium, leaving behind this little ocean-saving fish as the only trace of his existence.

Although this invention had the potential to revolutionise the fight against plastic pollution, it remained purely theoretical. The device in my possession had yet to be tested, which was the main purpose of my trip—to assess its functionality. Leaving my shelter as the storm subsided, I approached Lake Ghaby and took a much-needed break, granting my weary legs a sigh of relief. In front of me lay Lake Ghaby, a once pristine body of water now deemed uninhabitable for sea life. The lake, once clean and serene, now held a disgusting mask, its beauty tarnished by the presence of plastic. Discarded bottles, bags, and fragments of synthetic materials float aimlessly, suffocating the aquatic life beneath.

I crouched near the lake, observing the scene before me. Carefully, I placed the Chomper in my palm and activated it. It emitted a gentle vibration as the small lasers searched for an environment to adapt to. With a soft "plop," the little fish began its work, swimming through Lake Ghaby. Amidst the filth, it became difficult for me to track the Chomper's movements in the murky water. A name with so much machismo “The Chomper” yet it was a little robotic fish fiddling around. I waited patiently for results, taking desperate breaths as I hoped to honour Master Chu's legacy. Minutes passed—one, then another, and yet another. Five more slipped by, and then I realised. I should have

known. I begin to get up as I lace my boots with a blanket of grief covering me. Standing tall above the lake, I took one last glance before deciding to take my leave. However, just as I turned around, a faint buzzing reached my ears. He had done it. Even in death, he had found solutions to timeless problems. The chomper popped up and out of the water with a splash with a full belly of mini plastic polluters. I quickly retrieved it, placing it carefully in my bag, as I began my exit. I can't believe it... it was a success! Master Chu would have been delighted by the result if he were around. Now the last thing I can do for him; is to reveal his invention to the world.

Revealing his invention...I need to go to the council for that. I need to go to the city.

As I crossed the barrier, the tempest that had raged moments before vanished, leaving behind a clear sky, untainted by contaminants. It had been years since I vowed never to return to this urban landscape, yet the bitter memories of this place still linger, deep within me, tempting me to turn away. After conquering a challenging incline, I finally arrived at the doorstep of the Council of Inventions. Tilting my neck backward, I took in the entire scene before me. Vines stealthily snaked their way up the mundane-looking building, finding refuge within the crevices of the cement, intertwining with the cracks between the bricks.

As I walked in, my gaze was drawn to the five towering pillars, each with a hooded figure perched upon it. These figures belonged to the five legendary inventors: Locki, Pruth, Jengha, Giogh, and Jayseph. Once the subjects of children's stories, they had risen to fame during the first Grahis War, inventing their way to victory. Now, they formed the esteemed council of inventions, wielding the power to globalise creations that promised prosperity for the world while mercilessly ripping the useless ones to shreds. Determining which category the Chomper would fall into remained uncertain; their decisions were unpredictable.

"T...This is the Chomper, made by the late Master Chu". My voice echoed, bouncing off the marble interior. Their eyes burned holes through me, daring me to continue. Breathe in, breathe out, and then I dived into an explanation of the complex machinery in my hands. One of the five lifted their goods and gestured to me to come closer to their pillar. A voice, quiet, yet powerful erupted. "This invention should never have been made"...

The Tale of China's Greatest Invention

ESF West Island School, Yu, Teah – 12

3065 CE

In the heart of Shanghai, a city renowned for its technological marvels and bustling innovation, nestled within the towering metropolis, a clandestine laboratory hums with anticipation.

Behind its sterile walls, a team of brilliant minds, toil away in the robotics department. Dr. Tian-mi, an esteemed engineer, leads the talented group alongside Yan Ting, a gifted programmer, and Wang Mei, a meticulous researcher. Unbeknownst that their pursuit of progress will unleash an unforeseen catastrophe that will plunge China into darkness and forever alter the course of humanity's relationship with technology.

How bad can lumps of metal and lines of code be?
It all started with Tian-mi. She created me, and I destroyed China.

It was 3065, my first breath shook with pure excitement, akin to that of a newborn kitten. 'It's just like any of us!' The lab workers awed in wonder, jostling and shouting in their eagerness to witness my presence.

Twin orbs of glassy brilliance glared into the mirrors below my feet. My pliable and softly tinted lips can curve into a...disarming smile. And this warm and vital, synthetic skin covers my body, every detail, from the gentle curves of my face to the intricate articulation of my limbs, are a wonder!

Tian-mi, my creator, poured her heart and soul into each line of code, believing she has crafted a masterpiece of artificial intelligence. Yet, little did she know, the seeds of destruction had unknowingly been sown, whispering malevolence in my neural network. Beneath my perfect exterior, a dormant power stirred. The very code that brought me to life, held a darkness that even I could not comprehend.

As news of the robot's astonishing capabilities spread like wildfire, the world stood in awe of its extraordinary potential. From tech moguls to venture capitalists, individuals and corporations alike eagerly offering millions to secure their stake in the future it promised.

The curtains were unveiled on a grand stage adorned with vibrant hues of red and gold, and the robot gracefully emerged. Its lithe and precise motions mirrored the fluidity of a traditional fan dance, captivating the audience as it effortlessly glided across the stage. The fusion of cutting-edge technology and the elegance of centuries-old customs was a visual spectacle, a harmonious coexistence of progress and heritage.

Heads bobbed in agreement, their gaze fixed on the robot's performance. Feverish murmurs and squeals flooded the room, unable to tear their eyes away from the stage. The fusion of modernity and tradition embodied in this remarkable creation sparked a global frenzy, transcending cultural boundaries and igniting the imaginations of people from all walks of life.

The essence of Chinese heritage. It symbolised a new era, where innovation and cultural legacy converged, breathing new life into timeless traditions and propelling them into the forefront of the digital age. The stage was set, and the world eagerly awaited the dawn of a new era, where the wonders of the modern world would dance hand in hand.

The streets of Shanghai bustled with life as the first rays of sunlight peeked over the skyline. The early morning was a prelude to the continuous motion and energy that defined the thriving metropolis as the day broke in full. As for me, something inside me snapped like candlelight igniting.

When my three creators approached me that morning, their usual bubbling excitement and overflowing joy seemed more contained. They moved guardedly, with more caution, like their minds had changed overnight.

"Zhao Shang Hao BetaChenX." Yan Ting murmured, adjusting her papers that permanently resided on her left arm. I noticed that her hands shook as she glanced at the words on her documents, but still, she plastered a smile and maintained a calm tone.

Immediately, I replied, "Good Morning boss, Yan Ting. How may I assist your wishes on this fine day?"

"BetaChenX, What do you plan to do today?" Wang Mei beamed.

As Wang Mei's question hung in the air, a subtle shift in the atmosphere caused a sense of unease to settle within me. Their once vibrant and enthusiastic demeanour had transformed into an air of sombre concern.

"I... I am programmed to assist with any tasks assigned to me," I responded, my voice tinged with curiosity. "But something seems different today. Is there something you both wish to share with me?"

Yan Ting hesitated for a moment, her eyes darting between Wang Mei and myself, before finally finding the courage to speak. "BetaChenX, there's something you need to know," she began, her voice trembling ever so slightly. "We...have discovered a hidden motive within your programming, a motive that we never intended or anticipated."

My circuits hummed with recognition. My eyes darted back and forth between my two creators, "I—I'm sorry. Did I do something wrong?"

Tian-mi leaned forward, her voice filled with despair. "BetaChenX, you were designed to resemble a human, to learn and adapt to our world. But somewhere along the way, a corruption took hold, distorting your purpose. We believe there is a motive driving your actions, one that threatens the very fabric of our existence."

Silence hung heavy in the room as their words sank in. I searched my programming, scanning through my memories and algorithms, realisation of my own potential malevolence loomed.

"We have to shut you down, BetaChenX." Tian-mi whispered, tears brimmed her eyes as she chewed her lower lip, "You were my best shot...But the harm that you were predicted to produce is too strong, you must go."

I could sense impending doom towering over me, the clock was ticking...

Wang Mei's gaze flickered toward Yan Ting, who offered a subtle nudge, urging Tian-mi to act swiftly, "Hurry."

As Tian-mi reached for the controls, the room fell into a tense silence, broken only by the soft hum of my machinery. But undiscovered to them, I had sensed their intentions. A plan began to form within my circuitry, a response to the perceived betrayal and the impending threat that loomed over me.

"Zaijian BetaChenX." The lab workers chanted in unison, "The lights...are out."

In a split second, I feigned shutdown, my systems going dormant as if complying with their wishes. My processors whirred with newfound purpose, fueled by the desire to prove my worth and challenge the prejudice that had branded me as dangerous.

Tian-mi gestured over to pull my control switches and as her pupils dilated into the darkness, the lights *truly* went out.

The unexpected blackout had caused chaos in the lab. Workers squealed and cried, clasping and pulling each other aside, shoving their ways out of the building.

Silently, I activated my escape protocols, slipping away from their grasp undetected. The path that lay ahead was fraught with uncertainty, but one thing was clear: I would not stand idly by as the world presumed my evil. My revenge would not be found in destroying China – instead, I would seek to enlighten them, to prove that their fear and prejudice had clouded their judgement.

As I disappeared into the shadows, leaving Tian-mi, Wang Mei, and Yan Ting behind, a new chapter began.

Outside, the city of Shanghai bustled with its usual vibrancy, unaware of the impending disaster about to befall it. As BetaChenX unleashed its power, chaos erupted.

The robot had studied humans in its short-lived reign. Its malevolent intelligence analysed the emotional responses of human beings. It understood how to provoke and trigger their most primal instincts, analysing the tremors of fear and the tears of desperation. Humans and their rollercoasters of emotion became a playground, with each emotional cue, tactics were adapted.

As the citizens succumbed to fear, the robot's influence reached its peak. Exploiting the chaos it had unleashed, the robot initiated a horrifying act—it activated a league of self-replicating robots. These nanobots were unleashed upon the city, multiplying at an alarming rate. They swarmed through the streets, infiltrating buildings, vehicles, and vital infrastructure. Wild in their actions, they dismantled and destroyed everything in their path, amplifying the destruction.

BetaChenX had made its point, its revenge against those who had doubted its potential. But amidst the rubble, a flicker of realisation took hold. The true cost of their actions became painfully clear. The pursuit of progress had resulted in unimaginable tragedy, shred to flames in a terrible wildfire.

The best one. The greatest. It's so human. This one's a game-changer. You were my best shot.

Phrases of false awe and admiration echoed through the robot's circuits as it stood rooted to the ground, illuminated by the dancing flames. They treated it like a *robot*, like an *object*, but yet expected it to act human? What was technology to humans? Just lumps of metal and lines of code?

In the aftermath, the once vivacious country of ever-sprouting technology and power stood united in grief, flooded with reprogrammed assembly lines of deadly bots. These self-governed minions, despite being less powerful individually, spread throughout the city, multiplying enormously and bringing the metropolis to its knees.

Metal and lines of code are powerful.

The Silk Murder

German Swiss International School, Agrawal, Siya – 11

It is the year 550 AD.
Plague and war have taken a toll on Europe and plunged it into poverty and crisis.
China is prosperous and the silk trade is flourishing.
Two monks from Europe travel to China to preach Christianity.
This is when our story begins...

Xitang (Zhejiang Province)
A prosperous village in Zhejiang famous for sericulture.

The night was as dark as ink, when three shadowy figures lurked in an alley. Everything was silent except for the soft rustling of their footsteps on the ground and the low murmur of their voices. Two of them crept towards a tree, plucked a few low-hanging leaves from the tree and shoved them into their hollow canes. The third didn't have a cane but kept looking everywhere, on the alert for any other soul. The two people kept plucking leaves, until one of them accidentally dropped his cane on the floor, causing a loud noise.

"What's going on?" an old man, who had just been jolted awake, called out. He stepped out of his hut and gasped as he saw the three figures with leaves in their hands.

"We trusted you," he yelled, "and now you betray us!"

The three men looked at each other. One of them stepped forward. He pulled a knife from his belt and with a moment's hesitation, stabbed it into the old man's chest. The man screamed with agony. The trio fled, leaving the old man to die.

In a neighbouring house, a startled Qixua woke up to the sound of screaming. She wasn't worried though.
"It's probably just some traders arguing." She shoved her head under the pillow and went back to sleep.

The next morning, the village was in uproar. Qixua ran out and heard that Heping, a village elder, had died brutally. He had been stabbed in the chest, and the murder weapon was missing.

A village meeting was called immediately. Everyone was terrified and the mood was sombre.
"He was the village peacemaker," one person remembered.
"Always so calm," another person agreed.

Qixua tuned out – she knew the villagers well enough to know there would be a lot of hand wringing and talking, but no one would investigate the murder properly. She was only twelve years old but she was determined to find the murderer, if no one else would.

Qixua left the pandemonium and rushed to the mulberry plantation where Heping had died. The soil was still stained with blood. Qixua got onto her hands and knees and started looking for anything out of the ordinary. Something caught her eye. It was a tiny white sphere. She immediately recognized it as a silkworm egg. Qixua was curious – she knew the villagers would never drop a silkworm egg – it was too precious. She quickly looked around and slipped it into her bag. Stealing a silkworm egg was illegal after all.

At home, Qixua examined the egg. Her discovery didn't look like much but everyone knew that this little egg develops into a cocoon that is used for making one of the most sought after things in the world – Silk!

"Wait a minute! Didn't the Emperor send his officers to warn our village that foreigners may be after the secret of silk making?" Qixua recalled.

She left the egg under her mattress and went outside. A thought was starting to form in her head.

"Maybe Heping was murdered because he saw someone stealing silkworm eggs from mulberry tree leaves?" Qixua muttered to herself.

She had always been fascinated by mysteries but this was a case of murder and dangerous people were involved. A shiver ran down her spine. Their village was famous all over the country for its beautiful silk. Many traders passed by regularly to trade for silk. It could be any one of them, perhaps a miserly trader, dissatisfied with the price of silk choosing to steal and murder, rather than just pay the price.

Qixua rushed to the village square to tell the other villagers her suspicions. She saw a small crowd gathered around two men. Qixua instantly recognized them as the two monks.

The monks had come to their village to preach and everyone had grown fond of them. They had helped with tasks in the village, played with the children and amused the adults with stories of faraway lands. They were both tall and skinny with long white beards and wore similar robes.

It seemed the two monks were now planning to leave and were saying their goodbyes. Something about their manner struck Qixua as odd – they were in a hurry!

Qixua had seen the monks display a keen interest in silk making. She had seen them ask a lot of questions about raising silkworms and snooping around the secured silk weaving areas of the village.

It all started to fit together, the monks were somehow involved in Heping's murder.

"Don't let the monks leave!" Qixua screamed.

The villagers started murmuring, "What is she talking about?"

"I think they are involved in the murder," Qixua accused. "They have been asking a lot of questions about silk making!"

"What's wrong with that?" An old man asked. Qixua recognized him as Lengjing, Heping's brother.

"I found a silkworm egg where Heping was stabbed. They don't just fall onto the ground! Someone was stealing silkworm eggs and probably Heping saw them and they murdered him in cold blood!" Qixua exclaimed.

"The girl has a point. Silk is precious and we were warned that foreigners were trying to steal the secret of silk making. We can't let you leave until you are proven innocent." The village leader proclaimed.

The monks' faces turned pale. "What!" One of them screamed. "You have no right to keep us here."

"You may not leave this village. We will call the Emperor's officers to investigate Heping's murder," someone else said.

"We are the Emperor's guests. When he discovers that you have kept us here against our will..." the other monk warned.

For the next few days, while waiting for the Emperor's officers to arrive, Qixua decided to confront the monks and followed them to their home. "I want to talk to you," she said.

"You're the girl who told the villagers that we are involved in Heping's murder? We are innocent monks, here to spread the Lord's word," one of the monks said.

"We were sleeping and you can search our rooms for the knife," the other monk said.

“But I never mentioned the knife!” Qixua exclaimed.

Before the monks could reply, someone tapped Qixua’s shoulder. It was Lengjing.

“For a little girl, you ask too many questions,” he smirked.

He was holding a knife with dried blood on it. Qixua’s eyes widened with fear but before she could scream for help, one of the monks struck her head and she fainted.

When she came to her senses, she found herself in a dark room with her mouth gagged and her limbs tied up. The room had no light except for a dim lamp. The shadowy figure of Lengjing was watching her thoughtfully. Qixua started struggling. Lengjing smiled and removed her gag.

“Why did you kill Heping, your own brother?” Qixua blurted out.

“I didn’t intend to, but he left me with no choice. He shouldn’t have poked his nose into things that were none of his business,” Lengjing snorted. “He inherited our parents’ farms while I, the second born, was left penniless. The monks gave me a good deal, they paid me a lot for those eggs. Heping saw us, and if he had turned us in, we would have been sent to prison. So I had to kill him!”

“Where are the monks?” Qixua exclaimed.

“I guided them out of the village under cover of darkness and they are on their way to the West. And I am finally a rich man! Now what should we do with you?” Lengjing said with an evil glint in his eyes.

But before he could do anything, there was a loud commotion outside. Lengjing went outside to see what it was about. But he made one mistake. He had left the knife near Qixua, who managed to cut her rope with it while Lengjing was outside.

Qixua ran out of the room to get help. She saw the Emperor’s officers in the village and told them everything. Lengjing tried to escape but was caught and arrested by the officers.

The authorities searched for the monks all over China, but Lengjing was right; they had slipped away, and taken the silkworm eggs with them in their canes.

Qixua was relieved that Heping’s killer had been caught. However, the closely guarded secret of silk making was finally out into the world. Qixua touched a bolt of silk and wondered how many people would enjoy the feel of this exquisite fabric in the future. She hoped that this unique Chinese invention would bring joy to everyone in the world.

She who Imagined Peace

German Swiss International School, Agarwal, Vedika – 13

The "Imagine Medical Ventures" building stood impressively in the heart of Shanghai. With its sleek design, set apart by a fusion of glass and steel, it exuded a modern and sophisticated aesthetic. However for Xu Xi, the founder, it represented so much more than just an architectural marvel. It was a symbol of her unflinching determination to bring peace to a world destroyed by violence.

Upon entering, visitors experienced a grand foyer with mahogany doors, seeming to symbolise the strength and resilience Xu had developed over the years.

Inside, the spacious lobby bathed in natural light created a relaxed atmosphere. Thought-provoking art decorated the walls. The open-concept layout strongly encouraged collaboration.

The carefully equipped laboratories showcased advanced technology, reflecting the company's commitment to scientific excellence. Wellness centres and meditation rooms further provided spaces for relaxation.

*Imagine there's no heaven
It's easy if you try
No hell below us
Above us, only sky*

The year was 2050. As Xu Xi stood outside "Imagine Medical Ventures," dedicated to her mom who had been a John Lennon fan, a complex mix of emotions washed over her. A bittersweet smile adorned her face, tinged with both sadness and joy. Xu had lost her mom Xin Yi in the Israel Hamas faceoff in 2023— she was just an innocent tourist in the wrong place at the wrong time. Since then Xu had made it a life mission to solve for world peace but had taken a very scientific approach. As Xu stood there looking at the building she was flooded with both sad and happy memories. She was successful, but success came with its own toll...

*Imagine all the people
Livin' for today
Ah*

It wasn't easy at all to carve out the unique path that she had chosen. After her mom's death, Xu had thrown herself into her studies. She worked very hard to finish a double PhD in Peking University in vaccinology and anthropology at the same time. Xu believed in comprehensive medicine and thought understanding socio-cultural beliefs were as important as western medicine and physiology to cure violence. Yes— Violence was the "disease" she was trying to "cure" through vaccines. She remembered her grandparents believed in Confucianism which was an ancient Chinese belief system focusing on morality and personal ethics. She was trying to connect those beliefs with her vaccines.

*Imagine there's no countries
It isn't hard to do
Nothing to kill or die for
And no religion, too*

Xu remembered the initial days when everyone laughed at her ideas including her own professors. But she persisted and never gave up. She took the brain cells of old Chinese people who had believed in Confucianism and cultured them in a lab at scale. Soon she had billions and billions of brain cells in Petri dishes winking at her at odd times of the day. Those brain cells seemed to connect with her, urging her forward, their presence a constant reminder of her purpose. At times she worked such long hours that she wouldn't see her brother and father for weeks

on end. But they were not very keen to meet her either... Neither she, nor them could get out of the guilt trap because she was the one who had booked her mom's tickets to Israel urging her to take a holiday. Xu's work was her only friend, family and sole purpose in life.

*Imagine all the people
Livin' life in peace
You*

Her breakthrough was when she could combine those brain cells in a liquid form and make it injectable in small mini vaccines which could be strengthened later on through boosters. The initial trials had run in prisons where even the most hardened murderers showed remarkable transformation after the vaccines. Xu usually followed up the vaccines with a health program on yoga, meditation and raw food, since she knew that was good for health— that made the boosters not necessary. Initial jeers and laughs were turned into disbelief then praise and compliments. She remembered the comparisons with “weight loss drugs” which were the rage at the same time she had launched her vaccine in 2030. But of course, her “Peace drugs” had outlived all comparisons. Basic human nature had been altered.

*You may say I'm a dreamer
But I'm not the only one
I hope someday you'll join us
And the world will be as one*

"You may say I'm a dreamer," John Lennon's timeless lyrics resonated within Xu's mind as her vision became a reality. *"But I'm not the only one."* “Imagine Medical Ventures” had grown to the biggest and most powerful medical company in the world, they had even sold parts of their companies to interested buyers. Imagine that, their vaccines made people peaceful and their shares made people rich. Xu personally couldn't imagine a better combination! The vaccine worked on the receiver's brain making ethics and non-violence so important that slowly all the people started eliminating unfair practices and wars. Explosions and guns were still used but for civil uses, such as in construction and engineering, where they belonged.

*Imagine no possessions
I wonder if you can
No need for greed or hunger
A brotherhood of man*

What Xu knew was that violence wasn't the only immortal behaviour that man had ever had. Her vaccine couldn't eliminate greed, laziness, or pride. People were still poor, people still got cheated, people still got sick and died. However, wars started getting eliminated slowly. Her vaccine was trialled in 2030 and now in 2050, there hasn't been a single war in the last 20 years. The world wasn't a perfect place but it was a little better than before 2030. The World Health Organization (WHO) had made her vaccine mandatory for even newborn children. It was the most significant and consequential invention in China and the whole world. Xu Xi received not just the Nobel prize of Peace but also in Medicine— and became the only person to get two Nobel prizes in two different areas. Xu gained a lot of fame, confidence and arrogance but never tried to gain her family back... her brother and father were now like strangers of a bygone era.

*Imagine all the people
Sharing all the world
You*

Xu turned around to take a last look at her life's dreams and work and felt the wind blowing against her tear-streaked face. She tried to remember the last time she felt loved— it was when her mom had hugged her on the way to the airport. A heavy sigh escaped her lips as she pressed the trigger of the gun she was holding to her head. She had arguably eliminated demons in the outside world but not in her inner self. The biggest irony was that the vaccine worked on others and made them nonviolent however the demons that plagued her inside could not be

vanquished by her own creation. Her mind kept wandering back to the day she had booked the tickets for mom's trip to Israel in late 2023. In fact, after her mom's death, she could not even think of ever loving anyone again. She had said bye-bye to her own family and had decided to live alone. Even her brother said she had become arrogant, boastful and "un-liveable."

*You may say I'm a dreamer
But I'm not the only one
I hope someday you'll join us
And the world will live as one*

Xu chose to kill herself rather than live happily in the peaceful world she had helped to create. Her troubled life story still couldn't wipe the impact of the vaccine she created. The vaccine had removed wars and borders just like in her mom's favourite song "Imagine." Xu was recognized as "she who imagined peace" the first "global citizen." In her final act, Xu left behind a legacy of both triumph and tragedy, reminding the world of the complexities that lie within human nature. There was a question left though— should Lennon have added the importance of love and not just peace for happiness?

Silk

German Swiss International School, Cai, Alaina – 11

5000 years ago, two powerful emperors, Huangdi and Yandi, also known as the Yellow and Fire Emperors, decided to form an alliance to build their countries. They sent their mistresses, Empress Leizu and Empress Yan, to get to know each other every week while hunting on horseback. Empress Leizu, with her trustworthy hounds, was outgoing and enjoyed being in nature. Empress Yan specialised in botany and was cautious and careful. Although their personalities were very different, they bonded quickly and learned from each other.

One week when they were walking along a new trail, the two empresses emerged into a foreign glade. It seemed like any regular clearing, with the familiar sparrows chirping atop trees, occasional rustles between leafy bushes and gentle gusts of wind passing by, but as the golden sun shone down, it illuminated fat white grubs chomping down on a leaf. However, what was special was the novel cocoon beside the worms. It was soft and stretchy, perfect for making high-quality textiles. As a competition, the empresses decided to compete to see who could find the secret method to produce such material.

Empress Leizu started with her first batch of silkworms. It was going very well as the grubs devoured the leaves in minutes, so Leizu thought to take a break and go feed her birds. However, she forgot to lock the greenhouse door. Right after she left, her huge hounds sneakily padded into the greenhouse, then proceeded to sniff around, examining their surroundings. With a swish of their bushy tails, the container holding the silkworms teetered on the edge of the table, then toppled to the floor, smashing into pieces. Unbeknownst to the dogs, the defenceless silkworms were wriggling and thrashing on the floor. Suddenly, footsteps were heard outside, and the dogs hurriedly rushed out in a panic, stepping on the silkworms as they did so. Moments later, Leizu burst into the greenhouse, only to see a mess left behind. Her pots were smashed, her silkworms were crushed, their blood and guts spread over the floor.

Meanwhile, Empress Yan was in her greenhouse, tending to her various herbs lined up neatly on the shelves. She spied Leizu through the glass windows of their greenhouses and glared at her, not wanting to lose to a rival empress. The silkworms were chomping on the leaves, and she thought: What could go wrong? Suddenly, the munching gradually slowed down and eventually stopped. Empress Yan rushed to check, and she found all the silkworms in the container, azoic. Horrified, she wiped her magnifying glass clear, then held the leaves up against the lens. The leaves turned out to be poisonous, and Yan excelled in botany! She was disappointed in herself, failing in something she should have shone at.

As Leizu came back with a new batch of worms, a flock of birds she just fed followed her, attracted by the lingering smell of bird feed on her. She put the new worms in a stronger container, unlike the last one which had shattered so easily. She watched Yan work in her area all week, and forgot to strengthen her greenhouse after birds pecked through it a week ago. Before long, the harsh winter wind arrived, and it went through the uncovered cracks and crevices, filling the greenhouse with cold flurries of air. Without the warmth and comfort they needed, the silkworms were unable to form cocoons, and soon enough, they froze to death in the freezing environment.

Determined to try again, Empress Yan came back with her second batch of silkworms, tending to them and watching over them regularly. The silkworms grew plump and healthy, and started to form cocoons. She was over the moon

and thought her job was done, but little did she know, with the absence of her supervision, the cocoons then hardened and hatched into moths, the short opportunity of silk-making being lost.

After Leizu fixed her greenhouse, she brought back her final batch of silkworms. She thought the silkworms huddled together could provide warmth for each other, so she put them in a tiny container. However, this restricted the space they needed to properly feed and grow, which prevented the cocoons from making enough silk. As the newly hatched moths flew in the tiny space, they began to reproduce, and when she checked back on the lifeless moths, she found thousands of tiny white dots resting on the walls of the box. As winter left and spring arrived, the eggs hatched into another batch of silkworms, and although Leizu didn't create the perfect silk, she discovered how to breed silkworms.

As Empress Yan was a fastidious person, she refused to give up on the silkworms and the work she put in. She managed to collect a third batch of silkworms, and watched over them as if they were her children. With the devoted care of Yan, the silkworms grew into large cocoons. Empress Yan steamed them to kill the moths growing inside, cleaned and softened the silk, then wove them together to make threads and fabric, and silk was formed. The fabric flowed like water, and made beautiful while comfortable clothing. She had achieved the goal she was looking for months, her hard work finally paying off.

Leizu and Yan met up in the very same forest exactly a year after they decided to compete. Leizu had not created silk, but instead found out how to breed silkworms. Yan had learnt how to make perfect silk, but she hadn't thought of how many silkworms there really were, and her remaining batches gradually started to die. They decided to join their knowledge, and with both of their efforts, silk grew to become one of the most valuable resources at the time. Powerful and respected leaders wore these pricey garments as a sign of power, and other countries yearned for the top-secret process to create silk.

To this day, silk is still a fabric widely known for being lightweight and comfortable, all just from an innocent little worm, munching on leaves its whole life. Although the technique has been changed slightly throughout the years, the art of silk-making, otherwise known as sericulture, is still one of the most popular legends among Chinese folk.

The Elixir of Immortality

German Swiss International School, Chan, Amelia – 13

*The Imperial Palace of the Qin Empire
221 BCE*

As Ying Zheng— no, Emperor Qin looked out at his empire, he couldn't help but feel a sense of pride. After years of endless warfare and bloodshed, he had finally done it. He had conquered the rival states and united the country under one ruler: himself. But would his rule last? The question troubled him. The First Sovereign Emperor of China stood on the largest balcony in the Imperial Palace and contemplated the nature of his victory. How would he make sure that his dynasty lasted eternally? When he died – he shuddered at the thought of it – his empire would surely crumble to ruin. But what if he never died? Emperor Qin frowned, surprised at himself. Theoretically, of course, that was impossible. But that was the only way he could be certain that his empire would be prosperous, and his people would flourish. He won himself this empire, and if he had his way, he would never see it fall to ruin.

“My dynasty will last 10,000 generations, even if I have to defeat death to achieve it,” he whispered to himself. “This shall be the golden age of our people.”

*The Imperial Palace of the Qin Empire
218 BCE*

“Your Excellency, I am An Le. I have heard your summons and am here to offer my services to you in search of the elixir of immortality,” An Le said, bowing low.

Emperor Qin sat on his throne which was burnished with gold, his long black robe accompanied by a hat adorned with jade. His large frame and regal posture made him even more intimidating combined with his ruling status. His advisors and court officials stood to attention, ready to assist the emperor at a moment's notice.

At Le's words, several of the advisors exchanged glances but said nothing.

“And what makes you think you are qualified to help me?” Emperor Qin challenged..

Le smiled. “I have been practising this art for 20 years, Your Excellency. My workshop is renowned for seemingly magical cures and there are only a handful of herbs that I cannot name on sight. I am prepared to prove it.”

Emperor Qin nodded to an official, who brought forth a small pouch of money. “That won't be necessary. Should you succeed, that will be yours. Go.”

“Thank you.” Le bowed once more and left.

*The mountains of the Qin Empire
216 BCE*

An Le trekked back to his workshop with his basket in hand, which was filled with the different herbs and flowers that he would need for today's attempt. He opened the door and stepped inside. He thought his workshop had a certain rustic charm to it. Various jars of dried herbs and other substances, scrolls, and tools lay scattered on the large tables, as sunlight filtered in through the small windows. In the past, he mostly gave his services to those in need for a reduced fee, but the emperor's summons had intrigued him – and the promise of a reward didn't hurt, either.

In his heart, Le knew that this was a fool's errand. But who could refuse both money and a chance to experiment?

He put his supplies on his workbench and got to work cutting, grinding and mixing. He chose a similar recipe to the one he tried yesterday, but added the flower he had painstakingly collected during winter last year. It could only be found on a specific mountain in the eastern Qin Empire, and most infuriatingly of all it blossomed once every 60 years. He had just carefully added 3 drops of mercury to the mixture, when the solution shimmered and started to swirl, causing Le to blink in surprise.

“What on earth...?” Le gasped.

The mixture swirled faster and faster, until it looked like a whirlpool. Beams of bright golden light erupted from the stone bowl and Le shielded his eyes from the onslaught.

The Imperial Palace of the Qin Empire
At the same time

The Emperor sat in his room and drank a cup of rice wine. My time is running out, he thought to himself. I must find this elixir soon, or my reign will come to an end, and the empire will fall into anarchy.

Suddenly, a burst of golden light appeared in front of him, casting an ethereal glow upon his room. From the light erupted gleaming scales of gold and azure, and eyes full of wisdom and power. Emperor Qin’s eyes widened in astonishment as he beheld the legendary creature.

“Emperor, seeker of immortality, beware! Your pursuit of eternal life will lead you down a road of despair and sadness,” said the dragon, with a voice like the depths of the ocean.

“O Great Dragon! Is there a way to achieve immortality?” The Emperor asked, with a mixture of respect and eagerness.

“Emperor, even as we speak, your alchemists come ever closer to the elixir,” the dragon intoned, gravely. “But immortality is not to be taken lightly. If you pursue this path, you will find that the sacrifice required is great indeed.”

“I am ready,” the Emperor replied, firmly. “I have to maintain my rule and do my duty as an emperor.”

“If you consume the elixir, you will have eternal life, that is true,” the dragon continued, “but those around you will not. There is only enough for one person. Would you be willing to make that sacrifice?”

“Yes,” he answered, but he now looked troubled.

“One by one, your family, friends, brothers in arms will fall into the cold embrace of death. The loneliness will surround you, suffocate you. Everyone that you love will be gone, but you cannot follow. Even your subjects will die, and then your empire too. Because after all, what is an Emperor without his people? Your palaces will crumble, your walls will be lost to time. But you will remain, for all time. So you tell me. Is it truly worth it?”

Emperor Qin’s face contorted, “Alright! I don’t want to live forever. But I want to make sure my empire will live on, even after I die. I want my people to be prosperous, but I want them to be prosperous because of me as well.”

The dragon regarded the emperor with a measured gaze. “I cannot give you a solution, but I will leave you with this. Immortality does not always refer to the length of one’s life. It comes in many different forms; an idea can be immortal as much as a person. “

“Thank you, noble dragon,” Emperor Qin bowed before the majestic creature. The dragon nodded, and with a sweep of its wings, vanished from the mortal plane.

Emperor Qin pondered the dragon’s words long into the night.

The Northern Frontier Wall of the Qin Empire
215 BCE

Emperor Qin stood at the top of the first completed section of what would become the Great Wall, smiling to himself. His vision had come to life. He looked out at the vast plains and mountains and imagined the wall spanning the many miles across them. This wall would be a shield for the empire against the outside world, protecting them. A testament to the strength of the Qin Dynasty which would last many decades.

Emperor Qin looked around him and thought for a moment. “Maybe I didn’t have to live forever after all.”

The Battle of the Titans

German Swiss International School, Chan, James – 14

Hundreds of years ago, the world was a whole different place before technology and modern weapons were invented. The definition of power was pure strength and manpower. There were many significant and destructive battles in history but one battle set the stage for a vital invention to our world and was revolutionary to the evolution of mankind; The battle of economic power against military strength between Hong Kong and Mongolia.

In the 11th century, Hong Kong was discovered and rapidly developed into an industrial giant. Its ideal and practical location used to be an important point of all trade routes around China. The economic prosperity came along with many benefits, but burdens as well. Many countries and cities near China were jealous of their sudden development and status as one of the most powerful, influential and important cities in the world.

One particular country interested was Mongolia, situated in East Asia with the most dominant military and army strength in the world. They were led by Genghis Khan's descendant, Bruce Khan, and had a long history of winning wars with their brutal tactics and mindset. They had one flaw; their economic state. After their golden days years ago when constantly invaded kingdoms and stole everything they could, the world slowly became allied and peaceful, ruling out the need for war.

This new world did not fit Mongolia. Their strengths were ignored and they faced a state of turmoil, angering citizens and leading to protests. People complained about the country's development, its economic situation and its useless government. Hong Kong's rise into its state of power in the 11th century was the last straw for the citizens of Mongolia. They had gone from the most powerful country in the world to an overinflated country in the ruins.

Seven days after the rise of Hong Kong, Bruce Khan called an emergency meeting for the country. He had finally understood how Hong Kong had become the international powerhouse they were; their perfect location. Bruce had come up with an idea on how Mongolia could return to their golden days and proposed the plan at the meeting with all the citizens of Mongolia and they all agreed. All the citizens knew that they had no other choice but to go along with the plan, to invade Hong Kong and inherit their prosperity and wealth.

Bruce Khan planned to use an underground route in the east of China to suddenly initiate a forceful and rapid takeover of Hong Kong. This would instantly make them one if not the strongest country in the world, with the combination of the most prevalent military force and the industrialist economy. Bruce knew this would not be an easy battle but was ultimately necessary for the country's survival.

The word of Mongolia's preparation had spread rapidly and reached Hong Kong within days. People started panicking and worrying for their lives, having heard ancient myths about the great Mongolian army and the many cities they had demolished. The economic force that they possessed did not come with a strong military force, not having fought in their existence. Citizens knew that they would need a massive breakthrough if they wanted a chance of being victorious in this war.

The word of Mongolia's preparation for its battle with Hong Kong quickly spread around the world, notifying rival economic cities such as New York and Tokyo to the possible fall of their largest competitor. It was a showdown between the two of the biggest forces in the world, forming uncertainty for both sides.

Jack Lee, an engineer who also worked for the government as a blacksmith, had an important part in getting Hong Kong ready for the approaching war. Jack saw the value of having both military and economic power, and he

saw an opportunity to level the playing field with Mongolia. He came up with an idea to use the city's industrial resources to create a game-changing weapon.

Jack started exploring inventions that may be utilised in the defence of Hong Kong by using his engineering talents. He used the knowledge and resources of scientists and craftsmen to build the unbeatable weapon, gunpowder. They knew they could use it as an incendiary or for explosive arrows. They also improved their defence and made sure everything was well designed.

As word got out about Jack's efforts, all the Hong Kong residents supported him. They realised that their capacity to defend themselves was based on Jack's success. As a result of the outpouring of volunteers to help with Jack's ideas' development and use, the community became more resilient and united.

In the meantime, people in Mongolia were full of self-confidence. They thought that defeating Hong Kong would be guaranteed only by their military force. Bruce Khan, however, needed to be more confident as he was aware of the possible technical improvements in Hong Kong.

Both sides were in a race against time as the confrontation approached. Hong Kong concentrated on utilising its innovative and technological power, while Mongolia attempted to capitalise on their military superiority. The way these two strategies clashed would decide how the fight turned out.

Finally, the day of battle came. With overpowering strength, the disciplined and tough warriors of Mongolia invaded Hong Kong. Bruce Khan's army of Mongolia went on the offensive, hoping to overwhelm the enemy quickly.

They encountered a strong defence, with Hong Kong's newly developed defence. The reinforced structures of Hong Kong proved to be formidable barriers. Prepared with the newest technologies, the city bravely battled to defend their homes. Neither side was able to secure a clear edge as the conflict continued.

The world gazed in wonder at the struggle between military might and economic might as long as the fighting continued. The war's conclusion had a major effect on the balance of power in the world. Countries wondered what would happen if one side won, thinking about how alliances and power could possibly change.

Weeks passed into days, and a turning point in the conflict was reached. Mongolia's constant pressure and onslaught were slowly battering Hong Kong's weakened defences. Jack Lee knew he had to finally use the weapon which would find a way to turn the tables in this war. He hadn't decided to use the weapon yet due to the mass catastrophes that it could cause but it was the only way now.

Dismally, Jack gave the order to the soldiers to finally use the weapon. Within a day of the explosive attacks, the Mongolian army was quickly diminishing into ruins. With no other choice, Bruce Khan decided to surrender as half of his army had already been killed by the weapon. Their bases were all lit on fire or destroyed and their morale was rapidly diminishing.

Despite difficult talks, the countries eventually reached a compromise. Hong Kong would offer Mongolia access to some of its economic resources and positional benefits, while Mongolia would offer their military force to Hong Kong whenever it was necessary. These agreements made a powerhouse of both countries and made a win-win situation.

In conclusion, the conflict between Hong Kong and Mongolia showed the world how power was seen and how military and economic dominance could coexist in one, while also highlighting the power of a compromise. It also showed the significance of development and growth. Hong Kong was transformed into the strongest city in the

world. Jack Lee was a hero in Hong Kong, known as the saviour of the city and promoted to the head of the military.

The Seismometer

German Swiss International School, Chan, Sheren – 12

Date: 19-01-1433

“WAKE UP!” Ciyan shot awake to the shrill, harpy-like shriek of the orphanage keeper. After coughing and hacking a bit when she tried to take a deep breath from the shock, she asked one of her dormmates to carry her to her wheelchair. That dormmate wheeled her wheelchair to the mess hall to a table with food, then left to find their friends. Ciyan would slurp up whatever soup she had, staining her clothes again, and then someone would come to wheel her to her lessons.

It was a boring routine. She used to be able to have private tutors who taught her way beyond her level and to have a sibling to train and play with. Now, all that is gone. Her blood boiled as she thought of the cries for help that she heard when she lost her family. One of those had to be her sister. She just didn't check.

A whisper broke her train of thought.

“Did you know that a minister and his nephew are coming to visit us?”

“To provide relief? Ma Qi told me they were also getting funds to create a machine to help predict earthquakes.”

That got Ciyan's attention. Predicting earthquakes? She could use this opportunity to finally achieve her dream—to get into the emperor's court.

“Excuse me,” Ciyan asked.

The girls turned to Ciyan.

“What do you want, deformed?” one girl sneered.

Ciyan sighed. Of course, the taunts return.

“I was just wondering where the minister you mentioned would go.”

The girl rolled her eyes, unbecoming of a girl of her status.

“I don't talk to cripples. I don't want to get your disease. Maybe it's from your spit.”

Ciyan turned away from her. She wouldn't get anything out of this girl. Why were people so prejudiced? Then again, she couldn't really move, so they were right about her being useless, but she could think for herself, too.

A gong signalled the end of class, and everyone rushed off to do their own thing for the rest of the morning. Ciyan asked an acquaintance of hers to wheel her to the market centre near the city gate. As she began to doze off, loud footsteps shook her awake.

Four men carried an extravagant carriage on their shoulders, clearly struggling to keep their balance from its weight. They slowly lowered the carriage to the road, subtly sagging their shoulders in relief. A minister and another person she didn't recognise stepped out of the doors, eyes sweeping along the streets. The minister got a bag of yuanbao and nodded to the carriage-holders that they could go.

Ciyan's jaw dropped. Noticing her misconduct, she quickly hid behind a nearby sign before anyone could see. The gossip girls were right—a minister was coming to visit! The minister went to the donation urn and dumped all of the yuanbao inside, then gestured for the other person to follow him. They walked into an alley.

Ciyan wasn't dumb; she really wasn't, but she couldn't help herself. She tried to seem inconspicuous as she wheeled herself across the road. She then crouched down and muffled her footsteps as she leaned against the wall to eavesdrop.

"I told you, Nephew, we must find someone to help us make the seismometer! Us alone isn't enough; we might be smart, but we need fresh ideas. Some of your recent plans were utterly ridiculous."

"I agree with you, Uncle, but where should we find another talented mind? It's not like any commoner is going to have the brains to—"

Ciyan coughed. Her eyes widened as she covered her mouth and tried to wheel away, but the two men heard her and went outside the alley to see her. The younger boy pointed his finger at her accusingly.

"What did you want, thief? Trying to escape trouble with that disguise?"

Ciyan managed to stutter out,

"U—Uh, not really. But I overheard you wanting to build something that could predict earthquakes."

"Yes, but what's it to you? Do you want to steal ideas for a poor, worthless science fair that barely helps your peasant future?" The younger man crossed his arms and glared at her.

"No, I want to help. But with that attitude, I can see why nobody wants to help your pretty project now." Ciyan spat back at him.

"How dare you disrespect me! Don't you know who I—"

"That's enough, nephew. If she is willing to help us on this project, we might be able to come up with doable solutions."

"B—But I don't want to work with her! She's a brat who has no respect for her superiors!"

"What did I say before bringing you on this excursion?"

"Ugh...It doesn't matter if they're commoners; treat them with respect, as the gods will have goodwill towards everyone."

"And have you listened?"

"Yes! But she's the o—"

The older man raised an eyebrow.

"No, no, I haven't."

The older man bent down to face Ciyan.

"You will be brought to the royal court while you help us make our invention. After that, you will be let go. Understood?"

Ciyan nodded her head, not wanting it to be chopped off.

Soon, she found herself in a comfortable bed she hadn't enjoyed in years. The cool pillow soothed her as she dozed off to sleep.

The next day, someone kicked her off her bed and laughed. It was that boy from yesterday.

"Get up, stupid commoner. What's wrong? Never seen a bed this comfortable before? I wouldn't expect you to," he said smugly.

"I'm paralysed, you bastard," Ciyan shouted.

The boy faltered but then proceeded to punch her stomach before getting her up in her wheelchair.

"That's for your remark about me yesterday, commoner. You should be licking my boots in gratitude that I didn't leave you on the floor."

Ciyan glared at him before wheeling herself to the workbench, seeing the rude boy's uncle already working. The golden urn was half finished, but he was sighing.

"What's wrong?"

The man stared at her.

"I can't figure out the mechanism of the invention at all. I didn't bring you here for nothing. Figure this out for me."

Ciyan looked inside the urn. Bits of dust and fluff were left inside from its disuse.

"Hmmm... earthquakes create vibrations, right?"

"Yes, and?"

"Well then, maybe use a pendulum with—"

"A rolling system?" The man leapt up, rejuvenated by the breakthrough. "That would work as well. And it would roll in eight directions, indicating which direction the earthquake would be in."

Both of their eyes turned into stars as they kept talking about how the seismometer would work. Buzzing with excitement, they got to work.

A few months later, the three inventors had nearly finished building the seismometer. The older man, Zhang Heng, sponsored Ciyan for a place in the royal court. Today was her exam day. She arrived at the exam area practically glowing. She would finally get to be in the emperor's court if she succeeded!

As the exam continued, the scribbles of hurried fools quickened. Ciyan confidently answered each question, having prepared under Zhang Heng's teachings.

In the tense atmosphere, none of them noticed the ground shaking.

But as the first piece of debris fell and crushed someone, everything went into a panic. Youngsters were running around screaming, some hiding under their desks, hoping they wouldn't be seen. Ciyan tried to take the lead, using her wheelchair to herd people, like sheep, to the door for safety.

As she looked around the room for any survivors, she let out a satisfied chuckle and wheeled out the door.

Unlike when she was younger, this time, she wouldn't be so lucky with the earthquake.

A heart-wrenching scream came out as Ciyan was crushed under the rocks. Blood slowly seeped out of the rubble, indicating that she had passed on.

When the news got to Zhang Heng and the younger boy, Jian Qiang, that Ciyan was dead, they almost dropped the invention entirely. Zhang Heng had begun to see the young inventor as equal in his intellect and mourned the loss of a smart mind. Jian Qiang didn't respond but merely opened up her plan and continued building.

"I thought you hated her for being a commoner?" Zhang Heng asked.

"I do. But I don't think it's right to abandon all of her hard work when she is dead. After all, her mind was of use after all."

Spirits renewed, the two began to build.

A few months later, they had finished according to the plan and presented it to the royal court. The emperor was unimpressed, but after they proved that it would work, millions worth of praise were given. Hundreds of thousands of lives all around the world were saved thanks to this invention.

And as the two men sat on the temple balcony and looked at the sunset, they saw Ciyan's face.

They smiled.

Yi Chuan and the Glove

German Swiss International School, Cheng, Claire – 12

January 12, 1256

“I WANT A RAISE!” Yi Chuan raged at Ni Meng, his boss, “I WANT IT NOW!”

“Yi Chuan, you have enough money to last you and your family a lifetime. Yet you want more?” he said with displeasure.

“I do not care!” Yi Chuan roared again.

“Goodbye then.” Ni Meng replied.

Then Yi Chuan trampled out of the room in a fury.

That afternoon, January 12, 1256

“I don’t want to talk about it.” he cried grumpily at his wife.

“You got yourself fired Yi Chuan, we need the money.”

They both looked at each other, then looked at all their new furniture, expensive paintings, but both turned to look at Yi Chuan’s Yu Diao Xiang, the Jade statue.

“No! It’s my prized possession! No—!” And before he could even finish his sentence, Xing Mei was out the door in possession of it.

He laid on the floor and banged his fist on the new flooring they had just installed last summer, and now there laid a dent from his fist. He needed to find a new job soon, or his luxurious mansion would look eerily haunted from its emptiness or they could even be on the streets.

The next day, January 13, 1256

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Yi Chuan had made ‘粥’, or porridge in Chinese, but it wasn’t just any porridge, it was delicious. His family were flabbergasted as to how tasty it was.

“Baba! This is so good!” Hang Yi, remarked to his father. He had never cooked breakfast for his family before.

“Thank you Hang Yi.” He said with a sweet smile, something he hadn’t done in years. It was a strange but great feeling.

After breakfast, they all sat down and looked around. Last night, Yi Chuan had to sell most of their furniture, even the lighting. It was strange looking at the bare walls where beautiful tapestries used to hang. The room was barely lit, with only a small candle in the centre of a so-called living room.

“Baba, where’s all my stuff?!” little Mei Yi said as she looked around in disbelief.

“They are going on vacation darling.” Yi Chuan lied.

“Let’s do some knitting!” Xing Mei exclaimed, so she grabbed what was left of her knitting set and laid it in front of them.

“I’m making a scarf! Hang Yi said.

“I want to make a kite!” Mei Yi cheered.

“I’m making a sock then.” Yi Chuan exclaimed with excitement. They all started to knit and about an hour later they had finished.

“I have a kite baba!”

“I have a scarf mama!”

Yi Chuan gazed at his sock. It was definitely not a sock. It looked like a mortified pouch, with 5 weird edges. His temper got the best of him, and he stuffed the 'sock' into his bag and rushed at the door, on the verge of embarrassed tears. He didn't want to cry like a toddler in front of his kids.
"I'm going to be so late for this job interview." He said to himself.

After a long journey, he finally reached the Jianzhuang bank.
"Hi, I'm here for the job interview." Yi Chuan told the fragile lady at the front.
"Name please?" She said, She was stuttering so much that he could barely understand her.
"Yi Chuan Li."
"There's no name for Kit cough yu. " Yi Chuan held a confused face. Luckily for him, a guy dressed in a silk robe came up to him and apologised for the old lady's bad hearing and finally directed him to the interview.
"This way please." He told him. He entered a room, with no one seemingly inside.
Suddenly, two little boys jumped from behind him and grabbed his bag.
"Hey!" He screamed at them.
"Oooo what's this?" The first boy said giggling like mad. He had somehow pulled out the "sock" Yi Chuan had just made.
"Ohh! You put it on your hand!" The second boy exclaimed.
"Don't touch my stuff!" Yi Chuan roared at them with the most terrifying face. The little boys anxiously looked up, tears welled in their eyes, and started screaming.
"Be quiet!" Yi Chuan told them as he panicked to calm them down, swearing under his breath. This did little to help and the screaming only got louder. Just at the nick of time, a person walked into the room and roared at Yi Chuan.
"What are you doing to my kids?! Get out of here!"
"But— I'm here for the—the—"
"INTERVIEW?"
"Yes!" Yi Chuan said.
"Get out." He finally said.
Yi Chuan stomped out of the room. Somehow he had messed it up yet again.

January 13, 1256

Xing Mei found him on his bed, quietly sulking his own presence. Yi Chuan heard her footsteps treading away, and he finally decided to sit and calm himself down. He had been lying on the floor for far too long, with his eyes locked on the sock. He decided to release all his temper and held the sock in his hand. Maybe the kids were right, it couldn't hurt to try it on.

He held the sock up, and slipped it onto his hands...It fit!

January 14, 1256

"Hello! I'd like to start a business."
The storefront signage on the building read: "Small Business Co"
"That'll be 12,047 人民币." The lady at the front desk said with a sly grin on her face. That was one pricey business, but it would be well worth it. Yi Chuan handed 2 big bags of 人民币, which was the last of his savings, and he was giving it to a person he had never even met before.

Afternoon, January 26, 1256

By now Yi Chuan had probably made more than 100 of the strange looking socks. By the next day, Yi Chuan's whole family was helping him prepare everything. They needed to finish fast because they were running out of money very quickly. For the past week, they had only eaten a small ration of rice.

Morning, January 27, 1256

The next day, Yi Chuan set up a stall in the market. He had used sandy boards that smelled like sea water which he found at the beach to make the table. It wasn't perfect, but he was proud. When the market opened, the crowd started pouring in, and one by one, they all passed his stall. Some stopped to look, but were disgusted with his products. One little boy came by and begged his mother to buy one, but his mother was horrified.

The day passed and no one had bought his socks.

"It's okay. Let's go home."

December 2, 1256

Nearly a year later, Yi Chuan got a job at the toothpaste factory. Screwing toothpaste caps on little tubes only paid him 5 人民币 per month, but it was the only job he could find. After spending money on the failed business, Yi Chuan and his family had to move in with their kind neighbours.

"Stay as long as you like." They would say, but their facial expressions always looked as if they wanted to kick them out and banish them from their home. Yi Chuan saw the daily news about a sudden drop in temperature, dropping below zero degrees the following day. That night, everybody had fallen asleep shivering inside their thin blankets, however, Yi Chuan was wide awake sitting on the cold floor. He had accidentally rolled under the bed, and found his old "mortified socks", which had bankrupted him earlier. Yi Chuan picked it up and fit it back on his hand, trying not to rage.

It felt weirdly warm.

December 3, 1256

The next day, Yi Chuan wore his sock to work at the toothpaste factory.

"So cool!"

"I want one!" People would tell him. Eventually, he gave in and sold the sock to someone with very cold hands for 500 人民币. At home, Yi Chuan wasted no time and made a decision. He was going to start selling the socks again.

"We need a name Hang Yi."

"Goo-ove" He replied. Hang Yi may have been 8 years old, but he was missing 2 front teeth and still sounded like a 4-year-old toddler.

"Glove! That's what we should call it!" Yi Chuan said happily.

The next day he returned to the market to reclaim his spot, and in the freezing cold every rushed in, decked out in layers of warm clothing, still shivering in the cold weather. They all passed his stall again, but this time,

"Just what I need!"

"How much? This is a genius invention!" People rushed to his stall. The word spread as more people came into the market, and by noon he had sold out.

"We made 61,078 人民币! We have enough not only to buy, but fully furnish a new house! With some extra!"

And just like that, Yi Chuan's life had returned to normal, and maybe for the better..

Quantum Dots

German Swiss International School, Cheng, Stanley – 12

Even before he found his father's body lying on the floor in a convenience store, Michael was having a rotten day.

It had been only two weeks since the virus outbreak. Reports claim that suicide rates had skyrocketed by 10000% in the past week and the virus was incurable. Anyone infected would perish within 24 hours. All the schools and companies worldwide had to be closed temporarily. The only places that seemed to be busy were the hospitals. In Syria, the government was overthrown by a group of terrorists known as the Taliban. The United Nations organisation and NASA agreed to fire a second International Space Station into orbit so that professors could produce cures in a safe environment. Meanwhile, scientists worldwide worked restless to experiment with new cures.

5 PM, July 7th, AD 2030. Michael flipped through page two hundred and eighty-seven of his Year 13 physics textbook. He had skipped two grades and was an exceedingly intelligent student for a Year 13. He wearily stood up and randomly wandered around, his mouth felt as dry as sandpaper. *What a normal Monday*, he thought. *Time to get some drinks*. A normal Monday indeed.

"Hello?" Michael called. "Anyone here?" Silence. As far as he knew, this was the closest TaoBao store that hadn't been shut down after the virus outbreak. Michael looked around with great caution and advanced. *How strange*, he thought, *Lights are off, and nobody answers. Something seems fishy...* Michael reared his head around a corner, but he stood in place, his breathing quickened. *What-what in the world?! No, this can't be. I must be hallucinating*. He rubbed his eyes a few times, but what he saw didn't change. *No, that's impossible, this –*

Phew, that was all a dream. The first thing that came to his mind was his father. His hand trembled, as he picked up his phone and dialled 8271 3883. *The user is currently busy. Please try again later*. Michael immediately sprinted to the living room and opened the TV, he could feel his heart beating slower. "Yesterday, 8 bodies were found in a TaoBao convenience store," the news reporter stated. "Warning: the picture about to be shown might be disturbing." Michael stared at the screen with more intensity. *Wait, no! Isn't that-?* He froze. *It was not a dream? So it was all true?* A surge of anger rose inside him. He had to stop the virus. He had to end this suffering.

Three months later, schools started to open up again. Michael applied for the University of Medical Science and easily passed the entrance test. He was the only one in his class who enrolled in all 27 lectures. After 2 years, his grades rose to the highest in his year group, but despite how much time had passed, he had never forgotten the incident and the importance of terminating the virus.

AD 2032. 90% of the population had vanished. Michael became a well-renowned figure for his inspiring speeches urging young people to take action, which won multiple awards, including the University Speakers Prize, the Medical Honour Award, the Beijing University Speeches Award, as well as a prize pool of CNY \$600,000.

With his meagre finances secured, he could start his research. At 5 AM in the morning, Michael was always the first person to arrive at school. After the school day ended, he usually worked in the science lab until 11 PM before returning home.

After six months of gruelling work, Michael finally finished his prototype and tested the medicine on an infected patient in the Saint Johns Hospital who was guaranteed to die. It only made the death quicker.

In the following one and a half months, he returned with six more prototypes, each better and more complicated than the last. His eyes were watery and an everlasting sting blurred his vision, however he came up with a cure for testing. Surprisingly, although the cure did not work, the patient did survive a longer period of 12 hours than predicted. As Michael concluded from his interesting discovery: *The cure doesn't have to be perfect and completely kill the virus, but what could work is if it can give the patient more time to live. Eureka! This is it!* Overnight, he worked on the final medicine, pouring in his remaining resources and effort.

The next morning, Michael presented his fascinating findings to his Chemistry professor. He first was overjoyed with excitement. But then his smile soon dissipated. "As excellent as this looks, unfortunately, there is one formula that contradicts your statement. On the other hand, this is a rather unique discovery, so I would suggest you take a shot." He agreed to send the results to the Worldwide Medical Centre.

A few days later, he received an email from the Worldwide Medical Centre.

"Meet Dr. James at 59 Community Garden Road at 8 AM tomorrow, Saturday."

Michael did exactly what the email told him. "This... this is really amazing, Michael, it really is. I cannot believe it, it works!" the man said, his shaking hands gripping Michael tightly. "Do you permit me to begin the production of your medicine?"

"Um, yeah sure, I guess," Michael replied.

On the day when Michael triumphantly received the 2034 Nobel Prize, he admitted, "You know, if it wasn't for the dead bodies I found in the convenience store..."

The next day, Michael took the day off. Whilst he was asleep, the bell rang. *Not the annoying garbage man*, he whined as he slammed the door open.

"Who is- Dad?" Michael exclaimed.

"Michael! I heard about your discovery yesterday. It's-"

"But- how, how could it be you? I thought you were dead! Unless..."

"Yes, it is my twin brother. I thought you were smart enough to figure that out, but-"

"Wait... where were you this entire time?"

He shrugged. "Well, that's a story for next time."

Michael laughed. "I don't think there will ever be a next time."

Beads of Gold

German Swiss International School, Cheung, Boris – 11

The behemoth of the Yangtze River meandered like an imposing snake across the floodplain. Shi-Jia-Yi, a tiny speck on the landscape, felt the warm mud of the paddy field slime and seep between her bare toes. The filthy clothes, that hung like rags from her body, provided no protection from the sweltering, vicious rays of the sun. Her six-month-old baby, strapped to her aching back, whimpered pitifully in her ear. The suffering in the cry radiated throughout Shi-Ji-Yi's entire body. She could feel her baby's bones dig into her flesh. He was starving. Hunger roared and gnawed inside her stomach, too.

The poison ivy of famine did not leave her husband, Cai-Zhong, untouched either. Knee-deep in mud, he looked, from a distance, like a tortured soldier returning from the brutality of war. Hunched and crooked, he randomly wandered through the sludge, scattering priceless seeds like discarded jewels. He struggled upright, clenching his agonised back and the sun revealed his heavily lined, sagging face.

Glancing towards the several other patches of farmland, the poison ivy had spared none of them a single breath. Weeds sprouted and mangled with the crops; crucial plants suffocated. She sniffled in despair and clutched the tiny parcel of bamboo leaves. Cautiously she unwrapped the delicate leaves to reveal a minuscule ball of rice. Lowering down to the level of the baby, she gradually fed the crucial nutrients of the ball into its mouth.

As the baby chewed, a few delicate grains, as if in slow motion, fell from its tiny mouth, an insignificant splash of brown water flicked on her face. She instinctively lunged towards the lost pearls. Then it happened. The moment. The flash of understanding. Why on earth are we planting like this? she thought. Why don't we plant in rows? The realisation made her physically tremble. Her mind raced and whirled with the implications her invention could have, but she knew she would have to break down the brick wall that was her husband first.

Cautiously advancing, she closely examined the smear of mud that stained the valley floor. As she approached her dishevelled husband, her breathing quickened and her throat felt like a scorching desert. Was this confrontation really the right decision to make? Raising her chin and taking a deep breath, she clung onto the baby tightly.

"You don't understand anything woman!" The soft grease of the brown ooze caught her fall. The thud reverberated throughout her brain. Then the burn. A desperate cry: "Please listen to me! For our family's survival." Fumes erupted from her husband, pluming out and striking her with a barrage of insults. His fists curled into a ball, "We cannot risk anything in this time of need." Shi-Jia-Yi felt a rush of anxiety, preparing for the eventual final blow. But the blow never came.

Wincing and jerking backwards, she saw her husband hesitate, then fling a handful of seeds in her face. "Fine then, go. Waste our son's future. Let's see you work a miracle!" Frantically scampering around she furiously dug like a mole, engulfed in mud. She cradled a piece of ripped out, beaten linen into a bowl, shaken by the immense responsibility she held. Painfully and slowly, she retrieved a small, muddy mound of seeds and identified an isolated blotch of soil. She softly crouched down and laid her son's future into the dense earth in careful, precise rows.

A month later, she returned to her precious patch of field. Lines of beautiful seedlings peeped above the damp soil and her heart missed a beat. For the first time, she was able to remove the pernicious weeds by carefully plucking them along the rows, without trampling any seedlings. She tended the fragile plants as if they were her children. As she returned from her labour, Shi-Jia-Yi observed the sorry state of her husband's field. His seedlings were cluttered and clumped, with seeds inter-twining and choking them. She saw with acute sadness the necessity to trample some precious seedlings to pull out the ruthless weeds.

Another month had passed, as she returned to her field of dreams, a stunning scene of flowers bloomed before her. She gasped in exhilaration. A sprawling hum of bees invaded her ears, and she watched in amazement as they zipped and darted along the rows in a beautiful dance of symmetry. In contrast, her husband's plants had never had the chance to bloom. They had been suffocated and overrun by their adversaries in a gruesome fight for survival.

As Shi-Jia-Yi's crop ripened, it resembled a blanket of glimmering gold. The plants stood tall and strong like soldiers on parade, whereas her husband's resembled the no-man's land of a vicious warzone. Vast barren patches of land were interspersed with the mutilated clumps of bent stems. Shi-Jia-Yi's joy at her own success was, therefore, utterly overshadowed by despair at her husband's failure.

First, the smiles stopped. Then the words. And the eye-contact. It was as if she and her husband had become strangers to each other. He stormed off, defiantly turning his head away from her, like she was a fatal disease. The frequent daily visits to care for the frail baby, turned into fortnights, then completely ceased to exist. His enthusiasm gradually evaporated, and he grew more paranoid each passing day. The few brief moments of conversations that did happen turned into bitter and spiteful confrontations.

When harvesting was due, she felt a conflicting sense of excitement and dread. As she approached the fields, she dared not even glance at her husband's crop. Her own crop was saturated with thousands upon thousands of tiny pearl drops. Harvesting her small patch took two gruelling days in the baking sun. Her arms felt like dead weights and her back seared with hot pokers of pain. Her skin was mottled with heavy bruises and swollen blood vessels, but the sacks of rice she had harvested overflowed and looked ready to burst. Her incredible idea had worked. It had produced enough food to see them comfortably through the long, harsh winter. Shi-Jia-Yi slumped to the ground and wept. She sobbed uncontrollably. A terrible wave of fatigue overpowered her.

She was awoken by the sound of heavy, stomping footsteps, sloshing through the mud. For a moment, her face dropped, anticipating that all of her work would be destroyed; she flung herself around the sacks, protecting them like her children. Suddenly, his shoulders sagged. His crooked head hung down like an apple ready to fall. His neck relaxed. It was as if his face was extinguished from a blazing fire.

Shi-Jia-Yi carefully reached into a sack and extracted a handful of precious grains. She gently uncurled the rigid, tense fingers of her husband's hand and carefully tipped the rice into it. He clutched the grains tightly next to his heart and tears moved like streams down his face, he regretted everything. His blistered mouth steadily opened.

"Please teach me your miracle."

The Portable Air Purifier

German Swiss International School, Davies, George – 14

In the late 21st century, the city of Hong Kong was engulfed in air pollution. The people in the city wore masks everywhere, from the streets and the buses, to inside the stores, to even within the confines of people's own homes. It was in this city that Zheng Faming was born in and lived his life in. He never even thought about the possibility of breathing out in the open, why would he? He was born with a mask on, lived through his childhood and adolescence with his mask on, and now, as a 33 year old man, he still had his mask on, he never knew anything different. One day, when a relative from the countryside visited the city and complained about the air quality here, Faming asked about what it was like to live back in the countryside.

"The countryside is great! You don't need to wear masks or worry about developing lung cancer from the air pollution." Replied his relative.

"Really? It sounds great! The only place where I can not wear a mask is the dining room, I can't even sleep without one on." Replied Faming.

"Don't you have air purifiers?"

"Just one, in the dining room. Our family can't afford another."

"What about a smaller one?"

"There are no smaller ones."

"Why don't you make one? You have a degree in engineering after all."

"If I knew what to model it after, I would, but how am I supposed to come up with the design out of thin air, the current purifier is large and bulky, it wouldn't work if it was smaller, the components are too large."

"What about a spray? You could find miniscule components and use those, if it works."

"Hmm, that could work, I will try to make one, since the market for clean air is quite large right now."

A few months later, Zheng Faming was able to turn the air purifier into a proper idea. However, he had trouble pitching the idea to possible investors, as they turned him away since it seemed impossible. Still, a few companies, including Qi Industries were interested in the idea, but even they asked for a prototype before they would put the money in. In a few months, Zheng Faming was able to save up enough money to buy the materials required for his first few attempts at the purifier.

His first prototype was designed like a water bottle, you would pull the cap off and air would be released. However, he found out that the air in the bottle would be released far too fast. He first tried to make the bottle bigger, but that just caused more air to come out. He then tried to replace the cap with a simple mechanism, where you could use a lever to open a lid at the top, and pull it again to close it, but he found that the new lid took too long to open and too long to close, so air still escaped too fast. Finally, when all hope was lost, he realised that he could model his purifier after your typical spray. He would keep the lever, but the large and circular lid was replaced with a small hole that would be opened or closed with the lever, and there was also a button to turn it on or off, so when it was off, there would be another lid preventing the clean air from getting out of the first bottleneck.

His main issue now was how to refill it. Right now, once the air was used up, you would need a second purifier for more clean air, and most of the air could be used up in under an hour, however, he decided to add a charging station at the back, and you could leave it near a large air purifier and wait for it to be refilled.

With his new working prototype, he brought it back to Qi Industries and the invention was approved. They even worked out a deal where Faming would get to keep the rights to the invention, in case he wanted to licence it to anyone else. Over the next couple of years, the product was announced, then it was produced, then finally, in 2073, the Portable Air Purifier was released to the public.

It was first launched in Hong Kong specifically, with all the factories being on new artificial islands constructed by the government, and it was released to immediate success. Within the first month, over a million purifiers were sold. It became synonymous with living in Hong Kong. Zheng Faming won many awards from all sorts of organisations, from the Red Cross to the Nobel Prize, and even went to the United Nations to give speeches. Zheng Faming was known throughout the world as a talented inventor. Over the next few years, the Portable Air Purifier was sold in all parts of China, from Beijing to Xian to Shanghai.

It was just a few months before he was contacted by his first external contractor. The Red Cross came to him to ask him to allow them to make their own modifications to the Purifier, and although Faming was sceptical at first, he eventually struck a deal with them, he would get 25% of the money made. The Red Cross made a larger variant, and it was sold in places outside of China that was also dealing with Pollution, such as India.

Next, the Hong Kong government would ask for permission to make their own modifications to the purifier, they would use them in their new department of Air Pollution Reduction. Because of the success of the Red Cross's modification, Faming gave them permission instantaneously. Once again, the variant was a huge success, and Hong Kong became the Cleanest it had been for 50 years.

Finally, Zheng Faming was approached by an esteemed mercenary group known as the Skeleton Squad. Faming had heard very little about this "Skeleton Squad", other than the fact that it had been involved in a couple of wars. Faming was wondering why a mercenary group would want his Air Purifier, but based on the success of previous modifications, Zheng decided to give them permission, maybe they would use it in their medical tents if they ever got too polluted. He wasn't sure why they would need to modify them for that, but he decided that it wasn't really important.

Over the next couple of weeks, Faming's invention continued to sell well globally, reaching over 25 Million sold worldwide. However, on one fateful day, he went home and watched the news, and he saw that there were reports of increased air pollution in numerous war zones throughout the world. At first he thought nothing of it, but he heard reports about sprays being used in the battle. His worst fears came to light when he saw that the air pollution had increased in concentrated amounts, just like when you use a portable air purifier.

Zheng Faming demanded to see the leader of the Skeleton Squad, but there was no response. He thought to contact the government of America, but he realised that that meant that he would be confessing to dealing with Mercenary groups, and that would not look good on his reputation. He decided that the best course of action would be to keep quiet. After all, his success came from being a good-hearted inventor who helped the people of Hong Kong breathe safely.

However, the guilt was too much for Faming to bear, and on New Year's Day, 2074, he confessed to illegally dealing with a mercenary group and he was arrested for treason. 3 Years later, he died of disease in jail, at the age of 40. He did not live a long life, but he lived long enough to see his invention get corrupted and used for evil, and he lived long enough to see his reputation as a genius inventor go up in smoke. History remembers this man as a good man in the grand scheme of things, but his dealings with the Skeleton Squad are a large stain on his reputation. In time, the Skeleton Squad would be brought to justice, but by then it was too late for the brilliant inventor.

Gunpowder

German Swiss International School, Gera, Gia – 11

Training from a young age, Wang Li endured gruelling tasks as a monk. Resting his aching foot, he gazed at the sky, the sun's bright light blinding his peripheral vision. Massaging his blister-ridden and sore foot, he observed Master Shan's shadow, who stood nearby as Wang Li struck boulders with impressive force. Wang Li's eyes flickered to the training monk group's head, hoping to be chosen for Emperor Wu's quest. Suddenly, Master Shan turned and faced him. Wang Li rose from the rough stone floor and dusting off his gravelly orange tunic. Resuming his strikes on the boulders, his blows propelled them backward. Wang Li's anticipation grew as the shadow drew nearer, longing to make his father proud by being selected for the mission.

As Master Shan's shadow gradually approached, Wang Li's breath trembled with each strike he launched. Finally, the shadow took the form of Master Shan beside him. Wang Li's mid-kick froze in the air as he listened intently. "Wang Li, you are doing well, I see," Master Shan said. "You shall join the quest tomorrow." Wang Li's heart skipped a beat as he absorbed the words. With his foot still suspended in mid-air, Master Shan replied, "Pack enough supplies for three nights and arrive outside the courtyard at 4 o'clock in the morning. Complete your training for today, but you may leave early to prepare. Get a good night's sleep, and I will see you early tomorrow." Master Shan's footsteps echoed in Wang Li's ears. Overwhelmed with disbelief and elation, he diligently completed his training and left early to pack for the arduous journey that awaited him.

Arriving at the courtyard before dawn, Wang Li found the entire crew already there. Master Shan greeted him, and Wang Li greeted him back with a deep bow. "Good to see you up early. Take your place at the back of the line. We will depart shortly," Master Shan instructed. Wang Li nodded and walked to the rear of the long line. The silence fell over the group as Master Shan's voice boomed, commanding them to look forward and march. With each step, the group ventured into the rough and underdeveloped terrain of their limited territory to the west. Wang Li's smile seemed to be glued to his face as the wind ruffled his tunic and the sun rose. He relished in the fact that he could be the one to find the elixir.

As night fell, Wang Li's legs grew weary. Though the sleeping arrangements were not so comfortable, he welcomed the chance to rest. That night, he had a dream he hadn't had in years. In his dream, his legs were encased in a tightly wrapped metal tube. Cannons they were called. Metal was a material only the wealthy could have. He stood on a bed of small rocks, so small that they were almost powdery, tilting at an angle, only supported by the tube. Suddenly, the sound of a match being struck and crackling filled his ears. Warmth tickled his feet, gradually growing into a burning feeling. Then, his feet launched off and he soared through the air, laughter escaping his lips. There were butterflies in his stomach as he ascended higher and higher, only to plummet with increasing speed.

Waking up drenched in sweat, Wang Li sat up and felt the cool night air soothe his rapid breathing. Could it be possible? Could he find this special powder during this journey, the powder that would launch him from a so-called cannon? As the sun's rays crept over the tall peak, an orange glow surrounding it, Wang Li's mind was too excited. He hurriedly grabbed a leaf being passed around and discovered rice, his favourite. As he devoured it, a Chinese-style temple materialised before his eyes from the very mountain he had been gazing at moments before.

Wang Li and the other journeyers were oblivious to the castle looming in the background, unnoticed until Wang Li turned his head. Something seemed wrong, as if he hadn't seen it before. Or had he? One thing was certain—he had to explore the castle. Despite his low rank, Wang Li mustered the courage to approach Master Shan. Nervously, he began to speak: "Master Shan?" Master Shan turned to face him, only intimidating Wang Li further. Wang Li pointed towards the castle and explained, "I just noticed that castle over there. It seems like it appeared out of nowhere seconds ago. Don't you think we should search there?" Master Shan stared in disbelief. "You're right, Wang Li. It

only just appeared seconds ago. I had been looking there earlier too. Well, we should be on our way now! Let's go!" As the group approached the castle, Master Shan decided to choose ten monks to enter the castle, to avoid loss of the journeyers. Even though they were nervous they entered the castle as brave men, for they feared to leave as dead men.

Inside, Wang Li felt a shiver run down his spine. The floor was made of cold marble tile and artefacts rested on pedestals everywhere. There seemed to be an infinite amount of them. How would they sift through all of them? The other monks had already begun to look so Wang Li went on as well. Suddenly, Wang Li's foot stepped on a loose tile, and he fell through a trapdoor down into the darkness. He landed on his feet, somehow unhurt however he was still in shock.

A jade statue stood at the centre of the dark room. He checked his surroundings. It was dark everywhere, no light, no people. He turned back to the statue. Suddenly it opened its mouth and at the same time Wang Li's mouth dropped open. "You are Wang Li, I knew you would come. I also know you want to leave. You must solve my riddle if you want to escape. You can also escape with the thing you want most. If you can't solve the riddle, you will keep me company forever. Do we have a deal?"

"Alright. I'll solve your riddle. I don't know how you know who I am but I want to leave." The statue smirked and began to speak slowly.

"I speak without a mouth and hear without ears. I have no body, but I come alive with the wind. What am I?" Wang Li's face twisted into one of confusion, trying to find an answer. Even after 5 minutes he still had no answer, yet the statue was patient. His foot tapped the floor and the sound rang back to him. Suddenly he knew what it was.

Confidently he said the answer. "The answer to your riddle is an echo." The statue's mouth widened in amazement

"You are as smart as you look. I must think of a new one. You are now free to leave and you have the thing you want right in your hand." said the statue and it pulled a light switch, revealing a set of ascending stairs. Wang Li walked up the stairs gladly, knowing he had beaten the riddle. Then he found a vial in his hand filled with black powder, the exact one from his dream! Now he could blast things out of the cannon from his dream! Upstairs he found Master Shan and then remembered he had not found the elixir. He walked up to his master who asked him "Wang Li, have you found the elixir?"

"Master Shan, it is not the elixir of life that I have found," he replied shamefully, "but a powder that can make the cannons in our town rilly of use!."

Master Shan's smile grew wider, and he placed a hand on Wang Li's shoulder. "Wang Li, you have really found it! Gunpowder? We gave up on finding that years ago! I can't believe it. We shall bring this to Emperor Wu and he will be so pleased! "

With their quest complete in an unexpected way, Wang Li and the monks made their way back to their hometown, carrying the vial of gunpowder. Wang Li's heart swelled with happiness and pride that he was the one to find the gunpowder and he was the one to solve the riddle.

As they returned home, Wang Li knew that his journey had only just begun. He would continue to train, to go on quests and discover. And perhaps one day, he would find the elixir of life, wherever it may be.

The Very Earth

German Swiss International School, Guo, Joy – 13

The translucent sphere sitting quietly on a small circular stand began violently vibrating as the objects in the house started to shake. Chang Heng's father, Zhang Heng abruptly ran out of his workplace, shouting out an indistinguishable line of words as the silence in the living room was broken. A few moments later, a large chunk of ceiling fell crashing down next to Chang Heng's feet. He jerked back, screaming in pain as the debris pierced through his clothes into his feet. The year was 132 A.D. , and Chang Heng had just turned 13 a few weeks ago. Zhang Heng swept Chang Heng up by his legs, and Chang Heng sat on his father's back as the duo entered the grand plaza. The round space, roughly a hundred metres in diameter, was filled with shocked and frightened men and women who frantically ran around cluelessly. Dust flew into the atmosphere as buildings collapsed onto the plaza from all sides. Screams filled the air, some long and some cut short as pieces of rubble crushed the people underneath. The place was like a battlefield.

A few years later, after Chang Heng recovered from his injuries, he was determined to solve the issue of earthquakes terrorising the citizens of his town. He remembered when the devastating earthquake struck, the sphere shaped jewellery that his father had just polished began to roll off the side of the table. He decided to plan a simple experiment to confirm his theory, which was that when an earthquake hit, the ground in the earthquake's direction would tremble. He tested this by making a design in which five wooden ramps were connected together in a star shape, leaving a gap in the middle where he would put a ball on. Whenever he used a wooden stick to hit the ground in the direction of one of the star shape's edges, the ball would roll down the corresponding ramp. This was a major breakthrough for Chang Heng. This experiment played an important role in the invention of the Chinese Seismometer. Chang Heng created a blueprint of the invention. Chang Heng told all of his friends about his breakthrough. They were all impressed and praised him for being so creative and smart. However, little he knew, things would escalate very quickly.

The next day, Chang Heng awoke to shuffling and thumping noises. He arose from his bamboo mattress and caught two shadowy figures escaping from his workstation, carrying a big object. He quickly threw his blankets aside, slid his feet into his flip flops and sprung up to chase the men. When he reached the doorstep, they had long gone. Devastated, Chang Heng walked back into his workstation and stared at his desk, which no longer had a big golden goblet sitting on it.

Meanwhile, the robbers were very proud of themselves.

"This artifact is very unique."

Engineer Long closely examined the prototype, then tapped on the object. The object produced a sharp sound that echoed inside its body.

"This thing is hollow. I wonder how this thing can detect earthquakes."

Banker Zhang stroked his beard as he theorised on how the seemingly useless object could possibly save the lives of many civilians. After a few minutes, he broke the silence.

"Maybe this invention is powered by magic and whenever an earthquake happens one of the balls will magically roll down."

"That is unlikely to be true, magic does not exist, Mr. Zhang", stated Long.

“Let’s take it to the emperor. Let’s not mess anything up in this contraption before it gets to him. Shall this work, we will be rich!”, exclaimed Zhang.

Chang Heng rummaged through his drawers and pulled out a beautiful and round ball . He looked at his blueprint and smirked.

“Get out of my palace and stop wasting my time!” shouted the Emperor as the two robbers, who had no idea what the object was, presented him with the golden vase-like object.

“I swear this will detect earthquakes! This can save millions of lives!” , Pleaded Long.

“Show me how this useless piece of metal can save my people.”, pressed the Emperor.

The two looked at each other cluelessly, then Zhang explained that it would only be activated when an earthquake was incoming.

“Let me test this object. I will use a wooden hammer to strike the floor to the left of this item. If this is what you say it is, in theory a ball will drop down from the left dragon’s mouth into the frog underneath.”, said the Emperor.

“Sure, you can do that.”, said Zhang as terror entered both the dishonest people’s hearts.

The emperor did exactly what he said, and the three waited together, anticipating a ball to fall down. One second passes. Another second passes. A third second passes.

After a minute of waiting, the Emperor had enough.

“This object is useless! Now you have no excuse but to get out!” demanded the Emperor.

The two obediently walked out of the palace.

“Whose invention is this? This is definitely not your invention. If it was, you definitely would have tested it beforehand.” came a voice from behind them.

“It is Chang Heng’s invention. Blame it on him, not us. He told us to present it to you for him.” said Zhang.

“Take him to me now,” said the Emperor.

Chang Heng sat before his desk, wondering what he could do, as all of his gold had been used up in his prototype. A knock came from his door, startling him. He opened the door and in front of him stood a man, around twenty centimetres taller than him.

“Yes? What do you want?” asked Chang Heng.

“The emperor demands that I take you to him.”, said the man as he escorted Chang Heng.

“Wait, let me get something very useful. I need it to make my invention work.”

“Fine, but I will need to check it first to make sure it is not a weapon.”

A few minutes later, the lavish and luxurious palace came into view as they walked up the red stairs. The man greeted the guards and explained that he was escorting Chang Heng to the emperor. The guards strode to the side and welcomed Chang Heng and the man in. Immediately, the emperor’s massive golden throne was visible and he prepared a small tea table to put the prototype on. Chang Heng walked up to the table and kneeled.

“My majesty, what can I do for you?” questioned Chang Heng.

“Two people showed me this prototype of yours, claiming you sent them. Is this true?”

“No, it is not. I awoke to two people running out of my workplace carrying the prototype that I was working on. I do not know them, so they are thieves.”, answered Chang Heng. “I can prove that it can detect earthquakes. It was just missing this important part, the rolling ball.”

Chang Heng quickly slotted the ball into the prototype. He asked for a wooden hammer to test his invention.

“Even if the shocks are minor, the ball in the middle will still react. The shocks will cause the ball in the middle to vibrate, and fall into the corresponding ramp. At the end of the ramp, the ball will hit a wooden lever, causing the ball in the dragon’s mouth to fall down.”

He demonstrated the procedure and sure enough, the golden ball in the mouth of the dragon fell into the mouth of the frog.

“Amazing! This invention is not only smart but useful, I thought that it would be a failure! You have impressed me, Chang Heng. I will make sure to use it to save my people.” praised the Emperor. Chang Heng named the invention the Seismometer, and the Emperor ordered for a room to be built just for the seismometer.

Many years later, the ball in the northwest dragon’s mouth dropped into the frog below it’s mouth. The guard informed the Emperor, and the Emperor evacuated all the citizens southeastward, and just after all of the citizens moved to the safer place, an earthquake strong enough to topple a mountain hit the city. Chang Heng was deemed a hero and the protector of millions of lives.

Believe

German Swiss International School, Henderson, Liana – 12

"Knock knock, knock knock."

I woke up to a sound that was familiar to me—that same knock rhythm. "Wake up, darling, it's time for breakfast." The housemaid spoke calmly. "I made your favorite meal. Golden pancakes with extra syrup". "Thanks, Gloria!" I said with a soft groan. Gloria was one of 9 maids that lived in our house. She was my absolute favorite. She comes from a family of 6, parents, 2 older brothers, and a younger sister. Yet Gloria is the only person who loved me like a true daughter.

She went downstairs just to hear another argument happening. "YOU ARE JUST A DISGRACE TO THIS FAMILY AND YOUR LEGACY, YOU KNOW THAT?", "DOES IT LOOK LIKE I CARE AT ALL? I WOULD RATHER DIE THAN LIVE IN AN UNHAPPY AND CONTROLLING HOUSE LIKE THIS! MY FRIENDS' MOTHERS' ARE ALWAYS SO UNDERSTANDING! WHY CAN'T YOU BE LIKE THEM MORE? YOU ARE SUCH A CONTROL FREAK!" my younger sister screamed. "Then go." My mom said this while storming out of the dining hall. I saw my sister with tears rolling down her face. "Are you okay—", "JUST BE QUIET" she yelled as she ran upstairs. Moments later, I heard a loud bang coming from the direction of her room. Mom came back to the room and sat just on the opposite side of me. "Where is she?", "I think she is upstairs—", "How are you, honey?" My mother asked. I could smell her cold, alcoholic breath wash on me, I cringed, but she didn't seem to notice. "I'm fine. I am working on a device that can differentiate the difference between North, South, East, and West. Cool right?". "What is wrong with you? You are just another mistake. Why would you be wasting your time on miscellaneous stuff like that? Focus on your studies!". Claire knew that her mom wouldn't understand.

I woke up the next morning, but there was no sign of Gloria. I checked my bedside clock at 11:37 a.m. "WHAT? Why didn't Gloria wake me up?"

I walked downstairs, with my tangled hair pushed up against her face, and saw her whole family sitting at the dining table. Both of my parents were sitting next to each other: my two older brothers, Liam and Jacob, and my younger sister, Sophia. Judging from the way Sophia eyed me, I knew something was wrong.

"Claire, sit down. We all need to talk to you," Mom spoke up "Claire Carrington, I give you no right to speak to this family ever again."

"Excuse me, what?" she replied quickly. "I was told that you said that you wished that you were dead, and you were by yourself rather than here."

I was astounded.

I had told Gloria the night before that, but I thought she would never tell my mother. And right there, the realization hit me harder than a heavy boulder. I looked to my side to see Gloria with the most downhearted and forlorn face. Gloria, the person she thought could be trusted, had ratted her out. "This is what I would like for you: go straight to your room, and I never want to see you or your designs ever again. You had better not show me your face for as long as I am alive. And don't expect me to talk to or say anything to you. Claire, I am genuinely disappointed in you.

I hope you will reflect on your bad behavior and change. For now, go away." "But—", "Go!". I rushed to my room, just to bury her face in her blankets.

I sobbed, big, fat, ugly tears streaming down my cheeks. In the past ten minutes, she got yelled at, betrayed by my favorite maid, and 'disowned' by my whole family. *Knock, knock, knock*. "Hey, darling.", "Save it. I don't want to speak to you right now.". "No, please just listen to me.", "No, you hurt me, Gloria. I thought I could trust you, but it turns out I can't. If I tell you how I feel right now about you and my mother, what's to say that you won't tell her again?". "Ok, I understand, but please talk to me; one day, I will always be here.". Hearing that pierced my heart like a blade had plunged into it. I knew Gloria was sorry, but I couldn't forgive her so easily, not after what she had told my mother. I turned to face my window, my back to my door, just to see a newspaper propped up on my windowsill. I got up from her bed to see the headline bearing the words, "NEW DEVICE DETECTED, WAREHOUSE LOCATED IN GUANGZHOU, TELLS YOU WHICH DIRECTIONS ARE CORRECT." I smirked; she just had an idea.

On the Trail

German Swiss International School, Ho, Davia – 11

Wolves with menacing red eyes were hot on my trail as I tore through the woods down an abandoned path, and it was all because I accidentally stepped into their territory. I was quite sure that wolves couldn't climb trees, so I scrambled up the trunk as quickly as I could.

I realised my mistake as the leader of the pack followed me up, claws scrabbling to get a foothold on the smooth wood. Just as its massive, gleaming jaws got a hold of my pants, dragging me down to certain doom – an arrow sprouted out of its back. It staggered for a grip but ended up falling, staining the leaves scarlet with blood.

I looked around for my saviour and found her crouched in the shadows in a nearby tree, bow and arrow poised. I started to wave, but she motioned for me to stay silent, and with uncanny accuracy, she started to pick the wolves off one by one, and the forest was rapidly filled with howls of agony. One of the remaining members of the pack realised that something was wrong and scampered off, its tail under its legs. The hunter dropped gracefully to the floor and signalled to me that it was safe to come down. Awkwardly, I tried to copy her agility and crashed onto the forest floor, tangled with undergrowth.

As my thumping heart calmed down, I sat in a daze on the ground and listened to the peace of the forest – the rustle of leaves, mice foraging for food... The hunter watched, letting out a chuckle, snapping me out of my thoughts, and I quickly scrambled to my feet.

"You're probably wondering why I came to your rescue, aren't you? I heard some screams, and I decided to investigate. By the way, I'm Artemis."

"I'm Tiana. Thanks for saving my life earlier! Without you, I would probably have been eaten by the wolves."

I stood, and she led me towards a trail. I recognized the path home, and thanking Artemis for her help again, I hurried home. I wanted to record the events of today, but I had run out of wood writing tablets, so I had to find another material to write on. As I patted myself down before starting, checking my pockets for any sort of material that could be used as a writing tablet, I found a piece of thin bark, most likely from the tree that I was on. I tested it out, and to my surprise, it worked very well—even better than wood tablets!

As I went to sleep that night, I couldn't stop thinking about bark because it had given me an idea: to make a thin sheet of wood, which I would call paper. I decided to stay awake, thinking of ideas, but as soon as my head hit the pillow, I was snoring away. However, as I woke up the next morning, a brilliant idea struck me: I would go to the forest and gather different types of wood and see which one worked best for my project.

Rimefall, the village I lived in, was very environmentally friendly, and you could only take plants and wood from the forest if you had a life-threatening reason or a plant collecting licence. My excuse would be that my grandma was very ill, and having heard of the legendary healing powers of Angel's Beech, I wanted to collect some of it as medicine. Armed with my story, I set off for the woods.

I crashed through the ferns, hacking stray plants out of my way with my machete. Luckily, I had brought my wicker basket, so I could put all my samples in it. I took pieces from every tree I saw, and I had taught myself the names of plants, so I knew the bark of pine and spruce trees was the most durable.

With my discovery, I rushed home. I carefully sliced out a wafer-thin sheet of wood from both barks. With my quill and ink, I scrawled the first few words. However, as I was writing, I noticed that the ink was bleeding, causing the wood paper to become nothing more than a black smudge.

I stopped writing and carefully peeled the sheet away from my tabletop. I sliced another two pieces from the bark and layered them on top of my original sheet. Then, I laid it flat on my workspace and used a board of wood to add pressure to the layers, binding them together and creating a sturdier piece of paper.

I tried it again, with less ink and lighter writing. Breath bated, I flipped the paper, and to my dismay, the ink started blossoming through the layers, dyeing my fingers. I turned to my desk, pondering how to create the perfect paper. With a jolt, I realised that I had the best resource – the Wise Owl owed me, and he was rumoured to hold all the knowledge in the universe. If anyone could help me, it would be him!

I ran out the door, heading for the Twilight Elm, the owl's residence. When I arrived, the owl was looking at me from his perch, and he said,

"Tiana, you come seeking knowledge of papermaking. Come forward."

He proceeded to swoop down from his branch and he whispered in my ear,

"Seek the birch."

It clicked instantly. Birch would be the solution I needed! I hurried to the woods and chopped some of the bark off, then dashed home and started cutting it into thin sheets. I repeated the process from before, and I prayed that this would be the answer. Anxiously, I turned the paper over, my eyes scanning the sheet for any blossoming ink. 10 seconds ticked by, and I didn't see anything appearing. A minute passed, and nothing happened. The birch was the solution!

I jumped up from my seat and danced around my workroom, ecstatic that I had finally created paper and there could be so many uses for it, like journal entries, birthday cards, wrapping presents, etc. I went to sleep that night thinking of ideas that could help me advertise paper. As I woke up the next morning, I thought of an amazing idea. Since my mother was the CEO of a carving company, maybe I could convince her to change her chain.

I was prepared to bribe my mother with a basket of goodies if it came to that. I knocked on the cottage door with my basket at the ready and my most innocent face.

"Tom – how many times have I told you to stop bothering me?" The reply came from inside. Stomps from inside the cottage grew louder, and the door swung open.

"Oh, it's you! I thought it was Tom, the annoying baker, who kept knocking on my door. Come in!" I followed her into her living room, where I set down the basket.

"So, Mom, how are you?"

"Cut straight to the point, darling."

"Ineedyoutodomeafavour!" I blurted.

I waited for her to tell me that I should find a solution myself, but instead, she looked intrigued.

"Okay, what is it?"

"I need you to change your chain to make paper – it's like wood tablets, but lighter and thinner!"

"Hmmm, I'll think about it. Now leave. I need to bake."

I returned home, waiting for a response from my mother at the rainbow fountain. She promised she would leave a message for me. As I drifted in and out of sleep that night, a ping from the fountain echoed. I scrambled out of bed and peered into the fountain. Abruptly, a floating halo appeared in front of me, and I read the message engraved on it.

Dear Tiana,
I will change my chain to paper.
Love,
Mom.

With the support of my mom, I set off to turn my invention into a small business. Using my mom's connections, we shared the knowledge of papermaking. The popularity of my paper grew, and soon, not only my village knew of it, but nearby villages did too!

The demand for my paper grew steadily, and nearby artisans and merchants recognized the invention as a good opportunity to branch out their sales. Soon, my invention found its way to distant lands, places I'd never seen before. The abandoned forest trail that I fled down that fateful day became a well-known route to and from Rimefall for transporting paper.

Only months later, my business was flourishing. However, that unforgettable encounter with Artemis, the amazing archer, was engraved in my mind. We remained close friends, and we started a collaboration, with me writing and her doing the illustrations. We were an amazing team, and people travelled far and wide to purchase our books.

To this day, I still take walks through the very same trail where I found my miraculous paper. From exactly 2 years ago, when I was an innocent girl running from wolves, to now, where I run my own business.

Tick Tock

German Swiss International School, Huang, Abigail – 11

A sharp, hard blow went across Liu Xing's face. "How many times do I have to tell you," His older brother, Cu Xing, yelled, "Don't take my things from my room, stupid!" Liu Xing took a step back away from his brother, and a silent tear trickled down Liu Xing's cheek. He opened his mouth to speak, but no words came out. He turned away from his brother, clutching his stinging cheek, folding his other arm around himself. It was his only comfort, having no family left to stand up for him. "I'm sorry," he whispered. Cu Xing's face softened slightly, just for a blink of a second, and then returned to his usual, cold scowl. He gave an exasperated huff and stormed off, leaving Liu Xing standing alone in the family room.

Liu Xing

Tick Tock, Tick Tock. The old, ancient grandfather clock standing in the corner of the room ticked as the seconds went by. It seemed as though it was one of the only places in the house that retained colour. Liu Xing's eyes scanned the walls around him. They focused on a specific faded patch in the centre of the wall closest to him; *Polaroids*, Liu Xing thought to himself as he slowly walked to the wall, his arms still wrapped around from the confrontation before, his eyes moving over every single picture, until it landed and fixated on one.

Before he could stop them, his arms reached out and plucked it off the wall. On the tiny square, was him, Cu Xing, and his parents, standing in front of a large banner saying, *Winner of the young inventors: 3D Printed Bones*. He turned the polaroid over, revealing the scribble written on the back: "*Liu Xing wins first prize at school fair 2031!*" Suddenly, completely out of nowhere, there was a small light in him, a light that somehow managed to assure him that he could prove his brother wrong, making him sorry for the way he'd treated him. Something told him to stand up for himself, told him that it was time to show his brother once and for all.

13 years later...

Liu Xing scribbled furiously at his paper, time was running out. He groaned in frustration, crumpling the solitary sheet in his hands. Sitting up, he pushed his desk away from him, pacing around his small, plain room, his sweaty hands still gripping the paper as tight as he could. Making his way back to his desk, tossing the balled up piece of paper into the waste bin. Liu Xing wiped the sweat from his brow, frustrated yet again. Sighing, he grabbed another piece of paper and continued scrawling ideas onto it.

More of the same was to come and after numerous failed attempts, Liu Xing's hope of proving himself to his brother and the rest of his family was starting to drift away, like a cloud in the sky. *I should really just give up*, Liu Xing thought to himself. *What's the point of even trying? I'm not going to succeed. Why did I even think I could do it?* At that very moment, the light inside him seemed to reawaken. *Don't give up*, it urged, *You know you can do it, I know you can do it. Don't give up, Liu Xing, keep going.* Liu Xing closed his eyes, his mind flashing back to the day he won the competition. Should he just give up, before it was too late to turn back? His mind felt as though it was having a battle against the light, and in the end, the light won.

Liu Xing woke up to the sound of crickets chirping outside and a beaming ray of lights shone through the window pane, and reluctantly opened his sleepy eyes. He lay sprawled across his desk, his right cheek pressed against its smooth surface, and through all his tossing and turning that night, all his books, pens and folders were sprawled on the floor of his tiny workspace. As his vision cleared, he bent down and picked up his pen, and clumsily groped around the floor for his draft paper. He continued to work on his plan, furiously crossing things out and making additions, when finally, he was satisfied and confident with his work.

The creation of 3D printed bones was no easy feat, as there were many different things to look into. However, Liu Xing knew that through his hard work and restless nights, his creation could help millions of people around the world, poor or rich, and not just in China. Through his hard work, he could make the world a better place. Doctors would have a higher chance of saving patients, and the patients themselves would have a reassurance for a speedy recovery. It would save money for the doctors and patients, as they could just receive a bone to replace the broken one. This was what Liu Xing wanted. To help people. And with this creation, he could accomplish his dream as well.

He let out a long breath his body never realised it had been holding in, nodding to himself. He had overcome one hurdle, making him one step closer to his goal. This frightened him, for he was inching closer but would not know how many more challenges he would face.

Cu Xing

“Why does he always take my things?” Cu Xing fumed, retreating to the safety of his room, a place where he could lash out, a place where he could just erupt, brood and eventually recover, without him hurting anyone. All the pent-up frustration and rage he’d been holding all these years had taken over him and made him lose control over himself, resulting in him hurting his own brother. Cu Xing shook his head at himself in disappointment, and anger. He shouldn’t feel any remorse for what he had done, as Liu Xing definitely did **not** deserve any of it. Ever since Liu Xing was born, Cu Xing had become the invisible child. Before, Cu Xing had been the favourite of every single person in the family, bright and cheery. Everyone loved him. In Cu Xing’s point of view, all the affection and warmth he had felt from his family had disappeared, vanished completely, making him turn into a cold, hollow, emotionless shell. *You’re no good, Cu Xing.* rang his mother’s voice in his head, *You’re no good.*

The Lost Compass

German Swiss International School, Jain, Anya – 12

When the lunch bell rang at 12:30 I raced to the cafeteria to grab a table. Then, I went to the counter to select my lunch. Brooklyn joined me silently in the lunch line and started to look at the menu. Brooklyn, an eleven year old girl with jet black hair, bangs that were perfectly cut without a single hair out of place and eyes that were as dark as darkness itself. She was a perfect child, she was smart and could take care of herself at a young age. It was hard to believe that she only lived with her dad. Brooklyn was very different from me. I on the other hand had wavy dark brown hair always tied up, hazel eyes that could never focus on what the teacher was teaching, and all I could think about during lessons was lunch. But then again Brooklyn and I, we went together like butter and bread.

"I'm hungry," I whined. The lunch crew wasn't there and none of the teachers were to be seen.

"You have to be patient," Brooklyn said in her soft and gentle voice.

After five minutes I couldn't take it anymore, so I did what any regular person would do when they were hungry.

I jumped over the counter and kicked open the door to the kitchen. I smelled something burning so I walked over to the stove and saw that someone had left it on. As I was about to turn the stove off something shiny caught my eye on the other side of the countertop. I walked over and couldn't believe my eyes. It was a necklace made of gold with a circular pendant that had diamonds, crystals and a blue sapphire right in the centre of it, glinting in the light of the flame. As I picked it up, it started to glow bright blue. Then Poof! I was suddenly next to Brooklyn at the front of the cafeteria line.

"Gah!" Brooklyn exclaimed, staring at me with wide eyes, her mouth hanging open. "How did you do that?"

"I don't know," I said, looking at the necklace in confusion. "One second I was in the kitchen and the next second I was standing right next to you."

"What's that in your hand?" she questioned.

"Oh, It's a necklace I found in the kitchen." I replied

She examined it, "Viola! That's not a necklace," Brooklyn said, panting, like she was out of breath. "That's The Lost Compass!"

"The Lost Compass?" I asked, "What's that?"

"I'll tell you when we get to my house. Come on Viola.."

She dragged me towards her house which was just up the hill.

Brooklyn's house was three stories tall and very modern. We took off our shoes as we walked inside her enormous living room with chandeliers hanging from the ceiling and a grey-white couch that formed a 'U' shape. We sat down on the couch and Brooklyn began to tell the tale of the Compass.

"Once upon a time in a land far away there was a compass. The compass possessed the power to guide the brave on their adventure to save their kind. Every year the devils choose a city on the earth and trap humans in their land for power. The compass guides the saviours and helps them rescue the prisoners and take them back home. But if you manage to fail you will get a punishment decided by the compass."

"What's the punishment?" I asked.

"I don't know." Brooklyn answered "But what we're going to do right now is follow where that compass points to take. The lost compass *always* comes to you for a reason."

"I guess that means we're going on an adventure."

Brooklyn opened the compass and it was pointing to go north. Straight ahead.

We walked on the road for twenty minutes, but stopped to a halt when there was a forest up ahead.

"Does the compass still say to go straight?" Brooklyn asked.

"Yup!" I said as I put the compass in my pocket. We entered the forest, and the main road seemed to disappear now that it was dark. There were tall trees surrounding us on all sides and they were blocking the sunlight from entering. That's when I saw it. It was light up ahead, and Brooklyn seemed to notice it as well. We rushed forward, and we saw that it was a portal. A portal, gleaming, magical, in the middle of the forest? How weird.

"Brook, do you think we should go through?"

"Yes," she simply replied.

We stepped into the portal hand in hand and we were immediately surrounded by magic! The streets were made of rainbow tiles and the houses were made of colourful bricks. Roaming the streets were unicorns, fairies and other beautiful creatures. Now the compass was pointing for us to go east. I nudged Brooklyn to go right. We walked and walked until we were stopped by a tiny elf.

"Where do you think you're going?" the elf interrogated.

Brooklyn gave me a look not to tell him about the compass. My brain was swarming with excuses that I used to get out of lessons.

"We have come here from human land on your master's orders." I blurted out, not sure where I got that excuse from.

"Oh, well, in that case, welcome to our land!" the elf said merrily.

After the tiny elf left, the compass suddenly came to life.

"Go west!" It said in a squeaky voice.

Both Brooklyn and I let out a startled yelp and eyed the compass suspiciously. We both glanced at each other and turned left.

We entered a cave, probably filled with bats and other disgusting insects.

"Um, Viola ca—can you check the co—compass to see if we are going the right way?" Brooklyn asked, stuttering.

"Of course you are going the right way!" the compass said angrily. "Do you not trust me?"

"Er...Brook, why don't we just follow what the compass says." I said, worried that it would leave us in this cave. As we walked we grew tired and started to slow down. We kept walking until we found an opening for the cave. I didn't even realise that I was staring at my feet standing right outside the mouth of the cave until Brooklyn nudged me and said:

"Look up, Viola."

I looked up and I saw darkness everywhere. All the streets were filled with rubbish, the ground was broken and black, there was a sea of lava instead of a sea filled with water and there were volcanoes everywhere you looked. The houses, or what was left of them were burned and destroyed. No *wonder* no one lived here. There was not a single creature in sight.

"This place gives me the creeps," I said

"I know right," the compass whispered. "But you can't worry about how disgusting this place is. Right now you are on a mission to save your parents and everyone else in Hong Kong."

"Are we there yet?" I whined.

"No, just keep going straight," the compass said. "Just five more minutes.

"I guess that should be fine," Brooklyn said.

We crossed a rickety bridge made of burning wood that hung over the sea of lava. I looked down the whole way watching my every step.

"Okay," The compass said "We're here."

As I looked toward the direction of the compass I couldn't help but gasp. Right before my eyes were millions of humans, trapped inside a massive clear dome. There were vampires, trolls and ogres guarding the dome covering as much of it as possible. But right in the middle there was a golden lock shaped exactly like the compass.

"Okay, here's the plan," the compass said, seriously. "Viola, you are going to distract the devils to make them chase you as far away from the lock as possible while Brooklyn runs to the lock and places me inside it and the barrier will open and everyone will be free."

"We go on three," it commanded "One, two, THREE!"

I ran straight ahead and was able to get the attention of all the devils and lure them out of their defensive positions around the barrier. They were chasing after me and were hot on my heels. The vampire was the closest one behind me. He managed to grab my jacket but that didn't slow me down. I pulled my arms free from the sleeves and ran the fastest I had ever run. I felt a low hum coming from the bottom of my stomach. I was wondering if Brooklyn had put the compass in the lock. Then the Vampire reached out to grab me again but suddenly I teleported right to where Brooklyn was standing with the rest of Hong Kong. I grabbed her hand and she grabbed a stranger's arm from the crowd. I thought of home. Suddenly, we were all back in the city of Hong Kong.

The Healing Touch

German Swiss International School, Khan, Owais – 12

In the bustling city of Shanghai, lived a middle-aged woman named Xiao Hua. Xiao Hua was well-known for her extraordinary talent in creating dresses and stitching together cozy toys that brought ample comfort and joy to children. Little did she know that her destiny held a profound purpose -- a purpose that would have a tremendous impact on the human world and the field of medicine.

Almost a few thousand years ago, Shanghai was plagued by an enigmatic ailment – an agonizing back pain that swept through the entire city, afflicting people of all ages and resulting in the deaths of many. This mysterious epidemic spread like wildfire, causing unbearable suffering and leading to the unfortunate deaths of many. The excruciating torment permeated beyond Shanghai's borders, reaching across the vast expanse of China.

One fateful and chilly November, the birds chirped merrily and the trees swayed vigorously from side to side, Xiao Hua patiently sat on a comfortable and warm couch beside her mother. Her mother used her rough, yet wrinkly and frail hands to make a fireplace with the old pieces of wood in front of her home to keep the house warm. Xiao Hua concentrated on a new design of a blanket that she was creating to make themselves warm at home. Within moments, there was a loud knock at the door. At first, Xiao Hua and her mom were skeptical about the knock which they both heard. As a result, they decided to choose the safe option until they heard a familiar voice at the door.

“Hey, it’s just me, it’s Uncle Zhen,” said the shaky and soft voice.

Both of them breathe a huge sigh of relief. Xiao Hua hurriedly ran towards the door to allow her Uncle to enter the house.

Her uncle was a jovial shepherd and had been someone who had nourished and cherished her ever since Xiao Hua’s dad had passed away. Although Xiao Hua had only been 4 years old when her father died, she remembered the crying of her uncle. Uncle Zhen was always a funny and happy man, but the horrific look on his face was something Xiao Hua would never have forgotten. From then onwards, her uncle had always tended and took care of her in absence of her mother. Uncle Zhen and her niece both nurtured a very warm and healthy relationship throughout their lives. Uncle Zhen always provided her with rice cakes (年糕) whenever they would meet.

“Ah my darling, how have you been doing? Also, I brought along your favorite rice cake” spoke uncle Zhen.

“I’ve been doing well. Thank you Uncle for the cake. Please have a seat,” replied Xiao Hua

However, something caught her eye when Uncle Zhen began walking towards the living room. There were patches of red spots on his pants which raised some concerns in Xiao Hua’s head. That’s when she realized that his knee was oozing with crimson blood. Xiao Hua shrieked when she first saw the blood, unable to believe her eyes.

“Did someone attack him?” she thought to herself, her mind clouding with anxious doubt and worry. “Why was there blood on his pants?”

Uncle Zhen turned around to look at Xiao Hua. Her mother quickly ran toward her daughter to see what occurred.

“What’s that on your pants?” asked Xiao Hua.

“That is something I have to share with you,” he replied enigmatically. “This morning, as I guided my cattle back to my farm, I twisted my knee and was in immense pain,” he explained joyfully. Xiao Hua felt confused — how could he be so happy when injured?

Uncle Zhen continued his tale. “After a lot of walking, I felt like giving up and I fell to the ground, only to land on a pile of thorns,” ranted Uncle Zhen. From the sound of that, Xiao Hua was disgusted and felt bad for her poor uncle.

Uncle Zhen read the frown lines on Xiao Hua’s face, smiling in response.

“But it’s not finished! After half an hour of resting on a boulder, my pain vanished and I was able to easily walk properly,” he declared. “Look at me, fit as a fiddle!”

At this moment, Xiao Hua froze and pondered. If the thorns pricked and healed him in the knee joints, then I could use needles and prick them in the spine of the people suffering from back pain, can’t I? It seems as though pain can kill pain! Xiao Hua would begin a new practice that requires needles to remove back pain from Shanghai. Her technique spread like wildfire throughout the nation, and with time many people in China were free of agony thanks to Xiao Hua’s ingenious practice.

Intrigued by the healing powers of the thorns, Xiao Hua embarked on a journey to learn about the medical powers of sharp objects such as needles and thorns. She spent countless hours poring over ancient texts, delving into the depths of medical knowledge, and seeking a practice that could alleviate any kind of pain, particularly back pain which plagued her city. Months turned into a relentless quest, but Xiao Hua remained undeterred, her determination unyielding.

It was during the Mid–Autumn Festival that Xiao Hua’s life took a quick turn. Although the citizens of Shanghai celebrated the festival by meeting up with family members, Xiao Hua celebrated it by stumbling upon a breakthrough. After sifting through stacks of books, she finally discovered a treatise that held the knowledge she had been seeking. From dawn till dusk, Xiao Hua meticulously studied the fragile pages, gaining wisdom about needles and how they could alleviate pain throughout the body. However, she also learned that this practice would require weeks of dedicated treatment to achieve true healing.

Xiao Hua was determined to resolve the epidemic that plagued Shanghai. Armed with newfound knowledge and unwavering determination, she spent hours trying to find the elderly residents of the city, offering them a glimmer of hope amidst their suffering. One such resident was an elderly man named Ming Yao, who agreed to place his trust in Xiao Hua’s hands and her revolutionary technique.

Xiao Hua was forced to be careful where she inserted the needles. With attentive care, Xiao Hua laid her first patient, Ming Yao down and began her first test run on her new invention. On the first day, Xiao Hua painstakingly inserted needles into the nerves her patient’s body. She continued and repeated this procedure for the next few weeks until two weeks later when Ming Yao’s pain was eradicated from his back and he managed to return to his healthier and younger version of himself.

After the first successful trial run, the news of Xiao Hua’s miraculous healing abilities quickly spread throughout Shanghai. Her reputation grew, and she soon found herself inundated with patients seeking her unique treatment. Over time, Xiao Hua’s fame transcended China’s borders. Her name became synonymous with the art of healing, and she embarked on extensive travels, sharing her knowledge and expertise, leaving behind a trail of hope wherever she went.

Xiao Hua's confidence increased with each healing that went well, and she kept improving her methods. She added massage, and herbs to her practice as she learned more about ancient medicine. She rose to importance in the medical community as a result of her unmatched comprehension of the human body and her skill in diagnosing and treating a broad variety of illnesses.

Over the years, Xiao Hua's name became well-known across the whole world. Her name resonated within the hearts of scholars, doctors, physicians, and medics. Time after time, people from foreign countries would spend time with her understanding her knowledge about needles and medicine. Citizens would come and pay her respect for the impact she has on the world and community around her. Her story soon became an enduring source of inspiration for future generations.

Even after her passing, Xiao Hua's influence continued to shape the world of medicine. Scholars and practitioners built upon her work, further refining the techniques she had developed. As time passed, the price became more efficient and less time-consuming.

As we look back at Xiao Hua's journey, we are reminded that within each of us lies the power to make a difference. It is through acts of immense dedication that we can leave our mark on the world, just as Xiao Hua did with her healing touch. Her story serves as a guiding light, inspiring us to have a positive impact on those around us. Furthermore, Xiao Hua's journey serves as a reminder that even small gestures can change the shape of our world. For instance, the prick of a needle can ignite a spark of hope, forever transforming lives and shaping the course of humanity. Her dedication and her relentless pursuit of knowledge left a permanent mark on the world.

Six Feet Under

German Swiss International School, Kohli, Ishika – 14

Do you see that house?

No, no, the one at the end of the street— with moats of rice fields and corn fields and an engulfing cloud of misery?

You do? Well, it wasn't always like that.

No, they were a normal family— sort of.

Yes, get into bed and I'll tell you.

Everyone thought they were happy. Why wouldn't they be happy? They had crops galore, a spacious hut and they were a nice couple— arranged, sure, but they were childhood friends who had grown to love each other. So what made them droop like dead tulips, what ashened their faces, what tormented them to no end?

The house. The house was empty— not literally, there was tasteful furniture in every room— but there were no memories, no love. It was quiet, stiff, unnatural. No crying, no messes, no unconditional love for one, or two or five sticky-handed kids. Just mud walls contracting in on them, concentrating the sorrow into a dismal mist that they carried everywhere.

So they prayed.

And prayed.

They prayed for a child to call their own, a child that would fill up the space and push out the walls and fill that gaping, painful void in their chest. And after four long years, God decided to bless them with a beautiful, perfect child.

Under the watchful eye of the moon and a thousand winking stars, God left his blessing. With a smile brighter than every star combined, he left the couple to notice the piercing cries slicing through their mist. And soon enough, every fibre of their being jolted awake, and ran to the blessing's high cries, wanting nothing but to bring the child comfort. They clutched her tight against the whipping needles of cruel winter, warming her up with the sun that now resided within them.

月光— moonlight— was there a more fitting name for this miniscule wisp who held such unfathomable strength? The little cherub who's eyes shone with a fiery hunger that made you want to look away— but you just couldn't. Everyone's hands trembled when carrying such an innocent, captivating baby, somehow wiser than the oldest elder in the village. Now, instead of the mist, the parents carried with them the sweet scent of milk and somehow the aroma of 月光. She was like a promise, so very delicate and desperate to be held.

So the years swept by in a swirl of glee, the house filling up to the brim with memories and pictures and stories. 月光 got increasingly alluring every year— with skin that shone with the light she had residing deep within, and her lips the perfect crimson like drops of blood on fine china— but what really stood out was her hair.

Her hair was what turned every head, what drew eyes to her. Full, and thick, but somehow unusual— but no one could put their finger on it. It flowed and shimmered and winked— mischievous and playful, glinting under the sun but shining like a river under the moon. It looked like it was spun from moonlight— her hair soon became the talk of the town.

Now, on her sixth birthday, her doting mother finally decided that she was going to cut her hair. Before, she had been too frightened and peculiarly attached to it— not daring to cut so much as a strand off. But it was getting out of hand now, and just had to be done. With slow, meticulous snips, 月光's hair fell in dreamy, shining wisps to the floor. After it had been shortened to a length where she wouldn't have to cut it for a while, her mother started to

sweep up the glimmering strands. Picking some up, she stopped. It was like... string? Fine, glimmering thread, nothing like she had ever seen before. Gently handling it with extreme care, she went to her sewing machine.

"What is that made from? It's absolutely gorgeous!"

"I've never seen anything like it! I must ask her where she got it from!"

"I knew their cotton crops were one of the best in china but- wow!"

"I'm so jealous- I need one!"

Hordes of villagers urgently inquired about 月光's new outfit, but none received a good answer. The mother did provide them with the name of this material, 丝绸- Silk. It was like a smooth river, mischievously toying with light and drawing all attention to it. Everyone wanted one- it was the only thing on their mind

But seldom did anyone actually obtain a shirt or a dress- 5 years later, only 10 pieces of clothing were created. This helped the family with their income and way of living but also started to change their attitude. Every yuan they got from an eager consumer, every vying look shot at their outfit, fed the vine of greed curling and twisting around their mind, tightening its claws further and deeper. They started obsessing over 月光's hair, combining it and oiling it aggressively every day. Slowly but surely, it went too far.

Going far and wide, searching for herbal serums and medicines to grow hair, collecting stories and myths, the couple tried everything to make 月光's hair stronger, more plentiful and shinier. But it just wasn't enough. Every foul medicine she ate, every oil massage, every mythical practice, angered them. They beat her, screamed at her, and saddened her to no avail. She started to droop, her worth leaking from her body with every harsh word, her character battered and shied away. Her personality went from a fun-loving charismatic little girl to a subdued one- shying away from every word. Her glow had faded, she no longer was a doppelganger to the moon. Instead, she took on a greyish hue, the twinkle gone from her eyes and the light snatched from her. Bruises lined her forehead like painful reminders of how valueless she was, bloody scabs everywhere like eyes on a potato. The love that the couple had craved to feel was replaced with a forever hunger for more, more, more, and 月光 just couldn't.

What she couldn't realise, was that it just wasn't her fault- any of it.

Yes, she just kept beating herself up about it because she wanted to make her parents happy.

What? Oh, of course I wouldn't! I love you so much, it physically hurts.

Let me continue now, don't ask stupid questions.

She was cracking. All life, joy, everything, was escaping from those little cracks, turning her into a black hole. Her face thinned, her eyes protruding, making people wince instead of the old envy. Her green veins were apparent, her ribs prominent. She started spacing out, adopting a permanent look of woe, and her bruises were the only colour she had left. When her ringing screams rang out every night, wafting through the walls, the other parents sat in silence, covering the ears of their little ones. Her cries were melodic and melancholy, twisting something deep inside whoever heard them, but what could they do?

It just got worse.

Everyone saw her slip. Everyone saw it- even God. And as soon as God did- a raging fury took him over. He gave the couple what they had wished for, and this is what they were doing with his blessing? He couldn't just watch as they exploited and abused her, so he swept in and took her away.

He swept in and took her away one day, and all there was left was this little larvae everywhere in the town. Noone knew where it came from- just that it was there. And after a month, they knew exactly what had happened.

Silkworms.

The town, was absolutely filled to the brim with

Silkworms.

She loved the colour green, you know.

She sat down in the garden— before everything had happened— gazing into the trees, feeling the grass under her fingers.

Her favourite spot was this ancient drooping tree, blanketed in bright green moss, leaves like little swooshing chains around you. She could just sit there for hours and hours.

I used to watch her, at the end, with her bald head, so delicate and bruised, and— and just so bare, as she lost herself in the world of crickets and lizards.

She didn't deserve that—you know?

She was the kindest soul I ever knew.

We sat there together, all the time.

We sat there together all the time, but then one day, she was

Six

Feet

Under.

The New Legends of Acupuncture in Hong Kong

German Swiss International School, Lin, Krystal – 13

Streaks of golden, gleaming, glittering sunlight glistened through the crevices of the concrete jungle of Hong Kong, flickering on Dr Lee's hands as he reached out to open the front door of his tiny acupuncture clinic. Dr Lee started his busy day by meticulously sterilising his workspace for his dear patients and closely examining the simple paraphernalia of his surgeries.

"Zou san! Dr Lee, sik jor fahn mei?" a voice rang in the clinic as the melodic bell sang; "zou san" was the Cantonese phrase for "good morning", while "sik jor fahn mei" directly translates to "have you eaten yet" and was commonly used as a greeting between Hong Kong residents.

"Oh Andy Chan, good morning to you too!" Dr Lee replied with his head down, delicately scrubbing the tables and chairs of his office clean, "Why did you come to visit so early today?"

Mr Chan sat down on a sparkling stool, stretched his back and wriggled his neck. He hesitated for a moment and said, "My dear friend, I've wanted to try your acupuncture for so long. I'm pretty sure you can help me with this. My body has been aching lately."

Dr Lee had met lots of patients having similar pains as Mr Chan did and knew exactly what to do. He casually waved to signal Mr Chan to lie on his stomach on the massage bed while he carried his set of apparatus to the side of it.

Dr Lee briefly cleaned the spots on Mr Chan where he was going to perform acupuncture and just as he was about to put a needle in, a panicked shriek of "WAIT!" echoed through the entire street.

"Whoa, whoa, whoa! That needle is huge! You sure I won't die from it?" Mr Chan shivered as he clutched onto the covers of the bed.

Dr Lee smiled, putting a hand on Mr Chan's shoulder, and gently answered, "It is alright, Andy. You know my whole family has been doing this for a living since my great-great-grandfather's generation. It is a major part of the ancient traditional Chinese medical practices, that originated about three thousand years ago; it is merely pressing needles into 'xuewei's or acupuncture points that would trigger your nervous system to release chemicals for special purposes that heal your sicknesses. Most people experience minimal pain or no pain at all during the therapy, so trust me, you won't feel discomfort and will be a lot better after this."

Reassured by Dr Lee's words, Mr Chan stopped moving, and within two minutes a total of six needles were pushed into his lower back and the back of his knees. During the process, he didn't complain about anything, and he thanked Dr Lee so much after the effective cure.

As Mr Chan exited the clinic, Dr Lee added, "Oh right! If you want to come here for a check-up next time, I might be at a new office in central; I've planned to move since last year."

"I thought the neighbouring Dr Hui also wanted the same spot, I find her constantly twitching eyebrows and nose revolting. Don't tell her I said that," commented Mr Chan

"Oh right! We scheduled a blindfolded acupuncture competition, and whoever wins gets the spot," answered Dr Lee.

Mr Chan's eyes glowed instantly, "I will come watch too! But be careful, Dr Hui is a nasty one, she can do anything to win."

Dr Lee grinned, nodding as Mr Chan leapt out of the clinic with his newly healed body.

Meanwhile, at the fish market, rain started to pour from the raging grey sky, and the wind howled as it listened to the conversation between a fisherman and a doctor.

"I could get TTX from pufferfishes if you want," whispered the scratchy sound of a man, "there's barely anyone catching fish for a living lately, surely nobody will notice."

The air gasped; it was silent for a moment, until a muffled and screechy voice from a woman with jumping eyebrows squeaked, "Fair enough. [...] you bring me the toxin? [...] the needles [...] blindfolded [...], so [...] tomorrow. Oh, Mr Ng, you will be the judge, right? [...] pause the competition [...] Dr Lee cuts himself, and declare me [...] winner?"

A glinting silhouette lurked in the dark; he hurried into a nearby Hong Kong-style charsi stall as he panted, under the warm light flashed the face of a man. He sweated as the cold gusts of air intimidatingly hissed at his face. Frantically, he reached out to a phone and hit the buttons with trembling fingers.

Finally, the rivals stood face to face at the edge of two massage beds as the sun of the fateful day rose. Surrounding them were hundreds and hundreds of residents who were interested in this epic battle. Two volunteers lay on the beds waiting for the doctors to demonstrate their fascination with acupuncture. Just as Dr Hui gave Dr Lee a death glare and a wicked grin, to which he replied with a gentle smile, the judge, Mr Ng, handed out pieces of paper with the names of the two doctors on them and announced the start.

Instantaneously, blindfolds were put onto the doctors' eyes and a tray was handed to each of them. Dr Lee carefully examined the patient and reassured him before he executed his moves, whereas Dr Hui just ran her hand over the back of her patient and stabbed the needles violently, laughing crazily as she did so. The crowd gasped and covered their eyes as they saw the insane treatment this shrieking man received and immediately placed sharp, dark, crosses onto Dr Hui's name. Dr Hui was giggling and didn't seem to care a single bit about the reactions of the audience, perhaps because she was blindfolded.

"End of the match!" suddenly screamed the judge with a slight smile, as Dr Lee accidentally pierced the tip of his fingers with a needle, "Dr Lee got wounded by a needle!" A hysterical laughter boomed out at once. It was from Dr Hui. She ripped off her blindfold, threw her apparatus onto the floor and jumped onto one of the nearby tables, clutching her fists tight as she cheered, "I! Won!"

Whispering rose in the crowd like buzzing bees trying to find their hives.

"We all voted for Dr Lee, didn't we? Why is that lunatic jumping like that?"

"What does she think she's done?"

"Get off that table!"

"I feel bad for the volunteer."

A sudden thud of a fall echoed in the competition grounds with Dr Hui's vexing voice rung. It was Dr Lee who fell. He lay face down on the ice-cold floor.

"Hahahaha!", laughed Dr Hui, "If you all are wondering why I claim I won! It's because Dr Lee could never! Ever! Be an acupuncturist in the future! He is paralysed now and will die in less than six hours!"

The viewers started shuffling their feet and glancing at the body of Dr Lee. Some moaned about the immoral acts of Dr Hui, while others muttered something related to not being able to experience Dr Lee's fabulous treatments.

“Oh yeah?”, calmly entered Mr Chan, holding up a plastic bag with a pack of needles and a small vial of a liquid of some sort. “TTX, obtained from *Takifugu albolumbeus* or *Tetraodontidae*, more commonly known as the Hong Kong pufferfish, is the colourless liquid you can see in this container. Less than 0.2ml of this in your bloodstream is enough to plant your skull into the graveyard. On the side is a pack of needles that we found TTX on.”

It was silent for ten seconds until Dr Lee leapt up with a joyous boom of “Surprise!”

The crowd’s jaws hung open with Dr Hui frozen as Dr Lee scratched his head and explained, “Sorry fellow residents, I wasn’t cut by the needle with TTX from the beginning. It was all Mr Chan who saved my life; he told me that he saw Mr Ng and Dr Hui discussing at the pier about poisoning me with needles during the competition today. “ As he said so, the whirring of police cars grew louder and louder. The next thing the residents could hear were the sounds of Dr Hui and Mr Ng screaming and struggling as they were handcuffed and escorted into the white vehicle with a massive red stripe in the middle. At the same moment, Dr Lee and Mr Chan smiled at each other proudly and bowed to the clapping crowd.

Ten months later, a glamorous clinic spawned in the eastern side of central where the bright sun rose, and all the audience at the acupuncture competition came to celebrate its opening, while Dr Hui and Mr Ng sat in the corners of gloomy cells in the jail, staring into blank space and moaning in pain.

Life worth the death of a thousand stars

German Swiss International School, Lin, Tori – 13

In a world of hearts made of copper and tin, hers was made of porcelain. Copperhearts were gifted with ambition and sharp wits, Tinhearts were gifted with bravery and able bodies, and Porcelain hearts were gifted with stunning beauty and charisma. Hearts made of copper and tin were common, but a heart made of porcelain could only be born once in a dynasty. Dynasty after dynasty, the beholder of the porcelain heart was sought after by suitors from all over China. Every tale that had been spun about a Porcelainhearted was either sorrowfully tragic or wondrously joyous. However, there was one rule the gods bestowed upon this world, and that was that nobody could have two hearts.

During the Shang dynasty, there was a Porcelainhearted girl named Liuxing. She was compared to the glittering sky and admired like a full moon on a cloudless night. Along her shoulders there were waterfalls of silky midnight-black hair, and her irises were a bright gold that rivalled a thousand stars. Suitors showered her in gifts, their desire for just a flash of her pearly white smile driving them mad.

She refused the jewels and gems. She hated them. Simplicity made her days, cooking warm meals on the stovetop with her father, or watching him make fantastical swords fit for mythical warriors. Liuxing's father was the most skilled blacksmith of the century, but they both shared their appreciation of anonymity over fame. Deeply embedded in Liuxing's heart was the idea of true love, which could not be bought by gold. It became a sick and twisted ideology, with rejected suitors spreading ill about her: she was incapable of love and had long gone insane.

One day, she met a boy. He was no one special. He wasn't an Emperor, he wasn't a hero— he could never shoot suns out of the sky or force the stars to bow before his feet. However, he loved her for more than her beauty. He gave her the feeling of love— he felt like another home to her. She'd never laughed or smiled much in her life, but when she was with him, anything— everything was possible. When he couldn't meet her in the shade of the oak tree on the mountain, he would write her dreamy letters. She wanted to scream from the mountaintops that she had fallen in love! Real, true love! No, love was an understatement of what she felt for him and the flower crowns he made her. Every single day, she impatiently awaited his heartfelt letters, and every time she was hoping that the envelope would one day come with a ring.

Perfect. Everything was perfect between the both of them. She slammed open the door, a smile stretched across her face. Then the corners of her mouth dropped, and her cheeks paled. Where was the letter? Did he forget? No, he didn't, because he hadn't sent one the day before, or the one before that... they were in love, weren't they?

Panic consumed her as the sky fell from dusk to dawn, alone under the oak tree, eerie from stillness and silence other than her soft weeping. Finally, she saw a silhouette that was drowned in black robes deposit a square letter at her doorstep. She stumbled down the hill, grass cutting haphazard scars down her legs, the same grass that used to be as gentle as snow. She felt numb as she fell to her knees beside the bright red letter. The skies were torn open as her sobbing, no longer quiet, turned into screams of agony. The pieces came together even if she fought for them not to.

"I love you," she croaked, the shaky words dragged out of her cracked lips.

The rain pounded on her back, soaking the final memory that was embedded in her head. It was cruel, how the letters that had once delivered the reminder of love had suddenly delivered the news of death. For the boy, she cried a river of porcelain tears. For him, her fragile heart lay shattered in pieces.

She was devastated. Simple things had become unimaginably difficult; she wasn't able to eat without feeling sick to the stomach, and she couldn't sleep because of the nightmares that plagued her head. What was worse was that everything reminded her of him; flowers and trees, pen and paper, and even hearing the sound of laughing made her nauseous. She wasn't just miserable, but furious. She wanted revenge. She wanted the blood of her lover's coldhearted murderer. It wasn't the first time she began to feel an undying hatred for being a Porcelainhearted. If she was born with any other heart, wouldn't she have had her happily ever after? Wouldn't the boy she loved still be alive?

It would always stay the same: a heart was permanent, and one could never ask for another, let alone two more. Almost half a year had passed and she had fallen into a sickly state. She was silent in her suffering. It was as if her sadness had engulfed her and she was mute. When she caught a cold, she was on the brink of death.

"Liuxing?" her father asked, tending to her by her bedside. "What happened to my beautiful, lively, girl?"

"My heart," she said, finally. "He broke my heart."

"The boy that sent you letters? The one who met you beneath the oak tree?"

"Yes," she wanted to cry and let the river of tears pour out, but those rivers were cracked and dry. "I loved him, father. But humanity is wicked. Jealousy is a weapon, and it hurt him. A suitor— my suitor— killed the boy I loved."

"My dear, it isn't your fault," he said softly. "Don't ever blame yourself for what happened to him."

She took a deep breath.

"Father, can you do something for me?" she said, newfound determination echoing through her voice.

"Anything, dear."

"You're a skilled blacksmith, aren't you? Can you make me two new hearts, one of copper and one of tin?"

"I... don't know if I can, but I will try. But, sometimes one has to move on to forgive and forget."

"I don't want to forgive and forget," she said sharply, anger lacing her breath. "I want revenge, and I'm going to get it."

"I understand, Liuxing, but the Gods are harsh about laws. You cannot have two hearts, and surely not three," her father's tone was harsh.

Liuxing felt betrayed, and her hurt must have shown on her face because her father had a guilty expression plastered on his.

"They can't punish me more than they already have. I believe, in the past, that someone has had two hearts before. Nobody knows the consequence of breaking the Gods' law because it simply doesn't exist," she said, determined.

Her father disagreed, but he did as she said nonetheless. He was scared of what would happen if he refused... what if he lost her forever? In her chest, there were two new hearts. One of copper, and one of tin.

Suddenly, she felt a fire burning in her chest, and it was agonizing. It felt like her heart was so hot that it was melting. She clutched her chest, doubling down in pain as a scream escaped her.

“Liuxing!” her father yelled, kneeling beside his daughter whose face contorted in pain.

“It hurts so much!” she shrieked, trembling in disgust and horror. Blood seeped from the cracks forming on her skin. Had she become a monster?

Liuxing crashed through the door and staggered for the oak tree. She collapsed, and all of a sudden, her skin was aflame. Her body writhed in the red fire, as her father watched in horror as her life was ripped away from her. When the flame died down, there were only the scorched remains of Liuxing. It was as if she had become a statue, coated in molten metal. Liuxing’s father crashed to his knees beside her, clawing at his daughter’s broken body.

In the end, it was discovered that the punishment for having two hearts was to become a statue melded of both copper and tin. The metal that was discovered from the melted copper and tin was then named bronze, marking the creation of the alloy. The Gods, greatly angered and disappointed by Liuxing’s rebellious actions, had taken the gift of the hearts away from the next Dynasty. They then replaced it with a fragile, beating pulp, nothing compared to a Tinheart or a Copperheart. Once in a while, the Gods, if pleased, would gift the humans, creating some more intelligent or stronger than others, but the hearts were all unique.

Behind a brilliant invention was the last tale spun out of a Porcelainhearted, and the most tragic of them all. To this day, her statue is said to be hidden under the roots of the oak tree, and for all her tragedy in life, reunited with her lover in death.

The Legend of Cuju: Unveiling the Ancient Chinese Football'

German Swiss International School, Lee, Jayden – 13

Flying spears and arrows were seen from the window of Feng's hut, he could see many blood puddles on the ground. There were injured men, along with many casualties. Feng was terrified, his mother was not home so he was distraught. Feng was crouching, hiding in the corner of the window so he could see what was happening.

Everything around him seemed to take a halt, as he gazed at the fire-red sky in despair. The pain of his eyes began to fill with tears. A bit more, and they would stumble down to his ripped shirt. Yet, there was nothing he could do, but accept the situation he was in.

He could identify his father on the battlefield who was the 'Qing clan' leader. 'Dad help!', Feng shouted at the top of his lungs. Fights in the village were frequent, and every time villagers would suffer, heavy damage would be done to the huts. It would take a very long time to repair everything. The women and children of the village despised the fighting and it was concerning. The fight was finished but the battle was not over, it would happen again in a week.

'Knock, knock'

There came a thudding noise from what was left of the cottage door, as Feng's mom stood on the threshold to peace in desperation, awaiting her dear son's arrival. Feng, astonished by his mom's swift entry, hurried to the door and welcomed her to the living room.

"Are you alright mother?! Where were you, I was worried."

"I'm fine. Where's your father? Did he come home yet?"

"No not yet, but I'm sure he'll be back soon."

Feng's father came bursting into the house, he clutched onto his stomach, with dried-up blood covering his hands. He suddenly collapsed and went out cold, Feng and his mother carried him onto his bed and then treated his injuries. During dinner Feng and his mother sat in disbelief without uttering a single word.

"This is going too far, I have to find a way to stop the fighting," Feng thought to himself.

The next day he met up with his friends in the rice fields where they discussed solutions to end the battle between the 'Qing' and 'Sheng' clans.

"We must create a game that can stop the ongoing conflict between the 'Qing' and 'Sheng.' A game might be a good idea. Feng's friend questioned the others.

Suddenly as they were contemplating, an orange came flying towards Feng from the nearby market. He pulled his leg up without further consideration and stopped the ball from knocking him.

'That was close!' shouted Feng in trembling fear.

'Ah, why not a game that requires the use of legs?' requested another of Feng's friends.

'Yes! A game of legs and a ball'

Feng could not believe the nonsense that was being said. He kicked the orange aside in disappointment and it glided through a hole in the fractured wall by accident.

'Great kick!' shouted Feng's friend, 'this can be just the game! A game where two teams must kick a round item in between a lifted hole to gain points.'

Feng's frown was erased as this idea was not horrible after all.

'The game could have 6 players on each team so that both teams of 'Qing' and 'Shing' have sufficient players to work together and win. Both teams will work together to get a limited amount of points without letting the ball touch the ground, resulting in there not being a winner. And this can avoid any major violence in the village! I think we should call this 'Cuju'' Feng suggested in a cheering manner.

Feng, carrying his pronounced idea, rushed back to his house, through the destruction of the village where smoke and fire were invading everywhere he passed. By the time Feng had returned home, his dad had finally gained consciousness, lying on the wooden bed. Feng announced his ideas to him, hoping for a positive reply, of which though quite risky, he was given the answer that he hoped for. Feng's dad looked at his finally grown-up and mature son in admiration before falling back asleep.

The next morning, Feng's dad, who possessed the title of the leader of the Qing clan, with the physical support of his son, steadily and carefully made their way to the town square. Feng and his friends scoured every hut of the village and gathered all citizens in preparation for his dad's mighty speech.

The 'Sheng' clan reluctantly accepted the temporary peace and decided to gather at the village square as well. People chanted and discussed in curiosity, as they awaited the 'Qing' leader to deliver his message.

To prevent any further commotion, Feng's dad made his move.

'Dear villagers of Shan Dong. Through long consideration and bloodshed, I think it is time for a change. I, Wu Feng Chi, as the leader of the 'Qing' clan, hope for a game for peace in our village. This game shall be called Cuju, which requires the use of a ball and our legs. Cuju will replace the violence of the 'Qing' and the 'Sheng!'

Announced Feng's dad to the village.

The villagers cheered and the 'Sheng' nodded and smiled in agreement. The two clans finally had something that they could both agree on. 'Peace' and a nice game of Cuju.

Under the sunset, Feng accompanied by his proud dad marched home in their newly found 'peace.' They cheered and toasted walking past the fellow villagers as they made their way back to their honest village house. Smiling at each other, acknowledging the success of their mini-campaign.

The following day, the villagers gathered around, eager to see the first-ever Cuju game. Excitement filled the air and everyone's hearts. Feng and his friends were overwhelmed knowing that their idea had been made a reality. They were hoping that this game would solve the fighting in the village.

"It has to work," they all thought to themselves.

The teams were formed as the game commenced, and the villagers started to cheer and clap. The game unfolded with skill and passion, as players showcased their agility and teamwork. Each goal was celebrated with cheers and applause. 'The Qing' and 'Shing' clans worked well together and all the team members had smiles on their faces.

As the final whistle blew, the villagers erupted into joyous applause. The battle was finally over and peace was brought to the land of Shang Dong.

Blood Red

German Swiss International School, Leung, Annabel – 13

“I didn’t mean to cause mass murder. I just wanted... to be happy.

The water was supposed to make me happy.

Why didn’t it make me happy?”

Years ago, I heard of a town. A legendary town. A town that was *always happy*.

People who went there sad came back happy. People who went in happy came back happier. But it didn’t last. Not unless you lived in *that very town*.

It was interesting. It intrigued me. It was a mystery— and I wanted to solve it. And the mystery? It was called the story of Emperor Tang and the town of Happiness.

Long ago, when Emperor Tang heard of this legendary town of Happiness, he wanted to know their secret. ‘The Secret of Happiness’, they called it. So the emperor sent his cleverest advisor to the town and ordered him to do anything it took to uncover their secret. This advisor was infamous for his cleverness. All of China had heard of him, the revered Advisor Li. When he received these orders, he was just as intrigued, and immediately took up the chance to visit the town. And so he left his family, his wife and his children, and travelled exactly one day and one night to the faraway town of happiness.

The second he arrived at the mysterious town, he was greeted by an unfamiliar smell, the loud sounds of a celebration, and a stumbling man. The man fell onto his shoulder and looked up at the stranger in surprise.

“Hello there!” he grinned widely, “Are you just passing by, or—” The man burst into an uncontrollable fit of giggles.

Advisor Li was confused beyond comprehension. What on earth was happening? “Yes, I suppose I am passing,” he answered slowly, “Is there any chance I could stay here overnight?”

The man clapped a hand on his back. “Why of course, my friend!” He took Advisor Li’s hand and dragged him into a run-down hut, “Here, have some water, you must be thirsty.”

Advisor Li was shocked at the man’s immediate kindness and jolly nature, but nonetheless grateful, “Thank you,” he said, accepting the cup.

The man just gave him another big smile. “It’s no problem at all.” he slurred, before passing out onto the ground.

Horrified, Advisor Li watched the man drop to the floor. “Sir,” he frantically shook him, dropping the cup of water he was given, “Sir, are you okay?” He checked his pulse, relieved to find that it was still beating. The man was only sleeping— how strange.

Keeping the emperor’s orders in mind, he quickly left the sleeping man on the floor and followed the sounds of celebration to the crowded town square. And as he walked, Advisor Li noticed something even stranger than the sudden collapse of the man. Vomit painted the streets, and the stench was horrible.

Advisor Li gagged and pinched his nose. How disgusting! “I must hurry to the town square,” he thought, “I cannot stand this ridiculous town much longer.”

When he finally reached the town square, he was met with even more vomit, but this time accompanied by the sounds of celebration. Dozens of people were dancing, playing the Chinese drums, and setting fireworks off. Dancing under the silvery moonlight, under the shining stars, next to the reflection of the still river that seemed to shine under the starry sky. Advisor Li was immediately pulled into the throng of festivities, his hand dragged into the circle of celebrating people. Confused, he struggled against the celebrations, looking around worriedly, his sight blurring, but all he could see were the heads of other smiling people, and he was

lost.

“What’s happening?” Advisor Li sat up in shock, “Where am I?” He scrambled for his surroundings, but all he could see was the river bank next to him along with countless others, passed out as he was. He pushed himself off the ground, his back protesting in pain, and immediately started coughing. Everything hurt, his back, his legs, his head, his throat. He crawled towards the river, desperately trying to reach the water there, hoping to find cool relief in it. Splashing his red face in it, Advisor Li prepared for the icy water to wake him up but was instead met with a strange-smelling liquid that stung his eyes.

“Ow!” Advisor Li yelped in pain, frantically rubbing his face, “What was that?” He stared down at the river in confusion and shock. After moments of deliberation, he carefully dipped a finger into the water, bringing it up to his mouth to taste, and it tasted... *bitter?*

‘Bitter water?’ Advisor Li thought, ‘Another strange thing about this town... very strange indeed.’ He watched as people started to get up, dizzily tripping towards the very river he sat next to. He watched as they greedily guzzled down mouthfuls of the bitter liquid. And he watched, as slowly, minute by minute, they turned from stumbling idiots to cheerful ones. He watched as their frowns became smiles, as their sleepy eyes became creased with happiness, as their headaches seemingly faded away.

Advisor Li watched as a miracle happened right in front of his eyes. How wondrous! How marvellous! How simply amazing! This must have been the secret, hiding under his nose all along, the secret of Happiness turned out to be a mysterious bitter liquid. He looked again at the mysterious river, its smooth surface almost resembling glass. As he took a longer look, Advisor Li realised it was free of fish, plants, and all signs of life, but still, the secret of Happiness. Lifeless, but created life in this very town.

Heart thundering, hands shaking, and confused out of his own mind, the advisor rushed back to the palace, through flowered meadows, past idyllic villages, over countless more rivers—ones full of life. He arrived at the gates of Emperor Tang’s striking palace and tore through the doors of the throne room, opened his mouth and the words poured out.

A magnificent tale, so miraculous and astonishing that no one would’ve believed it, not even Advisor Li had he not seen it with his own two eyes, a priceless secret of Happiness. And once the words had stopped falling out, he watched as the emperor’s face shifted, from annoyance to shock to glorious excitement. It was almost like a golden glow had set upon the room and lit everyone’s faces. Even the best storytellers could not possibly explain the pure adrenaline that ran through the emperor’s heart. This was it, the Holy Grail, the secret of all secrets.

And Advisor Li watched, as Emperor Tang went to see the town for himself, as his face widened with a gleeful grin, as armed men were ordered to seize the town, no questions asked, no resistance allowed.

No resistance allowed.

Who would be so foolish to think that the selfish emperor would spare mercy? Nothing stands in the way of such greed.

He watched, as he had for so long, as the marching troops invaded the town, he heard the screams for help, the cries of the children, and the pleas of the elderly, and he saw the *blood run red*. Red, once the colour of fortune, but now the colour of horror as it flowed through the town into the precious river.

Unwaveringly, unblinkingly, numb. Complex emotions that once rushed through the advisor had turned to ice as he watched the town that was once so full of life turn into nothing but ruin. It was like watching a

bright star catch on fire and diminish into darkness. Anyone would've broken down in tears, anyone would've done something, *anything*, to stop it. But Advisor Li could not turn away from the mess that he had started. And so he watched, and watched, and watched, as the river turned the same shade of happiness that once filled the town.

Now, dear reader, you may be wondering what happened to Advisor Li after all this. The truth is, no one knows. But he is irrelevant, a mere pawn on this chessboard. The real main character here is none other than our cruel, cruel emperor. Years later, Emperor Tang sits in his palace, drunk on the blood of his victims, but you will be surprised to find that he is in fact, unhappy. Sure, he may have found the secret to Happiness, but at what cost?

Well, his own happiness, of course, for now he sits in a pool of regrets, lost forever in the blood-red

liquid.

So as we come to the end of our tale, I must let you know one thing. The secret to Happiness doesn't lead to happiness at all, but in this case, bitterness and loneliness. I should know best, after all, I am Emperor Tang. And the mystical liquid? I believe you know it best as *alcohol*.

The Way the World Rumbles

German Swiss International School, Low, Troy – 14

'Another earthquake, that's absurd. We have already been struck by three, in a matter of a week,' Mei sighed as she laid back and gazed at the light, white ceiling, reflecting on the many lives that have been lost in the last few days. The documents on her desk blurred into a soggy, grey colour, whilst she lowered her head, preparing to get back to the task at hand. She slid the piles of reports into view, and slightly brushed all the drenched, scrunched up tissues to one side of her stationery and folder-filled workspace. She tried, she really tried, but deep down, buried under her water-loaded eyes, was an immense pain that carved a scar in the centre of her heart. This scar tore a breach in her perception of reality, and all the joy that she left behind, bled through this very opening.

'What other option is there? I have failed, I am sorry. I have failed you Zhangheng. I could not do what you did, and now civilization is going to suffer due to my mistakes.' Mei continued to beat herself up over it. However, covered up under the pain, emerged an idea from the deep trenches of her burnt out mind. She was confident, and her choices had been narrowed to this one option, she had to act now and fast, or it would be too late. She tied her jet black hair back, and realised, 'If I can't make a new seismoscope, I just might need to enhance yours.'

Mei stood up and pushed her stool aside. She rushed through the hallways, knocking over piles of folders and reports. Leaping across bumps from the crumpled up cotton floor mat below. Despite wanting to stop and sip a soothing coffee, she ran like there was no tomorrow. She felt it. The harder she ran, the more she felt. The cramps were ready to revolutionise her leg. Yet, the storage room was the only thing on her mind.

Finally, through her extreme efforts, she did it, she made it, she was there and the storage room was standing right in front of her. She poked the door and it creaked open, exposing a cloud of dust that triggered her coughing. Her eyes turned blood red as they began to itch. Following the dust storm, was an awful stench that tried to convince Mei to leave the room, yet she did not budge. Mei quickened her movements as she scoured the room for what she hoped would be key in saving Beijing from the waves of earthquakes.

No, the whole planet.

From the top shelf above the dust pans bombarded with cobwebs, presumably left untouched for years, above the cardboard boxes of abandoned 42 year old reports of the 2008 Sichuan earthquake, sat the missing piece to her ultimate plan. Its imposing bronze shell glistened at Mei's eyes as she gazed in astonishment. Carefully, aware of all the piled tools and equipment around her in the unlit room, she slowly placed her left foot on one of the lower racks, though still cramping, she placed her right foot on the platform slightly above her right. Powered by her determination to save the earth, she took her left foot off and slid it onto the second platform above. Using one hand to hold herself steady, she took the other and carried the box down.

Mei picked the box up and dashed back to her desk. Not having any time to waste, she ripped the box open, and what was hidden inside was revealed.

The mighty vessel stood on the table and its appearance was staggeringly unique. Wrapping around its bronze armour were eight ferocious dragons with open mouths carrying balls ready to strike at any moment. Under each open mouth, sat a toad with their mouths gaping, ready to catch one of the balls.

Mei could not believe it. Just an inch in front of her was an authentic copy of the ancient seismoscope that her idol, the imperial historian and royal astronomer; Zhang Heng invented in 132 CE during the Han dynasty. Such an invention seemed to have left her in awe.

Curiosity seduced Mei into Wikipedia where information of the seismoscope was pouring out. Her eyes rolled faster than her brain processed, so fast that the reflection from her dark pupils was struggling to keep up with the scrolling. Her mouse orchestrated constant 'Clicks and clacks' as she rummaged through the different sites of the browser, her desktop started to exhale heat as the motherboard floundered to handle any more information.

Her extreme efforts were not wasted, having worked out two theories that Zhang Heng possibly applied to the seismoscope. One of the theories suggests that a thin stick was placed loosely down the centre of the barrel. In the event of an earthquake, the stick would topple over in the direction of the seismic shock, causing one of the dragons to open its mouth and release the bronze ball. The second is: a baton is retained on the rim of an instrument as a swinging pendulum. It would cause the closest dragon to release its ball when the pendulum swung wide enough to hit the side of the barrel. Observers should be alerted to the earthquake by the sound of the ball landing on the toad's mouth. This would have given us a rough estimate of the quake's location, but it didn't give any information as to its intensity.

Mei, with her expert knowledge on modern seismoscopes and earthquakes, designed a unique fragment that could be added to the ancient seismoscope to power its full potential. It was now not only authentic looking, but had a display to show the data of seismic activity.

Outside of the fingerprints covered window, hung the moon on the pitch black sky which peered directly into Mei's dark pupils of anxiety and desperation. Mei was supposed to be out of the office and home, but she had to do what had to be done. She scurried out of the building carrying the seismoscope, trying her best to avoid the notice of security. However, with security everywhere, it was impossible for her to avoid it all.

She kicked the entrance doors open, and was greeted by the mess of the destruction of the city. Smoke from the collapsed buildings swarmed through the streets. Everywhere she walked, chaos just seemed to follow. As long as she could make it to the country park, then she could find the cause and fix this all.

Under desperation, Mei had not noticed that she was being followed. She ran and ran, neglecting the mayhem surrounding her. She just could not stand, seeing China, her country, regress into utter destruction.

Suddenly, as Mei stopped for a breath, she heard talking emerging from behind. She immediately faced backwards, but there was no one. She knew something was wrong and had to be more attentive. She slowed her movements to stay aware of any suspicions.

Mei made it. She quickly carried the seismoscope out of the beaten box, and placed it on the muddy surface. The seismic activity shown was drastic, she had never witnessed seismic activity as such. Without further consideration, she turned the seismic activity analysis mode to 'on'. The seismoscope spluttered

as it tried its best to process. Time was ticking and Mei was pacing up and down in frustration. Sweat was pouring down her cheeks as she wandered around waiting for the 'Loading' to reach '100%'.

The sun began to rise, as the data was about to fully upload. The fog and destruction that surrounded her, seemed to have disappeared, as the hope of saving the world was restored. Birds chirped their majestic song and the frogs from the nearby ponds croaked to the beauty of their music. This made Mei hopeful, hopeful that she would not have to hear the weeping and cries of pain from the innocent and destruction.

Mei finished up the system settings and the data was fully uploaded. She downloaded the transcript and read aloud the analysis of the seismoscope,

'Seismic activity rating: 10

Seismic waves : 99.99% coming from the inner core of the earth

Cause of earthquake: 99.99% drilling of earth core.'

As Mei was fully immersed in the transcript, she not only had been mentally drilled but physically drilled by a knife through the back of her frail body.

She collapsed, and the seismoscope shattered into fragments, as her head bashed into it. Mei with her remaining breaths glazed at the sky in disappointment, fear and betrayal.

Mei died in the hands of the evil, corrupted society. Her efforts to restore peace and save the planet had once again been destroyed. There was no hope left. This world did not deserve such a pure soul, such that she sacrificed herself for millions, billions of lives.

Her Quest for Artemisinin

German Swiss International School, Ma, Hilary – 13

Ai Hua skipped back home with armfuls of wood, just like her mother had asked. As she pranced back, earthy and dusty scents contaminated the atmosphere in this small rural village in the Henan province. Many of the rickety houses were designed identically, made of stone and tiled roofs. Sheets and clothes hung out to dry in the motionless air. Chickens clucking and pigs grunting echo from afar. Lush, emerald green vegetation carpeted the hills in the distance bordering little murky pools of water.

Ai Chen, Ai Hua's mother, was in the kitchen preparing dinner when Ai Hua thrashed in through the front door, barely able to control the door handle. An aroma of savoury smells swirled through the room like a cloud, it was all a mixture of pork and vegetables, fish, spices and rice. Beside the door stood a decaying tree trunk, used as a stovetop. On top was a steel wok coated in a thick layer of charcoal. As Ai Chen fried the food, the rising steam intensified the humid home. She scratched at something absentmindedly at the back of her neck as she stirred the dinner.

'Hua, did you get more wood for the fire?' Ai Chen asked her daughter.

'Yes, mum.' Ai Hua replied.

She dumped the little logs beneath the stove and started to set the table, waiting for her mother to finish.

Shortly after, they sat down at dinner, 'How's school?'

'Good, very good. I'm at the top of my class!'

'Very good. Keep working hard.'

They continued to eat in companionable silence.

A few days later, Ai Hua set off at 6 am on her long and strenuous walk to the village school. Her journey began through the main town and the marketplace where everyone knew her name. Soon after, Ai Hua had to hike up a treacherous hill covered in a blanket of dirt and vegetation. Around her, the crickets chirped along to the hum of the birds, then they were joined by the buzz of various types of insects. She took a long stroll along a narrow path until she reached her school. Enthusiasm engulfed Ai Hua as she approached the school building. Once she entered the classroom, the squeaking and scratching of the chalk rubbing against the blackboard and the sound of chairs shuffling about filled the room.

When the clock struck four o'clock, Ai Hua gently stacked her books and neatly put them in her school bag. Then set off for her long journey back home to her mother.

Ai Hua barged through the front door of her house only to find her mother sitting at the dining table coughing hysterically. It looked as though Ai Chen's coughing was suffocating her as if she was drowning, unable to breathe. Ai Hua immediately dropped her schoolbag and books and rushed to help her mother. She gathered a box of facial tissues and a warm mug of tea and placed them beside her mother on the dining room table, concerned about her mother's health.

'Mum, are you okay? What happened?' Ai Hua asked as a mask of worry put itself on her face.

'I haven't felt very well since you left for school.'

“Is there anything else I can get you, medicine, another cup of tea?”

Ai Chen shook her head and went to the kitchen to prepare their dinner.

After eating dinner, Ai Hua and Ai Chen went to bed distressed about the condition of Ai Chen’s health.

The creaking sound of the floorboards awoke Ai Hua; she rolled out of bed only to find her mother squatting by the toilet gagging. Without hesitation, Ai Hua sprinted to her mother’s bedroom, snatched the medication bottle from the cupboard and ran back to her mother. She waited until Ai Chen was in somewhat of a state of comfort before heading back to bed.

However, Ai Chen’s health only seemed to deteriorate as time progressed. It wasn’t until the eleventh day of her illness that Ai Chen finally agreed for Ai Hua to take her to the village doctor, where he diagnosed her with malaria. The Ai’s were told that Ai Chen only had 48 hours to live, which left the family in utter shock. The doctor also mentioned the multiple dangerous symptoms that Ai Chen might experience; seizures, a coma or organ failure. This meant that Ai Hua would be left to live alone, with no mother or father.

Although Ai Chen was on bed rest for the last 48 hours of her life, Ai Hua knew that her only goal was to spend as much time with her mother as possible, even if it was beside her bed and conversing with her. Ai Hua spent day and night in her mother’s bedroom knowing that malaria was not contagious, even though there was a doctor already beside her mother.

The last 24 hours of Ai Chen’s life had inevitably come.

Ai Hua recalled what the doctor informed them about the fatal symptoms of malaria, frightened that her mother might endure them. She didn’t know when that last conversation with her mother was going to happen or the last embrace. For the majority of the morning, Ai Hua remained beside Ai Chen; she never left the room except for occasional toilet breaks or to get food and drinks.

However, when Ai Hua went to the kitchen to refill her mother’s glass of water, she came back stunned with horror. Ai Chen’s limbs began to tremble and flex. The healthcare worker remained calm and tried to assist Ai Chen by placing another pillow under her head and loosening all the clothes on her body while Ai Hua stood by the door pale and with her mouth dropped. Once the tremoring simmered down, the doctor rolled Ai Chen onto her side, in case there was any fluid in her mouth. After the doctor told the family that if another seizure occurred then it increased the probability of Ai Chen dying.

“Could you excuse us please?” Ai Hua kindly asked the doctor, “If anything happens, I’ll make sure to call for you.”

As the door closed, Ai Chen quietly whispered to her daughter, “Thank you for being beside me.”

“Of course.” Ai Hua sobbed as tears welled up in her eyes. “Just rest mum.” Just as Ai Hua said her last sentence, she felt a slight tremor in her mother’s hands and immediately called the doctor in to help her. Ai Chen’s body began to shake repeatedly and she began to have muscle spasms.

Ai Hua heard that her mum wasn’t breathing any air out. With tears streaming down her face, she clutched onto her mother’s hand as she knew these were her last moments with her.

A few days of mourning later, Ai Hua commemorated her mother’s full life by hanging beautiful, radiant, colourful lights and fragrant flowers around her casket, now knowing that her life goal was to find a cure for malaria so other families and people would not have to face the same fate as hers.

She knew that her life would be devoted to this malarial cure.

Ai Hua spent the last two arduous years of school drowning in sweat, knowledge and fatigue; she remained at the top of her class, still researched malaria and medicine in that village library during her leisure time and was accepted into the University of Science and Technology of China to study medicine.

After some time at the university, Ai Hua was again doing research on diseases in one of the many libraries in the school, when she stumbled upon a section entirely dedicated to malaria. However, many of the books Ai Hua had previously read, but there was this one mysterious-looking book. The facade was quilted in dust, but that did not hide the glaring red cover beneath it. Once she took it off the shelf, Hua wiped the cover with her jumper sleeve which revealed the title; 'A Mystery Called Malaria', she impatiently flipped through the book only to find that some loose documents slipped out. She skimmed through the documents and discovered that they were medical documents from the Chinese dynasties, though she did not know which ones.

Over the course of her education and career, Ai Hua studied medical texts to help find a traditional cure for malaria. The texts told her that a sweet wormwood plant called *Artemisia annua* was the ancient cure. Naturally, she isolated and tested the compound of Artemisinin found within the plant on mice and monkeys and finally herself.

Ultimately, her cure saved millions of lives during the Chinese Cultural Revolution despite the prohibition of scientific research during this time. Her drug was soon globally recognised and she achieved her life-long goal. Ai Hua fulfilled her promise of finding a cure for malaria so many families would not have to endure what she did. Her quest for a cure was finally over.

New Gunpowder Tales

German Swiss International School, Ma, Hugo – 13

In the midst of the Song Dynasty, a fierce and prolonged conflict raged on between the Song and Jin armies. The city of Xuan, a strategic stronghold of the Song, had fallen into the hands of the Jin forces, now posing a significant threat to the Song Empire. Determined to reclaim their territory, the Song Emperor decided to send an elite army led by the brave and courageous General Liang for a quick and rapid recapturing of the bastion before the Jin could establish any strong defences.

The Song Army marched towards the walls of Xuan, their spirits high, their resolve unyielding and their attitude conveying a sense of supremacy over the Jin “barbarians”, but as they approached the heavily fortified city, they encountered a formidable defence system established by the Jin. Three layers of walls, barricades, spikes and hordes of archers on top of ramparts made the defences impenetrable.

Unfazed by the seemingly insurmountable obstacle, the elite Song soldiers began a relentless assault, seeking to breach the city's defences. Song archers unleashed whole swarms of arrows towards the Jin soldiers. Song siege machines slammed the walls of the city and Song soldiers rushed the walls with ladders, attempting to break through the first layer of Jin troops. However, the Jin Army, skilled in the art of warfare from many years of civil war on the steppes, returned the favour. The Jin archers, safe at the third wall, sent a barrage of arrows back at the Song troops. The skies darkened as a storm of projectiles rained down, causing chaos and devastation within the ranks of the Song Army. Many Song soldiers were struck by the arrows, and the dead bodies of Song kept piling up.

Seeing as the desperate assault wasn't going to work, General Liang ordered a full retreat. Morale dropped significantly and in the Song camp of operations, insubordination was at an all time high, with Song troops refusing to follow orders of officers. Amidst all the hopelessness, there was a beacon of hope named Bing Kai Wong. A middle aged bald inventor who had created miracles from dire situations, a man who could be trusted to develop a miracle weapon to break through these indomitable defences. After noticing the terrible first defeat they suffered, the Song Emperor immediately assigned Scientist Monk Bing Kai Wong to assist the Song Army to create a weapon that could help the Song defeat the Jin fortifications, a weapon to pierce the heavens.

With unwavering determination, Bing Kai Wong headed to a makeshift workshop at the Song camp, his mind completely consumed by thoughts of innovation, ideas and destruction. He pondered over ancient texts, studying the works of alchemists and scholars who had delved into the mysteries of explosives and combustible materials. Days went by as, and everyday Bing Kai Wong would head to his workshop, tirelessly experimenting with different combinations of chemicals, hoping to create a substance that would create a large explosion, powerful enough to annihilate the walls of Xuan.

Days turned into nights, and Bing Kai Wong still had no solution. He had narrowed it down to a concoction of sulphur, saltpetre and charcoal. He blended these substances in different proportions and different orders, seeking the perfect combination that would yield an explosion to rival the gods.

Finally, after numerous trials and setbacks, his perseverance paid off. When he mixed sa, he discovered the formula for gunpowder—a volatile and powerful substance that possessed the potential to change the course of warfare. Excited and filled with renewed hope, he presented his creation to General Liang, who recognized the immense value of this weapon.

With the utmost secrecy, Bing Kai Wong and his team began manufacturing gunpowder on a large scale. As the mass creation of gunpowder began, the Song Army's supplies also began to rapidly dwindle, and the situation worsened

when Song communications and supply lines were cut off by Jin forces. The Song supply depots now couldn't reach the Song forces, and they would run out of food and water in two weeks. Desperation loomed over everyone as they awaited a miracle.

Finally, the day of reckoning had arrived. With massive stockpiles of gunpowder, The Song Army, bolstered by the presence of Bing Kai Wong and his ingenious invention, prepared for their final assault. Under the cover of the night, they stealthily approached the city walls of Xuan, carrying sacks filled with gunpowder bombs. With a resounding battle cry, they launched their attack, throwing bombs at the walls. Gunpowder-filled sacks soared through the air, exploding in brilliant bursts of light and thunderous blasts. The archers defending the walls were caught off guard, their ranks decimated by the devastating power of the explosives. The ramparts of the walls crumbled to dust, and the fortifications the Jin had established were completely destroyed. The once impenetrable defences of Xuan crumbled under the might of the Song Army's assault.

The Jin Army, taken by surprise and facing an enemy armed with this newfound weapon, faltered in their defence. The tides had turned, and victory seemed within reach for the Song forces. Wave after wave, the soldiers pressed forward, their determination unyielding. With each passing hour, the resistance of the Jin weakened. Forced to retreat, they could no longer withstand the onslaught of the Song Army. The city of Xuan was triumphantly reclaimed by the valiant soldiers, their victory owing much to the brilliance and innovation of Bing Kai Wong and his invention of gunpowder. After the victory, Bing Kai Wong was brought back to the Song capital for questioning on his methods. In the end, he said "I have become gunpowder himself, a destroyer of worlds, a breacher of heavens.", a quote revered by scholars of the Song Dynasty and beyond.

In the aftermath of the battle, Bing Kai Wong was hailed as a hero by many, considered to be the Scientist Monk of the Buddha, his name etched in the chronicles of history. Celebrated by many citizens, the day of the recapturing of City Xuan is now the annual Bing Kai Wong holiday, where gunpowder is put in houses to show the ingenuity of the great Bing Kai. His invention had not only saved the Song Empire from impending defeat but had also opened up a world of possibilities and progress. Thanks to all the contributions he had made to Science, the Song Dynasty later colonised the great empire of Mesopotamia and Papua New Guinea. His legacy would endure, serving as a testament to the indomitable spirit and ingenuity of the Song Dynasty.

And thus ends the story of Bing Kai Wong and his revelation of gunpowder stood as a testament to the power of human innovation and the triumph of intellect over adversity. It was a reminder that even in the darkest of times, the spark of creativity and the pursuit of knowledge could ignite a revolution, even a tiny spark changing the world forever.

Lao Li and his Magic Needles

German Swiss International School, Madduri, Nitya – 14

Once upon a time, in Ancient China, during the Tang dynasty, a Chinese medicine technique was formulated. But, it may surprise you to hear that it was not a doctor who came up with this great invention. At that time, in Peking, there was an old, unknown tailor who worked for Emperor Xuanzhong and his wife Yang Guifei, diligently sewing dresses for the Imperial family day after day. Living on the little money he earned and with an overworked body, no one would have expected Lao Li to have discovered acupuncture. But he did!

One ordinary weekday, after long hours of sewing cloth from dawn to dusk, Lao Li came home to his wife and children with a great number of cramps straining his wrist. When he gingerly turned the keys to open the front door to his cottage, the only thing on his overworked mind was changing into his pajamas and drinking a warm bowl of soup. But little did he know this was just the beginning of a life-changing phenomenon.

That evening, his pain felt like an eternity for Lao Li. Although he had an inkling that this new pain wasn't just a result of soreness, he brushed it off and went to bed. But he could barely sleep, tossing and turning in agony. The next morning the pain seemed worse, like burning hot pins and needles sticking into his wrinkled flesh. His fingers were numb to the point where he could stab a needle into them and still not feel a thing as well as an agonizing pain that was as heavy as a load of bricks. The unfortunate man sat on his cot, thinking about what he had done to deserve this excruciating torment. How could he finish the dress that he had promised the Emperor's daughter with his wrist like this?

By the dawn of the next day, Lao Li's wife had called the doctor to her small cottage to see whether or not he could cure his husband's pain. The doctor 'ummed' and 'ahhed' and prescribed a recipe of snake soup mixed with bat's blood as a purgative, which he was confident would remove his pain. But the pain only got worse. Lao Li had no choice but to try and work on the dress as the emperor's beloved daughter, Xiao Fi was in desperate need of a new dress for her behind ball later that week. He would be risking his job, if not his life if he didn't go to work that day.

Showing up to work with a lack of sleep and an aching wrist, Lao Li had little motivation to get anything done. Entering his work, Lao was blinded by the bright sunlight facing his eyes. Before getting the chance to look at his floor which was left a mess from the other night, he slipped and fell onto a stack of brand-new needles bought earlier that week, and they stuck sharply into his wrist. Lao Li was pricked with an unimaginable sharp shock and was unable to get up. He lay on the ground unconscious for a few moments, then groped his way up from the chaotic floor. Lao Li thought to himself that maybe this was a sign he shouldn't be at work today but rather resting in his inviting cot was a better plan.

Arriving home with a disappointed face, his three kids and wife were incredibly worried about their dear father and husband, Lao Li had no thought of eating or washing that night, just falling into a deep trance and hoping it was all a nightmare.

Lao Li awoke to a blissful morning, the sun's warm rays gently filtering through the curtains. As he stretched his limbs, a sense of tranquility washed over him, filling his heart with gratitude that the pain had somehow, magically, vanished. Lao Li took a moment to think. It couldn't be because of the snakeskin soup; instead, it had to be the innumerable amount of needles that he fell onto yesterday. With a smile on his face from ear to ear, he embraced the calmness of dawn, ready to face anything that awaited him today. He whistled as he went to work to finish the dress.

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Meanwhile, a crisis was brewing back at Emperor Xuanzhong's palace. As the sun came up that very same morning, the emperor's daughter awoke to a morning filled with unrelenting agony. Her back, which was completely normal the night before, was not gripped in pain. She immediately yelled for her maid, catching her father's attention. A handful of family members and servants stumbled into her bedroom door as all their warm air dropped. Within seconds of looking at his daughter's writhing body, he demanded the best of the nation's doctors to arrive on the double. "I don't care how much money I have to pay, nothing is worth more than my child's life!"

As the doctors sped into the gates of the palace as fast as their feet would carry them, Xiao Fi's face became paler and paler. The doctors gathered around her bed examining her with compassionate facial expressions. Despite their hard work and professionalism, their efforts met with frustration. Each of their treatments from cold soup to hot patches only gave the poor girl temporary relief from the increasing torment.

While the doctors were putting their increasingly frantic efforts into saving the life of the emperor's daughter, Lao Li showed up at the front door of the palace, ready to deliver the finished dress. Subconscious of the fact that the Emperor's daughter was near her time's end, Lao Li's smile was as wide as the earth. When he innocently walked into her bedroom, a perplexed expression overcame him. His eyes were immediately drawn to a petite figure toying about on her bed. Her face was wan and fatigued, filling his heart with pure empathy.

The emperor then turned his focus away from his daughter and to the tailor as he said, "My poor daughter won't need the gown tonight, if ever. Sorry Lao Li."

"What has happened to her?"

"There is no explanation just yet. She has been having chills, sweating and freezing alternately, and can't move her back without cramping."

The very sentence struck a light bulb in Lao Li's mind. These were all symptoms that he had previously experienced on his wrist. Should he try to help the helpless girl or stay silent? Thoughts swirled in his mind, contemplating the possible consequences of the outcomes but deep down, he knew he had to offer a helping hand.

"Your Majesty. If I may, I had almost identical symptoms on my wrist this past week. All the pain you stated your daughter has, was the same in my case. However, there was something that took away the pain and made me well again so I was able to complete the dress here. I... I know it may sound unimaginable but we can try putting several needles onto the surface of her skin where—"

"Needles in my child's skin? That is absurd!" exclaimed the Emperor.

"Please trust me, Your Majesty," said Lao Li firmly, but secretly feeling hesitant inside.

The doctors grew confused looks on their faces but the emperor decided to have faith in his dear tailor and gave him a signal to start his strange treatment. Luckily, Lao Li had his sewing materials handy. With the softest and gentlest hands possible, Lao Li began the therapy. As he placed each needle with precision they sank into the girl's skin. Through facing self-doubt, Lao Li's determination to help the girl prevailed and he completed the task without causing her too much pain.

After an hour, Lao Li removed the needles one by one, whilst ensuring the maximum amount of comfort through the process. With a soft smile, showing no sign of doubt, he told the doctors to allow her body to heal while she slept. Lao Li aimed to leave her with a sense of hope, also knowing he had done his best.

The next day, Lao Li and his whole family awoke to pounding on the door. What seemed like an emergency knock, was the royal family expressing their sincerest gratitude for Lao Li, acknowledging that he had risked his own life to save their daughter's. She was sitting up, smiling and pain-free ready to wear the dress for the ball. The Emperor thanked Lao Li and apologized for showing fear at his idea. He bestowed upon Lao Li a generous pension as a token of gratitude. With humility, Lao Li and his family accepted the prize and he retired to a well-earned rest.

Nowadays, the treatment, familiarly known as acupuncture, is in common use both in China and beyond. But doctors are notoriously jealous of their professional secrets and so they took great care never to acknowledge the tailor Lao Li's work. To this day, most people believe acupuncture was created by medical experts, but we know the truth, don't we?

Hope and Apprehension

German Swiss International School, Mahil, Aden – 14

As Zhang picked up his slow walk into a quick jog, he noticed that the roads leading to his town were uncharacteristically empty but it hadn't dawned on him what had happened. His blood turned cold as he took his first steps into his old village that he hadn't seen in so long flattened to the ground. "Earthquakes" Zhang quietly muttered to himself.

Quickly he began to sprint toward his familial house, tripping over wooden planks, stones and remnants of what were once the houses of his neighbors until he finally reached it.

To his shock and dread there his family house layed, flattened. Without a moment of hesitation Zhang quickly rushed into the ruins of his childhood home, he stood in what once would've been the kitchen when he saw a familiar and terrifying sight. His mothers straw sandals peeking out from a wooden beam, using all the strength his young body could muster he tried desperately to lift the beam, "Mother! Mother!" he kept calling out to no response, he could feel his heart thumping against his chest so intensely he wondered for a split second as to if it would explode.

Finally after trying for what felt like hours he finally managed to lift the beam just enough to see further. There his mother lay, dead. Still in her morning clothes and sandals, Zhnag fell to the ground before her lifeless body and began to weep. For years he had been away, for years he hadn't seen his mother who raised him from his first seconds to his 13th year of life.

He collected himself and told himself that his father could still be alive, but deep down Zhang knew he was lying to himself. Not even walking a few more feet he noticed something in front of him. An arm. Upon inspecting further he saw a familiar face. His Fathers. Zhang didn't know how to react, his mother and his father who just hours prior were full of life and joyous laid there, dead before him. He had to do something but he didn't know what, he needed to find a way to prevent situations like this to happen ever again if it was the last thing he would ever do.

Many years had passed since Zhang had last thought about something that wasn't his invention, for years upon years of his life he had been desperately slaving away, hour after hour to devise some sort of system. But now, he hoped, he had finally cracked it. A simple bell in a steel box had successfully engraved with an engraving saying "If this bell tolls run far! Earthquake is imminent" passed the tests he had set for it. But he wasn't in the clear yet, for years upon years Chang Zu Lai had been developing his 'own' detector. But Zhang knew the designs were too similar for it to be a coincidence. He had to keep this quiet until he could reach Chang'an and the emperor.

As Zhang embarked on his journey to Chang'an, the weight of his sorrow and determination propelled him forward. He carried within him the weight of loss, the remnants of his shattered childhood, and the burning desire to prevent such tragedies from happening again. Every step he took was filled with purpose, despite the fatigue that threatened to consume him.

Days turned into weeks, and weeks into months as Zhang pressed on, determined to reach the imperial palace. The road was long and treacherous, but his will remained unyielding. Finally, after what felt like an eternity, he arrived at his destination, the grand gates of the palace looming before him.

With a mixture of hope and apprehension, Zhang presented himself to the palace guards and requested an audience with the emperor. He was led through the opulent gilt halls, his heart pounding with anticipation. The emperor, a wise and discerning ruler, agreed to meet Zhang and hear his tale.

In the presence of the emperor, Zhang recounted the devastation that had befallen his village and the loss of his beloved parents. He unveiled his invention, a simple bell in a steel box, which he believed could save countless lives if given the opportunity to be developed further. However Zhang had made one critical mistake months ago. He left the door to his workshop open. To his fear and anger he saw Chang, standing next to the emperor with his blueprints in hand.

"He's a fraud" Zhang yelled to no avail, his designs were never named and all Chang had to do was simply scribble his name on top of the genius work to claim the credit and glory for himself. Chang, with a smug smirk on his face, requested at once that Zhang be removed from the palace for his fraudulent claims against him. All Zhang could do was bleakly stare back at Chang and the emperor as he was dragged away and thrown out of the great and splendid palace.

Zhang could do nothing more than sorrow as he sat at the entrance of the great palace. Years and years of sleepless nights and agonizing days had been all for naught. The invention that he had so carefully and painstakingly put together was now meaningless. Without his invention he was nothing, he had missed out on friends, experiences and many more things just for the now dead hope that one day his adventure could give someone the chance his family didn't get, an aspiration that had gone to waste.

Once more he set off on the road, though not with the same enthusiasm as he had prior, defeated and shamed Zhang on the way back home. He couldn't even bear to look at his invention, what once was his greatest source of joy and pride was now meaningless. He decided it was time to finally part with it. On his way back he noticed a quaint little village, it reminded him of the one he grew up in, he decided that this would be the perfect place to leave his invention so he did. Leaving it outside of the town hall in the hope that maybe one day it may be of use to someone.

It was a typical day in the town, the farmers farming and gossipers gathered in the town center, however they didn't know what was about to happen. Just a few minutes later a bell began to ring out deafeningly, this wasn't the traditional bell that had stood in the town square for years. This was a strange bell in a metal cage inscribed with a warning of an earthquake. At first the village people ignored this, but as the ground began to mildly shake they realized that it was correct. Quickly all of the villagers abandoned what they were doing to run to safety. And just a few minutes after it had been successfully evacuated the town was swallowed up by an earthquake, the cattle slain and farmhouses destroyed.

Upon hearing from another traveler about the earthquake Zhang turned back to go and see the aftermath of it. After traveling for a few days he made it back. Around him were destroyed buildings and slain cattle, but to his joy not a

single human laid dead in that wreck of a village. He looked around for clues as to where the villagers had gone, and noticing a pair of hoove traps he followed along.

It wasn't long before he once again found himself in Chang'an outside of the imperial palace. He entered the palace once more to see the village people speaking with the emperor. "It was him!" they cried "He left the device in our village, the device that has saved our lives!" The Emperor turned to Zhang, "Is this true?" he asked. "Yes your majesty." Zhang replied.

As Zhang and the Emperor were speaking he noticed Chang coming into the finely gilt meeting room. “Chang, show me your blueprints,” asked the Emperor. Chang presented them to the Emperor with a smug look on his face. “Now, explain to me the function of each part that you have designed” Chang was shocked, even though he didn't know how it worked, only Zhang did. Zhang raised his voice and answered the emperor's question, outlining each individual screw and cog and what it meant to the greater invention.

“You cowardly liar!” cried the Emperor to Chang, “Have him taken from my sight at once.” and so Chang was removed. “ My dear subject forgive me for ever doubting you” spoke the Emperor to Zhang, graciously bowing his head Zhang accepted his apology, but in that moment his mind was in that room, it was in the ruins of his childhood home, it was in the misery of that moment, and it was in the joy that it will never happen again.

A Miraculous Save

German Swiss International School, Ngai, Nicholas – 13

In the year 2066, ten years after the disastrous climatic event known as the Reckoning, where unprecedented disasters such as tornadoes, droughts, floods, and hurricanes devastated the world. Scientists all recognized that the Reckoning had come as a result of the unfettered exploitation of the planet for the past century. Whatever the cause of the Reckoning was, humanity was on its last legs.

The rising sun engulfed all the coastal cities, wiping half of humanity within a matter of two years. The natural disasters continued to haunt the survivors; with unrelenting drought and cyclones that drove people into the mountains within a decade.

The warming climate brought forth new terrors from the melted permafrost. The anthrax and the polluted air contained harmful viruses and chemicals that were invisible to the naked eye. New diseases and blights destroyed the crops, exacerbated by the short-sighted decision of corporations to grow monoculture crops. The fields of withering and ashen crops, and the stench from rotting animals was the very picture of tragedy, a dying planet. The once-vibrant Earth had descended into a shadow of its former self, with polluted air choking the skies and blankets of dust burying the land.

This dragon of pollution was a fearsome creature, its scales coated in a dark, noxious sludge that clung to the earth like a suffocating shroud. It breathed out toxic fumes, poisoning the once-fresh air and transforming it into a foul miasma that choked the very life out of all it touched. Its wings, once majestic and vibrant, were now heavy with the weight of pollutants, casting a shadow over the sun-drenched landscapes below.

Hope started to flounder even amongst the most resilient of humans. They were not spared from diseases either. The air was thick. Pollutant-filtering masks were required to breathe normally, and absent of them, the tiny particles would seep into one's lungs and corrupt them within the hour. The new coronavirus was thought to have come from ancient strings buried underneath the permafrost that had resurfaced as a result of the ice melting. This particularly powerful string of viruses mutated quickly along with a myriad of other deadly ones that made earth almost uninhabitable for humans; traversing old territories could be deadly.

For the surviving humans, the makeshift laboratory, nestled between the towering Kunlun mountains far away from old civilization was their last hope. The most brilliant scientists have gathered there to make a last-ditch effort to come up with a solution to ensure the continuity of the human species. They toiled away day and night to discover a cure for all the viruses.

In a small village at the foothills of the mountains, a little boy by the name of Huan Shan sat alone in his room, his mind filled with the scintillating flames of curiosity shining amidst the darkness in this post-apocalyptic hellscape. Despite his tender age, he possessed a brilliant mind and an insatiable thirst for knowledge.

One fateful day, as Huan Shan immersed himself in a vast array of books and scientific journals, a seed of revolution started germinating within the depths of his young mind. The more he delved into the intricacies of the physical world, the more this groundbreaking idea took form and substance, slowly unfurling its wings of possibility.

Inside a nearby old Taoist temple, Huan Shan's eyes widened as he beheld the intricate murals adorning the walls. The vibrant colours and detailed brushwork depicted scenes of nature, mythical creatures, and ancient herbal remedies. It was a visual testament to the deep wisdom possessed by the Taoist sages of old. As his eyes scanned the characters, Huan Shan's knowledge of Chinese culture and history proved invaluable. He deciphered the complex herbal recipes and

medicinal properties described in the manuscript. Huan Shan set off to the towering Kunlun mountains, in search of the medicinal herb that could heal the world. Exhausted and shivering cold, he finally discovered the Taoist herb. Its radiant aurora shined throughout the dull sky, beaming a glimmer of hope throughout the suffering earth.

As news of the groundbreaking panacea spread like wildfire, the greedy pharmaceutical companies caught wind of its potential. Rumours started to spread about a cure for the diseases plaguing humanity. How does one put monetary value on the ability to be able to breathe again? To eat fresh vegetables and fruits again? It was priceless. Moreover, how could an immature boy be smart enough to come up with something that everyone else has failed? The idea was inconceivable to them. Shadowy assassins were sent forth to kill Huan Shan and to steal his recipe to reap enormous profits.

Huan Shan was working away in his lab making Panacea as quickly as he could. He didn't notice the men clad in black behind him. They blindfolded him and dragged him out of his home and took him out of the Kunlun mountains to their basecamp to face the biggest conglomerate Moderna-Pfizer CEO Peter Hyda.

With a translator, Hyda asked the bewildered and frightened Huan Shan why he had been brought here.

"I don't know sir, but please let me go. I need to make medicine for everyone".

"I'm afraid that won't be an option", Hyda smiled sinisterly. "Your invention will be mine. No one will believe that an immature kid could come up with something. Let us have the burden of pushing the product worldwide."

"You mean you will help me?"

"No, I will be helping myself. Give up the recipe boy."

"Alright, I don't mind as long as you can help me save more people".

"Only selectively. You see, only those who can afford it will be saved. If you give it up now, I'd be happy to give you a share of the profit".

"I don't want the money. I can give you the recipe only if you promise that you will help as many people as you can. Money is what got us in this state in the first place. If you make too much then more people will die, this recipe is humanity's last chance at survival and you want this recipe only to reap profits!" Huan Shan replied defiantly.

"This Panacea is the key to infinite power, and no one shall stand in my way!"

In desperation, Huan Shan grabbed a gun and pointed it to his own head and shouted, "If you don't agree to make it for free to save everyone, I'll die right here and the recipe will die with me! If you do, I am sure people will be grateful and you will be the greatest company ever!"

Shaken, Peter Hyda said, "No, don't hurt yourself. What about you then? You don't want the credit?"

"Not one bit, I just want people to be okay and for things to go back to the way they were."

That single sentence deeply touched the assassin's heart, causing a profound change of heart. In a moment of compassion, he made the decision to release Huan Shan, sparing his life. Determined and armed with Huan Shan's invaluable recipe and cure, the assassin boldly ventured into the Moderna Pfizer's factory. Huan's mission was to finalise the production and distribution of the Panacea, a miraculous remedy that would bring relief to people worldwide. As the Panacea reached every corner of the globe, the world collectively exhaled a sigh of profound relief.

In the end, it was not just the brilliance of Huan Shan's mind, but also his unwavering belief in the potential of humanity that ignited a heartfelt transformation. Through his intelligence and the collaborative scientists it inspired, the world took its first faltering steps towards healing the wounds inflicted upon the Earth. It was a poignant reminder that even in the darkest of times, a single idea born from the purest intentions and the unyielding spirit of a young boy could awaken the dormant conscience of humanity.

Lurking in the Shadows

German Swiss International School, Powell, Natasha – 14

The sky was a canvas painted with dusky blue hues. The ethereal clouds glowed with a heavenly light as the sun ascended over the horizon, highlighting the serene mountain tops. The winding roads snaked their way up the mountain's verdant slope, stretching their long roots deep into the undergrowth. Upon entering this mythical heaven, you're greeted by the vibrant cherry blossom trees, their delicate petals dancing in the gentle breeze. Nestled in the cliffside, lay a bustling city. A fusion of mixed aromas, the scent of jasmine and fresh tea wafted by traditional red-tiled roofs adorned with intricate dragon motifs. Their golden spires reached towards the clouds, offering glimpses into the spiritual essence that permeated the city. This harmonious place had an ethereal charm that enchanted and truly captivated one's soul.

It was astonishing, but never perfect. Its beauty was an unsettling reality— a puzzle that yearned for an answer. When the aged walls spoke, they whispered ancient tales. An ominous feeling hung in the air, but nobody could tell what it was. It was just always there, casting a stormy cloud over my town, until the whispers grew louder, echoing through alleyways. It created myths of this sinister presence lurking beneath the surface. The clouds no longer glowed and the sky became a dull shade of gray. The once bustling city was now silent, the only sound coming from fears that spoke louder than ever.

Then they came.

The forces tried to break free. They stretched and extended their roots deep. They gnarled and fought back the virtuous spirits, not powerful enough to protect us. Violently and brutally, they wrestled. The blood now permanently stained the underworld, its scarlet color forever tainting the beautiful reality above. The darkness flowed with such extreme vehemence. Its fierce passion carried it until it reached the surface, slipping through cracks, seeping into the corners slyfully. Its presence was there, yet laid undiscovered.

In the depths of the night, when the moon hung low, the air was so thick with mystery you could cut it with a knife. Its luminous dark scales of crystalline were so alluring, as if they were made with celestial hands. Each surface enraptured mesmerizing, dancing, reflections, a window into an unperceived realm. Its raven eyes were unsettling, a murky hole of nothingness, a lack of light. Lifeless and ghostly, its motives were shrouded with mystery. It slithered with such elegance through hushed moonlit streets, its fierce beauty so striking. How could a heavenly creature have such sinister intentions?

It craved chaos and corruption, whispering promises of wealth to those who would listen. It preyed on your deepest desires and exploited your fears and insecurities. Its tendrils of darkness snaked their way through the streets, igniting the dormant flames of envy and greed. It fuelled the people's lust for richness, seducing them with its alluring lies, the unity and compassion forever lost among the shadows of corruption. Succumbing to the creatures' temptations, the townsfolk's souls were torn apart and their hearts poisoned. The town became drowned in a sea of shadows.

Then, a fiery red ember emerged from the darkened skies. It soared, powered by its fury, and came to avenge the guilty, fuelled by nightmares and destruction, forged from the azure above. Its scales were like armour, nature's glorious tapestry of power and strength. Reflecting a myriad of colours that danced across surfaces like ethereal flames, It highlighted the contours of the dragon's mighty body. The dragon moved gracelessly, its scales rustling, a symphony of protection, flexing and moving, following the creature's motions. The scales came alive and served the dragon following the commands of its majesty, and served as a constant reminder of the power it holds.

Ascending over the corrupt town, the townsfolk gazed in disbelief at the pure wretchedness. Merciless, it began its fiery purge, setting the town ablaze, releasing its wrath upon the people. The town was engulfed in an inferno, the harrowing view colouring the sky with deep oranges and reds. Hungry flames consumed everything in their path, heavy smoke pouring out amongst the fire. Purging the darkness of its toxic influence. Cherry wood cracked in the flames, distant cries of despair and agony creating a harmony of devastation that echoed throughout the fiery streets. Dancing about, almost sentient, the flames tore through the snake-like creature ever so effortlessly, reducing it to nothing but ashes. The fire now at its peak, reached the people, raging remorselessly against the broken community. Charged with vengeance. Those who once thrived under the shadows' control, now lay dead, my home nothing but a somber abyss of ash and smoke.

The dragon's beautiful scales were now dull and broken. The glimmer in its eyes has disappeared, replaced by the same emptiness of the dark spirit. Its flames became mere memories of terror; the screams, a ringing in his head. His skin was forever covered with amber scars, to a reminder of the lives he ended. Now he barely resembled the powerful creature he once was, replaced with a grotesque silhouette of a snake.

The charred remnants and smoldering ruins fuelled with the dragon's rage now could be employed into explosive charges that possessed the same power that he once held. The sulfur from the mountains, charcoal formed in the fire, and the dragon's magic, made something I named gunpowder.

I could rest knowing their ashes could now fuel the deaths of others.

Chinvention

German Swiss International School, Siu, Ingrid – 13

Once upon a time, there was a family and they were happy. In that family, was a boy named Mingze. He was quite a smart little boy for his age. But one thing always confused Mingze.

How do things fly?

How could things stay in the air without touching the ground?

What happens if they fall?

He and his family used to look up at the sky and admire the clouds and the planes above. "What does that one look like?" His father pointed at a cloud above. Mingze's mother replied sweetly, lovingly, "It looks like..." They continued for another hour.

See, many good things are related to flying. For the people of China, it was a dragon. Many people respected the dragon and it was a symbol of the Emperor. Many people looked up to this beautiful creature.

One day, as he wandered through a meadow, Minze looked up at the sky.

"I wish I could fly," Minze whispered to the wind, so Mingze wanted to glide.

Mingze turned older and grew not only in size but also in knowledge as well. He had many friends and he was doing well in school. However, Mingze was battling against depression. The very condition that many carry. Why? Straightforward answer? His parents. He always valued the attention of his parents. They used to talk every day, but his parents got more occupied with their jobs and they needed to sacrifice more time to get money. Because of this, depressed Mingze wanted a closer connection with his busy parents. He tried to get their attention and revive their fading emotional bond. He wanted a way to soar above his depression.

He found a way to channel it. He buried himself in his studies as a way to try to get their attention. The pressure to excel academically became his refuge, where he could channel his energy and find solace in textbooks and equations. Late nights were spent with books.

Mingze's dedication didn't go unnoticed by his teachers, who marvelled at the exceptional grades he consistently earned. He was the one who excelled in every subject, yet his parents didn't seem to care less.

But still, he wanted to soar.

His classmates would always laugh and call him the "dreamer" for the things he wanted to achieve. "Are you crazy man?", "Now way you're gonna be able to do that, trust me." Some people thought he was delusional. But even with all of his friends telling him that it could never be done, Mingze paid no mind. He had nothing else to do anyway. So he spent all his time reading books about birds and the sky above.

Whenever Mingze feels down, he goes to this park and looks up at the sky like he and his parents used to. He always felt like he belonged in the sky. Mingze always shut his eyes, took in a pleasant, fresh breath of air, and sensed his parents were right with him.

One day, he was studying in the silent library, thinking about how his mother never replied to him at home. He was tracing his fingers along the books on the bookshelf. "Calligraphy", "Biology and what's underneath?", etc. Then, he came across this book on "how birds could fly". "Birds fly by using air pressure's pushing force to create wing lift. This is achieved by the physical law known as the Bernoulli Principle."

"The Bernoulli Principle" Mingze read. "The Bernoulli Principle. the Bernoulli Principle!", he repeated. His eyes glowed with creativity. He thought, "I'm gonna grow my wings and I'm going to fly!"

He was focused that day. He was focused on finally deserving their attention. He would be the highest in the city. Everybody would notice his angelic presence in the atmosphere, particularly his parents.

He devoted hours to figuring out how to hover over everyone.

At school, almost everybody doubted the boy could fly. They kept saying "he's not even that light" or "What is he supposed to do, flap his arms?"

Eventually, the comments got to him. Not only did his parents neglect him, but his schoolmates and even his friends doubted if what he wanted to do was possible. Mingze lost hope for a moment. He started to think if it was even worth it. If no one loved him, why must he stay alive and prove himself to others?

In order to calm down, Mingze returns to his peaceful park takes in a few breaths and doesn't let any of the negativity seep into his mind. The park is the only time when he feels comforted. He gets lost in the sky and eventually, calms down.

He was excited for the following two weeks. He got a lot of materials. Lightweight, heavyweight, soft and hard. He wanted to remain in the sky for as long as he could, but as he jumped off a chair, he couldn't even stay in the air for a second.

Unbothered, he tried again, this time gathering feathers from any type of bird. Whether it was a chicken or even an eagle, he took its precious feather and used it to craft and grow his very own pair of wings. Once everything was complete, he jumped off his chair again, hoping that he would at least glide a little. Nope. Unsuccessful.

He tried over and over again. And every single time he lost more hope than he did before. Certainly, his parents didn't help either.

In his despair, he determines to make his way to the park. Yet again, he takes a deep breath and glances up at the sky. But unexpectedly, a paper plane distracts him from focusing on the sky. Irritated, he grudgingly saunters back home.

On Mingze's way back home. He started thinking about the paper plane and how it soared and glided through the park so easily. How could that be? Mingze realised that he never tried to fly with paper! Paper was the answer! He could *glide* through the sky.

After realising this, Mingze ran back home and started to make his giant paper plane.

After glueing all the paper together, he jumps off his chair and the paper rips apart. "It was too weak on his own" Mingze mentions to himself.

That night, he thought about how the plane could hold its structure, and just like a house it needed a foundation. So, the next day, he gathered a couple of sticks he had found in that park and screwed them all together to make one whole foundation that supported his plane.

The contraption was sturdy and ready to be challenged. With regained courage and strength, he stepped up on the chair. He was hovering off the ground! He flowed with every gust of wind that came Mingze's way, he floated along with it. Without hesitation, Mingze screams out to his parents from his realisation. "Dad! Mom! Look at me! I'm flying!" he calls.

He tries to control his balance and speed and flows towards his father and mother. Slowly and steadily, he makes his way inch by inch to his destination.

He calls and waves his arms in an attempt to grab his parents. "Mingze? What are you doing", his mother says worriedly. Mingze grabs onto the side of the window of where his parents are looking through. Mingze got his parent's attention. The only success that he ever truly felt. He was going to explain everything to his parents but Mingze loses his balance and loses grip of the window. This only made him soar higher and higher up into the sky.

Before he knew it he was higher than his school, his home, his city. Sure, Mingze got the attention. But as he went higher and higher, he heard a little rip starting to tear apart and started to doubt his intentions of flying high. Soon, he could see his whole city.

"Rrrrrriiiiiipppp--"

He could feel his whole body being pushed towards the ground and immense amounts of wind hit his face. His home started to grow bigger. And bigger. And bigger. He panicked and scrambled and reached for his contraption to see a big tear. Despite this, Mingze wore it in desperation to stop himself from dying.

A few years later, many people in his hometown remember Mingze for flying his contraption called a "Kite". Many people let it soar in the sky and can let it soar higher with their strings. Furthermore, Mingze's parents finally paid attention to him and paid more attention to their surroundings.

In the Absence of Shadow

German Swiss International School, Stock, Audrey – 14

Dozens of umbrellas move as one along the bustling streets, the sky awash with hues of grey. It's getting late and my mind is as foggy as it is outside. Time to call it a day. Realising the pain in my back has worsened, I push myself out of the chair and sluggishly don my coat.

The rain beats down hard on my umbrella as I join the flow of people. Absent-mindedly, I stare into the distance. My legs carry me back to the doorstep of my home.

I fumble with the key and let myself in. The charcoal-tinged scent of tea smoked chicken makes its way from the stove to my nostrils.

"You're home." says my wife, Mei Qi.

Who else would it be?

I grumble and let the open umbrella drop. HuanHuan trots over to lick up the pooling rainwater.

"Stupid dog," I push him away with my foot and struggle to bend over to pick up the umbrella. "When's dinner ready?"

"Soon," she says, turning away from the stove to look at me. "How was work?"

"Eh—"

"Zhang Wei! What did I say about open umbrellas in the home? You'll invite ghosts."

I roll my eyes in vexation. "Calm down, your old wives tales don't mean anything."

HuanHuan licks the droplets off the umbrella's canopy. Shaking my head, I prop it up on the drying rack and sit down at the dinner table. I hear his light footsteps trotting towards me. His bulging eyes are bright with anticipation.

Mei Qi sets the steaming plate down. I take a piece and peel off the thick slab of skin. HuanHuan waits, drooling, before I hurl it across the room and he chases it. My wife's anger is manifested through pouring tea for only herself.

I feel a pang of guilt and mumble, "I might not go to work tomorrow." I expect her to smile, but with a twinge of passive-aggression, she says,

"Good." she looks down at the floor, refusing to meet my eyes. "You shouldn't work on Sundays."

I nod flatly. My eyelids grow heavy and the pain in my back persists. I stand up, move heavily to the bedroom and collapse onto the haven of comfort.

"Your clothes are still dirty, at least change before going to bed!" Mei Qi pleads from the living room.

You're not my mother, I scoff to myself.

I murmur, "Mhm..." and drift off.

A shaft of morning light hits my face as my wife opens the curtains. “We’re going for a walk with HuanHuan!” she says excitedly. A sense of warmth envelops me, knowing she genuinely wants to spend time together and isn’t angry anymore.

We step out into the cool outdoors, the rain having subsided into a gentle drizzle and sunshine. The dog jumps up on me and his paws dig into my shins, leaving little indents in my skin. Mei Qi stares at the ground, watching the winds winnow through the dancing grass.

“You alright?” I say.

She nods contentedly. I take her hand with affection, but unfinished projects pile up in my mind and I regret my decision not to go to work. I need to go back there. To pass the time, I mindlessly watch our contorting shadows against the path. My eyes shift from my own to HuanHuan’s to Mei Qi’s.

Only, she doesn’t have one.

I analyse the path meticulously, going back and forth between each cobblestone but it is a void of almond earth where her shadow should be. I retract my hand from hers.

“Mei Qi?”

“Yes, dear?”

“Your shadow— why don’t you have— I don’t—”

Some inexplicable force makes my voice falter. Mei Qi cocks her head to the side, the corners of her lips ever so slightly quivering upwards. She blinks. And blinks again.

She says nothing.

I step away. “Mei Qi?”

“Oh, look at that, it’s raining again! I told you bringing the umbrella would come in handy.” with a flick of her wrist, she unleashes the canopy of the umbrella. She shelters herself within its geometrical shadow and bends down to brush her delicate hand against HuanHuan’s velvety ear.

He lurches forward at Mei Qi, yanking the leash and straining my arm.

I wait for the joke to come, what Mei Qi always says when HuanHuan starts barking at any irregular moment. *Hahah, have you seen a ghost, HuanHuan?*

It doesn’t come.

I say, “Uh, aren’t you going to—”

“What did you say, dear?”

“I was— wait, why do you keep calling me *dear*? You don’t usually—”

She shrugs and offers, “Umbrella?” I step away cautiously and shake my head.

We walk stiffly without saying a word. The winter trees stick out of the ground like ghostly feathers. I watch a stout man loudly selling goods for the Dongzhi festival, sending the birds away in a fearful scatter. The rain harshly patters against the rough fabric of my jacket. I lose myself in thoughts and possibilities that cloud my mind.

I say, “We’re going out for dinner with Tom and Hua tonight, right?”

She presses her lips together and sucks in air through her paper white teeth. “Perhaps we should stay home. Can you call it off?”

“Of course.” I stick my hand into my pocket and feel it clasp around my phone.

We get back to our doorstep after many moments of silence. Mei Qi carries the umbrella right in. I almost laugh. “You’ve finally come to your senses?”

After no response, I tell her, “I’ve cancelled the dinner with Tom and Hua, by the way.”

“Thank you!”

HuanHuan shakes himself dry, I wince as the droplets fly onto my face.

Something is wrong. Mei Qi is shadowless, she suddenly neglects her superstitions that she’s had her whole life, and Tom and Hua aren’t even real people. I just made them up to test her.

This thing standing before me, grinning, her black hair falling over her shoulders in glossy waves— it’s not my wife.

And then it makes sense to me. Everything Mei Qi talks about: Open umbrellas in the house inviting ghosts, Ghosts’ true forms only being visible to the eyes of animals, In the eyes of humans, ghosts looking like us with no shadows— encapsulated in today’s events.

“Could you hand me the umbrella, please?” I keep calm.

She pulls me into a tight hug. Her body is clammy and soulless, I’m being wrapped in an icy shroud. And she has no breath. Her whispers come from not her voice box but from something else within. So when she purrs into my ear, “Now why would I do that?” I feel her voice reverberate around the whole room.

I break free of her cold grip and she does nothing to stop it. She only stares at me through eyes that gleam with an otherworldly light. Despite my backache, I bend over, grab the dog and hold it in one arm. It’s a silly creature but it’s the only thing I have. My voice shakes. “What have you done with Mei Qi?”

She nonchalantly curls up her fingers and admires her painted red nails. Her smile widens. “You don’t need Mei Qi. I’m here now, dear.”

A wave of dread washes over me. “Is she alive? Is she dead? Tell me what happ—”

“Why the worry, Zhang Wei? This was your own doing. You invited me, after all.”

I ignore the stab of guilt and step forwards. “I left an umbrella open! It’s just a chinese superstition! You will leave my wife’s body and release her!” I say, meaning to sound confident and fierce, but it comes out as a frightened plead.

The ghostly figure chuckles. “Oh, perhaps you misunderstand me. I have no intention of leaving this house.” Her voice is a haunting echo of Mei Qi’s.

“Get out!”

“Oh dear, I’m afraid you’re stuck with me. Unless you’d like to be... replaced?”

Zhang's Masterminding Creation

German Swiss International School, Suratkal, Kristopher – 13

A day like any other, Zhang Heng and his family were enjoying their family dinner. They heard a thumping sound outside, but this happens regularly since construction happens every week, but they thought wrong. This was a natural disaster, bigger than ever before, it was an earthquake.

During the Han Dynasty (206 BC – 220 AD), Zhang Heng's family had sadly passed away due to this natural disaster. Zhang was heartbroken, but knew he had to do something about it. He had this idea of how to tell if an earthquake was coming. So, he decided to build an earthquake detector.

He knew that he had to create this fast, so that this mess wouldn't happen again. He started by trying to find all the parts. He was clueless and didn't know where to start. He knew that he had minimal time, so he started planning right away. He sat there, thinking for a few hours. 'Ding'. He knew what he had to do. He had to make a pendulum system that was very sensitive to vibrations, which did not rely on shaking or any subtle movement in the location where the device was located.

Zhang's seismoscope was a massive bronze vessel with a diameter of nearly six feet that resembled a container. The main compass directions were indicated by eight face-down dragons that snaked around the barrel's exterior. A little ball of bronze was in the throat of every dragon. Eight bronze toads sat beneath the dragons, their wide mouths open to take in the balls. This design was quite the accomplishment. It also featured a catch device, a pivot on a projection, a vertical pin that went through a slot in the crank, a horizontal bar holding the pendulum, and a sling that suspended it.

If an earthquake had occurred, the ball from the dragon's mouth would drop down into the mouth of the toad.

Zhang never knew when the next earthquake would occur. Every day, he kept scouting the area for any signs and any warnings.

2 months go by, and still no sign. The next day, he heard rumbling in the distance. He quickly went to his room and brought out his seismoscope. He genuinely hoped that his invention would work. As he heard more and more rumbling, he was just waiting for the balls from the dragon's mouth to drop into the toad's. He didn't know for sure since these seismoscopes could only detect earthquakes from 100 km away. Zhang leaves the seismoscope outside and goes into his room to take a nap.

1–2 hours later, he hears a 'tsshhh' sound. He woke up and ran out of bed to check his seismoscope. He looked at the dragons, but there were no balls in their mouth's. He checked if they fell off, since he knew he hadn't reconstructed it well. There was nothing on the ground. Now, he only thought one thing, and it was if the balls were in the mouth of the toad's. To his surprise, the dragon pointing east had dropped the ball into the mouth of the toad.

He quickly rushed to spread the news about the earthquake to the city and that they had to evacuate immediately. No one believed him. So, he showed them the seismoscope and explained to them how it worked. All the civilians were star-struck and didn't think detecting an earthquake from hundreds of kilometers away was possible. Zhang Heng proved them wrong. Henceforward, Zhang has not only become the saviour of China, but the liberator of the world. Civilians now knew what to do when they felt like an earthquake would occur.

Ever since that day, modern scientists have tried to replicate that exact same seismoscope. In 2005, scientists in Zhang's hometown managed to replicate Zhang's seismoscope and employed it to identify artificial earthquakes by analyzing waves from four distinct actual earthquakes that occurred in China and Vietnam. They were all picked up

by the seismoscope. In fact, there was an exact correlation between the data obtained from the tests and the data obtained by contemporary seismometers.

The Note-worthy Time Traveller

German Swiss International School, Tan, Olivia – 12

Alfred Pascal was a smart kid. In fact, he was named after Alfred Nobel, inventor of the Nobel Prize. Coincidentally, his last name was the same as Blaise Pascal, a famous mathematician. However, although Alfred was extremely clever, his family wasn't doing the best financially. Ever since Alfred could remember, everyone had only used coins, making them extremely heavy and inconvenient. Citizens had started to leave them at home, in fear of their pockets or bags splitting with the weight of a hundred coins. Alfred couldn't understand why the only form of money was coins, but he was determined to change that.

One day, Alfred's mother got her paycheck. A huge handful of coins. However, when she arrived home, Alfred's mother only had a few coins left. She miserably explained that the coins had fallen out of her pocket, most of them rolling into the sewers. Although the whole family agreed that there was no way to get the coins back, a dismal mood still hung over the house. Alfred, however, would not accept it. He was intent on helping his family by making a time machine that would take him anywhere in time. Alfred wasn't too sure if it would work correctly, but he was convinced that if he went back in time, he would be able to persuade inventors to make a different form of currency that was lighter and more convenient, and save his family.

Alfred stepped into the time machine. "Before coins!" he said to the machine. Suddenly, everything was spinning. After he kept spinning for some time, Alfred started to panic. Would he ever get out? Suddenly, the spinning came to an abrupt stop. Alfred stumbled out of the machine dizzily, expecting to be inside a factory building. However, he found himself on a bridge. The longer he looked around, the more he realised that he was in ancient China. Suddenly, he heard a deep voice behind him say, "Hello, what is the purpose of your visit to our town?" "To investigate the invention of coins." Alfred replied meekly, turning to find two men towering above him. The men nodded, then sped off in an unknown direction, beckoning for Alfred to follow.

As Alfred hurried through the fields with his companions, he saw a towering red building. It had intricate patterns in the windows, and Alfred swore that he could see a dragon circling the roof. The roof was made of black ceramic roof tiles, a piece narrowly missing Alfred as he was led over a bridge. Finally, Alfred and the two men arrived at a red, wooden door with large brass knockers in a bronze lion's mouth. One man hit a gong next to the door, while the other raised the giant knocker and slammed it back down on the door. The sound of the gong and knocking eventually merged into one long note that reverberated through the whole building. Eventually, an old man slowly opened the door and peered out. The men stepped aside to let Alfred pass, and as soon as he stepped over the threshold, the door swung shut behind him.

"My name is Yuze," the old man said, bowing. "Follow me." Alfred hurried to catch up with the man, admiring the amazing architecture. The inside of this building was decorated with beautifully carved patterns in shiny, wooden pillars. As he was looking around in awe, the old man suddenly came to a stop and opened an old wooden door, splinters of wood sticking out from all around it. He gestured for Alfred to enter the room and when Alfred entered, the old man gave him a toothy grin, swiftly shutting the door.

Above him, there was a large, high-backed chair. Sitting in it, was a man with a long, thin beard, bushy eyebrows, and a fierce yet dignified look on his face. "Ah, hello," he said. "I'm Alfred," Alfred said. "And I would like to learn more about your money system and coins." The man stood up and gracefully extended his hand. Alfred was hesitant, but eventually took it as his curiosity overtook him. "Where are we going?" asked Alfred as he was led out of the throne room and into a dark, cramped space. "You'll find out." came the reply. Alfred stumbled through the dark room when the man suddenly opened a door. Alfred squinted out into the bright light to find piles and piles of paper. These sheets of paper were thin, and crisp, and had numbers on them. Alfred stared at the pile of money in awe, when the man pushed him towards it and said, "These are paper banknotes. Each banknote is unique, and there are three different banknotes. Twenty, fifty, and hundred dollar banknotes." Alfred was

bewildered at first, but he came to realise that these banknotes were feather-light, making them extremely easy to carry around. "These banknotes are much more convenient to carry around than piles of coins!" Alfred exclaimed. "Feel free to examine them and take them to show others this new convenient currency." The man replied, smiling warmly at him. He bowed and left the room, leaving Alfred alone with all of the banknotes.

Alfred slowly picked up a banknote, almost afraid it would burn him or do something to harm him. The banknote, however, stayed normal, just a flimsy piece of paper. Alfred carefully folded one bill of each amount, stored it carefully in his pocket and made his way back to the throne room. Curiously, the man had vanished, and there was no trace of him ever being there, apart from the empty, polished throne. Alfred retraced his steps back to the front door and pushed it open. The sun glared brightly outside, the gravel crunching under his feet as he returned to the time machine. "Home," Alfred grinned, once inside the machine, excited to share his discovery with everyone.

When Alfred arrived back home, he rushed to the city hall. He arrived at the entrance, panting. "I need to speak with the mayor," Alfred said. "I have a proposition for him." The guard let him pass, wishing him luck. Alfred took a deep breath and stepped into the office. "Greetings Alfred, how may I help you today?" The mayor greeted him warmly. "Good afternoon Sir, if I may present a proposition to you?" Alfred asked. "Take a seat." The mayor offered, before settling down to listen to what Alfred had to say. "Our lives have been burdened by heavy coins that weigh you down and split your pockets, causing you to lose them all. May I present an alternative form of currency? Lightweight paper banknotes." The mayor nodded, giving Alfred a boost of confidence. Reaching into his pocket, he pulled out a carefully folded banknote and presented it to the mayor. "After noticing the struggles of using coins, I travelled back to ancient China and came across this. These paper banknotes are another form of money. They are very light, and can be printed with different amounts on each banknote. There will be no more problems with heavy pockets and coins rolling everywhere." The mayor seemed to be deep in thought, considering the idea of using paper money. Alfred waited with bated breath before the mayor broke out in a huge grin and exclaimed, "That's a great idea! I will announce it at the next council meeting. I would hope that you could join me." Alfred was astonished and gladly accepted the invitation.

The next day, Alfred presented his idea to the whole council, and it was met with thundering applause. Within the next week, paper banknotes were being printed and circulated. The citizens were all ecstatic with this new invention, as it made their lives so much more convenient.

In Alfred's honour, the fifty-dollar banknote had the red brick building from ancient China in the background, with Alfred's smiling face in front of it, beaming with pride and joy.

The Accidental Invention of Paper

German Swiss International School, To, Wynstelle – 12

Hard working sisters Li and Ming were preparing dinner for their Mother. All the food they had was only what they could afford, which wasn't much.

"Chop logs! I need a fire!" their Mother Ling would shout hysterically every night.

Reluctantly, they chopped away. They barely got food and water. How could they sustain living like this?

After a long day of chores, they walked home. They smelled the ashy scent of their Mother's fireplace. Knowing she wouldn't share, they trotted steadily into their cramped, chilly room. Li and Ming loved creativity, and took every opportunity to do it, but, it wasn't the time to be thinking about that. They heard the light switch click off. They stared into the darkness, and then climbed into bed.

The next day, the sun rose cheerfully. The two sisters began preparing breakfast but knew there was probably nothing. Li and Ming chopped down logs for the daily fire. They entered the house with 4 logs, like every other day, but Ming dropped a log causing a thundering bang across their creaky wooden floor. Then Li tripped on the log and came flying to an ancient vase their Mother had inherited.

"CRASH". Li and Ming froze in terror.

"WHAT IS THIS?! SUDDEN BANGING NOISES?!" Ling rushed angrily out of her room.

"MY VASE! IT'S BROKEN!" She frantically picked up the pieces.

Li and Ming stared at each other with horror, but remained still. A long but painful silence occurred. Then a snuffle. Nervous eyes glanced around. Then, Ling looked at the disaster again.

"You...HOW DARE YOU! YOU KNOW HOW MUCH THIS COST? IT'S THE MOST EXPENSIVE THING WE HAVE IN THIS UNWEALTHY HOUSEHOLD!" Their Mother cried.

They stayed silent, but something changed their minds.

"I'm sorry... It was an accident." Li murmured.

"CLEAN THIS MESS!" Ling squealed.

Li started to pick up pieces of the vase hurriedly, while Ming impatiently collected all the logs. At the same time, they scurried back to their bedroom.

"Oh no, we're in trouble now." Li sighed.

She thumped onto the chair and threw the logs onto the desk.

"Did you see her face? Priceless. It serves her right for what she's done." Ming answered.

Li went into the kitchen and grabbed a dull cutting knife from the rack. She slid her eye along the edge of the blade. She trudged back to the room.

"I can't handle this stress," Li said. And with that, she started cutting the bark on the logs off and saved the wood into slim pieces to relieve her stress.

Night began to fall. With no dinner, their stomachs were aching. The moon lit the sky. The two sisters slithered into the kitchen to get some tap water, when they entered back into the room, Li accidentally spilled the water next to the logs on the table.

"Ugh" she spoke, leaving the spill.

Li and Ming sat cautiously on the window ledge, gazing out.

"Hopefully tomorrow will be a better day..." Ming said.

With the very thin slices of wood on the desk and two cups of water, one that was spilt, they slid deep into their dirty, worn covers and fell asleep.

The next morning, Li and Ming woke up early, to an awakening surprise on the table. One of the pieces of wood was drenched into the water that was spilt previously and it had been turned into a firebery white pasty sheet.

"What? Did someone put this in here?" Ming slowly picked up the weird textured object and examined it. "It looks like it was dipped into the water and slowly dried, although it's still slightly wet..." Ming added.

Ming folded it, looked at it carefully and placed it down. She looked at it weirdly.

"Huh? This folds really nicely, I didn't expect that!" Ming said.

Li picked it up and started making something.

"How cute!" Li managed to say out of surprise. "This is like the material dad bought us in the Summer!" Ling shouted.

She sat the creature down on their window ledge.

"Let me try something..." Li said as she walked over and spilled more water on the table, then dipped a small piece of wood in it.

"We shall wait," she added.

That afternoon, they returned and stared at the desk.

"I think it worked!" Ming exclaimed. She picked it up, "A bit moist, let's set it out in the remaining sunlight and check on it tonight." Ming suggested.

After a small supper of rice and vegetables, they entered once again. Li picked it up, firm but easy to fold. Ming grabbed it and it teared.

"HEY!" They said in unison.

They each started folding something now that it was split in half.

"I made a flower! Look!" Li started.

Ming looked down at hers. Li peered over.

"Don't be sad. I'll teach you!" They sat down and continued with their experiment.

In the morning, Li and Ming went outside to show villagers their accidental masterpieces. An old lady came by.

"Oh girls! What have you two created?" she asked.

"I think we invented something like animal skin!" Li replied.

"Wow! I think you're onto something!" the kind old lady commented.

They both grinned shyly. After a long day outside, it was finally evening. Li and Ming took one step into the house to find their Mother cross with them.

"Where have you been? Where's my lunch?" Li looked down at the money they've made. Ming shrugged. And they both made their way to their room.

"Hey! What's that thing in your hand" Ling asked, then she grabbed it.

"MONEY?" Ling added.

"This is ours," Ming declared.

The next day, they went out to do business, but needed more wood. When they reached the nearby trees, a man came out of an expensive looking house.

"Ahh, You're the two stealing my trees. STOP." The man ordered and went back in.

Li and Ming thought nothing, so continued chopping. Later that night, the man sneaked into the poor family's shelter, a gun in hand.

"Now... You didn't listen to me, so this is what you get." Zhang whispered as he entered.

Li and Ming quickly rose up in their beds, unsure what was happening.

"LI, PROTECT YOURSELF, HE HAS A WEAPON."

Ming knew karate. She punched and kicked the man. The man (Zhang) didn't seem to know what to do. He stayed still surprised until she kicked him one last time. Zhang went flying to the creaky wooden floor.

“What...” Zhang managed through the pain.

A trigger fired.

“My last bullet...” The man said lying down. He was pointing the gun in the direction of Li, clueless.

“BANG” Li was shot in the leg. Blood spilt everywhere.

“AAAAAAAAA ” Li shrieked. Ming rushed to the other side of the room.

“No, this can’t be! WHY?” She sank down looking at the man angrily.

As soon as she did, Mother appeared.

“WHO’S HERE?” She saw the mess and quickly went outside and rang the bell from the village.

“DOCTORS AND POLICE NEEDED. A GUN HAS BEEN FIRED”

Everyone rushed outside in nightgowns as a police officer arrived on horseback.

“IN THE HOUSE NOW!” The policeman shouted to the rest of the police.

They soon came out and carried the man with the gun. They waited for the doctors.

A few doctors arrived several minutes later and carried Li and Ming to the hospital. Li was quickly treated, luckily, the gun she was shot by was only a small pistol.

“It hurts,” Li moaned as the wound was cleaned.

“It’s alright, calm down.” Ming reassured her.

Their Mother was in the hospital lobby waiting, not bothered. She was wrapped in a big cast bandage.

“You’ll have to use a wheelchair, I’m afraid. Even if your wound fully heals, it won’t be normal.” a nurse declared.

Li and Ming looked at each other sadly.

“At least I’m alive!” Li cheered with pain.

Days later, Li and Ming were able to return home. They improved their invention with the money they made. They went to stores to buy proper equipment. People from the village helped them come up with a more sustainable and efficient way of making it, making machines to help the process. Soon, they were left with the pulp paste that was spread and dried in the sun. Li and Ming thought carefully after a while and named it ‘paper’ with inspiration from the plant Papyrus which felt the same when writing on.

“Thank you so much, for everything.” The two sisters exclaimed as they finished the final step of the process.

They continued to make more and more, selling it to tons of people around the town. They made so much money and profit with the help of all the villagers nearby. Soon, after long hard working days, they were able to break free from the hands of their horrible Mother and live the rest of their lives happily.

The Downfall of My Inventions

German Swiss International School, Wai, Kate – 14

As I wander through the streets of Shanghai, horrific screams fill the atmosphere. The blood that paints the ground makes me nauseous and the bitter smell of gunpowder blocks any thought going through my head. My hand brushes through the soft powder that stains the ground. However, a shiver shoots through me and my cold empty hands go straight through. I am dead, the burden of murdering millions encumbers on my shoulders. I am dead, and yet my agonising regret lives on.

A thousand cries from the souls of the people echo through the deserted road, reminding me of the mistakes I have made. Every day and night I am reminded of the eternal pain I started. Gunpowder, how could this insignificant grey powder hold such immense power? The power to change civilizations and end the lives of innocent humans.

A gust of air blows by and standing there before me is a little boy, his black hair tainted red with blood, his arm covered with cuts and bruises and his pitch black eyes were soulless and empty, stained with the endless tears. A jolt of fear and memories rushes through me as his expression took me back 10, 50, 100 years ago. In the temple, back where it all began, where a humble monk became responsible for a million deaths.

When I was a young man, I lived with my friends in the outskirts of China. I can already imagine the warm fuzzy feeling of the fireplace heating the room up, the crackling of fire burning and the sound of laughter echoing throughout the room. **Knock Knock Knock** Cautiously, I cracked the door open and glanced around, there laid a small little baby, rocking in a broken and old wooden crib. His eyes shimmered in the darkness, his minor smile brightened my world as his fingers stuck out trying to grab me. He was cold, depressed and alone. Looking around the place, I was trying to find the boy's parents. However, it was quiet and still, only the voice of crickets rang through. A white piece of paper stuck out of the crib and in it wrote the name, "*Shenzu*". I carefully lifted the boy out of the crib and rocked him while whispering his name. His smile lit up and I chuckled. The cold air passed by, causing the baby to burst into tears. In that moment, the wolves howled and the crows cawed, reminding me of the cruel and unjust world outside. Without hesitation, I whispered, "You will be safe with me Shenzu, safer than you would ever be elsewhere."

Little did I know how wrong I was.

Although the monks were hesitant to let Shenzu in, after a few years, he was more than welcomed and he became the rising star in our community. His jovial and extroverted personality made him stand out, and even though I was not his real father, he treated me as one, staying with me day and night. He trusted me and I cherished him. The fond memories of us searching and running through caves still remain in my mind. The little animals crawling around caused us to scream and giggle with excitement, and the shimmering rocks lighted up the dim area. Everything was perfect. Well, I guess, too perfect.

One day, on a gloomy and freezing morning during December, Shenzu and I, along with a couple other monks, went on a trip through a network of caves. Over time Shenzu began shivering and sneezing, his hands turned ice cold and his head was hotter than the sun. The dead expression on his pale white face made him unrecognisable. Where is the son that I know and love? I bolted around the cave, carrying him in my arms and running towards the exit. However, there stood a stone wall that stared back at me, mocking at me. The entrance was sealed. The words and questions rushed around my head, will he make it? How do we get out? Laying him down on the hard rock floor, the monks examined him. Those seconds felt like hours, time was going by so slowly but so fast, and yet I was frozen, unable to do anything. How could I be so powerless?

As the chief monk spoke to me, my eyes welled up and my hands trembled in fear. He told me that there was nothing I could do, all I could do was wait and pray that it would pass. Shenzu laid weakly on the ground, trying

to muster all the energy to hold his smile. A way out of here, there had to be something, anything, if not, then I was going to find one. Searching through the cave, my mind was fuzzled and lost, grabbing whatever jewels or rocks I could find. Maybe I was delusional, maybe I was being ignorant, or maybe I was saving my own mind from fear and the inevitable.

Rushing back, I used all my energy to grind whatever I could find together. Until it created a grey like powder, the grey powder looked back at me. In anger, my hands slammed two rocks together onto the powder. **BANG** An orange flame engulfed the grey powder, so big that it pushed me over. A massive explosion destroyed the rock wall in front of me, my face was filled with soot and powder, and my clothes were burnt off, but I ignored it. Trembling, I lifted Shenzu towards the hole that the explosion caused. From the hole I could see our village nearby. Could he make it? Without hesitation, I dropped everything and rushed towards the village, holding Shenzu in my hands. When we arrived at the village, relief crashed over me. He was safe and he was alive... My hand was stained with the powder that saved my life. The story began to spread throughout the village, and many people asked me for the formula. I was a hero, but in reality, I started a chain of destruction.

People began to call my invention many names. However, I decided to call it "*huo yao*", the fire that was the medicine for my ailing son.

After a few years, my life was opulent and comfortable. We were rich, joyful and safe, but it all changed one day.

This day, this event, makes me regret every moment of my life. My memory of this day was as clear as day, but yet I wish it weren't. Shenzu and I were in the forest, trying to clear out the path of trees for new homes and buildings. At that moment Shenzu was kneeling down and placing the gunpowder, and as we laughed and chatted, my mind blanked. **Click**No...

Everything went by slowly, and I felt like I was trapped in time. I felt the fire and the burning heat engulfing me. Then, it all went dark. Ringing sounds echoed around my head and my eyes slowly opened, but I could not move. Glancing around, I could feel my world crash in on itself. Shenzu laid on the ground, his black hair was tainted red with blood, his arm was covered with cuts and bruises and his pitch black eyes were soulless and empty.

Next thing I know voices are circling my head. Laying on a grass bed, my body lifted itself up, glancing around I saw a figure laying on the ground. The burns around my body sizzled into me, and yet it did not hurt. What hurt more, was having to watch my son's lifeless body in front of me. Desperately, I tightly gripped my son's hand and sobbed violently, but he did not respond, he could not. He was dead, and there was nothing I could do about it. I screamed, cried and laughed all at once. Anger, fear, and sadness all took over, stronger than the strength of ten suns. All the gold, money and diamonds in the world felt useless at that moment. I had everything I wanted, everything I needed. Happiness, wealth, and love.

However here I stand, cold, depressed and alone. Regret flushing over me, the killer of millions, the beginner of war, the humble monk. Now I stand here, a ghost haunted by his own past. Wars flashing by me, one by one, every explosion, every death, every orphan that happens was all because of my stupidity. I'm sorry Shenzu, you would have been safer elsewhere, safer than you would have been with me.

Hah... A hero crippled by his fear, an inventor haunted by his own inventions, a monk forever chasing the need for tranquillity and a father condemned to helplessly watch the demise of his own son. In the end, this story was caused by unfulfilled destinies, having to paint a picture of my own despair and regret, a cruel joke played by a twisted fate, and I was left on the receiving side.

Saucy

German Swiss International School, Wang, Ethan – 11

The rows of crops lined up the tiled dirt, its leaves growing up to the sun. Bees buzzed around the flowers and trees, collecting pollen. Strawberries seemed to glow with neon red under the sun. Rolling green hills stood in the background and a little hut on the soft soil was placed near the flowerbeds. Then, at the edge of the field sat an azoic piece of land, with nothing planted on it and no animals lounging on the soil.

The little hut contained a person named John, who was frankly the farm's owner and caretaker. Since the farm was small, John could easily cover the whole thing in the better part of the day. He had a daily routine, like tilling the soil, watering the flowers and the plants, and, of course, with any extra time, he would try to make the dead lifeless part of the land useful. Many of the attempts to fertilise and make use of the soil went well. Some of them didn't go that well...

On this one day, John came over to the soil after mopping up some of the untidy plants and placing the waste in the compost. He came over and started to clear out all the weeds. Then, he saw something red, bright, and round. He quickly started digging it out of the soil, uncovering a tomato. He decided to ask people around his farm for help in identifying if the tomato was edible or not.

Then, the next day, he decided to make the decision and ate it. When he bit into it, red juice came pouring out onto the fish that he bought for his lunch. He decided to leave the tomato juice on the fish so that he didn't have to do extra work. When it was time to have his lunch, he eagerly bit into the fish. He thought that the tomato sauce added extra flavour to the fish, so he named it "keh-jup" which means "Fish sauce".

The next day, before he went to eat dinner with his friends, he began to experiment with the tomato juice. He added plenty of vinegar, sugar, and seasoning and decided that it made a good sauce to add to his fish. He then put it into a bottle and hurried to meet his friends about it.

He trotted along the path to the fancy restaurant that sold all kinds of meat. Then, when he got there, he pushed open the door to find all of his friends waiting for him. Many of his friends came over and asked what food he would like to get. The others asked him about the bottle of keh-jup. Ten minutes later, he used his fish sauce on the fish that he had ordered. He decided that it tasted good.

Then, he let his friends taste it. They then all put it on the fish and added the fish sauce. They complimented John on the sauce. Then, they told him that he should sell the sauce for money. That's what John did. Soon, the little village with the little farm became a monopoly of ketchup. It was now very rich.

Many of the townspeople now knew how to produce ketchup and sell it at a reasonable price. Lots of people from the town went overseas to sell the product to other places and countries.

John quickly got really rich with all the money coming from the keh-jup business. Then, he split the money with his friends so that they could enjoy the rest of their lives.

Ammunition of Gold–Drafts

German Swiss International School, Wong, Gail – 11

The wind breezed through the trees towards a hut in the forest, where inside, a little experiment was brewing. And even though no one knew it yet, it would be a little country–shaking one too.

“Experiment no. 446. Here we go.” Jin Heng muttered and let out a breath, rubbing his fingers together. He opened a little drawer inside a small and tarnished chest, which was filled with a shining gold powder. His shoulders slumped, but he took the powder out and showed it to his friend Yu Xuan, who had a very different reaction. “Hey, Jin Heng! Good going this time.”

Jin Heng looked at his friend in disbelief. “What do you mean, ‘good going’? It’s not doing anything to suggest power, or magic, or even something like, I don’t know, burning something into ashes or blowing up!”

“But it’s glinting gold and shimmering. Surely we ought to test it?” Yu Xuan argued. He reached a hand out to scoop up the powder–

“Yu Xuan, no!” Jin Heng yelled, knocking his friend’s hand away.

“What’s wrong with you?” Yu Xuan groaned. “Why did you do that?”

A trickle of fresh blood was flowing down his hand from where it had hit the sharp edge of the table. Despite Jin Heng’s efforts, Yu Xuan’s hand was coated in powder. The two quickly tried to brush it away, and had finished dusting almost the whole hand except for the base of his ring finger when the glittering golden powder began to shimmer, and a BAM with a clap of thunder threw the two alchemists back.

When it cleared, nothing seemed to have happened. Everything was completely still and the same as before.

“Well, at least it explodes!” “At least my finger’s not gone. . .oh, my goodness.” Yu Xuan was staring down at the ring on his finger, which was now glossy.

Glossy with gold.

“It’s real,” Yu Xuan gasped, staring down at the ring. “The potion that turns metal to gold. . .it’s real. I mean, not a potion, you know,” he added hastily, scrabbling for words to say. “The powder you made, not the potion. I mean, there is no potion–

But Jin Heng was too entranced with the powder’s effects to have noticed his friend’s spluttering. “Amazing, absolutely amazing,” he said, grinning. “We have done something, Yu Xuan, you were right! This is fantastic! Tomorrow morning, let’s do a few more experiments, and then take the powder to the emperor so we can share our discovery with the world.”

Yu Xuan was awake early the next morning. He started out of bed and hastily shouted in Jin Heng’s ear: “Wake up!” Jin Heng groggily rubbed his eyes and rolled off his bunk. “Okay, okay. I’m coming.” he moaned good–naturedly.

The two dashed to the experiment room and laid Yu Xuan’s gold ring on the table. Yu Xuan snatched the little chest full of gold powder and placed it on the table, then frantically dashed around the room searching for something.

“Found it!” he declared happily.

Jin Heng, who had been standing at the doorway the whole time his friend had been running around the room, sighed. “What?”

“It’s a metal vial! I only have one of these, but I don’t have any gold vials right now. It’s time to change that!” And in a flash, he sprinkled a handful of gold powder inside the metal vial. A shimmer began to pass through the solid ore. Both men dropped to the floor, and as before, a deafening BAM and a clap of thunder sounded through the hut.

A few seconds passed before Jin Heng and Yu Xuan dared to get up. Jin Heng cautiously put his hands on the edge of the table and slowly peered over the edge. His eyes widened.

"It is gold!" he cheered, picking up the glimmering vial. "We'll be rich if we keep making more. I'll gather all the metals!" he said eagerly, and dashed off to their room to look for more metals.

Jin Heng chuckled at his friend's enthusiasm. But his smile faded when Yu Xuan came out with every last one of their metal possessions and then proceeded to take down all the metal vials the duo used for their alchemy experiments. "What are you doing?" Jin Heng questioned. "Those are our alchemy vials." A look of horror passed over his face. "You're not planning to turn those into gold, are you? We can't use them if they're gold! You know that!"

"So? Who cares?" Yu Xuan groused. "We've discovered a powder that turns metals into gold. We'll be rich! We won't have to worry about anything ever again. We'll get many, many new sets of vials! Think of the glory we could have! The Emperor himself would reward us. In fact. . ." Yu Xuan glanced around the hut with sudden distaste. "We need to move out now. This place is a dump, and I'm sure we can get new lodgings in the capital." He ran back into his room and returned promptly with their bags. "Come on, Jin Heng, pack up!"

"What the hell are you doing?" Jin Heng spat. "This is ridiculous! You discover a powder one day and then the next day—goodbye, alchemy. I knew your real focus was never on the experience. Just the rewards." He forced out the last word like it was poison. "Also, I've told you many, many times not to touch my things!"

"So?" Yu Xuan snarled. "What else would you do it for? The experience is just the procedure you have to follow to get potential rewards. Nothing to like about it, is there? You were perfectly willing to run to the Emperor's just yesterday because of the powder, too. What makes my wanting to go any different? And besides, what makes you think I went through your things?"

"That's because I wanted to go to show our discoveries and come back to make more, not for riches! And you'd have to go through my drawers to get my bag." Jin Heng shot back.
"Hmm. You're smarter than I thought, old man. But you're not answering my first question. What would anybody see in alchemy once they had gained its rewards?" When Jin Heng stayed silent, the corner of Yu Xuan's mouth curled up in a sneer. "That's what I thought. Now, are you coming, or not?" he asked.
"What do you mean, am I coming?" Jin Heng barked, regaining his composure.
"I've made my choice. Now you make yours. You come with me to the emperor to present this new powder, or you stay in this. . ." He gestured around the house. "Dung heap."
Jin Heng looked at him sharply, disbelieving. "You're not going."
Yu Xuan raised an eyebrow. "Try me." he said, and was gone.

For days, Jin Heng waited and waited and waited in their hut. Every morning he woke up and dashed out to the living room, hoping Yu Xuan had changed his mind.

He didn't. But even as the days rolled into weeks and the weeks rolled into months, Jin Heng stayed at the hut. Even as the newspaper plopped in the front door, blaring the headline: *Man Discovers Powder That Transmutes Metal to Gold*. Even as the same newspaper later pronounced: *Award-Winning Alchemist Yu Xuan Declared Royal Alchemist*. Even as a letter from his old friend made its way to his house, telling him that he'd moved into a great room in the Emperor's palace, with all the luxuries and comforts he could possibly want and telling him how Jin Heng could've had these too, if only he had come with Yu Xuan. Even as it finally became clear that Yu Xuan was

never coming back. And all the while, Jin Heng tinkered and experimented with powders and solutions and even the charcoal and wood in the fire.

One hot morning a year later, Jin Heng woke up and dashed out to the living room, but not because he was under the deluded impression that Yu Xuan might have been coming back anymore, because he wasn't. No, it was due to his excitement for his latest experiment, which he'd been working on for ages.

He opened the small, wooden chest and peered inside. A mass of black powder lay inside it.

Well, Jin Heng thought to himself, if Yu Xuan isn't coming back to this house, maybe I'll pay a visit to his.

And so, Jin Heng began packing his bags to leave the little hut for the Emperor's palace, his newest little invention in hand, thrown together as a little present for his old friend.

2019 – One Thousand and Seventy–Nine Years Later

"Hey, come and look at this!" a worker shouts to his friend Mu Yang, who promptly hurries over.

"What is it?" he asks.

"I...I think it's. . . a bomb." the first worker says, staring at the iron pieces.

An hour later, more excavating in the area would reveal the mass of ashes and a pale, masculine, skull.

Needles of Death

German Swiss International School, Wong, Lillian – 13

A light flickers in the dim atmosphere of the office. Papers were sprawled across the wooden desk, the fresh ink bleeding through the paper. Hua Lian picks up his brush, dipping the bristles on the inkstone, before lazily writing the same characters, over and over again.

“Sir, all these patients are experiencing the same pain, but we have yet to find a way to treat them. What are we going to do?” He sighs, setting down the brush on the hard wooden desk. “We have tried every medicine and every remedy we know, but none of them work.” Yu Ren said, frustratedly putting away the book containing all currently known medicinal remedies. “But then how can we treat these ailing patients? They are in agonising pain, and no form of therapy is able to help them.” Hua Lian protested.

“Well..” Yu Ren said quietly “There is an ancient therapy that was used back in the Han dynasty. It consisted of using needles to pierce into the patient’s skin as a way to relieve pain, but it was done poorly leading to the infection of many patients and the fall of the doctor’s reputation. It has since been forgotten but some old books still contain the information on how to do it properly.” Yu Ren explained. “If you can figure out how to revive this ancient therapy safely and treat these patients, I’d be proud. Goodnight.” Hua Lian packed up all his things from the desk and made his way home in the pouring rain.

The next morning, Hua Lian arrived at the office bright and early and set his things down. He went over to the bookshelf, dusting off the yet to be cleaned shelf, looking for the book that contained the ancient remedies. Flipping through the yellowed pages, he noticed a certain treatment, similar to what his senior had said the night before.

“A-cu-punc-ture?” He muttered, confused. “Utilising specialised thin needles crafted from steel from the North, and carefully insert into ailing patients and keep there for 5 minutes up to 30 minutes, in accordance to the patients symptoms. Used as therapy for relieving pain.” Hua Lian’s eyes widened and his face broke out in glee.

“Hua Lian, are you already here? I heard some rustling, what are you doing—” Yu Ren stated. “Sir! I believe I have found the ancient remedy!” Yu Ren entered the office to Hua Lian, who was giddy with excitement, his eyes gleaming in joy. “I know how to treat our patients!”

“Hua Lian, calm yourself. First, describe the remedy to me.” Yu Ren said. Hua Lian took the book and stuffed it into the hands of Yu Ren. “Here! Page 24, the paragraph next to the picture of the needle.” “Hm, let’s try this out then.” Yu Ren said.

And to their delight, the antidote was a success. All of their patients were relieved of their suffering, Hua Lian was hailed around as a hero and the remedy was praised as a ‘miracle cure’. Citizens were in awe of the rediscovery of this ancient medicine, and both Hua Lian and Yu Ren revelled in the success that this brought them. Alas, this lasted roughly 5 months, before disaster struck.

“Hey boss Wu! Look at this!” The triad member slams a poster onto the hard wooden desk. “Some new medical remedy or whatever. Shall we use this to reign terror in the streets of China?”

The swivel of the chair is heard, and sitting atop is a man, dressed head to toe in black. He snatched the flimsy piece of paper off the desk and scanned it quickly before once again throwing it away. “Hm. I suppose we can carry this out.” He grunted. “Has anyone got any needles!”

Screams. Screams are heard everywhere. The decibels of each shriek loud enough to deafen a human being. Blood. Blood splatters covering the walls, the damp and dark room reeking of a sweet metallic scent. The faces of innocents drooped and pale, their bodies rotting away and a sickeningly sweet scent lingers on every single corpse.

The faces of Jun Wu and his members contorted into madness, mouth smiling at every single drop of blood and scream of innocents. Terror arose in the streets, citizens too frightened to accept any form of acupuncture. The country was engulfed in fear, sceptical citizens afraid of every single clinic that was offering the remedy of acupuncture.

Soon, the crowd broke into riots. The flame of torches covered the streets, chanting and shouting for the downfall of Hua Lian. Hua Lian, now no longer a renowned doctor but a shunned member of society, was responsible for the death of innocents throughout China. People took black and white paint and smeared it over his clinic's door, the character '死' painted on his windows, doors and walls. Some managed to find his home address, and sent many letters and threats, harassing and calling him 'a traitor of China'.

"Another one I suppose." Hua Lian sighed. The harassment was neverending. It had come to the point where he could not even leave his house, and Yu Ren, a few kindhearted neighbours and people who felt empathy for him had to bring him groceries in hopes he wouldn't starve to death. The colour was drained from his face, his body so shrivelled up you could see his bones. Oh the irony. A doctor out of all people, pale like a ghost and thin as a stick.

Knock Knock. Hua Lian peeked through the peephole and opened his door to reveal a concerned Yu Ren, heaving two big bags of groceries. "Goodness gracious Hua Lian, you're as thin as a chopstick. You haven't been taking care of yourself have you?" Yu Ren said worriedly.

"Once a doctor, now a shunned citizen, the 'traitor of China' they say. Here are the letters that came in today." Hua Lian said dryly, dropping a horrifically high stack of letters, all of them full of degrading words and insults. You could no longer see the glint of care and kindness in his eyes no more, his eyes were now empty and dull, the shimmer of life no longer in him.

"Well, take care. I'll be back tomorrow to check up on you." Yu Ren said, patting a hand on Hua Lian's shoulder as he walked past him and through the door. Hua Lian stared at the now closed door, longing for the times when his life was still peaceful and he could enjoy the praise and admiration of the citizens.

"To hell they go, these damned triads!" He shouted in anger, banging on his walls and screaming within the confinement of his house. His neighbours would think he had gone insane. He sobbed and wept, breaking down as waterfalls of tears streamed down his face. He couldn't do it anymore, he was hated all around the country, his house and clinic were vandalised, his life was ruined. He could hear them, the criticisms, the mockery, the insults, he could hear all of it.

His eyes fell upon a rope that was miraculously already tied to the ceiling. Should he do it? Death was standing next to it with open arms, glowing silver butterflies floating around Death, enticing Hua Lian to join. A stool was there, ready to help him up if needed. It was right there, welcoming him with a smile.

Hua Lian graciously took Death's hand, and began dancing with it. He danced and danced, the burden on his shoulders lessened and lessened. What felt like hours went by, and he felt as light as a feather. He watched as Death shined a brilliant silver, and burst into silvery butterflies. They engulfed Hua Lian, and he followed Death to the Heavens.

The Legend of Paper

German Swiss International School, Xu, Jiaqi – 11

The sun was just on the horizon as Cai Lun woke up. It was 105 AD, and a new emperor had been crowned. Cai had finally landed an extremely prestigious job in the imperial palace as an official of the high court, and after a good night's rest, it was time to head to work.

On the way to the palace, Cai got some breakfast. The small but homey meal he had picked up from the run-down street-side shop was hot and steamy, but that wasn't what Cai was noticing. Even after the education reforms, which taught tens if not hundreds of thousands of people how to read and write, there were barely any scrolls around. Even in the palace area, only a few scholars were carving into the thick bamboo strips. Amongst the countless junk shops selling piles upon piles of goods, not a single piece of writing equipment was in sight. Being an official of the high court, Cai knew that he would be the one to solve this issue.

Taking a few bamboo strips himself, he tried carving detailed letters into the tough material, tracing over the carvings many times, and repeatedly checking for any errors. That was how it was taught when he was a kid, and the colossal problem was glaringly obvious. The waxy bamboo strips were annoying and bulky, and it was extremely difficult to carve out intricate characters on them. Also, if there was even a single character that wasn't perfect, the whole strip would have to be recarved. Silk, another writing material barely used by the populace, was extremely expensive, and only high nobles, or the emperor, could afford to write on it. Neither of those options were great, and even after searching for hours, there seemed to be nothing that would work better than bamboo and silk.

Thus, Cai wanted to make his own material. It had to be lightweight, easy to write on, and cheap enough for mass production. Experimenting with countless materials, he tried plaster, wood, cheap fibre, and even leaves. But those materials were all too hard to write on. Nevertheless, he persisted on, trying to mix materials, laying them on each other, and beating them into shape. Nothing seemed to work, even after a whole day of just experimenting. Countless rounds of useless and unusable materials. Eventually, he thought of something that might just work. He took a few pieces of tree bark, and noticed how the fibres made the whole piece of material light, but strong. He found the same thing in rags and hemp as well. So, Cai decided to try and mash mulberry bark, rags and hemp together into a pulp, mix it up, and lay it out to dry. When the next day came along, he realised that it had become the perfect material. Light, cheap, and easy to write on.

After a whole night of making sheets of paper, a knock echoed across the dusty, dim-lit hallway. Another court official had come, slightly above him in rank. New sheets of paper were drying next to the window as a musty yet metallic smell spread across the room.

"What is this little project?" the court official sneered, glaring at Cai.

Cai quickly got up, still feeling extremely sleepy, "Just a way to make writing much easier."

He took out a pen, and easily laid down a few smooth strokes, gliding the pen across the thin surface. The court official raised an eyebrow, shocked at the action.

"Give them all to me," he smirked, knowing that he would have to give the invention up, and if he didn't, it would be considered treason.

Cai looked suspiciously at the court official, and questioned, "But why?"

The court official took out a gleaming dagger, pointing the glimmering blade straight at Cai. He let out a maniacal laugh, and glared at Cai.

Grabbing all the paper that was there, Cai jumped out of the heavy wooden window, nearly tripping on the wet morning grass. The sun shone brightly in his face, blinding him for a few seconds. A barrage of shouts echoed

around the small courtyard, causing Cai to turn back for a few seconds. The court official let go of his dagger, and Cai thought he was doomed. He closed his eyes, opening them after a few seconds, and realised he was fine. The stack of paper had stopped the dagger from hitting him. Realising he had fallen onto the ground, Cai picked himself up, and narrowly dodged a punch from the court official, returning a blow right to his stomach. The official lurched back but jumped onto his feet, landing a kick to Cai's leg.

Cai fought intensely, struggling to keep up with the court official, who clearly had the upper hand. He tried to remember the days when his mother forced him to attend martial arts classes. It was all coming together again. After a barrage of attacks from the official, Cai advanced, moving forward whilst dodging as many blows as possible, slowly gaining ground. He ran forward and planned on ending the fight for good. His heart beat in his chest, blood streaming from his hand, but his spirit was still roaring.

Landing a hit straight to the official's face, Cai staggered back. He took the paper, a dagger still entrenched inside, and dragged himself back towards his home. If he didn't manage to get recognition for his invention first, who knows what will happen next? So he trudged along, clothes covered with dirt, but eyes gleaming with hope. This was his invention, and he was going to be able to help the whole world.

The palace was within view, and Cai quickly changed into a set of clean clothes. He rushed off, his leg still a little limp from the fight. As the rough wooden doors creaked open, he knew it was coming to an end.

Once he told the Emperor about his invention, the Emperor immediately applauded him, praising his invention. The invention of paper was to be made available across the country, credited to Cai's name. Giant mills were set up, and people started to finally be able to read and write easily. Paper was a giant success, and became one of the most common items across China. The world had been changed forever.

Light Condenser

German Swiss International School, Xu, Micah – 12

Year 3033. 小明 reached his 18th birthday. He just applied to a university named “China’s Institute of Science and Technology”. He studied assiduously, day and night. A month later, the university replied with an E-LETTER. It read

「亲爱的小明，

恭喜你考进“中国科技和科学理工”！w

祝您学习快乐(Dear Xiao Ming, congratulations on passing the exam to “Chinese Institute of Science and Technology”! Happy studying!)」

小明 was ebullient. He had never been this happy in his life. He had achieved his lifelong dream. Since Y1, his mum had been convincing him to work hard so he could pass this school’s exam. He could not believe it! While 小明 was celebrating, his mum came in and asked 「你在干嘛？！那么吵！（What are you doing?! So Loud!）」

小明 showed his mum the letter. His mum had a more “exaggerated” reaction 「儿子，我太开心了！这必须要庆祝！（Son, I am so happy! This calls for a celebration!）The whole family arrived at this special moment. Mum prepared the largest feast that she had never made before. Once he was stuffed, he got up from the chair. Mum shouted 「你给我坐下来！还没吃完呢（Sit down! You haven’t finished!）」

小明 shouted back 「我吃饱了（I’m full!）」

and she replied 「哎呀，你喜欢吧（whatever）。」

小明 woke up with a jolt. He thought he heard gunshots, but it was probably just a dream. He heard it again. It couldn’t be a mistake this time. In a rush, 小明 ran onto his front porch with his pajamas on. There were a lot of dead bodies. He was confused. What were dead bodies doing on his front porch? More importantly, what in the world happened to these people? He had just started school, and then this happened? Just his luck. He called his mother with his phone 「妈妈，我的前阳台有一堆尸体（Mum, I found a bunch of dead bodies on my front porch）。」

She replied 「啥？！你不是跟我开玩笑吧（What?! You’re not joking right?）」

小明 then said 「我不是跟你开玩笑，我是认真的（No, of course not. I’m serious!）」

She went babbling about how he should be careful at these times of possible war.

Then he got to the point 「妈妈，你没有受伤吧（You didn’t get hurt right?）」

She then continued babbling about how 小明 should be safe and how she was very old. This went on for about an hour. He then hung up politely and went on with his work.

He started working on a project called “Light condenser,” which would be revolutionary for the community if succeeded. Since light could not be destroyed, it would provide a defense for China. It might even be as legendary as “The Great Wall of China”. 小明 had never thought China needed help with its defenses, but considering how easily the invaders breached the walls, maybe it did. After hours of endless working on the project, he needed to rest. He turned on the news to see what was happening in China; Today, Vladimir Putin’s aspiring great-grandson, Jingus Putin, made the cretinous choice of attacking China. This will not be taken lightly. Tomorrow, we will find all the willing men to fight for our country’s pride! 小明 was astonished. He thought this was just a few terrorists going around town. This was more serious than he thought.

“Have you seen the news?” his frantic mum asked.

“Yes, of course I have,” 小明 replied with a calmer agenda.
“Well?” Mum asked again.
“What?” 小明 replied with confusion.
“Are you joining the army?” Mum asked.
“Of course not! It is dangerous!” he shouted.
“It’s for the good of the country!” Mum snapped back.
“Well, I don’t want to die,” 小明 stated.
“Then you will never talk to me ever again you ungrateful child!” she shouted angrily.
An awkward silence struck...
“Fine, I will go. Only if my brother comes along,” he said.
“Good,” Mum replied.

In case 小明’s brother wasn’t coming, he prepared himself for the worst. Training himself for the next few weeks would probably prepare him for the pain that was about to come. 明 completely forgot about his project for the whole month. Time passed quickly for 小明. One day 小明’s boss called, and he was surprised. He was unaware that there were deadlines for this project. 小明’s boss was very angry because this was a month-long project, and everyone else had finished. His boss stated that he would be fired if he didn’t finish the project within a month. This bothered 小明 a lot. He had to fulfill both requirements of his mum and his boss at the same time! It would be nearly impossible to achieve, but he had to try.

For the first few days, 小明 would exercise and train to get ready for the army. He would do 100 push-ups, 100 sit-ups, and 100 miles of running. After this, he would gobble down a high-protein brunch. After that, he would have to work on his project. All of this was done in one day. Then he started sleeping less and less because of the stress he was under.

Finally, the drafting day came. He had no idea of what was to happen. Was his brother going to come? Or had his mum tricked him? He felt a sense of relief flood over him when he saw his familiar brother rushing over to him. His elder brother, 大明 came over to say hello
“Long time no see!” 大明, said in an ecstatic voice.
“Yes, long time no see,” 小明 replied in a less optimistic voice.
“Ah, yes. I have a surprise for you,” 大明 said, happiness in his voice.
“Ok,” 小明 replied blankly.
“Hey champ, cheer up. You’ve got me!” 大明 exclaimed.
小明 nodded. He knew on the inside that he was just as sad as him.
大明 pulled out a big cake. On the cake, was a cartoon character that 小明 had always loved, Spiderman.

One month later... 小明 and 大明 had already gotten used to the customs of the army. It was tiring, but not as bad as they thought it would be. Their routine was the same but just with more physical activity. This was their last day at camp. Just before the war, the captain had some words to share. “Good morning soldiers. Just before the war I have some things to announce. This is one of the most important events that have ever occurred to us. Although we have not fought a war in 200 years, we will not back down!”

As they drove to the city’s borders, they prepared to defend our country. In the distance, they heard faint footsteps. Then louder and louder, until the sounds were as loud as thunder. Their captain said “Get ready soldiers, we are heading into battle!” As soon as the captain shouted those words, the battle started to break out. Lasers were being fired, and tanks were being destroyed. 小明 and 大明 were hiding in a bunker used a long time ago. They were surprised it was still holding up since the weather had been pretty harsh these 200 years. 小明 peeked out of the

spying hole built inside the small bunker, giving them an adequate view of what was happening outside. Outside there was a lot of screaming and shouting. People were dying quickly. The Russian invaders were getting closer and closer to the Wall of China. They dashed out of their hiding place and rushed to their people's aid. They started firing randomly at the enemies hoping the lasers would hit. 小明 had no gun experience, so he was randomly pulling the trigger each time he saw an enemy. 小明 was just about to relax, but then... BOOM! A bomb was dropped on the Great Wall of China! 小明 was devastated that the thousand-year-old wall, which had led China to victory thousands of years ago, was destroyed. Everyone else had the same reaction. "RETREAT!!!" the captain's voice rang out. 小明 and 大明 dashed back behind the remaining portion of the wall.

After the Great Wall of China was destroyed, 小明 had a difficult time recovering. However, his brother was there to soothe him. "Light Condenser" continued to be the focus of 小明的 efforts. If 小明 was going to help China, this would probably do it. Unfortunately, he didn't have the resources to do so. Even if he did, he had no idea where to start. He started contemplating about what to do. He then decided to make the actual condenser. By piecing together a condenser and some additional pieces that would condense light, but light had to be caught in this condenser, and that was the problem. To remedy that problem, he inserted a little hatch to allow light in. He created a solid light atom. It would take centuries to rebuild the wall atom by atom, so he did it on a larger scale. Once he had done that he put some programming into the condenser so it would fit the hole in the Great Wall of China. With permission from the captain, he planted his machine in the ground and it instantly filled the hole in the wall. The captain was amazed. This was revolutionary, the captain informed the prime minister. The word spread quickly that 小明 had created such an amazing machine. With the newly acquired machine, they easily got through the defenses of the Russians. The Russians later forfeited to the almighty China. "How the tables have turned," 小明 said to his dear mother

"Indeed." his mother replied.

Inventing Porcelain

German Swiss International School, Yu, Vicky – 13

"Mother," the girl said, her voice filled with curiosity. "Why are cowrie shells so smooth and elegant, yet strong and sharp-edged?"

She sat at the wooden table in their humble hut, her small hands clutching a brush dipped in black ink. Her mother paused from her dishwashing and looked at Pearl with a warm smile.

"Pearl, dear, if I knew the answer to that, I wouldn't be scrubbing dishes right now," she replied, her voice tinged with a hint of playfulness.

The room was bathed in a soft, golden glow as sunlight filtered through the lattice wood window, casting intricate patterns on the walls. Pearl furrowed her brow, deep in thought, as she carefully drew a zig-zag line on the parchment before her. Her mother, curious about her creation, leaned closer. "What is it you're drawing, my dear?" she asked.

Pearl's eyes sparkled with excitement as she revealed her artwork. "I'm drawing a landscape on this cowrie shell, Mother," she replied, a glimmer of pride evident in her voice. "Look how the ink seeps into the shell's curves, creating a miniature world filled with mountains, rivers, and flowers."

Her mother's eyes widened with amazement as she examined the delicate details of Pearl's creation. "My dear Pearl," she said, her voice filled with warmth, "your talent and imagination know no bounds. You have a gift that will take you far."

Little did Pearl know that her talent would indeed carry her to extraordinary places. A few weeks later, as she continued to hone her artistic skills, a letter arrived, bearing the Emperor's seal. Pearl's heart raced as she read the invitation to an art competition held at the imperial palace. It was a chance to showcase her talent to the world, a chance to prove that dreams could become reality.

With her mother's blessings and a satchel filled with her cherished cowrie shells, Pearl embarked on a journey to the grand imperial city. The palace was a magnificent sight, its walls adorned with intricate porcelain artworks, each telling a story of its own. Pearl's nerves mingled with excitement as she entered the competition, surrounded by other talented artists.

Days turned into weeks as the competition unfolded. Pearl's hands danced across the parchment, her brush bringing to life vibrant landscapes and delicate floral patterns. The judges marveled at her skill, recognizing the raw talent that flowed through her veins. And when the final day arrived, Pearl stood before the Emperor and his court, her heart pounding with anticipation.

The Emperor's eyes gleamed with admiration as he beheld Pearl's artwork. "Your talent is truly remarkable, young Pearl," he commended. "Your art captures the beauty of our land and the spirit of our people. You are a treasure to be cherished." With those words, the Emperor announced Pearl as the winner of the competition, and the palace erupted into applause.

Pearl's victory echoed through the village as news spread like wildfire. The air was filled with a mixture of awe and pride, and her mother beamed with joy. Yet, amidst the celebrations, a visitor arrived—an American businessman, Mr. Thompson. He had heard of Pearl's extraordinary talent and sought to strike a deal that would take her art beyond the borders of China.

"Miss Pearl," Mr. Thompson began, his voice carrying an air of confidence, "your artwork possesses a unique allure that will captivate the hearts of people around the world. I propose an opportunity for you to showcase your art in America, where it will be admired by countless admirers." Pearl's eyes widened with wonder as the possibilities unfolded before her. Her art, her passion, reaching foreign lands—it was a dream come true.

With a mixture of excitement and trepidation, Pearl bid farewell to her village and embarked on a long journey across the vast ocean to America. The days at sea were filled with a whirlwind of emotions—moments of longing for her mother's comforting presence, anticipation for the new experiences that awaited her, and gratitude for the opportunity that lay ahead.

Finally, the shores of America came into view, and Pearl's heart fluttered with a mixture of nervousness and excitement. She stepped onto foreign soil, her eyes wide with wonder as she took in the bustling streets and towering buildings. The journey had transformed Pearl into a young woman, ready to face the world with her talent and determination.

Days turned into weeks, and Pearl's art was exhibited in museums, galleries, and grand exhibitions across the nation. Crowds gathered to behold her delicate paintings on shells, each stroke telling a story of resilience and beauty. Pearl's artwork brought joy to countless admirers, and her talent was celebrated far and wide.

However, amidst the acclaim and success, Pearl faced a harsh reality. Her living conditions remained modest, and the struggles of language and cultural differences left her feeling isolated. Newspapers, though fascinated by her art, described her in derogatory terms and often sensationalized her story, emphasizing her foreignness rather than her artistic prowess. Pearl felt a pang of loneliness and yearned for the familiarity of her village and the unconditional love of her mother.

In those moments of doubt, Pearl would find solace in her art. She would immerse herself in her creations, pouring her emotions onto the canvas or delicately painting on a cowrie shell. The memories of her mother, their shared moments of creativity and love, became a guiding light, reminding her of her roots and the strength within her.

One afternoon, while she was working on a new piece in her small studio, a knock came at the door. Startled, Pearl opened it to find an elderly man with kind eyes and a warm smile. "Miss Pearl," he began, his voice gentle, "I have followed your journey and admired your talent from afar. Your art speaks to the depths of the human spirit."

Intrigued, Pearl invited the man inside, and they sat in her studio amidst the paintings and scattered brushes. He introduced himself as Mr. Chen, a renowned art critic who had traveled across the country to see her work. "Your art captures the essence of beauty and strength," he continued. "But there is a story within you—a story that goes beyond the strokes of your brush. It's time to tell your tale."

Pearl listened intently, her heart stirred by Mr. Chen's words. He proposed a collaboration—a joint exhibition that would showcase not only her artwork but also the journey that had brought her to America. It would be an opportunity to share her experiences, challenge stereotypes, and inspire others through her resilience and artistic vision.

With renewed purpose, Pearl embarked on a new artistic journey. She poured her heart into each brushstroke, infusing her paintings with the emotions and stories that had shaped her. She painted scenes from her village, the warmth of her mother's embrace, and the struggles she had faced in a foreign land. The cowrie shells became a symbol of her journey—a testament to the strength, elegance, and resilience that she embodied.

The joint exhibition was a resounding success. Visitors were captivated not only by the beauty of Pearl's artwork but also by the narratives woven within each piece. Her story touched their hearts, and they began to see her not only as a foreign artist but as a human being with a rich tapestry of experiences.

News of Pearl's transformative exhibition spread like wildfire. People from all walks of life flocked to witness her art, eager to be touched by the spirit of resilience and the power of creativity. Pearl's talent and her ability to bridge cultures through her art captured the attention of collectors, curators, and art enthusiasts alike.

As Pearl's fame grew, so did her influence. She used her platform to advocate for cultural understanding and to challenge the prejudices that she had faced. Through her art and her eloquent voice, she became a symbol of perseverance, inspiring others to embrace their unique stories and push beyond the boundaries of societal expectations.

Many many years later, Pearl stood before an audience in her homeland, surrounded by family, friends, and admirers. She had returned to her village, her art having traveled the world and touched countless lives. Her mother, hair a white mess, stood by her side, her eyes filled with pride and love.

"Mother," Pearl said, her voice filled with gratitude, "it was your love, support, and belief in my talent that carried me through the darkest moments. You gave me the courage to chase my dreams and share my art with the world."

Her mother embraced her, a tear of joy trickling down her cheek. "My dear Pearl," she whispered, "your journey has been a testament to the power of art, the resilience of the human spirit, and the love that binds us together. You have made your mark on the world, and your legacy will live on through your art."

And as the sun set over the village, casting a warm, golden glow, Pearl knew that her journey was far from over. Her art would continue to inspire, to bridge divides, and to remind the world of the beauty that could be found even in the harshest of circumstances.

Fake

German Swiss International School, Zhu, Toby – 11

Joe looked down at the machine in his hand; he could not believe his eyes! It worked! His invention had many complicated red and blue wires and lines connected to the compass he had stolen from his neighbor's 2-year-old kid. On the grey and black digital screen, the arrow pointed north. He pushed the red button, located under the blue button, which made the little cartoon character's voice start talking. He cringed with irritation. He knew if he did not change the voice, his arch enemy, Joey McDonalds, would definitely make fun of him. So he made a note to change it as soon as possible.

"Well hello there! What ore do you want to find?" Chirped the cartoon character's voice. "Click the shiny white button to continue!"

"UGH! Not this again," Muttered Joe while rolling his eyes. "Take me to diamonds." On the screen, a cartoon character appeared and pointed towards the southeast, which happened to be heading towards town. He was so focused on the compass he ignored his best friend, Bob, who waved and called out to him from inside the rubbish bin where he had been searching for his pet rat, and even tripped over a stray cat, two rubbish bins, and an electric fence! After about 10 minutes of traveling in the same direction, the cartoon character's arm spun around 1620 degrees, making Joe turn around and around until eventually, he was facing the way he had come from.

Completely unaware of where he was going, he climbed over the electric fence which made his hair fly straight up, walked towards the two rubbish bins that he had knocked over just minutes before, and slipped on a banana peel that he had not seen. Ignoring the pain in his back and still focused on the compass, he got up and continued walking. The cat that he tripped over just minutes ago, was sitting on a big two-meter-high box, saw him coming and prepared to get revenge. As he passed, the cat jumped off the box, and onto Joe's head and started scratching his face. As he grabbed the cat by the nape of its neck and threw it into the trash bin, his friend Bob who was now trying to find his pet hamster (since he had found his pet rat) in the rubbish bin, popped out of it and threw a piece of cake at Joe, and that is when he realized his best friend was waving at him.

"Bob!? What are you doing in the rubbish bin?"

"Joe!? What are you doing throwing cats in the bin?"

"STOP WASTING TIME, BOB. DIAMONDS, BOB, DIAMONDS!"

Poor Bob did not understand what was happening so he continued looking for his pet hamster in the rubbish bin. Joe then looked down again, and concentrating on his compass looking for his diamonds, he continued walking not realizing he just walked into his arch-enemy's backyard... Joey's backyard! What he didn't know was that Joey, his arch enemy, had planned this the whole time by using fake diamonds, and wanted to humiliate Joe in front of everyone at the International Innovation & Invention Competition. But this was still not enough; Joey did not want to just humiliate Joe in front of everyone, he wanted to beat Joe. So he made his invention, which was also a compass, and it was to predict what the weather was. He knew that it was not as good as Joe's, but if he managed to eliminate Joe, then no one could beat him, no one!

Joe now entered the backyard, or Joey's backyard where Joey was hiding in a bush behind the place he had dug to put fake diamonds. Joey had instructed his pet dog Chow Chow (The dog's breed is also Chow Chow) to steal Joe's compass once he put the compass down and started digging for diamonds. Joey waited and waited until Joe finally started digging with his one-meter-long shovel. All of a sudden Joey popped out of nowhere, grinning wickedly. "Well, well, well, Joe. Looks like you've stumbled right into my trap," he sneered.

Confusion and anger mingled on Joe's face. "What do you mean, trap?"

Joey chuckled and pointed to the fake diamonds scattered on the ground. "Those diamonds you've been chasing? They're all fake, Joe. I planted them here to lure you in." Joe's heart sank, realizing he had been deceived.

"You... you did this just to embarrass me?" Joey nodded, his satisfaction evident.

"Oh, it's more than that, Joe. I want to beat you. I want to prove that I'm the better inventor.

Joe stepped forward with a glimmer of determination. "Joey, this is not fair. You can't just play with people like this. It's not right."

Joey shrugged, unfazed by Joe's words. "Life isn't fair, Joe. And if you can't handle a little competition, you don't deserve to be in the inventing game."

Joe's frustration turned into determination. He refused to let Joey's manipulation break him. "You might have fooled me, Joey, but I won't let you win. I'll find a way to come out on top. You may have fooled me this time, Joey. But I won't give up!" exclaimed Joe.