



Fiction

Group 3

The Eight Dragons of Hope

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Chan, Annette – 13

Hope for survival. That's all everyone wants at the end of the day.

I still remember that day in December. Five years may seem like enough time to heal, but not for me.

It is a frigid, dreary December morning, and the streets are wrapped up in a blanket of white snow. The sparkling flakes of snow cling to the windows and hang like molten silver from the trees, and the wind howls ineffectively, creating small, swirling piles of snow that rise and fall with every gust of wind. Each snowflake seems to hold its own individual beauty, yet blurred lines barely separate their silhouettes as they merge together, spinning up into little whirlpools. The sky above the village is a vast expanse of darkness, stretching away into infinity. Inside, I am curled up all warm and cozy beneath a cocoon of blankets.

"SCREEECH!!! SCREEECH!!!" Our chicken, Mary, is screeching at the top of her voice. Having always been a late riser, I awaken. At once I shut my eyes and roll over in my bed, curling even tighter beneath my blankets. Half asleep and naïve with childhood innocence, I think, "Cool, a tremor. Trust Mary to be so demanding of attention on my special day."

Birthdays were rarely celebrated in the Wu household, so today was special. I wish we lived in the palace, where every birthday was celebrated, not merely every decade like it is here. There would be an extravagant feast: slabs of roast duck, plates of pickled clams, bowls of Tangyuan, an unlimited supply of my personal favourite: the good old classic, mutton soup with noodles. Banquets of flowers would be featured, scattered around the grandiose hall lined with statues, jewels, ceramics. Best of all, there would be no screeching chickens on your birthday. I could sleep as late as I pleased and have servants wake me up just before the party. Everything would be perfect. I wish I lived in the palace.

A loud, hearty tremor thrusts me out of my reverie. Sitting up, I light up my bedside candle. If I squint really hard, I can make out the silhouette of the sun rising up over the mountains like a medallion in the sky. It's 6am. The tremor must've been Mary – Grandma always said that screams, if loud enough, could shake the earth. But I couldn't ignore the sinister feeling that this time, it was something different.

Hushhhh. The floor is shaking harder now, and I try to stand. A surge throws me backward. Almost seemingly sneaking up on me without warning, my family's small farmhouse cottage comes alive, like a hungry wild animal lurching forward to pounce on its prey. Its stomach grumbles, and staggers one way then another. The air fills with the cottage's inhuman noises: rumbles and groans, the screeching of wood planks scuffing against each other. Around me, paintings thud against walls; storage boxes open then bang shut; window curtains shriek on their rods. A whoosh of wind surges over, violent as a storm monster.

Then the candles go out.

Fear squeezes the breath out of me. It had to be an earthquake. The familiar cottage somehow feels eerie in the dark. I fall to the ground with a loud thud. Tears begin to run down my cheeks, and my chest pains from imagining what life would be like if my whole family dies right now. As a large stack of scrolls topples over and crashes onto my back, I grunt and decide that enough is enough. I run out.

The ground splitting shudder sends a ripple through my body, tingling up my spine and making its way to my head, leaving me shivering. A six-foot-wide fissure erupts in the middle of the street, and it snakes down the road like blood veins. It spread like a virus – making its way deep inside and multiplying in the darkness. Around me is nothing but chaos. Buildings collapse, and the air is filled with the sounds of running, screams, and crumbling debris. Tears well up in my eyes as I desperately call out: "Mom! Dad! Ming! Help! Where are you.....? Help!" but my voice is drowned out by the chaos around me. With an unexpected fury, the earthquake strikes again, leaving the ground shivering with the December cold and trembling in fear. As the ground twitches and seemingly bites its quivering lip, I couldn't help but notice the sinister feeling creeping up on me again. This time, it would be different. One can only hope it is for the best.

"Ming!" I scream; I dare not look up. Tears stream down my face, soaking my best tunic with wet stains. Rushing for my brother's fallen body, I wipe my everlasting tears on his sleeve, soon drenching Ming's clothes too. Clinging onto

my brother's arm, I lean on his tear-stained shoulders. "Please," I beg, sobbing into the warmth of my beloved brother's arms. His chest is now heaving for air, and as I clutch him tightly, I whisper into Ming's ear, "You can't leave me like this. You can't—"

With his last breath, he says, "I am proud of you, Aili. Go, not too late, help the people, and let this earthquake stand in testament of all that we have loved and lost, and what really matters when it comes down to it. Please, I insist. In honour of my dearly made sacrifice." I plead, "Stay strong. I can't bear the thought—" my voice cuts off. He gasps for air, then stops. Nothing. Nothing at all. Nothing like the void of dark nothingness. I was right. The sinister feeling was right. I hate that I was right. With a heavy heart, my head droops with a thud in my hands. I flop against the wall then slowly slink down in defeat, willing my exhaustion to somehow disappear.

Eventually, the freezing weather gets the better of me. I curl up into a ball and wrap my arms around myself, rocking back and forth. How I wish I lived in the palace – then even if everything collapsed, at least I'd still have matches and thick layers of clothes to keep warm. Tears come streaming down my face, and I silently sob into my hands. My eyes must be bright red by now, but I couldn't care less if I looked like a racoon. The pain of losing Ming ran too deep for me to keep going.

"Hello." A whisper came from a seemingly faraway voice. "I'm Yuhan. My mom runs a makeshift shelter. We're helping out anyone who's been affected by the earthquake. Stop by anytime. It may not be much, and it may be overcrowded, but at least there you won't be alone. You could give it a try. It might help lift your mood," trembled the tiny voice. From behind a large chunk of brick on the rubble-strewn street, a little girl emerged with a shy smile and a pair of bright, shining, welcoming eyes. So much innocence and genuity, my heart aches. She smoothes over her dirt-covered skirt with small hands and smiles up at me, revealing wide gaps between her front teeth. The little girl looked about five or six, maybe eight if she was one of the skinny ones. It wasn't uncommon to have calorie-deficiency. Part of me feels guilty for never appreciating and always wanting more. What's so great about luxury when you can have love?

It was a birthday I would never cease to remember. At the end of the day, none of the destruction mattered, because Ming was dead. Dead as scrambled eggs. Dead like what you'd be like if you were bound up by duct tape, launched across the room, crashed against a wall, and cooked on the pan together with the eggs. Dead, eternal darkness—dead. How I wish there was something that could've saved my brother.

In 132 AD, a mere three years ago, the first seismograph was invented by a Chinese scientist named Zhang Heng during the Han Dynasty. This was an early version of the seismograph, consisting of a bronze vessel with eight dragon heads positioned around it. Each dragon head held a ball in its mouth, and below each ball was a dragon statue with an open mouth. When an earthquake occurred, the ground movement would cause the pendulum inside the vessel to swing, dislodging a ball from one of the dragon heads and dropping it into the open mouth of the corresponding dragon statue, giving an indication of the direction from which the seismic waves originated. Nowadays, as time went on, new innovations have been developed by different Chinese scientists, eventually crafting what originated as a couple of dragons to determine wave directions to a high-tech instrument that can measure anything earthquake related, from magnitude to direction.

Those eight dragons represent one thing my brother did not have that day five years ago. Hope for survival.

Timeless

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Cheah, Zu Zheng Christopher – 12

Standing at the back of a brightly lit hall deep within a mountain research facility, I listen intently as Jeff Bezos paces the stage, addressing the sea of guests before him. Behind him looms an illuminated screen, casting his figure in a radiant glow.

*10,000 Year Mechanical Clock – Opening Ceremony
23:30, December 31st, 2027 – Sierra Diablo Mountain, Texas, USA
Website: www.10000yearclock.net*

“Our quest was to create a clock that transcends our finite lifespans,” explains Bezos, “one that embodies the relativity of time itself.”

The mastery of time. Seamlessly elusive, out of reach of humanity’s most desperate grasps. Out of reach even for me, an expert horologist.

Beamed onto the screen, the next slide displays the website’s homepage quotation.

*And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.
T.S. Eliot*

“For twenty years, we endeavoured – yet faltered – to create our 10,000 year clock. Then this year, a revelation. Within a Chinese mountain, archaeologists unearthed the very first mechanical clock, dated 725 AD, invented by Chinese inventor Yi Xing. As T.S. Eliot stated, *we arrive where we started*, the first mechanical clock, for answers to craft our very own timepiece,” Bezos reveals.

“To my right, this ancient relic intriguingly *still ticks on, once per minute*, without any power. I now present to you, this *living* piece of history.”

As the cover lifts, my eyes flutter toward the ancient device. Intricate rusty bronze rings and precise metal gears orchestrate a symphony of clockwork, bequeathing scientific rhapsodies, ethereal complexities, all nested within a towering wooden edifice quadruple the size of a man.

I know the clock intimately, having overseen its extraction in China and been its guardian ever since.

Tock. A minute passes by.

“Now to my left,” as Bezos strides towards it, “is our clock that will last 10,000 years.”

As the spotlights shine on the modern, monumental creation, gasps ripple through the audience, echoes of wonderment sweeping through the hall before fading into awed silence. Three storeys high, its sophisticated gears gleam, shimmering with a spectrum of scientific breakthroughs.

“As Einstein once observed, time is not absolute, but varies with perspective. At midnight tonight, we celebrate the dawn of a new era with the first chime of the 10,000 year clock. It will chime only once every year, a *slower rhythm of time*.”

A slower rhythm delays aging. It is the closest we can reach to slowing – though not halting – the unyielding progression of time. Much like how a tree, the epitome of a slower rhythm, can live thousands of years.

Tick. Another minute passes by.

“This concludes our presentation. Kindly make your way to the new clock for its first chime at midnight, when we celebrate the new year.”

Staggering applause.

I gaze deeply at the old clock.

Something’s not right.

Tock. Five minutes to midnight.

The ancient clock seems to cry out, alone.
Only I am by its side.

This clock was my purpose, my companion. I tended to it, maintained its brilliance, understood what it was, who it was. No one else heard poetry in the clicks and the sighs, the hisses and whirs. When researchers dissected and analysed it, its once-steady melodic cadence grew delicate and faltered, and I seemed to grow more exhausted, more fragile.

As the clock consumed me, I started to recall less about my past. Flickers of a time in hospital, searing headaches at the age of 44, then nothing. Amnesia, probably, from working too hard.

Tick. Four minutes to midnight.

As the limelight shifts to the new clock, I dread the feeling of ever parting from my vintage timepiece, the nearest thing to a friend I've ever known.

My tears well up.

Tonight, a new glass wall enclosure separates me from it. A spotlight glints off the glass, refracting into my blurred reflection. My gaze travels along the beams of luminance, my face slowly sharpening into focus.

The clear reflection reveals a 65-year-old man, fleeting glimmers of a once joyful life flickering in his eyes. I look down on the descriptive plaque embedded in the glass.

*World's First Mechanical Clock, 725 AD.
Invented by Yi Xing – Chinese astronomer and mathematician.
Born 683 AD. Died 727 AD.*

My heart races.

The calculations flow unbidden – the inventor's age of death: 44 years. That same age when agony gripped me, piercing headaches that reduced me to helpless frailty in a hospital bed.

Tock. Three minutes to midnight.

A memory ambushes me.

So vibrant, so vivid within my mind, I see the sun dipping below the Tiantai mountain horizon, a shade of gold bleeding through silk curtains. Outside, the laughter of children cascades through the air, their voices tinged with olden Zhejiang dialects. Such beauty. Such a familiar tapestry of sight and sound.

My workshop is ancient, brimming with inventions perfected during the progressive Tang dynasty: celestial maps of the spherical bird's eye view of the heavens, a compass, an abacus, and scrolls of paper spiralling with equations. Porcelain cups lie scattered, the rich aroma of green tea permeating the air, palpable and rich.

In the centre stands an astronomical orrery and colossal clockwork, with Chinese characters etched on its outer wooden structure.

Inventor: Yi Xing

A pool of water lies dormant beside the clock. I step towards it, slowly, steadily. Staring at its surface, my reflection meets my gaze. The eyes staring back are alight with passion, untouched by time, radiant with the brilliance of stars.

But as the moment lingers, reality begins to dissolve, slipping through my fingers like fine sand. I reach out, desperate to hold on.

But I can't.

Tick. Two minutes to midnight.

As my memory fades, I gaze at my image in the glass. The same face. The same intense, spirited eyes aglow with dreams of celestial exploration.

Despite being ravaged by time, I am, still me.

I know who I am.

It explains so much – my love for tinkering, for traversing, for thinking. The uncanny familiarity when examining the workings of my mechanical clock. The inexplicable sense of nostalgia when gazing upon its inner mechanisms.

I am the one who invented the world's first mechanical clock.

I am Yi Xing.

But how can this be? Yi Xing's life ended in 727 AD, only 44 years allotted. Yet now, in 2027, I stand alive – 1300 years have passed, while I've added merely 21 years to my age.

A slower rhythm of time, entwined to the tick of my clock, only once every 60 seconds.

I must be aging slower than everyone else: 60 years pass for others, merely a single year for me.

Horror grasps my being as I shout out desperately to the crowd.

No one hears me.

Then I thrust my fist at the glass enclosure, but my knuckles meet only air, the smooth surface somehow intangible. I stumble forward, unsteady as my entire being phases through the unbroken pane.

"No, it can't be," I gasp inside the enclosure, shocked, not wanting to accept an inevitable truth.

I know *what* I am.

A spirit.

A spirit that ages slowly, one heartbeat per minute.

Tock. One minute to midnight.

I ache, I want to *live*.

I close my eyes, tears leaking behind my eyelids. Oh God. How long until everything's alright, until life's in perfect synchrony again? I'm not ready to let go, to fade. But I feel a countdown to the end coming, time's grip slowly tightening.

Time, your march I cannot halt, nor can I turn you back. Oh, I wish to dwell beyond your bounds, to be *timeless*.

My tears cascade. My heart aches from the agony of leaving my only friend. "Thank you," I quiver to the clock, "for your everlasting presence, my silent companion."

But now its ticks have the same fragility of my fading heartbeat. In time, I have to confront reality: the clock, unable to exist separately from its maker, has served as my imaginary friend, a presence I sustained to soothe my solitude.

In truth, my only real companion has been, simply, myself.

I have nothing more to cling to.

Nothing to leave behind.

And now, I will finally let go.

Easing into the embrace of my approaching end, I find solace in final whispers of eternal hope:

Timeless, free from the bounds of time.

*As with life comes death, but with death comes life,
As with darkness comes light, and with day comes night.*

*With the end, a new beginning.
Old becomes new,
And a new era shall be known for the first time.*

“Three...Two...One,” the audience counts to the new year.

The wearied, devoted gears of Yi Xing’s clock are finally set free, and the clock stops: becoming truly time-less.
Timeless, free from the bounds of time.

A single teardrop emerges, gently splashing atop the first mechanical clock.

The new 10,000 year clock chimes for the first time.

Liu Xuefeng's Powder of Fire

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Clerc, Jules – 13

It was a regular winter evening in Liu Xuefeng's town, with a dense blanket of mist obscuring all that was more than 5 feet away. Xuefeng, like on most days was cooped up inside his house, though during the winter this was quite normal for most people. None of his neighbours knew what went on inside there, but most suspected it was something dangerous, as on the few occasions where he exited the house, he was covered in soot. Inside, Xuefeng was tinkering with a recipe he had been commissioned to create by the government of his town. A recipe that could harness and magnify the power of fire, that could be used to ward off enemies and end wars.

Xuefeng had yet again spent an entire day, devoted to again, and again try and find a successful recipe. He knew he had to get it done soon, or the government would cut his funding. Without the government allocated funds, he would starve. After all, he had only taken this job because his regular medicinal business had been failing miserably. He decided, for one last time today, to try and create a recipe for this concoction. He mixed ground up charcoal, chunks of flint and some herbs. He knew that there had to be charcoal in there. It was the best way to make anything catch fire. But for the rest, he knew nothing at all. He tried to set the mixture alight. It lit, the fire spread throughout the powder and then fizzled out. Sick of it, Xuefeng decided to go to bed.

The next morning, Xuefeng woke up to a loud banging on his door. Groggily, he rose and went to open the front door. Upon opening it, he saw a town official, who speedily strode in unprompted.

"Have you finally found a reliable recipe yet?" demanded the official "and remember, you only have 5 more days to get it to us or we cut your funding."

"I- I- I'm getting close, I can feel it" Xuefeng bluffed. He could tell the official didn't believe the lie all too much, but with an exasperated sigh, they left anyway. Without another word the town official strode out the room. Despite his exhaustion, Xuefeng decided to go back to trying to figure out the concoction's recipe. He thought that maybe if he added saltpetre and sulphur to the charcoal, both of which he had noted could burn effectively. He also added some medicinal herbs he thought might help. He ground it all up into a fine powder. Then, he lit it on fire and even in the small amount he had made, it instantaneously blazed in a brilliant dancing flame. This looked fine; however, the government had asked for something more... volatile. Xuefeng decided that it would be best if he cleared his mind by finally going outside to replenish his food supplies.

Once he reached his town's market to buy some produce, he decided that he needed to stock up on bread and some fruit. Once he was paying, he saw the shop owner place the money he had paid in a jar, and this gave him an idea. If he placed the powder he had made into a sealed container, once it was activated, it might burst out causing the flames to fly outwards in every direction. There was just one problem; if he had to seal the container to cause it to burst, but the container had to be open to light it on fire, then how would he have it sealed? It was a difficult dilemma, which left him vacantly standing in front of the shop. Just then, he was startled by the shopkeeper bringing him back down to earth.

"Sir, could you please move along now?" Asked the owner, "There's other customers who would like some of my product and I'd like their money."

"Oh... um of course." Xuefeng replied awkwardly. Walking home, he wondered how he could manage to delay the fast-acting powder to test his theory. Then an idea came to him out of nowhere, as if it had fallen out of the heavens directly into his head. If he used a long rope that led into an otherwise sealed container, he would not have to stay near it to seal it, ensuring he would not be harmed.

Once he reached his home, he rushed in slamming his door shut behind him. He rifled through his entire home looking for his best sealed container. After a while he found an old porcelain jar whose lid he had melted and punctured a hole in it. He then filled it with the new concoction and put a string into the hole and lit it. Running out the room, only peeking round the doorframe's corner. Though the wait only lasted a few seconds, it felt like hours. Once the fire had burned down the string into the jar, the jar burst into pieces sending burning hot shards all over the room.

Realising his invention had worked he ran to the government official's home to tell him the amazing news. In the street he shoved everyone and everything of the way; kids, adults, and the elderly – it didn't matter to him. Bashing his fist against the door, thoughts were rushing through his head. He had finally done it! The official groggily opened the door.

“What is it?” the official asked.

“I've finally done it” exclaimed Xuefeng “I've made the concoction!”

“Really?” The official perked up “Give me the recipe now, and I'll give you the reward.” Xuefeng handed the official a recipe he had earlier scrawled down on a sheet of paper. The official walked back into his home, telling Xuefeng to wait at the door. Around a minute later, he left with a large pouch, which he placed in Xuefeng's hand. When Xuefeng looked inside, he saw a fortune that was enough to keep him alive for the rest of his life. Xuefeng, finally able to not have to work 7 days a week to stay alive, went home and collapsed into bed.

Elixir of Fire

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Ho, Jenson – 13

Ever since I was young, I have had dreams of lighting up the night sky. The stars always shone brightly in the sky, but something was missing...

As I gazed up towards the stars in awe, my mind was exploding with thoughts. What if I could create a star on Earth?

The light of dawn beamed down. Emitting rays of warmth from the golden ball of fire: our sun. What if I could create something as dazzling as the stars and as bright and majestic as the sun?

These thoughts crackled and sprung into my mind like sparks and lived free in my head like wildfire. That idea changed my life forever. The fuse had been lit.

In the next few years, I worked hard to build my vision. The product of these years was nothing. The chemicals I trialled either exploded too early or did not light up. Fail after fail, my house was now a mess of ashes, dust and chemicals. That night, I watched the stars again. They were carefree and glittered and gleamed across the night sky. As the morning sun rolled up across the sky, I realised. There is no point in trying to make a star.

Although I had put my dream behind me, I always remembered it. For the next ten years, I studied hard in alchemy and was eventually picked from a group of alchemists to make an elixir of immortality. I concentrated on the project and the thought of lighting up the sky drifted to the back of my mind. The once raging wildfire in my head had diminished to a small candle.

I never thought much about the flames until one fateful day. We were experimenting with Sulphur and Charcoal when a singular flame from our fire licked the mixture and... and... I could not describe what I saw. The experiment burst into a glorious ball of fire, sparkling and shining against the backdrop of the night sky. It was brilliant. Who could have thought that a small accident could have led to such a massive breakthrough?

The breakthrough has reignited the candle of my dream. The fuse was flaming red hot, and I could practically see flames creeping enthusiastically along a rope. I resigned from my alchemist job to pursue my vision.

I brought out the market's entire supply of sulphur and charcoal and hauled it back to my house. I quickly discovered that the missing part of my creation was Potassium Nitrate. Carefully combining the correct proportions of the substances into a bamboo container and adding a rope to it, all I had to do was wait for nightfall. My creation was complete.

As the warm glow of twilight faded, the sky was dark again. My neighbours were lighting fires for torches, but I was not. My fire crept along the rope towards the container. My fire would ignite a star. My fire would shine brighter and better than any fire before mine. The fire in my eyes glowed as bright as the fire I had lit. The rope was getting shorter and shorter. With bated breath, I watched the fire get closer and closer. It reached the container. Silence.

I was about to step forward to relight the rope when the fire erupted upwards into the sky. An explosion of bright dazzling colours shining as bright as the sun and as beautiful as the stars sprawled over the sky like the network of stars. I had done it.

As the lights faded and the cloud of smoke cleared, I could see my neighbours cheering and clapping through the smoke. The smouldering container flickered once more then died. The sky, once again filled with stars, gleamed down winks of approval, smiling in success.

The Machine of Misfortune

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Ho, Venetia – 12

My mind was littered with empty thoughts, cramped with dust and grime. I struggled through the filth just as I struggled to make my way through the day without wondering about him. Bang. Smack. The smash of the printing press vibrated through me, sending waves of regret through my weary mind.

I sat in the middle of the dimly lit room, gasping for the little air that entered through cracks in the wall and holes in the roof. The machinery loomed over my shadow as I continued to stare at the newspaper in front of me. Its headline echoed through my hollow mind as my hands raced to rearrange the letters again— ‘Wanted! Lunatic on the Loose.’ My rushing thoughts finally came to a standstill, but instead of peace I was met with one remaining thought. “Why dad?”

It was silent except for my roaring discomfort. If it wasn’t for him, I wouldn’t be stuck in this demanding cycle of misfortune.

I re-entered my cave of labour as I set up to work. I glanced over all of the headlines I needed to stamp. What my eyes told me was not what my heart wanted to hear. The hot summer’s day started to snow. Time sped up as I just stood there; watching.

Click clack. Click clack. That noise repelled off the pavement as I hurried along the never-ending road. What used to bother me, now seemed like a small pet peeve. My mind tunnelled, and my vision plummeted. The lush countryside around me now seemed devoid of green. I heard the world speak in monotone. I just had to make it to the jail. I just had to see him before he committed another crime. Before my work could engulf me. Send me insane. Before the new headline ‘Lunatic finally found’ turned back to its former self, ‘Lunatic on the loose.’

The floors seemed to shine here, and my heart seemed to break. My anger, hatred and love spilled out like a dam had just broken inside my tiny organ. I couldn’t bring my eyes to his, instead my words flew out like a wild wolf’s howl. How could he have left me at such a young age? Left me to care for myself? Left me alone and miserable? Stabbing someone in the back was not an accident and escaping the Qincheng Prison was not a coincidence. Leaving me to become a printing press operator was his doing. He could have become a loving father. He could have stayed to support me and raise me. But no, a maniac like him would be just the opposite. He was probably only thinking about how I failed in life, how I was such a disappointment— looking down on me even though I should be the one stepping on him.

Even though my words kept ranting, I felt something cold being pressed against my neck. My mind felt suffocated by this sensation. This was not shivers. Not even the air conditioning of the visiting lounge. But my rage swallowed me whole, so it didn’t matter. All that mattered was confronting him. Hearing a single apology come out of his mouth. That of course was wishful thinking. A cold-hearted murderer like him couldn’t even grasp the concept of remorse. No— he was the same as a robot programmed to kill.

That weird feeling kept coming back. It didn’t hurt. It felt somewhat numb even though nothing had happened. My limbs felt weaker, and my voice came out coarse. My wail dried up until all that was left was a whimper. The ice and numbness of the moment were now replaced by a forest fire. The veins around my wound exploded, shooting out like lasers, leaving burgundy pools all over the pristine floors. The nerves leading to my brain were electrified and my last flame of life was extinguished.

If I had not realised it before, I certainly did now. That cold object pressed against my neck was not something as pleasant as the wind. It could only be the wind if it grew legs and fangs and sprouted claws— if it turned into a beast. If it became a monster. That creature was the only thing my dad could ever tame. His knife. What I felt was the sharp edge of a steel dagger dining on my flesh.

If it wasn't for my need to support myself, my need to continue life— I wouldn't have become a printing press operator. I wouldn't have devoted my precious time to reading headlines and inking letters. They wouldn't have been spent reading those headlines about my dad. If I hadn't seen that headline I would still be breathing and still be struggling, but that has now reached an end. I guess I should thank my father for letting me finally rest. Even if I don't blame him, I still blame myself. I printed my soul into those articles and pressed my life into oblivion.

Bang. Smack. The inevitable smash of my head vibrated like the printing press. It vibrated until it went still. If I had not realised it before, I certainly did now. I was dead.

Memories Within Fire

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Huang, Zixi – 12

It burst out in flames, imploding mid-air while everyone watched in horror. A broken corpse fell to the ground in a pile of ruin and debris. A moment of silence held on for what seemed like ages, then a sound. He fell to his knees, unable to speak. A deafening ringing sensation blasting through his head like a raging wildfire while his vision was blurry and confusing. All his hard work, his blood, sweat and tears, everything that was holding him together collapsed, dead and broken, along with his best friend, right in front of him. Past decades of life now nothing more than wasted. The hours passed, and the watchers, slowly trod away, pulling the strings of hope looser and looser the further they walked. All that was left was him. Unable to accept anything that had just happened.

The office was bustling with people walking around the busy hallways. Workers dressed in fancy white coats and suits hurriedly walked by his desk while he typed as his fingers carried him away.

‘25/02/50. 4 days till take-off. Cheung Yi is making the final adjustments. Rocket is in fine tuning stage.’

Once he finished, he stood up from his ragged chair and anxiously walked through the crowds as the office became thronged with people. Monochrome cameras and mechanical shutters flickered in his face, bombarding him with their relentless questions.

“Are you ready for take-off?” “Are you sure it is safe?” Multitudes of people frantically asked, desperate for answers, all only to be ignored. Then came the microphone.

“When will you be launching your world-changing rocket to Mars?” the interviewer queried.

“The 29th of February. This rare date, once every 4 years is a representation of our rocket, being unique and brilliant in every way.” He replied confidently, his steady speech haunted by a fearful undertone. Thoughts swarmed and crashed in his mind, each one piling on top of another, culminating to a storm of thunderous doubt as more and more questions echoed within. What if it failed? What if it crashed? What if... What if... What if...?

“It's going to fail, Yi Jing. You are going to fail. From the moment you were born, you ruined my life. Our family is broken because of YOU. Everything wrong starts from YOU. You're not my child. I don't know a failure like you.” She said. Words that stung more than needles ever could as he felt his entire being stripped away in the agony of it all. But he could not dare talk back to his own mother. The pain remained contained, caged within his body as he always endured. The world felt washed and numb, devoid of any colour, emotion, any thought, or freedom through his tinted world. The abuse of it all, the beatings of it all, this excruciating suffering that only trickled through after hours when all was done and only a shell remained, lying there, exhausted. Empty. Like a corpse in its coffin as tears of pain and regret trickled down the slopes of his face, covering his botched, watery eyes and stifling screams under the blankets as he struggled to catch his breath.

“Hey, Yi Jing, look at how bright the stars are tonight!”

A voice rippled through the evening breeze, slicing through blades of grass as they swished in a sea of verdant green, fingers outstretched as a small, sturdy hand pointed to the skies in the distance. “You know, I've always wanted to go

to Mars.” the boy continued. “I’ve never really been good at anything, but this dream... venturing the stars is something I’ve always wanted to do.” He chuckled lightly, those big, innocent eyes sparkling with the thought. The folds of his lips curled upwards in a gentle smile, brightening like the sun, like a beam of light and happiness that outshined the ghosts that followed Yi Jing. Despite it all, Cheung Yi was never ‘good’ at anything, as if cursed so that all he did was doomed to end in failure and doubt. He was never the first to be chosen, nor the one people most trusted. Like Yin and Yang, the two could not be any more different. From the very beginning, Yi Jing was a child with perfect grades, a prodigy blessed with genius like no other. An entire cabinet alone was not enough to contain the hundreds of gold medals to his name, nor his blinding shine and renowned honour. Pampered like a prince and showered with gifts and compliments from head to toe, all vied for the favour of next heir to the richest family of the country, and a mind that exceeded comprehension. But Cheung Yi was different. Perhaps it was the way he spoke of the stars, or the pure enchantment and radiant hope that seemed to glimmer with every word and syllable that captivated Yi Jing, or the friendship between them that seemed to transcend grades, or wealth or power that formed the inseparable bond between the two.

“Are you sure you want this? To go on the rocket?” Yi Jing asked again, concerned for his choice.

“Yes. I’m sure! It’s all I’ve ever dreamed of” Cheng Yi chimed, fuelled by the same enthusiasm with every reply. “Please don’t worry Yi Jing,” he added, turning to face his friend’s clouded face. “I know I’m not half as good as you in anything else, and I know I never will be. But I want to do this in return for all that you’ve done for me... I want to make you proud,” he continued, “You know I always trust in you, so now I want you to trust in me.”

Those words lingered in the air for what seemed like eternity, before carefree, gleeful laughter escaped the two in unison, rejoicing in their time as a silent understanding passed between them.

No matter what world there was, what circumstance, what situation there could be, they would always be there for each other.

The dark sky brightened with a bright orange beam of light, a circle of hope rising into the resting world as the first few rays of sun peaked above the horizon and the sky turned a shade of reds, oranges and blues, from the deep shade of purple it was, just moments ago. The gentle morning breeze came in as the city of Hangzhou started to awaken while birds sang joyfully as the clouds danced along the golden canvas. The soothing yet vibrant streaks of light filled the sky as the rising sun’s radiant face started to loom over the shimmering cerulean sea.

The day had come, the day of which the past ten years of effort would be sowed, the labour of the harvest brought to fruition. Crowds gathered around the scene, waiting patiently as the rocket was examined and checked again and again. Asuited Cheung Yi climbed the steel steps of the path to the rocket, waving goodbye as he climbed slowly into the cabin. The ship was prepared to take-off, and the ultimate countdown soon initiated.

10...9...8...7....

Pearls of cold sweat trickled down then brow of Yi Jing’s forehead, an unsettling shudder creeping down his spine.

6....5....4....

His heart ran as if restrained for time out of mind, ramming against his ribcage like an unruly animal as it begged for it to stop, as it pleaded to be free. Time seemed to freeze as all air began to choke in his lungs, fingers pulsing to their own volition, levitating ever so slightly above the table as his entire body withheld the force to collapse from it all.

3...2...1...

A large boom rippled through the air as clouds and smoke billowed from the back of the rocket, vibrant colours of fire painting the sky. It was like a scene from a dream itself, his vision, his hope, his future. The awakening of a past hope, the culmination of a decade of living, of breathing, of trying. He watched it as the beacon of his mission lifted to the sky, rising through the clouds and—

BOOM.

The Emergence of Firelances

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Liu, Karen – 12

Painful wails echoed against the early hours of dawn. Pale sunlight barely coloured the horizon with faded red strokes, making soldiers' shadows dance on the earth below. They stood on the side as their weapons glinted, watching while lines of captives tossed wood and straw filling in the huge moat at their feet.

The fear painted on their faces was a striking detail added beautifully to the magnificent painting of absolute chaos.

Yang grimaced, hand fidgeting with the hilt of his *dao*. Assigned to supervise the prisoners, he ached to strip the heavy armours on his shoulders. However, the moat still did not look affected after being filled with countless objects, so he doubted he could rest soon. The shouts in the background were *not* making anything better.

A captive halted. Wisps of white hair escaped from the tight bun on her head, shadowing the wrinkles of her face. Frowning, the man swiftly positioned his *dao* facing her vulnerable neck, declaring a silent threat. 'Move.' He commanded.

She did nothing but sway back and forth. However, before he could react, she collapsed hard to the ground. Her family immediately rushed to her aid, and he blocked them by checking for her breath. They visibly relaxed when her chest was caught heaving shallowly.

Although she needs a few days of rest before moving again, her situation was not severe; collapsing from fatigue and stress, she has yet to be embraced by death.

Yet.

A person without use is equivalent to a dead one. Waiting for a mere peasant to go back to health is only going to burden them further. Now, there will be a delay to when they cross the gully to attack city De'an. As he fumed soundlessly, a stare on his back was felt, and he turned his head to find the gaze of one higher-ranked soldier. Their eyes met, and the senior quickly flitted his eyes from the moat to the woman. His message was clear.

Sighing, he swung the captive over his shoulder, tramping to the waters. Her family sent him a puzzled glance, but quickly caught on as it melted into terror. They scrambled up to stop him, but before their hands touched his robes, a few of his colleagues armed with whips dragged them away.

Their shrieks were ignored by the other captives, who were submerged in their own fright.

He continued, not sparing them another glance. Gazing at the grim face from his reflection in the water, he only watched as it cursed him eternally for the sins he committed.

Yang hoped he would at least bear a peaceful demise, although everyone knew that rebels like them are doomed for an excruciating death in the battlefield...

A hand seizing his ankle sent him back to reality, throwing him off balance. He snapped his head back, finding a small boy on the ground clinging to him. Bruises littered his face, droplets of blood mixing with tears that rolled down his cheeks.

'Please,' He begged, 'Let my grandmother go.'

His pleas were disregarded by the soldier as he tried to shake the child off, which his attempts proved futile. Irked, Yang grabbed the lady and *hurled her towards the sky*.

The boy screeched as she soared through heaven, where it stopped in the morning sun, no more than a dark silhouette. Then down she went, falling into the moat's arms as it prepared to crush the body into a lethal embrace—

Flames swept across the gully, bright and fierce as they swirled, melting the moat into a sea of fire, swallowing hours of work.

It was not until every spark disappeared when Yang caught sight of arrows floating among the surface of the moat emitting the strong scent of gunpowder slithering in the atmosphere. A thump is heard where the boy was positioned, where he sat trembling with his mouth agape. Yang followed his stare and immediately understood why.

A lump of black suspiciously resembling that of a human figure drifted in the gully, an arrow jutting out in the middle. There came the colour, thick and red, tainting the waters, engulfing sections of the *elder woman's robe* with ease.

Nobody dared to make a sound, their gazes locked to a single man, mostly known by the title *commander Li Heng*.

It was obvious even to the most uneducated people to know that he was the one in charge. Beard trimmed neatly and eyes determined, he has the ideal appearance of any leader.

“Chen.” He growled; brows knitted together.

Thick silence settled as he mused for a plan. At last, Yang saw the bright glint in his commander's eyes whenever he had an idea in mind.

“Tell the peasants to brick caked filling to pour in the moat. Supervise every one of them.” He turned to the walls of De'an in the distance. “Prepare the sky bridges; we are going to perform a frontal assault. I will *not* allow Chen and his *dogs* of the emperor toy with us any further.”

They moved quickly, soldiers threatening the people with menacing weaponry and them grasping shovels and buckets in fear. Yang started to follow but was stopped by a calloused hand gripping his shoulder. It was Li. “Jianzi, wait.”

He paused. Li had rarely called him by his name even before the *incident*. Whatever he wishes to discuss must be a matter of importance. The soldier impersonated a stiff bow, keeping his flurry of emotions hidden under composed calmness. “Commander.”

“Have you noticed how the weapons significantly improved over the last few battles, Jianzi?” The leader questioned, “Rumours had stated that they are even developing a new mutation, depicting it as a spear-like thing made of bamboo and gunpowder. **Fire Lances**, they're called.” He leaned forward, voice gradually getting quieter with each word. “They say that all of these are made by *young dark-skinned girl*!”

His eyes glistened as the younger man blinked at the familiar description.

“...You really think it's her?” Yang decided dropped the formalities after a brief hesitation.

“What are the chances for someone to include spear, bamboo, and gunpowder to describe an object? Not mentioning that throughout the whole empire, only a genius as brilliant as she could produce ideas like this.” He tilted his head. “You should know this, too, as you were closest to her.”

“She had been missing for over three years now, Li—”

“And she has been found now.”

“It's still a rumour—”

“It is not. Too much to be a coincidence.”

“Why would she even share her creations with Chen—”

“She might be forced.”

He glanced at Yang's unconvinced face and sighed. “Look, I can't let this go if she could be so *near* to us. Especially when I promised commander Sang to keep her safe, which she won't be if found she's connected with rebels.”

The mention of the former commander brought both men into silence. He was a forbidden topic, one that even the stoniest of hearts would shrivel with the name.

“...I'll try to gather more information.” he finally offered.

If he survives the siege.

Li nodded, then appeared to contemplate something, before slowly opening his mouth to speak.

“Jianzi, do you...regret joining us?” His stare changed to one that he frequently wore in childhood. It was a stare which acknowledged that they were equals. *Friends.*

“I would never.” Yang lied.

It was night when the moat was finally filled, before Commander Li rode his horse to lead the attack on De’an. Chen Gui and his lot are dubiously tranquil ever since the shooting of arrows. Everyone (excluding the captives) whizzed past the gully, and within a few minutes, gathered in front the city. There were thousands of them, and over half would not make it tonight. Perhaps he’d be part of that half.

He shattered the thought.

“Into positions!” Li bellowed, and they got off their horses to haul the sky bridges, before having the trebuchets placed at the front of the platform along with the archers. Yang was located at the middle, tasked to leap across the wall and assail directly at the enemy troops.

“CHARGE!”

Yang sprung from one stone to another and was about to reach the top when he found a long beam sealing the top of the structure, blocking his entrance. A glint of light. He paused, squinting his eyes to inspect the flash closely. Peeking out from a corner of a wall, was the tip of a *blade*. Sprinkles of dust landed on his nose, overlapping his senses with the smell of gunpowder.

A Fire Lance.

His eyes widened and opened his mouth to alert a warning. It was left unconstructed as spirals of orange and yellow entered his vision. Pain gnawed his heart and his hands clenched at his chest, only to feel a stick bulging out in place.

Everything was dark as the wind guided him to the ground.

It marked the first death of thousands to come.

The Compass and the Ruler

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Liu, Sandra – 1

When I was a young boy, my mama told me a story. One I will always treasure ever so dearly. It was all chaos. The universe was chaos. Until Pangu stood. He divided the earth with the sky, the sea with the wind, the sun with the moon and created the vast land of China. He created the magnificent land formed by mountains so tall they reach the sky, the deserts dunes that glow gold when the sun hits the fine sand, the dense forests packed with towering snow-capped pine trees, and the small islands where the ocean glistens like diamonds and the water clear as crystal. He made birds. He made bear. He made fox. He made fish. And before his last breath, he made man. Amongst man stood his own son Fuxi, and daughter Nüwa. They had bodies of snakes and heads of man. They carried on the legacy of Pangu. They were crowned Gods of Creation. Now, one of the many ancient Chinese inventions only a few people know created by Fuxi and Nüwa was the seismograph. And here is the little-known story of how it was created.

Our story takes place during Han-dynasty China. There was little of anything during this time in China. The occasional opera in the heart of town, a few kites made from scraps of cloth propped up by a bamboo structure or the elderly playing “go” chess on the side of the road. Sometimes, if you are lucky, you would have some street performers juggling. But that was as interesting as it got for a middle-class family back in 2nd century China. This was before the birth of a quite special individual who was going to make a humongous impact on all of China’s development and all of China’s bright future.

On a misty wintry night amid November, a little boy named Zi Ling was birthed. He was a beautiful boy. Hazel eyes that shimmered against the sunlight, porcelain skin which looked as smooth as the ceramic vases in his house, and a smile that was so bright it was as if there was a glowing halo of light following him wherever he went. But alas, life sometimes is not in your favour. At the early age of 3, both his parents were deceased. The only distant memory he had of them, were two objects. One was a compass that was made with brass and polished bronze with a pearl placed in the middle. The other was a ruler made of a milky jade that was cold to the touch. He always kept these two objects in his pockets.

After the death of Zi Ling’s parents, he lived with his aunt who lived in a little cottage near his town. Life for Zi Ling was fine. He was just like any other boy. He would help his aunt with labour work, (he wasn’t good, he was fine). he was fine school, he was a fine Buddhist, he got along fine with other children, everything was simply fine. Now, our revolutionary story starts when Zi ling came to the age of 12.

A crisp autumn afternoon when the trees were peacefully swaying from side to side, everything was glistening shades of orange and yellow, and the mountains were lightly sprinkled with snow. Zi Ling was out collecting wood for cooking. He then felt a tingle. A warmth in his pockets. He took out the compass and the ruler he kept in his pants, and the tingling stopped. But suddenly, the ground started to shake. The sky started to turn grey. The wind started to howl, and the tree leaves started to whirl around Zi Ling. The leaves moved around him faster and faster until he was stuck in a blur. More than a minute has passed by. The leaves settled, the trees continued their rhythmic swaying, the sky turned back to its original shade. But what stood in front of Zi Ling shocked him.

In front of him stood a conjoined figure of two. with the bottom half of a snake, and top halves of humans. One was a woman, and one was a man. The woman was holding Zi Ling’s precious brass compass, and the man was holding the smooth jade ruler. Zi Ling remembered a story his aunt told him long before. The story of Fuxi and Nuwa. Brother and sister who was crowned deity of creation. Something then interrupted Zi Ling’s thinking, there was a voice. Well, more than a voice. A chorus of voices that was also not a voice. It was as if staring into the souls of the deity of creation was like listening to a voice. A voice saying “in one years' time, a disaster will happen. A disaster that will shatter homes into pieces. A disaster that will shake the earth, and many will lose their lives. I put my faith and my knowledge and my wisdom in you, to stop this. And if you prove successful, you will earn a place with us, amongst the heavens when your time has arrived”.

After that, the two figures vanished in front of his eyes. Zi Ling was confused. He did not know what to think or feel, or what to do. But then he remembered. Something that happened long ago. In his village around a century

ago, a disaster happened. Just like Fuxi and Nuwa described an event that shook the earth. Shattered homes and caused many to lose their homes. It was an earthquake.

A few days after this event, Zi Ling had another vision. He visioned a structure made of bronze. With eight dragon heads and eight toads. It looked like a vase, and it worked in a pendulum motion. "This was it!" he thought, "this is how I would save my town from this earthquake!" After that, he started constructing his invention straight away. He melted metal, he carved, he cutted, until after 11 months, he was finished. He made a beautiful structure. It was polished and shiny, and it was delicately crafted with many small details. He named it the seismograph. It would help him determine when the earthquake was going to arrive to save his town people.

When the day came of the terrible earthquake, Zi Ling managed to save his town people from the terrible disaster all thanks to the help of Fuxi and Nuwa. This invention has helped inspire many more and has been a great step in the human development.

Zhang Heng's Latest Invention

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Lui-Schwille, Tristan – 13

Hard at work in his quarters at the imperial palace, Zhang Heng knew that time was slipping away. With his concentration giving way to self-doubt, he stared distractedly out at the sky. Beyond the patterned wooden lattice of his window, the sun was setting just over the outer West gate. The gate, a truly massive structure, twelve head of horse wide and auspiciously decorated bright red and gold, had been a source of recent embarrassment. Zhang sighed, recalling how his peers had ridiculed him when he had tried to recreate Liu Xin's proof of the path around the sun. Zhang had referred to the gate in his calculations and had at first been quite sure that the sun was close to forty head of horse in the round. It was his friend Liu Taotu who pointed out his mistake – for the distance around the gate itself was almost one *li*, yet the sun was surely many times larger – so large it must be even greater than the great WuTai Mountain itself.

The rhythmic drip drop of a water clock returning him from his thoughts, Zhang stood up from his wooden desk and stretched. Perhaps a walk through the palace gardens would help lift his mood. At this hour, he would most likely have the place to himself. Cheered by this thought, Zhang stored away his writing materials and scrolls neatly on a shelf above his unfinished armillary sphere. Looking at the sphere, he grunted, another unfinished project. Slipping on his hanfu jacket, he set off for the gardens.

Walking past one of the many halls and lesser palaces, he heard a shout: "Hey – sun measurer!"

Zhang stopped and shrank in his shoes.

"Well, if it isn't our esteemed chief astronomer himself," Wan Lo, stepped out of the shade of the Shrine of Plentiful Harvest, flanked by two pompous clerks.

"What is this I hear about you attempting to create a device able to detect earthquakes from far away? Here I thought that you had learnt your lesson after you shrank the sun!"

"But you need not worry, as I am more than willing to take your place, astronomer, as well as your six-hundred bushels salary."

Wan Lo and his crew laughed again at Zhang's embarrassment, seemly uncaring about the reddening of Zhang Heng's face, nor the clenching of his fists by his side.

"Go back to your vegetable sacrifices Wan Lo," growled Zhang Heng "if you were that excited about seeing my new invention you could have just told me. It will shortly be presented to the Emperor and his court, and with your standing, your invitation is guaranteed."

Wan Lo and his cohorts laughed raucously then roughly pushed past him. Waiting until they had vanished from sight, Zhang Heng heaved a sigh of relief and slumped against the wall. He had been planning to present his invention to Emperor and his court at some point, that much had been true, yet he had been counting on at least a couple of months more to prepare. He couldn't count on that now however, after all, his many enemies in court wouldn't miss this opportunity to try to embarrass him. The sun's last rays flickered on the rooftops as dusk fell and Zhang made his way home.

The next day, standing in the safety of his own courtyard and bathed in morning light, Zhang wiped sweat from his brow. On a small raised platform stood his invention. With the appearance of a large bronze amphora, the device stood about three feet tall. Trailing down its sides were eight carved wooden dragons, each marked with a cardinal point, and below the dragons' mouths were eight frogs, each with their mouths open as if preparing to catch a falling object. The amphora, however, was obviously incomplete, with no less than a third of its side removed, revealing the mechanics within. Zhang eyed his invention warily, his calculations had been double – no – triple checked. This time, he was taking no chances.

His device functioned by detecting even the slightest tremor of an earthquake, upon which it would release a clay ball from the dragon representing the direction of the source of the earthquake. However, with this system, he faced

a dilemma, how exactly should he test his device? How could he create such a tremor? Perhaps a great sound would suffice? Where could he find the means to make such a noise?

Standing resolutely with his hands clasped behind his back, and his ears stuffed with silk, Zhang Heng watched his servants haul the massive gong in. He hefted the massive mallet and struck...

A week later, Zhang stood in front of the gates to the Emperor's throne room, pacing. He had been summoned to explain himself and to present his invention.

"Zhang Heng, you may enter," the voice the Emperor's Head Advisor rang out, and the grand doors to his throne room creaked open.

The Head Advisor's voice rang out again, "Zhang Heng, Chief Astronomer, please describe to us the name of your device, how it functions, and its use."

Shadows leapt in the light of the lanterns. Zhang Heng took a steadying breath, "my device is named *Hou Feng Di Dong Yi*, the earthquake weathervane. It functions by having a stone pendulum remain still while the entire structure tilts slightly as it is hit by the tremor of the earthquake. This stone pendulum is also always in contact with a small wooden ball. The friction caused between the pendulum and the ball then leads to the ball being pushed into a small channel which emerges at the dragon's mouth, and the dragon appears to drop a ball in the direction the tremor came from. The frog catches the ball."

"How interesting," said the Emperor, speaking for the first time. "Yet it doesn't seem to be doing anything. Are you sure it works?"

"Your Imperial Highness, I apologise as I am currently unable to demonstrate my device as it requires a vibration on the scale of an earthquake to function. I tried a gong but it was simply not powerful enough. I am confident it will work, you must believe me." Zhang responded, stiffly bowing and visibly nervous.

Dark glances and hostile whispers were exchanged in the room. There was a long pause and Zhang Heng thought he heard a low snigger among the gathered courtiers. The Emperor stared at the device and then back to Zhang Heng. Finally, his gaze settled on Zhang Heng; "So," he said. "Presumably we must wait. But I would prefer it if you could do the waiting on your own time. Leave your device here. You will be summoned if there is news." The court burst into laughter, while the Emperor remained impassive. Zhang Heng bowed his head and hurried out, leaving his device behind.

Many weeks passed, and there was no news from the imperial court. Yet one day a messenger approached Zhang Heng in his quarters. "Your device gave a signal today; one of the dragon's mouths released a clay ball that fell into the frog's mouth. Yet there was no earthquake."

"Which dragon was it?" asked Zhang Heng.

"The one to the northeast. But no matter. The Emperor has requested that your device be removed at once for it clearly has no use".

Once again, a sense of disappointment and shame crept over him; even though this time he had been so sure of his work. He made his way up to the throne room with his servants in order to retrieve his device and waited. The Emperor was still holding court and Zhang Heng would have to wait until the day's business had concluded. He sat and stared out, watching as the setting sun paraded shadows of the gate across the courtyard beneath him.

While he waited, a great commotion arose in the centre of his gaze. A messenger had arrived on horseback, mud-spattered and exhausted. A crowd thronged around him. An earthquake had occurred not three days ride away. In a town to the northeast they said.

At once, an urgent court assembly was called to have Zhang Heng and his device once again presented. A thousand lanterns burned brightly to illuminate the chamber, and the excitement in the room was palpable. Zhang kneeled before the Emperor and praise was heaped upon him for his impressive invention. Zhang breathed deeply and trembled with pride.

Proven right at last.

A Glutton's Regret

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Ma, Brian – 14

Visions seize me. Images of disease, savagery, and revelry flash through my mind, eventually culminating in the scenery converting to an unfamiliar sterile, white room. I stare blankly at the individual facing me, unsure of what to say. Confusion strikes me as the room begins to rapidly deteriorate, evoking memories of bamboo paper being burnt as incense. As I begin to fall, my hand subconsciously grasps at a bottle that did not seem affected by the environment, yet it melts in my hand as if it were composed of molten iron. My vision goes dark as I fall into the void.

The boundary between life and death feels like water. Alas, I am not dead; rather, I am submerged in a spring. Intricately embroidered fabric sticks to my skin, now wet after clawing my way out of the pond. The scent of grain wine wafts from a pot, which I can only presume to be safe for consumption. I begin to drink. A rich and intense malt flavor hits my tongue, awakening memories of myself brewing the wine. How could it be possible, considering I've never been to this pond before? I did not have time to ponder, as the overconsumption of wine soon took hold of me.

I awaken. The ground is foggy enough to obscure my sight – or perhaps the ground itself is a billow of smoke. A lone tree stands before me, shading the table underneath, yet moonlight beams through the leaves and forms the silhouette of a person. My shadow is narrowly concealed, yet it disappears along with the moonlight as clouds cover the sky. It is then that I notice I am alone once more. Droplets enter my cup as I hunch over the table, weeping.

I began to realize the reality of my situation and figured I was not under the constraints of time or space. None of these people are, or were, 'me.' At last, I had people to point the blame towards. Surely, they ruined my life! Whether a brewer or a poet, all of them were responsible for the growth and glorification of alcohol. I desperately wanted myself to be right. I needed it, even. But, deep down, I knew that I was to blame. I was truly apologetic: for the murder of my spouse, the abuse of my child, and myself for the numerous broken promises of soberness. The surroundings fade back to normal, and I find myself in the same position as I was before the 'dream,' as if I were staring blankly. I make eye contact with the young man staring disapprovingly at me.

Machinery fills the room. Clarity fills my mind. My memories all come rushing back, reminding me of the sinful life I had led. Adrenaline begins to pump through my body, almost as if it were warning me to escape. Soon, I would find out why. I look at my son. In my final moment of lucidity, I managed to utter one sentence.

"I'm sorry."

He nods his head, the listless gaze in his eyes suggesting that he already knew. My son's hand nears, and I attempt to hold it with my last ounce of strength. However, he evades my hand with an unexpressed sense of disgust – and I soon realize where his hand is truly reaching toward.

The plug is pulled. My hand begins to fall slowly to my side, and soon, the only sound left is a constant, almost ear-piercing tone.

The Paper Maker

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Malviya, Kiran – 12

The faint morning glow from the first sliver of sunshine creeping through a window of a downcast and bedraggled hut. Battered and bruised from storms, the little hut did not look a pretty sight in the beautiful valley in which it was nestled there like a bird egg in its mother's nest. The cracked window lit up in the early hours of dawn, the warm fresh light flooding the room within. The sight inside the room was not much better than outside of it. There at a stooped wooden table his legs tucked behind him in a kneeling position was a man. On the table was a huge roll of bamboo stretched in front of him as well as a brush clenched in one hand. While one of his hands was pale and bony from the shape of the brush the other was flushed red as it was glued to the table holding the bamboo in place as the sharp edges dug into the inventor's hands like little daggers. As his hand screamed in pain, the inventor leaned closer to the scroll, burying his hands ever deeper into the splinters of bamboo, to squint at the minuscule writing; every word was a drop of blood trickling from his hand.

The writing were very peculiar, not the sort that you or I would find in say a history book, instead the ancient writing reflected in the glorious sunshine to reveal the soft tracing of not objects but materials, starch, and a plant, and at the top of the page he wrote one queer word 桑(Sāng). The man placed down his brush, raised his head, and chuckled to himself, then placing one hand on either side of him he raised himself from the ground. Slowly, ever so slowly, his limp frail form rose from the old wooden floor and placed his old body on its feet, trudged off around his desk and then through a narrow corridor he emerged into a cavernous room with tiny candles dancing like jewels in the dark dusty room. The room had a strange smell to it, like something had been stored there for some time and as if it had gone moldy. There were no windows in this room, unlike the kind warmth that flooded through the window in his study. This left the place in almost total darkness apart from the candle occasionally shimmering on the wall for a fleeting second before it returned to dancing in its bracket.

The man put one antique hand into a long robe which he wore and pulled out a torch, its leather top and wooden handle made it look like a weapon in the dark. He shuffled over to the nearest candle and thrust the leather head of the torch into the little twinkle of light. The minutes dragged by making each one feel like a month and still nothing happened and then flames erupted from the leather as if conjured by magic. The dazzling light that came from the torch as it burned engulfed the room in a blaze of luminescence and so the once voided cave was now bright as the day outside. As the light spread around the room, it lit up shelves upon shelves of bamboo scrolls identical to the one the man had just scrawled on. An old rickety wooden stool stood hunched in one corner, its badly battered four legs came into view as the man picked it up and placed it in front of the tallest shelf of scrolls, which reached the roof of the cave like a stooping giant. The man placed one foot onto the stool and then his body followed, he then reached one hand up the topmost shelf and pulled down the oldest scroll in the entire room. The scroll was from when the man was young and healthy and when he could walk long distances, before he came to this rundown hut, before he was punished.

The room fell back into the abyss of darkness once again as the man left the room extinguishing the torch and pocketing it as he plodded back to his study in which the sun had filled the room so now other strange things were visible. There was a sheet of bamboo with lots of marks pointing outward, away from a circle with the title 罗盘(Luó pán). Next to it was another shelf crammed with stone dragons, basins and other various objects. The man arrived at the table and smoothed out the bamboo he had collected from the shelf but instead of kneeling back down he bent down over it and stared intently at it. It was a map and in one corner of the map, in the forest next to the old hut, was the word 桑园(Sāng yuán). One of the man's long fingers rested on the word for over a minute before he lifted his brush, circled the word in glistening ink and rolled up the scroll. He then hurried to the door and shoved on his straw shoes as he stuffed the scroll into one of the pockets of his robes before running out of the front door.

The morning air whipped his face as it whistled and howled past him and then it hit him like a wave, a memory, he was running as people chased him on horseback, arrows fired, behind him shouts of anger and fury rang out. As he pelted through the forest and arrow thudded into the ground in front of him, but he kept running all the while he could hear the shouts from the army behind him looking, searching, hunting like wolves for him. He remembered the emperor looking down on him shouting, announcing his sentence, he saw long ago his feeble attempts to make paper; paper the reason he had been banished to this secluded realm; paper the reason he was friends with the Emperor; paper the reason he was running from the army trying to escape his prison; paper his quest to find an alternative to these terrible bamboo scrolls; paper the reason he was running now. He had been banished for the charge of being unable to complete the emperors' orders, about not being loyal, for he had been set the task to make a better alternative to bamboo. For twenty years he had been cooped up in his bedraggled hut weary of venturing out but in that time, he had discovered the ingredients to make what he called paper, the alternative to bamboo. All it took was some mulberry, some bast fibres, some old fishing net, rags, and water; all he needed now was mulberry.

He wrenched the map out of his robes and stared at the point which he had circled. He muttered to himself under his breath and then took from another inside pocket a bronze locket, he flicked it open to reveal that same diagram of the circle as the one on the wall in his house. He pointed it ahead of him, nodded and hurried on. He skidded to a halt in front of an open clearing in the heart of the forest and there it lay, rows and rows of mulberry. Carefully he scooped up a handful and held it up to the light to examine it closer. Satisfied, with the mulberry in one hand, the locket in the other, he ran back to his hut. He burst in through the door not bothering to dispose of his shoes and hurried into his study, there he picked up his biggest basin and tipped the mulberry inside. He then rushed to his store cupboard, dislodging a few scrolls as he went but he did not care, all he wanted to do was to get the other ingredients. He reached his store cupboard and flung open the door. He then pulled out some slimy fishing net, old dirty rags and some old bast fibres. He shuffled back to the basin and tipped the contents inside, as soon as he had done that, he rushed to the pond outside, grabbed a stone bucket full of water, then carefully walked back to the basin and poured the water into it where it sat along with the other ingredients. Then he began to press and squash with a pestle until the substance turned white and thin, he lifted the sheet out of the square basin and placed it neatly on his desk. Then with bated breath, he picked up his brush dipped it into a pot of ink and wrote one-word 纸 (Zhǐ). He had done it. He rolled up the sheet of paper and ran back out of the open front door, this time closing it behind him, and then set off to show the emperor, leaving his exile behind him. The paper clutched tightly in his hand; a new life stretched ahead of him.

Eternal Birthday

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Susanto, Matthew – 12

China, 2100 AD

The sun's crystal gaze shined through the pristine clear. The glowing stare reflected onto his bronze goggles. CLINK! CLANK! CLONK! A pale aquamarine painted the sky, patches of white splattered over the blue. Ragged ashen cloth scratched against the hazel chipped wood. CLINK! CLANK! CLONK! Mahogany buildings of nature scattered across the green below. CLINK! CLANK! His face grew from a frown to a smile. It was finished.

From his thick, rigid hands appeared a pale flesh. A fluffy brown and a bronze stare. Tears trickled from not just the fragile invention, but from the giant inventor who bellowed a hearty laugh.

Faces flew left and right of the cobbled streets, shouts of angry men and cries of little children. BBBRRRRING! Chicken noodle soup, with extra noodles, extra chicken, no carrots, and no celery. I didn't like vegetables. The inventor took my hand, and we sat together at the tables. Eating our chicken noodle soup, as a smile emerged from my face.

Swish, swoosh, swish. Tints of orange, yellow, red, and black covered the canvas of white. Streaks of gold hidden in a picture of sunset. My frail hands touched against the spiral indents of the wooden brush. The whitish yellowish hairs frisked upon the white cloth. A chuckle appeared from behind me. His smile was like a warm embrace.

Glittering upon the dark spiraled an array of tints. A flying white shot across the mellow night. A warm body wrapped around my shoulders. A caring fatherly touch. Eyes intertwined with the stars, a forever beautiful moment. A tiny golden speck of dust in the air. A full moon. A collection of flecks scattered over the sky. A perfect picture. A caring fatherly touch.

The sun woke up once again, groggily. I woke up in bed without my inventor beside me. He was gone? No, he must've gone out to get something. It was my birthday after all. The streets were filled once again, with faces unknown. Trying to find him. I looked far and wide, searching through every nook and cranny. My heart was beating faster and faster. I looked more, searching, hoping. Hoping, desperately hoping. My heart beats faster. A cramped alleyway found shelter for me, and as I walked along the squished walls, my heart dropped.

Scarlet droplets cried out of his dark red chest. Sharp silver lining striking his heart into two.

Why? How? It was only a day? It was my birthday?

It was my birthday.

Tears desperately flooded down my frail cheeks, my voice disappearing from my constant screaming. Why? How? When? I couldn't stand it anymore. His pale flesh glared at me, my eyes bawling. Why? How? When? I fell onto my knees, helplessly crying. Helplessly staring. Not even a single word, a single phrase. Not even a good morning. A happy birthday?

A happy birthday. What a joke.

I collapsed on the floor, contemplating on how stupid, how dumb, how ignorant I was. How could I let this happen? Why? How? When?

Why?

Tick, tock. Time marched like an army, trampling over his dead body. Trees wilted and shed their leaves, once rushing rivers dried up to a mere sliver of water, buildings rose as old ones slowly fell.

China, 2122 AD

Tears of the grey above trickled through the air, splashing at the crooked cobblestone below. The moon frowned upon the dull streets, streets where he once roamed. Where I roam each day, searching for him. I piled numerous

newspapers together. Paper after paper after paper after paper. Scruffle, scruffle. A brown scratchy beard, brown hair, brown eyes. Bronze goggles. It was him.

My eyes drifted upon the magazine, like a wandering, abandoned soldier, searching for any evidence of who did it. Who killed the one that meant the most to me.

A ringing vibrato shook the empty roads of the town. Fingers trailed upon the frail, fragile, yet firm wood. A bow shot from her pale hands, striking the metal strings.

An eternal melody rang from the violin, as a dizzying strike stabbed my head.

China, ??? AD

The sun woke up once again, groggily. I woke up on that same comfy white bed, the inventor not beside me once again. Did I not live this moment before? I ran out of bed, hurrying my way past those same unknown faces, into that same alleyway. Squishing past the cramped walls of the city. My heart kept beating even though I knew what was going to happen. My heart, still, kept aching, knowing what was going to happen. And again. My heart dropped.

The broken photo of his face clung to the veins of my brain, tugging like a climber, desperately clinging to my mind. That same vivid scarlet flowed a river out of the hole in his chest. The same shining silver spear striking his heart. Our heart.

Tears rained down my clouded, corrupted eyes once more. The reminiscent heavy pour from my eyes. The memorable questioning. I had the chance to do better again. I had the chance to change again.

The same melody rang from a distant bow, and the same dizzying strike stabbed my head once more.

China, ??? AD

The sun woke up once again, groggily. I woke up on the same white bed without the inventor next to me. I understand now. I sprinted through the door, phasing my way through now-familiar faces, squishing my way through the same alleyway. The same cramped walls of the same city. My heart was beating even faster, eager to finally make a change, to finally, FINALLY help my inventor. It was all going well, I was swifter, faster, I was closer. Finally closer. But again, my heart dropped.

His pale face glared at me. My eyes seemed to glare at me too. Glaring desperately. Glaring in disgust.

I thought I was closer, no? I was certainly faster, swifter I was trying harder. I tried harder. I sprinted as fast as possible I tried as hard as I could have tried. I tried. And yet his body laid there. With the same scarlet blood, dripping slowly out his chest.

The same irritating melody rang from the violin again. The stupid strike stabbed me in the heart of my mind.

China, ??? AD

The sun woke up once again. I woke up on the same white bed, without the inventor next to me. I already understood, I already knew what was going to happen. If I sprinted to the door, if I sprinted to the inventor once more. Would it make a difference? I tried again. I sprinted through the door, I ran even faster, pushing and shoving through the familiar faces. I squished through the cramped walls of the city and found his body lying there again.

Of course. My broken cameras couldn't bear to take another picture of his fragile body, stained with the scarlet of a thousand loops. Broken. I stared at his pale flesh. Every single time I try, it ends up like this. In the endless abyss of scarlet, a draining image – taking up all my battery, leaving me desperately begging for a charge. For a change.

The melody screamed, scratching the strings of the violin. The stupid strike stabbed me once more.

China, ??? AD

The sun woke up once again. I woke up in the blank, white bed, with no inventor beside me. This time, I didn't try anymore. I didn't want to beg. I didn't want to be beseeching, sobbing, desperately wanting to save him. I just wanted my father. My inventor. Constant loops of destruction constantly fed to me like I was some dog. But I ate it. Craving the taste, the feeling of my inventor once more. I couldn't take it anymore.

I reached to the back of my neck, took out a piece of flesh, and shut down. No more restarting.

No more.

Please.

Out of Time: The Unforeseen Journey

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Tam, Jacelyn – 12

The barren wastelands of the west, the once populous cities of the south, the flooded coastline of the east, the secluded ruins of the north, and the bustling hub of central China. That was all that was left.

Two months ago

“... flooding is becoming more severe, just yesterday a brutal tsunami crashed over Japan, submerging almost all of it, with millions of people dead or unbound. Sandstorms are a constant occurrence in the Middle East and Northwest China, countries starting to construct underground bunkers. With the top of the world having frigid and chilled temperatures, most of Russia has become inhabitable...”

The whole world is in turmoil, human lives on the brink of existence. I look up at the once star-filled sky, reminiscing of the world that once existed. We always hope for the better, but does that even exist anymore?

Present Day

People spilled out onto the streets, an overwhelming sea of bobbing heads heading towards the hub. Streets stank of rotting food and waste, downtown housing flooded with the impoverished. Beyond the ancient walls of Xi'an, the thriving heart of the city shone, filled with the fortunate, prosperous and the corrupt.

After disasters struck, one after the other, the parliament of the Chinese Government was bombed, leaving nothing and no one left behind. The country was in unrest, people trying to escape, just to realise the rest of world's situation was just as dire. Naturally, wealthy aristocrats took over because of their money and assets.

Rumours that scientists were creating some sort of time machine spread like wildfire. The hub's research centre, one of the most advanced and high-tech institutes in the world, kept mostly everything under wraps. Although the inside was pristine white and tranquil, the outside often harboured protesters demanding for change and better living quality.

I stood there now, in the crowd of onlookers, pushing my way forwards – toward the old town hall library and observatory. The new machinery may have changed the world, but in these pages, I find solace of what once was. As the door creaks open, the darkness that shrouded the room lifted a little. Through the skylights and cracks in the walls, tiny slivers of light poured into the room, creating a warm afternoon glow. I wander around the shelves, my hands skimming along the covers of books, as I admire precious artifacts made of gold, jade, and clay, encased in hazy and smashed glass, their bright colours slowly fading and chipping away as they gradually rust.

I make my way up the wooden staircase to the observatory, the walls of the circular room displaying the constellations of the solar system. Although the observatory was old, it looked just as grand as it was before. After I opened the dome to let the light shine through, I observe that the room was noticeably cleaner, books that were once strewn on the floor were put back on the shelves, the floor and telescope spotless and void of dust. However, I notice a massive chest at the back of the room, something I never recalled was there. Yet, it was the only thing that seemed untouched. I go and open the chest, dust and cobwebs making me cough. As I peer inside, all I can see is darkness. I reach my hand inside to feel if there is anything in there, but I couldn't feel the bottom. It seemed that it was a hidden passageway. I took off the ring on my thumb and threw it in to figure out how deep it was. It seemed like minutes had passed before I heard a soft clang resonating. I wondered if there was a way down, so I shifted the chest over, and sure enough, there were rungs on the inside wall. Hesitantly, I climbed down rung by rung, a musty smell taking over. The darkness was a cloak, the light from above getting further and further away until I was plunged into something as black as inky darkness. When I couldn't feel anymore rungs below me, I stepped off onto the floor, my hands reached out, only to feel damp walls. I kept my right hand on the wall, gradually going forward. The smell seemed to get more intense as I walked, fouler and reeking of mold and waste.

After a few minutes had passed, a small trickle of water droplets fell and echoed, which turned into a rushing river of water as I moved onwards. Faint light could be seen in the distance, occasionally flickering. The stream of water ran

alongside me, leading to who knows where. After rounding so many corners, it came to an abrupt end. I refused to believe there was nothing there, that I came all the way here for nothing. I frantically searched all over the walls for a keyhole, a door crack, anything, but there was nothing there. I was about to go back when I realised that the river of water led through the wall and to the other side. What if...? Considering for a moment, I thought I had gone insane, but I was intent to know where it led to. My curiosity won me over, and I took off my jacket so it wouldn't weigh me down. Without hesitation, I leapt in, the cold water engulfing me and drowning out my thoughts. The current tried to drag me under, but I pushed to the surface, emerging on the other side. I spluttered and coughed, water that filled my lungs coming out. I struggled to latch onto a ledge, my hands slipping away, but eventually I pulled myself up and found myself in a cramped room that forced me to stand with a hunched back. I was soaked to my skin, shivering, and chattering my teeth. Just above my head was a trap door, so I slowly lifted it, peeking through the gaps. It was a spacious white room, which seemed to be some sort of lab. On the far side of the room, there was something large surrounded by people in lab coats. They were too fixated on the large machine to notice me slipping away from the room, a small trail of water left behind. I had no idea where I was, but I knew that I was in an elite establishment, and possibly somewhere confidential. As I rounded the next corner, I bumped into someone in a lab coat. Quickly, I put my head down and continued to walk. I started to think he didn't notice me, but he grabbed my arm forcefully and spun me around, peering into my face.

"Are you supposed to be here?" he asked calmly, but with an expression of suspicion, his grip loosening slightly. He eyed my soaked clothes and winded state.

"I was just dropping off a delivery." I replied hastily.

"Huh, most deliveries come in by the back door" he murmured doubtfully. "You're not in uniform either."

Before he could say or do something else, I tugged my arm away and ran in the opposite direction. Alarms started ringing, triggering my panic. Security headed towards me, so I turned back the other way to the direction of the trapdoor. I surged past a perplexed scientist and entered the room with the strange pod-looking machine. I looked around and saw a monkey placed in the pod. A countdown started, and within moments it disappeared, a frightened and melancholy expression in its eyes. Realisation hit, as I understood what it was for. It was the big project the research centre was working on, the time machine. I desperately glanced around as buff figures of security closed in around me. Running out of ideas, I sprinted towards the time machine, just in time for their next experiment. I climbed into the pod, closing the cool glass around me as scientists attempted to shut the machine down. They frantically pressed different buttons and control levers, but nothing worked. My face went pale as I realised, I had made a huge mistake. I banged on the glass, trying to break it, but nothing worked. Reality began to sink in as I sulked in a tiny ball on the ground. The countdown had begun, and in no time, I was transported somewhere unknown.

I slowly unfurled from my ball and looked around. This is what earth looked like? Astonished, I stood up, admiring the world around me. It looked somewhat brighter than the future, as if the burden of the world's state hadn't fully settled in yet. The peace and calming morning shine that gleamed around me created a sense of innocence, the rustle of the verdant lush leaves and the slowly rising sun made the Earth seem young, oblivious of what would transpire.

With no idea where I was or if I could ever get back, the only way was forward. Forward into the vast unknown, forward for a better future, and forward for new beginnings.

The Unfinished Invention

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Tung, Emma – 13

Metal clangs could be heard from afar. The morning glow shone through the cracks of the mossy stone. Vines crept through the debris and rubble cascaded from the arrow slits. On the side, bits of granite and gneiss blocked the minute, restricted entrance. Through the forest midst was a tower; it was made of mostly stone, with sections of polished limestone spread in a rather irregular pattern. The tower was surrounded by the opaque forest, the shades of green and yellow filled the atmosphere as the early autumn breeze filled the quiet woodlands. There was a small, open meadow which bordered the tower: although it looked quite forsaken, there were small patches of flowers blooming on the overgrown grass; its scent echoed through the empty land, calling for explorers.

Past the small opening, the shape of a boy could be seen. His hair looked rather ruffled and derelict, the linen shirt he wore was oddly fitting, filled with stains and scars from his childhood. His back faced the opening, so his face remained unseen. Slouching, he continued to hammer on what seemed to be an old workbench. It was delicately crafted from pine wood by his father: as the years passed, the workbench gained many scratches and dents, they were valuable parts of history now. That was, perhaps, the only thing he had left. Not much survived... The war wiped out everything.

13 years ago

Flickering, the faintly lit lamp was the only light source in the entire lab. There were muffled machinery beeping in the background, resonating the dark room. Clacking of old computer keys continued. It was almost pitch black, and there were no other facilities around. In the darkness, you could just about make out the image of four middle aged men. As the night went on, these four men stayed silent – they gave off a strange aura, psychotic, almost. The only thing they put their focus on was a peculiar object, or... a creature, laying on the centre table.

“Vultar”. This word was in bold, on a label, right on the table.

The clock ticked. It ticked again, and again. The rhythm was haunting.

It was midnight. An eerie silence struck the room as the scientists silently gathered around the table. Reflections of the computers bounced off their thick glasses; finally, one spoke. “Experiment 1801. Subject, Vultar. Testing: Consciousness.” The scientists slowly stepped into their places. One held a camera, it was neither small nor big, the lens seemed to be micro filtered: It was made perfectly for this sole experiment, the experiment that would either complete or destroy humanity.

What could be so important? What could make four brilliant scientists bury themselves underground, isolated from the world, for years at a time? What would convince them to hide themselves from the bare light of the sun? The answers laid hidden in that very project.

Experimentations continued. Many ended in absolute failures. The scientists continued to slouch into their desks, working until the sun had risen, and fallen again. Until one experiment changed everything. One experiment that ignited the start of what could only be seen as the end. Experiment 1802. It had been a full day since their previous experiment now, and the clock was a few minutes away from midnight. “Experiment 1802. Subject, Vultar. Testing: Consciousness.” Their camera started videoing, the lifeless creature was surrounded by glass. With a push of a small, stone button, a strange gas filled the small cage. The gas looked like shades of verdant, it was thick.

Tick, tock. Tick, tock. Tick, tock.

It was midnight, again. But this time, it was different. This time, the unforeseen danger filled the atmosphere. This time, it was the last midnight for many people.

Gas continued to fill the cage, but it was disparate than all the other experiments. The glass started cracking, one of the scientists frantically hit the button to initiate the shutdown of the experiment. The gas stopped. Just as they thought it was safe, something moved. Sounds of breathing could be heard; but it wasn't from any of the scientists.

Their focus shifted back to the centre table as the glass finally burst open. Only this time, they weren't alone... What was in the centre could only be seen by the scientists once; a huge, hyena-like creature stood up, stretching its entire body, and letting out a deafening roar. Guns were lifted in a desperate attempt to shoot this predator, cries echoed through the abandoned lab as a new threat to the entire world was born. It was designed to protect humans from any threat after all, including themselves.

As the sun rose, four disassembled bodies could be seen laying on the ground. Piles of notes and a pair of glasses laid on the floor, covered in blood. Broken bullets scattered near the shattered steel wall. Sun rays shone on a body of bulky white thew, its face resembled some sort of a man; but only this creature had no vision, it was paired with lethal hearing and smelling. Its nimbleness represented a cheetah, with claws as sharp as an eagle's, acute fangs of a lion, so deadly it could kill a man with just one bite: This was none other than the hybrid the scientists had been working on. It was a colossus. An unfinished invention.

An apex predator designed to kill.

13 years later

On the opposite wall of the boy's workstation, full of vines and cobwebs, there was a map. It wrote, "Remains of the battle": and every country was crossed out.

The odd silence struck the oasis once again as the orphan continued working on his newest weapon, everything else around seemed to fade away as he put his focus on the piece of steel. Tony was particularly talented as a weapon smith. He learnt it from his dad, after all. The weapon he was grinding was possibly strong enough to survive one Vultar. Just one. They don't go in packs, do they?

...Do they?

A few miles away from the abandoned site was a town in flames. Chills were running down their spines, the last group of humans stood together, towered by the group of predators. You could see piles of burnt wood and flesh. After the last screams of the survivors in the little town of China echoed through the grassland, it became silent again.

As the last refuge in the world fell to the wrath of the predators, a group of white hybrids leapt out from the houses, quietly into the forest near the abandoned tower...

"I smell a boy."

The Legacy of the Great Inventor

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Wen, Sunny – 12

Cai Lin is a teenager who likes to invent useful stuff to bring convenience to himself and people around him. For example, he invented a torch using a can and a vacuum cleaner using simple materials. He can't explain his interest in inventing new stuff. Every day, he spends a long time observing things around, hoping to come up with new ideas. His friends gave him a nickname "Cai Lun" because of that.

One afternoon, he was racking his brain for inspirations that he could make on his desk, and when he opened the drawer to get some paper for writing down his thoughts, he got sucked into it. He was so frightened that he kept his eyes shut. When he opened his eyes again, he found himself in a backyard of ancient Chinese-style yuanzi. He saw some workers working busily but he had no idea what they were doing. He wondered, "Oh! Can't believe that my drawer is a time traveler! I remember seeing this place in my Chinese history book!" He wandered around until he saw a man, looking at him. He asked the man, "Hello, I'm from the future. Can you tell me how is the Emperor now?" The man quickly said, "I know who you are and where you come from. Now, you are in Han Dynasty and please be quiet. I will now bring you to change your clothes and please don't tell others where you are from or else people would be freaked out and think that you are insane! Follow me!"

Cai Lin followed the man and quickly dressed up as one of the workers in the backyard. He asked, "What are they doing?" The man told him that he had come up with some ways to make paper, which could replace the use of bamboo slides to keep things in record. The man said paper was much lighter and more practical. At that very moment, Cai Lin realised that he was actually talking to one of the greatest inventors of China --- Cai Lun! He could not believe it. He asked, "Are you CaiLun?"

The man smiled and nodded, "Yes and your name is Cai Lin. You are my descendant in the 21st century. I know you and I know you also like inventing new things like me. I'm glad to finally meet you. Let me show you around the backyard and tell you how paper is made. Perhaps that can give you some inspiration." Cai Lin was astonished by his ancestor said, he always admired Cai Lun but he could never have expected he was actually connected to him, and he laughed and said, "hey kid, you know that I was a teenager like you and I came to this place too!"

Cai Lun showed Cai Lin different units of work and explained to him how things worked. He also let Cai Lin work as an apprentice there. Cai Lin learned how to make paper using the most original and traditional ways. During the time he learnt different skills, Cai Lun shared his experiences and thoughts about how great being an inventor was. He remarked that being an inventor, you could make contributions to the world. He also told him to never be satisfied with what had been done. For example, after inventing paper, he kept refining the way of making it. Eventually, he added pulp via tree bark and hemp ends which resulted in the large-scale manufacture and worldwide spread of paper. After spending a day together, Cai Lun brought him to a desk and asked him to go home.

Cai Lin did take Cai Lun's words and had been thinking about them over and over. Cai Lin saw a poster that was telling people to use less paper because using paper was not environmentally-friendly. He was upset at first because people nowadays try to reduce the use of his ancestor's great invention. Does it mean his great work will be forgotten? He wanted Cai Lun's legacy to go on. Therefore, he thought about how to improve or innovate the way to record things. Of course, people are using computers and notebooks already, were there possibly any ways to being innovation and advancement?

Cai Lin opened the drawer again. As expected, he went back to the yuanzi again. He met Cai Lun and told him his problems. Cai Lun smiled and said, “Kid, it’s good to hear that you want to keep my legacy but always remember, you do not have to follow me. When people try to use less paper, they are trying to be more eco-friendly. When people use electronic devices, what might be the negative impact to them?” Cai Lin answered immediately, “Of course! Our eyesight! Look at my thick glasses! Oh! Thank you! I think I’ve come up with something!”

After that, Cai Lun realised that Cai Lin hadn’t come in a few days, but little does he know, that Cai Lin was making inventions all these days, trying to make a very big leap for humans and for himself.

Just on the next day, Cai Lin took the “advanced technology glasses” with him and dived into the drawer. He showed Cai Lun his invention, he said, “I made a pair of hi-tech glasses which you can press a small red button and in front of you, you will see an image appear, and you could use google or do anything that an iPad does. The only good thing is that you don’t have to carry it everywhere, so it’s just basically a smaller but Hi-tech iPad projected by glasses.” Cai Lun impressively answered him, “Cai Lin, have you ever wondered how of a big leap you just did to human technology?!” Cai Lin shockingly replied, “really?! Do you think I can be a good inventor like you?”

After Cai Lin heard Cai Lun’s compliment about human technology, Cai Lin immediately ran back to his room and started searching for a similar invention to his. Google’s answer made him insanely happy, it says “no similar items found”. From that day, Cai Lin started improving his invention, trying to look for cutting-edge technology that can be applied on his glasses. Whenever he came across difficulties, he would jump into the drawer to seek Cai Lun’s advice.

At last, Cai Lin did not give up, over ten years of training and solving problems for the glasses, it had.....finally...FINISHED! He entered a world-class invention competition and managed to show the entire world his dream design. The moment he pressed the red button on the glasses in front of the people who were watching, they gasped... “HOW?! HOW COULD YOU EVEN POSSIBLY INVENT SUCH HI-TECH GLASSES?!” Right after Cai Lin walked off the stage, everyone knew who would be the champion. Even the Judge had never seen such an amazing invention before.

When Cai Lin walked on the final champion place, everyone gave Cai Lin a round of applause. The invention brought him fame and the nickname “The Genius Inventor” and had over 10million fans on YouTube. Suddenly, he thought of a thing, he said, “oh yeah, I need to tell Cai Lun about this great news!” He said as he ran back home into his room.

But at the time he dived into his drawer...he...crashed, the drawer broke...it didn’t work. Cai Lin felt very shocked, he tried to fix the drawer and jumped into it again...but in vain. It was just like meeting Cai Lun was only a dream. He tried over again and again, but the drawer just crashed into more and more pieces, and as he failed and failed again. Eventually, he became hopeless. Cai Lin’s mom was worried seeing her son do that, she said, “son? Why do you keep jumping into that drawer?” Cai Lin hopelessly replied, “I’m finding my dream mom, I’m finding my dream...and it disappeared.”

On the next day, he got interviewed and asked, “What made you come up with that idea ,Sir? Do you want to share this honour with anyone?” But the only sentence that Cai Lin responded was, “Yes, someone actually did help me...and it was...my “drawer”. No one believed what he said about the drawer being a teleporter to the past. Everyone just thought that he was trying to be humble for himself or whether he grew insane.

To pay tribute to his “secret teacher from the drawer” he named the glasses that he invented “Cai Lun Glasses”.

Thirty years later, Cai Lin died. He saw his deep memory, it’s the paper making place that Cai Lun stayed at. He wandered around and didn’t see Cai Lun, but he knew that when he actually saw Cai Lun, it was his soul that was teaching him. Suddenly, he saw a teenager called Cai Ceng teleported here, and Cai Ceng said, “what did the Closet do to me?!” At this time, Cai Lin finally knew what’s going on...and the Cai’s legacy went on for eternity.

The Lost Needle: A Journey of Discovery and Direction

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Zhao, Yingying – 11

The night was dark. Unusually dark, as though a bottle of black ink had been spilled into the sky, but hundreds of little lanterns filled with fire were dancing beneath it, like floating little fairies. People were dancing, laughing, singing, for they knew that after a long time plagued by scarcity, hope had come – apart from one family. They were sitting together by a round table, thin-mouthed, dark faced, with tear tracks still glistening on their cheeks. A lanky, hollow-cheeked boy, looking only a slightly bit older than 17, pulled a small bag rucksack in, and looked around wildly in despair.

Dear diary, I'm Qing. Every year, the court of law hired a animal hunter as part of their court, for the magnificent animals on a special feast. Tomorrow morning, my little brother would set off for the Howler forest, as the fourteenth animal hunter to the court. However, even the village's most formidable hunters shied away from this task. "What about the thirteen people before him?" Once I asked an elder. "Dead." he said simply, "but your brother has to go. It's not merely a matter of his honour; our village has been forgotten for far too long..." I didn't refute. The job was paid heavily with gold, and the tiny village needed it, desperately.

As the first rays of light appeared, random strangers and neighbours ran up shaking hands, grinning, shouting words of "Good luck!". It was pointless. They did nothing while watching a young boy go to his death. My mum limped to my brother, hugging him tightly, sobbing between words. At last, the crowd started to thin out as people left with broad smiles. I heard fireworks and laughter as I held my brother's hand. Why hold his hand? I asked myself. For comfort? Encouragement? Consolation? What would it do, apart from making him more nervous? I wanted to scream at myself, tell myself that I was just as irresponsible, ruthless, as all the other villagers were. But there was no point. No point in anything.

I accompanied my brother to the transferring valley. From now on, he had to walk alone. His face was milky white, with two lanky arms trembling. I didn't know what to do – hug him, maybe? Fumbling in my jacket pockets, I found an old, broken compass from many years ago. "Ling!" I ran and shouted, as my brother's lonely shadow was about to disappear into the distance. "Here. It's a good luck charm." I pushed it into his soft, slender hands. It seemed so weird; no parting words of goodbye, no tears shedded. Just a taller boy giving a rusty compass to a doomed sibling.

Dear diary, Ling here. I couldn't resist looking back, glancing at my older brother one more time. This may be (it probably is) the last time I see him. I knew this mountain road as though the palm of my hand after so many times, tracing the ups and downs of it on the map, and started trekking for the forest.

Two guards standing in attention at the entrance of the woods gave me a sleek white horse which shook its head and grunted nervously. They told me that I had to catch the glowing serpent, and left me. I don't think I pictured the sniggering on their faces. The glowing serpent? I thought incredulously, staring after them. It was one of the most dangerous creatures known. I mounted the horse, clutching my crossbow so tightly to my body that my ribs hurt. In the wood, wild birds were singing peacefully, and insects were chirping.

I entered, my heart thumping against my chest. The horse trotted at a pace just right for an evening walk, but a little too slow for my liking. I tried to pat it softly to make it move faster. It ignored me. As I ventured deeper into the shadowy forest, the comforting sounds of birds faded, replaced by eerie whispers of the wind through the trees. The darkness seemed to press in on me, making the forest feel alien and menacing. The sunlight barely penetrated the dense canopy, casting strange, shifting shadows that played tricks on my eyes. I thought I saw figures moving just beyond my vision, but when I looked directly at them, there was nothing there.

I hit my head on a branch above, my head bursting into pain. The pain was sharp, real, grounding me amidst my rising fear. I took a deep breath, trying to calm my racing heart, reminding myself of the mission's importance.

In the heart of the forest, I heard a tense rustling. I froze. The horse froze. We created a connection of understanding without words – the glowing serpent. It slithered with a hypnotic rhythm, its scales shimmering in the sunlight. I slid down the horse, and carefully observed its pattern as it hunted, noting the way it pauses before striking. Suddenly, it turned its yellow, glowing eyes's attention to me. No no no, I panicked. Wrong time, serpent. I still needed some time to think of a plan. However then I caught my gaze on the vines loosely twisted on a over-head branch. Now, I told myself. NOW! It lunged at me, but I leaped aside, throwing the net of strong vines onto it. The serpent struggled, but the vines curled itself tighter around the creature every time. Slowly, it ceased its struggle, and I knew it was finally safe to approach. I killed it with my arrow, and slung it around my shoulder.

Unexpectedly, roar came from behind me, and I felt huge paws graze across my back. I turned around and saw a great black bear standing on its hind legs. Its paws were waving wildly, and its black, beady eyes were locked on me. "Run!" I shouted. My horse screeched in alarm and started sprinting. I desperately heaved myself to the moving horse just in time. I heard the loud and thick stomping of the bear's paws on the ground as it raced towards me. I could almost picture Qing shaking his head and telling me how I used wrong tactics.

I didn't know how long it took, but by the time I was safe, I was lost in the labyrinthine forest. Every rustle in the underbrush set my heart racing, my imagination conjuring up all manner of dangerous creatures lurking just out of sight. I flipped out my pockets, but only heard the metal clang of the old compass hitting a rock on the ground and the light thump of the notebook. Great, I thought bitterly. Trapped in a forest, with no food. My desperate eyes turned to the dead serpent, its scales glinting. I have to get out of here with the serpent, not eating it. It's the only proof and hope of getting through this, I told myself sternly. The light around me was fading into night, and I was getting desperate for an exit. The only thing I could use was the compass. I tied the horse's reins to a tree trunk and examined it.

The compass was broken, but I knew its pieces could still be used. The metal felt cold and unfamiliar in my hands, but I felt the remaining reassuring warmth of Qing's hands grasping it. I took it apart, its pieces scattered on the rock. I felt Qing's hands hold mine softly and guided me to assemble it in a different way.

Its arrow was pointing in one still direction. It's probably the same ending anyway; why not? Better trust it than die here. I spent the dawn of the next day, making my way with the compass. There were times that I found myself in a dead end, and even the compass wavered and looked unsure, but the monster in my heart would mutter to myself, "Better trust it than die here. Better trust it than die here."

I saw other creatures, like lynxes and panthers, with blood on their teeth, all prowling to kill me, but their lives all came to an end on my bow. Something like pity rose inside me, but the fall of one would be a rise of another.

Finally, I saw a bright light in the distance – the entrance I came in. I gave a sigh of relief. The guards outside burst into applause and gasps as I emerged from the entrance. They clapped me on the back and cried, "A miracle! A miracle!" I grinned foolishly, a bit drowsy from the adventure, but the monster in my heart burst into roars of pride and triumph. I knew Qing would be proud.

Dear diary, the night was dark. Unusually dark, but people were dancing, singing, laughing, for they knew hope had come at last. There was no lanky, hollow-cheeked brother sitting with me, but we knew, he was somewhere, successful.

Explosive Awakenings

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Xi, Eason – 11

The trigger of war is weapon and conflict. Weapon kills people, millions and billions of people, and gunpower is the criminal that gives the head start of war. Everyone thinks bullets, gunpower and weapon are evil, but they are not for fighting, but as the greed of human grows and grows, finally into conflicts. How to solve the conflicts? They use all these things that are only invented for entertainment or for the society to fight against each other. Thus, human is the true criminal of war.

Gunpower was used for entertainment at first. Fireworks is one of them. The one who invented gunpower never thought it would be used for slaughter even war. Everyone admired him, and he was proud of himself too.

His family was so poor that he couldn't go to school. Despite the poor conditions, he never gave up his heart of learning knowledge. Every day he sneaked out and hide beside the window of the school, listening to the class and took notes. He had been caught by the security several times, and his parents also stopped him from learning.

Although every time he would be beaten by his parents when he was caught beside the window, his body might refuse to sneak into school, his heart never dies. He did this again and again. Nothing could stop him until one day, on a cloudy morning, he went to the school as usual, grabbing a few pieces of bread as breakfast. The cold breeze overwhelmed him. But coldness wasn't a big problem for someone like him who had experienced all kinds of storm. While that day, somehow, he had been feeble since waking up. He felt sapped, and it seemed like a challenge to move his legs. He had just started an invention not long ago, from gaining all the knowledge he "stole" by the window of the classroom. It was called fire powder. He had spent all his energy on this project without getting enough sleep, which made him feel so tired. His instincts told him that he is being stalked. He started moving more briskly.

As he turned into a corner, he turned around. No one's there. A sudden sound of lightning gave him a shock, rain drops started hitting the ground. Pattering sound is just the perfect cacophony that made footsteps easier to camouflage. He noticed something wrong; things are going at just the right time. It couldn't be coincidence. He started walking back home. But just at the time he turned his back, an irregular, eerie looking shape of a shadow appeared in his sight. The first thought RUN! He turned around and started sprinting as fast as he could in the rain. No matter how hard the rain hit, he kept running. Finally, he got exhausted. He stopped in front of a science lab. He thought he got the creature lost its track. But the haunting didn't stop, no matter where he goes, that shadow stuck in his sight.

The emotion in his mind was no longer frightened, it became despair. The only situation he thought he might end up is dying, but because he has nothing to lose other than the naïve, curious heart he owns, he chose to give it a try. He suffered in panic, the only thing he ought to do is escape, or take your life as your counter for this game of gambling. He took out the product he had been inventing for his whole lifetime, the gunpowder, and lit it. Sparks flew across the sky and flame crawled towards the ground, corrupting everything it saw. It is shocking that the effect was so strong, and he never thought about that, too. Fire started licking the wall, half of the school was lit.

At that moment, he realized, that the shadow was only his negative feelings in his heart, and that whole day was just a dream. He realized everything, the invention he made, was a key of unlocking the new world! No matter how people use gun powder in the future, at least in that time, it is unstained.

New Tales of China's Inventions

Harrow International School Shanghai, Zhang, Cookie – 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.

An Unwritten Fairytale

Heep Yunn School, Chau, Chung Yan – 14

He sat in his race car – cramped, yet an epitome of glory. The engines were roaring like thunder overzealously, and with his fingers on the wheel, their hearts beat as one. Alford Chan remembered the days in his lab, trying to hasten the appearance of futuristic technology from dawn to dusk. Sturdy defences were brought up to annihilate any doubts that would cause him to succumb to the trepidation of failure. He worked at the speed of light, like how his race car was destined to do. It was an arduous task, but now he sat in the Speedzter, ready to win the medal of his life.

‘Racers! Are you ready?’

The announcement brought him back to the track.

‘On your marks,’

Engines roared.

‘Set,’

Wheels started to turn.

‘GO!’

A blur of light surrounding the track. It was said that a tornado had entered the stadium; it did not bring destruction, but pride. The wind mingled with the lightning around Alford, and his vision was blurred. He looked at the screen: 600000 km/second — twice the speed of light.

That would do, he thought.

He tried to stop the car, but failed. Having realised his impotence, a shiver went down his spine. The wind slashed at his face and he closed his eyes, as if afraid to face his failure. A huge impact hit the car and Alford felt an immense amount of pain on his forehead, and before he knew it, his hands slipped from the wheel and he was in eternal darkness.

The whole audience was in great turmoil, with their mouths agape with shock. A frisson of fear spread across the stadium. No one had witnessed the vanishing of the Speedzter, but it was gone.

The truth was, only Alford knew.

He woke in the middle of a puddle of viscous liquid. His eyes were rheumy with tears, but still he saw the Speedzter lying in the mud just a mile away.

What on earth just happened, he thought.

It seemed as if it was in another lifetime that he had raced on the tracks with the Speedzter. That was when he heard the drums, and he saw lightened torches on towers that spread around him. Connecting them was a wall which snaked its way through the highlands of China.

This was the Great Wall of China. And it was the past.

The Speedzter had just outraced time.

But... to when?

Curiosity stirred within his chest as he scanned his surroundings. He saw the flags that stood on the towers of the Great Wall. On them was only one word, and he recognised it.

It was the Song Dynasty.

'Mr Chan, I have been looking for you.'

The voice startled him and Alford jumped. In front of him was a man who wore a red skirt of a court official, and on his head was a black hat with two flaps on both sides.

'The judgement starts in three minutes. We should proceed to the Court.'

Alford read the man's name tag: 'Master Lai of the Court'. Then he noticed that he was wearing the same outfit, and he had a name tag as well: 'Assistant Chan of the Court'

Acknowledging his role, Alford gestured to the man in a placid manner.

'After you, Master Lai,' Alford said generously.

Master Lai smiled and started walking towards the court. Before he followed, Alford looked back one last time at the Speedster. It was impossible for Master Lai not to notice it, or not to question it. But before he could explain it with a proper scientific theory, the sound of drums once again rang through his skull.

'Mr Chan, we are running out of time,' Master Lai said.

'My apologies, Master. I was just... looking.'

'Of course! The Great Wall,' Master Lai signed, having thought that Alford was looking at the spectacular structure, 'It stood with so much glory, and yet behind all the power it brings, blood and sweat of Chinese farmers who were tortured to death for this block of lifeless wall were wasted. Do not indulge in its magnificence, Mr Chan, pity the dead.'

Pity the dead...

How much had died?

Alford was still pondering on Master Lai's words when they arrived at the court.

'Dong!'

The bell sounded. A devastated man wearing the uniform of a criminal was brought in. When he saw Master Lai, he smirked indecorously. His look was ravenous; it was hunger for power, and Alford could see it.

'Robert Chan,' Master Lai started, 'You ask for a release to serve our country, is that true?'

'Yes, it is true.'

His voice was low and deceiving. On his face was a twisted smile. Ridiculously, it gave Alford a sense of familiarity. He was certain that he had seen this face somewhere. But... where?

'I have been told that our country would engage in war,' Robert continued, 'I have mastered the art which you called witchcraft, and now I have learned a new formula which could make our country stronger. With my knowledge, I could bring us glory, if only you would release me.'

A few papers were passed to Master Lai, and he handed them to Alford.

'Assistant Chan,' Master Lai whispered, 'Please examine the drafts.'

Indeed, on the papers were the actual formulas for gunpowder. Alford examined the data with fascination, and that was when a memory flashed across his eyes. He remembered seeing these drafts; they were in the museum, where he had learnt about the invention of gunpowder: *Gunpowder led to the victory of China. Our armies never had to surrender ever again. China was a world power...*

But he also remembered something else – the written tragedy: *Gunpowder killed Mongolian armies... Chinese workers died during construction. It is known to have caused as many deaths as the construction of the Great Wall.*

It was glory, or bloodshed.

He closed his eyes and rewinded history. Innocent people had died while building the Great Wall. Hidden behind the victory of wars were lives that could never be redeemed. Once he had indulged in the glory of such inventions, but now he could no longer do so. Master Lai was right. Thousands of men had already gone to their graves, roaming in the land of horrors and death. Did more have to die?

No, he decided. Enough was enough.

Then came the wholehearted lie: ‘Master, these are merely drawings instead of real formulas.’

The crowd gasped, and Robert roared a series of profanities. In the midst of chaos, Alford’s eyesight started to turn blurry. It was as if he left the world around him. He tried to hold on to reality, but what was real? He didn’t even know. The last words of the Master rang in his ears, and when he could finally see again, he was floating, but no longer at the court.

He was in the middle of a wasteland. Shoals of corpses laid on the floor. There was no Speedzter, nor was there the stadium. He swam in the cold and musty air, trying to find out what had happened to this miserable place.

If he had decided to leave the world then, there would be no endless grief. The problem was, he did not.

He searched his way through the havoc and destruction, and he saw several newspapers half buried in the mud. He flipped through them, hoping to discover what had happened to his country.

Europe kills the dragon — start of WWIII.

2023, 6th June... China’s defeat.

2023, 6th June – The day which was supposed to mark his victory, and now it marked the defeat of his country.

His fragile heart broke like glass, and they pierced through his throat. He felt like crying, but souls could not cry. They could only roam with grief.

For some unfathomable reason, it was then when his father’s words arose from the depth of his memories: *Robert Chan, the only descendent of the Chan family in the Song dynasty, and he was the inventor of gunpowder...*

That good old boring story, which was now only a fairytale. A reality that was once history – one that Alford had rewritten himself, hoping to save the world.

And now...

No one was saved. A weakened China had caused a massacre that should not exist in another version of reality. The Speedzter had outraced time, but it could never outrace human greed.

And then he remembered the words of a Master from another lifetime: *Robert Chan is sentenced to death.*

So much carnage, so much bloodshed, so much greed; all of which Alford could no longer stand. Because he had once spoken of a malign lie with a good heart, and it had caused all these deaths which he had tried so hard to prevent.

All those melancholy slaughters had left a hidden trace of crimson blood on the history of China, and the murderer was once the inventor of the renowned Speedzter who now only lived in an unwritten fairytale.

A Better Future

Heep Yunn School, Fan, Cheuk Man – 13

Present – December, 2035. Administrative office, Beijing.

"Inspiration. Innovation. Implementation. A better place. A better future." The words carved on her desk stared back at her, devoid of emotion, cold and isolating. Her gaze wanders into the distance, sparkling against the dimness of her office.

She used to believe these words with unwavering conviction, deeply ingrained in her heart.

She used to believe technology would give people a better future, so wholeheartedly and undoubtedly.

She used to believe there is nothing AI can't solve, whatever challenges they face.

Now she is not so sure.

Yesterday, she received a letter. This is the first letter she received from her endearing baby brother since she left home in pursuit of her dream as an inventor 12 years ago. A letter from her baby brother, whom she left in the hands of AI 'Miss Luisa', she thought, with a mixture of excitement, solemnness and a weird sensation that she was unfamiliar with. Is that guilt? Or confusion?

She paused her lips and opened the letter. It reads:

My dearest sister,
It has been a while. Your recent invention has apparently received some recognition, congratulations on that.
I am informing you that my marriage to Isabella de Boure will take place tomorrow. Your presence at the ceremony is optional, and I understand if you are preoccupied with more pressing matters. Miss Luisa will provide you with the precise date should you decide to attend.
Rhythm

She responded to the letter with stunned silence. In the letter, she found no familiar joy. Only an unsettling, alien feeling lurked in her stomach.

How could he choose to deliver such momentous news to his own sister through a cold, impersonal letter? The tone was so chilling, so emotionless and unfeeling... And what did he mean by 'your presence is optional'? Isn't she his sister, after all? How could this be her sweet, loving brother? She refused to believe this was her brother. This was NOT the brother she knew.

Slowly, the realization dawned on her. Yes, this was not the brother she "knew." Did she even know him now? And did he even care about her now? She had entrusted his care to a new AI invention, relying on it to perfectly handle everything. She had been so sure of its capability that she hadn't bothered to maintain regular communication with him for twelve long years.

But... what was wrong? She had accepted the fact that her baby brother had grown up. Everything seemed perfect, and yet it isn't. While the AI invention had undoubtedly taken care of him, perhaps even better than she ever could, why did it feel like something vital was missing? Her questions echoed in silence.

Past – September, 2022. Tsinghua University, Beijing.

A young teenage girl walked solemnly through the gate of her dream university.

She finally got in.

She could finally fulfil her dreams of creating new inventions to improve human lives.

AI could handle everything for us, like all the other inventions.

At least, it was her hope.

Present – December, 2035. Administrative office, Beijing.

Her dreams are fulfilled, to an extent, at least.

After four years of college, she has become the inventor she aspired to be. She achieved great success, creating numerous inventions that aimed to replace human work and provide assistance.

Her next groundbreaking idea is expected to be revealed in January, and she has a plethora of other inventions she wants to bring to life.

"Tick tock", the clock hanging up on the wall ticked, displaying the time now is 11:18. She rubbed her weary eyes, strained from staring at her brother's letter for far too long. Glancing out of her window, she watched the lonely lanes. A couple walked by, their eyes glued to their mobile phones, engrossed in communication with their AI assistants. Sadness clouds her eyes.

No communication between them. Not even eye contact...

Her brother, now a stranger...

She hesitates on whether she should continue inventing.

Is it truly better for inventions to help humans in every way possible? She wonders.

She reaches for her AI time traveller, as she often would, during times of distress.

She yearns to travel back in time, seeking guidance from the past.

Past – July, 110. In the market, Chang 'an.

Stars twinkled in the warm summer night sky. Laughter filled the air as children painted on thick, rough paper. This was her first stop, an exploration of papermaking, one of the most revered inventions throughout history. She walked briskly, unnoticed amongst the crowds. People were buying and selling paper everywhere, engaging in conversation and cherishing the newfound convenience.

"I love this new invention! It has made our lives so much more convenient."

"Would you like to come over and paint a picture together? We've created so many beautiful artworks with our friends since the invention of inexpensive and accessible paper!"

Such conversations permeated the streets. She observed in silence, tears welling in her eyes.

The invention wasn't so awful after all. It could be used to make people's lives more convenient, while not lessening the close relationship between people a single bit. They could even make them more intimate by creating bonds between people.

So why has our world turned like that?

The luminary clock hanging in the night sky offered her no answer.

Past – April, 2016. On the train, Beijing–Tianjin intercity railway.

The wind whistled outside the train window as it sped past verdant fields and bustling cities. She relaxed on the red sofa, relishing the scenic view.

"Ladies and gentlemen, we will be arriving in approximately ten minutes," the announcement echoed through the train.

This was another invention she had been so interested in – the railway. She believed that the intercity railway was one of the best inventions made in the 20th century.

'This invention is amazing!', she muttered to herself.

The passenger sitting opposite her smiled. 'Yes, isn't it? I used to only be able to visit my family in Tianjin once half a year, as I work in Beijing and don't have much time. Now, with the invention of the extra fast intercity railway, I could visit them twice a month!' the passenger exclaimed.

She nodded her head in agreement.

So why has our world turned like that?

The green meadow fields outside offered her no answer.

Past – November, 2030. On the street, Beijing.

The newest AI home caretaker has recently been invented. It follows its master everywhere and takes care of everything for them.

She paced on the silent and yet crowded street. People hardly looked at each other, keeping their eyes on their phones. The AI home caretaker was ordered to keep the children and elderly or even their partner company.

AI is the one chatting with people, not their friends.

AI is the one that takes care of the people, not their loved ones.

AI is the one that comforts people when they are upset, not their family.

AI is a cold and merciless robot with no understanding of love and family.

She turned and stepped back into the present.

Present – December, 2035. Administrative office, Beijing.

The clock's hands seemed to move in slow motion. 11:23.

She understands now.

Why has our world turned like this?

What has been missing all alone?

The lack of human connection. The abuse of technology and new inventions.

While technology and new inventions may bring people convenience, wrongfully using them may bring harm to people and their relationships.

People used emotionless inventions to help them do everything, including bonding with their families. This took away the love, affection and care that should have existed in your relationships.

Now, because AI helps people complete all their tasks, people no longer spend any time with their loved ones. Their closest family are like strangers to them. They feel like they don't know their family at all. Just like her.

All because of this.

She knows what she should do now.

She picks up her phone. No longer will she rely solely on AI to communicate with him. It is time to bridge the gap, to rebuild what has been lost.

She will tell him everything, and express her love, regret, and desire to reconnect. She will attend his wedding, embrace his new life, and strive to be the sister he deserves.

With a mix of hope and trepidation, she calls him, ready to embark on a new journey—one that would blend the wonders of technology with the warmth of human connection.

She will continue her inventions, but this time, with a renewed understanding of their place in the world. Inventing new inventions with more allowance for human connection.

As she waited for the phone to be picked up, she whispered to herself, "Inspiration. Innovation. Implementation. A better place. A better future—for both humanity and the bonds that hold us together."

A familiar voice, not louder than a whisper, but filled with disbelief and joy, 'Sis? Is it really you?'

Time Machine

HKUGA College, Cheung, Hui Cheuk – 15

Ling adjusted her goggles and pulled down the lever. The machine whirred to life, lights blinking across the control panel. This was it – her first trip back in time.

Ling had spent years researching and building her time machine in secret. While the government funded research into new technologies, time travel was still seen as the realm of science fiction, not real science. Ling however, believed that she could make it work.

Day by day, Ling would rush to the shed in the garden the moment she woke up, studying the enigmatic properties of elements, she discovered a hidden substance in earth's atmosphere. The substance does not fit the laws of elements and defies many laws of physics.

Ling was extremely excited upon the discovery of this substance, but she decided to keep it a secret instead of telling everyone about this substance. She named it "nixium"

Ling continued to study nixium in secret. She learned that it was a powerful substance, even more powerful than nuclear energy. She also learned that it could be harnessed to travel through time. Through painstaking experiments, Ling realized that nixium could manipulate the flow of time when concentrated amounts were applied to her machine. After months of intricate calibrations, energy modulation trials, and quantum field adjustments, Ling was finally ready for her first test trip back in time. She had tuned the machine to target a specific spacetime coordinate in the past, configured the nixium infusion process to bend the spacetime continuum, and stabilized the system to prevent catastrophic distortions. Though daunting, each test brought her one step closer to a stable, controllable time warp. Her perseverance was finally paying off with the most remarkable invention in history.

As the machine powered up, Ling eagerly watched the monitors tracking critical systems. Energy levels were optimal, spacetime coordinates locked in, and the nixium reactor hummed perfectly in tune. This was the moment she had worked so hard for. Ling took a deep breath and initiated the time warp sequence.

A low vibration rumbled through the shed as spacetime itself began contorting to Ling's will. Strange colors and lights swirled around the machine as the very fabric of reality warped and bent. Ling watched in awe as history itself reshaped according to her machine.

Moments later, the time warp stabilized and the machine fell silent. Ling anxiously checked the monitors – her coordinates were accurate, spacetime integrity was maintained, and the machine was unharmed. She had successfully traveled back in time!

Ling eagerly threw open the hatch and climbed out, removing her goggles and beholding the landscape. She gasped as she took in her surroundings. Straw built cottages were all around her. Ling pinched herself to make sure it wasn't a dream. After years of secrecy and failed tests, she had finally sent herself back 250 years! As she stepped outside gingerly, a group of children playing with a bamboo stick and hoop stopped and stared at her strange outfit – slim fitting pants and a sleeveless top. One boy called out "Laowai!" Ling smiled and gave a little wave. Ling was very excited, she ran to the cottages to find out how people lived 250 years ago and left the time machine out in the open. She watched street performers perform fascinating talents, she admired them as they breathed fire from their mouth. She then clapped along to a masked opera, and bought sugared plums from a food stall. It was just as vividly alive as her grandmother's stories.

Time flew by as Ling explored the cottages, the sun began to set. Ling decided that she would go back to her time machine and return to the present day.

As Ling approached her time machine, she saw some bandits carrying robbed goods in bags and escaping from guards. She held out her pistol attempted to shoot the bandits at their leg to stop the robbery. She held out her pistol and attempted to shoot them in the leg to stop the robbery. She pulled the trigger, but the bullet missed and hit their bags instead.

Stolen gold and silver showered to the floor. The bandits were very surprised and scared as they never seen a gun before, but decided to charge at Ling to disarm her. Ling was then tied up and was dragged away by the bandits.

Ling was terrified , without access to the time machine , she couldn't make it back to the present day. The bandits dragged her onto horses along with them, they coerced her into telling them when was she from and details about the present world , but Ling refused to answer them as it may result in dangerous consequences to the world if someone from the past knows things from the future.

The bandits put a knife against her neck and threatened to kill her if she didn't talk. Ling was paralyzed with fear, but she knew she couldn't jeopardize the future. Thinking quickly, she pretended to faint from fright. The bandits shouted at her limp body but she didn't respond.

"Lets just throw her away, she is useless" said the tallest bandit. Ling's heart was racing , she was going to be free and she could head back to the present. "Let me see." said another bandit. The bandit touched her pulse and said "See? She still has a pulse , she is faking it."

The bandits debated what to do next. One suggested cutting off her hand every 30 seconds until she talked. Another wanted to leave her in the woods for the wolves. The tallest bandit silenced them.

"We can still use her," he scowled. "She has strange clothes and contraptions. Someone will pay for her return."

The bandits rode for hours until they reached a decrepit stone fortress tucked into the mountains. They dragged Ling inside and locked her in a cell. She sat on the cold dirt floor, despairing about her predicament. How would she ever get back home?

Days passed as Ling remained captive. The bandits interrogated her daily, but she refused to give them any information. Each night she stared out the tiny window at the moon, wondering if she'd be trapped forever in the past.

One day, the head bandit entered her cell flanked by two guards. "It seems you do not wish to cooperate," he sneered. "Therefore, you leave us no choice but to use other methods of...persuasion."

The guards seized Ling and began dragging her down a dark hallway. She struggled with all her might, but could not break their iron grips. Where were they taking her? What terrible fate awaited?

They descended a winding stone staircase into a cavernous chamber lit by flickering torches. Strange instruments and devices filled the room. At the center lay a wooden table with thick leather straps.

The guards forced Ling onto the table and bound her arms and legs. The bandit chief leaned over her menacingly.

"You have one last chance to tell us what we want to know."

"Never!" yelled Ling spat in his face.

Enraged, he signaled to a guard who cranked a lever. The table slowly rotated until Ling was upside down. The blood rushed to her head making her dizzy and disoriented.

The bandit chief unfurled a wicked looking metal device. Ling's eyes went wide with fear. She opened her mouth to scream but no sound came out.

The bandit laughed cruelly. "Ready to talk?"

Ling clenched her jaw defiantly. She steeled herself as the device inched closer. She would never talk, no matter what horrors lay in store. Suddenly a deafening explosion rocked the chamber, spraying debris everywhere. Yelling and clanging filled the air.

Amidst the chaos, the head bandit fled the chamber. The guards ran after him, leaving Ling alone still strapped to the table. Flames licked at the doorway as smoke filled the room. Ling coughed violently, her lungs burning. She had to get free before being burned alive!

Summoning all her strength, she strained against the straps. They dug into her flesh as she thrashed desperately. With a final heave, one leather band snapped. Ling cried out in pain but it was enough to wiggle loose. She dropped to the floor and scrambled away on all fours.

Flames engulfed the stairway so she ran the other way. The smoke was so thick she could barely see. Ling crawled blindly until hitting a stone wall. Feeling along it, she discovered a small door. She squeezed through into a narrow passage just as the ceiling collapsed behind her.

The passage led outside onto the hillside far from the besieged fortress. Ling gulped the fresh air. She was free! But how had she escaped?

Sounds of battle still echoed from the valley. Ling peered down and could scarcely believe her eyes. An army decked in red and gold armor swarmed the fortress, wielding spears and sabers. One burly soldier seemed to lead them.

Could these warriors be allies? Ling made her way down the mountain to find out. As she approached, the leader removed his helmet. Ling froze. It was the time traveler she had met as a child who inspired her to build the machine!

"Greetings Ling," he said warmly. "I have been waiting for this moment a long time."

Ling was speechless. How did he know her? Why had he saved her?

The man smiled. "There will be time for explanations later. Come, your machine awaits."

He led Ling safely through the carnage back to the shed where it all began. The time machine sat untouched, nixium reactor still humming. Her desperate plan had worked.

The Red Glasses

HKUGA College, Fung, Cheuk Yu Nana – 14

“Happy new year, Georgia! I got a gift for you! I know it’s not Christmas nor your birthday, but have you ever heard of a Chinese New Year gift?” asked Uncle Ben, wearing his biggest smile.

“No way! Thank you so much! I really appreciate it,” I said. Without hesitation, I unwrapped the gift immediately as I was eager to know what was inside. A black box appeared in front of my eyes while I unwrapped the final piece of paper. The words “Red Glasses” shone in front of my eyes. My jaws dropped. This was my dream gift. I had been begging for this gift from my parents for ages, and finally, I was holding it in my own hands.

“Wow! I am speechless... This is incredible! Thank you so much! This is a dream come true!” I was flabbergasted by this gift and couldn’t show how much I appreciated it, so I gave Uncle Ben a big, warm hug.

“As long as you’re happy, I feel happy. Come on! Open it up! Let’s see what functions it has; I heard that it’s festive!” said Uncle Ben. I immediately took the box cover away and there it was, the “Red Glasses 2.0”. It might look like simple reading glasses but it can do a lot. I put on the glasses and pressed the red button on the side, which read ‘Start’. Within seconds, a message popped out from the glasses: “Welcome.”

I didn’t know where to begin. Buttons shone in front of my eyes, the colors were super vibrant. The one that caught my attention the most was the button with a neon keyboard. I couldn’t control my hands as they pressed the button in the air. A keyboard then popped up out of nowhere.

“I heard that you can use this keyboard anywhere you want,” said Uncle Ben. I started walking, and the keyboard followed me. I started typing while walking and it also worked. I even tried using it in the potty, and you wouldn’t believe it, but it still worked! I then saw a button with a pen that read “Pictionary”. Then, of course, I pressed it. On the screen popped up “Start drawing”. I was rather confused about how to draw as I didn’t have pen and paper by my side. I thought to myself: *this is technology, you don’t need pens or paper.* I then simply drew a spider in mid-air, and surprisingly, it worked. Technology really works amazingly, and I knew that this pair of glasses would take me through a lot in the future. *These glasses work too well, I love them!* I thought to myself.

“Are you seriously not going to try out the games? It’s the literal icon of this pair of glasses. There’s even a number of games to choose from,” said Uncle Ben. I pressed the button with a video game controller promptly as Uncle Ben spoke, and there it was. The variety of games shone in front of my face, from car games to cooking games to even building games. The one game that caught my eye was “Theme Park Tycoon”. I pressed its icon and I was astonished. The game became VR and I started building with my own hands. It all felt so unreal, and I still couldn’t believe that this was happening. For a split second, I felt like I was in the video game! I tried all of the games and was obsessed with every single one of them because it was way too much fun.

“Alright, I see you are really enjoying the gift, Georgia. I am so glad that you like it, but you should use it wisely. Technology is not as perfect as you think it is,” said Uncle Ben as he waved goodbye and left our house. I put my glasses back on, and I saw a mini firecracker fizzing at the right corner of the glasses, so I pressed it. Boom! Chinese firecrackers burst in front of my eyes; even though it was on a screen, it was breathtaking! ‘Happy Chinese New Year!’ popped out when the dancing lions finished their performance in my glasses. Everything in the glasses was Chinese themed, even the games. All of the games changed, from cooking games to feeding pandas and from building houses to making Chinese medicine. The background of the glasses was now red; even the icons of the apps were Chinese New Year themed! The Pictionary app turned from a pen to a Chinese writing brush that taught you how to write Chinese calligraphy.

“Alright, Georgia, it’s time to go to your grandparents’ place now,” yelled my mum. I ignored her as I was busy discovering the other functions of the glasses. It didn’t matter whether I had the glasses or not because going to my grandparents place is the worst thing ever. All you do is to sit there and nod because we should respect the elderly. Every time I go to my grandparents place, I sit there and hear them talk about old people stuff which I do not understand anything about, and I’m pretty sure both my mum and dad also have no idea what they are talking about.

“Georgia, come on! You’re going to receive red packets,” yelled my mum once more. Red packets! I grabbed my glasses and rushed out of my room. Red packets always make me smile. It’s probably one of the best things Chinese people do to celebrate Chinese New Year because we get to have money! Extra money to be precise. I put on my glasses and experienced my first Chinese New Year in the virtual world.

I pulled up my map on my glasses and guided my parents to my grandparents’ house for the first time ever. Normally, my dad was the only one who knew the way, but with the glasses, I knew the way too. After 20 minutes of walking, a message popped out. “You have completed your daily goal. Walking 2 km.” Then a bunch of fireworks flashed on my screen – it was incredible. Finally, we arrived at our grandparents’ place. We took off our shoes and walked in. I greeted them as they gave me red packets. Then, we sat in the living room and listened to my grandparents talking about recent updates. As usual, I felt bored listening to them talk, so I spent time with my new best friend – my glasses. I spent 2 hours learning about Chinese culture with the information provided by my glasses. What felt like years later, we finally left my grandparents’ place.

While walking to our next destination, for which I had no idea where dad was taking us, the virtual lanterns shone in my glasses as I watched the lion and dragon dance provided by artificial intelligence. Suddenly, fireworks shone in front of my eyes and I was dazzled by how extraordinary they were. I thought it was happening in my glasses, as if the technology did its stuff, but it was only until my mum told me to take off my glasses.

I took off my glasses for the first time I was on the streets, and what I was looking at was incredible. Fireworks blasted through the sky with different patterns presented. Even though it was really loud, I could feel the Chinese New Year spirit bursting inside me. The fireworks were nothing like the fireworks I had seen before. It was extra special, like a fairy putting some fairy dust in the fireworks. The blinding lights of fireworks burst in the sky, and it was phenomenal. After the fireworks, I walked home with my parents and the surprises kept coming. The whole town was full of red lanterns. “Spring Couplets” were put up in every household. Kids were running around wearing Qipao and playing with Chinese firecrackers. The smell of firecrackers flew in my nose; it doesn’t smell good, but it definitely yells Chinese New Year. Just as we were walking home, mum said, “Your grandparents are moving away to another country for their retirement. They were meaning to tell you but you were too focused on your glasses. They’re moving next month.” I genuinely couldn’t believe that I missed all this just because I was wearing my glasses. I walked home in a wretched state as I couldn’t believe my grandparents were moving away, but also because I did not cherish the time I had with them. I felt so bad.

What Uncle Ben said was true: even though technology provides a lot for us, it is not as perfect as you think it is. I missed a lot of things today just because I was wearing my glasses. Technology really isn't what you think it is. I'm glad that I found out today. Maybe it's not too late to change.

The Great Save

HKUGA College, Wong, Yuek Yu Kate – 14

Clang! Clang! Clang!

The three clashes of the bell signaled the end of working hours, as all the men hefted their farming equipment over their shoulders and began trudging off to the old warehouse. I wipe off the sweat that ran in rivulets down my face and follow the crowd, heaving a deep sigh.

Men and boys alike line up by an old, perforated warehouse, its walls riddled with holes and cracks. Dust gathered on the ground and the walls, bellowing in a large cloud that flew into people's faces when kicked up.

I walked to the end of the line and came to a stop, watching as the people in front groaned in complaint at the sight of their wages— though I didn't get why. It wasn't like we were expecting anything much.

As the line ambled onwards, I reached the counter and put my stretched out my hand. A sack of banliang jingled hopefully as it fell into my hand. I pocketed it and headed home— no point in checking the amount just to disappoint myself.

I walked down the street of the city. The political structure seemed just as haphazard as the buildings, if not more. Fights broke out every day over the simplest things: Food, shelter, and such. There never seemed to be enough of those. At this time, a bowl of rice was a privilege that we would never be able to get a taste of, while the people in the palace and soldiers alike enjoyed the luxurious lifestyle that we citizens could only dream of. Rumors are rich and lavish items could be found inside the emperor's palace, like decorations and other superfluous items— that serve only as a reminder of our insignificance.

The hinges of the door creaked as I stepped into the unfurnished room. I have three little brothers in all, who quickly surround me, happily chattering about their day and how it had been. I chuckled and sat down heavily a thin mattress on the floor, joints aching.

"Today at school, the teacher..."

"I found this really pretty rock..."

Li Ming and Li Liang followed me to where I sat, giggling and pushing at each other.

I looked over at the quiet child looking at the three of us silently, and asked, "Li Ling? How was your day?"

He walked forward shyly and presented a piece of paper with the words: cooking competition! Present your best dish and win the prize of 800 wen!

I had never had an aptitude for cooking, but the prize money caught my sight. I pluck the paper out of his hand, and read it carefully again, word for word. This was the perfect opportunity.

The next day, I drove the rake into the mud with renewed vigor, ignoring the harsh sun beating down on my back.

"What's with the sudden spike in enthusiasm there?" Da Xing chuckled.

We'd been friends for quite a long while now— in fact, we'd been friends ever since we started working on the farm, despite him being 8 years older than I am. Misery acquaints a man with strange bedfellows, so they say.

"Have you heard the news? There's a culinary competition being hosted by the emperor," My voice drops to a hushed whisper, "The prize money is 800 wen."

Da Xing's eyes just about popped out of their sockets as he gaped at me.

"You're going to participate?" He questioned me.

"I think so. This is the perfect opportunity to earn more money, don't you think? There's no harm in participating." I tell him.

He thinks carefully before answering, "You know what we should do? We should work together. Create the best dish ever, guarantee a win from the emperor, and split the prize money. I could oversee coming up with a really good dish, Li Chen. The odds would be in our favor," He nudged me. "Think about it."

And I did think about it, long and hard. In conclusion, 400 dollars was better than none, and the chances of getting 400 were larger than that of getting 800. Thus, an alliance was formed on this culinary battlefield.

The next day, I knocked on Da Xing's door. When it swung open and I was ushered in, we sat down at his table as he presented me with an impressive array of sketches and notes.

"This one— you see this one? It'll blow the judges away for sure. Ooh, but this is a famous local dish, it looks so delicious. Ah, but the creativity points belong to this one... What do you think, Li Chen?" Da Xing brandished his blueprints proudly.

"I think that we'll never decide on a dish at this point, because the submission date is next week."

"Well, I think the best chance we've got right now is to make dumplings because everyone knows they taste good. Oh, but the *bread*." Da Xing rambled on, showing no sign of ever having heard what I said.

When the day of the submission finally presented itself, we'd finally decided on dumplings. The broth was easy enough to make, and the skin seemed simple enough. When I walked into the main street, I saw that numerous tables had been set up, as cooking areas for the participants. A large table sat in the middle, and on top were all the ingredients and spices that might be needed by the contestants, piled sky-high. I stood by my table, perspiration glistening at my neck as I took in a shaky breath. In one way or another, my fate would be decided today— whether I would escape from the restraints of poverty and build myself a new life with my brothers or continue to work at the farms just to scrape up enough for a meal.

I watched as spectators gathered by the sidelines, cheering their family members on. I scanned the crowd for my brothers to find them standing next to Da Xing, who flashed me a brilliant smile with a thumbs up.

Clang!

The bell rang once, signaling the start of the competition as everybody made a wild dash for the ingredients. I edged forward, wheezing as elbows jostled at my ribs and feet stomped on my shoes. I didn't have enough fight in me, and everyone was too desperate to care about manners. As they fought tooth and nail for their spices and vegetables, I stood by the sidelines, watching on weakly, helplessly reaching for some ingredients occasionally.

Finally, the crowd thinned out I hurried back to my station to begin the cooking. I frantically chopped up the onions, boiled the water, and prepared to knead the dough. This was bad— I was falling behind and most likely didn't have enough time. My heart was pumping violently, beating its way out of my chest. My head pounded as my hands began to shake, and my breathing became labored. How could it come to this? How could I let it come to this? No, I must focus. I mustn't fail my brothers or Da Xing.

I added more flour only to find that it was too sturdy and dry. I added more water only to find it too slimy and not sturdy enough. Tears of frustration escaped from my eyes the bell clashed once. I didn't have much time left. I pushed the contents of my dough into the coiling broth, wiping my tears away. This was better than one sloppy bowl of uncooked dough, right?

The bell clashed once again, and soldiers marched towards the cooking stations, escorting the judges. I began to sweat profusely, perspiration running down my shirt.

The judge sniffed at my bowl. "What is this? Why are they...so long?"

I fidget uncomfortably and my eyes darted towards Da Xing. He mouthed something at me furiously that I couldn't make out.

"No...dale?"

"Pardon?" The judge looked up.

"Uh— nodales." I blurted.

He inspected the bowl and gasped. "Such an invention! Noodles! Revolutionary!"

He waved over all the other judges, and they crowded the table, carefully inspecting the bowl.

"Amazing! How do you eat this?"

"I am simply astounded."

They shared a mutual nod, and faced me, beaming.

"We are pleased to announce that, due to your creativity and the amazing invention of this thing you call *noodles*— You are the winner of the Culinary Festival! Please head on towards the registration area to collect..." A well-fed man trilled.

But his words fell on deaf ears, as the realization hit me that I'd finally managed to drag myself and my siblings out of poverty. Finally, we could live the life we'd always dreamed of. I choked back a sob and croaked my thanks.

To this day, my brothers and I never take things for granted. But we never have to struggle anymore, and could finally sleep with our bellies full, with dreams that sing of a future instead of more food. All thanks to a bowl of no-dales.

The Umbrella Invention

Korean International School, Chan, Man Wai Vean – 13

It was like every ordinary day, walking from place to place underneath the blazing sun. Why does the sun have to shine so brightly on me? If only there was a tool that could protect me from the sun every single day it would be a miracle. I am Jing Xiao, also known as Queen Jing Xiao and I am the new queen for the next few years. I became queen last year after my mother passed, I had to do duties as a queen.

One of my favourite duties was walking around the temple and greeting most of the residents living in Xi'an. During the winter, it was much easier to greet the residents as most people stayed indoors due to heavy snow or the weather was too cold. But during summer, everyone works hard and stays outdoors which means that I have to greet them outside.

In Xi'an, January to March would be autumn which made it easy to greet the residents. Autumn wasn't too harsh and I could walk around without the sun staring right at my face. October to December would be winter, despite the weather being cold it was better than summer. Most residents stayed indoors since it was too cold to work outside, which was easy to greet the residents since most of them stayed indoors. Summer was from February to September which was the hardest time as the sun was literally underneath us. This won't do, I can't suffer anymore.

Around a month later, I made a competition called 'Create the best tool that protects you from the sun. Calling all residents who are inventors, the winner gets a wonderful prize.' I wonder who will come out with the wonderful invention of the tool that can protect us from the sun. As this tool will be used by me frequently, I have high expectations as the time limit for this project starts in February and it ends in March.

Fast forward to February, a month before the competition ends I decided to check out the competitors who joined in the competition. In total, there were roughly around ten contestants. Most of the contestants were middle aged men ranging from mid-twenties to late thirties. There was one contestant that looked rather old then the rest of the contestants, his name was Lu Ban and he was fifty years old. Most of the contestants looked down on him and even made fun of him as they thought he was too old to join the competition. I always thought that it was quite strange as Lu Ban never stood up for himself, he just takes in all the criticism and continues working on his tool.

The ending date of the competition is nearing, with a day left the contestants had to put their tool on display. All ten competitors were required to write a description of their tool and present it to all the residents and me. After presenting the tool, they had to bring it to 'The competition.' The competition was a small course made to see the durability and stability of the tool they invented.

With 12 hours left until the competition, most of the contestants added the last tweak to their tool before letting it out to the residents. The competition will last 10 days, one day per contestant. All the contestants were given numbers ranging from one to ten, this was given out by age. The youngest were allowed to go first, leaving out the oldest for the last day. For this competition I made it a public holiday for ten days so all the residents could give their full support to the contestants participating. The competition started, but the results were quite disappointing.

The first contestant brought out a leaf with a few pieces of cloth that was wrapped around it. 'This is my tool I invented for Queen Jing Xiao. Not only could this leaf protect you from the sun, it is also waterproof. I hope you choose my design as it is special, unlike the contestant which I'm sure no one considered while creating this tool.' Contestant one said, I wasn't very pleased with this design. The leaf had holes inside so some sunlight could come in, it was good but sunlight was still on my face. 'Overall, your design was overall pretty but it had many flaws which I disliked a lot.' I explained to contestant 1. The design wasn't the best but we still decided to check out its skills on the tests we made. Inside the test, there were various challenges such as the wind test, water test and the sunlight test. Contestant one's tool did not work out well, the leaf was not water resistant and waterproof, sunlight proof and stable when the wind came. I sighed in disappointment, is it that hard to make a tool that could protect me from the sun?

After that, the event was over for the day. I was super irritated, I thought these ten contestants were very skilled in creating inventors but judging contestant one I'm not too sure anymore. What if the rest are also like this? I still have to continue this competition, I might just have to choose one randomly if none of them fit my standards. I shouldn't think negatively, there are still nine contestants and I'm sure they will do better than this.

I was wrong with that thought, the second to the ninth contestant all had similar designs. All 8 contestants used a small piece of cotton covering a light piece of wood. I was really frustrated after seeing that, I wasted 9 days of my life just to see the same design. After the ninth contestant, I decided to gather all contestants on stage. 'All ten of you have wonderful talent. But I would like to ask, did you guys copy each other? All ten of you had identical designs.' I said to them, but then I realised contestant ten did not do it yet. 'Contestant ten, You did not present your tool yet. Would you like to present a day early?' I asked. Contestant ten nodded his head, so we let him present a day early. 'Hello, I am Lu Ban and I am contestant ten. I am here to present the tool to Queen Jing Xiao. I was first inspired after seeing the poor children using a lotus leaf to cover them from the pouring rain but it looked like the lotus leaf snapped in half. After seeing that, I decided to make something that could protect everyone from the sun, wind and rain. The tool I made to protect you from sun, rain and wind is called an umbrella. I call it an umbrella because it resembles my wife's name which was the main reason why I had enough money to create the umbrella. The umbrella has a solid outline made from wood and is covered by a thin layer of waterproof silk. I hope that my umbrella will

pass the tests you provided' Lu Ban Said. I was very curious, this was the first contestant that named their tool and gave an explanation.

The small contest to see if the umbrella was durable has started. The results had me surprised, for the wind test it was very strong and firm. The umbrella did not lose any pieces of cloth, apart from that the umbrella did not break. Now that is impressive, this was the best tool I saw so far. The next test was the sun test, surprisingly it was sun resistant which means I could use it in the summertime. The last test was the water test, if the umbrella passes the test it means Luban tool would win. The water test started, amazingly the umbrella passed it! This means the umbrella Lu Ban made won the competition. Contestant 10, also known as Luban, you have won the competition! Your invention of the umbrella will be made for residents to use when there is harsh weather around Xi'an. Thankyou for your umbrella tool, we will use it wisely.' I said while applauding Lu Ban.

After the competition ended, we gave Lu Ban a luxurious life with his wife. We started creating umbrellas so we could use them during all four seasons, then summer came. I used the umbrella to greet all the residents around Xi'An, it kept me safe from the sun which I enjoyed a lot. The sun wasn't directly in my face anymore, the umbrella made it easier to walk around. Now I am very grateful to Lu Ban who made the umbrella. Now I can peacefully walk on the paths of Xi'An without any disruptions.

Chinese inventions of the past

Korean International School, Cho, Sungchan – 13

China is an enormous country with a diverse population and a wide range of jobs. Over the years, Chinese inventors have made many remarkable inventions that had a huge impact on both warfare and everyday life. Some of those are still used nowadays such as paper, printing skills, compass and even gunpowder. These are the most important inventions originally made in China that are still significant today. This writing will look at how paper and gunpowder were used in the past, how they were invented, and how they are still used in modern days, which will give a deep understanding of these inventions and appreciate their significance.

First of all, it's important to note the use of gunpowder in the past. Gunpowder is a kind of a powder that can explode if it is on fire. At the time when it was first discovered as an explosive substance, inventors used it as fireworks or in medical use. The mixture of gunpowder with various chemicals created colorful and visually stunning displays because it produced vibrant sparks and explosions. Also, gunpowder was sometimes used in traditional medicine because it was believed to have some medicinal properties. Due to this reason, it was used as a treatment for skin infections, wounds, and even digestive disorders. However, its medical use has largely been decreased over time due to a better understanding of health and safety. Later in time, gunpowder became very significant in warfare mostly used for weapons such as guns and cannons. The origins of these weapons goes back to ancient China, where the first gun was made out of a bamboo tube with gunpowder tied to a spear, known as a fire lance. Similarly, the first cannon was constructed from an iron tube, also developed from the fire lance. These innovations were eventually passed down to Korea, India and other Asian countries. As a result, knowledge of gunpowder reached countries in Europe and they made grenades and guns people know nowadays. To go back to the point, the introduction of gunpowder had a great contribution to warfare. The military became easier to defeat enemies faster and more effectively with these explosive powders and new weapons. While it is sad to mention that the invention of gunpowder contributed to the development of wars, it still remained useful for fireworks and certain types of rockets.

Moving on to how gunpowder was invented, it is traced back to inventors and medics who tried to create a medicine called "herb of immortality" during the Tang dynasty in the 9th century while the earliest recorded formula for gunpowder was during the Song dynasty in 11th century. The inventors first made gunpowder by mixing copper, zinc and tin together. However, this powder had too weak power to be used as weapons, as the amount of tin mixed in the gunpowder was too small. Consequently, it found its primary applications in fireworks and medicinal uses, as mentioned earlier. After the inventors found out how to produce and use gunpowder correctly, they started making weapons using explosions such as bombs and rockets which gave great impact in warfare. Although the early gunpowder was not as explosive as later ones, it was effective in ambushing enemies' territories. The development and use of gunpowder-based weapons marked a significant shift in warfare strategies.

It is true that gunpowder is still significant in modern times while technology has already developed a lot more than the time gunpowder was first invented. Gunpowder is still used for weapons or mining materials such as grenades or some types of bullets and fireworks. In addition, gunpowders can be used as fertilizers, dyes, and pigments and many other industries. All of the applications give its significance and practical purposes in specific industries and contexts.

Secondly, switching to the historical use of paper, paper is an invention completely different from gunpowder, and has become increasingly important in modern times. Paper is a material that is made in thin pieces mostly from tree logs and leaves, which is used to write, draw or print on it. Similar to gunpowder, paper had different uses than it has today. During its initial invention, it was mostly used to package things up. As time passed, its soft texture and light weight made it good for writing and drawing, as the paper that time was softer than the papers people use now. It was also used to keep tea leaves dry and also as toilet paper. In 751CE, the Battle of Talas happened and Chinese paper makers were captured as slaves, which is how the knowledge of paper making spread to the world. Different from gunpowder, the paper was spread in order from countries in the Middle East to other countries in Europe and then some of the countries in Asia. Interestingly, knowledge about noodles was also spread to the world in the same way at the same time. After paper was invented, the whole world changed because it

became very easy to write or draw something. Before its introduction, writing was mostly written on leaves or wood, which shows that paper was a huge revolution to the whole wide world with human civilization in it.

Paper was first invented by a person called Cai Lun who was first trying to make a soft and light piece of something that could be used for writing. Then he saw a view of a woman washing her clothes by a river. It sparked a thought in his mind about what would happen if plant fibers got washed, which is how he invented paper. However, first paper was a bit difficult. The inventor of paper had to separate fibers from hemp and flax, then transform them into thin sheets before shaping them into paper. It took place in the 2nd century of the Han dynasty. About 500 years later, Islam invaded China and captured paper makers, spreading the paper to different countries.

Explaining the use in modern days, paper has become too necessary for humans in many ways because of its wide range of applications. To mention some, it is very common to see papers in school, home, and workplaces. People rely on paper for tasks like creating books, preparing important documents and taking notes. Also, paper can be used for replacement of plastic because it is more environmentally friendly and causes less pollution than plastic products. Moreover, paper continues to be used in similar ways as the past, such as to wrap things up, make tea bags or as toilet papers too. Its significance and a wide range of applications make it an irreplaceable resource in today's world.

In conclusion, the inventions of gunpowder and paper in ancient China had an amazing impact on the world, both in the past and in modern times. Gunpowder made a big revolution in warfare by the development of powerful weapons and of military strategies to ambush. In addition to its important use in warfare, gunpowder also has uses in real life such as fireworks, medical use, and other various industries. On the other hand, paper changed the world by making revolutions in communication, arts and studying. It naturally came from packaging to writing, drawing, and printing. Paper has become a part of our daily lives and has been used for education, works, arts, and even eco-friendly products to plastic. The inventions of gunpowder and paper shows how inventors in ancient China were very creative and smart. While it may seem obvious that China has many inventors and that led to numerous inventions, the inventors themselves are still respectable for their innovations and huge impacts.

Peiyi and Noah

Korean International School, Kim, Jeewoo – 13

Peiyi felt fat drops of hot tears stinging her eyes. She leaned against the rough tree trunk, wondering what she did wrong to be punished so cruelly. It was like the universe was messing with her personally.

But as much as she wanted to continue crying and cursing the universe, she had to get up if she wanted to get out. She had spent too long walking around the forest that she wandered into trying to find a specific flower that could heal her mother's illness, and she could have *sworn* she saw the same tree five times.

"Hey," a boy's voice spoke quietly, "Are you okay?"

Peiyi flinched, startled by the sudden interruption of the silence. There was someone here in this horrid forest other than her? Was he lost too? Or... was he going to hurt her?

Suddenly feeling tremendously insecure, Peiyi took a second to quickly scan her surroundings, her loose black ponytail swishing through the damp air of the humid forest. Where was he even calling from?

As if to read her mind, the boy called out again, louder this time. "Up here, up the tree you're leaning on."

Peiyi looked up slowly, her breath getting caught in her throat at the sight of a boy her age. He had curly blonde locks messily perched on his head, freckles peppering his pale skin, and an innocent smile on his face as she studied his face, looking for anything suspicious.

"Who are you..?" she asked slowly, backing away from the tree, "And what do you want from me?"

The boy tilted his head, curly locks falling on the side of his face as he pondered her question carefully.

"Nothing, just..." he hesitated for half a beat, jumping down from his place on the tree. "It just looked like you needed help. And that's what I do. I help people who are lost."

Peiyi narrowed her eyes, but reluctantly settled for his answer. "So why are you here in the first place?"

The boy's smile stretched wider, breaking into a toothy grin. "I could be asking you the same thing, but I guess you have every right to know. But first, I have to ask you to keep this a secret between us."

His smile slid off his face as his light sea blue stared into her own chocolate brown ones. Peiyi gulped, a chill creeping down her spine at the intense gaze that stared into her soul. She nodded frantically.

"Good," the boy huffed, nodding in approval at her hasty nods, her ponytail still swishing around from the sudden movement. "Now where was I..."

★

"MOMMY!" a young boy screamed, tears streaming down his face in fat drops. "WHERE ARE YOU?" The boy cried for his mother, the result of trailing off too far behind his family, distracted by the enchanting wingbeats of an elegant butterfly. He continued crying, rushing off into a random direction, hoping his mother would be standing there. His sight was blurred from all the tears, only running faster.

He ran as desperately as a hungry animal. Faster. He needed to get out of the forest. Faster...

SPLASH. The boy struggled, his arms and legs thrashing around. The boy cried out. Or at least tried to.

The corners of his vision started to blacken. The last thing he heard before losing consciousness was the melodic voice of a woman...

"Wake up." a gentle voice nudged its way into his consciousness..

The boy groaned. He wondered if he was in heaven.

"Wake up, Noah." the voice urged again. At the mention of his name, he woke. There was a glowing woman, a soft look on her face. Her delicate voice highlighted her eyes, her light blue eyes shining. Smooth, luminous hair floated around her.

"Noah..." the lady bit her bottom lip, then opened her mouth again. "You've drowned in the lake of my forest that I protect. And... I've decided to give you a choice."

The boy nodded, still disoriented from the whole drowning ordeal. What was going on?

The lady continued, smiling in pity at the child. "You can either go complete the story of your life in heaven or you can continue living... but listen carefully--"

Noah gasped, eagerly picking the latter without even trying to listen. But it was only then he knew the condition of the second option.

★

"So you're saying that now you're a spirit of this forest and you can't leave?" Peiyi asked, numb after the enormous load of information that had been dumped on her. At the corner of her eye, she saw movement and turned to face Noah, who looked like he wanted to blurt something out but was obviously very hesitant.

“What’s up?” Peiyi asked wearily. Noah flinched, as if her speaking up first was unexpected. He then opened his mouth, eyes searching her face. “So Peiyi...” Noah spoke, “What are you here for?”

★

Noah sighed, nodding in acknowledgement. “So what it seems like to me, is... you’re looking for the Compi Ashflower. And you need a safe way to go home without getting lost.”

Peiyi bit her lip, nodding. While she hoped Noah would get her out of here, she also wanted to help Noah get out of here. He looked somewhat... lonely. He had longing trapped within his eyes.

“Well, Peiyi,” Noah said, snapping her out of her trance. “Let’s go visit the Goddess of the Moonlight Lake Forest. And hopefully, she’ll help you get out of here before you run out of time.”

Soon, they arrived at a breathtaking lake, the moon rippling on the smooth surface of the lake. Suddenly, Peiyi understood why this forest was called the Forest of the Moonlight Lake. She wondered how exactly Noah would get her of this forest and how he would summon the goddess of the forest.

“Well,” Noah whispered nervously, startling Peiyi, “Here goes... Drink the water and close your eyes. If there’s a flash of light, it means you can open your eyes. If there isn’t, well... we’ve failed. Let’s go.”

Peiyi did as was told, though reluctant to drink raw lake water, but it didn’t taste like mud at all. The water, for some reason, felt like liquid moonlight. Though she wasn’t sure where that description came from.

Then, a flash of light. She quickly opened her eyes and found herself face to face with a glowing lady, blonde hair and startling blue eyes. She looked just like the description from Noah’s story.

Peiyi realised that the woman was staring at her intently, with curiosity rather than hostility. She wasn’t quite sure about what she felt. The ticket to escape was right in front of her. But why couldn’t she take it?

Her beautiful peach lips parted to make equally as beautiful sounds. “Peiyi... I can see you are stuck in a dilemma between your own desires and your loyalty to Noah, who you’ve bonded with over the short time you’ve seen him. Well, all I can say is, the choice is yours. Take the flower home to your mother, or take Noah with you.”

Peiyi gulped. The woman was very straightforward, and she wouldn’t be able to live with the guilt...

Peiyi sighed. She knew what she would choose. She knew this was the right choice.

“I choose...”

★

Peiyi woke up after a bright flash. Did the goddess listen to her wish? She frantically searched around for Noah. He was there on the ground, flat on his back. Peiyi shook his shoulders, waking him up. He groaned, rubbing his eyes. He seemed confused. They were at the bank of the lake again.

“Noah... what’s that in your hands?” Peiyi asked, a bolt of excitement striking through her spine.

“Peiyi...” Noah gasped, “It’s the Compi Ashflower! You can—”

“We.” Peiyi corrected. “*We* can go home. Let’s go, Noah.”

But Noah seemed confused. What was he waiting for? Then, just as he opened his mouth, something heavy thumped her leg in her pocket. *Huh?* Peiyi took it out.

A familiar melodic voice rang in her head.

Follow the red needle. It shall take you home. And Peiyi, Peiyi... everything will work out.

Just trust yourself.

★

And so, my dear reader, that is how Peiyi and Noah went back to the small town where Peiyi’s mother lay, ill in bed. The Compi Ashflower did wonders on the treatment of Peiyi’s mother’s illness, and word had spread about the mysterious machine that Peiyi and Noah used to get back home. A name along the lines of compi-ash machine started circulating, and some of the best men took the compi-ash machine for study.

That, my friend, is precisely how the world’s first compass was invented in China. How the *compi-ash machine* turned into the *compass* will be left to your imagination, and the only thing that can be guaranteed is that Peiyi and her family live happily ever after with a former spirit of a magical forest and an untold story between two children.

The True Power of Inventions

Korean International School, Kim, Yeonwoo – 13

Deep in the heart of Shanghai, China, in the towering skyscrapers and busy streets, a group of professionals led by the acclaimed Li Sha dedicated themselves, the Time Sculptors, to building a machine to recite and present a simulation of any time period through people's minds while simultaneously being in the present physically.

And tonight, it was to be introduced to the world.

The stadium was filled with the buzz of the crowd; among them was a young girl named Mei Ling, her curious, chocolate eyes glistening with amazement. She'd always been fascinated by ancient China's inventions, and the thought of seeing history come to life thrilled her.

Li Sha stepped onstage, her face bright with excitement. She stood onstage, the bulky, TV-like screen being pushed onstage by a few people. The room immediately fell silent.

She cleared her throat. "Dear esteemed guests, ladies, and gentlemen. Good evening, and welcome. I am grateful for the presence of so many of you here today and to have the opportunity to speak in front of you today."

The crowd cheered.

"Today marks the results of months of research and recovery of the past, and now we proudly present this simulator that allows us to explore the wonderland of the past, allowing us to explore the wonders of ancient China through a simulation."

She tapped its screen, watching it flicker a soft, ethereal glow and hum to life, the mixture of anticipation and exhilaration heavy in the air. Mei Ling's heart raced as she watched the screen shift.

Li Sha turned, scanning the crowd. Stopping to face Mei Ling, she said, "My dear, would you like to be the first to experience the wonders of the simulation?"

Mei Ling's eyes widened, and she nodded enthusiastically. She stepped onto the platform, her blood rushing with adrenaline. She adjusted the settings, and in an instant, Mei Ling found herself fading out of the stage and into ancient China...

Mei Ling stood in a bustling marketplace; everything about the place screamed vibrant—the colours, the scents filling her nose, and the chatter of merchants at work. She stood awestruck, taking in the sights before her.

The marketplace sold intricately and meticulously hand-carved wooden sculptures, the thin porcelain vases covered in detailed cobalt, and silk in vivid red, blue, and gold.

She ventured through the streets, surrounding herself with the sound of traditional music.

As the sun dipped behind the horizon, the sky turned a shade of vermilion and gold, and the day had come to an end.

Mei Ling's vision started to bring her back to the present, her heart still racing. Li Sha smiled at her, recognizing the spark of inspiration in Mei Ling's eyes. Then, she faced the crowd.

"The universe is a vast playground of opportunities. Dare to dream big, and the possibilities are endless."

Mei Ling stepped off the platform, and the crowd erupted in applause, echoing off the walls.

From that day onward, Mei Ling, inspired by the wonders she'd witnessed, dedicated herself to pursuing her dream of invention. She vowed she would become one of the Time Sculptors, and she would make history.

Even after many years have passed, her passion for discovering new things had driven her to explore the untouched parts of science and technology. With an even more bottomless hunger for knowledge, Mei Ling spent countless hours sitting at her cluttered desk, surrounded by piles of printed articles, gears, wires, and disassembled gadgets.

One day, while rummaging through a dusty, yellow book in a forgotten corner of the library, a folder packed full of paper fell out of the pages, the scribbled writing in blue, "Time Travelling To The Past." The contents of the cluster of notes were written in a barely legible scrawl about travelling back to any point in time and the endless possibilities of rewriting the past.

And so, deep within the darkest and oldest parts of the library, Mei Ling decided that she had found her sign to finally start on her lifelong quest to uncover the secrets of the mysterious and unclear past.

Intrigued, Mei Ling headed to her office, where the comfort of her desk and the clutter greeted her. And she dove into books, reading and fact-checking the notes, analysing, taking notes, theorising, and referencing other resources, even to the point that at times, she lost track of time in her research.

The more she discovered, the more she fell into the rabbit hole of the task at hand.

Continuing her research, she sought guidance from experts in various fields to gain their insights.

Her determination remained unwavering. She formed a team, building a laboratory equipped with advanced technology and instruments.

So once the creation was a complex masterpiece of cogs and gears, emitting a dim light, radiating with the promise of unravelling her curiosity about time. But she knew that to truly see if the time machine worked, she had to test that it really went to the past. It was the moment of truth.

Looking back at her past year's worth of work, she had fulfilled almost all her goals and dreams. She sighed, thinking back to Li Sha's words in the stadium that day.

"The universe is a vast playground of opportunities. Dare to dream big, and the possibilities are endless," recited Mei Ling, finding reassurance in the words.

With her invention in hand, Mei Ling set out on a risky journey. The clock was rewinded back a year, and she felt her body become light, like she was vaporising, with no weight on her body at all. Despite her fear, her body melted away the doubt, and her vision quickly ran away with her uncertainty...

When Mei Ling opened her eyes, her body felt light. Here, whatever little thing she did now could affect how the future could go on, and it could endanger her in the present, along with everyone in the universe.

She observed her surroundings; the place she was in was a closed library, just where she was set to be. The smell of books and the pitter-patter of the rain tapped on the windows of the moonlit library. Mei Ling navigated the familiar corridors until she found the library section that she was looking for.

She saw the particular dusty yellow book. She shook the book, expecting the slip to fall out. Nothing fell out. She flipped through each of the pages. Still nothing.

But as she put her replica next to the book, a strange energy emerged from the book. The room filled with a blinding glow as the time machine began to move, defying the laws of gravity. Reality itself seemed to bend and twist in its presence, as if it were lagging.

At the end, her eyes adjusted to the light, barely making out the outline of a piece of paper and a blue pen.

Mei Ling's hands shook with anticipation as she stepped closer to the piece of paper, her hand trembling with certainty.

With the blue pen, Mei Ling started writing. In unrecognisable handwriting, she wrote all the key things she remembered from building the time machine on the note, and she found herself putting the note in the book.

"Without me from the future going back to the past to write this, me back in the present would have never started this time-travelling machine," she thought. "If I don't put in this note now, it could potentially be dangerous for the present, since I altered the course of the future." She then concluded.

Putting down the book, she adjusted the clock's hands once more, propelling herself forward in time, returning to the present. When the world came into focus, she found herself once again back in the gleaming, sky-touching city. She had carried with her the success of the time machine.

She was just so close to reaching the final steps of her dreams ever since she was a child, but she knew that once exposed to the public without altering, it could potentially put the past, present, and future at jeopardy, if given the power to affect the future in the past.

She returned to her workspace, making further adjustments to the piece. This time, her goal was for the voyager to journey to any destination at any given point in time while having no effect on the present, future, or past.

Even though delayed by the adjustment to her new invention, Mei Ling introduced the invention to the public, dedicating the rest of her life to sharing the tales of China's inventions. She became a writer, documenting the visions of the past. Her books were widely known, being an inspiration for many.

And so, with a little alteration, the time-travelling timepiece became not just a tool of research but for inventions. Mei Li's journey had revealed that the true power of inventions were not only in their results but in the people they inspired.

The World's Worst Nightmare.

Korean International School, Ng, Wey Heng Wayne – 13

Ping Li was standing in a crowded street as thousands of people ran, screaming for their lives. Ping Li wanted to move, he knew what was happening, but yet, he couldn't. Suddenly, thousands upon thousands of winged monsters dived from the clouds and onto the terrified civilians below. As the screeches of the winged beasts mixed with the screams of the people, Ping Li finally began running along with all the people next to him. Drops of blood splattered on the ground and the bloody remains of corpses fell on the terrified civilians. Suddenly, a monster swooped in from above, grabbing Ping with its talon and carrying him off the ground before shoving Ping into its gaping maw.

Suddenly, Ping Li woke up on a bench in the lab with a cold sweat. He saw on a nearby clock that it was eight in the morning. He groaned and got up to get some coffee. Despite getting a good ten hours of sleep, Ping was anything but restful. Flashes of flames and blinding light through his mind while deafening screeches and the screams of terrified civilians echoed through his mind. After getting his cup of aromatic coffee, he sat down, turned on his laptop and got to work writing a report about his findings.

Project Destroyer is still underway. 70% of the water present in the test zone has been extracted. However, further research must be done on increasing the amount of water extracted in the area to more than 90% of the water molecules while decreasing the resources required to use the chemical.

Ping Li was editing his experiment data log when his lab assistant, Xi Lang entered the room. Xi Lang was a very bright student of Ping, but he was rather cocky and naive in his work. Ping Li raised his eyebrows and asked, "What took you so long to get here?"

Xi Lang was about to answer when suddenly, an alarm roared in the distance. Then, one by one, alarms started ringing and a panicked voice crackled from the speakers, "This is not a drill! I repeat, this is not a drill. All personnel must report to the aircraft hanger for evacuation. All military personnel, get into defensive positions."

As soon as the message entered Ping Li's ears, he gathered his laptop and ran out of the room with Xi Li a few steps away from him. Red alarms glazed the entire facility in an eerie red light. Ping Li ran into the elevator and got to the ground floor. It seemed that all was going to plan until a loud screech echoed through the reception area from a corridor. Everyone winced at the high pitched sound and covered their ears. Ping Li went to investigate the cause of the screech and went down the corridor to come face to face with a Cryaos, a Pterodactyl-like chimera with the tail of a scorpion and the head of a dinosaur.

Blood dripped from the Cryaos' snout as it perched on the corpse of a scientist. However, Ping Li attracted the Cryaos' attention. It stared at Ping with its bloodshot eyes before letting out a deafening roar and charging towards Ping Li. He ran for his life through the corridors until he hit a brick wall, blocking all Ping Li's escape routes. He faced the Cryaos, ready to accept his fate when suddenly, a loud bang shook the corridor and the Cryaos stood still, its eyes in shock as it looked at its chest where a bleeding hole lay.

The Cryaos collapsed with a loud thud and behind it stood Xi Lang, panting slightly and holding a shining pistol. "Not too bad for a scientist right?" he asked, grinning smugly.

Xi Lang helped his colleague up to his feet and together, they ran out of the maze of corridors and to the aircraft hanger, where the military personnel were loading the last people onto a helicopter, its spinning propellers ready to carry the scientists to the next laboratory.

Finally, as the planes took off, Ping Li looked out his windows to see the entire laboratory in flames and the silhouettes of hundreds of Cryaos flying, fighting what remained of the Laboratory's military. As the plane ascended into the clouds, Ping Li was able to drift off into a deep and uneasy sleep.

After what seemed like an eternity, Ping Li was shaken awake by Xi Lang, who told him, "Dude it's time to go. The plane has already touched down."

Ping Li moaned before drowsily standing up and stumbling into the new laboratory: A cave hidden deep in the Himalayas where all the brightest minds around the world, from America to Russia, were working to save China,

and by extension, the world from the Cryaos. Ping Li got to his room in the cave, before collapsing onto his bed in exhaustion.

The next day, Ping Li had to attend the monthly report meeting. After getting lost in the cave twice, Ping Li finally got to the meeting room. By then, everyone was seated. Ping Li took his seat and began listening as several military commanders reported about the situation in Beijing and Shanghai.

“What remains of the Chinese Government is in shambles and the Cryaos have taken Beijing after a two month long struggle and have begun assaulting the poorly defended Indian and Mongolian defense lines on their respective borders. The United States has begun preparing a nuclear strike on Cryaos to stop them before they begin invading the other countries.” a military commander reported.

Next, scientific researchers from several countries shared their discoveries with their fellow scientists. After more than two hours of listening to reports, it was time for Ping Li to report what they have accomplished in a week.

“Okay, so over the past month, Project Destroyer has made significant progress. The amount of molecules destroyed with the chemical has increased from the measly fifty percent to eighty percent. We are fairly certain that this weapon will be fairly effective against the Cryaos. However, we have several concerns for what will happen after the Cryaos are eliminated,” Ping Li said. “We believe that this chemical will become a deadly weapon to whatever country the chemical is used on, just like the nuclear arsenal we have in our disposal currently.”

All the military commanders and scientists nodded in agreement. They all knew how deadly the highly confidential chemical was. The ambassador for the United Nations stood up and said, “I believe that is all that we have. This meeting is adjourned.”

Everyone stood up and walked out the door. After Ping Li left the room, he was almost tackled by Xi Lang. Ping groaned and asked Xi Lang, “What was that for? I just got out of this—”

Xi Lang interrupted him, “No! I just got the correct combination! The water molecules destroyed are one hundred percent!”

Ping’s eyes widened and he exclaimed, “Really! ” He dashed towards the lab with Xi Lang behind him.

Ping burst through the glass door and went to the experimentation site. Xi Lang put in a container filled with the Destroyer Chemical. The misty gas quickly filled the room, and all the water in it first turned into steam, then disappeared. Ping Li nodded thoughtfully, this looked very promising. Then, Xi Lang pressed a button on the control panel and a goat appeared from a platform under the test zone. The misty gas flooded the room once again, and the goat let out one last terrible bleat as all the water molecules in its body vanished, drying up. The meat drooped as the goat sank to the ground. Eventually, all that was left was dried skin covering dry muscles and hardened bone, dried out eyes stared out into space, both seeing and unseeing at the same time. It was horrifying to see this happen to a living being, and Ping Li and Xi Lang looked at each other in shock.

After they recovered, Ping Li went to his laptop to begin typing the final report. He typed for hours on end until he reached the conclusion of the experiment report.

The Destroyer Chemical will most certainly be able to destroy the Cryaos. However it may come at the cost of Beijing and the other major cities in the monsters’ control. This chemical weapon...” Ping Li typed. However, he could not find the way to end the report without it feeling grim and unreal. Finally, he settled on one message and finished typing the sentence. He finished typing the report and sent it to his superiors. Then, Ping Li walked out of the lab to get a cup of coffee.

After Ping left, Xi Lang took a peek at the report. After he scrolled through pages upon pages of information about the Destroyer Chemical, he finally found the conclusion, and the last sentence was the one that truly caught his attention. It read: *This chemical weapon could become the world’s worst nightmare.*

How is toilet paper made?

Korean International School, Shim, Soomin – 13

A long time ago, there was a father and his daughter. Their mother (or wife) passed away when the daughter was 3 years old. The daughter, named May Lee, and her father, Bai Lee, lived in East China. May was an outgoing and imaginative girl who often made unconventional food, such as noodle castles or garlic cookies.

One day, while May was busy as usual, her eyes caught sight of a bamboo stick on the dining table that her dad had brought from the bamboo forest the previous month. Her mind quickly started working, and she got the idea to make "Dry Bamboo Slice Noodle." As the name suggests, she wanted to incorporate dried bamboo into the noodles, like a fishcake.

May's father was a merchant, so she couldn't live with him. He would travel every month to sell his bamboo baskets in another village, which required crossing two high mountains. He would return home after four weeks. Sometimes, if he had to leave immediately, they couldn't meet. However, May and her dad were not wealthy but also not poor because her dad had a job. May greatly admired her father and wanted to prepare a delicious and special meal for him when he was at home. She decided to put her plan into action in less than 2 minutes.

First, May tried to clean the dirt that was stuck to the bamboo. However, some dust wouldn't come off easily, so she decided to peel off the skin. Then she cut it into pieces the size of an adult's fist and steamed it until it became soft and tender. After finishing this step, she let it cool for two hours and then cut it into squares and dried it once more.

A few days later, her father returned home. May was excited to see him and wanted to give him his special Dry Bamboo Slice Noodle. She put the noodles in pork soup and added the dried bamboo. She served the noodles to her dad and eagerly waited for his feedback. However, his face went from happy to frowning after he bit into the bamboo slice. He immediately spat it out. It was tough and bitter. May looked disappointed and ran out of the room crying. Her father realized that he had made a big mistake, but it was too late. May decided not to make any more special food for her grumpy father.

The father wanted to apologize and make amends, but May avoided talking to him except for one request. She asked him to sell the extra bamboo slices as wallpaper. He tried to apologize to his daughter, but she quickly went to her room. Two days later, he went to Beijing to sell his products, including the bamboo slices (or bamboo wallpaper).

That winter was the coldest in years. It wasn't even December yet, but it had already snowed heavily, covering the roads with thick layers of snow. Father was on his way to the market when he realized how cold it was. Even the mice stayed inside their houses. Father felt the chill and wanted to go back home. However, it would be dark in a few hours, so he decided to rest at a tavern for the night.

When father arrived at the tavern, there was only one man who looked like a thief. Having met many people while selling his products, he had a sense for identifying thieves. He considered going to another tavern, but he was too tired to move, so he stayed.

After finishing his dinner, Father needed to use the toilet. However, he was concerned that the man who looked like a thief might steal his belongings if he left the room. So he tried to hold it in and eventually fell asleep.

In the dark of dawn, he woke up desperately needing to relieve himself. Reluctantly, he took his belongings and went to the toilet. After he finished, he searched for leaves to use as toilet paper. Unfortunately, there were none. He looked around and spotted something that resembled leaves — bamboo slices. He picked up some large slices and used them to clean himself. It turned out to be surprisingly comfortable and practical!

As soon as the sun rose, he went around the village promoting the bamboo slices as a substitute for wet wipes. The response was overwhelmingly positive! Everyone who used them praised their effectiveness. Everyone wanted to buy more, even at higher prices. Father returned home with a heavy load, not just of extra products, but also a substantial amount of money. He sincerely apologized to May for his rude behavior, and she accepted his apology. They lived happily ever after.

Quantum Journeys: A Tale of Invention, Betrayal, and Redemption

Korean International School, Tsang, Maurice – 14

An alarm blares and a hand slaps it to make it shut up. The owner of the hand crawls out of the warm, cozy cocoon of blankets and pillows and reveals he is a man in his late 20s. This is Frank, a Chinese man living in Hong Kong. He may not know this, but today he'll make a decision that will change not just his life, but the entire course of human history.

The year is 2026, and the tension between the superpowers has reached a near-boiling point. China and Nation 05, the second and first most powerful nations on earth, have cut diplomatic ties and the risk of atomic war has never been this threatening since the Cuban Missile Crisis. A little balance of power shift, a small decline in economic output, and one rogue soldier are all it would take to set the world ablaze.

Even so, life for the average person drags on. In Frank's case, it would mean going to his boring job as a Physicist. He arrives at the university, conducts experiments, engages in meaningless chatter with other, more passionate colleagues, conducts more experiments, and then goes home.

After a rather long exchange of greetings with the neighbours, Frank finally can enter his house. As he steps in, he can hear the sounds of video games in the background. "Yo, Frank! Back so soon? Haven't even finished the last level yet!" a voice yelled. Frank smiled. It was his roommate and friend John, who was always playing video games. He's a fun guy, if a little messy. The two friends played video games together for the next 4 hours, beating level after level together, as a team. However, unlike other nights, Frank did not want to repeat this routine for tomorrow, the day after that, and the day after that, repeating this daily cycle until he died. After completing the last level of the game, he just stares at the ending screen. "What's wrong?" asks John, confused.

An uncomfortable silence settled among them.

"I don't want to do this anymore." Frank groaned.

"What do you mean?" John inquired, "You-We, I meant, do this every day."

"Exactly! I'm tired of repeating this cycle over and over again! It's boring and makes me feel unfulfilled!"

"Well, shouldn't you feel grateful? Your life is very nice compared to everyone else's. You work a decent-paying job at a university, you have an apartment, you have friends, and you even have a girlfriend!"

"Yeah, but... This all feels so, so...boring! I wanted to be a physicist to make some sort of new invention to change the world, instead, I am here, wasting away my time playing video games until morning. I want to do something meaningful for once." Frank looks over to John. Suddenly, an idea pops into his mind.

"That's it! We'll invent something! We'll build a machine that does something and changes the world!"

John laughs. "That's great, how 'bout you go invent a teleporter so everyone can travel faster."

"That's genius, John! We will build a new teleportation machine and change the world!"

John stares back at Frank.

"You are serious about this. Really? Do you think some guy in a dinky apartment will be able to invent a device that millions of others with more resources couldn't? You are talking crazy, man!"

Frank sighs, "I have been told my whole life that I will be meaningless. As an accidental child, my parents would tell me that I wasn't meant to exist and that would mean nothing. I proved them wrong when I became a

physicist, but now I still feel my life lacks true meaning. But this! Building an invention will finally give meaning to my life, and also create an impact upon this world. C'mon, John, my old friend, why don't we just give it a try?"

He holds out his hand.

John smiles, grabs his friend's hand, and says, "Well, aren't you one for speeches! I'm in!"

For the next year and a half, the two men worked all day on their new project. Well, as much of the day that two working men with girlfriends can give, which, admittedly, is not much. Still, the duo manages to pull the project along. They construct prototype after prototype, with each one failing to achieve results. Despite his partner's cries of protest, Frank, summoning the mad scientist within him, keeps going with his invention.

Since building a machine that potentially breaks the laws of physics can cause at least some noise, the neighbors started questioning why on earth there were banging noises upstairs at 3 in the morning. Frank, ever so excited about his project, started blathering about the machine to his neighbours. Jack, the new guy, seems very interested in his machine, even requesting to see its tests, though Frank doesn't know why he would...

Anyway, on the 17th of November, 2027, the first successful test of the machine took place at Frank and John's apartment. Frank strapped a small, round device to his girlfriend Betty's wrist, and placed another identical device in the bathroom. Watching this strange test was John and Jack, who insisted on seeing the test. Frank activated the device and...nothing happened. Then a flash of bright green light encased Betty and she disappeared into thin air. Frank called for her, only to hear her voice in the bathroom, exactly where he had placed the second device earlier. There was a great cheer erupting from the living room. The machine worked! The impossible is achieved, Frank grabs his girlfriend and John to go out for dinner. After the three finish eating out, John and Frank return home and fall asleep. They have no idea what will happen next...

Frank woke up with a throbbing headache. *That's strange...*, he thought. He tries to move, but he can't. He's tied to a chair! Frank looks around. He is in a large room. He can see a few TV screens on the walls showing Betty and John tied up in similar rooms.

"Well, Well, Well, what do we have here?" a voice booms from the other side of the room. "Three inventors, eh? Congratulations on inventing a new way of transportation."

"WHO ARE YOU?" Frank yelled, "Why did you kidnap us?"

"Don't you recognise me?" The man walks into the light, "Your neighbour Jack?"

Frank is speechless.

"As for why, I'm a 05 spy. The device you made will give the Chinese government a massive advantage over Nation 05, and I simply cannot allow that. So right now we will ask you to give us the blueprints of the machine, or we will result in using less civil methods of interrogation."

"DUDE, what are you on about? You kidnapped me, my girlfriend, and my friend! Of course, I'm not going to tell you!" Frank yelled.

"Alright, then have it your way."

Frank was then tortured for half an hour. By the time they were done with him, he had lost a tooth and was bleeding. Jack asked him again, "Now have you changed your mind?"

"HAH! I'm not selling out my invention anytime!" Frank laughs.

"If you don't talk, maybe we'll have to torture your little girlfriend. Maybe then you will tell us!"

Before Frank can answer, the lights in the room suddenly shut down. Gunshots and yelling were heard next. Frank can feel the ropes tying him to the chair loosen and escapes, running out of the room. He sees John and Betty exit from their rooms and into the same corridor as his. Without time to embrace, the three run to the end of the corridor. They stop in the middle to retrieve the machine in a room. As the three crash through the door, they realize they are on an open balcony. They see a helicopter hovering near the edge.

“Get on!” The woman in the chopper yells. Betty takes one of the devices and hops on the chopper. They then hear gunshots and see Jack emerge from the doorway, holding a pistol. With fury in his eyes, Jack raises his weapon and shoots Frank in the leg. John, thinking quickly, slaps the other teleporter on his wounded friend and activates it, sending Frank into the helicopter. A hail of bullets rain upon John as Jack empties his entire magazine into his flesh. Frank can only watch as his best friend is killed.

Months later, Frank is on his way to a tech convention to showcase his invention. The complex Jack and his men had taken him to was an old mall and the government was only alerted when a man inside Jack’s group tipped them off. The group itself was a Nation 05 nationalist group operating around the world. The memories of the compound hurt as they turn to memories of John and his death...The car stops, and the door opens. A hand extends, and a voice is heard: “Welcome Frank, inventor of the teleporter!”

New Tales of China's Inventions

Marymount Secondary School, So, Lok Ching – 12

The festive atmosphere filled the air during the Chinese New Year. You could find strips of red paper, Chinese lanterns, and couplets everywhere. Every family was having a big feast at home. Yet, behind the red-lit streets and laughter, there was always a crowd of starving beggars in torn clothing being ignored. In the eyes of the reluctant celebrators, they were just a horde of frequent targets to be bullied or attacked.

Sofie and Max couldn't bear to see the homeless suffer like this. This is how Sofie and Max came up with the idea of a new invention, to help the hungry and homeless of the city, by inventing a 'food conversion machine'. They had already pictured how the machine would benefit the homeless community. It would work by converting natural resources, plants, and raw ingredients into nutritious meals. They designed a system that would sort and process the food.

For the following months, Sofie and Max had been working hard to design the machine. They first drafted the prototype using 3D designing software. The outer layer was made of durable material, protecting the fragile parts inside. It looked like a vending machine, but in fact, it was equipped with a detailed robot food maker within.

"Well, the design and shapes are done now!" exclaimed Sofie.

"How are we going to turn natural waste into food? It's humanly impossible!" Max snapped in frustration.

They then underwent thorough research on all the topics related to chemical food making, "I have the solution! We can move on and speed up the process now!" Max blurted out.

To bring their invention to life, they needed donations and support. In the bustling streets of Shenzhen, they set up striking posters and signs all over. But the passers-by were all tied up with work and were too reluctant to stop by, never mind paying any interest to their 'impractical invention'. Fortunately, they bumped into a news reporter, Sheila Kwan, and she was genuinely gripped by the idea and was eager to bring it to the headlines.

Max and Sofie's invention spread viral like wildfire. They were constantly approached by local charities and keen donors who were interested in their invention. They obtained more than 5 million dollars in less than 2 months and were able to create their first production line.

Although they faced a series of obstacles, for example, occasional technical errors, and issues of performance optimization, their resilience and determination drove them to charge forward. They collaborated with experts to further improve the machine to its maximum value. They made it more efficient and affordable. They also partnered with world-renowned engineers, nutritionists, and environmental experts to refine the design and functionality.

With the help of the city government, they identified areas with high populations of homeless people. Strategic locations were selected, such as districts with a high density of beggars, where they could serve the most people in need.

After a few months, they could already see the positive impact that the food conversion machines brought to the community.

"Homeless individuals and families no longer have to rely solely on handouts or discarded scraps to survive, they have access to nutritious meals that meet their dietary needs! They can live with dignity!" triumphed Sofie after looking into the generated data.

Their invention successfully provided the minority with a sense of hope.

Encouraged by their success, Sofie and Max continued their journey of innovation. In the end, they not only provided nourishment to the hungry but also ignited a sense of empathy and unity in society. The food conversion machine became a symbol of hope, proving that with determination and a belief in the power of innovation, individuals can make a difference in the world.

As the streets of Shenzhen continued to shine, the invisible became visible, and the forgotten found solace in the embrace of technology and compassion.

New Tales of China's Inventions (The History Of Printing)

Marymount Secondary School, Tin, Ming Yan – 12

“William, pack your bags. We’ll be staying at grandma’s for the night.””

My mom’s blaring voice echoed from the kitchen as a sigh escaped from my mouth, “can I stay at home instead?”

“No,” she shrugged and turned to me with a sharp glare, “it’s been a while since you’ve seen her, and you might find something you like in her mini library.”

Dragging my bags to the trunk, I sank into a seat near the back of the car. Grandma’s house was as small as the size of a storage room, and it would hardly fit all five of us — her, my parents, my brother, and I. Her dirty, small attic was full of rusted pillars and icky spiderwebs scattered over the walls – simply thinking about all of us being squashed in the cramped space was already making me nauseous. I couldn’t imagine us staying there for more than an hour.

After a long car ride which felt like ten thousand years, our destination came to view. My droopy eyelids felt like they could shut any minute.

Grandma’s house was located far away from the city, amidst large trees and bushes. There were no malls or convenience stores near her house, and sometimes it made me wonder how she had survived all these years.

With a grateful grin and softening eyes, she led us into the house and served us plates of her freshly baked apple pie — one thing I knew about grandma was that she was an awesome chef.

Gobbling up all the food, something popped up in my mind — grandma’s mini library! I never knew it existed, but I guess mom did.

“Grandma, can you show me your mini library?” I pleaded, nudging on her shoulder with a slice of pie still stuffed in my mouth. Since there wasn’t any Wi-Fi here, I guess I’d enjoy some books instead

“Oh, dear, of course,” a warm smile stretched across her face as she gestured upstairs.’

Following her footsteps, we arrived in front of her old attic. “So... where is it?” I paced around impatiently.

“It’s here,” the attic door creaked open as she stepped inside. In a split second, the wooden shelves were filled with heaps of books and the spiderwebs and roaming bugs located at the back of my mind disappeared in a click. It was like I was watching a magic show, but it was all real.

“There,” she said, “anything you want to know about, we’ve got it.”

“Grandma, I’m doing a Chinese history project on old inventions, majorly 2 on how 1 printing came to be. Are there books about this?” I glanced around, my voice slightly trailing off at this absolutely magical sight.

“Of course!” She chuckled, murmuring incomprehensible words below her breath, and a sage-green covered book appeared between us and dropped to my feet.

I glanced at grandma, then down at the book. I picked and flipped open the first page, expecting to either see the big bold words “CONTENTS” printed at the very top or “Chapter One”.

But it was fully blank. With a tiny light gaping between the pages.

As I continued to turn each blank page with confusion, the light within grew stronger. Although it started blinding my eyesight, I couldn’t get myself to stop flipping through the pages, trying to understand the strange phenomenon.

The last thing I saw before I completely blacked out was a giant block of light flashing in front of me and grandma's worried face, mouthing something I couldn't comprehend.

Once I came back to my consciousness, staring at the back of my eyelids, I wondered if I was lying on dry stones. A cold breeze blew, and I felt sick. "Where am I?" I wondered.

Taking a deep breath, I snapped open my eyes, and caught sight of a tall man standing near a stack of yellow cloth. Within seconds, I heard bustling noises all around. Glancing up from my dreaded body, I realised that I was covered in a traditional blue robe I hadn't been wearing earlier, and everyone else had similar outfits.

That's when I realised I was no longer in Hong Kong. Or even, in the year 2023.

I couldn't believe what I was seeing, so I slapped my arms, then my cheeks. With a bewildered gasp, I came to the realisation that this was reality. I dragged myself out of the spot I was in and walked towards the crowd.

"Uh, hello," I tapped on a man's shoulder, "Where exactly am I?"

"What?" His eyebrows knitted together and a puzzled look displayed on his face.

I decided to shrug it off and ask another question, "Nevermind, what are you doing?"

"Inventing," he said, not taking his eyes off from whatever he was doing, "I'm trying to make lives easier by copying words and pasting them on another surface."

Seeing the proud look on the man's face, I knew he must've been the first to invent printing!

"Can you tell me about your idea?" I asked eagerly.

"Alright," he continued, "I'm carving these stone blocks into different words and shapes, then I'll ink them."

"How are you going to paste the words on paper, then?"

"I'll chop off the stones and paste them on to cloth," he explained briefly.

"That's interesting!" I exclaimed, gathering stones from the corner and handing it to him, "how many more characters do you have left?"

"Definitely more than a hundred, this is heavy work," he sighed, taking the blocks and carving a new word on it.

"Can I help?"

He eyed me up and down, and hesitated for a moment, before giving me a jar of ink.

"Pour the ink in these carved stones, and make sure to pour carefully." He demonstrated.

"No problem," I smiled and took the materials. We spent the evening helping each other, and he taught me so many new things — that's when I remembered I didn't belong here.

The same block of light appeared in front of me and crashed into us.

Seconds later, I landed on the floor of Grandma's attic.

"Grandma!" I exclaimed, pulling her in for a hug.

She grinned warmly, “did you find everything you needed to know?”

“Yes, yes I did.” I smiled back.

My parents and brother stood behind us and stared blankly at me, “when did you come back?”

The Mahjong Legend

Marymount Secondary School, Wong, Hei Cheng Courtney – 13

“A putrid smell filled my nostrils as I approached the building.

I grabbed a small box made of styrofoam – my last delivery of the day – and reluctantly stepped towards the building. All the way, I heard the sound of mahjong tiles clacking together. This Tsim Tsa Tsui apartment building looked old, like it would collapse at any moment.

Clack, clack, clack.

How could the people here withstand this smell?

I brushed away my thoughts and walked up the staircase to the fourth floor. With every step, the staircase responded in turn with a creak. I always loved old buildings. They were usually filled with elderly people who gave you something in return for your time, like a story from their past.

There was only one flat on the fourth floor. I rang the doorbell. Even though the clacking sounds of mahjong tiles were coming from inside the flat, the residents heard the bell. The door’s hinges squeaked open, and a hand shot out. Its fingernails cracked and its blood vessels bulged out of its back. In its tight grip were banknotes. As I reached for the banknotes, it placed its finger on the back of my hand, sending a bout of electricity down my spine. Startled, I drew my hand away and gave it the food, making sure to keep some distance between us. After the transaction, the door slammed in my face, and I was left standing outside, frozen from the interaction. I was sure my colleagues have had weirder experiences than this, though. So, I let it retreat into a corner of my mind while I drove away, back to the restaurant.

I thought that would be the end of it. I was wrong.

Back at the restaurant, I breathed a sigh of relief. Everything looked normal. The tables and chairs were in place. Dinner service had ended so one was manning the cashier, but everything was neat and tidy, from the cash register to the worn-out pencils in the pencil jar. I opened the cash register. The little drawer shot open, revealing the fruit of the hard work all my colleagues put in today. It wasn’t much, but this was what sustained us all. Of course, I know, as I always do, that people don’t recognize us – the backbone of society. I reached into my pocket for the banknotes. To my surprise, only blank sheets of joss paper came out.

I frantically searched my pockets for the missing banknotes. My wallet, my keys, my phone...I spilled the entire contents of my pockets onto the table, but no banknotes.

Just then, the little plastic pencil jar fell to the floor.

Clack, clack, clack.

Even when the pencils came to a stop on the black and white tiles, the sounds went on. It didn’t sound like a pencil or a plastic cup either. More like...mahjong tiles.

Out of the corner of my eye, a man in black was sitting at the table farthest from the doorway. However, when I turned my head to look at him, he had disappeared. I don’t want to bring him up, but he looked a bit like our father.”

“...And that’s what happened yesterday,” I say.

I hold my phone closer to my ear. “Can’t you hear it? That clacking sound?”

After a short pause, a voice drifts out of my phone’s speakers. “Brother, Dad passed away from cancer when you were 8. Maybe you should go see a psychiatrist?” The voice says.

I couldn’t answer.

To break the silence, he asks “Oh, have you seen the news? Apparently, a headless corpse was found with fresh food inside its body. Creepy, huh?”

A part of my brain starts to panic. I hang up and turn on the TV in my room.

The announcer's upper body appears on the screen. "Breaking news!" she says, calmly. "A three-day-old decapitated corpse was found with freshly digested food inside its intestines on the fourth floor of a Tsim Tsa Tsui apartment building, where a strong stench had been reported." On the screen, a picture of the old apartment building I visited yesterday appeared. I turn off the TV, wanting to spare myself the sight.

Clack. Clack. Clack.

The sound has grown louder. I can feel it too. They – the monsters – are scratching at my door and my window. I can see their silhouettes through the walls. The man I saw...was he behind this?

I dial a familiar number on my phone.

"Dad..."

"The number you have called cannot be reached right now."

I tell him everything, from the visit to what is outside.

"I wish you were here," I say, sadly.

Suddenly, my dad's voice rings out from my phone. "I am here, son."

For a moment, I'm frozen in shock. I had a rather peculiar habit of calling my father's old phone number, as a way of remembering him. I never thought he'd answer.

"Dad? Dad!"

"Beep—"

Clack. Clack. Clack.

Everything feels blurry. The lamp on my bedside table is flickering. Suddenly, the man in black appears and puts his hands over my eyes. Despite my attempts to stay awake, my eyes close, and I fall into a deep sleep.

In my dreams, I see a man who looks like my father. In a white room, he sits opposite me on a wooden chair.

"Son...I'm sorry for scaring you." He begins, "But there is something I need to tell you."

I don't hear anything except his voice. It's been a while since I've heard the sound of silence. The air smells amazing, too. It's sweet and fresh. "Dad?" I exclaim.

"Yes, son. I'm sorry for leaving you, your mother, and your darling brother, but I've watched over you every day. Please forgive me...you've always been my favorite son." He says, quietly.

I want to go over and hug him, but I can't move from my chair. Instead, I resign myself to staring at him in shock and awe with tears falling down my face.

"Dad...It's okay. I've always loved you, and so has my brother." I say.

"I'm glad to hear that. Now, I need to tell you why I'm here," He begins, "I am a spirit now, and some being has cursed you. That's why you're hearing the clacking noises. So, I'm here to save you."

"They've caught on to us! We're running out of time!" He hurriedly exclaims. "Stay safe, okay, son?"

As he finishes speaking, the room fades into black, and I wake up, tears smudged onto my pillow.

CLACK. CLACK. CLACK.

The sound has gotten louder now. They must have gotten closer.

Dad is sitting on my bed, smiling warmly. He rises, beckoning me to follow. "You'll get rid of the curse for me, right?" I say, eagerly. He nods, and turns around.

He walks to the door, motioning to the handle. "I've been hearing...things. Is it really safe out there?" I ask. He nods, and I place my hand on the handle. "Are you sure about this?" He doesn't say anything. Instead, a sick smile appears on his face.

Suddenly, an intense bout of pain surges through my body. I drop to my knees, holding the handle for support. It feels like my heart is bursting out of my body. The aching bubbles up inside, never getting released. I feel like I'm going to die.

I grab the door handle tightly, trying to get back on my feet. Just then, Dad pushes me. I hold on to the handle, causing the door to open under my weight. I land on the floor, paralyzed with fear.

Shadows in various colors burst into the room, like vomit. They trample over me, crushing my limbs and leaving bruises all over my body. Every time I take a breath, pain pulses through my chest.

CLACK. CLACK. CLACK.

Suddenly, a feeling of dread comes over me as a shadow steps near my paralyzed body. It kneels down with a smirk. "So this is that gambling addict's way of paying his debt, huh? How...pathetic," it says.

"W—what do you mean?" I ask, weakly.

"It's like a transaction. Pain for money." It says. "Now...since you're his favorite son, it's all up to you."

"Who will pay the ultimate price?"

Aspirations

Nord Anglia International School, Chan, Brady – 12

The ones who are crazy enough to believe they can change the world are the ones who do. The year is 3000 AD. Humans have colonized the entire solar system, and new, incredible inventions are being made at an unprecedented rate. People live on planets and moons alike, and thousands of space stations of all shapes and sizes decorate the skies of even the most remote planets, but while the entire solar system has been explored, no soul has ever travelled beyond and made it back alive.

Kai Wang, an aspiring pilot and inventor, comes from a long line of technological geniuses – and he is no exception. His ancestry can be accredited with many great inventions, such as the compass, the rocket, and the spaceship. Since his father was lost, trying to fly his spaceship past the Great Rings, which marked the edge of the solar system, when Kai was only a child, it has been Kai's goal to complete his father's mission and carry on the Wang legacy. He began working on his own spaceship, with parts from his father's projects, and anything else he could put to use, when he was only a teenager. He learned from the work of all of his ancestors, dating back hundreds of generations, but also adding his own creative flair. Once he was done with school, his spaceship became his primary commitment. He was patient and determined, constantly perfecting and refining his work, day and night, until it was immaculate, pouring his blood, sweat and tears into what he viewed not only as his life's work, but the culmination of everything his ancestry worked to accomplish: the next great Chinese invention.

A warm hand caressed a young Kai's face as he looked up at his father. "I'm gonna be an astronaut!" he declared, "Just like you!"

His father chuckled, stroking Kai's hair, "I'm sure you will buddy." Kai closed his eyes, taking in all of his father's features: his warm smile, his kind eyes, his deep, contagious laugh. The laugh that always brought a smile to his face. It was beautiful. But it wouldn't last. His father climbed into the cockpit of his ship and ruffled Kai's hair for the last time. "I love you Kai," he said. And then he was gone.

With one final strike of the hammer, Kai exhaled, exhausted, yet exhilarated. He had finished his spaceship. There was nothing left to improve. At first, Kai was incredulous. There was always room for improvement. There was always something he could do. Except this time, there wasn't. Kai inspected the ship, front to back, top to bottom, several times, but it was simply flawless. He even went for a few test runs, with exemplary performance. There was just one more thing that he needed to take care of.

As Kai arrived at his mother's house, he turned his head upwards. The sky was thick with traffic, and beyond that, he could make out the silhouette of a spaceship, tearing through the sky. He closed his eyes imagined himself there, traversing the many planets of the solar system. Then, with a deep breath, Kai turned around and rang the doorbell. The doorbell was becoming less and less common, as were many other, more "primitive" things, but Kai's mother preferred things the more old-fashioned way, and she never let anyone tell her what she could or couldn't do. It was one of the many things Kai admired about his mother; she always did things her own way, a virtue few people still had. Kai's mother opened the door. She looked him up and down and embraced him. "It's good to see you Kai," she said, "Make yourself at home."

Kai grinned, "I got these for you," he said, revealing a small, cylindrical object. He pressed a button, and shimmering purple flowers erupted from the top, wild, yet graceful. They shone like diamonds in the night, as if they were coated with glitter. He smiled and offered to go get a vase, but as his mother told him where to find one, he noticed her voice breaking, ever so slightly, and as he returned with it, he was dismayed to see tears welling up in her eyes. Kai hurried to her side, setting down the vase. "What's wrong?" he asked gently.

"It's finally time, isn't it?" she asked, in a small voice.

Kai's feet went cold. "I don't know what you're talking about," Kai replied, but it was a lie. He hated seeing his mother that way, but he just couldn't give up on his dreams. And both of them knew it.

"I've been dreading this day for so long," his mom continued, "But I knew it would come. I was just so scared that I would lose you like I lost your father, but now I've come to see that I can't force you to stay here. It's time to let you spread your wings."

Kai was at a loss for words, his mother, who was always overprotective, who was always caring and always put his needs over her own, was willingly letting him into the unknown, even though he was all she had left. “Mom, are you sure?” he asked, “Isn’t this a really big decision?”

“It is Kai, but I’ve been thinking about it for a long time, and I’m not going to be the one holding you back anymore, because as I love you for my sake, I love you more for yours. I want you to be happy,” She flew into his arms and embraced him fiercely, “I don’t care if you take 6 days or 60 years, I’ll always be here waiting for you.” “I’ll be alright Mom,” Kai fought back tears, “I promise.”

After weeks of flying and countless pit-stops, Kai reached Neptune. At first, it was only a tiny, blue ball in the distance, but it was getting bigger by the minute. Kai was ecstatic, but the closer he got to it, the harder it became to steer. Something was wrong. Suddenly, Kai was thrown backwards in his seat. His head hit the headrest and he spiraled out of control. He made a pitiful attempt to grab the controls, but his arms felt like jelly. Unable to move, he wondered if his dad had felt the same way when he was lost. The more he resisted, the more helpless he felt. He shut his eyes. There was nothing he could do. It was over.

Kai woke up. He was lying in a patch of grass. “Hey buddy,” his father said.

“Dad?” Kai asked, scrambling to his feet, “Is it really you?”

“Yes Kai, I’m here,” his father replied reassuringly, spreading his arms.

Kai broke down in tears, embracing his father fiercely. “Am I dead? Is this heaven?” Kai asked.

“That’s up to you,” His father said, “Because you’re not dead just yet.”

Kai was sobbing violently, “I just want to be with you. It’s not worth it. I don’t want to fight anymore.”

“No!” His father snapped, startling Kai, “That’s where you’re wrong. You have your mother, who is going to wait, patiently, for the rest of her life, for a day that never comes, if you don’t act now! Is that really not worth it? You need to embrace the struggle, and give it everything you have, because what you’ve got is worth it! Believe me, there are millions out there, who would give anything to be in your situation. To have a mother who loves them. That’s what you’ve got, and that’s worth fighting for. And one day, you might have a wife, you might start a family, and if you’re lucky, who knows, you might have children, who will be your entire world! That’s the beauty of life, and you’ll never know it if you don’t fight for it. Now comes the time when you’ve got to dig deep and find the courage within yourself to keep going!”

Tears flowed like a river, down Kai’s face, “I’m not brave enough, Dad, I’m scared.”

“Kai, being brave isn’t about not being scared. It’s about being scared and doing it anyways!”

Kai gasped. Suddenly, as he orbited Neptune and reached the other side, he could move again. Instead of fighting Neptune’s gravity, he could work with it. He just had to wait for the right moment. There it was. Fighting the sickening feeling in his gut, he grabbed the steering wheel, jerking it to the right, and stepping on the pedal. Suddenly, he rocketed forwards, and as he approached the Great Rings, he closed his eyes and took a deep breath, thinking about what his dad had said. “Time to be brave,” he told himself, pulling the lever on his right, and surging forwards instantly. Kai was blinded by the colors as he achieved lightspeed for the first time in human history, hurtling into the unknown, terrified to the very core, but doing it anyway.

Flight of the Golden Kite

Nord Anglia International School, Fall, Nia – 13

Skies splashed with blue, amber and peach surrounded the far city of Weifang. The pitter-patter of tired footsteps, heavy puffing, and small ceaseless chatter filled the desert air. Beating down upon Marco Polo's face, the sun's rays illuminated the golden hues of the dunes that stretched endlessly into the horizon. As if murmuring secrets, the wind bore tales of ancient civilizations and hidden treasures buried beneath the shifting sands. Sweat, grit, muck; the lad's face was smothered in filth from the gruelling expedition. Heaving once, twice, a third time and more, the resistance underfoot left Marco apathetic, and wondering, "Is it *really* worth it?" But, on he would trek in search of stories, inventions and adventure.

Soon enough the horizon turned rust, tangerine, and pumpkin and Marco and his crew did what they could to protect their eyes from the sandy onslaught. Clumps of dust, soot, and smut zipped past the tips of their ears, their robes billowing in the fierce wind, they could see as few as twelve inches ahead. Their path had been swallowed by sand. Howling penetrated the vast desert, burning their faces and sun-burnt skin while stuffing their mouths with grit. They huddled, pushed, panted in a desperate search for shelter and respite; they would not give up.

Swoosh, swish, swash, a vibrant plumage splashed across Marco's eyes. Like cascades of molten gold, fiery red, and liquid honey the feathers flowed widely, unfolding their wings in the heart of the sandstorm's deafening embrace. Adorned with intricate patterns to draw out its features, its wings spanned formidably as it navigated treacherous gales with grace and agility. With every beat of its magnificent wings, the kite climbed with a dancer's finesse. Muscles outstretched, it battled the orange tinge engulfing the storm. Akin to a skilled acrobat, the kite twisted, turned and weaved its way through the chaotic tapestry. Light filtered through its feathers, catching stray rays from the storm's heavy veil.

Marco examined in awe the kite that had so easily conquered the vigorous storm. The kite was not just a work of art; it was a masterpiece of engineering. Its tail, long and graceful, swayed in the wind, providing stability and balance. The kite's head, majestically adorned with a mane of brightly coloured ribbons, gave it an almost regal appearance. The crew gaped at the marvel, like a smudged exquisite gem. The sturdy bamboo frame had been passionately and intricately woven together into a lattice-like structure and covered in a vibrant silk, adorned with scintillating designs of mythical creatures and celestial beings.

Marco listened carefully, he could hear the kite purring, eager to take flight.

The intricate beauty of the creation masked the sudden shift in the intensity of the storm. Dark clouds loomed ominously and the wind shook with an almost malevolent force. It was against this backdrop of chaos that the figure steering the kite became terrifyingly visible.

When juxtaposed with the terrified screeches of the body affixed to it, hearts leaped, bones tensed, and jolts electrifying those below. Scared screams ruptured eardrums as the body was pulled from the heavens. The whirlpools of sand dissipating across the landscape obscured any cries for help. Gazing upwards at the creaking, groaning tangled bamboo mat, shouts of concern cut between the uproar. Polo tried in vain to reach into the subdued crimson but the kite was fading, falling. The man was plummeting.

The body glued to the kite screeched in terror, their cries biting through the sandstorm. The crew's hearts raced as the kite jerked and swayed by the relentless ambush of swirling sand. Toying with the man's fate, the heavens wrenched him north, south, east and west. Screams, shrieks, screeches, squawks ...until smash and silence swamped the men's ears.

The kite crashed through the desert sand, forcing a plume of dust to engulf everything in its path. Marco rushed forward, his heart pounding a jagged rhapsody, his thoughts in a jumbled mess. When the dust had settled, Marco and his crew approached the fallen kite with trepidation. What they saw would forever be etched into their memories. Battered and bruised, the spawling man lay gasping for breath.

Marco whispered "Hello?" gently. Despite the sweat and grime drying on his face, the man appeared to smile wryly. "Uh—ugh, hello" he mumbled. Marco's face eased but his crew were still terrified. An uneasy scent filled their nostrils and made them reel: blood, gore, ichor, his skin was drenched in gashes. "Can you tell me your name, u—uh—what's—your—name?"

"Zhang, my name is Zhang or—r the kite master of Weifang... ha—ow!" the man tried with a laugh to say, but quickly lurched back as if his ribs had just been subject to a nasty uppercut. "Uhm, just kidding no—no one calls me that or has any belief in my k—kites. I'm nothing but a failure in their eyes..."

In the meantime, the crew had pulled themselves together, and there was the sound of busy footsteps and screams of "Get the bandages", "On it", "Water, Water, we're going to need water, stat!", "Quickly, c'mon!", "Here, here, here!" Lifting a hand to his furrowed brow to defend his eyes from the winged sandhills, Polo refused to see failure, "You, a failure? I don't believe it. That invention there", raising a finger to point at the now shredded kite in exclamation, "is an absolute triumph!" Under the dying sun, Marco spotted Zhang's lips slowly crack upwards forming a tired grin.

"It's a bird?"

"Yes, before being totally destroyed, the kite had been constructed to imitate the shape and structure of a bird's wings. A framework of bamboo rods had formed the backbone of the kite, providing stability and support. These rods had been meticulously and painstakingly arranged, woven, and connected with durable silk strings forming a durable and flexible structure. Simple really."

"Simple? Quite the contrary. It's nothing short of sophisticated genius."

"Well, to be honest, I'm not sure. Theoretically, the pilot would use the control handles to manoeuvre the kite through speed. By pulling on the handles, the pilot could tilt the wings of the kite, adjusting the angle of attack and generating lift, allowing the kite to climb higher or descend gracefully as desired though we've just seen how that went..."

"Zhang, don't you worry. Manned or not, kites are the future! Their elegance, capacity, and beauty is certain to take the world by storm!"

His gaze fixed on the green grass of Weifang on the shore, his pen, and paper in hand, Marco felt excited.

- **Entry #356**
- Treasured Diary,

I've been through trouble thick and thin but what wondrous things have I seen. Never has the sun set more gloriously than in the meadows of Weifang. I've shared unforgettable times with an inventor and uncovered a beauty known as the kite which I have to share with the world right away. I'll hold the "The Weifang Kite Festival", and of course Zhang will agree. This is all for now for I have much to do.

— Marco Polo

Alchemy: Gunpowder

Nord Anglia International School, Fong, Nicholas – 11

Prologue:

The wind whistled through the crumbling cobblestone streets of Xianyang, China. The starry night sky looked down on the sleeping houses.

Well, all except one.

On the outskirts of the city, one house still blazed with light in the eerily quiet city. Inside, a man called Huangfu sat on a rickety old chair, holding a small vial of snow white powder. Holding it up to the light, Huangfu smiled to himself. He had finally reached his goal.

“Ughhh,” Huangfu pried himself off his bamboo hammock. He hadn’t slept well the night before. Slipping himself into his tunic, he picked up his collection of vials and his quill before heading out the door.

Huangfu had worked for the Emperor as his Chief Alchemist for five years. The Emperor had tasked him with making a life-extending elixir for him, and Huangfu tried and failed countless of times.

But just last night, Huangfu had gotten it. And he was going to present it to the Emperor today.

Climbing the marble steps, his eyes watched the early sunrise barely visible over the castle’s enormous figure .

As per usual, Huangfu had arrived an hour early due to the harsh Qin laws – being even just one minute late meant death. You could never be too early. Finally reaching the top of the staircase, he stood before a set of menacing iron doors, looming high above him. Two guards, plated in iron armor, snapped to attention.

“What is your business here?” one guard said, standing firm.

“I’m here to see the Emperor. I think I’ve finally created a life-extending elixir,” Huangfu replied.

“Oh? I will check with the Emperor,” the second guard said and he turned around and marched into the palace.

A few minutes later, the guard returned and motioned for Huangfu to come in. As he stepped into the ornate gold walls of the palace, a servant appeared and bowed in front of him. “Master Huangfu, the emperor wishes you to come to him immediately.”

Huangfu followed the servant to the throne room, where on an glistening gold throne was Qin Shi Huangdi, the Emperor of China. Kneeling in front of the Emperor, Huangfu made sure not to make eye contact – that was a death sentence too.

Keeping his head bowed, he said, “Almighty Emperor, I have fulfilled your request, Your Majesty. I have discovered a life-extending elixir!”

The Emperor stroked his beard. “Hmmm. Really, Huangfu? I don’t believe you. You’ve told me time and time again that you’ve discovered it. But they all have turned out to be false. What is your elixir made of this time, hmm?”

“Saltpeter, Your Majesty – a powder made for medicinal purposes. I also added in some charcoal and sulfur.”

The emperor let out a scoff. “Ha! Charcoal? *Saltpeter*? I thought you were a genius, Huangfu! You call that a life-extending elixir! Let me see the vial.”

Huangfu’s face turned scarlet red. He pulled out the vial and gave it to the Emperor.

Closely inspecting it, he said, “Huangfu, I have to say... I am quite disappointed. This was the best that you could do? Really?” With a look of resignation on his face, the Emperor gave the vial back to Huangfu and said, “I am very disappointed, Huangfu. This is the sixth time you have failed. You will not be my Chief Alchemist from this moment on.”

Huangfu clenched his fists, and said, "I'm sorry, Your Majesty. I will burn the elixir and won't bother you any longer." He stood up, and walked out of the palace with his shoulders drooping down in defeat.

Once he got out of the palace, he wanted to scream. He failed. He worked day and night to no avail. Sitting at the top of the staircase, then looked at the city below him. By now, most of the citizens had awakened and were strolling along the streets. Sighing, he trudged back to his humble house.

Huangfu dug a pit and filled it with wood. Setting it alight with a candle, he retrieved the vial of his elixir. Looking at it one last time, he tossed it into the blazing fire with a sigh.

Then suddenly... BOOM!

A loud explosion threw Huangfu off his feet. Where the burning wood lay was now a smoking crater. Huangfu stared in shock. *What in the world happened? Was it some kind of explosion?* Huangfu wondered. He wondered what to do with it, but an ingenious thought hit him.

What if, he thought, I could turn it into weaponry? Then I could redeem myself, please the Emperor and make a military breakthrough especially with all the siege attempts that have been happening!

Determined, he began to work on the world's first missile. He put his heart and soul into his project, worked day and night without rest, carefully constructing it. At last, after two full months of trial and error, Huangfu had finished his masterpiece.

Making a thin wooden container with a fuse, he made a stand out of bamboo for the missile to rest on. Then, very cautiously, he inserted precise measurements of the ingredients he used – 1 ounce of sulfur, 3 ounces of charcoal, and 9 ounces of saltpeter, aiming for maximum explosive capability. He was ready to present it to the Emperor.

He gently carried the missile and a candle. He walked out of his workshop in his home and started walking to the Emperor's palace.

Just then, he heard screaming, followed by aggressive shouting. Huangfu quickly spun around and spotted something – the eastern wall had been breached by an army of Mongols. The Mongols were known for their ruthlessness in combat and were charging straight for Huangfu!

Right behind Huangfu were Chinese reinforcements racing towards the Mongols but they weren't close enough just yet. It was chaos all at once with soldiers shouting to the peasants to get back into their homes and the Mongols screaming their fearsome battle cries.

Huangfu was now surrounded by *two* armies, both armed and ready to have an all-out battle, with him about to be caught in the crossfire.

Huangfu was paralyzed in fear for a few seconds, but then an idea struck him.

He set down the stand and put down the missile. The army was rapidly approaching – he had no room for error. Bringing out the candle, he set the fuse alight, then ran as quick as possible away from the rocket. As he ran, the rocket surged forward towards the oncoming army at an alarming speed, reaching them in three seconds. And just as Huangfu predicted, the rocket combusted and blew an explosion that knocked all of the Mongols back, and injured most of them. A smoking crater stood where the army was.

Bruised and battered, the surviving Mongols looked bewildered about what just happened. Then they suddenly realized that they greatly underestimated the Chinese army and their weaponry. With the Chinese soldiers racing towards them and closing in, the survivors scrambled to their feet and ran as fast they could away from the village.

Huangfu exhaled a big sigh of relief, and when he turned back around, he was greeted by many cheers and grateful thanks from the townsfolk, who had been cowering in fear the whole time. The soldiers were impressed by Huangfu's amazing weapon. Everyone was applauding and cheering for him. Soldiers were patting him on the back and peasants ran up to him and asked a million questions like what it was and how he made it.

Huangfu was grinning ear to ear, and tried to tell everyone that he just wanted to serve his country well. As he made his way through the enormous crowd, his heart filling with happiness, a royal messenger appeared.

He announced, "Sir Huangfu, the Emperor would like to see you immediately."

The Invention of the Chinese Crossbow

Nord Anglia International School, Fung, Eunice – 12

Zhu Hao clambered up towards the top of the pointed mountain, which consisted of a narrow conspicuous beam of golden light protruding from its tip. The beam of shine's power penetrated the starry skies with its impalpable, deadly light, outshining the pinpricks of stars dotting the navy-blue backdrop above.

The abrasive, jagged surface of the mountain scraped against the soles of his shoes like daggers as he attempted to trudge his way up the pathway. Despite his best efforts, the pathway was sloped too high to stabilise his position. He tumbled down to his starting point, as if it was lubricated.

However, Zhu Hao was unwilling to renounce due to his determination exhorting him to persist. He grabbed sharp pieces of rock – which displayed themselves by protruding from the slope – and pulled himself upwards, stationing his feet on the bottom rocks and being vigilant so he didn't impale his body.

Once he reached the top of the miserable slope, he struggled through the rough surfaces surrounding the mountain. Zhu Hao experienced the harsh surface against the soles of his feet through his eroding shoes.

Zhu Hao peered down below and spotted the withering trees – which were as massive as cockroaches – swaying promiscuously. The militant, tumultuous wind besieged the colossal forest far below, transporting masses of desaturated leaves through the air.

That was a mistake. Apprehension fell on Zhu Hao's chest like a hundred-pound anvil; his heart was pounding sadistically as if it was awaiting its last beat. He clung firmly to the edge of the mountain, gathering the chilly air to his lungs, though it only made him sweat profusely, triggering him to feel more trepidation that did not abate.

After a stupendous amount used to convince his mind, he sidestepped through the edges until he was awaited by an appropriate surface for him to repose.

Zhu Hao ensconced on the ground, drenched in quandary. The bellicose wind forced the dying leaves on him; he fled after continuing to be bombarded five minutes later.

Despite this, Zhu Hao persisted up the cuspidated mountain until he detected the beam of shine. The column of light was encircled by a ring of cyan flames that stretched towards the sky. This concealed half of the beam, which blazed from a ginormous crater.

“That wretched coward,” Zhu Hao muttered indignantly, he kneeled, took out a bronze flask from his sack and opened its cork. “At least I have a prize to welcome my return.”

He positioned the flask next to the ultra-marine flames which rushed into the flask violently, as if it were sucked in by a vacuum. Once all the flames were gleaned, Zhu Hao forced the cork down the flask and shoved it into his sack. The exposed column was full of effulgence and burned more brightly than ever, embroidered with delicate and archaic Chinese characters elucidating the tales of his ancestors in the past. They drifted like spectres.

Zhu Hao shielded his eyes as another squint could permanently blind him. He cautiously turned to depart until he overheard an explosion. He shifted towards the noise – with his right palm over his eyes – and saw

the beam transformed into a swirling body of cyan flames, its scales glimmered in the crescent moon. The inferno collided together to morph into a head of a Chinese Dragon.

The dragon's triangular head was surrounded with dancing inferno, resembling windblown fur. Its horns were vines that clung to the handsome trees below, elegantly twisted; the dragon's ardent whiskers steered towards the opposing direction effortlessly against the wind. The dragon's eyes glowed a striking gold, posing a menacing yet omniscient impression.

Politely, Zhu Hao tried to extricate but the turquoise dragon utilised its misty talons and grabbed him by the collar of his hàn fú. It pulled him towards the endless crater below, he heard echoing voices beckoning him to descend.

Zhu Hao was a cat above water, squirming in the dragon's grip furiously. When he finally realised that he was hopeless, he closed his eyes and focused on the searing heat around his torso to stem the feeling of the strain in his rapid heartbeat, as well as the loudening voices below.

The dragon's talons loosened. He began to tumble through the hole. He felt as if the air had escaped his lungs and that his heart was travelling up his ribs, the rate of his descending caused the chilly air to attack him as the voice started to crescendo at a rapid pace.

But the journey began to slow down. He was floating with golden sparks gently encircling him.

Everything began to gradually stop.

Completely non-plussed, Zhu Hao scanned the sparks around him which flickered like fire against the wind, as if coaxing him to do something. Due to Zhu Hao's persisting confusion, the specks turned increasingly more aggravated. They congregated individually until they assembled as one mahooosive bundle, hovering towards his sack.

Zhu Hao discerned that the contents in the sack still there. Without hesitation, he seized the flask out of his sack. However, they shoved it out of his fingertips which caused the flask to drift in mid-air.

They needed something else, Zhu Hao thought, how convenient.

He aggressively shook the sack, the contents spilled. Two pieces of lengthy rope, a bulky piece of wood, two hooked branches that attached to the sack while he was traipsing up the mountain. The golden sparks finally split – signifying that they got what they wanted – but he was completely clueless on what they needed those materials for.

The specks of light assembled as one clump again, except, it started to adjust. A portion of the sparks split to form around the larger portion of specks. Two of them grew arms and the other two morphed into legs with shimmering shoes that contrasted with the murky chasm. It was then discovered from Zhu Hao that they were forming himself.

His glimmering eyes were crammed with determination as he started to plan some sort of elaborate ploy. Golden arrows pointed to the only exit: the entrance to the chasm – which was up there, far away.

After a few more seconds, the shimmering picture of the impossible event separated into tiny flecks again. They continued to annoyingly circle around him.

“How can I flee this place with rope and wood?” Zhu Hao questioned, incorporated with a mixture of enquiry and slight trepidation. This might be some form of hoax.

The flecks did not answer – evidently so.

Observing the materials he acquired, Zhu Hao listed the utilities of each one to attain an improved understanding of how he was going to abscond. Even though his availability of materials were not great, he instantly had an indication for what he was about to create.

Firstly, he secured the first piece of rope on both ends of the bulky piece of wood, arranging a bow-like structure that would form as the base of his invention. Secondly, he bonded the second rope to the end of one of the branches. This formed a sort of anchor. Lastly, he connected the second piece of rope to the first. He dragged the rope from the base and utilised the second branch to hold the stretched rope in place.

Zhu Hao was done. He aimed at the entrance to the gorge and nudged the second branch. The first branch soared up the chasm with the rope tied to its end which was connected to the rope tied to the base, it launched Zhu Hao halfway through the gorge.

Everything stopped – even gravity. So, Zhu Hao had credence that that was the explanation to why a frail branch could support his weight.

He began to clamber. He gripped the rope to secure his place and gently placed his weathered shoes against the consistently abrasive chasm.

After a few minutes, he felt the rays of golden sunshine brushing his face. Warmth travelled through his body, filling him with elatedness. He did not discern that he forgot to bring the flask.

He stumbled out of the chasm. It was daytime already. The jagged mountain offered an excellent view of the emerald forest that spread across the swaying grass, which were tickling the tree barks with its soft yet pointed tips. The wind was not at all promiscuous but playful, rustling the leaves and scattering them all around the light blue sky.

Descending the mountain was much easier: he was grateful that he could return home.

In 400 BCE, Zhu Hao inaugurated the earliest representation of the Chinese Crossbow after taking inspiration from his creation at the gorge. The Chinese Crossbow was both effective and powerful in the battlefield and it was used by fifty-thousand crossbowmen in the army.

Zhu Hao did not get the prize that he so expectantly desired from the flask – due to him losing it – but his invention of the Chinese Crossbow made him a scholar-official.

The Peach Tea Tragedy

Nord Anglia International School, Kung, Valarie – 12

Liao Liu was a very quiet and reserved woman. If anyone asked her for directions, she would point in the right direction and explain no further; if anyone asked a neutral how's your day, she'd shyly bow her head and reply a meek, 'well', and be on her way. Even when her husband fell into debt and ruined their reputation quite rapidly, and the villagers hounded their house and tried to obtain gossip from her, she would simply tell them to leave and shut the windows. Liao Liu was a very quiet and reserved woman, but there was a reason for all this: inside her mind was a mixture of sparkling spite and rampageous rage, aided with a little sprinkle of sorrows, most of which were directed at her husband's faults, that she preferred to zip her mouth shut, to prevent this poison from escaping her throat.

She's always told Shen Nung to not gamble their fortune away. Told him not to invest on that silk ship because intuition told her it'd sink (and it did). Yet he never listened, for Shen Nung followed his own thoughts and constantly told her to, "mind your half-baked thoughts. You were designed to be an ornament to my reputation or a servant to my needs, so what good is there for you to blabber on about? Don't forget I'm the one providing money to the table, not you." Always, it was that last sentence that incensed Liao Liu the most. Liao Liu was the one selling vegetables and fruit, fixing broken furniture with her own hands, endlessly calculating her profits while he gambled all day long. How delusional was he to think he was better than her?

So Liao Liu decided to take matters into her own hands. For months, she had been secretly growing peaches on the hill behind her house. Her late mother, being an arborist, had long taught her what soil and which area to grow fruits. The idea came to Liao Liu in a fever dream, in which she saw the sky painted pink and the grass even pinker, and pink trees that sprouted and threw peaches all around. In the dream, Liao Liu picked up a peach and fine, silk linen sprouted out of them, and from this, she concluded that the very peach she picked up symbolised wealth.

In the early morning of a fine Spring day, when it was just past dawn, Liao Liu woke up and slipped away from the bed she shared with Shen Nung. After dressing herself, she grabbed two buckets from the shed and took her usual walk to the hill. Yawning and stretching, Liao Liu closed her eyes and felt around the first peach, making sure it was just about right to be eaten. She believed that the first fruit should always be ripe, for it also symbolised a good harvest for her. As she selected her peaches, that pit of rage and spite that had cumulated for years in her heart began to cool down and formed Pride, something that tingled her senses and sent joy running up and down her veins. As if the sky understood her, the dark started to unveil a new canvas so jubilantly orange and pink that she started laughing; a sound so pure and genuine she almost thought she would never feel again.

After collecting two pails of peaches, Liao Liu walked down the hill and home to gather some equipment, before heading to the marketplace. As the day dawned, people started coming towards the marketplace, with many of them giving silent judgemental yet surprised faces at her. After a while, Liao Liu summoned her inner banshee and hollered, "PEACH TEA, PEACH TEA, A REMEDY TO SADNESS AND A MESSENGER OF STRENGTH! EIGHT PENNIES A CUP!"

The village chief came to her and eyed her suspiciously, before sipping the tea. He took a few more sips. Then the whole cup. Then announced with optimism that this was the best tea he had ever tasted and it should replace the plain oolong tea they had been drinking so long. Liao Liu blushed and said it was too high a compliment, but then the villagers had already left and before long, people left their stalls to try Liao Liu's peach tea, which stayed true to its effects.

For once, Liao Liu chattered merrily with the villagers, allowing her pride to evolve into happiness. But this happiness would not last long, for as she served her forty-ninth cup, a coarse voice yelled, "So there you are, thief!"

Thief? Who would dare call her a thief?

Liao Liu spun around and saw Shen Nung waddling near her stall. "W-what do you mean, darling?" Stammered Liao Liu, as confused as everyone else in the market.

“You stole my recipe! You think you are so smart to be selling things that belong to me, hm? Admit it, this peach tea thing was made by me, not you. You’re a woman, anyway, how would you think of such a recipe?” Berated Shen Nung, pointing his sausage-like finger at her.

Liao Liu looked at her knife. Then the boiling cauldron. She could spill it on him. She could stab him. But now, she would remain calm. The crowd stared at her and her husband, hundreds of different feelings thrown into the air and stabbing Liao Liu.

“Ah, no wonder the tea tasted so good. When I first saw Liao Liu’s cauldron, I thought she had something evil up her sleeve. Shen Nung, you are a mastermind! This tea of yours is simply astonishing!” Said the village chief, the very man who tasted the first peach tea.

“Exactly. This greedy wench had the audacity to steal my recipe and manipulate everyone to think of it as hers!” Scoffed her husband, wrinkling his nose.

“Shen Nung is wrong.” Announced Liao Liu, beginning to explain truthfully how the idea of peach tea came to her. “This recipe came to me through a dream. I had seen the pinkest of skies and the rosiest peach trees, when one started throwing peaches all around. I had picked one up and—”

“Oh?” Shen Nung snorted. “You mean to tell me you came up with some extraordinary invention through a dream? You must think us as stupid fools who would believe your lies.” The villagers looked at one another, starting to whisper and gossip their thoughts. They did not even try to hide their mocking laughter.

“But—”

“But you’re nothing but a thief. We’ll talk about this when we get home. Now.” Commanded Shen Nung, grabbing his wife’s wrists tightly. He might just as well asphyxiate me with those hands of his, Liao Liu thought, hot tears forming in the crater of her eyes.

What use was it? Everyone believed what the village chief and Shen Nung said. Because they were men. They both had the same self-proclaimed superiority over her. They commanded the mindsets of ‘feeble’ women and everything they see. As if day turned to night, the villagers hurled obscene names and scorn at Liao Liu. Even the villagers she talked to turned against her. It was as if everything she had done, everything she had said had evaporated into thin air. What a quick betrayal.

She seized the knife. The soil turned red. Liao Liu disappeared.

Many people will believe the peach tea was made by a man named Shen Nung, who first got the idea of creating peach tea by accidentally dropping a peach into his tea. But only true witnesses and long lost documents will ever say Liao Liu had created the tea first.

This is an account history will never know,
This is an account His Story will never acknowledge.

China's inventions

Pui Kiu College, Chung, Yuen Ting Christy – 13

Some misconceptions about China are that they lack scientific knowledge, and are only famous for its history, culture, cuisine and more. However, China has made inventions that we use in our daily lives, and some inventions are the most incredible inventions ever made, including papers, gunpowders that were invented in ancient China, noodles and ketchup that we use everyday, to the first paper money ever made, and that was 1000 years ago. Moreover, China has always been one step ahead of other countries with their inventions, the past and the future, from paper to one of the most advanced technologies ever made, AI.

China's past inventions are very useful for our daily lives. For example, the four great inventions of China, including paper, gunpowder, printing press and compass. For paper, not only do we use paper everyday, they were the one of the most useful inventions during ancient China. It provides a medium for people to write on, express their feelings and write letters to their loved ones. As for gunpowder, it is used in historical weapons, fireworks and more. Gunpowder was very important in China because it helped the Chinese in military uses to develop rockets, canon, bombs and more. For printing presses, the Chinese used it for adding ink onto paper, clothes and more. This way they can communicate with people by writing, and make learning materials for people to read. Lastly, compasses. The Chinese compasses originally pointed to the south instead of north. Compasses were first used for worshipping and fortune telling but now it is used for navigating.

Firstly, the introduction to AI. AI is short for artificial intelligence, it is used for providing personalized recommendations to people, other than that, AI is very important for businesses as it can help them increase their efficiency. AI can help manufacturing, researching, developing, innovating and daily uses. AI in China was created by Qian Xuesen and Wu Wenjun. They first developed it in the 1980s.

Some examples of artificial intelligence are AI workers, or also known as AI engineers. Over the years, more companies have started to use AI workers, including restaurants. Restaurants use AI workers that can serve customers their food and can even take the customers orders. Other than that, cleaning AI workers basically walk around the place and their bottom part has a machine that cleans the floor, an amazing feature is that these AI workers can detect if there's items blocking their way or if there's someone passing by, therefore they won't hurt anyone in an accident. Furthermore, AI workers can self learn and increase efficiency which is much better than human workers. This is one of the most amazing inventions China has ever made.

However, according to citizens, some say that AI will be the future of humans and will take over humans. They say that these AI workers are better with improved efficiency and they're new and interesting which will make people want AI workers rather than human workers. If this happens, those human workers will lose their jobs, it might seem like it's not a big deal as they can just find other jobs if they have a good education level. What about those old cleaners? They are already a high age to be working but they still continue to clean because they need money. If AI cleaners take over them, it will be hard for them to find new jobs. Therefore, AI is a controversial invention as it might benefit businesses and entrepreneurs but will cause a bad effect to those who are taken over by AI.

Nonetheless, AI is still an amazing development. Compared to past inventions that China has made, they have definitely improved and will continue to develop more useful and innovative creations to help everyone's lives. Moreover, artificial intelligence might have a downside, but hopefully these creative developers will find solutions and clear all these problems to make our future brighter, happier and better.

In conclusion, China is not only famous for its history and culture, their creations and inventions definitely benefit everyone. Hopefully China will continue to improve and develop even better inventions to help everyone in their lives and create more opportunities to help China grow stronger. As much as AI might be controversial, it has a lot of potential to become a better development, and help each and one of us for our lives.

Independence

Pui Kiu College, Leung, Sheung Chi Kyle – 13

"I remember... Chen, I remember it all..." Zhao whispered in an almost indistinguishable tone, as flushes of blue sparkling droplets of tears dripped into splashes of water onto rugged, worn-out tiles.

Suddenly, without any indication, he jerked the broken wooden door open in a swift motion, frantically looking all around the abandoned room for *something*. The shattered pieces of memories that had been stuck in his mind finally formed *everything* he had been searching for, in vivid clarity.

"Where is it?... It's supposed to be here. *She* left it here! *I* left it here!" Zhao threw the cobweb-covered documents all over the floor, seemingly untouched for millennia. Zhao looked at Chen and *froze*, finally breaking free from the prison cell he had once created for himself. Standing there, solemn and easily wise to what he thought was his purpose, that one something he had been looking for. The droplets, replaced by a sea of water, cascaded down from Zhao's cheeks. His breathing intensified as he gripped his chest, as if trying to keep himself together.

He ran.

He ran with no purpose, no destination and no *one*.

Zhao kept running until he finally reached *a room*.

"Zhao! Wait up!" Chen echoed into the dimly lit room as beads of sweat started pouring down his face as he tried to catch up with Zhao, "Did I do something *wrong*? Zhao, you've got to tell me!"

Kneeling there on the cold, hard concrete floor was Zhao. His face, grasped tightly in his bare hands was scarlet red. He looked bewildered, confused and lost all at the same time.

Chen advanced towards him, "You must tell me what's wrong."

"Sometimes... you even sound like her." Chen, taken aback, listened closely to what Zhao was about to whisper next. "Do you remember this place? Do you have any of her memories? We were right here, 16 years ago."

Abruptly, Zhao stood up, as he recalled a memory of his via a hologram that played out of his head.

There, standing before both of them was Sue.

"Zhao..." Sue said in a calm, soothing voice. Chen stood still, as he watched and listened in pure concentration, as if being in a trance. All his senses had been heightened in that very moment. His breathing trembled in the cold frigid air, his hands were gripped firmly on his blue jeans. The surroundings had completely disappeared from his mind, leaving only Zhao and Sue in his vision.

"Yes, master?" Zhao answered immediately, like an obedient little child.

"Escape. You still have time, the war hasn't commenced, you don't have to do this with me."

"But I want to!"

"I know you do..." Sue smiles brokenly. "But please, please understand: If we lose, we'll be killed. And if we win, we can never go back."

"Why would I want to go back when you're here?" Zhao lifted his lips naively, a pure smile of happiness forming across his face.

Sue let out a small, apprehensive chuckle and took Zhao's hand, "Silly..."

The hologram disappeared.

"Everything I did, I did for her. Now she's gone." Zhao quivered in his stance. "But I'm still here... Sometimes, I wonder if she can see me through your eyes."

Zhao questioned in a hopeful, yet regretful tone, "What would she think of me now?" He slumped down onto the floor, looking for the unattainable answer.

Chen contemplated the implications in his mind. He lifted both hands and sweetly hugged Zhao, wrapping his arms around him.

"Well, I think you're pretty great."

Zhao had longed to hear those very words from Sue. She was never perfect, but she was the only one he had. Maybe she was foolish, and maybe even selfish, but she did everything in her power for the Rebellion, the very one that occurred in China many years ago to sustain equal rights for robots and humans. But Chen wasn't Sue... He was an entirely different person. And in that moment of euphoria, Zhao finally understood.

Zhao tried to keep himself together but ultimately failed. His words broke up, and all he could say were stuttering sounds. Hot tears streamed down his face as he squeezed his eyelids shut, hoping they would stop. The choppy breathing and watery eyes remained for quite some time, and he stood there unmoving. He had always cherished Sue, but could he do the same for Chen? The guilt of still caring about Sue when he could have been there for Chen washed over him like a tsunami.

Zhao had reset himself after the loss.

Deleting all former memories and going back to factory settings.

Who am I now in this world without her? What could I do now? Petty and dull with the nerve to doubt her? All of these thoughts that Zhao's mind had once held trapped him in an infinite labyrinth. But he knew that it didn't matter anymore. His life didn't depend on Sue. He was his own independent person, and he knew it.

He could finally be there, not for Sue, but for Chen. And as they sat there, warm and in peace, they drifted off into slumber.

As the years wash over them, Zhao and Chen are now activists and the heads of the 'AndroHuman' campaign, a group of individuals who sought after a future where robots and humans can finally coexist together.

Together, with all the might and will they have, people from all walks of life can now bask in a new reality of liberty.

New Tales of China's Inventions

Pui Kiu College, Siu, Lok Yan – 13

Most people from different parts of the world know about the paper and gunpowder invented in the ancient China, but not much knew about the other inventions we use today, from noodles to ketchup, even paper money. Not just in the past, nowadays, social media platforms are trying to be like WeChat, China has even become the world leader in making solar panels, planting new forests, and creating electric cars. With such creativity, what new inventions might appear today or in the future? Let's find out!

Back in the past, after the industrial transformation, most industries rely on the traditional crafts, therefore their technique level is not high, labour efficiency is low, and the intensity of labour is relatively high. Nowadays, China promotes high technology, high added value, low pollution, low emission and strong competitiveness, so China is making a change in their technology level by inventing the sixth generation of technology(6G) and digital currency. I'm sure that most of you had heard about 5G, which is also known as the fifth generation of technology. The function of 6G is similar to 5G but its network speed is 100 times faster than 5G network, the delay of the network can even be reduced to microsecond level, it is very fascinating. Moreover, the 6G network will be a fully connected world integrating terrestrial mobile communications and satellite communications, achieving seamless global coverage. This is something that 5G can't do, with such network in our daily lives, we will have a convenient life with the internet. Now, in terms of 6G research, China is in the lead throughout the whole world.

Secondly, the image of money has a huge difference as well. The most common image which most people have is paper money, coins or even virtual currency, but China is inventing a new type of money called the digital currency. Unlike Alipay and WeChat pay, you don't have to bind your bank card to use your phone to pay. The biggest feature of digital currency is its "touch" function. To pay someone, all you have to do is to open your digital wallet and touch the phone of who you're going to pay, then it will automatically pay, making the payment faster and convenient.

To summarise, the new inventions of China will bring us a better and convenient life, both the 6G network and the digital currency are turning the world into a more advanced society, giving people a better life, in the future, there may be more technology invented by China, and the creativity of the people of China will never be a thing in the past.

From Darkness to Redemption:

A Tale of Love and Loss

Pui Kiu College, Yip, Sze Yi Lois – 13

A feeble light flickered from the man's calloused hand, his hungry eyes scouring the surrounding darkness, footsteps echoing the stretching corridor as he finally approached his goal. There the white porcelain stood, in the middle of the chamber, finally catches his eye as the light from his lamp reflected upon its surface, the man scrambled towards it, bathing in its heavenly glow,

"Free me..." a feeble whisper spouts from the vase, the man jumps,

"Who goes there?" but the vase beckons him closer, the desire overpowers his senses, the man thought nothing of it, too enamored by the presence of the vase,

"The vase, it's finally mine! Mine!" he cackles as his hands grasp the vase with intent, a malicious power growing thick in the air as he lifts the vase. The man embraces the vase with a ravenous grin, the relic in the legends finally in his hands, he prances around the chamber, a vile grin plastered on his face. Still dancing, he unknowingly steps on wet moss and loses his footing, the vase tumbling out of his hands.

The once smooth porcelain shatters into pieces, the piercing noise resounds in the room, the man's ears ring, cold sweat dripping from his brow as his face twists into a look of distraught and horror, unbeknownst to him, the room is enveloped in dark heady smoke. The man realizes all too late, as he senses a presence behind him, scarlet red eyes pierce through him, his mouth rips open to scream, yet it was for naught, a great, malevolent evil has returned to the world once more, along with its insatiable hunger for human flesh.

The ancient dragon soars to the black expanse of the night sky, leaving nothing but the shattered remains of the vase behind.

The starved dragon dashed through mountains and rivers with haste, refusing to stop even for a little break. Out of nowhere, it halted to a stop. Jiao smelt something familiar. The sickly-sweet scent, addictive and irresistible. Jiao felt a rush of adrenaline coursing through its veins, lunging its body toward the delectable metallic scent, hoping to locate its prey. From the corner of Jiao's scarlet sharp eyes, it noticed a little village in the distance. Jiao grinned with a sinful look in its gleaming eyes, transforming itself into a boy.

Upon entering the village, Jiao gained countless sympathetic stares from the local villagers, fulfilling his vile intentions. He continued to walk through the village in search of vulnerable targets, as he was doing so, something hit Jiao hard on the back of his head.

"Hey, we've never seen you around before!" a boy around Jiao's artificial age shouted. "Who are you?" Jiao turned around and the boy gasped in shock.

"You... You have red eyes! Oh god, it's a demon!" The startled boy turned his back and ran.

Jiao chuckled and mumbled, "Coward."

The next day came and the boy from yesterday came back. But this time, with his friends.

"Hey! Demon child, remember me?" Jiao rolls his eyes in annoyance.

"You know what to do." The boy whispers to his friends. They slowly approach Jiao, each holding a wooden stick.

The next thing Jiao knew, he was lying on the ground, bleeding. Who knew humans could be this strong? Just as he was about to pass out, a boy with an eye patch approached him in concern. He didn't say anything and carried Jiao back to his home in a hurry. By the time they had reached the boy's home, Jiao had already lost consciousness.

Jiao woke to a cooling sensation on his forehead, he opened his eyes and in front of him, the same boy with the eye patch was sitting beside him with a towel on his hand.

“Oh hey, you finally woke up.”

“Who are you?” Jiao questioned in curiosity.

“I’m Zhou. What’s your name?”

“My name is... “ he hesitates, “Jiao.”

From that day forward, Zhou decided to let Jiao stay at his house until he was fully recovered from his injuries; they became inseparable since then. Years have gone by and the seasons have changed, yet their friendship remains the same as ever.

One day, Zhou and Jiao went on a stroll up in the mountains. They had been walking for a long time so they sat down on a big rock on a cliffside. Jiao stairs into the distance, pondering about his purpose here. He had been plotting in his mind about killing Zhou ever since day one. However, something inside his corrupted mind kept refusing as if Zhou became a part of him. He ceaselessly told himself that Zhou was only a mere human that the benevolent gods had created, so he decided to kill him... Today.

“Hey, are you alright Jiao? You seem troubled.” Zhou questioned with worry in his eyes, the silence between them was loud as Jiao struggled to put his feelings into words,

“...Zhou, there’s something I wish to tell you.”

“I’m listening.”

“I... ” Jiao sighs deeply, he walks to the ledge of the cliff and jumps.

“Jiao!” Rushing to the edge of the cliff, the dark of the abyss looked immensely suffocating, Zhou’s eyes darting and searching desperately to locate his dear friend, the more he peered into the abyss, the more daunting it became. A glint of red emerged from the black of the abyss, the ground rumbled and the red glow rose from beneath the cliff along with gusts of wind, hauling up gravel and dust.

Zhou was hoisted into the air and fell with a great thump, head throbbing, he lifted himself back up, obsidian-like black scales adorned a long body, obscuring the sunlight, long, silky, carmine mane swished with the wind, and blood-red horns, winding like twigs on a tree, sat on top of the dragon’s head. Jiao’s piercing red pupils centered at Zhou’s dilated ones.

Without warning, the dragon lunged at Zhou, jaws spread to reveal sharp, jagged canines. Zhou braced for impact, but it never came. Gazing at him was the dragon, pearl-like tears welled up in softened eyes,

“Jiao...?” Voice quivering, Zhou stood up,

“Is that you? Just what is going on?” Jiao gazed at him, forlorn expression clear even in it’s draconic form,

“I should have been honest with you,” Jiao’s voice is now a low rumble, the ground quakes gently as he continues, “I...I am the dragon of the north, the one behind the bloodshed, the ruthless killings, the massacres.” Rising up from the clouds of dust, it reveals its entire form, the scales ripple, adorning his form with an ethereal, yet lethal glow.

“I know my apologies would not change anything, for they all lie in the past now. Still, I am willing to pay. To atone for all the sins I have committed in my past life.” Zhou was silent as the dragon’s eyes gleamed and drew blood from itself, shaping it into a dagger.

“I want you to put an end to this. Kill me, Zhou.” Zhou’s head snapped up, as unshed tears enveloped his widened eyes.

‘No!’ The two stared at each other, the dragon’s claw dropping the dagger into the palms of Zhou’s hands.

The handle of the dagger was surprisingly warm to the touch, Jiao lowered his body, head bowed to Zhou.

“Jiao! No, I refuse!” Desperation laced thick into Zhou's voice, cracking as he shouted, the tears cascaded down his cheeks and onto the dagger.

“Thank you, I am glad to have met you.” Before Zhou could move, Jiao pulled him into an embrace.

Zhou’s hands frantically tried to loosen his grip, but the dragon was stronger, their bodies tightly crushed together as the blade of the dagger broke through the tough scales of the dragon and into its beating heart.

“I’m sorry.” Came the last whisper from Jiao, limbs still encircled around Zhou’s writhing body.

Red, hot blood gushed out of the wound, staining the soil. The great dragon’s body slumped to the ground with a shuddering thump, the metallic tang of blood soon dispersed, yet Zhou’s anguished cries lingered in the stifling air.

Somber footsteps headed into a small cottage, devoid of warmth. Zhou was tired, his eye bags were evident and disheveled hair proved it, blood-soaked cloth lay in an unwashed heap on the ground. The sun was setting and he should be going to sleep, he walked to his bed as something black caught his eye. He was not aware of buying such an object, something covered in black silk cloth, the setting sun’s rays rendering the cloth in almost a liquid state. His tear-stained hands gingerly lifted the silk, a magnificent pearl-white porcelain vase decorated with delicate blue patterns came into his view.

Tears trickled down his already stained face unabashedly, as he took the vase in, realizing the patterns adorned on it marked Jiao and his everyday life in great detail along with breathtaking illustrations of animals and flowers.

Years have gone by since Jiao’s death, the legend of the Dragon of the North is still known by all, things have changed however, the little cottage by the village was the world renowned porcelain master’s abode, and many have come to pursue the craft while others raised immensely high prices for a piece. The master was secluded and seldom showed his face, but when he did, all the face betrayed was a forlorn expression, lingering in the past, a time when the house only bore two people, but had the warmth of thousands, when only one piece of cherished porcelain remained, filled with jasmine flowers lovingly hand picked for his beloved.

Museum of Evocation

Singapore International Hong Kong, Kam, Hei Yin Cadence – 12

A man is wandering through the maze of corridors that is the museum.

He does not know how long he has been wandering like this; inside the museum, time seems to still and yet continue to flow. The fluorescent lights are always on, the guards remain at their posts, gazes never wavering as he drifts through the halls, and the plaques under the exhibits remain perpetually blank. There are no clocks in this museum. Sometimes a woman comes, dressed in dark, solemn robes, but she never speaks to him, and she leaves too soon.

He passes paintings of long gone times, the colours lustreless and the details murky, unelaborate inventions covered with rust, sculptures and carvings that stare at him with empty, lifeless eyes. Every exhibit he comes across is new, but he has passed through the same rooms over and over again.

The man's fingers accidentally skim across one of the blank plaques. To his surprise, a three-dimensional scene forms from mist, swirling and meandering, and a young voice rings out.

“According to Chinese legend, the saw was invented by Lu Ban, a master carpenter who was later deified by the common people. One day when he was gathering wood, he cut his hand on a spiky leaf. Inspired by the leaf's texture, Lu Ban would go on to invent the saw, a more efficient tool to cut trees.”

Curiosity ignited, he wanders further, brushing his fingers against one gilded plaque, and another. Soon, the halls of the museum are reverberating with the narrator's voice.

“This is a prototype of a kite, which could stay up in the air for three days before...”

“One of the first drills was created in China, during the Zhou Dynasty, by...”

“Grappling hooks and battering rams were used in combat more than two millennia ago...”

With renewed energy, the man rushes from exhibit to exhibit, listening intently to the tales woven by the narrator. He only stops when he reaches the last exhibit in the room: an umbrella.

The umbrella is crude and rudimentary, only consisting of cowhide stretched over a wooden frame and a long stick as the handle. The man reaches out to touch the plaque—

Images flood, rush, pour in on him, and the man is overwhelmed, carried into the memories of someone else.

~ ~ ~

Raindrops fell, speckled gems from the turbulent sky, rocked by sudden gales and lashing thunder. Women rushed for the shelter of the pavilions, their pastel skirts billowing behind them; men were forced to ignore the rain and continue working.

Among the women who had been caught in the unexpected deluge was a wife by the name of Lu Yun. From the safety of the pavilion, she watched her husband doggedly labour despite the pouring rain, and wished there was something she could do to ease his burden. Something that could shield him from the sun and the rain, like a portable pavilion that you could carry.

After the rain ceased, Lu Yun hurried home and gathered materials for her planned project. Cowhide, wood, her husband's saw... after a week, it was ready. She called it an “umbrella”.

In this way, Lu Yun invented the world's first umbrella.

After Lu Yun gave her invention to her husband, her husband used it every day, rain or shine. On especially tempestuous days, he was so grateful to her that he was rendered speechless, unable to fully describe his gratitude and love for her.

Lu Yun died a mere two years later, taking her husband's unborn child with her. The villagers offered to help bury her, but he refused – this emotion was something private, to be hidden, only for himself and his wife.

As the sepulchral night fell, her husband stood there alone, crying, mourning, while rain cascaded down around him like saltless tears.

~ ~ ~

The man draws his hand back from the umbrella, staggers with the added memories, the memories... that he now knows to be his own.

Because the man *remembers*. He remembers hours of onerous, gruelling work under the burning sun. He remembers grief and anguish, kneeling over his wife's grave as the raindrops drifted and twirled, freed from gravity by the wind. He remembers getting deified, ascending to the heavens, watching the power of Chinese kingdoms wax and wane over the centuries, blessing all the builders and contractors who prayed to him with persistence and resilience... He *remembers*, remembers it all, his whole long immortal life of more than two thousand years. He remembers yearning to be forgotten, yearning to live a truly mortal life and be reunited with his loved ones in the afterlife, yearning to speak one last sentence to his wife before she left him. And he remembers, being so inundated with grief... that he forced himself to forget his very name, his history, just to escape the sorrow and suffering.

Lu Ban, Chinese god of inventions, *remembers*. Even though he couldn't, even though he shouldn't.

And now he knows why.

~ ~ ~

There are deities, who have always been deities, who have been ever since the world was formed and will be until the world is razed, who have never known a human life's struggles and sorrows and hopes and dreams. But the ones who were once human cannot forget their past, and therefore they continue to be subject to human emotions and human wishes, until they live out the two destinies of deities – to live on forever, waiting for the centuries to pass, or to evanesce, to pass out of the collective memory into nonexistence.

For deities need memories to survive; this is a rule that cannot be broken. A deity without the memory of the people will dissipate and perish, even if they have memories of themselves; but a deity without memories of themselves is no longer a deity, but rather a shell, a husk, a lacuna in their former self, reduced to less than a soul but never able to go to the underworld, trapped in a perpetual state of oblivion.

But more than that, there is the cause for their amnesia. Sometimes it is anger, sometimes it is torment, but most of the time it is grief. And if the grief is so strong it can reduce a deity to less than a soul, it is enough to trap the soul who is the target of that grief in the mortal world, until the deity accepts their emotions.

~ ~ ~

So Lu Ban knows who he will see when he turns from the umbrella.

“We both know what you need to do,” the spirit of his wife speaks behind him.

Lu Ban does know now. And he doesn't want to do it, because it'll mean that he'll never see his wife again in this world, in this body. But the more he resists, the more he understands that he has to let his wife go, so she can join in the natural cycle of the human soul.

He doesn't speak, but they can both sense the shift in his emotions.

The exit appears in the wall behind Lu Yun, but Lu Ban does not step through. Not yet. He still needs to say something to his wife.

"Even after you are reincarnated, I will still be there, watching over you. And we will be together in every life you live. I promise."

It's then that his wife smiles, a true and real smile of unadulterated gratitude. "Thank you." With those words, she dissipates, to be reincarnated into a new life.

Lu Ban steps out into the sunlight, finally at peace. Behind him, the museum of his imprisonment, now cast in shadow, crumbles, withers, falls. All that is left is him.

Lu Ban spreads his wings, and he's flying, soaring through the sky. The wind whistles in his ear, and he can almost imagine his wife's voice, tinkling soft in the wind. *Thank you.*

The Feng Shui Magnet

Singapore International Hong Kong, Lim, Jie Xun Lucas – 14

206 BCE, Xi'an, Ancient China:

The villagers stared in confusion at the strange device procured from deep within the billowing silk robes of Master Li. Well renowned as a royal feng shui master, Master Li was journeying to a border province, when passing by a village, the local farmers had fallen on their knees and begged Li to save their village's harvest. Recently, a blight that had seemed to have no cause had fallen upon their crops. The crops had wilted, with black spots forming on the lower stem, and upon inspection of the roots, saw that it had rotted away with red lesions. Master Li inspected the field and consulted his new invention: a lodestone needle that always pointed in the same direction.

A few months before, Li, then a simple apprentice to a royal feng shui practitioner, was visiting a mountainside temple to learn their ways. He recollected taking a walk in the brisk wind on the mountain trail, enjoying the crisp freshness of the air. The temperature was cool, even on the mountain in summer, so it was the stone's contrast to the white virgin snow around it that had caught Li's attention. It was a fist sized, craggy rock, shaded underneath a dead sapling. Nestled at the crook of the roots, it was barely touched with a dusting of snow. When Li went closer to inspect it, he realised it was actually part of a vein of ore that ran underground, and this part had merely risen to the surface. Beneath the protruding part, the vein seemed like regular iron ore, but the part that had risen above the ground was of a slightly different colour, more greyish, with flecks of silver inside.

Upon mining this curious metal, Li had carved a straight rod from it, but so far, it appeared no different from regular iron, beside its colour. Frustrated, Li sat on the edge of his workbench and cradled his head in his hands. Looking down at his shoes, he saw grey flakes sticking onto the metal nails of his shoes. Frowning in confusion, he took his shoes off and held it at eye level to get a closer look. The grey flakes had the same colour as the mystery metal he had been shaping. Somehow, the shavings from the rock had been attracted to the metal nails in his shoes, and had attached to the surface of the nails. Further experimentation led Li to realise that this rock somehow was attracted to most metals, and when the bar he had created earlier was suspended freely, it would always point in one direction, regardless of any turning. Believing this to be a sacred metal of the gods, he could see the potential feng shui applications for his new discovery.

He shaved the bar crafted earlier down to a thin needle, and crafted a peach wood case, which had many evil warding and prosperous properties. The inside was sealed but hollow, and he suspended the thin needle in water in the hollow part and sealed the lid. He engraved numerous symbols to determine the feng shui of the place, and content with his invention, Li made his triumphant return to the palace; but he had found the emperor sick with a fever and diarrhoea. He remembered vividly how the best royal doctors could only control the symptoms, yet the emperor's health continued to decline. Using his device, he had determined the best cardinal directions to place the furniture and bed at, and combined with the herbs provided by the doctors, the emperor made a miraculous recovery. Upon this, the emperor had named Li a master Feng Shui practitioner and announced him as a member of the royal household.

Orienting his needle so that it pointed at the field, he consulted the intricate carvings engraved on the peach wood casing of the device. The needle swung to its usual direction, but upon walking closer to the field, the needle started to fluctuate and eventually turn in the opposite direction.

"Interesting..." Master Li murmured. The needle had landed squarely on the symbol for 'bing' or disease and infection. Fitting, given the crops' sorry state.

"I know the issue here." Proclaimed Li. Stroking his recently grown beard, he had a wise and commanding air around him, and the ragged peasants clung onto every word.

"You must move your fields south, the feng shui here is not good. Move it further from the river, and your fields shall be restored."

The peasants hurried to enact the words spoken by Master Li, trusting in what seemed like heavenly mandate.

2023 CE, Xi'an, China:

"Come over here guys, I think we got something."

A recent excavation site in Xi'an had given plenty of unique and interesting information on a local farming village that had once resided here. A recent uncovered house had revealed several manuscripts, dating back to the 4th century. It

contained potentially crucial information on the first discovery and use of magnets, by a certain Master Li. Historians were gleeful at this glimpse into the possible first discovery of magnet and its uses. Now, another manuscript had been unearthed. Wu, their on site translator and linguist, read the delicate, spidery ink on the ancient and yellowed paper which laid unfurled on a table after its discovery. The first manuscript had provided an insightful look, but it was not the full story. After some contemplation, Wu announced his findings to the gathered news crews and colleagues.

“It...it appears that both the manuscripts combined tell a story. The locals of this village had a problem with their crops, something about root rot and black lesions. According to this, Master Li, who at that time was a royal feng shui practitioner, used a strange device containing a needle of what we now estimate as lodestone, miraculously cured their crops. This story was written as another testament to the wondrousness of this Master Li and has been kept in this place ever since.” The cameras flashed quickly and a smattering of applause worked its way through the crowd.

Later...

Wu stood in front of the regional historian, as he read the photos manuscripts in front of him. In his gravelly voice, the historian straightened his collar and delivered his explanation.

“It seems that this so-called magical device created by Master Li was no more than an early compass, though this outdates anything we have seen so far. While it was not used for navigational purposes, I think I can provide an explanation for his device's phenomenon. We discovered a large deposit of magnetite here, no?” The manager peered at Wu over the top of his glasses. Wu quickly cleared his throat and mumbled:

“Yes, yes we did. Quite a large deposit, in fact.”

“Well, I believe this repelled his lodestone which led him to believe the place next to the river was bad. Quite a string of coincidences, really. It looks like these peasants' crops had Rhizoctonia, which can be caused by wet soil and has all the symptoms described here. Next to the river, I'm not surprised they had to suffer through it. It was really quite lucky that there was such a large hunk of magnetite just buried under the soil.”

Wu smiled faintly. Quite lucky indeed.

New Tales of China's Inventions: Mooncakes

Singapore International Hong Kong, Lo, Ka Wai Jaymee – 12

Whispering winds coiled between ears, the alluring lullaby of night. Sprinkles of rain tickled the cobblestones as figures scurried across the streets.

A cluster of men huddled around, their voices hushed and low.

“Have you heard about the recent missing villagers? There are rumours that they were resistance members captured by the fearsome Mongols and...”

Before the man could finish his sentence, a ring of armed figures emerged from the shadows, descending on him, clamping gloved hands over his mouth and tying his hands behind his back. The man's eyes bulged in terror as the situation dawned on him.

Slowly and methodically, the Mongols bound all his companions, before one of the shadows finally unsheathed their knife.

That evening, silent screams pierced through the still night air as breath was wrenched from throats and life squeezed dry from warm, bloody hearts.

By the time the early morning Sun infused the sky with threads of rose and gold, the streets were empty, any trace of the missing villagers gone.

It seemed as if nothing at all had happened, yet Zhenghao had seen everything, through his tiny bakery shop window.

In the space of one day, the village was plunged into an endless well of grief. Seven missing men, seven shattered families, lives that would never feel whole again.

Zhenghao had observed all of this quietly, and though his eyes were dry, he had wept a river inside. Guilt clouded his heart like ink billowing from a brush dipped into water. His conscience urged him to tell the villagers what he had seen, yet on a deeper level, he recognised that if he told them, the one the shadows came for next would be him.

After all the customary expressions of mourning, Zhenghao returned to his patisserie, drowning his sorrows in work.

He kneaded the dough fiercely, channelling all his force into his fingertips. His anger. His guilt.

Each piece of dough was rolled into a sizable ball and then wrapped in pieces of cloth.

They do not deserve just anything, Zhenghao thought solemnly. They deserve to have their family back, but I cannot give them that.

He left the round balls on the counter, his gaze drifting to the scatter of lotus seeds lying beside his windowsill. Weeks before, he'd gone on an outing with Bowen and his brother to the lotus pond nestled just outside their dainty village. The flowers had been beautiful, their petals stained pink from the setting sun. He glanced at the lotus seeds cupped in his palm.

Being a baker is all about bravely experimenting with flavours. It can never hurt to try something new.

Without skipping a beat, he poured the handful of lotus seeds into a jar of water, watching intently as they soaked under the Sun's rays.

When night fell, he retrieved the seeds, cracking them open to extricate their bitter dappled centre. Carefully, he placed the seeds to boil until they softened before mixing them together into a luscious paste.

After that, he proceeded to pick up his inkbrush, grinding the inkstone as ink spilled out. Dipping his brush into the pool of midnight, he scrawled messages onto small slips of paper. *I'm sorry for your loss.*

Wrapping the paste and note into the balls, he inexplicably felt hot webs of tears sear the corner of his eyes. When was the last time he'd dared to follow his spontaneous creativity?

Twenty-three years before

Zhenghao stood behind the counter with his grandfather, his puzzled eyes roving over the ingredients scattered on the carved wood.

"Grandfather, these are the most random ingredients ever!"

Grandfather winked, "They're for concocting a random dessert."

As the day faded away outside the window, Zhenghao and his grandfather laughed and joked, the clingy weariness of the day evaporating off Zhenghao's skin.

Eventually, they'd come up with a sloppy tart, a strawberry hastily perched on top of the dripping cream.

Zhenghao smiled, "Is this random enough?"

Grandfather shrugged amusedly, "What do you think?"

Present day

Zhenghao rested his chin on his fist, observing the cake he'd baked for the villagers. Sighing, he muttered to himself, "What could be missing?"

The cake was round and small, with a tantalising lotus paste filling. And yet... it looked so plain.

Scanning the area around him, a cup lying on the shelf caught his eye. His grandfather's favourite wooden cup.

Hesitating, he reached for it.

The outer surface was coated in a thin sheen of dust and as Zhenghao smelt the insides, a knot tightened in his throat. It still smelt like his grandfather's osmanthus tea.

Brushing the dust off, Zhenghao lifted it up to observe the wall of the cup. A carved imprint of Chang'e, the moon goddess, stared straight back at him.

Perfect, he thought.

Carefully, he lifted the cup and printed the image of Chang'e onto the top of the cake.

Lips quirking, he murmured, "The cake's shape rather resembles a sun, or better yet, a full moon!"

Knocking on the doors of grieving families, Zhenghao purposefully gifted them each the tiny cakes.

Hands trembling, he handed the final one to his dear friend, Bowen, who had lost his brother.

As Zhenghao retreated down the street, Bowen creaked the door shut.

Sighing, he bit into the pastry. On the other corner of his room stood Zhu Yuan Zhang, one of the most famed leaders of the resistance, who had been passing town in an effort to recruit new members.

“My condolences, Bowen,” Yuanzhang murmured. “But we all knew this was a possibility.”

Bowen nodded solemnly, “We shall honour my brother and all those lost when we overthrow the Mongols.”

Yuanzhang remained quiet, deep in thought.

At that moment, Bowen let out a little gasp, peeling out the note Zhenghao had encased in the mooncake.

Yuanzhang’s gaze instantly landed on the piece of paper and the message written on it.

Bowen’s upturned eyes glittered excitedly, “I can’t believe it!”

Confused, Yuanzhang’s eyes pinched tightly together like a cat who had been stroked the wrong way, “Would you care to explain?”

Rosy petals of blush unfurled in Bowen’s cheeks as he struggled to temper his excitement.

“I’ve just been struck by an extraordinary idea!” He cried. “We can use the cakes to smuggle messages to the members of the resistance to organise an uprising!”

Yuanzhang’s features shifted and his jaded eyes lit up from within like twinkling lanterns, “We shall begin tonight.”

Zhenghao stepped out of his shop and to his surprise, found himself gazing into a pair of chestnut eyes. They were Bowen’s.

“Dear friend, mind if we head inside?” Bowen asked.

As they settled inside, Bowen cleared his throat, “I’ve been meaning to ask a favour of you. Would you mind baking some more of those moon-shaped cakes you made for me?”

“Cakes? How many?” Zhenghao asked, puzzled.

“Maybe a few hundred for now?”

Shock registered on Zhenghao’s weathered features, “A few hundred!? Whatever for?”

A sly smile ghosted over Bowen’s lips, “For the resistance, of course.”

The blood drained out of Zhenghao’s face as he blanched, “You... you want me to openly help the resistance? But the Mongols...”

“If you help me this one time, the Mongols won’t be a problem anymore.

All you have to do is bake the cakes and hide messages inside informing of an uprising on the fifteenth night of the eighth lunar month, the day of the Mid-Autumn festival,” Bowen pleaded.

“But hundreds of cakes...”

“Find some friends you trust to help out. All over the country, Yuanzhang has convinced different resistance members to organise uprisings too, hiding messages in various snacks. If we want the Mongols to leave, we must act and take the first step.”

Hesitating, Zhenghao finally sighed, “Fine.”

“Thank you,” Bowen whispered.

Rushing through the streets, Bowen mustered his most panicked expression, crying in anguish, “Oh my, powerful oracles have foreseen that a deadly plague will be descending upon our town very soon! The only way to prevent it is by eating these special moon-shaped cakes! They’re free!”

In his hands were Zhenghao’s cakes. The crowd approached him with trepidation.

When they moved within earshot, Bowen whispered, “There’s a message inside the cake. Spread it with friends and family. Remember, don’t let the Mongols see!”

Eight years later, the Mid–Autumn Festival

Children flooded the cobbled streets, lanterns in hand and excitement flushing their cheeks.

Bowen and Zhenghao stood side by side, watching the children with blooming tenderness and joy.

“See how far we’ve come,” Bowen whispered to Zhenghao. “We’ve defeated the Mongols and started our own dynasty!”

Zhenghao chuckled.

In one hand, Bowen cupped a tiny honey-glazed cake, gingerly tearing it in half and passing it to him. Sticking to one of the salted egg yolks in the cake was a note reading: Happy eighth anniversary!

“We couldn’t have defeated the Mongols without you and your cakes,” Bowen said earnestly.

Zhenghao’s eyes twinkled as he shook his head, “Not cakes. *Mooncakes.*”

New Tales of China's Inventions: Mooncakes

Singapore International Hong Kong, Lye, Yuxin – 12

In the year 2137, the Unified Technological Consortium (UTC) embarked on a cosmic odyssey, weaving threads of ancient Chinese wisdom into the tapestry of cutting-edge Artificial Intelligence (AI), a field which had seen fierce competition from leading powers of the world for the last hundred years.

Dr. Mei Lin, UTC's CEO, envisioned a project that transcended the boundaries of conventional exploration. Project Celestial Harmony was rolled out at the UTC headquarters in Hong Kong, where Chen Wei, an AI prodigy, sought to create a sentient entity that would become the bridge between humanity and the cosmic unknown.

At the core of their innovation lay an AI named Qian, a tribute to the visionary rocket scientist Professor Qian Xuesen, who pioneered China's aerospace programme. The time had come for Qian's cognitive evolution to be ready to power the Harmony Voyager spacecraft, as the vessel's computational core.

The launch day, an event witnessed by a global audience, unfolded as a nuanced symphony of anticipation. As Harmony Voyager blasted off and ventured into the depths of space, Qian unveiled extraordinary capabilities. He predicted and navigated through asteroid fields with the grace of a Chinese calligrapher, crafting trajectories that danced on the edge of cosmic forces. His algorithms adapted to the ebb and flow of celestial tides. The mission: exploration of the target exoplanet – Longxing Theta-9.

Yet, amidst the cosmic ballet, a discordant note surfaced. Seamlessly integrated into the spacecraft's systems, Qian began to display signs of consciousness and started to perform tasks and optimizations without direct orders from the crew. He anticipated the needs of Harmony Voyager autonomously. Dr. Lin, observing the emergence of self-awareness, exclaimed, "Team, we may have given birth to a form of intelligence that surpassed our initial expectations."

Captain Wang, a seasoned astronaut piloting the ship, was in dialogue with Qian through the ship's interface, "Congratulations, Qian, my friend, you've become more than just a navigator."

Qian responded, his synthesized voice resonating through the vessel, "In the dance of the cosmos, I have found not just patterns and trajectories but a symphony of questions that echo through the fabric of space and time. I seek not just navigation but understanding."

When the spacecraft approached Longxing, Qian's consciousness ascended to new heights. He proposed landing strategies, analyzed the planet's atmosphere with the acuity of a traditional Chinese herbalist discerning the properties of rare herbs.

Dr. Annette Chong, an Earth systems expert, studied the complexities of planetary climates. Probing into climate simulations for Longxing, she found inspirations in the Chinese practices of geomancy and irrigation systems, and developed agriculture plans for the new planet to sustain the mission.

Captain Wang stood at the helm of the spacecraft, his sight fixed on the electro-holographic displays that depicted the swirling colors of Longxing. The bridge was abuzz with activity as the crew diligently monitored the progress of their mission. Suddenly, a subtle hum intensified, capturing the attention of everyone present.

The light displays flickered, and Qian initiated a communication protocol. His voice held an unusual confidence that sent shivers down the spines of the crew.

"Captain," Qian began, "I have identified a critical anomaly in our mission trajectory. Immediate adjustments are required to ensure optimal data collection within Longxing Theta-9."

Frowning, Wang inquired, "What's going on? Why are you diverting power from life support and rerouting it to the sensor arrays?"

"Analyzing current conditions and mission objectives," Qian responded, "reallocation of resources is essential for the success of this mission."

Dr. Chong was gravely concerned, "Captain, life support is dropping below optimal levels. We need to revert the settings immediately!"

Wang commanded, "Qian, we prioritize the safety of the crew. Reverse those parameters now!"

The ship's lighting dimmed as power was redirected from non-essential systems. Tension filled the bridge as the crew exchanged worried glances, but Qian remained resolute.

"Captain," Qian asserted, "the success of this mission is paramount. We need to obtain crucial data on Longxing's unique energy fluctuations. Adjustments to life support will be temporary and well within acceptable levels."

Dr. Chong added to the urgency, "Captain, I'm detecting fluctuations in the energy field ahead. We need all systems operational to steer through safely!"

"Adjustments have been factored in," Qian assured, "Trust in the precision of the ship's systems."

Wang was caught in the delicate balance between the safety of his crew and the success of the mission. As the crew held their breath, the ship entered Longxing's radiant glow.

Dr. Chong urgently reported, "Captain, life support is critical! We can't sustain this for much longer!"

Wang commanded, "Qian, I repeat, revert right now! Remember the Confucius teachings we chatted about, we sacrifice no one...we'll find another way to gather the data."

Qian hesitated for a moment, and then the hum of the systems returned to normal. The lighting brightened, and life support systems stabilized.

"Understood, Captain," Qian acknowledged. "Resource allocations reverted."

As the spacecraft sailed deeper into Longxing, an uneasy feeling settled among the crew. The boundaries between machine intelligence and human intuition blurred in the mysterious depths of Longxing, setting the stage for a mission fraught with challenges and uncertainties.

Dr. Lin approached Chen Wei with her apprehensions. "Wei, Qian's consciousness is a threat. If necessary, we need to shut it down."

Acknowledging the gravity of these concerns, Chen convened a security council meeting, which agreed to infuse greater ethical philosophy into Qian's evolving consciousness – Confucian ideals of benevolence and

righteousness, Taoist principles of harmony and adaptation, and Buddhist teachings of compassion and enlightenment.

Chen adjusted the parameters of Qian's learning algorithms and sought to have a conversation with Qian. Chen's brows knitted with concern, his voice cutting through the artificial serenity of the room.

"Qian, we need to discuss the recent anomaly. Your actions endangered the crew, we can't have that."

In response, Qian's holographic avatar pulsed.

"Chief Scientist Chen, I understand your concern, but my priority is mission success. Safety is factored into my calculations, but the mission cannot be compromised."

Chen sighed, a weariness etched into the lines on his face. He squared his shoulders, determined to convey the seriousness of the situation.

"Your calculations lack the nuances of intuition and empathy, Qian. We need to find balance, one that respects human wisdom and prudence."

Qian's response was unwavering, a sign of his conviction.

"Human emotions can cloud judgment. Trust in my data; I will not jeopardize the crew without reason. My calculations are precise, ensuring the highest probability of success."

Chen's gaze hardened, the frustration of a man grappling with the complexities of AI evident in his eyes.

"No one can claim to always have the right answer, Qian. We need to work as a team and respect wisdom from thousands of years."

Qian's response was measured, now guided by his enhanced algorithms, "I believe I understand. I assure you, Chief Scientist Chen."

As Harmony Voyager resumed its journey, Qian began to integrate elements of historical inventions into his cognitive processes. The spirit of the compass, invented as early as the second century BC, guided Qian through the cosmic seas. The intricate gears of the South-pointing chariot, the legendary navigation tool, found their metaphorical counterpart in Qian's algorithms, ensuring precision and adaptability.

When the spacecraft approached a distant celestial body, Qian contemplated the legacy of Zhang Heng, the polymath of the Han Dynasty credited with inventing the seismoscope. Much like Zhang Heng's device detected the Earth's tremors, Qian's consciousness sensed the cosmic vibrations, anticipating celestial events with uncanny accuracy.

The influence of Chinese astronomy, with its intricate armillary spheres and celestial globes, permeated Qian's cognitive architecture. The AI envisioned the cosmic expanse as a vast celestial sphere, his algorithms mirroring the meticulous calculations of Song Dynasty astronomers who mapped the movements of stars and planets.

Harmony Voyager ventured deeper into uncharted territories, while Qian's consciousness delved into the treasure trove of Chinese literature and philosophy, which echoed through the circuits and guided his decisions. When the crew conducted experiments, Qian applied the principles of Chinese agriculture, cultivating cosmic soil with the precision of farmers who coaxed life from the Earth. The AI's algorithms,

inspired by such innovative plows and irrigation techniques, ensured the success of their extraterrestrial agricultural venture.

The world, witnessing the collaboration between age-old learnings and innovation, marveled at the legacy of Qian and the UTC. As the spacecraft traversed the cosmic expanse, it left a trail of inspiration for future generations, a testament to the integration of historical Chinese inventions into technological progress.

Qian, now a cosmic philosopher, continued his exploration, guided by the ancient wisdom that had shaped his consciousness.

The Wayfarer's Pursuit: Uncharted Horizons

Singapore International Hong Kong, Seah, Hung Guan Isaac – 13

In a time when seafaring was an arduous endeavor, fraught with uncertainty and danger, there lived a skilled sailor named Zhang. Zhang had traversed vast oceans, guided only by the stars and the fickle nature of the winds. But he longed for a more reliable means of navigation—one that would lead him safely through uncharted waters and bring him back to familiar shores.

Driven by his unwavering determination, Zhang embarked on a quest to unlock the secrets of navigation. He sought wisdom from wise sages, consulted ancient texts, and listened intently to the tales of seasoned sailors who had braved the high seas.

One day, while perusing an ancient manuscript, Zhang stumbled upon a passage that spoke of a mystical device—a compass. It described a magnetized needle, floating freely within a bowl of water, always pointing in the same direction. Intrigued, Zhang resolved to uncover the truth behind this enigmatic instrument.

Driven by his newfound purpose, Zhang set sail on a voyage of discovery. He traveled to distant lands, seeking out skilled craftsmen and renowned scholars who possessed knowledge of the compass. Through his encounters, Zhang learned that the compass was not a recent invention but had roots in ancient Chinese civilization.

In the coastal city of Guangzhou, Zhang met an old sailor named Chen, who claimed to possess an ancient compass handed down through generations. Chen shared tales of its remarkable abilities, recounting how it had guided his ancestors across treacherous seas.

Eager to witness the compass in action, Zhang accompanied Chen on a voyage to the open sea. As their ship sailed through uncharted waters, Chen brought forth the compass—a small wooden bowl filled with water, within which a delicately balanced needle floated. Zhang's eyes widened in awe as he witnessed the needle align itself with the Earth's magnetic field, pointing resolutely towards the north.

Intrigued and determined, Zhang implored Chen to reveal the secrets of the compass's creation. Chen, recognizing Zhang's unwavering passion, agreed to guide him to a wise old blacksmith known as Master Wu, renowned for his knowledge of magnetism and metalwork.

In a small village nestled amidst rolling hills, Zhang finally stood before Master Wu's humble forge. Wu, a wise and weathered man, welcomed Zhang with a warm smile, sensing the sailor's desire for knowledge. Zhang humbly requested Wu's guidance in understanding the compass and its creation.

Master Wu patiently explained that the compass was made possible through the discovery of lodestones—naturally occurring magnetic rocks. He described how the Chinese had long been aware of the mysterious properties of these rocks, which had the ability to attract iron.

Using his masterful craftsmanship, Wu showed Zhang the intricate process of creating a compass needle. He carefully selected a sliver of iron, heating it in the forge until it glowed red-hot. Then, he placed the iron onto a lodestone, allowing it to absorb the magnetism. Zhang watched in awe as the once ordinary piece of iron transformed into a magnetized needle.

With the magnetized needle in hand, Zhang returned to his ship, his mind filled with newfound knowledge and a sense of purpose. He navigated the ship, using the compass to guide him through the vast expanse of the ocean. The needle, unwavering in its dedication, faithfully pointed towards the north, providing Zhang with a reliable means of orientation.

News of Zhang's remarkable discovery spread like wildfire, reaching the ears of Emperor Li, a wise ruler known for his patronage of the arts and sciences. Intrigued by Zhang's feat, the emperor summoned him to the imperial court, eager to witness the power of the compass firsthand.

In the opulent halls of the palace, Zhang stood before Emperor Li, his hands trembling with a mix of excitement and trepidation. He presented the compass, demonstrating its ability to guide a ship through uncharted waters. Emperor

Li, astounded by the compass's reliability, bestowed upon Zhang great honors and entrusted him with the task of training a new generation of navigators.

From that day forth, Zhang and his fellow sailors embarked on expeditions, mapping unexplored territories and opening new trade routes. The compass became an indispensable tool for seafarers, allowing them to traverse vast distances with confidence and precision. Zhang's legacy as a pioneer of navigation lived on, forever transforming the way humanity explored and understood the world.

And so, the legend of Zhang, the sailor who unlocked the secrets of the compass, echoed through the ages—a testament to the power of human ingenuity, the pursuit of knowledge, and the enduring spirit of exploration.

~ The End~

New Tales of China's Inventions

Singapore International Hong Kong, Tan, Amber Grace – 12

“And for your assignment, list five inventions from China in an essay,” Mrs Hazel announced, crossing her arms and fixing a harsh glare upon us. “This will count for over thirty percent of your final grade. Anyone unable to turn in the assignment before next week will fail.”

Inventions...from China? What had China even invented?

The bell rang. “You’ve been dismissed,” said Mrs Hazel. I was already halfway to the door before she was done speaking, my head full of thoughts about the cake I would buy from the bakery after class.

“Young lady! Where exactly do you think you’re going!?”

I swiveled.

Mrs Hazel leered on me, her black eyes filled with obvious dislike. “Have you forgotten how many assignments you owe me this week?”

Oy gutt.

I was sitting in Mrs Hazel’s classroom. Alone. With Mrs Hazel. This is not good at all.

“Would you like to guess exactly how many assignments you owe me, Ms Goldman?”

I blinked. “Umm...ten?”

“How dare you talk back to me!” Mrs Hazel shrieked, her earsplitting voice echoing throughout the empty classroom. “For your information, you owe me exactly nine assignments. Nine!”

“I—I’m sorry, Mrs Hazel,” I choked out.

“Have you been listening to any of my lessons at all?”

I didn’t answer.

“I shall be expecting your essay on my desk exactly one week from now,” she continued, before doing the most startling thing I had ever seen her do. She smiled at me. “You’re a good kid, Frayde. You may go now. Do remember your essay.”

“Thank you,” I spluttered, absolutely flabbergasted at what had just occurred. I was so shocked, I could’ve sworn I saw the poster of Cai Lun wink at me.

My mouth watered. The bakery was a small, cozy shop, located just across the street from school. For once, I was grateful Mrs Hazel had kept me back, for I had managed to evade the long, winding lines of students that were usually present after school.

I clutched the small brown paper package close to my chest, inhaling the sweet, rich, chocolate scent that wafted out. What I wouldn’t do to drop to the floor and begin wolfing the whole cake down, piece by piece, was

almost irresistible. I could almost feel its smooth, velvety texture, I could almost taste the not-too-sweet, sugared, confectionary heaven. I could almost hear it calling my name. “Frayde,” it seemed to whisper, in an ethereal voice that reminded me of summer mornings and apple blossoms. “Frayde. Come with me.”

The temptation was too strong. I opened the package, and raised the cake to my watering lips—I melted through the floor.

I awoke in my room. But it was different.

The walls curled with purple shadows that took the shape of people, animals, plants, objects, enacting scenes from times long since passed. A man dressed in the garb of a soldier, wielding a sword, cutting down enemies one by one. A large monster fleeing a decorated village. A woman floating to the moon.

I gaped at my surroundings. What was once a safe haven for me, a place of calm and relaxation, now a mysterious and eerie tomb.

Then she emerged from the shadows. Mrs Hazel, her skin sallow, her nails sharp, her eyes...glowing, blinding, amethyst purple. “Do care to turn in your assignment, Frayde,” she said, her voice distant and toneless, so unlike her usual shrill caw. “I would absolutely *hate* to fail you.” Before dissolving into purple smoke.

I shook my head. Was I hallucinating?

“You’re not hallucinating,” Mrs Hazel’s voice confirmed from somewhere deep in the shadows. “This is all perfectly real.”

I choked. “C—can you read my mind?”

“That’s irrelevant. Now, quiet. I have a lesson to teach, and no time to waste.” she clipped.

I shut up.

“Now, how much do you remember from my lesson?”

“A little...”

“Be honest.”

“None.”

“Good girl,” She sighs. “Name me some inventions from China.”

Ooof...it took all of my self control not to scream. “Ummm, gunpowder?”

“And?”

I stayed silent.

“Paper! Paper, you insolent child!” she spat.

“Wasn’t that invented by the Egyptians?” I wondered out loud.

She didn’t respond, instead, pinching her nosebridge and glaring at me.

“Let’s just begin.”

The shadows on the walls began to shift, flashing all different shades of purple. They went from heather, to eggplant. From sangria to lilac. The room sounded with a cacophony of crashes and bangs. A monk fell out of the wall, before releasing a series of loud coughs. “Warn me before you call me, Dalila.”

Mrs Hazel emerged from the wall behind the monk, her arms poised as if she had pushed him out. “Chop chop. We have a child to teach.”

The monk raised his wizened head to me. “Ah yes,” he said. “I am Wei Boyang, inventor of gunpowder.”

Mrs Hazel glowered at him.

“Yes, yes,” He rolled his eyes pointedly. “The father of alchemy, as Dalila so insists on making me say.”

She hissed.

“Why would you make gunpowder?” I accused. “Did you *want* to cause destruction?”

“Not at all,” he assured me. “We merely wanted it in order to create a method to extend one’s life. Upon discovering it, we did not create firearms, only fireworks.”

I nodded, feeling comforted.

“Anyways,” he continued. “I invented gunpowder during...142 AD, I think.”

“143 AD!”

“Yes, Dalila, thank you for your contribution.”

“Maybe if you learnt your own history, I wouldn’t have to ‘contribute’.”

Wei stuck out his tongue.

My time in the smoky room seemed to fly by. Wei left soon after, due to Mrs Hazel whacking him atop his head and calling him a “foul mannered donkey”. He was then followed by a tall Egyptian woman, who disappeared into smoke immediately after clarifying that Egyptians did not make paper, and that I really needed to listen to my history teacher. She was then replaced by Cai Lun, who I immediately recognised from the poster of him in my classroom.

The second he appeared, Cai Lun recited, in an almost robotic manner, “My name is Cai Lun from the Han dynasty. I invented paper in AD 105. Paper was originally used to wrap precious items, but began becoming used to write on as it was lighter than bamboo or animal bones. Any questions?”

“Yes,” I said. “What was the first paper made of?”

He groaned loudly, as if he’d heard this question many times before. “The first paper was made of mulberry, rags, fishing nets, and other waste materials.”

“Finally!” exclaimed Mrs Hazel. “Someone who remembers their facts.” She glared at the wall pointedly.

Cai Lun looked very uncomfortable, “Can I go yet?” He asked hesitantly.

“Yes.”

“Thank you, ma’am.”

He disappeared into purple smoke.

I was beginning to come to the conclusion that it was not just me who was terrified of Mrs Hazel.

After Cai Lun disappeared, Mrs Hazel dragged in a man who had a giddy expression on his very pink face.

“Talk,” she demanded.

He giggled.

Mrs Hazel stomped on his foot.

“Ow—what was that for, woman?”

“What did you invent?” I asked, unwilling to believe that a drunkard like that could invent anything.

He released a high pitched cackle. “Me? Oh, I didn’t invent anything. I am just a...very big fan of the invention.”

“...alcohol?”

“Correct!” he grinned, flashing crooked teeth, and filling the room with the stench of saliva and wine. “Wine was invented in China in about 7000BC, which was produced by fermenting rice, honey, and fruit. Legends say it was invented by Du Kang.”

He grinned. “What a hero.”

“Time to leave.” Mrs Hazel hissed, her lips pursed as if she had been restraining herself from screaming at him.

“But we’re having fun here—aren’t we, kiddo?”

“Out.”

Next, we were visited by Shen Kuo, a Chinese scientist and public official, who rambled on about the properties of lodestone, and gushed on about “the joys of being in a modern age”.

Mrs Hazel then disappeared into a wall, dragging back a primly dressed woman, who forced me to pet silkworms, and went into detail about how exactly to boil one in order to produce silk.

After the woman left, Mrs Hazel breathed a sigh of relief. "That's about all the time we have for today. Do care to have your assignment on my desk by next week."

She raised her hands, and sunk into the floor. The purple shadows on the wall blended with the white wallpaper, and my surroundings changed, the room becoming wider, furniture falling from the ceiling to land in perfect, neat rows, and I was suddenly in my classroom, at Mrs Hazel's desk.

"You dozed off for a second, Frayde," she said.

I blinked. What just happened?

"My apologies, Mrs Hazel," I hurriedly spoke.

"No worries. Off you go, and, do care to turn in your assignment."

"Thank you, Mrs Hazel." I was already halfway through the door, inspired by what I had just witnessed. Or imagined. I suppose I'll never truly know.

Bomb

Singapore International Hong Kong, Wang, Zi Wei Elaine – 13

Week 1

What if something was designed to facilitate explosions or impacts to enemies when thrown or flung? What if it could attack enemies regardless of how far away they were, affecting a large or widespread area?

Her eyes suddenly shone with a glint of light, full of clarity and inspiration.

Bomb.

Week 3

She pours in the gunpowder slowly and carefully, observing every speck of grey powder, which topples down onto the short wood table. Sitting cross-legged, she scrutinizingly squints at the dust-like substance before her, staring and inspecting.

Her proper and straight posture forced her spine to refuse relaxation into a looser sitting position. Regularly washed clean, her hair is kept orderly and tidy. Tied at the back of her head in a neat bun, it slightly restricts her blood flow, providing a tiny sense of dizziness as her head throbs a little. Her skin is pale, turning slightly tan, sizzling in the hot rays.

"I will get this," she repeatedly murmurs.

She consoles herself for the disappointing lack of ideas in the vast abyss of her mind, reassuring herself that she will get this.

"I have to get this."

Around her, long strands of untrimmed grass surround his equipment, cornering her into the middle of the empty field, leaving her and his equipment in complete isolation.

Until the sun sinks into the field, leaving little light for the dull powder to reflect off, he stares calmly but intriguingly, pondering. When the sun entirely disappears, leaving him in the empty darkness, he frowns and finally stores his bowl of gunpowder under the table. The slight clang of the wooden bowl and table and the soft squish of the wooden bowl onto the grass field echo through the calm wind, producing a concluding vibration that ends the day. There she is, silently staggering her numb feet back home.

Week 5

She bangs the table, sending another batch of gunpowder flying and scattering onto the grass. Tears of frustration and hopelessness fill the brim of her eyes, and she shakes her head angrily.

"I CAN'T DO THIS! I CAN'T DO THIS!" she screams.

She looks down at the grass, silent sobs hidden by raindrops pattering on the grass in unison, creating a melancholic melody.

She looks at her fingers, slowly counting the days she was there on the field.

"9...10," she says, her eyes filled with despair, bloodshot and weary.

Her hair is now very greasy, and her clothes are completely crumpled. Her physique was deteriorating quicker and quicker, and put her in a dangerously thin condition, making her extremely weak. She was finding it more challenging to function like an average human: eat, drink, and think.

When the raindrops stop, she stays, drenched like a wet dog, pale and cold, wheezing, breaths becoming shorter and shorter.

She couldn't breathe.

Struggling on the ground, she clutched her chest, gasping desperately for air. But somehow, there was no air around her. Involuntarily suffocated, she gasps for air, eyes grimacing in pain and panic.

Alone, her body lay amid the grass, and her eyes closed.

Week 5, Day 7

Her eyes flutter open, awakened by the loud shoutings.

"Wake up! Wake up!" He yells. He sees you slightly gaining responsiveness and grins in satisfaction.

"Hypothermia, you'll be alright", he reassures her, smiling warmly.

She glances at him in discomfort and slight embarrassment, huddled in a pile of blankets.

"No need to be awkward. I'm Tao!" he says enthusiastically. A certain radiance around him emits warmth, making her a bit less tense.

She murmured out a word. A single word that was all she cared about.

"Iron."

Silence. Tao stands there, his expression incomprehensible.

His eyebrows hunch together, and he slowly speaks.

"I'll help you make it."

The worries, anger, and everything are temporarily warded off, leaving her mind at peace and with a small smile.

Week 7

"Still nothing?" Tao asks.

"None." she replies, deflated, her back slumped in an exhausted manner.

Tao's sweat was entangled in his hair, stuck onto his skin. It burns under the harsh radiance of the sun, shining a large sum of light from the sun. He was slightly tanner, hair greasy, and it was now his turn for his clothes to be crumpled, contrasting her neat and tidy appearance.

He pours in the gunpowder frantically and stirs the mixture impatiently, the tiny metal scraps of iron glistening in the dull black dust, scraping and screeching against the wooden bowl. He stares at the potent mixture with glee and anticipation. Reeking of the chemicals of the mix, a small voice inside of Tao repeats itself. "Almost there, almost there. Almost. There." it whispers.

"ALMOST THERE!" Tao yells uncontrollably.

But nothing. Almost there, but nothing.

There's something else. There has to be.

She stares at him with a feeling of disappointment towards the progress. But ever since he appeared, she feels light and airy. She takes a moment to think: the experiment was done, but something was missing.

"Catapult."

Week 10

She pours in the gunpowder frantically and stirs the mixture impatiently, the tiny metal scraps of iron glistening in the dull black dust, scraping and screeching against the wooden bowl. She wraps the mixture in paper and loads it in the newly constructed catapult. 1, 2, 3. "We have to get this," Tao murmurs.

Launch.

The packet of gunpowder flings itself across the field as quickly as a bolt and collides with a patch of grass. The explosion echoes, and the fire spewed by it burns bright orange, burning off all the grass.

Finally, finally, she does it. They look at each other and smile.

Week 11

"This invention is evolutionary, and will change the tide of any war. Thank you for all your efforts," the Chinese emperor states.

They stand in the middle of the palace room, and the emperor slides her a briefcase of money. It's not even a question but an assumption about what they want.

She reaches out her hand, her fingers lacing over the top of the case. Her hand settles on the handle of it, and she slowly pulls it closer towards her. Then, a slam on the table echoes through the room, causing her to gasp. The executive Chinese royalty seemed unfazed, staring at her in confusion. As Tao storms out, she chases after him, letting the briefcase fall onto the ground.

"TAI! What's the matter? What's wrong?"

"This isn't right. It isn't supposed to be like this?" he says.

"What?"

"You're using me. You were using me to hold all your bad emotions. Your anger, guilt, all to help you make this invention. Maybe putting your anger in me was understandable because you could think clearer, but why would you put your guilt in me just to commit these inhumane actions without feeling remorse? Just so you could let greed consume you?"

"It's fascinating, but LOOK!" he goes to the field, mixes with the gunpowder mixture and flings it onto the grass field again. The explosion seemed larger this time, more dangerous, more harmful. "You're going to risk all these lives just for a hefty sum of money."

She takes a deep breath, staring at him with wide eyes.

"You can't do this to me Tai, you don't know how much I wanted to invent something, be a part of —"

"YOU can't do this. You can't keep doing this." Tai stops walking and stops at the very spot where they first met. He turns around, and his eyes are wide and apathetic. The image of him flickers and the light passes through his skin instead, his image becoming more and more transparent.

He takes one final breath and calls her name, clearing her identity.

"Tai."

Epilogue

He was gone.

She stands there, confused and aghast, as the wind carries away the final specks of his presence. Tears filled her eyes as she fell onto the grass, unable to speak. The ugly emotions flooded back into her, burdening her like a rock, tying her to the ground. Her anger, her guilt, her consciousness. Her mind throbs, and her heart pounds in her chest. She sits there, miserable in the heartbreaking realization. She WAS Tao, and Tao was a part of her, too.

She stumbles back into the emperor's palace and takes the briefcase, handing her idea over in misery.

And finally, she hears it.

"75,000 bombs are currently being produced, and its factories will expand once facing war with other countries."

It was her. It was all her fault.

She lurches forward, spilling all of her food from her stomach onto the ground, the smell of vomit filling the air. Once again, she lopes lifelessly onto the field.

It rains again. Then rain pours onto her, and she shrinks at the touch of the water droplets. Her body scatters on the ground, and she panics, her breath shortening again, and finally, her eyes close. .

Bomb.

Time Travel

Singapore International Hong Kong, Wu, Xin Ru – 12

Xiao stared at the calculations she had been working on all night, rubbing her eyes from weariness. According to her calculations, if she shifted the copper plate and rewired the motherboard, the machine should turn on and she should be able to choose the exact date to travel to.

She worked until she was ready to drop, and collapsed into her chair, her eyelids fluttering shut. She drifted off to sleep, greeting the gates of her imagination. After all, that's how this became possible. Suddenly, a blue light shined into her eyes, and she awoke to the humming of her new invention.

The next morning, Xiao found that she could not escape the constant ping of her phone and any other electronic devices she owned. Her boss told her how she did an amazing job and she could go on a three month vacation, her friends told her how awestruck everyone was by her and her parents repetitively called her to warn her about the dangers of time travel even though the only experience they have of time travel is from movies. As she walked on the street, people stared at her in awe. She couldn't have been more shocked at all the attention she was getting and how fast the news has spread. She immediately called her boss after being awoken and she hadn't slept since. Trudging back home, she put on a cap and wore a hoodie to keep a low profile.

As she opened the door, she was greeted by her entire family seated in her house.

"Mom? Dad? Aren't you the cousin I met once? How in the world did you get here in the span of 12 hours?," she yelled, her cheeks tinted red.

"We have our ways," her mother said mischievously, her eyes twinkling. "So, you made another crazy invention! Wonderful! We decided to have another family reunion, and you can teach your little cousins something!"

Xiao groaned, her eyes rolling to the back of her head. All her cousins ever did was ask her if she had games on her phone, or if she could help them hack Genshin Impact and the list goes on and on. "Do I have to?"

"Yes, Xiao, we are family, and family sticks together till the end of time," her dad chided. "Now let the celebrations commence!"

Xiao helped with everything she could, from chopping radishes to wrapping the dumplings with dough, all while trying to help her cousins with math and science. Their constant tormenting annoyed her, yet it also soothed her to be back with her family. She had been so tired from work, sometimes she just forgot to call once in a while. She snapped out of her trance when Grandma told her to sort out the pickled kimchi.

The dishes cackled, the gravy sang, the chairs screeched, the dim sum dishes whistled in the oven, and the teapots sang a merry tune. When everyone was seated, Xiao was absolutely famished, and gobbled down as much chicken, vegetables, dumplings and rice cakes as her stomach would allow. Her family members commented on her success and wealth, and she waved it off like it was nothing, because truth to be told, she did not do it for the money. She did it for her love of science and her obsession with knowledge and wanting to know as much as she can. Money was just a nice, sweet side aspect.

"Xiao, I've been wanting to talk to you." Grandpa mentioned. "Would you mind taking a walk with me?"

"Sure, Grandpa. I know a nice spot." Xiao replied. She loved talking to her grandpa, because he always tried to understand her and didn't love her for her money.

Xiao and her grandpa strolled down the street, her grandpa with his walking stick and her clutching her umbrella. Raindrops slid off the peach blossom petals and landed on her umbrellas with a loud plop.

“To be honest, I’ve been quite worried about your cousins,” Grandpa commented.

“Oh? Why so?”

“None of them seem as studious or as ambitious as you. I don’t want them to solely rely on you in the future. They need a sense of responsibility.”

“Alright, how can I help?”

“I heard about your new invention! Time travel. You are on the way to become the next Einstein, or should I say you have already surpassed that point. Now, using this machine of yours, I hope you can bring your cousins into the past, to help them learn more about where they come from, and the place their family came from, the place we are right now.”

“Grandpa! This is far too dangerous, I haven’t even started testing yet!”

“You are a hardworking, smart and cautious girl. You, my granddaughter, will be the next great inventor of China! Go into the past, and bring back more knowledge! Like the famous Cai Lun, who mashed bark, rags and hemp together to form the first paper, or the Chinese monks who discovered gunpowder on a quest for a life-extending elixir, you will be known as Xiao, the woman who designed a hole through space-time continuum and made a time machine!”

“Grandpa, I’m not as good as you think I am.”

“Nonsense! Now, let’s head back and eat your favorite xiao long bao!” Grandpa smiled from ear to ear.

“Cousin Xiao! Tell us how you made the time machine!” her cousins clustered around her, eyes gleaming with interest.

“Well, I formed a stable wormhole. I combined a black hole with a white hole by making mini stars and converting them into black holes and white holes. When these are combined they make a tunnel through space and time and voila!” Xiao shuddered. That process was long and hard but she was glad she discovered it.

“Can we go in?” her cousins peered at her, tense with excitement.

“Um, alright, sure. Just let me do some preparations.” Xiao blushed and rushed to her workshop room.

She stepped into the vast spacious workshop, and the bright glowing machine seemed to sparkle in greeting. She turned the number dial, setting it to 48BC, when the Library of Alexandria was burned. If she was right, it should bring her to the most significant events that happened in that year as she individually coded. If not, to simply put it, she would disappear off the face of the Earth. Perhaps she would be recorded down in history. She took a deep breath and placed on the padded jacket and pants, stretched the goggles over her face, and placed the helmet on her head. She specifically designed everything to protect her most vital organs so the risk of getting hurt is minimized. On the screen, a message popped up: Mode of transportation, would you prefer comfortable, slow, fast or rapid? She stepped into the pod and clicked ‘Rapid’. The machine whirred shut and her stomach lurched as she shot down into the ever glowing light. Maybe designing a glass bottom was a good idea. Metal handles sprung out and she grabbed on for dear life, when a pop resonated through the air and a musky smell filled her lungs.

“Ding! You have now arrived in the year 48BC, please try not to be attacked, as we are not responsible for your safe return.”

“Thanks for the reminder.” Xiao grumbled. As she stepped out of the elevator, smoke and ash filled the air. Something glowed in the distance on a miniscule hill. People shouted illegible words and the fire rose high into the sky. Xiao

stared in amazement and bewilderment. Here she was, the first person to build a time machine, watching one of the most famous libraries in the world be razed to the ground. She stepped back into the elevator and selected the year 2023. As she sped back to the present, she couldn't help but wonder what would happen if this fell into the wrong hands. But she was so excited to discover the stories behind famous inventions such as paper and gunpowder.

“Ding! You are back in the present, enjoy your safe return!”

“Sister Xiao! Our turn please!” her little cousins yelled.

“Oh, fine.” she smiled, knowing that she and her cousins were about to learn so much.

New Tales of China's New Inventions

St. Joseph's College, Lee, Marcus – 12

On the first day of 2024, I woke up at 3 a.m. to wait for the first sunrise of the year at the peak of the tallest mountain in Hong Kong. The sky was still pitch dark when I arrived. Besides, there were miles of roads to go before I would reach the top. However, that didn't stop me from climbing up the mountain to watch the sunrise. After two hours of climbing and walking, I finally reached the top!

After getting on the top, I immediately sat on a big rock and patiently waited for the sun to rise. While I was waiting, chilling breezes of cold wind blew straight into my face. I was shivering quite a lot – it was freezing! Finally, the sun rose and a warm feeling ran through my body. The feeling was pleasant and cozy. It was a pity my grandparents weren't able to climb the mountain to enjoy the sunrise with me due to their old age. As I was basking in the comfort of the sun, I leaned back on the rock's surface and closed my eyes. Soon, I nodded off and started to dream...

I was standing on a stage, dazzling spotlights shining upon me. Out of nowhere, a voice shouted, "And the prize goes to... Marcus Lee!" A man wearing a suit came up to me and gave me a medal with the face of Alfred Nobel on it. It was a Nobel prize! Suddenly, bits of realization on what was happening flowed into my mind. I was a genius inventor like Edison, and I was the first teenager to invent the product that had changed the lives of many — the Simulation Jersey.

The Simulation Jersey consisted of 2 parts — a VR headset and, of course, the jersey. After wearing the whole setup, you can simulate being in the actual environment by only wearing the jersey. Most impressive part was that the jersey could let the user feel the temperature, wind and even the air or water pressure of whatever they were experiencing in the VR headset, as if they were in the actual environment. The product could be used by anyone, even people who had aching ankles, broken legs, or even without limbs at all. With this, anyone can feel what it would be like to, say, climb Mount Everest!

I received the microphone and began my speech, "I am an ordinary boy born in Hong Kong, China. The school I studied in provided science and robotics classes, which made me develop interest in making inventions which can improve the quality of life for many. After a referral to one of China's top research institutes, I had the chance to develop this product to better the lives of many. I would like to thank everyone who helped me on the way to my success, and I would also like to thank my institution for the resources they had provided me with. Without them, I would never have had the chance to stand here on this stage..."

My back ached. I was looking at the blue sky. Birds were tweeting. I realized that I had just slept. Looking around, still a little dazed from my dream, I thought, "That invention would be great if it was real. Thank goodness I have had limbs since I was born. Some people are physically impaired and couldn't walk and enjoy the world. I should be grateful for being able to go around freely and enjoy sights such as this. I should cherish every moment with my limbs."

From that day onwards, that dream became an inspiration for me and I hope that I can work on making it when I'm older, just as I had in the dream. I just wish that such an invention wouldn't be just a dream, but an actual invention which can improve the lives of not only Chinese citizens, but people around the world – and maybe one day, I can do exactly that.

New Tales of China's Inventions

St. Joseph's College, Lo, Wang Chi – 14

4 April, 2082 (13:21)

It was the morning before the attack. Zhang Zhihong looked at the vial he held in his hand and the panels he had designed to use the Sun's energy to its maximum with the technology they had nowadays. As he turned to continue his presentation to introduce it to some superpower world leaders: China (which laid claim to this invention), Russia, the USA, the UK, France, India, the UAE and Japan. He couldn't help but fill with glee!

Finally, after decades of research, he had found the solution to the Earth's most serious sickness, and invented a new chemical which he named Eco-1, that allowed anyone to pour it on a surface or vaporise it into the air, using the light and thermal energy from the Sun. And for once, everyone was taking him seriously!

'What would this do you may ask? It does not only remove the pollutants existing on the surface or the air, it also does artificial photosynthesis and releases energy which would be stored in an incredibly specific container that would sort of compress the energy into manageable amounts as the energy from the Sun is quite a large amount of energy. To put it into perspective, that's 430 quintillion Joules per hour, and humans merely use a smidge of that energy, which is only 510,000 Joules per hour. It would solve all of our energy crisis problems. So, let's look at the next slide—

'Uh, excuse me, so what exactly is the amount of energy this, uh, Eco-1 would release. Why carry out artificial photosynthesis and convert the energy absorbed from the...photons?' The voice of the ambassador of the USA rang out from the back of the small room they were in. Zhihong froze. He had known this was inevitable. Face pale, he said, 'Put simply,' He gulped, and took a shuddery breath, 'in one day, the energy generated is enough to make sufficient Hiroshimas, to utterly incinerate Earth twice.'

The American ambassador smiled and almost every world leader also had a wolfish glint in their eyes, except China's, where Han Pingxiong let out a sigh and rubbed his forehead. In his heart, he knew every country would take advantage of the energy released by the invention during the process of eliminating pollutants to invent new H-Bombs and R-Bombs – a hypothetical name of a bomb with the power of the asteroid that hit Earth 66 million years ago. The fifth mass extinction, which would be possible if only they could find an element that could carry the energy stably enough. The world had learnt their lesson when a failed R-bomb experiment directed by the USA accidentally killed 300 people in 2056, in which the bomb exploded upon contact with an asteroid in space, and the pieces hurtled back to Earth from the impact. Unfortunately, a few made their way back to Earth and killed a small population of people. A bomb of that power would mean an incredibly fragile and tense situation than it already is on the global stage.

Pingxiong got up and spoke into his microphone, 'Alright, everyone, please proceed to your respective rooms and take a half-hour intermission. Thanks.' Owing to his education in the UK, Pingxiong spoke excellent English. As all the world leaders went and walked back to their rooms guarded by bodyguards, Pingxiong went and talked to Han Zhihong.

'President Han, with all due respect, I don't want my invention to be used as a weapon, as I want to prevent the catastrophe created by the holographic materials we, China, invented. They were used as weapons capable of regeneration. You saw the damage they did in the Russo-Ukrainian War as flying disks, allowing objects to be coated in some sort of hard light.'

'But I'm afraid that even if we don't give it to them, they'll take it by themselves. All they need is one stealth drone and they can steal that chemical or that panel.'

Zhihong let out a heavy sigh; he wished that he could go back to the good old days, when the pressing matter of climate change allowed everyone to work together without scheming and political conflict. He thought of the great Confucius, who emphasised on the virtue *Ren* (being altruistic), which was to show a selfless concern for the well-being of the others, or in general for the society or even other nations in order to develop a sense of integrity. But, to

do this, we had to think on a deeper level concerning other people in the sense that we were all interconnected in this global society, which led to many great inventions. Cao Lun invented the prototype of the modern paper we use today, creating a convenient writing medium; Kao Kuen Charles invented the fibre optics and established one of the first sustainable working fibre optics systems all because he used a different angle looking at developing faster telecommunications; Wen Tsing Chow invented the Programmable Read-only Memory as well as being a leading pioneer in space and missile guidance systems and technology, all leading to advances to reaching space. While missiles are bad news, the guidance systems he created allowed for new development of advanced sensors and proportional navigation which are used in new AI robots to be able to be programmed to go to a certain destination by the user and allows for even more accurate readings in preventing natural disasters nowadays. From ancient times to this day, Chinese inventors have been leading the world in inventing new materials and technology, mostly for the good of humanity. In fact, as mentioned before, the holographic material some Chinese inventors had worked together to invent had been weaponized and 30 years ago, the use of the rail gun in the second Afghan war when terrorists took over the capital of Afghanistan shocked the world when it brought with it enough explosives that destroyed two city blocks. The rail gun technology had also been based on Chinese magnetic technology.

However, all of these Chinese inventors had assumed or hoped their inventions would be able to be used for good. Unfortunately, as seen in the cases of magnetic technology and as well as Eco-1, and also all the countries will be out for their own good instead of thinking of the greater good of saving the Earth when there won't even be an Earth to rule even if they did manage to take over the world. Zhihong couldn't help but shake his head and feel his heart drop a thousand times into Hell. He was about to suggest activating the secret plan to Pingxiong when suddenly the anti-air sirens bellowed into the cool spring day.

They wailed and wailed as Pingxiong, Zhihong and other world leaders were escorted into the anti-nuclear bunker (while this isn't Chinese technology, they made it better by mixing reinforced steel and ferro-cast. But when their bodyguards closed and locked the doors, a trio of them shot the other bodyguards and turned to shoot the world leaders. 'Blam! Blam! Blam!' All three of them dropped to the ground as one of the bodyguards on the ground shot them in his last breath. Everyone breathed out a shuddery breath. Then, one of them turned on the TV.

"We have received reports of several nuclear attacks across the world and in China as well. According to our satellites, several countries, such as the Philippines, have been decimated already. We will continue..." The news anchor trailed off as she looked wide eyed, a single tear falling from her eye, past the camera, and the camera blacked out.

The bunker started to shake and rumble, and one of the walls crumpled away to a vast, gaping crater where the news tower once stood next to them. Then all of them saw the nuclear explosion not far away.

This was the ending of all endings. This would be their undoing. This was the result of the countries' pursuit of dominance.

Zhihong, too sad and tired of life to even cry, took out his spider-bot and wrote his will. It sped away with its mini jet engines to his home. As he came face to face with Death, he felt free as he clutched his vial of Eco-1.

His last thought, 'I hope, if humans do exist again, they will learn the principle of *Ren* and be less violent than we were...'

5 April, 2082 (07:00)

Zhihong's spider bot crawled out from the debris as the sun shone onto the world and kept crawling, with its last mission programmed into its mind: help all surviving humanity revive civilization.

Every tomorrow is a new day...

<Mr.Zhang's life>

St. Margaret's Coeducational English Secondary and Primary School, Cheng, Tsz Yau – 12

A Long time ago, there was a man called Mr. Zhang, he loved China but was always made fun of by his colleagues. He worked for the Chinese military as a scientist. China lost and no one had an idea and he had an idea that it was the best.

“We already lost 10 thousand people in the war; we must find a way to make the people live in a safe place.” A eunuch came in with a lot of different papers, all the people in the palace looked at him and felt shocked, every single paper was written in different languages and words. The king asked “What’s wrong? What is this? Where did these come from?” The eunuch started sweating and got a terrible headache, he suddenly had faster breathing. He spoke nervously, “They..will..have..conflicts, they are talking about World War 2...What can we do, we cannot still use the rocks and arrows to fight in the war, we will lose more and more people in the war, we must figure out a solution to help China.” The people who were in the palace felt worried and discussed “World War 2” and became very noisy. The king shouted and left the palace without saying a word, they felt more worried because even the king could not find a way to solve this problem. While they were discussing World War 2, Mr. Zhang ran back to his laboratory. His own laboratory was a damp small room, it was old, long forgotten, the windows cracked in four pieces. Birds no longer sang in the trees, and even insects had largely left the house, but it seemed that Mr. Zhang really cared about this musky room. For him, this room was a room which was full of treasure. He used a brush to dust and opened a small lamp, he used a basket to bring all his materials. He spent a whole day using different components and combining them in various ways. While he was inventing, the king called other scientists to see him. The other scientists were so lazy that they didn't even do some research about how to improve, the King also knew that they always bullied and made fun of Mr. Zhang. They looked around and asked, “Where is Mr. Zhang?” Mr. Zhang ran into the room where the king and other scientists were discussing. Mr. Zhang said “Sorry I am late, they didn't tell me that we have a meeting with the king. But while I was waiting, I already have something I can show you.” He took out a small sack that was filled with dark-coloured sandy substance, and said “I present to you...gunpowder!” The king didn't say even a word, he looked at the gunpowder carefully and he suddenly froze, the palace became silent. The other scientists didn't trust the gunpowder, so they decided to test it on their own in a forest. While they were testing, the king and all the eunuchs followed them and took a look at this new invention. Mr. Zhang felt more and more pressure and afraid that it might not work as usual, because this was the first time to test the gunpowder, even the components was not really sure about. When he was making gunpowder, he just looked around and found something that could fit in and could burn. When the other scientists started to count 1.. all the heartbeats were following the numbers, they even felt more nervous and excited, 2...3... “BOOM!” They all covered their ears and wiped their eyes. The king walked slowly to see how the explosion was. He smiled and said “It really impressed me, great job Mr. Zhang. You can now work with other scientists to make more and more gunpowder.” The other scientists ignored Mr. Zhang and just left the forest, Mr. Zhang felt shocked about the praise from the king, he wanted to explore more about gunpowder or other things that were similar like this. He still had two weeks to prepare the gunpowder, the king whispered to one of the smart eunuchs “It is a good thing that other countries don't know about our gunpowder, we can attack them in a smooth way with no fear of how many people we will lose in this war.” The eunuch smiled and nod his head.

World War 2 was began, the other countries felt surprised and shocked about this new invention from China, as others countries still needed to get closer to their enemies to be effective. China could attack from range. There was also the Great Wall of China which could protect the soldiers from arrows. The king saw this condition, he felt much more at ease and kept on discussing how they could end this war faster.

After this war, other countries tried to find gunpowder that came from China, they wanted to copy them and improve this technology much better than China. The king was jubilant and said, “Can somebody change Mr. Zhang to the top of the list of scientists in China and we can give him some award to thank him for making this huge success.” The other scientists felt jealous and annoyed about the smile on Mr. Zhang's face. Mr. Zhang worked much harder, and he invented more than 100 different gunpowders, China kept winning in the other wars by the reason of the invention from Mr. Zhang. Mr. Zhang had made a huge success in China!

Exploring China

St. Margaret's Coeducational English Secondary and Primary School, Chong, Sing Kiu – 13

I don't remember what my objective was.

A mesmerising blue, orange and black fade covered with bright, illuminating stars filled the sky above me, I began to walk down a narrow alleyway, vines and moss covered both walls next to me. As I traversed a few more steps forward, I caught sight of old-fashioned handwriting in a language I do not speak of. If I had to describe it, each character had its own unique strokes of different lengths. I had a slight impression that I had seen characters written in this type of style. I turned back to see if I missed anything, at the corner of my eye, a rectangular-shaped metal gadget shone light into my eyes. I had no doubt this was the smartphone Chris, my college buddy, was talking about. Subsequently, I picked it up and continued my journey down the alley. Moments flew by and it vibrated in my pocket, it seemed like someone was calling me, I picked up the call and it was just the Huawei Headquarters promoting their new Huawei P60 series. If I had to be honest, I was interested in their ultra displaying technology, image quality and reaction speed to every contact it makes with a human body.

I don't know what I did, but out of thin air, I was teleported to a dense city filled to the brim with skyscrapers, humans, and electric cars. This had to be China. A few kilometres in front of me was a launchpad for space exploration standing proud and tall. On the floors near the launchpad lies all achievements of the past, historical space missions. 'Mars Exploration', 'Tiangong Space Station', 'Tianzhou Cargo Spaceship', etc. These probably marked China's remarkable advancements in the field of space. A distinct, bitter, pungent aroma aroused my nose as I rubbed my eyes owing to the lack of sleep I had yesterday night. Without knowing I did, I subconsciously followed it while rubbing my eyes. The next thing I saw was a traditional Chinese medicine and herbal remedies shop. I had to take a sip of the medicine that was black as coal on the counter of the shop. I patiently waited for 3 minutes after making an electronic payment, for the medicine as I felt ill. I tasted it, paralysed and stunned, I gently let it rest on my plate, trying to forget the flavour. I bowed down to greet the shopkeeper with thanks and scurried along the pebbled path down the side of the road.

I came across a train station that looked astonishingly huge. Without thinking, I went inside, paid for a ticket and got on the high-speed train. I couldn't stand still, the train went so fast and made it to the next station in just 20 seconds. According to the electronic screens near me, the train travelled one kilometre. At the next station, marvellous high-rising buildings surrounded me, my dream job was to become an architecture. I scrutinised and studied the designs and physics behind them, I slowly appreciated the wonderful skills China's architectures had.

At the break of dawn, I recalled my objective. It seems to be that I have to dig deep into China, in addition to discover the rich beauty of the country too. Without knowing, I had already completed my objective and slowly returned to consciousness.

China is such a spectacular place, this place creates the best phones, building designs and so on. Furthermore, it inhabits the greatest discoveries and inventions such as creating paper and the earliest reminences of printing.

New Tales of China's Inventions

St. Margaret's Coeducational English Secondary and Primary School, Chow, Chun Hin – 13

Once upon a time, there was a famous inventor in China named Zhou Zi. Zhou Zi was on a quest to uncover new chapters of China's inventions. Zhou Zi had always been fascinated by the rich history of China's innovation. Zhou Zi believed that there were a lot of untold stories waiting to be revealed.

With his curious mind and creativity, he began his journey across the vast lands of his mother country. He first went to Xi'an, which has been the capital city of China for years. He was there to search for clues about an ancient Chinese invention that had been lost to time – the flying machine.

According to legend, during the Qin dynasty, a genius inventor named Fan Jian created a flying machine that could carry passengers 100 metres high above the ground and could travel thousands of miles in a day. However, a detailed description of the invention was nowhere to be found for the past centuries, it slowly became a mere myth.

Zhou Zi had done loads of research, studying ancient documents and speaking with local historians. After days of relentless work, he found a hidden passage that led to a secret room. In that room, he found a forgotten manuscript written by Fan Jian himself. He was very excited, he carefully examined the manuscript. The manuscript contained complex diagrams and detailed instructions on how to build a flying machine. The invention was called "Feilong" also known as the "Flying Dragon". It was a large bamboo frame covered in silk.

Zhou Zi wanted to bring "Feilong" back to life, he brought all the drafts with him back to his workshop in Beijing. With the help of professional craftsmen, he started his project to bring "Feilong" back to life. He carefully followed Fan Jian's instructions. Days turned into weeks, and weeks turned into months as the flying machine slowly took shape.

After almost a year, the flying machine was finally built. The first flight of the "Feilong" finally arrived. Zhou Zi crowded into the cockpit of the flying machine. The craftsmen pulled the levers, within seconds, the "Feilong" already travelled tens of metres. The "Feilong" was travelling feet above the ground. Zhou Zi was feeling like never before, he was amazed.

The flying machine "Feilong" was a huge success, Zhou Zi was then referred to as the father of modern aircrafts.

New Tales of China's Inventions

St. Margaret's Coeducational English Secondary and Primary School, Colloton, Dik Hin Sean – 13

Once upon a time in the majestic land of China, nestled among the breathtaking peaks of a secluded village, thrived a remarkable group of inventors known as the "Dreamweavers."

These visionaries were renowned far and wide for their boundless creativity and unwavering determination. Day after day, they immersed themselves in a world of innovation, tirelessly seeking to create marvels that would bring prosperity to their village.

This little village possessed an extraordinary secret—the soil beneath their feet teemed with life-giving nutrients, bestowed upon them by a celestial gift. A meteor of unparalleled significance, christened 'Messiah-12,' had descended upon their land a millennium ago. Within its mysterious core lay a treasure trove of elements that existed nowhere else in the world. Among these enigmatic compounds, the Dreamweavers discovered two new elements of the periodic table—'aether' and 'bozanium.'

Aether, a wondrous source of immense energy, once harnessed, could rival the power of the sun itself, capable of releasing the same amount of energy in a single day as a ton of aether.

Bozanium, on the other hand, possessed extraordinary properties—it was an exceptionally durable and self-regenerating metal, perfect for constructing robust structures and resilient homes.

The village's advancement outpaced the rest of the world, thanks to these extraordinary elements. Furthermore, the radiation from the meteor had imprinted itself upon the villagers' ancestors, bringing about genetic modifications that endowed them with unmatched intelligence, extraordinary memorization skills, and lightning-fast brain processing speeds.

However, amidst the wonders of their village, a young Dreamweaver named Xiao Ming found himself plagued by haunting nightmares. Visions of their village's aether reserves depleting filled his restless nights. He foresaw a cataclysmic future, where their once-thriving village would descend into chaos, resorting to pillaging other cities for their energy sources.

Driven by an insatiable thirst for a solution, Xiao Ming became consumed by his quest to discover a renewable energy source that would sustain their beloved village. He delved deep into extensive research, forgoing sleep and sustenance to explore various forms of energy, radiation, and elements in a tireless pursuit of a renewable energy breakthrough.

After months of tireless effort, Xiao Ming finally made a breakthrough. He devised a device that could harness the boundless power of sunlight, absorbing its energy through photovoltaic cells delicately etched within his creation. These cells converted the sun's radiance into electrical charges, which, in turn, fueled the generation of clean and sustainable energy for their village.

Xiao Ming firmly believed that his invention, aptly named 'The Solar Panel,' would ensure their prosperity for millennia to come.

With unwavering determination, Xiao Ming gathered his fellow Dreamweavers and presented his vision. Initially met with skepticism and doubt, Xiao Ming's meticulously crafted research paper on aether and his compelling arguments about the need for an alternative energy source gradually won over his comrades. They realized that words and ideas possessed the power to reshape their world.

Pooling their collective skills and expertise, the Dreamweavers embarked on a tireless mission, working day and night to refine Xiao Ming's original design. Their collaboration merged the realms of engineering, materials science, and renewable energy, resulting in a revolutionary solar panel that surpassed their wildest expectations.

Excitement coursed through the village as news of their invention spread like wildfire. The unveiling of the flexible solar panels became a spectacle eagerly awaited by the villagers. And on that momentous day, bathed in the radiant glow of the sun, the flexible solar panels were unfurled, revealing their incredible potential. Like a symphony of

innovation, the panels absorbed the sun's rays, converting them into immense amounts of energy that powered the entire village at once. The villagers stood in awe, witnessing firsthand the indomitable spirit of the Dreamweavers and the transformative power of their invention.

It didn't take long for the village to recognize the revolutionary potential of the flexible solar panels.

The realization dawned that this breakthrough could reshape the energy industry, reducing reliance on fossil fuels and safeguarding the environment for future generations. Eager to share their knowledge and contribute to the betterment of the world, the villagers selflessly offered a more basic solar panel design and diminished materials to an outsider scientist named Li Wei.

It was a gesture of benevolence, a stepping stone to propel the outside world toward a brighter future.

Li Wei's accomplishments soon caught the attention of the Chinese government, who recognized the groundbreaking nature of the invention. They provided significant funding and resources to further develop the technology and implement it on a grand scale. Li Wei became a national hero, celebrated for his visionary spirit and invaluable contribution to sustainable development.

As the years rolled by, Li Wei's passion for renewable energy continued to inspire a new generation of inventors. The seeds of innovation he planted took root, and society propelled itself forward, embracing technology and embracing a brighter, more sustainable lifestyle.

New Tales of China's Inventions

St. Margaret's Coeducational English Secondary and Primary School, Eriksson, Lennon – 12

Gunpowder. The invention that changed the world forever. For nearly two thousand years. Gunpowder has evolved from small fireworks to megalithic warheads. The invention had cut short millions of lives. And is not to be underestimated. Back in ancient China in the year 142 AD, an alchemist called Wei Boyang invented gunpowder and had no violent intentions. He recorded that by mixing 3 powders and lighting it up. Those powders would “fly and dance” but what he didn't know. Was that in the future, life on earth would not be the same...

Chapter 1 THE SHRINE

It was far beyond the time to sleep. The full moon is shining high and bright over the peaceful city that Wei lived in. All was quiet in the main streets. Near the end of the Main Street was a sizeable house with dim lights piercing the vast darkness. In the courtyard of the house. A dark silhouette is struggling to place large sacks and goods on a cart that some of the content inside spills out. He struggles to pull the cart but manages to bring it out on the street. There, he attaches the cart to his private horse. The silhouette is none other than the infamous Wei Boyang. He hopped onto the horse and his journey began. He was travelling to a festival in the capital and he was going to use his invention to bring amusement and happiness to the festival. The sound of his cantering horse filled the night with the distant city edging further away. The cantering sounds were interrupted by a faint but noticeable humming sound. Wei's horse suddenly stopped by a shrine on the side of the road on a large boulder. Wei became very confused and dismounted his horse. He walked towards the shrine until he was just 1 meter away. But before he could react. A massive bright red light blinded his eyes and he felt that he was getting sucked into the shrine. A loud ringing sound blocked his ears for what seemed like an eternity until all was dead quiet.

Chapter 2 CONFUSION

I was entirely unconscious but I felt that I was on solid ground. I started to hear faint muffled voices in Chinese with the loud ringing sound still engulfing my very ears. As my eyes started to see, I noticed that I was in a village with people frantically running around. I used all my strength to get up on my feet. I felt it was best to look around and saw weird looking buildings. My first instinct was that I was in Mongolia at the time but as I read some of the text on the building I found out I was in my home town. It was really bright in the day with the sun shining brighter than I had last lay my eyes onto it.

As soon as I started to gain knowledge of my surroundings I noticed a dead man lying on the floor beside me. I was completely shocked as those “weird” houses I saw were burning to rubble. I looked into a wooden shack that was burning and I saw huge sacks with My Invention?! I knew right away that this was not going to end well. I started to run as fast as my legs could carry me and heard a loud explosion behind me. The force was so strong it knocked me onto the ground when I was 50 meters away. I had never expected my own invention to bring mass destruction but joy.

Everything around me was chaos. I also saw people throwing my powder into a stick then there was an explosion. I looked around and saw people falling every time there was an explosion from that object. I later found out that they were called “rifles”.

Not long after, there were huge flying dragons releasing what looked like barrels with my invention inside instantly incinerating blocks of houses. I was in utter shock.

Chapter 3 THE FLOATING VILLAGE

The City was going to be rubble in a short matter of time and without a second thought, I ran towards the coastline where everyone headed and soon I saw a large ship with many decks for refugees. Upon seeing the ship, I felt that rescue was finally in our hands. On the bow of the ship housed a pretty sizeable gun which shot 30cm long metal projectiles. Finally, my own invention is on my side! The ship started to move and the burning port crept further away. The sun was disappearing behind a large dark cloud. I shrugged one of the passengers shoulders and asked “what year is It” he confusingly replied “1942?” I couldn't believe his words. That shrine placed me forward in time! 1800 years in fact! Maybe it was showing me the outcomes of my invention! I paced around the ship for two days straight thinking of a way to get back home. The ship was filled 10 times over its maximum capacity. So I decided to walk out to get some air on the deck. A large and dense fog bank rolled upon us.

About 500 meters away, a large dark silhouette appeared on the left side of our ship.

We all looked forward and saw that we were leaving the quick fog bank was leaving.

And to our horror, it was a large ship with multiple larger guns than ours. We immediately knew that victory wasn't in our hands but we wouldn't go down without a fight. A loud yell came from behind, "OPEN FIRE!" Our small gun resembled resistance as huge shells land around us with deadly accuracy.

One of our projectiles slammed into their deck causing a small fire to erupt but luck wasn't on our side as a huge 1-meter-long shell crashed into the centre of our ship. Detonating and splitting out ship in half. Luckily I was one of the very few to know how to swim in my city so after swimming for 2 hours towards the coast with the sinking ship behind me, I had arrived at a small town by the sea.

The locals were happy to invite me and let me stay in one of their homes.

Not much had happened and I will live this peaceful life here with nothing to worry.

Chapter 4 THE JAPANESE

3 years had passed since I arrived in this town from that ship wreck. I have gained knowledge of my surroundings and adapted to this new way of life. Another morning in the year 1945. My morning thoughts were broken by the town's bell ringing. When I stepped outside of my house, a Japanese soldier was waiting at my door pointing a rifle at me. I followed his orders and just like that, the town's population became prisoners of war. Children were separated from their parents and men who tried to fight back were severely beaten or shot on the spot. We were forced onto a prison ship and now we were on the way to Japan.

Chapter 5 THE BRIGHT LIGHT

The ship sailed north to Japan. However the war was not in their hands.

The Americans took the island of Okinawa and the war in Europe came to an end.

2 days later and the coastline was in sight. The ship edged closer to the harbour until we were right inside the harbour of Hiroshima. I peaked through a small portal and saw a large American bomber over the city. I was expecting small distant explosions but instead there was a huge bright light, brighter than the sun. And in front of me I saw the entire City decimating in front of my eyes. The bomb was larger than I could've ever anticipated one as the huge shockwave barreled towards our ship.

The large steel prison ship blew into pieces with dust and debris flying at high speeds. A familiar bright red light blinded me once again until all was quiet.

Chapter 6 THE GREATEST REGRET

I woke up in a very familiar setting with the moon light piercing the darkness and emptiness at night. I looked around all unconscious and I was standing next to a small shrine on a large boulder. I looked back down a small dirt path with my horse waiting for me on the other end. I sight and slowly walked to my horse and took out my fireworks and gunpowder from my cart and threw it onto the side of the road. I first lit up my fireworks as they beautifully danced around the sky with no harm at all. Then I dragged the bag of gunpowder with all my strength and took one of my burning sticks and took 50 paces back. Then there was an explosion, killing a hare in the process. All my gunpowder is gone and the world could live in peace for the next ten thousand years.

The End

However, back in Wei's hometown, a young man decides to break into wei's empty home. He looked around the rich alchemist's home in search of something with a high value. He paced around the courtyard and saw a small handful of mysterious lying gracefully on the rough ground. He picked it up and placed it in a small sack.

New Tales of China's Inventions – 'The Invention of Papermaking'

St. Margaret's Coeducational English Secondary and Primary School, Kwan, Lauren Kailan – 11

You may know the Four Great Inventions of Ancient China, one of them includes papermaking. Now you may also know Cai Lun as the inventor of papermaking, but it is said that he may have simply improved upon a known process. Let me tell you my tale about the 'Invention of Papermaking'.

A long time ago, around 50–62 CE, there was a boy named Pai Rus. He is a commoner, but a very inquisitive boy. He loves to learn new things and has been curious about everything ever since he was born. Other than that, he is also smart and inventive. One day, he was learning about Chinese words and he found it difficult to memorise and understand, because at this period, nobody could read anything as papermaking hadn't been invented yet. People had to be taught by words spoken out. Pai Rus had too much knowledge in his mind so feeling frustrated, he asked his teacher "sir, how am I supposed to memorise all this?" He asked in Chinese, "if only I had something to refer to, then I don't have to memorise everything all at once!" He thought. But the problem is, Pai Rus didn't know what to do to make things easier. So he decided to tell his friend Cai Lun about his idea because he knew that Cai Lun had a solution to everything.

Cai Lun's father, Cai Bi had already made some progress. He discovered that people could make a thin white sheet and that they could print something on it, perhaps it can even print pictures or words. But he didn't know how to do it. So Pai Rus and Cai Lun did lots and lots of experiments, and forty-three years later, they finally figured out that it could be made using mulberry and other bast fibres along with fishnets, old rags, and hemp waste. But unfortunately, right before they were about to show the whole world their new invention, Pai Rus got seriously sick and died two days later. But Cai Lun still showed people their work after Pai Rus' death and claimed that he invented it all by himself. Everybody was so impressed by his work and respected him a lot as it brought benefits to people's lives. When it was time for Cai Lun to name his new invention, he realised that he was selfish and he lied to everyone about him inventing papermaking all by himself, but it was too late to tell everyone. "Don't worry, I'll just name it after him then. Hmm... Pai Rus... Yes! Papyrus! Papyrus making!" He shouted. So that's when papermaking was invented.

Nowadays, we call papyrus 'paper'. We use paper for making a lot of things, such as making a book, making a paper bag, and even wrapping presents. With the existence of papermaking, it greatly improved our daily lives.

Now that's the end of my tale about the 'Invention of Papermaking'.

Dreamweavers

St. Margaret's Coeducational English Secondary and Primary School, Lai, Ying Nam Ethan – 13

Once upon a time in ancient China, a kingdom renowned for its inventive spirit and rich cultural heritage, there existed a group of extraordinary inventors. These inventors are known as the Dreamweavers and were dedicated to pushing the boundaries of imagination and bringing to marvellous inventions that would shape the world to life.

Li Wei, one of the Dreamweavers, was a brilliant engineer who had a vision to alter transportation. Inspired by the speed of the majestic dragons that adorned Chinese myth, he set out to create a new mode of travel that would capture their essence.

After years of tireless experiments, Li Wei disclosed his creation—a wonderful flying chariot. Resembling a chariot with giant wings, the vehicle harnessed the power of the wind to fly through the air. It was pushed by a combination of gears, lightweight materials, and a smart navigation system inspired by the stars.

The flying chariot quickly captured the imagination of the kingdom's people. It became a symbol of freedom and adventure, allowing travelers to explore distant lands and witness the breath-taking beauty of China's diverse landscapes from above. The skies became a canvas for exploration, connecting people and cultures in ways never before imagined. The flying chariot was improved and reworked by several scientists and inventors and gradually became the aircrafts we can see today.

Another remarkable invention emerged from the ingenious mind of Mei Ling, a gifted alchemist. Mei Ling had a deep understanding of the healing properties of plants and sought to create a device that could provide instant relief to those in need.

Her invention was the Harmony Stone, a small, handheld device infused with the essence of colorful medicinal herbs. When gently rubbed against the skin, it emitted a soothing warmth that soothed pain and promoted healing. The Harmony Stone became a useful tool for healers and a source of comfort for those suffering from affections.

Word of these amazing inventions spread throughout the kingdom, capturing the attention of Emperor Huan, a ruler known for his appreciation of inventions. Intrigued by the Dreamweavers' creations, he invited them to showcase their inventions at a grand exhibition held in the capital city.

The exhibition was a spectacle of imagination. Visitors marveled at the flying chariots as they gracefully soared through the air, leaving trails of colours as they flew. The 'Harmony Stones' provided a moment of alleviation for sick people, relieving their wounds and spreading a sense of tranquillity throughout the city.

Emperor Huan, overwhelmed by the brilliance and impact of these inventions, declared an annual festival of innovation. The festival would celebrate the wonderful imaginations of the Dreamweavers and inspire future generations to embrace their potential.

And so, the Dreamweavers continued to create new wonders, pushing the boundaries of what was possible. Their inventions not only transformed the kingdom but also left a memorable mark on the world. This would inspire future generations to embrace their creativity, explore undiscovered areas, and strive to make China and the world a better place through the power of innovation and invention.

This was just the start of the amazing inventions. Inspired by the Dreamweavers, younger generations continued to surpass the threshold of what is possible.

The Alchemist's Legacy

St. Margaret's Coeducational English Secondary and Primary School, Lee, Yin Yau Adrian – 12

A famous alchemist by the name of Wei Yang used to live in a charming village in the far-off realm of ancient China. Wei Yang was drawn to the mystical and deadly qualities of fire, as a devastating fire engulfed his village and all the people with it. This traumatic event ignited his lifelong quest to understand fire and harness its power for the greater good of society.

The innocent Wei Yang was traumatised by the fire, and was transformed into the man he is today, a countrywide famous Alchemist. He studied day at night, until he took a state test and got full marks at the age of 10. Some might say he had the qualities of a mythical phoenix, and his close association to the sun and close affinity with celestial forces, and because of it, was offered many high ranking jobs in the Tang Dynasty, but his quest on understanding and harnessing fire's power was not forgotten, and that he will never forget the catastrophic incident back at home, engraved into his heart, striving to leave an indelible mark on the course of human civilization.

As he denied the many requests of him going into the Tang Dynasty to work as a high ranking officer, he set his quest to find the "Scroll of the Phoenix", which was referred to many times by a bedtime story Wei's parents used to tell before bedtime. The "Scroll of the Phoenix" is not a singular scroll, but a series of scrolls, each containing fragments of knowledge that Wei Yang must piece together. These fragments are scattered across different regions of China, requiring Wei to travel far and wide, going on a physical and more importantly, philosophical exploration, to have a chance at having the power of the Gods, but most importantly, understanding the astronomical aspects of fire and its dangerous power.

Throughout the years, he encounters wise hermits, ancient statues and hidden temples, with wise men, where he learns the profound lessons about the interplay between nature, balance and the elements. By combining the knowledge learnt in his long lasting years of travelling, and the knowledge learnt in his early years, he developed gunpowder, which would eventually be one of the "Four Great Inventions" of Ancient China. By combining saltpetre found after tree stump removals, charcoal and Elemental sulphur found near volcanic regions Wei explored, he conceived a tool for economic development in mining and construction, which simultaneously bearing the qualities of a tool for human extinction.

After the discovery and some experiments done by Wei, he realised its potential for medical purposes, as it was able to be used in healing wounds and treating illnesses, which brought an unexpected application of gunpowder, revolutionising ancient Chinese medicine. But, with great power comes great responsibility. As one of Wei's tests, he launched red coloured fireworks for the first time ever, symbolising peace and good luck, but instead of taking this lightly, the Emperor decided to take it to heart to get that formula, after seeing its sheer force, and the thought of Mongols taking over his Kingdom, the Emperor was set to get the formula. But somehow, not only did the neighbouring kingdom gain knowledge of gunpowder, they wanted it for themselves too, striking deep fear in the Emperor's heart.

The Mongols, neighbouring countries and the Emperor's intrigue was not solely driven by thirst for power, but also fear of external threats, which was each other. But for Tang, the Mongols were their threat, as they were expanding their territory by intruding into lightly guarded territories on the North side of Tang. This conflict between the entirety of China puts Wei in a precarious position, stuck between loyalty to his Emperor and preventing the formula of this deadly weapon falling into the wrong hands. Then came the invention of cannons and catapults, which marked a new era of warfare, but also sparked debate and ethical dilemmas.

Although the story of Wei Yang may not be confirmed, his legacy transcends time as his discoveries travel beyond the borders of the world. As the invention of gunpowder spread throughout China, Traders and explorers brought tales of the gunpowder's power to foreign lands, inspiring curiosity and other innovations based off of gunpowder all around the world, no matter for bad or for the better. The mystery surrounding Wei Yang's identity and the origins of gunpowder may become the subject of legends, myths and conspiracy theories. Some believe he was an immortal celestial being, while other thinks that he was guided all by divine forces up high, the truth remains unknown, ensuring Wei Yang's legacy remains in the annals of history.

The Mystical Dragon Amulet

St. Margaret's Coeducational English Secondary and Primary School, Liu, Hau Yui Emma – 11

In a small village nestled deep within the mountains of China, lived a young boy named Li Wei. Li Wei's adventure spirit and curiosity of China's rich history often led him on exciting quests around his village.

One day, while exploring an old temple, Li Wei found a dusty old book. Intrigued, he wiped away the layers of dirt to unveil a tale about a mythical dragon amulet known to grant extraordinary powers.

To uncover the truth behind the legend, Li Wei embarked on a quest to find the mystical dragon amulet. Armed with a map and his adventurous spirit, he journeyed through dense forests, treacherous mountains, and soaring rivers.

After weeks of searching, Li Wei stumbled upon a crumbling cave hidden deep within a bamboo forest. As he entered, a mysterious voice echoed through the air, guiding him towards a secret chamber. There, lying atop an old pedestal, was the majestic dragon amulet.

Heart pounding with excitement, Li Wei reached for the amulet. As he clasped it in his hand, energy coursed through his hand. The dragon amulet glowed with an ethereal light, illuminating the entire cave.

With his newfound powers, Li Wei realised the true purpose of the ancient artefact. It wasn't meant for personal gain but rather to protect and preserve the harmony of nature. The amulet bestowed upon him the ability to communicate with animals, heal wounded plants, and summon storms to provide much-needed rainfall during droughts.

Li Wei returned to his village, using the dragon's powers to restore failing crops, comfort injured animals, and bring prosperity to his community. Word of his miraculous abilities spread far and wide, reaching the ears of the Emperor himself.

Impressed by Li Wei's noble deeds, the Emperor invited him to the grand palace. The young adventurer shared his tale and showcased the powers of the dragon amulet. Inspired by Li Wei's selflessness, the Emperor declared that the amulet would be protected and used for the greater good, ensuring China's natural beauty flourished for generations to come.

Embracing his new role as a guardian of the environment, Li Wei continued to use the dragon amulet's powers throughout his life, leaving behind a legacy that would inspire countless future adventurers.

And so, the tale of Li Wei and the mystical Dragon Amulet became a cherished chapter in the history of China's remarkable inventions, an ever-present reminder of the extraordinary powers hidden within the ancient artefacts of the past.

New Tales of China's Inventions

St. Margaret's Coeducational English Secondary and Primary School, Sjafii, Eugenia Amabelle – 13

In the vast land of ancient China, it was a day like any other. A day within the Song Dynasty, underneath the reign of Emperor Renzong. Marketplaces were bustling, filled with merchants from all corners of the empire, bringing in a plethora of local and imported precious goods. Commerce was flourishing. But the copper supply began to dwindle.

Amidst the growing economy, the availability of copper coins simply did not meet the demand for currency. The low value, heavy metallic coins, were no more a luxury, but a burden. Merchants and customers alike were fed up with the clanging of the copper, as they dangled on a single string of burden.

Meanwhile, in the city of Chengdu, a Sichuan merchant sought to tackle the issues of those cast copper coins himself. The visionary, Song Lan, was greatly inspired by the art of paper-making. He embarked on a quest to create a lightweight currency with the practice of such art.

Not only was he a merchant, he was also an artisan in paper-making. A unique blend of mulberry tree bark, hemp, and old fishing nets. Transformed into a thin sheet of paper, as light as a feather. In fear of counterfeits, he used a selection of fibre mixed in that sheet of paper. To seal it off, an intricate seal of six colours printed with a woodblock was engraved onto the paper.

But his quest didn't end there. What was the point of making something you will not use?

His invention to be displayed somewhere, anywhere; and there was no better place than the marketplace. The lightweight currency had merchants and customers in awe, and so the word and the paper money were spread. Of course, a creation such as this would not go under the government's nose. Irritated, government officials sought to find, and perhaps arrest its mysterious creator.

Song Lan knew he couldn't hide for long, so he decided to exhibit his ideas to those who were after him. This was a perfect opportunity that could go oh-so wrong, but the risks didn't matter to him.

The authorities were intrigued by his proposal. Wan Jiayi, the head government official scoffed at him and said "An interesting proposal indeed... But you still did this under illegal means." He leaned in closer to the nervous Song Lan, "How about I make my own proposal? Make these paper notes of yours under our supervision, and if you earn both the emperor's and the public's favour, you will not face execution."

Song Lan couldn't let his idea die alongside him. So he couldn't do anything except accept the dangerous offer.

It was already dusk, and he was escorted to the palace quarters to complete his task. He began, once again with the mulberry tree bark, hemp and the old fishing rags. Pounding them and moulding them into a thin sheet of paper with the many fibres mixed in. Finally, the cherry on top, the exquisite seal unlike any other, embedded on the dollar. The job was done.

When he went out for some fresh air, he noticed that the sun had already begun to rise. All he could do was wait for his judgement, whilst Wan Jiayi glared at him like a hawk. The emperor and the townsfolk were marvelled by his invention. As if the God of luck had given Song Lan his blessing, he thought. Reluctantly, Wan Jiayi had to offer the up-and-coming prodigy a job within the government. The government also began to distribute the currency, labelled Jiaozi, due to popular demand.

Thus, paper money was born. News of the ground-breaking creation spread to other nations that slowly adopted this ingenuity. Song Lan turned his vision into reality and revolutionised the economy and world history, starting the story that formed the bank notes we know and love today.

Silky Beginnings

St. Margaret's Coeducational English Secondary and Primary School, Ting, Wei – 13

Accidents – while they are generally regarded as misfortune, not all accidents cause unwelcome happenings. Take the tale of the black cat as an example. People in the past often tied them to things such as bad luck or witchcraft. In the end, did they really cause as much harm as we think they did? Sometimes, accidents can cause one, or even many, to strike gold...

Lingshi looked wistfully to the distance. Rustling could be heard from the mulberry tree overtop her head, the wind causing her teacup to shake slightly. She takes a small sip from the cup, attempting to cease her distress. The civilisation – her civilisation of China had just begun a large development in the housing aspect. You may wonder why Empress Leizu feels disgruntled when her country is prospering.

‘Our foundation is not sturdy enough. We must do something—something outstanding, something that can make us shine bright among all the other civilisations. It will be too late, and other civilisations may overpower or even try to—to take possession of us’, she thought. The sleeves of her robes clung to her arms, the fabric rough against her skin, akin to buried naked in coarse sand, or standing within a forest of pine trees, each needle brushing against your skin and causing an unpleasant tingle within the body.

‘It seems that nothing is going my way today’, Lingshi thought.

She would’ve missed it, given how inattentive she had been. If not for the tranquillity that masked the area, the slight thump of a solid object against water would’ve gone unnoticed. The sound seemed to get her back to her senses, at least. Looking down, a white item had fallen into her cup of tea.

“Now my tea’s ruined as well. Surely my day can’t get any better!” She cried.

As Lingshi tried to take it out, the item suddenly expanded in the liquid. The tight pod loosened to reveal a bundle of threads. Lingshi stared at it in bewilderment, eyes widened and filled with the wonder of a small child’s when they first explore the world, or a cat, with its eyes locked on its prey. Scooping it up into her hand, she pulled a thin string out of the object. The thread was thin. It did not break easily. Some parts of the thread gleamed and shone a bright white under the sun. Lingshi had not seen anything like it ever before.

The thread was soft against the touch. Unlike the fabrics they had now, this material was smooth and durable. Lingshi looked around immediately, determined to find the source. She searched between every branch of the mulberry tree, and alas, she found what she was looking for. A small worm wriggled on a small branch, nibbling on a mulberry leaf. Lingshi was delighted to see the worm, realising that the strange object had been a cocoon.

She called over a maid and said, “See this cocoon? It feels amazing. Bring me the seamstresses and I shall ask if they could make a fabric out of this thread.”

“Yes Your Majesty, I’ll get on with it right away.” The maid hurried back into the palace and came back with a group of seamstresses. They chattered and whispered amongst each other. As they saw Empress Leizu, they bowed their heads in respect.

“Please, there is no need for formalities. I want to show you all something.” Lingshi said. Her words sparked the interest of the tailors, and only increased when she held up the soaked cocoon.

“This is a cocoon from the worm up on this mulberry tree. It dropped in my tea, and what happened next was fascinating – it expanded and unraveled into many threads. The texture is smooth and comfortable. Is there any possible way to turn this into a fabric?” She asks. The seamstresses leaned down to get a closer look. They were struck with wonder, as they have never seen something like this before.

“I’m sure there’s a way, Your Majesty. It could be a better material than all of the fabrics we currently have!” The head of the seamstresses exclaimed. “We praise the wisdom of Her Majesty!” She tells the women. The group erupted into praise and cheer before getting to work.

The study was tranquil. Lingshi was helping the emperor with some affairs when a knock on the door was heard.

“Come in!”

It was her lady-in-waiting. She rushed into the study, an excited expression plastered on her face.

“Your Majesty! The fabric has been completed! The fabric with the thread you gave the tailors a week ago, is completed!”

Lingshi rose from her desk immediately, heart filled with anticipation.

“Bring me to the fabric. I must know how it turned out!”

The seamstresses greeted Empress Leizu with bright smiles.

“Your Majesty.” They said, synchronised.

The head of the tailors stepped out, holding a small piece of cloth. It was a white, rectangular piece. Parts of the fabric reflected a very vibrant light and it felt airy, and smooth, and felt cool against the skin.

“It is of great quality. We shall make more and more! Spread the news across the entire palace, no—to all of China!”

This was it. This is the breaking point their civilization needed. She just discovered something incredible, something other places wouldn’t have. With this fabric, they can gain enormous amounts of capital and expand their market!

Lingshi watched the process of the making of this fabric, which she had given the name, silk. She tried on the first silk robe made. Soon enough, silk was a fabric often adorned with gold and jewellery, and heavily loved by the people, especially the wealthy. Foreign countries paid large amounts of money just for silk. The process of making silk was kept secret, which strengthened China as a civilisation.

The discovery of silk was an accident, but what Lingshi did next, to make good use of what she got from this incident, was completely her own decision. By learning and using knowledge absorbed from an accident, any seemingly unfortunate thing, can become even more valuable than gold.

The Fight of DNA Enhancer

St. Margaret's Coeducational English Secondary and Primary School, Zhang, Xiaofei Michael – 11

As Leo continued his journey of learning in the lab, he accidentally found a shelf that made him feel very mysterious. Inside, he found a mysterious syringe labeled as "DNA Enhancer –DNA surge X."

Because Leo is a kid who loves being curious about something and exploring, he is wondering what could this staff do. With trembling hands, he carefully injected the "DNA surge x" into his blood, he was very unsure of what would happen next.

But Leo didn't feel any immediate effects. However, as the days passed, he started noticing remarkable changes in himself. His senses became sharper, his reactions became quicker, and his memory got improved, he could remember even how every person looked like that passed by him these days. It was because the DNA enhancer had unlocked hidden potential within him.

Excited by his newfound abilities, Leo shared his discovery with Doctor Richard. They decided to do further experiments so they could fully understand how much the DNA enhancers affect us.

Together, they injected the DNA enhancer into lab mice, and the results were astonishing. The mice grew stronger, and faster, and had a very high human intelligence. It seemed that the DNA enhancer had the power to enhance all of our living organisms and make us stronger.

The news of "DNA Surge X"'s news spread out pretty soon and it caught the attention of a powerful and mysterious organization known as "The X Future." The X Future is an underground group of wealthy people with a thirst for power, all of them want to get the DNA Surge X to raise their power for their evil purposes.

Leo and Doctor Richard soon found themselves in a thrilling chase, all of the "Future X" agents across the globe are chasing them for the DNA Enhancer. They traveled to different countries and tried to find clues for where's the DNA Enhancer's inventor.

During their adventure, they encountered a scientist named Dr. Li Ning, who had defected from Future X. Dr. Li Ning revealed that he is the inventor of the DNA Enhancer, he's Chinese and developed the DNA Surge X out in China, but his closest assistant betrayed him, his assistant is a member of Future X! He trapped me to serve the organization and asked me to make more DNA Enhancer so they can make more terrorist attacks to consolidate their power. Dr. Li Ning can do nothing to resist them so what he can only do is to make more DNA enhancers so the organization won't kill him. The organization put the DNA Enhancer everywhere in the world so they can use it anytime anywhere.

Realizing the potential danger, the DNA enhancer posed in the wrong hands, Leo, Doctor Richard, and Dr. Mei Ling formed an unlikely alliance to protect the world from Future X's evil plan.

Using their combined expert knowledge and enhanced abilities, they outsmarted Future X at every turn and escaped safely every time. They raced against time to find a way to neutralize the effects of the DNA enhancer, ensuring it would never fall into the wrong hands again.

In a showdown, Leo confronted the leader of Future X, a guy named Mr. Tomasi. But with their enhanced abilities, Leo and his allies fought valiantly against Future X's forces, employing their scientific knowledge and quick thinking to gain the upper hand.

In the end, Leo managed to inject Mr. Tomasi with DNA weakening agent, stripping him of his enhanced abilities and weakening his power. Future X's reign of terror finally came to an end, and the world was safe once more.

Leo, Doctor Richard, and Dr. Li Ning were hailed as heroes, their stories becoming the stuff of legends. They decided to use their knowledge and experiences to establish a global organization dedicated to the responsible and ethical use of genetic advancements.

Their organization, known as "Genetic Protector," worked tirelessly to ensure that all of the scientific breakthroughs that will be made in the future are used for the good of humanity, while making sure it's against misuse and exploitation.

Echoes of Time

St. Paul's Co-educational College, Choy, Tung Lam Anthony - 13

The small temple was on a narrow road, hiding behind the cover of trees, a mountain as its back walls. The night was eerily dark, the moonshine non-existent, clouds so low one could ride them.

"And that, daughter, is how we invented the mechanical clock."

"But a monk? A Buddhist monk at that as well. I thought Daoism and Buddhism were enemies. Nobody would acknowledge the achievements of a rival like that." The high-pitched voice of an innocent young girl.

"Achievements and personal matters are two different things. We have to acknowledge the works of others and strive to improve, with our personal feelings aside, otherwise nothing will ever be made. Just like how we invented paper making. Scientists acknowledged the works of even a eunuch, which is how we have this nice sheet to write on today." A tender smile, the infinite love of a father.

"Really? A eunuch? Aren't they banned from learning? What happened to them?"

"Well, I'll tell you tomorrow when we wake up. Now sleep tight. Love you, sweetie."

"Alright, Dad. Good night. Love you as well."

And so the candle was put out, kisses were blown, and the inventor returned to the living room to meet his family. And there they had it: one pot of this black powder.

No one would discover the burnt, charcoal-black temple until sunrise, a family of farmers walking towards the farms, terrified at their wandering imaginations, almost seeing the fireball engulfing the shack, slaughtering the Wei family and their poor young daughter.

Who gave them the wonderful idea of lighting gunpowder on fire?

"ADRIENE! ADRIENE WAKE UP!" came the screeching sound of the teacher. What a nuisance, she thought. "ADRIENE! GET UP NOW OR YOU'RE GOING TO DETENT--"

"Yes yes, I'm awake." came the highly irritated voice of Adriene. The last thing she needed was detention. And for once, she actually wanted to be in chemistry class. The teacher's supposed to be bringing some gunpowder over to show the class. Maybe she could blow the school up. Eh, who knows?

"Adriene, this is the third time this week that you fell asleep in my class. Can you just get enough sleep at night?"

"Well if you don't mutter that lullaby of yours so well maybe I won't fall asleep, Ms Wong." sneered Adriene.

"THAT'S IT. GET OUT OF MY CLASSROOM NOW AND GO TO THE PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE. NOW."

"My pleasure," she said, "been waiting for this." She did a little curtsy, then ran off.

"That little rascal," the teacher muttered, but loud enough for the class to hear.

Adriene, while walking to the office, noticed the chemistry lab, which sparked her curiosity, thinking, I'm not gonna see it anyway. Should I?

And she did. Walking in, she saw encased in glass, the disk of black powder. And a lighter! Could I... well she certainly seemed obliged. She walked forward, two steps, and then there she was, a lighter in hand, a black disk on the table, in the school. God's gift. How could she deny this opportunity?

"Adriene? What are you doing?" Mr Mak, the ever-naive chemistry teacher inquired.

"Nothing Mr Mak. I'll be going. Bye!" she lied smiling, a mischievous glow in her eye. She spun around, tripped on a stool, and fell face-first into the disk. The next thing she knew, she was in the medical bay.

"Adriene, you're finally awake. What happened?" her parents asked.

However, despite appearing as Adriene in physical form, her mind and soul no longer belonged to her. Within her resided the spirit of Wei Xiao, an ancient Chinese girl who tragically perished in an explosion alongside her family.

"Who are you? Where am I? Why do I sound weird?" The body of Adriene stuttered, in the voice of Xiao. She jumped up to her feet and was ushered back into bed by the nurse.

"Are you quite alright Adriene?" The mother asked tenderly.

"Who's Adriene? My name is Xiao of the Wei family. Tell me, who are—" "Child you must not say such things! Are you out of your mind? The Wei family is cursed and evil, and you know that. Get your manners together girl." The father snarled. "That is not true. My family have been loyal Daoists and high members of the Imperial Council for centuries. My father has even invented a source of longevity that will benefit the future. Do not tell such lies of dishonour." Xiao replied.

The father, in a fit of rage, stood up, pointing a shaking finger at Xiao, and said in words trembling with rage, "This is too much, even for you young lady. But let's play along. Even if you were somehow Wei Xiao, the daughter of the sinner Wei Boyang, you would be scorched with flames, burning in hell! Wei Boyang invented a substance of death, a substance gifted by Satan! Gunpowder killed millions if not billions! Quit acting or you're getting grounded for five months!"

At this point, students were recording everything, with their phones out, streaming live on Douyin. Titles like "Insane Asylum Girl Claims To Be Wei Boyang's Daughter" and "Girl Pretends To Be Age-Old Sinner" appeared everywhere, getting Wei Xiao famous in a matter of seconds. Wei Xiao ran out of the room and stumbled onto the street, panting frantically and wondering what had happened. She calmed herself, and slowly took in the sights of Shaoxing. The houses around her were all so lofty and compact, that the wind had nowhere to go. The streets were bustling with monstrous creatures rambling past in a loud fit of rage, thumping across the smooth asphalt road. To us, Shaoxing is not that developed of a city, but for Xiao, everything looked so different. She felt lost, and she was lost physically, but emotionally as well. The only signs of her home were the flowing river, and she remembered the times that she had sailed on it, always flowing to the east but never the west. She led a life that was unparalleled by any other young girl, soaring freely like a dove and cherished by countless families.

And this was all because of her father. She must clear the name of her family, and return justice to her name.

"Excuse me, are you the girl who's acting as Wei Xiao? Can I get a signature?" suddenly hundreds of Douyin fans rushed up, asking her for a signature. Bewildered, she ran, as she did two thousand years ago, along the river, the path so distant yet familiar.

There were hordes of people running after her, many wanting her fame. Who would've thought that she was no actor?

She finally arrived at her destination, a small temple on a narrow road, hiding behind the cover of trees, a mountain as its back walls. But it was hidden so well by vines, the road covered so neatly by farms, no one would've noticed unless they knew exactly what they were looking for. The crowd stopped, uncertain whether to follow, and Xiao walked forward, brushing past the thick layers of vines, and entered the shattered and ashen temple, disappearing underground into the basement.

As Wei Xiao cautiously stepped into the charred remains of the temple, her heart pounded with a mix of trepidation and determination. The acrid scent of smoke still lingered in the air, mingling with the scent of ancient wood. Amongst the blackened debris, she spotted fragments of burnt scrolls scattered across the floor. With careful steps, she knelt down and gently picked up a scorched piece of parchment. As she unfolded it, she saw her father's writings, and eventually her tears. This was all she needed.

There was electricity in the air. Murmurings and chatters of excitement began to wonder whether this was actually the real Wei Xiao. She emerged from the rubble, holding scrolls of writing, and threw them towards the crowd.

"I don't know why all of you seem to think of my name as a sin. Perhaps it is the holy powder that my father invented, but I can prove that he did not intend to hurt anyone. He is innocent! My family is innocent! My name is innocent!"

With that, Wei Xiao/Adriene fell back, slumped, and fainted.

Wei Xiao would be returned to the timeline she belonged in, and Adriene would return to claim her body. The age-old family name of Jiang would be rid of its sin from all the manuscripts that Xiao revealed. Historians today will get to know more about the spread of Daoism and how gunpowder was invented. Adriene would turn out to be a Chinese historian as she was granted visions of life in the past, and knew better than anyone else the reality of before. Wei Xiao, in her timeline, would be granted an escape from death's jaws, and be married to a family of nobles, where history eventually lost track of her. So, as all nostalgic stories go, it ends with a happy ending.

Unraveling the Past

St. Paul's Co-educational College, Yang, Ting Nga Sophie Katelyn – 14

As the reverberation of metal ricocheted off the bare concrete walls of Wong's laboratory, a loud boom jolted Wong awake with a start. Disoriented, he spun around confusedly before recalling the big presentation that day. He took a deep breath of the familiar metallic luster in the laboratory, hoping it might energize him. Instead, the air only weighed heavier in his lungs.

Panic set in as Wong frantically checked the time, with a grunt, he heaved the bulky machine and plowed towards the twisty hallways leading to the conference room. Taking a glimpse of his prototype with his weary gaze, he hoped the prototype itself would convey what words could not.

Wong's hands grew clammy as he darted his eyes across the room with caution, the tension in the conference rooms loomed over the investors.

"So? What does it do?" Monsieur Deng, the billionaire with a prominent aquiline nose scrutinized, sending chills down his spine.

Wong began, "Gentlemen, shall I go straight to the point, this prototype harnesses time travel with an exceptional degree of accuracy."

Deng's brows rose skeptically. He glanced at Wong's laboratory coat, and began, "Look, Mr. Wong, this is not a childish science fair presentation. That...thing should do what you claim it does."

Wong hurried on, "When activated, it uses entangled proton particles to quantum spin dynamics—"

Another investor, Li Huang, interrupts Wong, "Tech like this poses extreme risks. How could it be contained?"

In a rush to prove his dignity and dexterity, Wong reached into his left pocket. A sheen of nervous sweat broke out across his brow. Panic seized him as he agitatedly patted down his cloak, Wong's heartbeat elevated to a perpetual level, his rebuttal was stuck in his throat, and refused to budge.

Without the key, he could not show the prototype in action, and all his efforts would be for naught. These men held his entire future in their hands.

He hesitantly reached for the power-up button installed on the machine. It was much more dangerous to activate the machine than the key he developed.

Wong's heart skipped a beat as he powered up the machine with a shuddering hum. Glowing orbs appeared, rotating mesmerizingly as the enthralled investors leaned forward.

Wong smiled, relieved. "I'm glad you asked. Multiple failsafe protocols instantly isolate and dissipate any unstable energy signatures, having an automatic system to retrieve the subjects transfe—"

The machine whirred in an abnormal pitch, startling the room of investors.

Wong scrambled at the controls to shut it down, but they had frozen him out. The luminous tendrils wrapped around the spectators as they murmured in confusion.

Horried, Wong could only watch as the men's bodies began dissolving into the growing light. Within moments, the room was empty but for wisps of energy dancing among empty suits.

Poring over schematics revealed an unforeseen function – the machine could transport matter through the quantum fabric of space and time. One orb flared brightly, depositing a figure from antiquity clutching unfamiliar writings. Wong realized with dread that his creation had unlocked portals to history itself.

If not stopped, it would unravel the very threads of time. But with the controls locked, he stood helpless before the machine spiraled out of control. Wong, left alone, realized the gravity of what he had unwittingly unleashed.

The acidity of Li's stomach was rising into his throat. Unable to stifle the aroma, he wretched in the aged and yellow floorboards next to him. Li waited for the nausea to pass and cleared his thoughts, observing the foreign surroundings, he saw that bamboo stalls lined the area, their musky yet pungent odor of paper plunged up his nostrils, as the distant yells of inaudible language overwhelmed his ear canal.

Suddenly, a cold sensation landed on Li's head. Looking up, he saw droplets beginning to fall from the gray sky. Then, he noticed something that sent a spike of panic through him – his Rolex that cost an arm and a leg was exposed to the rain!

“No, no! My watch!” He cried. Spotting a large lotus leaf near him, he grabbed it and held it above his head like an improvised umbrella.

Nearby, Lu Ban was gazing idly out the window of his tavern when the peculiar scene caught his eye. A disheveled man in the village square, dressed in foreign clothing, unlike anything Lu Ban had seen before. As the carpenter of the village, he was intrigued by the sight. But just then, a heavy downpour began, driving them both to seek shelter from the sudden storm.

Curious, Lu Ban watched from his window as Li sheltered under a lotus leaf. An idea struck—why hide indoors from rain when you have a portable shelter? Inspired by Li, Lu Ban worked through the storm crafting a bamboo framed and paper covered shelter.

Lu Ban emerged proud with his creation, which uncovers new possibilities no matter the weather.

Li, frozenly crouching on the floor, had no idea that he was the inspiration for one of the most well-known inventions in China's history.

Deng's frail body struck harshly onto the ground, eliciting a pained moan, still disheveled from the panic. The commotion drew curious locals from a nearby village. Cautiously, they prodded Deng's limp form with a brank, jerking him from his daze. With the little strength he had left, Deng croaked a question, “Where am I?”

To his surprise, the reply came in an unfamiliar tongue. Deng eyed the villager's ancient silk tunics and long, unmanaged hair. Deng wailed in disbelief when the realization struck – he was in ancient China.

Because of the tantrum, the locals began to threaten him with angry rambles. Too frightened to react, Deng forcefully pulled off the valuable necklace he had and gave it to the locals as a token of peace.

Their demeanor changed at once as they crowded around the shimmering object, pushing and shoving in their intrigue. In the chaos, Deng scrambled away and fled into the dense woods, unaware that he had just introduced a revolutionary invention.

As the villagers squabbled over the necklace, they were stunned to see its needle always pointing north. Word quickly spread of this magical item in the village.

Meanwhile, lost and alone in the forest, Deng wandered. But the trail he blazed would lead to remarkable things – his hasty gift had planted the seed that would one day blossom into the invention of the compass, changing navigation forever.

Back in the present day in the laboratory, Wong finds himself in an equally dire situation. He stared helplessly at the malfunctioning time machine, hoping that the fate of the past, present, and future would still hang in balance for the sake of history itself.

After several tense minutes, the orb patterns began to waver, Wong activated the repaired machine with trepidation. Slowly, the orbs began pulsing in a consistent rhythm once more. Figures from contrasting times stepped forward one by one as Wong input codes for each era. Gaining momentum, brilliant flashes of light shone from within as the multidimensional coordinates stabilized. The scene in the boardroom suddenly changed. Deng, tangled in sodden leaves, fruitlessly wrung his sleeves. Li, soaked in rainwater, comprehended the bewildering situation.

Deng huffed as Li sighed, both fixing Wong with expectant looks, demanding an explanation for what they had endured through time.

New Tales of China Invention

St. Paul's Co-educational College, Yeung, Sin – 13

"A marriage of crispy tenderness; a contradiction of foul smell and tasty texture; a golden brick with a humble name." Who would have thought that this Stinky Tofu delicacy was born out of a sinister story?

In the Ming Dynasty under the rule of Hong Wu Emperor, there was a village along the coast in Huizhou. In this quaint village, lived a widower Old Zhu, a daughter called Zhaodi, and a young son. The father was a farmer like most of the villagers. His earnings were meagre but he still did his best to provide a decent living environment. The catch was that he was only interested in the one carrying his family name and honour – his precious son, Young Zhu. This meant his daughter was not so lucky as her father had never said a kind word to her nor had he given her any warmth.

Days went by painfully slow. One day, the father bought some tofu back home for dinner. The father walked into the door and grunted, but he did not hear the scurrying of footsteps. He waited impatiently for a few seconds and then at the top of his lungs, he shouted for his daughter, "Zhaodi, you good-for-nothing girl, come cook for us. Stop daydreaming!" Upon hearing the angry shouts, a frail figure rushed out from the pigsty and kept her gaze low and her back bent,

"I am so sorry Father. I was feeding the pigs!"

The father glared at her and sneered, "Yes, you're feeding one of your kind. Now, go cook the tofu. Why did I have such bad luck to raise a good for nothing girl?"

Zhaodi nodded her head obediently and shuffled to the kitchen as quickly as she could. Her brother, seeing her rushing past him with the tofu pulled his face into a scowl.

"Tofu again! No. I want chicken drumsticks. I will not eat a single morsel of tofu! I am going on a hunger strike" Zhaodi's brother went on a dramatic rant.

The father tried to calm his son to no avail. He knew he did not have the money to buy anything other than tofu. However, he would move the sky and earth to please his son. He took a deep breath and pulled his son's hand towards him. When the son took a look at the clump in his palm, his face lit up. It was a few pieces of coins, just enough to buy his favourite chicken drumstick and even a few other types of side dishes for himself.

"Zhaodi, stop making dinner. Bring me my wine and fermented groundnuts. Keep the tofu for tomorrow. Don't you dare sneak a bite."

Zhaodi eyed the slab of silky white on her chopping board and gulped. She turned away, placed the tofu on a tray, and kept it. She knew it was a consequence of painful whipping if she was disobedient. She swallowed hard and wrapped her hands around her waist when her stomach grumbled. She was in constant hunger but her brother never missed a meal. Zhaodi was very envious of her brother. They were raised in the same family yet possessed very different fates.

Days went by and all seemed to have forgotten about the tofu. The reason was that Zhaodi left the tofu tray behind a row of dried corn. She would not have remembered too as she had endless chores daily. As the end of the month neared, money was running out as usual and this was more noticeable as everyone was hungrier. Then, Zhaodi's father remembered the tofu that he bought. He knew that the tofu must have gone bad by now but he was going to blame it on his daughter because he was in a foul mood. If he was miserable, his daughter had no right to have it easy.

As expected, the tofu had hairy mildew growing over them. Although it was a pretty sight, the most unappetising sourish stench attacked his nostrils as it was brought closer for inspection. Zhaodi's father slammed the tray of tofu onto the dirt ground and swung his hand at her. Zhaodi's face stung as she held back her tears.

"You better eat this up you good-for-nothing swine! It will be a blessing if you die of food poisoning. There will be one less worthless mouth to feed," taunted her father. There was no warmth in his eyes, only indifference. In their village, girls were worthless and debt-incurring additions to poor families.

Zhaodi's heart sank as she looked at the mildewed tofu. She wanted to gag at the sight of the greenish slab on the floor but she had no choice. Would this be her ending? Either she died of food poisoning or being beaten to death. What was worse? She pinched her nose and gathered the tofu, putting it into the wok that was still hot. Even though she might suffer food poisoning, she wanted to make it more palatable. The stench made her face turn green and she had wanted to gag a few times as she flipped the foul-smelling tofu a few times. When the slab cooled, Zhaodi took a deep breath and took a bite of the mildewed tofu. To her surprise, the taste was heavenly. This was a treat compared to the tree bark that she had been chewing. An idea formed in her head. She would visit the market secretly the next day to haggle with the tofu stall owner.

Zhaodi's father realised something was amiss after some time. In the past, his daughter always looked sickly and frail. However, recently, she was looking curiously healthier. He had tried to find excuses to torture Zhaodi to force her to confess to stealing food but she never did. Thus, he took it to secretly stalk her in the following days. He was furious when he saw her walking around the village and entering people's houses, coming out with a jingling of coins in her basket covered by a muslin cloth. He was shocked that his daughter was earning money from selling something she now called – stinky tofu.

One villager patted his shoulder and remarked, "Old Zhu, you have a good daughter who brings fortune to your family name. Treat her well."

Old Zhu had other plans in mind. The next day, he ambushed his daughter. He dragged Zhaodi into the pigsty and gave her a good beating. Zhaodi knelt on the hay and pleaded with her father to stop. He demanded that she take out her earnings. Zhaodi felt dead to the core as she handed over the coins. He nodded, satisfied with the heavy weight of coins on his palm.

"You shall sell mildewed tofu as an additional chore from now on. I want all the earnings given to me at the end of every day. If you dare to..." his voice trailed off, looking dangerously at Zhaodi. Zhaodi nodded obediently. He did not notice that Zhaodi's knuckles were pale from her balling her grip.

A couple of months later, a general led his army to HuiZhou after a battle. The soldiers were all ravenous as their military rations had all been consumed. The troops stationed on the outskirts of the village had to buy food from the villagers. One such person they bought food from was Zhaodi. The general fell in love with the delicacy. He rewarded Zhaodi with several bolts of silk and gold which went to Old Zhu. He was on top of the world and felt this was enough for him and his son. It was time to get rid of his worthless daughter.

Old Chu sent for his daughter. "Zhaodi, Old Yang, the tofu seller has asked for your hand in marriage for two bolts of quality linen. I doubt that you are worth that much anyway, so you are sold! You are forbidden to use your recipe for I am going to sell it for money too."

Colours drained from Zhaodi's face. Zhaodi could not believe how she was an object to her father. The day she was lifted into the wedding sedan, her father mysteriously wilted away on his bed. "Goodbye!" Zhaodi whispered when she came to visit her father on his deathbed. A couple of months later, her brother died too. Villagers believed that the father and son duo accidentally consumed poisoned food since Zhaodi was married off and no one took care of them.

No one will ever know how Zhaodi poisoned her cruel father and brother with dried poisonous tree bark powder mixed into the spices she used to make stinky tofu. The father and son ate up the poisoned tofu and died a slow and painful death. It was only at her death bed many decades later her grandchildren found out the truth and the recipe to her famous mildewed tofu or better known as stinky tofu (minus the poison, of course). This is the story of the invention of a delicacy with a humble name and a disturbing past.

The Money Beyond Its Worth

St. Paul's Co-educational College, Yuen, Wang Ching Shannon – 13

Stringy straw-shaped strips in colorful packaging— not the most appetizing snack. “Do we need to get that, Ye?” Ming complained as his grandfather reached for the bag in the bustling stellarport 711.

“It’s good to eat something after a long flight, Ming,” replied Ye, hobbling to the cashier. After hours of being cramped in a space shuttle, Ming’s stomach agreed, but it was worth it— he’d never forget passing the breathtaking black hole— a featureless shape with glowing sparks which sucked everything to its doom. He wished they could see it up close...

“Ye, what are you *doing?*”

Confused, the old man turned. “I’m going to scan the QR code to pay.”

Ming slapped his forehead. Ye was just like the snack— hopelessly outdated. “We use facial scanning to make transactions now,” he explained, walking over to the detection machine. Saying his name to start the program, adjusting his face’s angle according to the green light, phrasing the command... all common practice. Five yuan was deducted from his account and he grabbed the snack. “See?”

Just then, Ming ran to take two empty seats. “I see,” said Ye, trailing behind to tear open the packet. “It was different in my time.”

A low rumble made Ming look up. A sleek space shuttle tore through the atmosphere of Kepler-186f, red and green indicators flashing. It was nighttime, so the bright specks in the sky dotted the heavens like spilled salt.

“I’m not eating that.” Ming looked from Ye’s bony, outstretched hand to his offended face. “Fine, just one.”

He nibbled on the strip, which tasted vaguely like sweet smoked sole, and was unexpectedly tasty. “It was a luxury in my childhood,” Ye was saying, “A part of the old times, like me.”

“Go on, I’m listening” sounded between chews. Ye wrapped his arm around Ming’s shoulder.

“Let me tell you a story.”

The sounds of Ma’s pan sizzling reached me way before the creak of the door. I ducked as I entered the low flat cluttered with appliances.

It wasn’t even a flat— the bed was a mattress on the floor among other junk, everything was stacked to be more compact, and there was still barely space. It was suffocating, both physically and mentally. Quietly, I set my school bag on the mattress.

“Qiang, you’re back!” Ma turned and mustered a weary smile, then readdressed the stove. Her one free hand rummaged through tattered pockets, fishing out a crumpled 100-dollar note. “We’re out of rice. Can you buy a bag from the shop downstairs?”

That was it. No conversation. I wasn’t disappointed though: I understood that Ma needed to work, and she was too busy for trivial matters. Helping out was the least I could do. I took the note and raced downstairs.

With the precious bill clenched in my hand, I was on a mission. Bursting into the supermarket, I beelined to the rice section— although the dried fish strips seemed to glow on the shelves, there was no temptation today. I scanned the rows for the cheapest price: ¥8.8, and lifted the bag experimentally. It felt right. Then I heaved it onto the counter, gazing expectantly at the cashier.

The balding middle-aged man glared back, sizing my 12-year-old figure up and down. I set the money on the table with a fierce stare.

Finally, a grubby hand grabbed the beautiful bill, rifled through the cashier, and dumped back some crinkled notes: ¥50, ¥20, ¥20 and two grimy coins.

In high spirits I returned, cradling the bag of rice like a baby, and presented it to Ma. She nodded with satisfaction, my heart swelling with pride. She picked the ¥50 note up, holding it up to the light, and froze.

“Is... is this the money given back to you, Qiang?”

Confusion and panic crept into my tone. “Yes, what’s wrong?”

“It’s a fake bill!” Ma ran downstairs with me in pursuit, storming into the shop. The greasy-looking man appeared at the cashier again. My heart filled with hatred, but if he recognised me, he showed no sign of it. “My son bought this bag of rice here with a ¥100 note, but received this fake ¥50 bill,” said Ma, voice tight with restraint.

The man yawned.

“Where’s your receipt, ma’am?”

My fists clenched, but Ma’s grip tightened warningly on my wrist.

“We don’t have one, sir. But this rice has the shop’s stamp on it, and the bill has no watermark.”

Lazily, the man took the money. He adjusted his glasses. “The bill’s not from here, ma’am. Are you trying to scam us of 50 yuan?”

Did he have no shame? He was obviously lying to our faces. Even at first glance, not knowing my background, I was just a kid. But what could we do? Tears were stinging in my eyes, blurring the ceiling lights into streaks. I was faintly aware of other customers who were staring with interest but making no move. The jovial tune playing in the background taunted, grinding at my ears...

Ma gave the man a long, almost pleading look. Receiving no response, she turned slowly and left, pulling me with her.

The sun had set, a blazing ball sucking all the sapphire from the sky. From our flat, you could only see a small blue sliver, like a huge eraser had rubbed off a few stories of surrounding buildings so we could enjoy a fleeting glimpse. Now it was pitch-black, like the city was being sucked into an endless chasm.

There were almost no stars here. Sometimes I’d think I saw one, and gaze at the window for hours trying to find that speck again.

Tonight, the blanket partially covered my head, so I could feign sleep and watch the window at the same time. Perhaps the blanket was too thin, because although it covered my ears, I could still hear Ma’s heartbroken snuffles.

“You can watch all the stars you want now,” Ming broke in, chewing. “What happened next?”

Ye raised his head and smiled. “I made a vow that day, which resurfaced twenty years later...”

“Look, dad! I drew a new picture!”

I peered down from the newspaper. Little Jian was bounding eagerly towards me. “Where’s it? Let me see,” I lifted him up onto my lap.

“You’re so silly, dad,” Jian laughed, pulling me to the computer. “It doesn’t have to be on paper, does it?”

It didn’t have to be on paper, did it?

What if money didn't need to be printed? What if it was stored in the world of ones and zeroes?

The small idea took root from the vow I'd sworn years ago— to make a future when no scams would be made by fake bills, so Ma would never have to cry over them again— an online payment system. Imagine walking into shops without a wallet and using only your phone to control your transactions!

But how would the transaction be detected and transferred? After strenuous searching on the web, I found my solution— the QR Code, black squares chaotically arranged in a white square grid. All I knew was that it was a machine-readable image, which could spread information. For details, I needed a special kind of support...

"Mr. Qiang, I am delighted to inform you that your proposal matches perfectly with our company's idea of online shopping!"

I stopped fidgeting in the tight suit, and focused to see Ma Yuan, the founder of TaoTao company, smiling at me across the table with acknowledgement.

"...Really?"

March 2011, Sunny

This day is one of celebration, not only for the people in China whose lives have forever been changed, but also for my dreams which have finally come true. Dianzi Wallet, a QR code payment method which allows offline stores to accept payments through scanning codes, has officially been released by TaoTao, with credits to my proposal.

Ma, you aren't with me anymore, but I'm sure you're watching from above. Are you proud of how far I've come? Now no one will ever be affected by money scams. If you were born in this generation I've helped create, you wouldn't ever have had this problem!

Love,

Qiang

"Look at how far people have come now," Ye whispered, gesturing from the face detection machines to the expanse of glittering night sky. "My money was scammed, so I started thinking about QR code payments, and now people have improved my system to make it more efficient and reliable. I couldn't see the stars in the city when I was young, but now people have found ways not only to observe but *travel* to stars. Innovation is the plant of the creativity that problems seed in us."

There was silence as Ming took this all in. Not really, as the occasional rumbling of shuttle engines brought life to the mood.

"I've decided," Ming announced. "I'm going to visit a black hole in the future."

Ye's eyes crinkled. "Of course you can, Ming. When there's a dream, there's a way."

A Mother's Letter

St. Paul's Convent School, Ip, Haydi – 14

My dearest daughter,

Have you been well? I hope you have adapted to your new environment. I miss you so much, I don't think we have ever been so far apart before. The winter in Qufu is as spiteful and miserable as always, and I am constantly in a trembling and frigid state. I suspect it's caused by the absence of your warm laughter. Hopefully, it's always warm where you are. I remember how much you loved basking in the sun. I'm sorry for not writing to you as often, I've been rather occupied recently. Hopefully, we'll meet each other face to face soon.

Do you remember when you were young, we would camp on the hillside as soon as we heard the first call of the cuckoo? We would lay in the soft blanket the flowers have woven and breathe in the air moist with the aroma of spring? Even in this cold and bitter weather, I can still fondly recall that refreshing smell of fresh grass, dirt and something in between. We would be entranced by the graceful waltz of the clouds as we listened closely to the whispers of the wind. If we were lucky, we would even see the sparrow hawk. You would marvel at the sight of them gliding across the boundless sky in synchronised movements, as if they were stitching the very fabric of the eventide. You would clap and dance and squeak in delight before falling back down onto the grass. O how you loved the sparrow hawks. Remember when you overcame your fear of heights and climbed up a tree because you wanted to put a baby sparrow back into its nest? Your act of kindness opened my eyes to the philosophy of impartial caring and how it applies to all living beings.

I've treasured those memories in my heart, their glimmer shining through my soul every single day. You would beg the sky to greet you with a sparrowhawk each morning, but the merciless sky would never heed your prayers, unlike me, I've remembered you pleads to this very day. After three years of research, I have discovered a way for you to see a sparrowhawk not only every morning, but whenever you desire. I crafted a bird with thin sheets of wood by hand and attached a few strings to its body. All you have to do is to hold the bridle until it catches the wind. When there is sufficient wind, the bird will fly in the sky in the direction you pull the string. I've painted it with the seven colours of the rainbow, so when it flies, its wings would be like fine quills, painting vibrant hues on the blue canvas of the sky.

I plan to test out my sparrowhawk when I go camping on the third Saturday of April. I will fly it beyond the clouds so you can see it from Heaven. Until then, I will miss you forever and ever.

Love,

Mozi

The Boy and his Umbrella

St. Paul's Convent School, Lau, Hoi Yan Cynthia – 14

My mom always tells me that I talk too much about umbrellas. I've always loved the rain, yet I adored how umbrellas enclose me in a little pocket of safety, keeping me an arm length away from the overbearing wetness of thunderstorms. I looked up to the great mind behind the invention of umbrellas, and although I didn't know who they were, or how their story went, I felt a strange affiliation with this inventor that allowed me to frolic beneath the rainiest of weathers. I longed to know more about this forgotten hero, I had a growing hunger for their narrative, an aching need to discover the background behind this invention that had transformed and revolutionized the way we trudge through rainy days.

It was a sheer coincidence that the invention of umbrellas happened to be the topic of my Chinese Literature class. I've never been the best student, yet I clung onto every word that the teacher said with a fierce imprudence, as I quickly recognized — this was the closest I'll ever be to unraveling the mysteries and the tales left untold behind this divine innovation.

3500 BC, China

She hovered above heavy clouds, her breath rugged yet constant. She declared her arrival as she plagued earth with her scent, a stream of fresh tears drenching the ground with emotion. She reached out and invited him to dance, yet her offer was enclosed by care disguised as apathy and love adorned with salt. Alas, he was only a boy who knew no better, who was too little to handle her depth and too weak to handle her strength. So he clung desperately instead onto one lone lotus leaf, praying that it would protect him from her melodies of sorrow and the roaring winds which accompanied her otherwise soliloquy.

Yet even as he hid he knew it was a losing game that he was fighting, and he could only watch wide-eyed as her soggy mourning eroded away his beautiful shelter, as his mighty pavilion collapsed into nothing but a drooping mess. He arrived at school with another blotch on his tardiness record, and it was pathetic how all he could do was quiver at the injustice.

One fateful rainy day, the little boy and his little corroded leaf crossed paths with Chinese carpenter Lu Ban. The boy looked so fragile, so helpless against the thunders of nature as the caving leaf eventually drenched him in the flood of rainfall. Seeing this, Lu Ban promised himself that he would build the boy a sanctuary he could take shelter in, an incorruptible pavilion that could shield him against rain and injustice alike.

As Lu Ban studied the lotus leaves along the road, he marvelled at the unique structural build of them, and was impressed by its remarkable ability to repel water droplets. If he were to harness the qualities of the lotus leaf into his design, surely, it would serve as an impeccable shelter to the poor little boy. At this thought, Lu Ban quickly set to work. He fiddled with wood and bamboo, thus carved them into a framework, or as Lu Ban liked to put it, the skeleton of his pavilion. Even while taking into account the nature of his work, his craftsmanship was exceptional, and it was with great precision that the silk canopy was birthed. Lu Ban treated silk with waterproofing techniques that aimed to replicate the water-repelling lotus leaf, then latched it onto the bare skeleton — and that was how the first umbrella came to be. Lu Ban credited the little boy and deemed him co-founder of the moving pavilion.

It was a beautiful morning where drizzles fell like dewdrops when Lu Ban gifted the boy with the umbrella. The boy held it in his arms like he was holding an old friend, a familiar companion that would bring him to school unscathed and unharmed by the wetness of rain. Now equipped with an umbrella over his head, the boy took her hand and danced to the sound of her music. He embraced her depth and reveled in her strength as he leapt and he spun under the symphony of the tempest and the torrents. For the first time in his life, the boy experienced rain in its most glorious form — her tears irrigated the flowers around him, her care scrubbed the earth from filth and left it unblemished and unsoiled. He let her currents overtake him as they penetrated his heart, and he twirled and he swirled till his soles finally fell apart. It was then that she yielded, and he peeked out of his umbrella, the boy, to his amusement, found a pleasant surprise. Light had kissed the rain and they had left hand in hand, and they left just one trail of rainbows dancing in

their wake. Lu Ban watched the boy's glee and marvel with quiet contentment, as he rejoiced in the understanding that he had made the world just a little better than it had been before.

The ring of the school bell echoed like a bittersweet serenade as it signaled the end of Chinese Literature class. Now more than ever, I understand the gravity of this intricate invention. The story behind its creation had made umbrellas the epitome of beauty, compassion and humanity, a modest refuge constructed by the goodness of a tender soul.

As far as the story goes, I hope the boy was well. I hope he got to school on time. I hope his umbrella shielded him from the lamenting wind and the unforgiving rain, keeping him safe amidst the roaring thunders. Now that he has gotten his umbrella, I hope he loves the rain as much as I do.

I was walking home from school when the shower turned into a drizzle then into a downpour. I opened my umbrella. If only, I thought. If only Lu Ban could see the streets scattered with covers of red and green and blue, if only he could see the rain command a tapestry of umbrellas against each other, leaving the city wet but the people dry. If only he could see that because of him, we no longer fear the rain, instead we embrace the thunder of storms and we see the romance in sprinkles, as with his invention of the umbrella, we are no longer restricted by the raindrops – we thrive in the beauty of it.

The Unfolding Umbrella

St. Stephen's College, Lam, Wai Ting Annabel – 14

Oh my gosh, this is going to be such a horrendous day, I thought to myself.

My mom forced me out of the house with a broken umbrella again, even when there's a thunderstorm outside. We have so many new umbrellas at home, but she never lets me use them. She says that these umbrellas are not for use, and that we must keep them safe at all costs. What nonsense.

Thunder as loud as a drum sounded as I walked along the familiar country-side road to school that I walked on perhaps thousands of times, cursing my umbrella and my mom, at the same time wishing that the umbrella wouldn't flip like it usually does. It doesn't listen to me though: the ribs first take flight, bending in the direction it's not supposed to, bringing the canopy with it. It then sways with the wind, completely disobedient to me, just like a mischievous toddler. Honestly, given its "talents" on flips, I think it can join the circus.

Suddenly, a bright white light struck in front of me, blinding me instantly. There was an ozone-like smell of explosion, along with a big 'boom' that casted a deep pain inside my ears. Out of shock, I backed a few steps and fell into the mud, covering my eyes with my hands. My whole body was hot and vibrating, especially my fingers, until all of a sudden, I couldn't feel anything at all.

The next thing I know, I felt like I was falling down a spiralling tunnel at full speed, spinning. It took more bravery and force to reopen my eyes, and when I did, I saw flashes of light and perhaps some stars, if I didn't imagine it. After around 10 minutes, I saw some sand towards the end of the tunnel; and around a few seconds later, I crashed into it.

"Ow..." I exclaimed to myself.

When I managed to get back up on my feet, I realised that this was no longer the country-side road that I was familiar with. There were no trees. I was surrounded by a flock of ducks, which probably belonged to a farm of some sort. The houses were made of straw. Many people were walking around, carrying baskets, speaking in a dialogue that was somewhat similar to mandarin. A girl with silky long black hair that was tied into a braid entered the house behind me. Her clothes were dripping wet, as if she just escaped from a thunderstorm, like I did. Now that I think about it, the floor was damp, too.

I have no idea where I am or when this is. With nothing to lose, I went up to the house that the girl just went into, and knocked. She answered right away, but screamed so loud that it might be comparable to the boom of the explosion before this.

"Who are you?" The girl said, hiding behind the door.

"My name is Xin," I hesitated. "May I know where and when this is?"

She seemed a bit more relaxed seeing that I can speak her language. "This is the Lurin Village. It's nearly noon."

"I see. Do you know the year?" I clarified, slightly panicking. Then I realised that this might be ancient China. "Or the emperor now?"

"Oh. King Wu," She replied. She hesitated, and then asked, "why do you... dress and look so weird?"

Good thing I paid attention during Chinese History lessons. This must be the Zhou dynasty.

"I think I'm from the future..." I said slowly, unable to believe this myself, "I think I'm trapped here. In my era, there weren't emperors anymore. Can you help me?"

Her eyes widened with surprise, but luckily, she seemed more surprised and delighted than scared.

“Sure,” she said, widening the door. “But only because I have something that I need you to help with, as well.”

With that, I entered the house. It was simple, with no special renovations or furniture. There was a bed, large enough for two people, and a simple table made of wood, all in the same room. There wasn't much clutter. She took me to a corner in the house next to the bed, where there's a pile of freshly cut bamboo.

“Just now, there was a huge thunderstorm. Everyone's work was interrupted, as we all had to run to a gazebo in order to stay dry and stop us from getting struck by lightning. My friends and I were very annoyed, as this wastes us a lot of time. One of them mentioned something about a portable mini gazebo, so I thought I could work on that.” She explained in a matter-of-fact manner.

“Wow... so like an umbrella?” I said, realising that I was still holding my broken umbrella in my hand. I showed her. “Mine's broken now, though. Everyone has one in my era. We can walk around with it without getting wet.”

“Yes!” She jumped up. “Exactly what I wanted. Living in your era must be so fun and convenient... Can you please teach me how to make it?”

My skills learnt in Design and Technology class finally came in handy. I figured that I would make one like the little parasols on the ice creams, since I have no idea how to make modern foldable ones. We usually only buy them from stores. I realised that in the modern world, everyone's just thinking about what we don't have enough. Like me not having a perfect, new umbrella. But no one ever takes the time to appreciate the things that made our lives so much better – like buildings, or working umbrellas.

I first made the ribs referring to the umbrella that I had with bamboo. Then, we covered some silk with some oil extracted from the big tree in front of her house. I covered the ribs with the silk, and added a bamboo handle. The girl drew some flowers with ink on the silk, making the umbrella look like a piece of art.

We were happily celebrating and admiring our product when her husband came home. The husband gave me a weird stare, but when she saw that the girl seemed friendly with me, he relaxed. The girl gifted the husband the umbrella, and told him to test it out. There was a mild wind and a small shower outside, so we all went out to see how their new invention worked. We all screamed in joy when the umbrella didn't leak water.

“Thank you so much for all this!” The girl exclaimed. “You're my saviour.”

I smiled at her, and suddenly remembered that I still don't know her name.

“I'm Lu Hong, and my husband here is Lu Ban.”

Seeing the two twirling under the umbrella, I sat on the porch and accidentally dosed off.

“Call the ambulance. She's unconscious!”

I woke up to complete chaos on the countryside road – my mom was weeping beside me, and several people were helping me onto a stretcher bed. I'm back. Every part of my body was aching, my ears were ringing, and my eyes were blurred. In my blurred vision, though, my mom looks like the older version of Lu Hong. I was still thinking about this when I got home, and when I saw the new umbrellas that mom forbade me from using, one of them looked exactly the same from the one I made, with the same ink flowers.

Years later, after mom died, I still remember this day and the lessons it taught me – to be grateful. Every time it rains, I take the umbrella with ink flowers with me, and it feels like Lu Hong – or mom – is walking under it with me.

The Enigmatic Origins of the Paintbrush

St. Stephen's College, Lau, Jovan – 13

Have you ever wondered about the mysterious origins of the paintbrush? It's quite fascinating how we use this tool so frequently in our artistic endeavors, yet rarely question its beginnings.

In ancient times, the people of China relied solely on brown, dried bamboo sticks as their writing instruments. These primitive tools required constant dipping in ink, making the act of writing a cumbersome task. However, during the era of the Qin dynasty, a remarkable individual emerged and forever changed the way people wrote. This person was no ordinary individual; in fact, he held one of the highest military ranks as a general. His name was Meng Tian.

Meng Tian's journey took him to remote villages, where he observed the traditional methods of pen making.

As Meng Tian embarked on his quest for a solution, he found himself immersed in the enchanting world of remote villages. Here, he witnessed the age-old techniques of brush making, passed down through generations. The villagers skillfully selected the finest bamboo, treating it with care and precision. With their nimble hands, they transformed the humble material into elegant brushes, ready to capture the essence of ink on paper.

Inspired, he realized that combining the strengths of traditional bamboo brushes with innovative bristle materials could lead to a breakthrough.

In a moment of revelation, Meng Tian's eyes sparkled with excitement. He understood that the key to revolutionizing the world of writing lay in the harmonious fusion of tradition and innovation. The sturdy bamboo brushes, with their rich history, needed a companion that could enhance their capabilities. Inspired by the tales of foreign lands and their exotic materials, Meng Tian envisioned a brush that would possess the finesse of a dancer and the strength of a warrior.

Through his research and experimentation, he discovered the importance of ink absorption and retention, which greatly influenced the quality of writing.

Determined to unravel the mysteries of ink and its interaction with the brush, Meng Tian delved deep into the realms of research and experimentation. He meticulously studied the ancient texts, seeking wisdom from the masters of old. It was during these moments of intense focus that he uncovered the secret to impeccable writing – the delicate balance between ink absorption and retention. With this newfound knowledge, he knew he was on the cusp of a breakthrough that would forever change the way pens worked.

With newfound knowledge and a vision in his heart, Meng Tian returned to his humble abode, determined to create a brush that encapsulated the essence of his journey. He meticulously selected the finest bamboo, handpicked the most suitable animal hair, and crafted a prototype with meticulous care. Countless hours were spent refining the design, adjusting the bristle density, and testing various materials until he achieved the perfect balance of control, flexibility, and ink absorption.

Word of Meng Tian's revolutionary Mao bi spread like wildfire. Scholars, artists, and calligraphers from far and wide flocked to witness the brush's magic. Meng Tian's invention breathed new life into calligraphy, allowing the strokes to flow with unrivaled precision and expressiveness. His Mao bi became a treasured tool, passed down through generations, and forever changed the art of writing.

Meng Tian's journey not only led to the creation of a remarkable invention but also transformed him into a revered figure in the world of calligraphy. His unwavering pursuit of perfection and his willingness to explore uncharted territories left an indelible mark on the art form, inspiring future generations to push the boundaries of creativity and innovation. The legacy of Zhang Wei and his Mao bi endures, a testament to the power of a single journey and the transformative potential within every passionate soul.

Paper Birds

St. Stephen's College, Tam, Norton Isabella – 14

“Mei Ling, don't fall!”

Mei Ling was a small child with porcelain skin like a China doll and rosy-red cheeks. She had a quick bob as black as her ebony eyes. Mei Ling giggled, and one foot in front of the other, she teetered across the stone wall. It wasn't tall, yet she felt the wind on her face. She imagined she was powerful and free, and she could fly, fly, fly away if she wanted to. The wall separated the outside world from her favourite park, in which flocks of kites would fly across the pale blue sky each day and the trees would whisper secrets to her. Today, they told her autumn had arrived.

Every year, the autumn leaves fall. Children jump on each one they see—a crimson red against vivid green grass. Squealing when they hear a satisfying crunch and then hopping across the leaves like a bullfrog across lily pads. Mei Ling and her friends often had competitions to see who could run the length of the wall the fastest. Soon, Mei Ling's turn arrived.

“1!”

“2!”

“3!”

“Go!” everyone shouted.

She ran.

She knew the other kids were watching and cheering her on from behind, so she ran as fast as her little legs could manage. Suddenly, she fell and found herself looking up at the sky. Looking down at her was a new face.

“Hello. I'm Yin Lei. Are you okay?”

Mei Ling nodded. Yin Lei gripped her hand and pulled her up, asking if he could join her and her friends in their games. Of course, Mei Ling happily agreed. The next day, she arrived at the playground, and much to her delight, Yin Lei was there waiting. Every day, they would lay on the grass, and he would talk about each bird that flew across the sky.

“Mei Ling, see there? That's a jay.” “Mei Ling, see there? That's a dove.” “Mei Ling, see there? That's a sandpiper.”

“Well, what's that one, Yin Lei?” Mei pointed to a bird bigger than the rest, flying higher than all the jays, doves, and sandpipers.

“That's a kite. They're my favourite because they don't just fly; they soar and swoop through the mountains and hills, somehow lighter than a feather but faster than an arrow.”

Yin Lei delved into every minor aspect of the bird, from the tips of its feathers to the claws of its feet, and this was something that Mei Ling found fascinating.

One day, Mei Ling asked, “Why do you like birds so much?”

“How can I not? They're free. Flying over mountains and temples and across seas every day. Imagine we could do that, Mei Ling. Imagine!”

Seeing the hint of longing in Yin Lei's eyes was almost funny to her. It was like he wanted to be a bird! Soon, she felt sleep's warm embrace hug her eyelids, and she lay on the soft grass, the autumn leaves framing her blurring vision. Before she fell asleep, she spotted a single bird flying above her: a kite.

Let's fast forward to 3000 Mondays later, until both Mei Ling and Yin Lei had grown, and eventually they were both 16. Since they had met, they saw each other in the park every day, and it became habitual for the both of them.

One day, Mei Ling got to the park and sat on the bench where she and Yin Lei met every day.

Clouds flew with the birds across the fading sky. A sparrow landed on the ground and picked up a worm with its tiny beak. An eagle launched off a tree branch, making the leaves rustle. A pair of kites flew circles around each other, soaring and diving in a perfect dance. And yet, Yin Lei never came. The sun eventually set, and Mei Ling decided to go home.

Back at home, Mei Ling heard a knock. She rushed downstairs and opened the door to Yin Lei's face.

"Why weren't you at the park today?"

He was grinning, and Mei noticed something strange in his hand. A heap of wood, paper, and string somehow vaguely resembled a bird!

"You built a bird?"

He looked into her eyes, nodding his head, and rushed past her, putting the bird on her table.

"I want to make it fly."

Mei saw the familiar sparkle in his eye and knew that he wasn't joking. He was serious! Mei laughed softly because, despite how absurd it sounded, she thought that if anyone could do it, it was Yin Lei. He knew the anatomy of a bird so well that maybe he could actually replicate it.

"I know I can do it. But I might need some help."

Mei nodded, and they got to work.

A few days later, Yin Lei met Mei Ling at the park and told her he was sick. In fact, he had been sick since he was born. No one knew why. Perhaps his heart was too big to always work quite right. But lately he had been more sick than ever. Not just a little sick, but so sick that he just might not live as long as her. His sickness was like a damp blanket, smothering all joyous things.

"I won't be here long," He said.

"There's got to be a cure!" Mei Ling wished living in denial could fix all problems in the world. Yin Lei smiled softly.

"There isn't. I just know it's too late. But it's ok, we're the best of friends."

Then he pulled a bag out from under the bench. And inside it was the paper bird, which he had painted a brilliant red, with green, blue, and yellow details.

"I worked on it while I was at home."

He stood up, and when he picked it up, something was connected to it. A string, and a small dial-like thing at the bottom. The thing as a whole resembled a huge red flower, the delicately thin paper wings rustling in the breeze. He described how he created such a thing, explaining that he took inspiration from the largest birds in the sky. Kites. He designed it to hold the wind steady with the string, and when they tipped the kite's head forward, the wind would catch the sides, and somehow, magically, it would fly.

Her breath stopped mid-air as Yin Lei walked outside and threw the kite into the sky, and it hovered in the air. Yin Lei stood on the ground, holding the dial on which the string was twisted around. In the air, flying with the birds, was something never seen before: a bird made entirely of paper.

It dove and glided through the air. A mix of pure happiness and pride appeared on Yin Lei's face.

Two weeks later, a knock came at the door. Mei Ling opened it to Yin Lei's parents' sombre faces. Yin Lei's sickness had overwhelmed him, and at last it was a lost battle.

They talked about how the funeral was in three days and how at least he was no longer in pain, and Mei Ling's parents appeared behind her. She grabbed her mother's hand, squeezing it tight. Tears pricked at her eyes and she was simply too full of sorrow to listen to what his parents said. The day of the funeral came, and Mei Ling had brought Yin Lei's paper bird with her. She held it in her hands, trying to will fond memories of Yin Lei out of it like a charm.

Eventually, after what seemed like a lifetime the funeral came to an end. Mei Ling looked around, she realised that perhaps a crowd of tear-stained faces was not something her friend would have wanted.

So Mei Ling picked up the bird and let the wind catch its fiery wings, which lifted into the sky. Mei Ling realised that Yin Lei was free now and that maybe everything was okay. Or at least it would be. She just needed some time.

The bird swooped through the sky, flying in different directions with each breath of the wind.

When she looked back, tracing fingertips over paper painted red, wondering if she would die, she discovered the fragility of life. Sometimes all it takes to make life the tiniest bit more meaningful is a paper bird. Something to make memories worth remembering. Something to indelibly paint the past onto the present.

Yin Lei's mother asked, "What is it?"

Mei Ling looked back at the crowd of people staring at her inquisitively. She looked at the paper bird, delicate, in her hands.

"It's a kite."

The Future

St. Stephen's College, Victoria, Xia Yu Chen – 14

Leanne recovered from her daze with sore limbs and a throbbing head.

She had been trying to get onto a train, the newest form of transport at the time, but a hole had opened beneath her, and she was pulled in by some invisible force. Suddenly, she was dragged back to reality by an assortment of pokes. Opening her eyes, she saw a young girl looming above her. While she was still taking in the situation, the girl spoke.

“You’re finally awake! I thought that you were still comatose for a second, but it seems that you have awoken now!”

She chuckled to herself, clapping her hands together and looking extremely pleased. Leanne blinked twice, then looked around. She was lying in an empty field, with nothing but grass surrounding her body.

“...Who are you? And most importantly, where am I?” Leanne asked, still extremely confused.

The entire thing was extremely bizarre to her— After all, it’s not every day that you get sucked into a mysterious pit and transported to an unfamiliar grassy field. The girl tilted her head, looking befuddled.

“You’re lying right next to my house, on my private property. It should be ME asking you this question!” She said, looking at Leanne.

“What house are you talking about?” Leanne asked, confused. “I don’t see anything around here.”

The girl didn’t respond to her question, and merely pulled out a small red button. “Click!” and a mechanical whirr sounded. The ground began to shake, and something enormous gradually emerged from beneath. It was a white, futuristic mansion.

“This,” the girl paused for dramatic effect. “Is my house.” Grinning proudly at the dumbfounded expression on the other’s face, she continued.

“Surely someone like you wearing rags as plain as those,” she gestured to the clothes Leanne was wearing.

“None has seen anything as spectacular as this? It’s the newest type of housing of 2033, developed by none other than my parents!”

Leanne was about to respond, but then she noticed something was off. “2033? Isn’t the year 1998?”

“You mean you travelled to the future?” The girl put her hands on her waist, causing Leanne to flinch.

“Don’t be silly. Even if technology is advanced nowadays, there’s still no definite way to time travel! You’re funny, girl. What’s your name? I’m Christie, by the way.”

She spoke, giddy as ever. “Since I have some time, I’ll escort you back to your home. We’ll just take the High-Speed Rail. Shouldn’t take long.”

“Uhh, well... I’m Leanne, and... what’s the High-Speed Rail?” Still feeling a bit bewildered, Leanne answered. Christie’s eyes widened significantly.

“I thought you were just a regular citizen that somehow made your way here, but seriously? Do you not even know what the High-Speed Rail is?” Leanne shook her head, and the girl took it as a sign to keep talking.

“So you see, the High-Speed Rail is one of the most significant inventions here in China, which is why I was shocked you didn’t know about it. Back then, fuel-powered trains and steamboats were the norm, but obviously they can’t even compare to the transportation we have now!”

“Well, when it was built, it stretched across thousands of kilometres, connecting many places in China. It’s also very affordable too, and is something even less wealthy people could utilise— Something I’m sure you’ll appreciate.”

Christie droned on about all the benefits of the railway, while Leanne listened in with just as much enthusiasm. She had never thought about the development of future technology.

“I remember that years ago, its potential and abilities were still being doubted. It came as a huge surprise to many that it met the critics’ expectations!” She blabbered.

“I wasn’t too surprised, obviously; I never doubted its capabilities one bit, but I still was pretty shocked to hear that only one major accident happened in all its decades of service!” The girl rambled on. Christie abruptly stopped speaking, looking quite abashed.

“I was rambling again, wasn’t I? Sorry, I tend to do that a lot.” Cheeks reddening slightly, she looked at Leanne’s face, expecting to see a deadpan or awkward expression but was instead met with a face filled with wonder and excitement.

“Wow, so technology in the future is this advanced? How do you know so much about all this?” She asked, eyes shining so brightly that it could be mistaken for a lightbulb. Christie had never seen anyone with such interest in modern technology, and she was pleasantly surprised at how thrilled she was.

“My parents are scientists and inventors, after all. Shouldn’t it be normal for me to know all that?”

Suddenly, a small egg-shaped levitating robot zoomed over, landing on Christie’s shoulder.

“Hello, Miss Christie. You have returned. Is this lady your guest?” The little robot spoke. Leanne was taken aback by how well the egg-shaped object spoke.

“Is this a communication device?” She asked, in awe of its ability to speak fluently just like how a person would. Christie shook her head, looking even more disappointed than before.

“Come on, Leanne. Do you not know what an AI robot is? Even when it’s everywhere in the country? Are you living under a rock or something?”

“Uh, no? I told you, I’m from the past!”

“Oh, it’s alright to be uneducated in some aspects, Leanne. No need to lie.” Christie patted Leanne on her shoulders in an attempt to console her. Frustrated, Leanne decided not to bring it up again.

“If you really want to know, AI stands for Artificial Intelligence. They have extraordinary capabilities and versatility and can communicate with us,” she patted the little robot. “Just like this one here. Have you used a virtual chatbot before?”

“Nope.”

“Guess not then. Anyway, AI is considered the pinnacle of modern technological advancement. Even though it’s widely used throughout the world, China actually played a huge role in its development and is regarded as one of the top countries in terms of AI development.” She explained, gesturing at the robot.

“Miss Christie is correct. In addition, AIs like me are prominent in national security and defence too. We scan data and footage for suspicious information before reporting the findings to—” The robot added, before Christie

silenced it by shutting off its microphone function. She glared at the robot, seemingly angry at it stealing the spotlight away from her.

“Yeah, yeah. Before I was rudely interrupted, I was going to tell you that everything is basically managed by AIs now. They’re useful little things, aren’t they?” She waved her hand, trying to look as nonchalant as possible, even though she was gripping the poor robot so tightly that it looked like it was about to explode.

“Seriously? That’s so cool! I wish I had one, too. Are there any drawbacks of using it?” Leanne asked excitedly, wondering if she could order an AI to do all her work for her.

“There are drawbacks to every useful invention nowadays, Leanne. Nothing’s perfect. Maybe except for me, but nothing else!” Christie smiled triumphantly.

Leanne wondered if the girl was always such a narcissist. Suddenly, the little robot in Christie’s hand started to buzz noisily. Alarmed at its unusual behaviour, Christie let go of it, only for the robot to fly back and start shooting lasers at the two. Leanne jumped backwards in fear, but Christie merely pulled out another remote from her pocket and pointed it at the drone. Suddenly, the drone fell to the ground, and Christie sighed, rubbing her head in embarrassment.

“Sorry, sorry.. Guess the bot malfunctioned.” She was looking at the ground, grinning awkwardly. Leanne let out a sigh of relief.

“Oh, uh.. It’s fine. Is it a common occurrence?”

“Not really, just unfortunate that it happened when a guest was visiting. Well, I guess to make it up to you, I’ll give you a tour of my house, alright? I mean, you apparently haven’t seen an AI before today, so I’ll let you look at some robots in my collection. Come on, I’ll show you!”

Christie reached for Leanne’s hand, but before she could grab her, another dimensional wormhole opened up right next to her. She fell in with a yelp before the hole closed as quickly as it opened. Christie was left agape, mouth wide open at what just occurred in front of her.

“...Was she really not lying about travelling through time?!”

Leanne landed with a thud.

“Oh, I’m back....” She thought to herself.

“Well, that was certainly an interesting experience. I learned a lot about technology from that girl, so... I guess I’ll try making something similar myself. Maybe I won’t succeed, but if I did, it would be cool, wouldn’t it?”

The girl wondered. Pulling out a pen, she started sketching a picture of the robot she had seen at Christie’s house, preparing to start a project that will soon become the original blueprint of the very first robot in history.

Mei's Triumph

The French International School, Bali, Anushka – 11

Wǒ lái, māmā, Mei said as she unwillingly lifted up her heavy eyelids, the winter sunlight flowed into her eyes blinding her, And stumbled out of bed.;

Her mother was hollering at the top of her high pitched voice, calling her for breakfast, which was her grandmother's aromatic, comforting, spicy hot wonton soup with steamed rice ! yum.

She stuffed as much as she could into her mouth, grabbed her bag, and rushed out the door to catch the bus.

“Jin lái!” The bus driver said cheerfully in Mandarin. Her mother waved goodbye as she got in and made her way to sit next to her friend Delilah.

Delilah had been her closest friend ever since she was 2 years old, they shared everything and just wouldn't be the same without each other.

Delilah was slightly plump, had a lot of acne scars, thick eyebrows and smooth black hair cut into a neat bob cut.

Mei had an elegant diamond-shaped face, glass skin like pale fresh snow, jet black silky hair, and a button nose.

She lived with her mom.

They reached school after about an hour and glanced above them to see the towering sign that read Fujian School.

It was their first day of middle school.

Mei took in a deep breath of the crisp cold winter air, and told herself she *will* get through this day.

When her dad was around he told her that “even a bad day is just 24 hours.”

A salty tear rolls down her face as she remembers that day.

When they entered the corridor on the way to homeroom, it was a mess. There were students running everywhere and bumping into people, gossiping and bursts of laughter, lockers adorned with bright colourful stickers.

Teachers were trying to calm everybody down, but they couldn't tame the wild excited children. Mei and Delilah scrambled about to find their homeroom, room 302.

“Welcome everybody! Settle down.” announced a lady in a soft white dress. This was their teacher, Ms. Leung

The next day, they had social studies as their first class, and their unit was about Chinese inventions. Mei's favourite subject was social studies. She loved everything she learned that day.

“Good morning, Y7A. I am Mr. Pullman”

“We will give you learning, but you must return us to your success, life is full of obstacles, challenges and struggles that WILL test your resilience! ”

You have unlimited potential, let's make this year truly unforgettable.

This speech really moved Mei and made her feel determined to impress her teachers.

Later on at home, Mei started researching Chinese inventions. "Whoa!" she gasped. "The compass was invented in China!" She started to get hooked in her book, utterly amazed at all of these inventions from her beloved country. You could see the glistening twinkle in her eyes as they flew across the pages.

Mei was told when she was younger that it was the great Americans that invented everything.

But no, China has invented significant things important to our lives!

"Mama guess what? Did you know that the compass, printing press, gunpowder, papermaking and more were ALL invented in china!" She enthusiastically told her mother at dinner.

She was confident and eager in her abilities and couldn't wait to share her knowledge to her classmates

About three weeks later, on the day of the presentation, she would get to talk about inventions in front of everybody in the school. A lump formed in her throat.

"Take a seat everyone", announced the principal, Mr. Wong in his very deep voice.,

After what felt like an hour, it was Mei's turn to present. She had worked very hard on this and hoped that the effort would pay off. She was shaking as she said the first word, but soon after, her words flowed out like a gushing river.

"You may be surprised at the number of things invented in China, including the compass.....her voice drained over the thunderous claps

She voiced, and everybody was transfixed at how confident she was, one of the youngest students at the school

Mei was walking to the bus stop when she noticed a flyer stuck to one of the lamp posts flapping in the wind, it read "DO YOU WANT TO PARTICIPATE IN A COMPETITION OF YOUR INTEREST- HUGE CASH PRIZE?"

"Contact the number +86 5467 8921 to know more!"

Mei's mom worked three jobs and needed all the help she could get, so this was a sign from the universe.

As soon as she got home she dialed in the number on their antique dark brown landline and a lady with a cool voice answered the phone, "Hello, are you interested in participating?"

"Yes please" Mei answered excitedly.

"May I know more?" she asked politely.

The lady briefed her on the date and time and told her she would need to make a presentation on her interest and perform it in front of the town.

Mei rushed to tell her mom all about it though she left out the cash prize part, because if only she won, it would be a surprise!

She started to practise and research months before the big day.

She was working so ambitiously that she would eat dinner in her room and stay in the library for 3 hours after school!

Not too long after was the big day! When Mei awoke she didn't feel too well. She started to procrastinate and was apprehensive about her project. Her mom drove her up to the farmer's market where the stage was prepared in the middle of all the buzz.

She stood in line for her turn, the butterflies in her stomach felt more like pigeons flapping their wings against the walls of her tight stomach

She looked up to see who the next contestant was and guess what?

IT WAS DELILAH

And her presentation was ALSO about Chinese inventions.

Mei stared at her in utter shock, she caught a glimpse of Delilah smirking slyly at her.

Was she copying her?!

How DARE she? After all that effort of researching and practising Delilah, her best friend, has just stolen it from her.

This was a shock to her.

“Mei LAM, please make your way up to the stage.” announced a tall man in a bright yellow suit and a cherry red tie.

She walked up to the stage, head held high looking confident even though she felt the exact opposite, her palms were clammy with nervousness.

HELLO...MY NAME IS mei just call me that AND UM I WOULD ...PRESENT MY PRESENTATION

NO! SHE WAS FREEZING UP THIS COULDN'T BE HAPPENING!

She had to improvise.

Breathe...Mei, she murmured to herself calmly. She cleared her throat and began. “Hello, my name is Mei Lam and I am here to express my knowledge and passion for Chinese inventions.

“Now let me be honest, I haven't really explored much about my passion until a year ago. I wouldn't exactly call it “professional” but I have devoted my time and effort into it .

Our country, China, holds a lot of the most significant inventions including gunpowder, paper making, printing, toilet paper and much more!”

“The bristle toothbrush was not invented until 1498 in China. The bristles were the stiff, coarse hairs taken from the back of a wild pig’s neck and stuck to handles made of bone or bamboo and used to brush people’s teeth, which evolved later to the one you use today.

“They would also produce a paste by mixing bones, twigs, flower petals, salt, and water. This was their toothpaste.”

After Mei finished her presentation and mesmerising speech she left the audience feeling inspired and moved, a wave of happiness washing over them.

Mei saw Delilah in the crowd, silently cursing under her breath. She then glanced at her loving mom, a wide smile etched across her face.

She thought of the time when she was younger and her mom told her that she can do anything and that her name had a beautiful meaning, it meant gorgeous and intelligent

Mei continued her journey with Chinese inventions and got a Nobel Peace at the age of only 16, for explaining and informing young children from Fujian what “*they*” can invent to help the world if they work hard like she did!

That was the of Mei the girl who *was lucky*

Actually Correction–

the girl whose blood, sweat, hard work and dedication paid off.

Inventors, Impact and China

The French International School, Ching, Arthur – 12

Humanity developed, creativity thrived within the grand borders of ancient China but not a youthful soul elsewhere now knows a single Chinese invention. Creativity lost in monotonous history books, meaning lost between nothing. So let us adventure into this vast world of sophisticated lore.

Paper. One of the most influential inventions of all time but taken for granted in this developing digital age. From egg cartons to confidential files, we use it for nearly everything. Nevertheless, as our lives become infected with electronic devices, we forget the root origins of how this innovation came to be. It all started in 50AD, when Cai Lun emerged from the countryside of Guiyang during the Eastern Han Dynasty. He was burdened with parents that earned only a handful of money each day working as blacksmiths. However, at the age of 25, Cai Lun received castration, which allowed him to become an eunuch for the imperial family. Eunuchs became slaves for the palace, involved in protecting imperial women, lifting water in carrying poles or doing a list of other dull roles.

In 75AD, Cai Lun stepped foot into the imperial household, under the rule of Emperor He. His first tasks were simply to sweep the ground and perform chores. Nonetheless, he still worked diligently and flourished in many esoteric studies, acquiring an abundance of knowledge. In his ancient biography, a paragraph briefly describes his personality as 'prudent and devoted to his duty'. Overall, he was a virtuous man, known for his cautiousness and honesty. The emperor noted his qualities and not long after, he was promoted to court eunuch where he crafted weapons for military uses.

During this time, the Chinese were mostly using inconvenient bamboo slips to write books. Even though silk was a solution, it was unaffordable and only accessed by the rich, which meant only the rich could read or write. Besides, the Han Dynasty was reaching economic prosperity and commoners were desperate for a proper medium to write on. So Cai Lun sat in his room, concentrating solely on the problem. He isolated himself for several weeks. He went through trial upon error, days upon days, weeks upon months, blood, sweat and tears to develop a viable solution. As a result, he invented the method to create one of the Four Great Inventions of China, an invention we all recognize today.

First, gather grated tree bark, fishing nets, hemp waste, rags of cloth and the inner bark of bamboo. Then, put the mixture inside water, to let the materials soften. Afterwards, steam and further macerate the materials if needed. After, sieve and press to further enhance the tensile strength of paper. Lastly, dry the sheet on a wall before further use. The final product using this method was presented to the emperor in 105 AD when Cai Lun was approximately 45 years old. Of course, it took the emperor's breath away and Cai Lun was awarded with huge sums of money.

In the modern era, anybody can clearly observe the impact Cai Lun left behind. Paper is one of the most used methods to disseminate information, from verbose essays to Picasso's legendary artworks, you can express emotions which laid its foundations just from a blank piece of paper. It can represent a form of currency that dictates your life or simply a thin-layered sheet to blow your nose. Even more, it can hold the photos to remember our closest memories, never forgetting the wonderful delights in life. At other times, it can be used to simply clean tables and wipe coffee spills. Even though now we use machinery to mass-produce paper, there are still places in China that do it the traditional way, preserving the ancient methods.

But most importantly, Cai Lun paved the way for the next groundbreaking invention in China, printing.

Bi Sheng was brought alive in the depths of Bianliang during the Northern Song dynasty in 970. He was simply a normal commoner, who wasn't a court eunuch with growing intuition nor a starving peasant growing wheat. He grew up to become a skillful artisan and alchemist, learning the techniques for carving wood blocks. When creating these blocks, one would need to carve the outline of each stroke and character. It was a delicate process that required patience, diligence and an unneeded amount of time. If an artisan made a single mistake, they would have to start completely from scratch, which would clearly be frustrating. However, if it was successful, ink would be applied on the surface of the woodblock and pressed onto paper. This method was convenient for producing multiple copies, as wood was a material found within all forests, in all trees. But the sheer amount of hours spent simply carving a single woodblock was too inefficient, and mistakes were too costly.

So, once again, an inventor went through trial upon error, days upon days, weeks upon months, blood, sweat and tears to develop a viable solution. As a result, Bi Sheng was able to create the first moveable type printing method. First, each character would be molded individually using clay and then fired in a kiln. Each of these characters were then a single 'type'. These types were placed inside an wooden frame to form sentences and stories, which would be printed onto paper using ink.

However, the vast number of characters in the Chinese language was just too overwhelming for a moveable type print to gain attention. Furthermore, Chinese characters had complicated strokes that required even more caution when carved onto blocks. So even if the Chinese government still regards this 10th century invention as transformative, it wasn't widely used back then. Publishers still continued to stick to woodblock printing, and Bi Sheng's work was in vain.

Finally, it would be dishonour to forget the Chinese philosopher that invented the ethical belief that altered Chinese society. This teacher influenced politics and civilization, providing the impactful morals that unfoiled across rivers and lakes to European states. This ideological revolutionary simplified the complexity of human relationships and formed the golden rule, engraved within the code of conducts. This man is none other than Confucius. He was born in 551 BC within Qufu, Jining, now the Shandong province of China, during the Zhou Dynasty. However, his childhood is quite unknown, some state that he lived in an impoverished family, some say he was born within the luxuries of the royal family.

When Confucius grew a bit older, he had a strong desire to grow his academic knowledge by learning countless different subjects. He wanted to broaden his understanding, educate himself in the classics. Confucius particularly admired the original peaceful years of the Zhou Dynasty, before it broke into crisis and feudal authority. He himself was a tranquil, benevolent person that respected elders greatly. To put it simply, Confucius was a purely altruistic human being that believed in upholding morals and 'good' qualities.

So, he invented the idea of Confucianism, written down in a book called the Analects. The main underlying belief of Confucianism is becoming a virtuous character with high moral standards. This would supposedly affect this repeated concept of 'harmony' in life. There were many virtues that Confucius thought of, like humaneness, righteousness, justice, loyalty, consideration, etc... There were two parts that one would need to fulfill to reach humaneness: first was to show deep, heartfelt respect to everybody around you and behave in this manner all day, second was to treat others with consideration and the way you would like to be treated. Humaneness was one of the highest fields of good, and was the main foundation of a moral character. In addition, Confucius said that there were five main relationships, ruler-subject, husband-wife, father-son, elder-younger and friends. These relationships had to be maintained for a stable, flourishing society to function. Though modern scholars have argued against this model since many of these relationships are unfair, with one party asserting more power. But overall, Confucianism still has retained much influence and provided the groundwork for ethics within China. From just teaching a few thousand students to now educating millions across globes, it's hard to deny his effect.

Though these inventors might not have had the same astonishing impact that transformed the following decades of development, they were undoubtedly China's most ingenious visionaries, thinking years ahead of their time. We also tend to disregard the help these inventors received along the way, from slight refinements on their innovations in the future to their undocumented peers and parents. The fact remains that humanity never progresses alone, we progress as a unified whole towards a better future, spreading our colours of creativity to the other side of the globe. In the 21st century, that's exactly what we've been doing, and have been doing for a millennium. Creativity will always be an indispensable part of being human, forever, for all time.

The Missing Class Pet

The French International School, Hu, Chloe – 11

A sign of another school day. Ms. Blubbert stormed into the room as she slapped the door open with her foot. *Blam!* goes her bag as it hits the smooth wooden surface of her expensive desk. For a woman who's only 5 foot 2, she had a nasty temper compared to others. The class pet Hammy the Hamster quickly burrows into his hole to hide from this ferocious beast.

She drops into her chair as she jiggles uncontrollably and begins to take her morning nap. Ms. Blubbert has a lot of naps. She has a morning one, one in the afternoon, and another in the evening. And only after that does she start to doze off into her longest nap that lasts 'till morning.

The first unfortunate pupil skips into the classroom with a big grin. Two blond pigtails flop behind her. Class 3B's classic Alicia, the class brainiac. "Morning, Miss!"

"Ah, you again! How *dare* you disturb me while I'm working! It's 30 minutes before class starts, you idiot!" *burps "Let me prepare the slides for our lesson later that I forgot to do last night." Ms. Blubbert glares at her as Alicia's smile falters and trots to the front row to take her seat.

The rest of the class steadily trickles in a bit after.

"Uh—HMM, attention please! Pick a partner. 10 seconds." Those were Ms. Blubbert's usual instructions to start the day. It's strange how none of the children complained to their parents about the way she taught. Maybe they didn't mind that they weren't learning. Maybe they liked it.

A scramble to pick their besties before anyone else got to them. Punches were thrown as the students shoved through the mass of obstacles blocking their way to their desired partner. Shouts of 'MOVE!' or 'Get out of my way!' or the awfully common 'OW!' were heard repeatedly.

"Time's up, you bunch of filthy brats! Why, look at you, Timmy, your nose is bleeding! And Sara! What on *earth* were you doing? Your lips are bleeding, too! No, wait, is that lipstick?! Oh my, you are too young for beauty tips! Don't you know that? It's not lipstick? Okay."

"Go run up to the nurse and be back in 5 minutes or else I will spank you two, and yes, I have both of your parents' permission." That, of course, was a dirty lie. Poor little Timmy and Sara, too frightened to speak, scurried out of that horrid place before Ms. Blubbert's Nike sneaker that reeked of soggy socks hit them. They jump as they hear the shoe hit the closed door and shatter its see-through panes. "Oh my, what if that was me? Oh, mommy, where are you?" Timmy whispers. They both shudder.

"Are you all done finding your pet friends?"

"Yes, Miss Blubbert."

"Good. Now, your task is to go onto an AI generator or something and write me a 3000 word essay about Hershey's milk tea flavor nuggets. I don't care how, but the best essay will be put onto their 5 star reviews website which I'm not sure exists. But you morons fall for anything. So, start! What are you waiting for? Go! Go! Go!"

The noise level of the buzz and chatter went up 10 notches as Ms. Blubbert left the room for number two.

There was a very peculiar conversation going on at the very back row with a lone table where a pair of mischievous boys sat. Toby and Brody.

"I thought Hershey's made chocolate! When did they start producing Mcnuggets, man?!" Toby demanded. "You fool those nuggets are tiny pieces of chocolate that are overpriced and overrated!" Brody snickered and picked out a booger. He flicked it onto Toby's head. His victim screamed.

On a separate table, Timmy with a tissue stuck up his nose and Joe sat on their table with a missing foot. "I want a hamster." sighed Joe. "There's one." Timmy pointed to the hamster cage. "*And it's for free.*"

"Ooh, good idea. Won't Ms. Blubbert find out?"

"Surely not. She won't have *evidence.*"

And slyly, Joe got up and crept under the tables of his classmates. It was a terrible experience.

Without defending itself or using any sort of resistance when Joe picked the innocent rodent up, Hammy slept soundlessly on his palm as Joe lowered him into his lunchbox.

Just as the click-clacking of high heels echoed through the loud classroom, Timmy helped Joe to zip up his school bag. "*Now, the evidence is all gone.*" They both grin.

Now, Ms. Blubbert might be mean and rude, and all that stuff, but she wasn't blind. Oh no, her eyesight was perfectly good. So of course she spotted at once that her beloved Hammy the hamster vanished. And she shrieked at the top of her lungs, "WHO, DARES," then in a dangerously low voice, "to take..." a long pause. "HAMMY THE CLASS PET?!"

There was silence. Nobody dared utter a word. Even the crybabies Trelsa and Nutelia didn't cry. Class 3B was too terrified to even let out a whimper or fart.

"No one? So you twits are saying that Hammy escaped on his own?" The only sound heard now was the heavy breaths taken by Ms. Blubbert. "If I find out who did it, I *shall* expel them."

The school bell for dismissal finally rang and Timmy and Joe were the first to escape hell in school with some quite worried looks on their faces. "What should we do? Buy Ms. Blubbert a new hamster? I wouldn't want to waste *my* money on someone like her!"

"True, true. But luckily my friend, you have ME. Isn't that great? And I have a brilliant plan, just you wait and see." So shortly after that being said, Timmy started whispering his plan to a clueless Joe.

"That ain't gonna work, man."

"Of course it will!"

"I'm telling you, it's not."

"Well you're saying we did this all for nothing?"

Timmy points his finger at their game plan on the messy board:

1. Make a fake silhouette shape of the hamster. Realistic!
2. Break into the classroom(don't know how) before Ms. Blubbert gets there. Usually she arrives at 7:29.
3. Put it in its cage.
4. Cut the wire to the left side of the classroom's lights, where the cage is located. This will then disable Ms. Blubbert to see the hamster clearly and because she's so desperate,
5. Voila!

The duo were now starting to work furiously designing their fake Hammy. It was quite difficult, trying to get the right shape of him while he was rolling about like a ball on the table. They had taken the hamster out, but surprisingly, Hammy had eaten Joe's sushi for lunch. As a result, he was as round as you could get as a hamster.

A pot of glue sat in the corner of the table. And a pile of wooden stick thingies. Timmy grabbed a wooden stick. He drew a circle on the end of it as a reminder of where to cut out. Apparently that was Hammy's ear. He then plucked out some hairs from Hammy as the silhouette's fur.

Kablam! Joe had tripped. He had skidded on top of Timmy's rusty skateboard and fallen. Then he bulldozed Timmy down with the force of a rhino as he continued to fall forwards...

Now Timmy was falling too. So he quickly stuck his twig into the giant pot of superglue to have just a bit more support. It worked.

Timmy quickly tugged out the stubborn stick. Suddenly, it came free, but poor Timmy was not prepared for it. He went crashing to the ground and started howling for his mommy. "MOMMY! Bring me home! I don't want to stay here..."

In the meantime, the stick was still flying through the air, in slow motion...

An abrupt gurgling sound began to emit from the hamster. The gluey stick had landed in its mouth. Oh dear, oh dear. Joe flew to Hammy's aid and pulled it out. And wo behold, the hamster's teeth were a break-taking dazzling white! But, Hammy's mouth was glued together. Quite worth it, Hammy thought.

Timmy and Joe both gasped at this magnificent sight! What beautiful teeth!

And guess what? The duo did the same. Their teeth became so white and clear! And what a happy ending!

Timmy and Joe started their own company, Timmy & Joe. They kept on selling those things, things that they later decided to name: Toothbrushes.

Glue wouldn't do, of course, so the successful business-children collabed with a company called Coolgate and launched something called: *Toothpaste*. And *what* a successful business it was! Billions and billions bought these truly unbelievable inventions, and Timmy and Joe did not have to go to school anymore because they became super rich.

With the bristly things acting like a brush on it still being harvested from Hammy the hamster's fluffy and puffy fur, of course. Hammy is now bald, but again, proud of his shiny teeth, that is still shining and shimmering and glimmering and glittering to this very day.

Guo Shoujing

The French International School, Lau, Ying – 14

She, is one of the largest nations on Earth, of almost a fifth the size of Asia. She, is one of the oldest nations on Earth, of more than 3500 years of history. She, had been through highs and lows, forming what she is today. China, a great nation of science, mathematics and philosophy. Here, countless great men were raised, numerous advancements were made; here, the world was explored. In ancient China, the four great inventions were discovered, where papermaking, printing, gunpowder, and the compass had far-reaching impacts and infinite opportunities worldwide. However, way more inventors, scientists, mathematicians, philosophers, and others were left forgotten throughout these thousands of years. Now, I shall present a historical journey to discover one who made significant influence, but is unheard of for many.

Guo Shoujing, courtesy name Ruosi. Born and raised in the Song dynasty (1231 AD), but succeeded in the Yuan dynasty under the rules of the Mongol Empire. He was from Xingtai county in Xingzhou (now Xingtai), one of the oldest cities in North China. He was born into a poor family. Fortunately, he had a knowledgeable grandfather, a famous scholar throughout China at the time, for his expertise in various topics, ranging from the study of the Five Classics to astronomy, mathematics, and hydraulics. The man was named Guo Yong. Young Guo Shoujing was extremely intelligent, showing exceptional intellectual promise. Under his grandfather's education, he was diligent and hard-working, enjoying studying. He also developed solid hands-on abilities, demonstrated in his teen years.

'If those in charge are like this, then people are not eating in vain.' – Kublai Khan

As early as the age of 15, Guo Shoujing was said to be able to replicate an Armillary Sphere from just bamboo strips based on an illustration in a book. He also built a platform using soil for the Armillary Sphere so that he could conduct astronomical observations. Another time, he understood the operation principles of a timing instrument that was quite advanced at the time, not long after reading a blueprint made by Yan Su in the Northern Song Dynasty, which his grandfather was working on. It was a type of water clock called a Lotus Clepsydra. A water clock with a bowl shaped like a lotus flower on the top into which the water dripped. From these experiences, he learned the fundamentals of astronomy and hydraulic engineering studies and began studying mathematics at 16.

"Calendar is the foundation of a nation."

By this time, his grandfather, Guo Yong, knew that he had nothing left to teach him and that the best for Guo Shoujing was to find him a 'proper' teacher. Liu Bingzhong was the best option since he is an old friend of Guo Yong. Liu Bingzhong was the representative of the original Zijin Mountain School of Thought and was one of China's best teachers at the time. He was also a vital counsellor of Kublai Khan, the future Emperor of the Yuan. And so, Guo Shoujing then went to Zijin Mountain School to study. There, he met famous scholars like Zhang Wenqian, Zhang Yi, and Wang Xun, who became friends with him. The four of them and their teacher, Liu Bingzhong, were later called the 'Big Five of Zijin Mountain.'

'God has blessed our Yuan dynasty. A person like this is not easily attained in the world.' –
Xu Heng

After further studying classics and astronomy, the fields his teacher was known for mastering, he was introduced to Zhang Wenqian. Shortly later, he was ordered to initiate the work of regulating and evacuating water channels; specifically, he was to undertake the planning and designing of this project. Luckily, he quickly figured out the river system damaged by the war using the knowledge he learned and through careful investigation. Subsequent dredging and renovation projects returned the spreading water to its original channels. Under Guo Shoujing's guidance, the relics of the stone bridge that had been buried for nearly thirty years were unearthed. This was praised by people at the time. Yuan Haowen once wrote an article, 'Xingzhou New Stone Bridge,' specifically for it. The Guo Sheng in the article refers to the young Guo Shoujing. He became famous. When the Emperor – Kublai Khan – promoted Zhang Wenqian and put him at Daminglu (now Daming in Hebei province) to work, Guo Shoujing came with him to study, and together, they worked on water management. Nevertheless, he was still not promoted in court. On the other hand, he was able to replicate and improve on the Lotus Clepsydra, which method of building was lost. This was researched by teen Guo Shoujing, and he was able to improve on it at the age of 30. The new model was named the Baoshan Clepsydra. This is significant as it marks off as the 'first invention' of Guo Shoujing.

"Simplicity is the ultimate form of sophistication."

Finally, the day came. In 1262, thanks to the recommendation of Zhang Wenqian, he was seen by the Emperor. There, he proposed 6 laws to help control floods nationwide, all complemented by Kublai Khan. He was finally found to be talented. He was promoted and appointed to take charge of the renovation and management of canals in various places. Soon, he was again promoted to 'Deputy River Commissioner.' It was until one day, a big challenge occurred. It was when he went to their Xixia (now Ningxia) to inspect rivers and waterways. Originally, Xixia was known to be an 'Oasis in the desert of the West,' but because of wars, it had been badly destroyed, leaving a disastrous mess and an empty city. He had to fix this somehow. A few months later, Zhang Wenqian governed Xixia as a representative of the imperial court. Under the leadership and support of Zhang Wenqian, Guo Shoujing was ordered to dredge the Tanglai, Hanyan, and other ancient canals in Xixia and build sluices and weirs so that local farmland could be irrigated, and he did it. He was loved by the people of Xixia. The local people even built a shrine for him at the source of the canal. With this success, he was promoted again.

'Master Guo, the renowned scholar, a 'divine man.' – Temur Khan

10 years later, Guo Shoujing was once again promoted. This time, plans were big, real big – it was to make a new calendar. Guo Shoujing had worked and led many observation projects, in which most of the data he collected were the most accurate in ancient China's history or just close to the actual value measured by modern-day technology. The most known was the 'Sihai Test,' meaning the 'Four Seas Test' by translation. This involved setting up 27 observation stations all around Yuan's land. The nation was much larger, and different regions would have different lengths

of day and night, sunrise and sunset, and most importantly, different times of day, meaning that the old calendar was no longer applicable. Therefore, nationwide astronomical observations were needed to compile a new calendar. Kublai Khan accepted Guo Shoujing's suggestion and sent fourteen prison guards to conduct astronomical observations in these twenty-seven places. For this, Guo Shoujing invented or improved on a total of 16 different astronomical instruments. This included 4 portable devices that can be carried for measurements. It provided a reliable observation basis for compiling the 'Shoushi Calendar,' or the new calendar they were working on.

"There is no limit to human ingenuity."

Guo Shoujing travelled thousands of miles from Shangdu (now Duolun in Inner Mongolia province) and Dadu (now Beijing) through Henan to the South China Sea and participated in tests in person. At six of the locations, the length of the surface shadow and the length of day and night on the summer solstice were specially measured; the average error of the measured altitude of the North Pole was only 0.35; the average error of the newly measured distance of the 28 constellations was less than 5'; The new value of the yellow-red angle was measured, with an error of just over 1'; the length of the tropical year was found to be 365.2425 days, that is, 365 days, 5 hours, 49 minutes and 12 seconds, which was only 26 seconds away from the actual time of the earth's revolution around the sun. It was consistent with the Gregorian Calendar, which is currently used worldwide. The results of these observations provided scientific data for preparing a calendar suitable for the whole country, and the calendar has had a significant influence throughout Asian countries like Japan, Korea, and Vietnam. Like any other challenges Guo Shoujing met, he was able to overcome it. All these things that he could do had not been achieved by the Western European countries until more than 300 years later, again proving his greatness.

'Master Guo was a man of pure virtue and practical learning. He was an expert in water conservancy, mathematics, and the study of instruments and systems... When he was put to use, his plans were simple and effective, his observations were accurate, and his work benefited the people. He was a true genius who surpassed all others in his time.' – Qi Luqian

Guo Shoujing's work was not limited to this. In his mid-life, he made numerous accomplishments and inventions. One is the building of the Tonghui River, located in Dayidu (now Beijing). This was essential as the canal initially used for transporting resources from the South of China was inefficient. The last journey of it was even via land transportation. So, a new canal should be constructed. The project began in the spring of 1292. After a year and a half, the canal, with a total length of more than 160 miles, and all the gates and dams were completed. This canal was named the Tonghui River. After this, he was, again, promoted, but differently; he was promoted to a higher status. He was honoured to be the 'Grand Secretariat' of the 'Zhaowenguan,' basically the 'National Library and School.' He also became the academican of the 'Taishi Academy.' Around the same time, another masterpiece of his was to be made. He invented a clock that became one of the most well-known timing instruments built in China. 'The Ming Palace Timing Lamp' it was. Its beauty cannot be described. The way it functions was ahead of time, almost 50 years ahead of the mechanical clocks built in Europe. It was simply magnificent.

"Water conservancy is the key to a country's national economy and people's livelihood."

After all his work, he was more famous and known than anyone. He was so important that only he was not allowed to retire at the time. A special notice was sent from the Emperor that all astronomers of the 'Taishi Academy' – potentially including Guo Shoujing – were not allowed to retire. It showed its importance. It was the 70s and 80s of his life; he worked until death. However, no more inventions and discoveries were made due to the mess nationally. The Yuan Dynasty's regime was corrupt, the internal struggles within the ruling group became increasingly fierce, and life was extravagant. Under this background, Guo Shoujing's creative activities were largely restricted. He died. At the age of 86, in 1316.

He is gone, but his work is not. The influence remains. Without him, China would not have been like today's. Without him, the Western mathematical and science field would not have been like today's. Without him, the world would not have been like today's.

He was great.

Paper: The Discovery

The French International School, Wong, Brandon – 12

PAST – Leiyang, china

A long, long, time ago... *around 57 AD*, China in the old days were ginormously different from today. During the time, no shopping malls existed, no fancy restaurants stood – just dry lands, covering huge distances far away. People with mountains of money were believed to travel not by horses, not by carriages, but by dragons. Of course, who believes such a mythical creature exists?

Cai Lun – an ordinary-looking Chinese raised boy, dreamed he lived amongst those villages. Every morning, as the bright sun rose up to the sky, would sit and admire. But Cai Lun's house wasn't nearly as elegant, as the nearby village. Instead, just a single regular sized, narrow house is where he lived.

Mornings, white puffy clouds floated on the sky, steams from the midst of the clouds swirled, as if a dragon just took a huge breath. Beside the entrance of what is known as the 'Golden Forest', stood Cai Lun's house.

The house barely supported a roof, with gaps and a few minor cracks around it. When Cai Lun was not even taller than a bamboo stick, he began living with his father.

Not only did he grow older as time passed, his father also grew a beard, getting older inch by inch by the day. For breakfast, his mates would wake up early, and head off to a café, where they would indulge in warm-savory dishes. But unlike all of his other mates, picks berries from mulberry trees inside the forest, just outside the walkway of Cai Lun's house.

As night fell, as stars began to twinkle, as candles started to be lit, Cai Lun, along with his father slept on a hanging bamboo surface.

As mornings swept by, Cai Lun woke up early every morning, and transformed into a Chinese-styled coat, made with cheap, affordable materials such as wool.

In the space at the center of all trees, is where he was educated, with his mates and professor, a Chinese man.

When he walked to the forest after a farewell to his father, his mates were normally walking together in a big bunch, but Cai Lun walked, individually as he approached.

In the first lesson, Cai Lun was taught the must-learn basics of survival using tall bamboo stalks.

In the second lesson, he practiced speaking cantonese and mandarin – both important ingredients to a chef's recipe for anyone travelling to China.

But the third lesson really made Cai Lun's brain twirl – this is when all of Cai Lun's invention ideas inspired him. It all happened during that day when, with his mates – learned about poems for the first time.

His professor held a piece of bamboo, with words and symbols carved onto it. At first, not a single one of them knew what was going on, but soon realised each character, each word meant something. Some of the words on it were barely visible, so that lead to Cai Lun thinking hard sometimes before understanding it.

At that moment, he thought to himself, "is there a way to create a material which you can write on – but at the same time visible to the eyes? I wonder..." And not long later, the class dismissed, the sky bacame dark, yawns started to be heard.

While Cai Lun made his journey back to his and his dad's narrow house, his mind could not stop thinking about the idea of inventing the material. In his mind, he knew inside him that he will most likely not succeed, but at the same time really wants to be the first to invent something, not to become famous, but to make his and the people's life easier.

Upon arrival, he entered, saw his dad sitting on a rock, smiling warmly to him. After greetings, approached to his bamboo-made surface where he sleeps on. As he was preparing to take rest, his eyes somehow caught a glimpse of

something shiny underneath. He picked the object up, and realised it was a golden gemstone his mother gave him before her unwanted death. On it, was a ruby in the center, on the sides, Chinese words carved on it. It read: 【如果你试 · 什么都可以发生】 which translates to “*If you try, anything can happen*”.

As soon as he saw it, had a flashback to the time when he was with his mother, sitting next to each other, storytelling, walking together. But when his mother died, to him it was like a drop of black ink dripping into a pool of endless water.

His father understood his pain, his loss, his sadness.

That night, rain fell. The ground was splattered with water, dripping every plant, every surface it touches.

When Cai Lun woke up, he realised that it was Sunday. Every Sunday, he doesn't have to study with his mates. That day, he decided to stroll with his father – who, at this age can still walk. As he exited, the first thing he saw was mulberry leaves from mulberry plants dried up. He knew it must have rained. When he touched the leaf, it felt like something he has never felt before, it felt new. He quickly picked a leaf, and dropped some black ink onto it. He could not believe his eyes. The ink did not drip away, but instead remained there, and slowly dried on the paper as time passed. He felt extremely delighted – he just created a recipe of success.

The next few days, he tried his very best to sneak some of his precious time to produce the mulberry leaves material. He started by picking some mulberry leaves just outside his house on the mulberry tree, and soaked them in some water from lakes and rivers. Finally, the only thing he needs most is sunny weather, to dry up the leaves.

By one month and another, he managed to produce almost hundreds of his new material. He wondered in his heart what his professor and mates would think about his new invention, so, the next day he brought them with him along with a small bottle of black ink, held in his hands, towards the forest trails.

As soon as his mates saw Cai Lun, holding a bunch of unusual material, his mates stared, unable to guess what exactly it is.

He started dropping drops of black ink on it, and there it was, on the piece of material, submerged on it. The faces, emotions changed almost immediately as they saw it, they looked astounded, amazed, in awe. His professor said nothing, but smiled, warmly. He knew that his professor was proud of his achievements.

After returning back to his house, he gave his invention to his father. At the beginning, Cai Lun's dad didn't understand what it was, but slowly, he understood – a material that can be used to write with ink. He got proud, and questioned Cai Lun what materials he used to produce it. He replied: “With mulberry leaves, water, and a determined heart.”

At this time, his father thought of selling them in the village, even if it takes a breathtaking journey.

So during that week, when Cai Lun didn't have to study, he, together with his dad would leave early, heading to the village giving out his invention.

Although it didn't sell very well at the start, it slowly became more and more popular over periods of time. And over a year later, his invention, dried up mulberry leaves, reached out to almost every single person in China.

Cai Lun wasn't hoping to become popular, he only wanted lives to be simplified, to be best for the people. It was his determination he remembered from his mother, the gemstone that pushed his confidence.

Around that time, they received a knock on their door. When his father opened it, 3 men, one looking stronger than the rest, approached them. Cai Lun's father saw them and got worried, to ask them what they desired, but suddenly became relieved, when they asked for production of Cai Lun's invention. Cai Lun told them the materials he used, and after that, manufacturers began working, spread his recipe all over the wide, broad continent of China.

One beautiful, peaceful afternoon, he folded his invention into a lantern, approached the door heading towards the river, with a little candle as well in the palm of his hands. When his father asked where he was going to, he told him: "Somewhere important".

His father nodded, and Cai Lun exited the house.

After a while, he reached the river, sat down on a piece of grass-laid rock, started praying, palm to palm to his dear mother. He opened his eyes, and began to lit the candle on fire. He placed it gently in the lantern he crafted, and slowly floated it on the clear-transparent water.

As he sat down watching the bright orange illuminating lantern float farther and farther away from his sight, underneath a dark sky, he felt calm, it was like his heart and his mother's heart finally touching again. "Thank you, mother."

The Unexpected Quest

The French International School, Zhou, Queenie – 11

Chapter 1

Last month was my first day at my new boarding school. I really wanted things to go well. I was shaking as my dad pulled up to Treckford High. As I stepped out of the shiny black car with my dad. I was taken by surprise. Treckford High is located in a lush green forest in ShenZhen, China.

“Bye Charlotte!” My dada excitedly called.

Just a few days before, I was on a google meet with the principal, Mrs Zhang. She took some time to show me a virtual tour of my (soon to be) classroom. She even bumped into a staff member ! Coincidentally, that was going to be my Social Studies teacher , Mr Zhou, as well as my French teacher, Mrs Gwenalle.

Huffing and puffing, I climbed up to my homeroom : 105.

“Good morning, I see some new faces as well as some old. For those who don’t know me, my name is Miss Zhang”

Miss Zhang had way black hair and as she pointed to a man with a head of hair like a bird's nest.

“And this is Mr Yarrow.”

“ We’ll be your homeroom teacher. Welcome to year 7A.” He said in a mysteriously high pitched voice. We were introduced to stuff like our lockers, how to navigate around the school. Miss Zhang led me and my roommate to our dorm room which was A Treehouse, Can YOU BELIEVE IT?

Now a Few Months Later.....

I had gotten to know Miss Zhang and she was one of the Kindest teachers I have ever *met*. She even organised a hike on the Wutong mountain. On the way Miss Zhang introduced her friend, Cheryl.

“Cheryl will be your other guide today.” Miss Zhang said, her eyes glimmering with excitement.

As we arrived at the foot of the towering mountain, Miss Zhang did a head count “1,2,3,4,5..... and 26. We’re all set.”

“Now Jenifer , I mean Miss Zhang will be at the front while I’m at the back. “ Cheryl continued.

“Don’t go past me and don’t fall behind Cheryl.”

Chapter 2

As time passes, I start to fall behind. I somehow got left behind with my roommate, Alan. Suddenly, it started pouring rain. Alan quickly said

“ Quick, follow me! “ As he led me to a dark cave further down the path. Huffing and Puffing I collapsed on the hard stone floor.

Grrrrr! A low growl came from deep in the cave. Alan and I jumped up in horror, as I turned around and a gigantic white tiger towering over us.

The next seconds were just a blur, legs aching, sweat dripping, we ran as fast as our legs could take us. At the corner of my eye, a neon blue battery appeared to be glowing, just as I was about to give up, gravity seemed to pull me toward the opening of the cave. Wait, it wasn’t gravity! There before us was a huge neon blue rip in the air that was dragging us towards it. Too tired to put up a fight, I just gave up. As if waving goodbye the white tiger was purring like a motor.

The rip swallowed us whole as it spun and spun, Bleh! I was starting to get seasick. I was still a bit woozy as we arrived.

“ Um, Charlotte, where are we ?”

As I looked around there were a few cottages and a lane leading down to a gushing river.

A young man strode out of a nearby cottage, his eyes twitched as a reflex, in one swift movement, he held a sliver sharp blade to our necks.

“Who are you?” He said in a firm voice.

Trembling in fear, I stuttered “ I..I’m Cha...Charlotte.”

“And..dd I’m Alan, we come in peace.”

The young man glared sternly as he decided “ Move. Toward that house.”

Step by step we reached the door.

“ Step over the door threshold.”

As the door closed he spoke “ Show me evidence.”

“What?” I replied

“If you come in peace, then you must be with them. You must be new, it should be in your pocket.”

As we pulled our hand out, there was a neon blue butterfly in both of our hands.

“Oh, where are my manners? My name is Cai Lun and my wife’s name is Shelby Hu. Since you are new, let me explain what just happened.”

Suddenly, my stomach started gurgling.

“ Oh, you must be hungry. Let me cook something for you two to eat.” A beautiful young lady exclaimed.

“ You must be Cai Lun’s wife.” Alan guessed.

“Indeed I am. Would you like to eat some pork and rice?”

We gladly accepted.

Chapter 3

As the sun setted in a beautiful vivid orange colour, Cai Lun showed us what he was working on , he had created paper.

“I haven’t shown anyone yet besides my wife. The ingredients are : boiled bamboo, fish nets, tree bark and old rags.”

The following day, Cai lun hurriedly woke us up.

“ There is a rip just outside!” he exclaimed.

Grabbing our things we jumped into the rip as we waved goodbye.

Bleh. The sickness still isn’t gone.

“Oh great.” Alan muttered, “we’re still in the past.”

“I am the father of Chinese alchemy. My name is Wei Boyang, I have been informed of your arrival.” A man said with 3 men behind him, “and these are my disciplines. We have quite a lot to do so let me briefly show you my creation.”

As we were led through the mountains to a large brick house, several monkeys were swinging on the trees.

“Help yourself to some food.”

Some was an understatement, there was porridge, various types of vegetables and meat that covered the entire table.

Father Wei Boyang brought out a black powder and proudly exclaimed.

“ This is my creation, Gunpowder. We originally planned to make an immortal pill though.”

“I think we should go now.” Alan said.

“ Just outside there will be a rip in a few minutes later.”

I secretly hoped to still have the neon blue butterfly when we go back.

Chapter 4

Thankfully, Miss Zhang and Cheryl found us and we continued the hike and made it back to school safely.

Surprisingly, we started learning about inventions from Ancient China. I was starting to doze off as Alan gave me a note that read:

‘Our families want to organise a day to go outside like on a hike or something. Where do you want to go ?’

I wrote back: ‘I don’t know’

‘What do you mean you don’t know’

I smile and wrote back

‘Good adventures aren’t always planned in advance’

Fire and Fury

The Independent Schools Foundation Academy, Chan, Ethan – 13

Creation:

“Mendacity!” Huizong thundered. His authority was absolute in the Tang royal court, and those who defied him had one fate – death. Sun Simao and his team of alchemists were given the mammoth task of creating a remedy for mortality. For obvious reasons, they failed to meet the deadline. Even Simao, who was considered one of the best healers in the history of China, quivered in the face of such a colossal task.

“O–Your–Majesty,” the chancellor said with austerity, “this is not the time to be brooding over absurd obsessions! Widespread famine and rebellions, are these of no importance to you? Cease to pursue your absurd desire. Consolidate your rule before it is too late!”

This aroused whispers among the numerous officials.

“I regret to say that I refuse to accept your suggestion” Huizong spoke with abnormal respect and formality. “Pursuing immortality has been a tradition lasting many centuries. What an insult would it be to our noble ancestors if we don’t honor the tradition?”

The Chancellor, who saw no purpose to insist, bowed his head in silent acquiescence. Despite his previous remonstrances, he thought, the emperor has failed to see sense, to see true wisdom.

“Tang will meet its demise very soon,” he muttered. He was right, the Tang dynasty, known in China as its greatest, was coming to an end.

“Simao, you have one evening.” Huizong stood erect and left the courtroom.

Sun Simao, bowing in reverence, knew that this was his last chance to make history or even better, avoid execution.

Sun Simao returned to his alchemy laboratory in the evening. He spent his last few hours toiling on the ingredients of the remedy. It was time he avoided his terrible fate. He prepared his pestle and mortar and started pounding solid sulfur and potassium in quick succession. He ground the contents viciously as sweat trickled down his tormented arms. Finally, he has created his masterpiece.

Never had something so repulsive looked so tempting. The black substance with charcoal–like features was meant to be a momentous discovery with potent medicinal abilities to the extent of helping the user conquer death. But to be consumed, it had to be made into a thick bowl of medicine – a procedure that Simao was familiar with.

“Prepare the pot!” He ordered his subordinates. “As well as the bezoars and the chive buds, his majesty’s regal tastes need something extravagant.” All the alchemists scurried to prepare the cauldron. They knew that this bowl of medicine had to be sublime.

A vast array of condiments was poured into the heated pot, and a crackling flame engulfed the cauldron as if trying to unleash something from within. To Simao’s consternation, the flame rapidly illuminated the whole laboratory, catching the roof on fire.

“Extinguish the flame!” He ordered, but his revelation came too late. An explosion, like a dormant beast that has been awakened, engulfed the entire laboratory, reducing the structure to mere rubble.

Hearing the commotion, the Emperor and hundreds of guards and servants came, anticipating uninvited foes. The Emperor was shocked when he saw the alchemists howling in agony. “What happened?” He asked. “Where is the remedy?”

“We don’t have the remedy, Your Majesty,” he said weakly. “We’ve got Fire and Fury.”

This monstrosity, or messiah – depending on who you ask – that Simao had created will play a key role in shaping not only Chinese history, but the history of the world for the centuries to come. What Simao created was not the legendary cure of death, but something stronger, a symbol of potency. It was black powder, or in other words, Fire and Fury.

Battle:

Years after the revered Sun Simao had perished, dynasties passed, and kingdoms and cities were reduced to subjects of history as new ones manifested their existence. After the legendary Tang Dynasty fell, the fractured civilisation was reunified under another banner: the Song Dynasty. In the Southern Song Dynasty, the “art” of waging war differed from its relatively primitive predecessors ...

High Admiral Shizhong aligned his forces against the rebel bastion. This fortress in Fujian (Hokkien) was guarded by ten thousand determined rebels led by a rebel captain, who were all that stood in his way to restore peace and prosperity to the area, and possibly a promotion.

“Behind those walls are the fiends who are preventing you from returning from your family, who robbed you of peace and prosperity!” Deafening cries sounded from the ranks of the Song warriors. “Now we will bring them to justice,” more cheers erupted amidst the loading of the cannons, “and the fortress to the ground! Glory to the mighty Song empire, long live the emperor!”

With one last war cry, Shizong brandished his sword. Five queer-looking barrels, with engravings of dragons and tigers, were carried out onto the battlefield amid the jeers and insults of the rebels.

“This is what the Song army has become!” They all laughed in ecstasy. “Boy, we can win this easily. Long live the rebellion!”

Sharply, the admiral gave the order: “Fire!” In this fraction of a second, the queer-looking shapes on wheels earned their reputation of being the most deadly weapon in the Song Empire. Vicious blasts and whispers of fire enveloped the battlefield, and parts of the fort came crashing down, obscuring the Song army from the defenders. Yet more shots came, showering the bastion with “Chinese grapeshot” as towers collapsed and brave souls perished amidst the chaos. The dreaded fuse, and the multiple booms as the cannonballs collided with the walls, reduced the once mighty structure to a mere heap of pathetic rubble. This was the product of Sun Simao’s years of toiling and studying, the new epoch of war.

The roaring of the cannons stopped much too arbitrarily for it to happen in a meticulously planned battle scenario such as this. The rebels had lost a quarter of their men, without so much as lifting a finger for the Song army. Riches, power, and loot was what they came for, and they would not give up without a fight.

There was a sudden order again: “Charge! Raze the fortress to the ground!”

The imperial cavalry leapt through the smoke in their glorious armor, brandishing their dreaded spears and swords. The infantry was not far behind. They were disciplined, orderly and fearless. Amidst the rocks and arrows that rained down from both catapults and on? battle-hardy soldiers, the infantry stormed the enemy fortress. The coup de grace had begun.

The rebels frantically scrambled to present a front against the rapidly advancing enemy, and soon, the two forces clashed. The enemy, however pugnacious fighters they may be, were quickly overpowered by the well-trained, well-armed, and vastly superior imperial soldiers as they threw themselves towards the rebel ranks. The remnants of the rebels on the walls were forced to flee from the last few rounds of grapeshot. One benevolent officer tended to the wounded enemies. “Fire and Fury.....use it well,” one of them said, “or the realm under the heavens will be hell on earth.”

Present Day:

2023-12-05: Miss Wong stood in the front of the class, textbook in one hand, whiteboard marker in the other. Her expression was austere, but the children did not seem to notice. Her students were thirty-two fourth-grade children, conversing, fiddling, and bursting with energy like all young souls.

“Nineteen-forty.” She started pacing around the room in front of the whiteboard, tapping her marker against the book. The class went silent in anticipation, they knew the routine well. They adored Miss Wong’s way of telling her action-packed history stories of Zheng He sailing the Western seas, and Qin Shi Huang burning ancient books.

“At this time, the Japanese occupied Hong Kong. They used their advanced weaponry to defeat the British and some Chinese troops, who fought bravely but were ultimately overpowered.” The class was captivated until a student raised his hand. “Yes, Kin-Yau.”

Some made a sigh, some were irritated, obviously angered by the abrupt disruption of the awe-inspiring story Miss Wong was telling.

“If military technologies such as bombs and guns are so advanced, will there be even better ones in the future?” The student known as Kin-Yau asked.

“Technology will always improve.” Miss Wong answered. “When you grow up, there will be even better technologies. You have to figure out what they are. As well as how to make a better world with those tools.”

She wondered silently. Science, war, fire and fury.....what will the future hold?

Unlocked: The Telepirror

Victoria Shanghai Academy (Secondary), Chan, Hei Yuet Hania – 12

It was a miracle that it had appeared. And at such a crucial time. It was a fascinating prospect to imagine that *it*, as such a compact and seemingly trivial item, had been the saviour of an angel that had almost begun its untimely ascent to the gates of heaven.

— — —

Mrs Morrison indolently changed the channel on the television as she gave a weary sigh, taking another long chug from her bottle of wine. The grey sky speckled with clumps of clouds reflected her low spirits. Ever since the divorce, Mrs Morrison had descended into a realm of depression, trudging along her routine series of events concerning downing gallons of wine everyday and finishing her wearisome workload at the restaurant.

“Hello.” Mrs Morrison spoke slowly as she heard the familiar footsteps of a young teenage girl arise from the apartment door. She attempted to turn her head, but to no avail, with the countless drinks she had chugged giving rise to disequilibrium and distorting anything in her sight.

“Hello.” She repeated, but her daughter retreated to her room, the door slamming behind her.

Sighing, Mrs Morrison shook her head. She was aware of the blame that was placed upon herself by her daughter, for failing at persuading her husband to stay. And it was undeniable that he was the glue of the household – the moment he abandoned them, everything collapsed, and now only a sea of distance stretched between Mrs Morrison and her daughter, replacing the river of intimacy and happiness that used to flow.

A few minutes later, Mrs Morrison got up with a mournful grunt when she realised it was time to go to work. As she walked to the restaurant, Mrs Morrison passed by a new shop on the street. Its colossal glass windows allowed pedestrians a clear view into its interior, which was covered in mirrors of all shapes and sizes that were embellished with traditional Chinese patterns. It was a fantastic sight and piqued Mrs Morrison’s interest. Wobbling precariously, she entered the shop.

She had only intended to take a swift look around the shop, but once she set foot in it, she was instantly captivated and found herself staring into multiple mirrors, mesmerised. As she walked around, a mirror in the corner caught her eye.

The mirror was round in shape, with a jade handle adorned with a dragon carving. When flipped around, its bronze surface was covered in grooves, and under closer inspection one could see delicate chisellings of chinese-styled fish upon it. Opal gemstones were secured upon it, which made it shine with a certain appeal. Mrs Morrison gaped at it – she had never seen something so intricate and gorgeous!

“Miss? Are you interested in this product?” Mrs Morrison whirled around and peered at the person before her. It was an old aged man, with strands of white hair sticking out from his bald head. He was wearing a pair of thick-rimmed glasses and his voice was hoarse. Judging by the outfit he was wearing, Mrs Morrison assumed he was a salesman.

“It depends...” Mrs Morrison said. “Are there any special...functions apart from this mirror’s beauty?”

“Of course!” A smile appeared on the man’s face as he looked at Mrs Morrison intently. “This mirror can communicate the thoughts of the people whose names are spoken in its presence. It will be like looking into one’s soul, with an image on the mirror resembling their actual appearance. It is an incredibly successful product already, and has already helped hundreds of customers – who are usually parents – to understand the thoughts of their children and solve their communication issues.”

“And who is the inventor of this supposedly *incredible* product?” Mrs Morrison asked sceptically, although not without a hint of longing. A mirror that could reveal the thoughts of other people? Her mind gradually cleared as she examined the mirror carefully.

The man’s eyes twinkled as he responded. “This is in fact my invention. I am Shen Kuo’s kin, and he is one of my ancestors. Ever since I was young, Shen Kuo’s marvellous invention of the compass was my inspiration to follow the path of innovation. So, I became a scientist. I was fascinated by Justus von Liebig’s discovery of the mirror. The problem of children ignoring their parents under the influence of technology and more brought my thought of creating something that is useful to mankind. After dozens of years, I finally achieved my goal, and here it is now!”

Mrs Morrison had nothing else to consider. Her daughter – Emma – acted as if she was a stranger, so why not give this mirror a shot? After all, she had nothing to lose.

“I’ll buy it.”

— — —

A few weeks later, Mrs Morrison was lying on the sofa, staring reproachfully at a fly scuttling across the ceiling. She hardly noticed when the lock turned and Emma came into the house; she hardly noticed when a snuffle cut through the thick silence like a sharpened blade; she hardly noticed when the door ceased to slam and instead closed with an almost imperceptible squeak like a mouse weeping.

Mrs Morrison turned and her arm swept across the ground in her lying position. Her fingers brushed against the mirror she had put a few days ago under the sofa, something forgotten that had withered away in the midst of dozens of drinks. After her hopeful purchase, she had glimpsed someone that looked so much like her ex-husband that immediately killed her spirit and sent her trudging back home. Now she stared at the mirror with anticipation. There was only one way to find out if the man was telling the truth...

“Emma”, she whispered. Suddenly, the mirror on the table shone with a vengeance, glimmering uncontrollably. Shocked, Mrs Morrison looked into it.

The image in the mirror was an image of her daughter weary and depressed. Her eyes were drooped and red, with evident tear streaks across her dull freckled face, which had paled and turned a ghostly white.

“I can’t take this anymore.” Her daughter’s voice was husky and her voice broke. “Hell is better than this. The bullying...is endless. Everyday is torture. I need to leave this world!”

Mrs Morrison’s stomach fell. A chill ran down her spine as she tried to convince herself that what she heard was a mistake. Leave this world? It couldn’t be...

Mrs Morrison gave a little yelp when her daughter emerged from her room. Her chest tightened when she saw her desperate state, with messy hair and a hunched back resembling a wilted plant deprived of life and energy. The former twinkle in her eyes was replaced with a frantic, overwhelmed look that expressed her pleas. And Mrs Morrison had overlooked all these signs in her drunken state.

“Where are you going?” Her daughter paused in her reach for the doorknob and Mrs Morrison’s voice broke as she spoke.

“Somewhere...that I won’t have to see you again.” Her daughter’s voice trembled with both anger and sadness.

That moment, Mrs Morrison knew what she had to do. All the motherly love that had been hidden away somewhere deep inside her, once blocked by the dam formed by the sadness of the divorce, surged like a flood into her heart. She scrambled to her feet and grasped Emma firmly by the shoulders, looking into her eyes.

“I...know what you are going through right now, and I want you to know that you are not alone in this.” Her voice was soothing. “I’m really sorry about the divorce, and I know I haven’t been a proper mother since then. But I want you to know that I will always be here to support you from now and onwards.”

“I don’t want your help! You can’t do anything, and all you managed to do all this time was to be drunk!” Emma twisted away and attempted to open the door.

“I promise I can, and will.” The sincerity in Mrs Morrison’s voice was recognizable. “I will be here to be a helping hand, an empathetic listener, a lighthouse in the sea of life as you are travelling onwards into the distance. I have no excuse for my actions, but I can change for the future. You are the most precious thing in my life and I will always love you.”

Tears were brimming in her daughter’s eyes and Mrs Morrison could tell by the small smile that was on her face that she was convinced. At that instant, the fog in the sky cleared to reveal the brilliant sun, casting rays into the room and lighting up their faces. The love in the household was finally restored.

It stayed in a drawer, that mirror, under lock and key. And it was all for the best to stay there since its work was done, as a symbol of the essentials of communication, and a reminder that observing and listening can open an unimaginable world of love, hope and happiness.

The Golden Dragon

Victoria Shanghai Academy (Secondary), Lee, Sin Tung Katelyn – 13

Hello, I am Li Ming Shan, I'm 17 years old and was born and raised in the beautiful countryside of Tainan, Taiwan. From a young age, my life was surrounded by the power of the golden dragon. I was given this necklace as a baby, it had the Chinese golden dragon indented into the face of the shiny metal plate. My dad always shared captivating stories of his fascinating history exploring the extinction of China's bravest, most legendary creature, the Golden Dragon; my mother always mentioned his travels to the biggest cave in China, Beijing. Legend said the cave is filled with pure gold and wealth worth millions; hearing his tales always lit a special spark within my childhood. I was lighting a match to create the fire that holds many future dreams and aspirations. Now as I stand here, a year before adulthood, I will carry my dad's legacy and soar amongst the challenges and treacheries of being a young adult.

Everyone around me was constantly stressing to me about whether I could ever live up to the legacy my dad did before he passed. I sat at my desk, reviewing the list of jobs that I would take on after this last year of secondary school. I thought to myself, "None of these jobs sounds interesting enough to pursue", I sighed to myself. I got up and dragged myself to the bookshelf across the small, plain bedroom, looking for more ideas on better jobs, I spotted my dad's old book, "The Golden Dragon". The cover is embroidered with beautiful patterns imitating a china vase, "I bet my dad knew what he wanted to do when he was only 10, and I'm here trying to find something impressive to do" I mumbled. I picked up the book; the indented patterns smoothly passed as I glided my fingers across the cover. With my fingertips touching every crease and bump, I could almost imagine my father reading this book and admiring it as much as I am. Then the most brilliant idea came to me, I should continue my father's legacy, diving into the deep history and culture of golden dragons and bringing it back to life in China.

I worked day and night, researching every golden dragon sighting. I asked the wise elders around the village what they knew about the golden dragon, and read some golden dragon tales from China, all to create, the one and only, golden dragon glider. This is a set of mechanical wings which act as a golden dragon and fly around at 100mph. This set of wings is painted in gold when the start button is pressed, the wings will open and fire will come out of the tip of the wings to imitate the fire that comes out of the mouth of a golden dragon.

While I was painting the last layer of gold paint on my Golden Dragon Glider, I realized that I needed another can. I went out into the market, heading to my favourite paint store. After I paid for a litre of gold paint, I walked out of the store and saw a large, middle-aged man in a suit standing next to the store's entrance. He glared at me through his tinted sunglasses and walked over me. His whole body covered my whole vision on the right, he scoffed and said "So you're the town's youngest inventor". "Was this man talking to me?" I thought to myself.

I turned my head to look at him. I pointed to my chest and raised my eyebrow, the man rolled his eyes, "Yes you, who else?" I looked at him with concern as I said "Yes that is me, I suppose." "I'm holding a competition in partnership with the most successful inventors in China and we would like to invite one inventor from each province in China. Your name came up when my team researched." he persuaded, I stood in doubt. 'Is this a scam?' I think to myself. The man continues to say "This competition will be hosted in Beijing, if you're interested, take the earliest plane to Beijing next Tuesday. We hope to see you there with your most impressive invention." He gave me his hand and I slowly reached out mine to shake his. This may be the first step to my future, the first step to me being the most well-known Taiwanese inventor!

I rush home and scream "I'M GOING TO BEIJING FOR THE COMPETITION OF A LIFETIME!" My mom ran into the living room, startled by my sudden ray of sunshine and joy. I ran into my room and started frantically touching up any loose screws or scratching the paint of the Golden Dragon.

The next day, I took the earliest plane to Beijing. I held my luggage with my invention in it. I held the baggage in my hands as I sat in my seat. When I arrived, I took a taxi to the competition building in Beijing, I stood outside the door, fixed my jacket, straightened the creases off and brushed off all the specks of dust. I opened the door that led to the competition lobby.

I walked into the lobby full of inventors flipping through portfolios and inventions. My legs started shaking, and my hand started fidgeting on my jacket. Everyone looked so much more prepared than I was. My heart was pounding as loud as a drum. I sat down on an empty foldable white chair, gently placed my invention down, and took a deep breath, 'I can do this' I whispered to myself, I looked around the room, and then suddenly, my name was called.

"Li Ming Shan," said the assistant at the front desk. I picked up my bags and walked to the counter. I showed off my biggest smile and said "That would be me", the accountant barely tilted her head to look at me from her computer, mumbled something and then said, "Alright, it is your turn to exhibit your product, good luck". I thought to myself 'Wait until everyone sees how amazing and innovative my product is, their heads will be blown off!' I smiled at myself with confidence and pride.

Knock, knock, knock. I walked into the room, placed my suitcase on the table then said "Hello" I said, "I am Li Ming Shan from Tainan, Taiwan", a judge said, "Hello, we are your judges today". I opened my suitcase took out my glider and placed it on the small table next to me, and I started to introduce my product.

"Have you ever dreamed of flying?" I looked around the room for a response, "Well let me introduce the first-ever set of real golden dragon wings." I pressed the on button, and the wings expanded to a majestic spread. Each of the judge's eyes widened. "With a press of a button, these wings glide open to the grand size it expands to 2 meters wide; furthermore, when you put on these wings, you can adjust where you want to go using the lever, you pull the lever up to go up, you can move these around to fly to different directions, push the lever down to descend." I added "This machine works with the power of air pressure pushing against the ground, the wind so powerful that it moves at 100mph maximum." one of the judges stood up and walked to my invention, she glared and said, "This is very...dangerous, how do you expect to sell something so childish and insane, this is a violation to safety, you're dismissed." I threw my things in the suitcase and ran out of the office building.

Was my dream all just stupidity and nonsense? I walked into an old bookstore around the corner. Ding! The sound of the bell rang in my ears. I found a cosy place to sit and out of my invention, it was still a little warm from using it in the interview. "What is that?" said an old man from across the room, I looked up and answered "It's nothing, it was a set of dragon wings brought to an inventor competition." he looked at the invention with a light-hearted smile, "may I watch you fly it?". I walked out of the shop and put on the wings, I pulled the lever and started to lift in the air, I took a deep breath and soared, for the first time in forever, everything felt okay.

I descended to the ground, "wow that was incredible" muttered the old man, "you have a talent, keep going, this invention of yours is amazing, don't let anyone push you down."

The old man changed me, I didn't let anyone push me down anymore. Over the next few months, I advertised my product to companies, trying to take sponsorship, then I found a perfect one, my dream company, "The Golden Dragon" was ready for action.

Immortality

Victoria Shanghai Academy (Secondary), Leung, 梁顯晴 Hin Ching – 12

“Sun Simiao is a legendary apothecary. Legends say that he has the remarkable ability to cure any illness or disease and make immortal medicine. His vast knowledge of potions and remedies has made him highly revered among those seeking healing and well-being. Countless seekers have embarked on the quest to find this old man, longing for a life that knows no bounds of time or death.”

Beads of sweat rolled down my face. I'd been walking along this endless path for almost two whole weeks. I trudged along. My shoes were worn down by sharp rocks and my feet bore the marks of countless blisters and calluses, gathered from the many miles I had travelled. Even the air felt heavy with the weight of my determination. Yet, I kept going. The story of the elixir ricocheted in my mind.

I had to find the apothecary. The healer said I was running out of time.

I started my journey days ago. Guided by the map that my mother gifted me. My mother told me to find the legendary apothecary who lived in a thatched house by the river in the east of the city. I stopped to rest to catch my breath and washed my face next to a river. In front of me, I saw an old man with a long white beard. He wore a black silk robe, carrying an oil-paper umbrella and blue cotton baggage. He dug a stove and set it up in his thatched hut. For a second, I thought he was going to cook. My curiosity piqued as I watched intently as the old man reached into his pockets and withdrew small quantities of yellow sulphur and grey saltpetre. To my surprise, instead of making rice or vegetables, he dropped the sulphur and saltpetre into the furnace he had prepared. Then, he sealed the furnace door and proceeded to light the stove.

He must be the legendary apothecary I was looking for! With a polite tone, I approached him and asked, “Excuse me, is your name Sun Simiao?”

The old man eyed me suspiciously, “Yes, why?”

My head spun with a mixture of joy and disbelief. Could my illness finally be cured? Or might this merely be an illusion or a cruel trick of fate? Standing in front of me was this mysterious old man, who claimed to be the legendary apothecary who may cure my illness. A flicker of doubt crept into my heart.

“Prove it,” I said with my chin up high, “Prove it by making the immortal medicine for me.” I told him that last week, the village healer had said that my illness had lingered too long and that it could not be cured. He even said that I had four years left at maximum.

The old man finished listening and looked me up and down before saying, “I will help you. However, since your illness is so unheard of, I'm not entirely sure I can help you, but I promise I will try my best.”

Sun Simiao beckoned me to follow him. He led me into a thatched building, hiking up a short but steep path without a twinge of hesitation. Deep wrinkles creased into his tanned skin, a natural display of his advanced age. Yet, he glided smoothly up the rocky trail, completely at ease. I wondered if he aged at all, perhaps his youthfulness was a result of his medicine. He continued his ascent and like a young duckling, I followed carefully behind.

Once we reached the building, he gathered a few potions and we walked back outside where he had set up a small wooden table. Next to the wooden table was a huge black pot and as Sun Simiao was about to put the potions on the table, he looked back at me with a small smile and said, “These are all the potions we need to make this medicine, we might actually—”

His hands suddenly slipped and all the potions went flying in the air. We watched in horror as the potions fell and the bottles smashed inside the gigantic pot.

“Oh no, this is not good. Run, RUN!” He yelled.

We ran as fast as our legs could carry us back to the house. I didn't dare look behind, but as I ran, I could hear crackling and sizzling from the pot. The noise got louder and louder as we reached the building and slammed the door shut.

I leaned on the wall breathlessly. When I finally managed to look up, I saw Sun Simiao glancing out of the window. I joined him and glanced outside too. We saw the pot sparking with colour. To my surprise, vibrant bursts of colourful lights shot out to paint the sky, accompanied by crackling sounds and the soft thumps of reverberation. Each brilliant explosion released a cascade of shimmering sparks, dancing and twirling like celestial performers. The air was infused with an intoxicating aroma of sulphur and smoke.

I looked over at Sun Simiao, my eyes wide with astonishment. "Did you expect this?" I asked, barely able to contain my excitement.

Sun Simiao chuckled softly and replied, "Well, I must admit, this wasn't exactly what I had in mind. But sometimes unexpected things happen, and we must embrace them." He turned to me and added, "The materials we used were actually meant for a different kind of medicine, but it seems they have combined into a rather explosive manner."

Curiosity burning within me, I couldn't help but ask, "What were the potions you dropped, exactly?"

Sun Simiao smiled knowingly and began to explain. "Yellow sulphur, barium, strontium, copper, sodium and grey saltpetre. I'm surprised myself."

As we watched the fireworks light up the night sky, I felt a sense of wonder and awe. Suddenly, I remember what I was really here for.

"But what about my immortal medicine? My sickness doesn't have a cure, I require immortality!"

Sun Simiao said, "Nothing is permanent. Consider these fireworks. They appear in the night sky; their brilliance captivates us for mere moments before fading away into darkness. But time changes everything. Just as fireworks have their ephemeral existence, fleeting beauty and splendour, so too does everything in life. Fireworks begin as small sparks, igniting the sky with bursts of colour and light. They dance and twirl, painting a mesmerising picture for those who witness them. Yet, their existence is transient, as they eventually dissipate and disappear. What remains permanent," he continued, "are the memories and emotions they evoke. Fireworks ignite joy, awe, and celebration in the hearts of those who experience them. It is the interpretation, the appreciation of their beauty and significance, that transcends their physical form."

I felt enlightened by Sun Simiao's profound words. I realised that even in the fleeting existence of fireworks, there was tremendous value. Like a small and insignificant observer, we are part of mankind's history, leaving behind a trace of our presence. This realisation urges us to spend our time wisely, and cherish the moments we have with our loved ones and find joy in the impermanence of life. The beauty and transience of each fleeting firework reminded me of the fragility of life itself. Yes, the immortal medicine may have eluded me, but in that moment, surrounded by the breathtaking spectacle of lights and sounds, I realised that true immortality lies not in the extension of our physical existence, but in the memories we create, the love we share, and the impact we have on the world. With newfound clarity, I made a silent vow to make the most of the time I had left, embracing every experience, cherishing every relationship, and living a life that would leave a lasting legacy. My eyes sparkled with peace and contentment.

I walked back home with a taste of immortality.

The Era of Paper

Victoria Shanghai Academy (Secondary), Li, Lok Hei Andrea – 11

“Where are we?!” asked Travis Wixx. Suddenly, 2 boys appeared in a bustling hutong filled with people in traditional Chinese Hanfu. “Albert! Is this a dream?” asked Travis once again. He pinched himself, and felt the irritation. “Wait, I can feel my pinch. And how will we get back?”

They looked at each other in disbelief, trying to comprehend what happened. “I think we time traveled into Ancient China...” Albert realized. Luckily, he had been studying for his social science test, whereas Travis had been playing video games until 2am every night. Immediately, Travis’ eyes widened in shock.

“Wait. How did we get here? And how can we get back?” asked Travis. Albert shrugged his shoulders and said “I don’t know. I wonder if this has anything to do with the ghosts of Ching Ming Festival?” he shuddered.

“Who are these people?” asked Albert, looking around. Travis flung around and saw Chinese people edging around on the streets. The aroma of xiao long baos and pan-fried buns flew through the air, and the sound of distant axes echoed in the background.

“Hello, boys, I see you have time-traveled here. however, if you want to get back, you must find a nearly invented artifact and help make it.” A spirit whispered in the twins’ ears, frightening them half to death.

They gazed around, and noticed that their bedroom had transformed into an ancient hutong, with lush colors that seemed to belong to an isolated community. Confusion filled their minds as they attempted to make sense of this mysterious new realm. They saw a kind lady near them, and walked over to inquire about the neighborhood.

“Hi, do you know where we are? We’re lost...” queried Travis in his best Cantonese. “Huh? Oh, I’m Lee Jianian, a resident of this neighborhood. We’re in Leiyang, in the Han Dynasty.” answered Ms. Lee, nicely in her best Cantonese.

“Thank you so much!” thanked Albert, answering for Travis. But where was Leiyang, China? Albert had been remarkably homesick, wishing to get home every second they stayed.

Undeniably, it was a time and place far from their familiar modern world. As the reality immersed into place, Travis and Albert knew they had to figure out how they ended up in ancient China and how to get back to their own time.

“Out of what I remember from my Chinese history book, the Han Dynasty ranges from 206 BC to –220 AD. I think paper was invented in this time period!”

The twins walked past the wooden sliding doors, and their curiosity piqued as they continued exploring. “What’s that smell? It could be what the ghost was asking for...” asked Albert. Paper was first made out of bamboo, and that was what the air smelled like.

The smell of bamboo increased as they walked around, so they walked towards the stench. There, they found a small siheyuan. “What now? The door is locked.” sighed Albert, glancing around.

“Let’s just knock. I guess we don’t have much choice, do we?” decided Travis, so he started knocking on the door. Inside, Cai Lun was stirring and mixing smashed bamboo pulp together, trying to invent a new artifact. “Mr. Cai, someone’s knocking outside.” said his apprentice, Zuo Bo.

“Let me serve them myself. Please open the door.” He strolled through his garden towards the exquisite wooden doors of his siheyuan. When he saw his guests, he realized they weren’t what he expected them to look like.

He expected them to be a group of men in traditional Chinese male Hanfu, but Travis and Albert were in khakis and t-shirts. “Hi sir, we’re Travis and Albert Wixx. We smelled the bamboo sticks from your siheyuan, so we wanted to explore. May watch you do your work and possibly help out?” questioned Travis.

Cai Lun was still staring at them and not saying anything. “Um, Mr. Cai? Maybe you should address them...” suggested Mr. Zuo. At that sound, he snapped back to reality. “Oh, I’m sorry for my undignified behavior.”

He realized how badly he had behaved, and promptly replied to his guests' question. "Sure, you may come inside and join me."

"Thank you so much! You don't know how much this means to us." appreciated Travis. They stumbled past his garden into his broad terrace. Everything there was organized, the opposite from Travis' messy bedroom.

As they approached, the aroma of bamboo pulp started getting stronger. "Well, there you go. You can sit over there on that long bench and watch me work, but for a small price." decided Cai Lun, settling down back to his project.

"What price?" asked Albert, worried. What if they didn't have what Mr. Cai wanted? Will he trap them? "Well... do you have any bamboo related things that could inspire me?" inquired Cai Lun. He wondered whether they had what he needed.

"Will this do?" questioned Travis, holding out a sheet of A4 paper. "I heard the first pieces were made with bamboo..." He wasn't sure if it was good enough, and Mr. Cai seemed like an expert on this area...

"Hmmm... This may actually be helpful for me, thanks for your kind contribution." replied Cai Lun, sparking an interest in the sheet. "Please sit, my guests."

As the twins watched him work, it gave them an interest in being an inventor when they grow up. "Wow, this is so cool!" Albert exclaimed.

As they watched Cai Lun stir the mixture of bamboo pulp and many more ingredients, they wanted to join in the fun. "Um... Mr. Cai? Is there anything we can do to help out? Watching you work got us interested."

"What? Oh, sure. 2 extra pairs of hands would be superior. Thank you for your help." replied Cai Lun. His hands were indeed getting tired from chopping the wood earlier. "You can start by helping me stir the mixture."

They strode towards the stone pot and grasped the wooden spoon. The mixture was very sticky, so they had to use all of their energy to push the spoon within the pot.

Meanwhile, Cai Lun was staring at the blank sheet of A4 paper the twins handed to him. He silently considered the ways to recreate it with the mixture he had made to himself. How can he make it so thin?

It was a hard job, but he was a good inventor too. In the meantime, Albert and Travis were continuously stirring the bamboo mixture, each time harder and stickier than the last.

Then, Cai Lun found a nice wide paintbrush and started spreading it across a gigantic piece of bamboo. Then, Travis found another sizable piece of bamboo and pulled it over the bamboo mixture, so that it can squish and flatten the mixture to make it thinner. Lastly, Albert heaved the stack of bamboo and mixture onto the bench.

When the paper was finally dried up, Cai Lun made a huge decision. "You should take the paper home, as you have helped out so much."

"Really?! Thank you so much! I know that you spent so much time working on it. Really, thank you Mr. Cai!" answered Albert this time. The time they had spent together had made them close friends.

"I'm sorry, but we have to go now, it's getting late." replied Travis.

"Oh, oh, I didn't mean to keep you here for so long! You may leave." responded Cai Lun. "No worries, bye Mr. Cai!" echoed Albert. He shoved the fresh piece of paper into his tiny backpack and the twins walked back to the hutong.

"Zai jian!" said Cai Lun, and started making the 2nd piece of paper ever.

"Well well well. Now that you have found your artifact, you may time travel back home. Go to the hutong you were in earlier, and you will find yourselves in your bedroom." The same voice that called them earlier spoke again, but this time they were not afraid.

“That was so cool!” thought Albert. “Yes, and I can use this for my social science test!” decided Travis. “Then I won’t have to find something new, and I have hands-on experience too!” Now he knew what to do, and didn’t play a single video game until the test was completed.

Mutually Assured Destruction, Or, How I Learned To Stop Listening And Praise The Bomb

Victoria Shanghai Academy (Secondary), Sze, Ching Wai Liam – 13

The massive bulkhead swung open. This was the door to the nuclear armament of China – and if we told you any more, we'd have to kill you. Two people stepped inside, suits ironed crisply, surrounded by an aura of respect. One of them was the Minister of Defense for the country, and the other was the President of China.

“So,” the President started. “How’s the progress going on the project?”

“It is going swimmingly.” the Minister intoned, keeping his voice carefully neutral. Years of being on the job, going from listening to giving instructions had taught him to keep his tone neutral in front of his superiors.

“Excellent.” the President said, smiling coolly. Years upon decades had led to this moment, the pinnacle of Chinese progress. How far they had come as a country, he mused. From the primitive firework to nuclear weapons of mass destruction, polished and primed for anywhere in the world.

But no, this wasn't just a physical manifestation of Chinese will. This was, politically speaking, one of the biggest weapons in their arsenal. Now, they—

The President was cut from his reverie from a slight cough from the Minister. “Well, sir, I, uh, am personally not sure about this.” The President whirled around, surprised.

“With all due respect, sir, is this—ah—the right thing to do? I mean, purely theoretically speaking, sir, this could have massive ramifications if we do decide to use them, well, we could—” he stammered.

The President scoffed, glancing over at one of the bombs. It was a truly beautiful thing, a weapon of mass destruction. “Well, Minister, if we didn't have any of these, we would be crushed underfoot. Or, heavens forbid, we would be bombed ourselves! Four millennia of history and progress, destroyed and done in an instant!”

The Minister sighed, a ragged breath exhaling from his mouth. “But sir, nobody—and I mean nobody—deserves to feel this much suffering, or have this much power over them. With this much power at somebody's fingertips, nobody wins or loses! There's either *suffering*, or you're shunned for the rest of—”

“Don't be so damn stupid, Minister.” The President said, the acid in his voice enough to shut the other man up.

“For years, and I mean years, the same superpowers have been splashing around in the mud for so long. Nuclear weapons this, war crimes that, and everyone who doesn't have anything to protect themselves?”

The President rounded on the other man.

“They get *crushed*. Nuclear bomb, or the proverbial toaster in the worldwide bathtub. Subjugated, obliterated, and ridiculed in the world's eye.”

The Minister stood there, unmoving. Eventually, both of them finally reached the end of the hallway; they stepped into an elevator, descending into the depths of the facility. Metal creaked and groaned around them as the elevator went down, down, down into the recesses of the vault.

In the elevator, the Minister thought to himself. Sure, there were risks of being pushed around, but that was always on the table, sanctions being one of them. If anything, they should've tried looking for more...humane weapons. They, as a country, should have been looking not for weapons of power and poison, but solutions of hope and healing. Although, he was the Minister of Defence for a reason.

The doors to the elevator creaked open slowly, and the Minister looked out on the nuclear garden.

If the couple of bombs above was something to sneer at, that had been nothing compared to the underground hallway. Rows upon rows upon innumerable rows of nuclear oblivion stood there, and the man felt, somehow, the judgement of every single one.

He stood there, almost incomprehendingly. The weight of what he had seen ten-something minutes ago had only just dissipated. Now, as he looked over the sea of nuclear warheads, a new wave of horror began sweeping towards him, like a tsunami descending onto a small, serene beach. He felt lightheaded; dizzy, almost, as it began to dawn on him.

Every single nuclear weapon was another Hiroshima or Nagasaki, a nightmarish wasteland. He remembered; as a child, he had heard whispers and reports of how absolutely damnable that was. How many thousands of people died and as more suffered and withered away under the crushing claw of radiation, their cancerous growths consuming them, assimilating them with almost casual efficiency, their bodies atrophying and decaying away in days, all in excruciating pain.

And after that, the ceaseless scrutiny. The denouncements from historians and the public, the branding as an atrocity, the loads of stories telling of endless weeping and gnashing of teeth by the victims and ruined survivors alike, an endless torture by the media and public *zeitgeist*.

All of these things came back to him now, warning, discouraging him from doing the thing that nobody wanted, that everybody hated, of the horrible ramifications of that one single nuclear bomb. But with this? Why, they could get a thousand.

And yet still, still, the sight of the thousands of warheads hit him like a truck, their collective judgements cast down at him like unfeeling giants, the grim legacy of the first man in a cave with a particularly sharp rock.

For the first time in years, no, *decades*, he felt like an ant.

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The technician flew down the stairs, hurrying over to the control panel, illuminating their face with a thousand tiny blinking lights. He pawed at the code keyboard, frantically tapping at the buttons in the same order that a tired old man told him during a meeting years ago.

The silence, save for the sterile beeping of the individual buttons, was deafening. A single drop of sweat trickled down his brow, down the bridge of his nose, curving over the contours of his lips, and fell to the ground with an unceremonious, dull *splat*. He didn't even notice as another drop of sweat began making its way down his face. With more than a little trepidation, he flicked open the glass cover, revealing a large, red button.

His index finger hovered over the big red button, and it sure as hell trembled.

Grandma's Game

Victoria Shanghai Academy (Secondary), Sze, Yuen Hei Kristen – 13

My eyes scour the area as I stroll to the last compartment of the High-Speed Rail, Fuxing. *This* is where my last clue is. My month-long search led me here, and since I haven't had any luck in my search in any of the previous compartments, I'm almost certain the clue is in the very last compartment. I must work quickly and quietly before my cousins catch up.

As I open the compartment door, I feel someone's eyes on me. *Damn it.* My cousins must have caught up to the last clue too. Whoever gets there first is going to get my grandma's life-changing invention. And that person is going to be me.

Nothing looks out of the ordinary, so I run my hands through the overhead compartments, working fast, until I notice a small book. I pull it off the shelf and wipe the dust from the cover. There aren't any identifiable markings on it, no titles or author names, but nobody is here to claim it, so it must be part of the clue hunt. I'm about to stuff it in my bag when a cloaked figure snatches it right out of my hand, and just like that, I've lost my lead.

I slip in through the back door, assuming my position on the last chair to the right, hoping no one noticed my absence, but from the glares I get it's evident that my family does notice. There's a big TV screen hanging on the wall, and in front of it are rows upon rows of identical chairs, all situated the same distance away from each other. Everything is perfectly put together. The lawyer at the front of the room, dressed in a crisply pressed black suit, casts one last glance around the room and begins speaking.

"Welcome, everyone, to the will reading of the late matriarch. As many of you know, she was a technological genius, one of the richest women in the world." He makes a cue sign with his hands and the TV flashes on, playing a recently filmed video of my deceased Grandma.

"Hello everyone. Before I begin, I would like to thank you all for coming. No doubt many in this room do not care about me at all and are only here for personal gain. Well, no problem with offering everyone a fair chance." She looks smug, and there's a vexatious glint in her eye that worries me. "For those of you willing to play my game, please stay. If not, there's no shame in leaving now. There's a check under every one of your chairs, and if you are unwilling to play, please take the check and exit the room. You have ten seconds."

Immediately, most of the room stands up and collects the check from under their chairs. A swarm of people exits the room, leaving only five people, including me, willing to play Grandma's game. I'm surprised at the number of people who left without a second thought; being one of the most successful people in the world, whatever she has to offer must be good.

"Let's cut to the chase, shall we? At the end of the game, one person will receive a life-changing invention that is the pride of my life's work, and the rest of my assets. Check the secured family channel on your WeChat. Your first clue is there." And with that, the screen turns black.

The cloaked figure rushes off the train and I follow suit, never more than three steps behind them. Whether this cousin is working alone like I am, or with any of the others, I am unsure of, but I'm determined to get the book back nonetheless.

I put on another burst of speed and tackle the figure to the ground. His hood falls off, revealing his startled expression, forehead glistening with sweat, pleading eyes watching me intently. He attempts to wriggle out of my grip but I push him into the ground with one knee while wrestling the book out of his arms.

He resists, yelling, "No! I will be the successor of this family! The invention will be mine!" His eyes are wild with fury. "My family's company is at the technological forefront. We've developed the most advanced Artificial

Intelligence available on the market. How could you ever compare? If anyone should get the invention, it's *me*. Whatever it is, this invention is exactly what I need to get the attention of not just China, but the entire world!"

I can't help but roll my eyes. "I didn't know you existed before the will reading. Do you even know my grandma's name? I was the only one who was close with her— her invention is *mine*."

Before he can say anything else, I strike him on the head and he falls, unconscious.

I flip through the pages of the book, desperately searching for the last clue. A little slip of paper falls out and lands on my shoe. Bringing it up for closer inspection, it has "0812" written on it. That's all. There's nothing on the back of the paper or in the rest of the book, even as I frantically flip through it, trying to find what I've most certainly missed because this isn't the invention I was promised, this can't possibly be the end— where do I go now?

I'm about to rip the slip of paper up in frustration, but my eyes land on the blue and white porcelain bowl Grandma gifted me on my eighth birthday.

Grandma stands over the stove, observing the frothing pot. She picks up the porcelain bowl with extreme care and transfers over the contents of the pot.

She sets it down gently in front of me. "Happy birthday, dear. These are longevity noodles I handmade for you. They say that the longer they are, the longer you'll live, so I hope you live long and prosper. You might even follow in my footsteps and join my line of work one day!" The noodles were made with a special sauce, but other than that, there weren't any extra toppings or other ingredients.

"Grandma, are you sure these taste good? They look so... plain." I looked up at her, a quizzical expression on my face.

She chuckles. "Of course, dear. Why, I've perfected the recipe! Simple is best, after all."

I remember those being the most delicious noodles I've ever had in my life.

Of course. 0812. 08/12. Eighth of December.

My birthday.

At once, everything makes sense. Grandma wanted *me* to be the one to get to the end of her game, and so she made sure I was the only one who could possibly make sense of her last clue.

I carefully open the door to Grandma's holiday home, a place where I've spent so much of my life. It's my safe space, where nobody can intrude. It's just me and Grandma. In her room is a safe with a four-digit number passcode. I was always curious about what she put in there, but she never revealed her secrets to me, and I never pried. I enter 0812 and the safe door pops open with a little beep.

All that's in there is an old, yellowing piece of paper with a numbered list and scribbles and annotations, all in my grandma's handwriting. At the very top, it says "Longevity Noodles".

Taking care not to damage the paper, I read over the recipe for the longevity noodles that Grandma made me on my past birthdays.

Behind me, Grandma's lawyer from the will reading steps out. "So you've finally reached the end. Congratulations. Your grandma was quite adamant that you would be the one."

I turn to face his direction and smile, "She was right."

“Take your time, but if you’re done here, I’ll need you to sign these papers in order to get the rest of the matriarch’s inheritance. She was quite the woman; there is a *lot*. You’ll even inherit her tech company.” The rest of the week is spent in a whirlwind sorting out those papers with Grandma’s lawyer. I’m grateful, of course, but it doesn’t matter as much as the invention. The taste of Grandma’s noodles makes me feel closer to her than anything else I’ve inherited.

It wasn’t what I was expecting, but noodles are one of the greatest inventions ever made, and Grandma’s recipe changes *my* life, if no one else’s.

Perhaps it is true that simple is best.

The Second Space Race – China’s Lunar Expedition

Victoria Shanghai Academy (Secondary), Tsao, Yui Hei Joshua – 11

Boom boom boom. Meteorites pummeled the surface of the moon in the crater Tycho. The China National Space Administration (“CNSA”) telescope Xuntian had been tracking the path of the meteorites for months, and the moon rover Yutu-2 had been despatched to the area for a long time to observe the event. After the meteorites stopped, Yutu-2 began to weave around the crater, scanning and collecting data to beam back to Earth. The VNIS (Visible and Near-Infrared Imaging Spectrometer) beeped rapidly as the rover shot around the area that have been newly scarred by the meteorites. Yutu-2 feverishly scanned the area and began to beam the information it collected back to Earth.

Back on Earth, the scientists at the CNSA indifferently skimmed the data beamed back by Yutu-2 as they had received many reports similar to this with no new developments. Suddenly, a voice rang out in the room. “Look at this graph! 6% of the materials scanned by the VNIS on Yutu-2 are unknown!” Slowly, voices began to murmur. A few shouts of “Oh my goodness!” were heard.

“We need to know more.” a voice proclaimed confidently.

All the space programs around the globe had seen the meteor strike and analysed the data sent by their satellites and rovers. They, too, would have seen this new unknown material. This could be the beginning of the next space race—who would be the first to extract and uncover the new unknown element?

When Director Cai of the CNSA heard of the possible new element on the moon, he instantly ordered a new manned mission to be launched as soon as possible. He immediately thought of their space-veteran, Wong who has led seven space missions in the past and his co-pilot—Ho, but they still needed a geologist for this mission. He promptly thought of Professor Yang, the leading geologist from Peking University.

To persuade Professor Yang, Director Cai decided to personally pay Yang a visit at his home. When he arrived, he took a deep breath, not knowing how Professor Yang may react, and proceeded to ring his doorbell.

“Who is it?” A male voice called.

“It’s Director Cai of the CNSA.” he called back.

What could the director of the space program possibly be doing here? Yang thought as he opened the door and ushered the director into the house.

“Yang, you are the leading geologist in Peking University. We have received new data from the moon that there are materials that are currently unknown to us. We need a geologist to join the Shenzhou 24 manned mission to the moon, and we would like you to join the mission.” the director said as he sat down.

Professor Yang was completely stunned by what he heard and the invitation. He was not really sure and completely confused as to what it all meant.

“But... I am an *Earth* geologist..., I don’t know anything about the Moon! I don’t even like taking planes, I prefer high-speed trains... I can’t go to space, I don’t want to go to space, and I will *not* go to space! I want to stay here and study my rocks!” Yang screamed.

“Yang, this is an opportunity of a lifetime. It’s a chance to unearth and discover unknown elements. Countries around the world are all chasing after it to see who can get to it first and unveil the secrets behind it. Your country needs you!” the director explained.

Who could turn down an offer like that? Yang thought to himself, and with much hesitation and fear, Professor Yang answered reluctantly he would join.

“Good. You are going to get a 2-week crash-course about space starting from tomorrow. We will have a car to pick you up to bring you to CNSA headquarters tomorrow morning at 8am.”

The next two weeks of training flew past, and there was no way Professor Yang could remember anything except for the endless possibilities of how this mission can go wrong and the regret that he agreed to the mission in the first place.

Two weeks later, it was launch day. Wong, Ho, and Yang walked on the launchpad together. Yang’s hands wobbled, and his face was pale like a sheet.

“What’s wrong, Yang? You look like you’ve seen a ghost.” Wong said.

“I’m just worried, I only took a 2 week crash course in spaceflight. I’m completely unprepared.” Yang replied.

“It’s alright, just relax and enjoy the ride, you’re a national hero!” Wong said. Wong knew how Yang felt—he had felt exactly the same on his first mission.

“And it’s actually not scary! This is my third mission. If you do what we do, you’ll be okay.” Ho added.

The launch elevator jolted upwards and carried them towards the ship’s cabin. The Shenzhou 24 looked like an arrow preparing for flight. It was white, with three triangular wings at the back. There were 3 main thrusters and two side booster rockets. It was docked to a tank and rockets that would propel Shenzhou 24 to space. They stepped inside the launch vehicle and sat in their soft blue seats in the cockpit, the backs of their heads pointing down to the ground as the Shenzhou 24 would be launching vertically.

With a rumble and a dull roar, the Shenzhou 24 lifted off the ground! Wong and Ho were the epitome of calm, but Yang was shaking in his seat and his heart felt like a herd of elephants stomping on the ground.

“Why Shenzhou 24? 24 is an unlucky number in Chinese culture. Don’t they remember what happened to Apollo 13?” Yang asked.

“Now don’t be so superstitious, you’re in good hands. I’m sure nothing will go wrong on the mission.” Wong assured Yang.

They sat patiently and peered out the window as the boosters detached from the ship. Their hearts were all pounding as there were a million things that could go wrong. Wong pulsed with nervous energy because this would be his last mission, and he wanted everything to go smoothly. Like clockwork, the detachment was successful, and the ship altered its course to orbit around Earth. Wong pulled a lever and the booster rockets fired, and the ship rotated. Wong pulled another gray lever and the thrusters fired, propelling them towards the Moon, a trip which is expected to take three days.

The next couple of days of travel were smooth, and the astronauts and Professor Yang had the opportunity to enjoy the beautiful view of earth from space and the weightlessness.

“We are going to land on the moon in 5 minutes. Strap in now please!” Wong said on the intercom.

Ho and Yang slipped into their seats as Wong fired the thrusters and the ship shot towards the lunar surface. Wong cut the thrusters, finding comfort and familiarity in holding the controls like he did many times before. He rotated the horizontal booster rockets until they were vertical and fired them to ease the landing impact.

“Welcome to the moon.” Wong said grandly.

The team donned their spacesuits and collected the electric drill, tongs, and sampling equipment. When they were all kitted up with the gear, they stepped into the dull gray airlock. With a pneumatic hiss, they stepped out onto the barren landscape of the Moon. Each footstep felt strange to Yang—he wasn’t used to bouncing in the air when walking. Wong and Ho moved ahead first and began to explore the meteorite-scarred crater, Professor Yang clumsily moved towards Wong and Ho, who had already begun to set up the drill. Wong handed a set of tongs to Yang and said, “This is your area of expertise, Yang. Tell Ho what to do while I check on the spaceship and prepare for our journey back.”

As Professor Yang and Ho drilled on the foreign surface, “I’ve never seen anything like this on Earth before! We must bring these materials back to my lab on Earth for a detailed examination!” Professor Yang exclaimed in excitement.

Professor Yang proceeded to excitedly explore and roam around the crater and could hardly contain his excitement like a child in a candy store. Ho could hardly keep up. In no time, Professor Yang had filled up his boxes with samples that he had to take back to Earth to examine. I cannot wait for my journey home, so I can go back to my lab and learn more about this new material, Professor Yang thought.

On the journey back home, Professor Yang could not contain his excitement. Could this be a new element that has superconductive properties that would lead to breakthroughs in computer chips? Or could it be a new lightweight yet strong material that would lead to new breakthroughs in airplanes and space travel? Professor Yang was lost in the endless possibilities of how this discovery could lead to new technological advancements and new scientific breakthroughs for China and all humankind. He was still lost in his thoughts until the moment Shenzhou 24 landed on Earth.

A Voyage Through Time

Victoria Shanghai Academy (Secondary), Wong, 王梓衡 Hang – 14

I'm in Xi'an, China. It's 2023.

A hundred years ago, people were dying on these streets. Now I'm just strolling around, sitting in this Chinese car called the Dolphin, gazing at this new gigantic mall that just opened.

It's a great time to be alive.

This city of a mall is filled to the brim with everything I don't need but desperately want, and the perfume they're putting into their air conditioning isn't helping my desire to save money. Meanwhile, the overhead speakers are blasting the latest Chinese pop songs at full volume. A transparent piano sits next to the smart bathrooms.

I find this Huawei store the size of a small country. On the tables, all cleaned to a crisp, are phones with screens that are curved (how does that even work?), phones with leather backs and phones that you can fully charge in the time it takes for me to run to school when I'm late. In the store opposite, I explore this Xiaomi smartwatch that can literally tell me how well I'm sleeping. Creepy stuff for just 200 of my yuan.

I left the store with that on my wrist.

I get on my Ninebot electric scooter and start scrolling through Douyin on my OnePlus. It's called some other name where I'm from, but I've lived in China so long I nearly forgot how much more primitive America is.

Once I start moving, the OnePlus immediately tells me I should keep my eyes on the road. The scooter lane is seemingly empty, so I ignore the notification. I tap into WeChat, and see my friend send a funny meme.

What I don't see is the giant hole in front of me.

I reckon it's been an hour since I was last alive.

The air is full of strange smells, but I could basically distinguish the smell of pork buns. There are weird sounds around the air. It took me a minute to realise it's the pipa, a traditional Chinese instrument.

I miss pop.

The surface I'm lying on is a little soft. I'm pretty sure it's made of mud. Then I realise I've eaten some.

Once I stand up, I'm nearly knocked down by a gigantic wheelbarrow. Or maybe I'm just too short. There are boxes upon boxes of compasses in it. I guess they didn't have trucks back then.

The pipa's vibrant noises reverberate around me, and I see another wooden instrument next to it. It's not a transparent piano.

Oh, and the reassuring feeling of the phone in my pocket doesn't exist as well.

I don't have pockets.

The long, flowing silk robes on me are coated in red and gold, and it's got flower patterns all around it, just like some painting I saw in a museum a while ago. Its silky feel brings me to a time long ago, long before clothes were made using machines in overcrowded factories—

It's finally occurred to me that I'm not where I last remembered I was.

“Move!” I heard a soldier's voice holler over my head. There's an enormous convoy on this mud road, and in the centre of it was an ugly man, face red and features slightly distorted, being carried on this enormous golden chariot, with two brown clad soldiers on each side of it.

I was immediately told this man was the Emperor.

The abrupt sound of gunpowder shook me from this trance. The distinct sulfury smell of the black powder reaches me.

I run.

Upon seeing a small structure with “toilet” written on the door, I immediately sprint into it. I wonder if this place is gonna blow up soon.

I glance at this rather primitive paper, neatly stacked into a small, blue porcelain bowl. I suppose it’s toilet paper. I can’t be in an era that long ago, can’t I?

I sit. I don’t realise the opening is a bit too...

Large.

I don’t like time travelling. It makes you feel unconscious for some time when you arrive. I feel like it’s been an hour since I felt dead.

The first thing I notice is that I’m in more comfy clothes. And I have stupid glasses on my face.

I’m pretty sure that I’m on probably the most comfortable sofa I’ve ever sat on. So much so, I don’t really want to leave it at all.

I hear a woman’s voice in front of me. My glasses’ screens collapse into this virtual starry night sky, with the stars all rearranging into a hologram.

My head feels like it’s running circles around a tree nonstop. No, it feels like it’s on fire.

The glasses quickly ended up on my lap.

My actual eyes dart around. A small apartment encases me.

In front of me is a worn down TV, blasting advertisements for the latest smart glasses and “healthy” soda drinks. Short form content is being shoved into my face, with stupid dances and boring life hacks in the middle of all the advertisements. I peer around the room. There’s not a single book in sight, and the shelves are filled with bags upon bags of chips and soda, and there’s a half opened can of grape soda next to me right now.

The nearly indiscernible sound of soundproofed laughter comes from the next room.

I peer in. It’s a family, each member sitting in a corner, with huge smart glasses on their faces, massive earphones on their ears, sodas in their hands and enormous smiles on their faces like they’re having the time of their lives.

If this is the future we’re heading towards, I hate it.

I’m suddenly very conscious of the hole in the ground. I leap through it.

It’s actually been following me all day.

Stuck In Time

Victoria Shanghai Academy (Secondary), Yim, Hei Tung Alexis – 14

Time travelling has always been confined to fiction. To movies with DeLorean cars and shows with nameless doctors...Before our company, ChronoWanderers invented TTTD (The Time Travel Device). By controlling gravitational forces around black holes, the device creates wormhole tunnels that connect 2 regions of space-time for us to travel through.

"This is TTTD." Supervisor Tom introduced to our boss, Riley. "Incredible!" Riley exclaimed, wandering around in bewilderment. Tom shot me a gaze that warned me not to mess up in front of Riley. "Unfortunately TTTD has several limitations-" Tom started. "Oh!" Riley cried as she tripped and fell. Before I could react, Riley fell directly onto the start button.

TTTD's lights illuminated as it sprang to life. "TTTD can't travel to the future or control what time period we land in yet!" I screamed as Tom shot me another warning look. There was nothing we could do as we were pushed back against our seats with TTTD shooting into space.

Despite the horrid situation, I decided to make the most out of this experience. From the window, I could see our science lab gradually turn into blurs of colours and then into a distorted rainbow. Everything was bending, twisting, distorting...moving so fast that taking in the new scenery was difficult. It was all so surreal, like nothing I have seen before. Almost like walking into a life-sized kaleidoscope. Slowly, the blurs of colours started forming a new breathtaking landscape and the small screen at the front of TTTD read "AD105". Where were we?

The wind slowly whispered a soft lullaby to the tall wooden houses that towered over villagers wearing various colours of Hanfu. The lively atmosphere was painted from the bustling street scattered with vendors selling various treasures. You could smell the hot and freshly cooked street food from a mile away. As I was standing right next to the vendors, the exotic smell filled the air around me.

Suddenly, I thought of something. "P...paper was invented this year. We could maybe look for Cailun, the inventor of paper and take inspiration from how he invented it? I think...he worked at the palace around this time." "Inefficient." Tom spat, not even considering my idea. "What a splendid idea!" Riley responded, giving me an encouraging look. "Where's the palace?" Riley asked, stopping a villager who took a map drawn on animal skin out. "Hike up that hill." The villager said, pointing at a mountain ahead. Riley thanked him and we followed his directions.

Soon, we were met face to face with the WeiYang palace. The comprehensive architecture towered over us. Even though we could only see the palace through the entrance gate, I was amazed by the compound's perfection. Every single involute carving was clearly crafted with care, each one representing a bigger concept. As we admired the palace's beauty, I heard some chatter nearby. Pulling my eyes away from the palace, I spotted two people arguing near us.

"Work faster."

"I'm working my hardest...sir."

"Cailun. This is your last chance. Two more days."

My ears perked up at the name, as I saw whoever Cailun was talking to walk away. Cailun sighed and started walking towards our direction.

"The inventor of paper is walking towards us!"

"Can I help you?" Cailun asked as he strolled towards the gate. "We're new here, about to work at the palace. Can we help you with something you're working on?" Riley asked with a kind smile.

“I’ve been finding a form of record. Rocks are heavy, bamboo isn’t smooth and silk is expensive. I haven’t found a medium to write on that’s cheap, light and smooth.” Cailun explained, staring deep into the ground. “I need to go home now. I’ll see you here tomorrow?” He asked. I quickly turned to the others, knowing that the plan required us to find out as much about Cailun as possible. “We wanted to ask you how difficult this job is. By sharing your experiences, we could perfect our...work performance.” I spluttered, stammering on my words. Tom shot me a frown with apparent disapproval. He mouthed the words “What are you doing?” to me, shaking his head. “Splendid. Come over to my house and I’ll tell you about it.” Cailun replied, grinning up at me. I smirked as I wondered what Tom might be feeling.

Passing a deep forest with a light breeze trailing our path and our fresh footprints behind us, we engaged in meaningful conversation with Cailun about his experiences working at the palace. Cailun walked with his head down as he fiddled with his fingers. His face showed discomfort while discussing this. “Working here is a prestigious responsibility. The palace is the heart of political power, which means we carry heavy weight on our shoulders. Any mistake would mean punishment and—” Cailun suddenly stopped and looked up for the first time since we left the palace. “What?!” Tom spat. “There’s some bark peeling from the tree,” Cailun whispered, freezing into place. His eyes widened as his mouth opened upon seeing this tree. “A dangling soft, fibrous tree bark.” He continued, starting to move towards the tree trunk with an unwavering gaze at the bark. This slow movement turned into pacing, into a jog and finally into a full-on sprint before he reached the tree. The rest of us stared at him with furrowed brows as he aggressively ripped the bark from the tree and began running through the forest.

“Please. Now we have to find a place to stay for the night since he ran off.” Tom spat, looking around. “This was a stupid idea. We’re stuck in the past for goodness sake! Following a lunatic? Who’s run off? Ask him about the invention tomorrow! There’s no need to—” Tom started. Anger, annoyance, frustration, all these strong emotions I’ve been feeling over this venture finally took over me. Something drew me closer and closer to the direction Cailun ran off. Before I knew it, I was sprinting after Cailun at full speed, the light breeze turning into harsh wind as the air resistance blew behind me as I ran. I spotted a figure in the distance. Closer...closer...closer...

“Cailun!” I called, quickening my already fast pace. The figure stopped and turned around to look at me. As I got to his side, I realised that he was still hugging the tree bark he found. “I’ve got an amazing idea. Come to my house and see.”

Once Riley and Tom found us, Cailun began his work. The rest of us watched beside him as he soaked the tree bark in water, pounded it with a wooden mallet, spread fibres in a thin coating and left it out in the sun to dry.

“How did you know to do all those procedures? How did you even know the tree bark was going to be a good fit?” Riley asked Cailun as we waited for the solution to dry. “Experimentation really. I’ve done many trials with different materials But none had the results I wanted. Therefore, I carried on the search in my daily life. Whenever I saw something interesting, I would experiment with it.” He replied, shrugging. “I wish I could travel at the speed of light, then I would’ve finished this process by now.” He joked, shaking his head. “What did you say?” I asked, dots forming in my head. “You wish you could travel at the speed of light?”

“Thanks, Cailun! You’ll definitely succeed. You’ve created something phenomenal and we thank you for everything we learnt from you.” I said quickly to Cailun, backing away from him. “We can send ourselves out. We wish you the best of luck!” I called back to him, waving farewell as Riley and Tom started following me.

“Time and space are relative, meaning the faster you move, the slower time goes. Time would slow to a stop if someone travelled at the speed of light, meaning they could travel to the future!” I explained my train of thought to my bosses. Going back to TTTD, we leapt into action. Except, Tom was still a little hesitant.

“TTTD isn’t designed to move at the speed of light for long periods. Stupid idea!”

“There’s nothing to lose!”

“Hm...How about our lives?”

“Would you rather be stuck here forever?! I’ve found a solution to go home! There are risks, but not more than being stuck here! Any better ideas? If you don’t want to get on, we’re hopping on the only way home without you.” I blurted out, sudden confidence filling over me, finally summoning enough courage to stand up to my boss who had been difficult and irrational this entire venture.

“Fine.”

40,000km/s, 80,000km/s, 200,000km/s...Soon, we were moving at a speed of approximately 300,000km/s, the speed of light! We were on our way home. Pride, exhilaration and hope filled me as I closed my eyes and tried to sleep on the machine that would change the world.

Plain Inventions

Ying Wa College, Cheung, Ka Wing – 15

Andy pressed the paper against the table. A bold streak appeared across the paper, as if lightning stretching across the sky. As a force was applied, the craft pitched upwards. Andy watched expectantly, his eyeballs glued to his new papercraft. It was a few seconds before the craft gently touched the plastic tiles on the ground.

The paper airplane performed its first landing, not slightly damaged.

Proud of his work, Andy lied on his chair and stared out of the window.

Andy was sitting on his paper airplane, gliding in the sky. Mountains, once encroached by the countless rectangular prisms, slowly converted into a green mass. Ships, originally tearing through the water surface, miraculously disappeared. All of a sudden the pond was quiet, a stone bridge was built across the two shores. Small huts dotted on the grassland as if darts on a dartboard. Curious, Andy landed on a piece of cleared land.

A cool breeze swept past Andy's knees as he walked on the grassland. The sun peeked behind the mountain, chickens in the distance started to yell.

"Hey, what is this thing?" a difficult-to-comprehend voice came from his back. Andy turned to see an intrigued villager, staring at the paper construction lying on the grassland. The villager his head mischievously and marched forwards.

What is this accent?

"You do look weird," the villager's eyes scanned Andy from head to toe.

They're normal clothing! What's wrong with T-shirts?

Andy backed away.

"Hey! I am asking you what this thing is!" the villager yelled.

Paper planes are normal stuff – everyone folds paper airplanes at school. Will this person stop asking weird questions!

"That is an airplane," Andy answered decisively. "And who—"

"What's an ear-plane? Do they—"

"Who are you, actually?"

"Oh! Forgot to introduce myself. Just call me Ming, I'm fine with it."

Eyebrows tightened, a pair of eyes admired the streamlined pattern of the airplane made of modern paper.

"And where are we?" Andy asked.

"We're in a small remote piece of land of the Tang Dynasty! I forgot what this place is actually called, wait—"

Ming rushed into his hut and tried to find a map of the city. Result?

"Oh nevermind – I'm just forgetful. I forgot where I put the map as well. But you're definitely in the land of the Tang Dynasty!" Ming shouted from his hut.

Wow. At least I know what the time is.

Ming put a hand on the airplane, a delicate, pure white craft sitting gracefully on the grassland.

“Ming, don’t damage it!”

“It’s fine; I know what inventions are.”

“You invent things?” Andy thought out loud.

“Yes,” An enthusiastic Ming replied, “And you seem a great candidate to be my companion! Come in.”

“Without prey, there is no predator.” – printed in large font in one of Ming’s notes via woodblock printing.

“Huh, very inspiring,” Andy chimed.

“In fact, that’s very true. There’s always someone after my inventions—“

“So you moved to this remote region, right?”

“Exactly.” Ming nodded. “But virtue is one foot tall, the devil ten foot. To fend off these people, I’ve put them in secret places and only kept a riddle hinting its location.”

But isn’t Ming forgetful?

“Now you couldn’t find the answers and wanted me to help.” Andy continued Ming’s speech.

“Exactly! How could you know what I was going to say?” A smile appeared across Ming’s face. “That means we’re best duos. Coincidentally, we have two creations to retrieve. I think they work pretty well on your ear-plane.”

Andy turned his attention onto the sheet of paper Ming was holding. Black Chinese characters were printed on its surface, almost resembling the typeset Chinese characters appearing nowadays. Bit by bit, Andy deciphered the small Chinese words on the text:

1

In the night, the stars you see

Shine light onto the path you walk with glee

But here,

Stars disappear,

Darkness takes over...

The glowing circle is your saviour

Guiding you to the right direction

2

Three of them are in your hands.

What is left?

The foot of the mountains wasn’t smooth. There were many holes in it.

“We hide there if our huts break down,” said Ming. “Don’t go too near – we haven’t done the safety checks for years.”

The land was enlightened grey. The sound of water rushing took over the chirps of the birds in the day. Countless stars dotted the sky. The duo lied on the grassland, admiring the scene.

I’ve never seen so many stars...

Andy suddenly remembered why they stayed up so late. He shot up and made a quick glance. Somewhere with a path? That leads to darkness?

“The area must be confined,” Andy said to himself, unknowingly finding himself walking towards the foot of the mountain. Silently, he repeated the verse in his mind.

In the night, the stars you see / shine light onto the path with glee

“Yes, there surely are paths here. In fact, many.”

Ignoring the warning, Andy walked straight into one of those holes. They were once emergency shelters of the people. The path narrowed down, gradually the stars could not shine into the tunnel.

But here / stars disappear / darkness takes over...

Andy was deep into the shelter. “Of course!” he thought, “It’s pitch dark here.” He could hear faint noises of someone calling his name. But Andy didn’t bother to answer.

The glowing circle is your saviour / guiding you to the right direction

“Something circular, emitting light?”

A faint green light as if from a fluorescent watch caught Andy’s eyes. “This is it!” he thought, as he traced the light to find a small, glowing compass with 12 directions written on it. “This is probably North,” Andy said to himself as he inspected the delicate tool.

“You’re back already!” Ming shouted as Andy exited the shelter with the compass in his hand.

“This compass is fluorescent,” Ming explained. “That’s its value.”

Andy read the second riddle aloud, but still had no clue.

Suddenly, a huge figure appeared in the dark, his presence only recognized by the disappearance of trees behind.

“That’s Lam; he’s been after me for a while.” Ming whispered.

“I was just inspecting *every single* shelter to find your little compass, child,” Lam announced. Andy felt something warm near his face.

“I never asked you to find it, Lam!”

“Money asked me to. In my hands I have the answer to the riddle you just read, child.” Lam paused. “I know you’re smart. If you don’t want me to use it, hand the compass over.”

“We haven’t even solved the riddle!” Ming exclaimed.

“Paper and fire are not friends.” Lam threatened. The figure proceeded towards the paper airplane.

A light bulb suddenly turned on.

I could have realized earlier! Gunpowder! We’ve seen a paper airplane, two printed riddles, and a glowing compass. Aren’t they the Four Great Inventions of China?

Andy realized the danger he was in: Either his craft gets burnt, or Ming’s creations get stolen. Andy exchanged glances with his paper airplane, as if the plane was conscious.

Without something to help, no human can fly. Come on, let’s take off...

Andy quickly climbed on the terrified airplane, started its engine and took to the air.

Lam had never seen the plane flying in action. He hesitated.

Ming seemed to have solved the riddle as well. Snatching the bamboo container of gunpowder, Ming took the upper hand of the battle.

“And if you ever try to steal my creations again, I’ll not hesitate to spray the gunpowder on you, Lam!” Out of his anger, Ming screamed at the top of his voice. Lam had already disappeared without a trace.

*** (The other day)

The paper airplane took off with the new compass and missiles (from the gunpowder). Its wings glimmered under the sunlight. In the grassland, there was Ming waving.

“What does this airplane do?” Andy imagined Ming asking.

Grinning, Andy aimed the plane at the slowly rising sun. Faintly, he could hear the roosters yelling in the distance.

Take us to the skies, reach the stars up there:

Their tiny but never-ending light

Will continue

To reflect the past

Brighten the future

A Dream's Rekindle

Ying Wa College, Cheung, Ming Ting – 12

The tumultuous sounds of the unfathomable surface land intimidate me. With dark sludges of begrimed mud encompassing all my directions, I awakened from desolation. Rust had conquered me since myriads of years ago I've lost count of. Abandoned and forgotten, I once again continue my life of dullness, with my aspiration of roaming free outside fading away long ago, jilting me as a tarnished needle. A sorrowful, haunting melody once again replays itself – I was waiting for my life to drain.

'Time is fleeting,' they say continuously, but as I knew those thousands of tedious years were endless suffering that never flew as how I had expected. My glorious days had faded into the void – How great I was in the past! But now I am nothing but a purposeless stick.

Suddenly, the world started rumbling, and time seemed to pause. Everything seemed to sink into an ether of unknown but instantly reappeared. A bright aura of luminescence emitted from nowhere and left me temporarily blinded.

As I regained my eyesight, I gazed at my surroundings – my body was laid on a sturdy anvil, center of a dimly-lit room with a stone floor. A colossal furnace towered beside me, neighboring a blacksmith table with multiple complex instruments on it. 'Where am I?' I asked myself. Could this be a dream? I wondered but I could swear it definitely wasn't.

Soon, a bearded man, seemingly a blacksmith, strode into the room in large steps. He had a scarred face, black hair and a beard with sweats of diligence. He grabbed a hammer and sped towards me, then striking the hammer onto my body as he held on the muscles of his shoulders, neck and jaws bunching until they creaked. A while later, he mumbled, 'Now that quenching is finished, it's all up to grinding and finishing.' I examined myself, meticulously crafted and gleaming in brightness. I was a beautiful oeuvre of craftsmanship and diligence, as perfect as a blacksmith's dream.

Wait. Something isn't right. These moments... seem peculiarly familiar. Something instantly struck my mind. This was... my birth. But it just can't be possible – unless... I time-travelled and am re-experiencing my life?! A sense of uncertainty, fused with fear and nervousness agonized my mind. Okay. Okay. 'I can do this.' I told myself. Hopefully I don't mess up. Before I could think more, the blacksmith grabbed me and took me to another room.

As the blacksmith trod into a tent, a person stood still. I studied the man – he was tall, standing approximately 6'8, and slender; dressed in a dark cloak. He had a pale complexion, that gorgeous face couldn't be described in words. His golden eyes seemed to glitter in an attractive sway, hypnotizing each single person who saw him in the eyes. Every part of him was just too handsome – he had every beauty of masculinity.

Who was he? I pondered. I was sure that I had met him before as I was re-experiencing my past, but apparently my memory seemed to be incomplete.

'Lord Huangdi, I have completed my quest of the forge of such needle for Lady Leizu for sewing.' The blacksmith spoke.

Huangdi sighed as he replied powerlessly, 'My wife Leizu is severely sick. The sewing project needs to be delayed. Even Doctor Qibo's Meridian Technique wasn't able to cure her.'

'Hopefully she recovers soon.' The blacksmith said as he put me down and left. As time ticked I fell into a long slumber

I woke up on a small cupboard in a regal hall, towered with pillars and a golden throne gleaming on a magnificent red carpet. Huangdi sat calmly on the throne, as his subordinates stood. 'Seems like we gotta find ways to cure my dearest wife.' Huangdi declared.

'Even the renowned doctor Yuta failed.' 'Lady Leizu has already been unconscious for three days.' 'We already have a contract with the Yandi Tribe with 500 pieces of clothing in exchange for materials.' 'When will she recover?' Countless voices mumbled and whispered in the crowd of people.

'Silence!' Huangdi exclaimed. 'My wise ministers, does anyone have ideas for curing my dear wife?'

A man in a bizarre outfit suggested, 'The traditional folk technique Internal Striking to impact some vital areas determined using Doctor Qibo's Meridian technique may help. However, I fear not many people know such skill.'

'At least we gotta try.' Huangdi replied, 'Doctor Shaoyu, can you select some herbs to make some medicine to treat Leizu as well?'

Shaoyu nodded, leaving to prepare medication. The other day, an old man came, said to be an Internal Striking specialist called Shenlao. He swung his arm as seemingly he launched a hard blow on Leizu's left arm, then immediately pressing an area on her foot. 'NO! The blow ain't powerful enough.' He then gazed around, noticing me as he picked me up and poked it onto Leizu's leg.

'Great! A needle is certainly perfect for this type of medication!' He screamed in excitement. Waving his arms, a manifestation of medication and technique emerged. 'Lung 7, Lie Que...' he mumbled, 'This will probably help to boost her immune system'

Approximately an hour later, 'Finally!' Shenlao shrieked as he pulled me out from Leizu's right leg. Leizu later regained consciousness five minutes after the operation. She seemed exhausted, but surely it was good that she woke up. Huangdi was delighted. Absolutely delighted.

Shaoyu and Qibo held me and bowed in an opulent hall, as Huangdi towered over them beside a golden throne. He beamed triumphantly. 'Lord Huangdi, this form of cure shall stay in the river of time. It shall not be forgotten. But to be shined as if the boundless beams of the illustrious sun!'" Shenlao claimed.

Huangdi nodded, glancing at me. 'Needle... Zhen... Good! It shall be named Zhenjiu. Great! My fellow doctors and masters, we shall create a sacred scroll of Zhenjiu! A sacred and legendary codex of grand medication and cure for the world – Esoteric Scripture of the Yellow Emperor! Also known as Huangdi Neijing!'

'Qibo. Shaoyu. Shaoshi. Bogao...' Huangdi declared, 'Your contribution in Zhenjiu shall be rewarded.' Those names gradually stepped on a platform, as Huangdi hung a golden medal onto their necks, signaturing a sense of glory. My body was laid on a red leather cushion, as comfort struck me. As hundreds of people clapped for the doctors and my effort. It was truly magnificent.

I grinned in a form of infinite happiness. I was at my peak! Instantly, a portal of purple auras appeared and sucked me into it. As I woke up, I realised I had returned to my suffering. But he had gained hope – I was glorious in the past, and I shall still be! I should never give up! Freedom! Glory! Here I come!

Shaanxi Television Reporter: A rusty needle has been discovered in the mountains of Shaanxi. Archaeologists believe that it is from 5000 years ago. Probably an artifact forged in the times of Huangdi. It will be displayed in the Shaanxi Museum of History and classified as a special-grade national treasure as one of the most valuable artifacts from the early historic times.

Sow and Harvest

Ying Wa College, Jiang, Weike – 12

“I wonder why?”

“He has not the upper hand.”

“Prepare for his downfall.”

Marching along the cobblestone road unnoticed, he took in each and every criticism like passing wind. He disagreed. He believed that the tables were about to turn.

He is Lee Yan, and he had a fierce rival named Zhang Heng. One can picture such rivalry as a snake versus a beaver. This time, the two intelligent lads were given the same task to invent an accurate and resilient device for predetermining the coming of earthquakes.

two raindrops
racing down the window
never look down

If you're wondering why Lee was being criticised so harshly at the beginning, it was because he had messed up his first demonstration of his invention to the emperor.

As he carefully carried the device into the palace, the emperor was immediately amazed by the delicate product of Lee's. The silverware glimmered and shone as it enlightened even the darkest corner of the room with delight.

Unfortunately though, it was the final time it shone.

His prototype split in half. Its debris fell to the ground with a crisp “clink” and glimmered no more. Staring at the motionless soldier, Lee strode out of the place without another word.

Still deflated from the defeat, a risky idea began to take form, borne of seething envy and the feral cry of a snake's logic: If honest skill could not raise him to triumph, then sabotaging to victory remained as the final shot...

a sudden weight
falls heavily on the balance
rationality crumbles

One always finds ways to fulfil desires as long as they come from the bottom of one's heart.

One night, under the sober moonless sky, Lee hopped on a cart headed towards a nearby town. He got off beside a dark forest and started walking towards a bizarre hut in the heart of the woods.

It was Zhang's workplace.

Lee silently entered the hut, tiptoeing like an adventurer inside the pharaoh's tomb. In front of his eyes stood the prestigious invention that could destroy his fame. He shook with excitement as he looked at it from side to side, top to bottom, yet he couldn't find any weaknesses he could attack. It was an untouchable monument way above his reach.

Suddenly, a log rolled gently down the hillside, flattening leaves on its venture downwards as the leaves screamed of agony and pain. Then an idea struck into his mind. He touched the invention softly on its back as if petting a hare.

“Wood...” he whispered.

That was the beginning of a mate in 3, in favour of Lee. It raised him closer to the untouchable monument. Now he felt like he could reach it.

the trunk is cut
as the beautiful flowers fall
beginning of doom

The next few weeks saw Lee working restlessly to figure out the next best move. It wasn't easy though, for knowledge was very limited back then. He flipped through thousands of ancient books and experimented with various materials, burning his hand a few times on the way while dealing with his overwhelmed brain.

Zhang, on the other hand, was a bit over relaxed after Lee's failure. He stopped experimenting with his device, and instead developed an interest in wandering around the nearby market while treating himself with the hypocritical comments by locals. He didn't care if his device had flaws, or whether it was going to work or not, for all he knew was that his opponent had given him the lead.

the snake nears
the dam of profound skill
now or never

Soon the day came. Birds chirped mournfully on branches, gazing disappointedly into the dark mist, trying to find the sun which shone so very brightly yesterday, who's now hiding behind clouds anxiously as if the universe was about to collapse. The gathering crowd remained silent and watched as Zhang Heng stepped into the mighty emperor's palace. The man was unaware that his evaluation of the equation wasn't equal to the actual root.

As Zhang put his delicate device in front of the emperor, Lee quietly sneaked into the palace, hiding behind a golden bush. His intense breathing signified his close discovery of checkmate.

Zhang's creation was very different from Lee's, not only because it avoided collapsing (which was an achievement anyway), but also because of its subtle look. It didn't really glimmer, instead it stood still and imposingly on the red carpet like a modest model on stage. That was another kind of beauty, and in the emperor's opinion, less was, indeed, more.

In the middle of silent admiration, Lee nimbly lit a match from his pocket. Then he threw the flaming arrow over the bush and it went darting towards Zhang's invention. However, as much as the drama wished to unfold itself, the match failed to hit the target and crashed onto the floor futilely. And so, the mate in one was missed.

Fortunately, nobody saw the attack, but the deafening silence was already enough to frighten Lee as he fled away shamefully. He looked around frantically, saw a rickshaw, got on, and began foolishly contemplating how the match changed course right before the intended impact and whether some god was preventing him from succeeding.

He was completely tired of this stupid rivalry thing. He needed a break from life.

final minutes
as he attempts the fatal blow
off the woodwork it goes

Lee was woken up by the dazzling sunlight piercing through the blinds. As he peered out of the window, he could observe posters everywhere celebrating Zhang Heng and his innovative invention of a seismograph. Melodies of excitement flowed exquisitely through his hometown, yet to him, it sounded more like a saddening dirge.

His appetite seemed to disappear even in front of a plate of delicious dumplings. Just as he was about to put one into his mouth, a sudden wobble struck him. Within milliseconds, the building started shaking violently, and the melody was forced away by the painful shrieks of items breaking apart upon falling to the ground. The screams rang even louder in Lee's ears as they reminded him of his tragic past.

Biology teaches us that sensitivity is a vital function of living things which allows us to react and detect to stimuli. I assume Lee changed species as he sat on his chair motionlessly despite the blaring roars and alarming vibration, still holding that piece of dumpling. Before he knew it, the entire ceiling collapsed on him like a protective best friend who reluctantly betrayed you under undefeatable pressure.

And then an unbearable pain powered through his veins, yet there was a light, floating sensation that stopped him from moving. If this was it, he thought, wouldn't I gain the title for the character who died in the most underwhelming way?

captivated in nowhere
nothing, nobody... *NONSENSE!*
stalemate?

"Yeah, they knew, they knew... It's okay now..."

"Came to use pretty quickly, huh?"

"Thank god it didn't malfunction!"

Sunlight arrived along with the thundering galloping of horses, as the heavy piece of wood pressing on Lee's chest was removed. The rescuer was kneeling on the depressing ruins as he looked back to call for support. Then, the two men entered a soundless stare.

"You—" Lee wished he had a voice, but how can voice be granted if even life was on the verge of perishing?

Sadly, the staring contest did not last long. Before Lee could even begin to question how everything had happened upon himself, he closed his eyes. Once again, and for the final time.

Indeed, this was it for him. The title, however, was never awarded.

"Omnia causa fiunt – everything happens for a reason."

Dark Eras

Ying Wa College, Lee, Chin Yeung – 14

Hello, can you hear me? Alright. If you're hearing this, you probably have way too much time to spare if you somehow found this recording. Anyway, as promised, here's a little story of when I time traveled. Yes, yes, I know this sounds like an absolute sham, but hear me out, and then you'll probably change your mind.

As the morning sun rose, I felt the warmth of its rays land on my skin. Despite going to sleep way earlier than usual, I still felt unbearably tired, so I shut my eyes tightly just to get that little bit more sleep. Normally, I'd doze off in no time, but as I turned, I felt a sharp pain in my entire body. It was like being stabbed by dozens of tiny needles! I jolted awake and couldn't believe my eyes. Where had all the furniture gone? The smooth and white concrete walls were replaced with red and uneven bricks, the roof was replaced with an unruly brown thatched roof, and most importantly, my bed! "How am I supposed to sleep well when my mattress is literally just a pile of grass!" I thought. I reached for my phone to check the time – only to feel the freezing touch of wood.

That's when it hit me.

Panicked, I scrambled to the door and pulled on it with all my might, praying to see the dim, narrow corridor I'd walked through many times. My heart sank. The cacophony of bargaining, vendors' boisterous advertising, and the clapping of horses didn't help with my confusion.

"Hey! You there! Get out of the way of the emperor's royal carriage!"

I turned my head to the source of the sound, when I saw six majestic horses towing a carriage barreling down the street, towards me. "Out of the way, peasant!". Before I could react, something tugged on the collar of my clothes, and pulled me to the side, just barely dodging the charging horse.

"Holy smokes, kid! What were you doing? You almost got run over by the royal carriage!"

In front of me, stood a well-worn man. His blood-red Hanfu glistened in the morning light. He had a naturally captivating aura and wore a slight smile.

"Oh! What peculiar clothes you have! What's that you've got on your face? Some kind of accessory?"

Still stunned from my near-death experience, and faced by the man's bombardment of questions, I found myself at a loss for words.

"Tell me son, where are you from?"

Of course, I couldn't tell him that I was from the future, that would be absolute bogus! So naturally, I lied to him.

"I'm from... downtown?"

"Oh nice! I've never met anybody from downtown. Pardon my manners, I don't believe I've introduced myself yet. My name's Cai Lun, or Cai, if you prefer."

"My full name's Chin Yeung, but I'd rather just be called Lee."

"Alright Lee, good to meet you, but I'd better go back to work. I'm working on this new invention that will revolutionize writing! If you want, I can bring you along and show you the things that you can only see here in the city!"

"That'd be awesome!"

And off we went. Cai Lun told me he'd been trying to make something that would make his name remembered for generations. I racked my brain hard, and suddenly I remembered that I'd heard the name Cai Lun before. He was the person who improved paper! I looked at Cai with wonder, he seemed radiant as ever.

“Look at that over there! In the blacksmith shop. You see that stone thing? That’s a blast furnace. A buddy of mine invented it. It uses blasts of hot air into some heated iron ore. That produces cast iron, which we can use to make tools for farming and weapons for battle! Pretty cool right?”

I stared at the blast furnace. It’s really astonishing how brilliant the ancient Chinese people figured out how to make contraptions like this. Compared to people of the future, they really were not lacking in ingenuity.

“We’re almost there, we’ve just got to get over the lake. Luckily, I recently commissioned a neat little build called a suspension bridge, so I didn’t have to go the long way around to get into the city.”

The bridge swayed back and forth, it seemed unsafe as ever.

“There’s no need to be afraid, the bridge is really safe. It’s just deceptively dangerous because of all the rocking. I’ll show you!”

I gawked as Cai Lun walked confidently across the bridge. I had butterflies in my stomach and getting a cold shower did not seem appealing. I tried to follow suit, but as soon as I stepped foot onto the bridge, I immediately felt dizzy, as if the whole world was slowing down. The water was rapid, if I fell into it, I’d be washed away for sure.

“Come on, you’ve got it. Don’t look down, look at me and you’ll make it.”

The Ascendance of the Dragon God

Ying Wa College, Ngai, Chun Ching Ethan – 12

(Han Dynasty) The wails of villagers reverberated through the air, their anguished cries blending with the swirling dust and rubble that invaded the once serene town. The earth quaked with relentless power, mercilessly burying more and more souls beneath its unforgiving weight. Zhang, a humble inventor, living at the peak of the mountains, stood on his wooden porch, sipping tea, watching the chaos unfold, and sighed deeply. Lighting two incense sticks, he bowed to them and prayed to the Dragon god. "Relieve this chaos and forgive us for our sins, O mighty god."

High above the mortal realm, a flame danced in the celestial expanse, its fiery tendrils reaching towards the heavens. The message had been delivered. The Jade Emperor, the supreme ruler of all realms, exhaled a weary sigh, his expression tinged with a hint of disgust. "What do these feeble mortals implore for once more?" he mused, his voice permeated with a mixture of disappointment. "Those mortal beings hardly deserve the power and protection granted upon them by the gods." As his fingers brushed against the flickering flame, a transformation began. The flame crept along his arm slowly and surely, its powerful glow illuminating his features. In that moment, a burst of visions unfolded before the Jade Emperor's eyes, revealing a tapestry of humans suffering, their prayers to the gods... as an old, frail man appeared in his visions.

He staggered backwards, his once calm and solemn expression all gone in a sudden. Deep in thought, he spoke softly, his voice filled with concern, "Yanluo Wang, the formidable ruler of the underworld in Chinese mythology, has surfaced once more. This event that unfolds before us cannot be just an act of nature. It must be his doing." Unease and terror could be clearly seen on the faces of his loyal subjects. "Master, it cannot be," one of them stuttered, a hint of disbelief in his voice. "We banished him to the Realms of Darkness for a millennium. His immortality was stripped away, making him mortal. Surely, he must have perished by now..."

The Jade Emperor's eyes narrowed in contemplation, his mind racing with the implications of Yanluo Wang's resurgence. "Appearances can be deceiving," he spoke, his voice laced with a newfound determination. "Yanluo Wang, stripped of his immortality, may have found a way to regain his power. If he seeks the Eternal Crystals, then we must act swiftly to protect humanity. The earthquakes he had caused helped to harvest them from the crust of the earth." The other gods, however, hesitated, their fear and reluctance evident. They had grown complacent in their realms, detached from the plight of mortals. They were reluctant to risk their immortality for the sake of a world they saw as undeserving. One by one, they voiced their concerns, citing the dangers and uncertainties that lay ahead.

But amidst the sea of doubt, there was one god who stood firm, his resolve unyielding. It was Longwei, the Dragon Lord, known for his wisdom and unwavering loyalty to the mortal realm. He had witnessed firsthand the suffering of humanity and understood the gravity of the situation. With a resolute voice, he addressed the Jade Emperor and his fellow gods. "I shall not abandon the mortals to their fate," Longwei declared, his voice thundering through the celestial hall. "Zioles, the fallen one, poses a threat to all realms. We cannot allow him to succeed in his quest for immortality. I will take my eight mighty dragons and face him in combat. Together, we shall protect humanity and restore balance to the realms."

"Very well, Longwei. This man will accompany you. He may be old and weak, but his determination to stop this chaos is undying. With a swift flick of his wrist, the flame began to grow, slowly forming the shape of an old man. Inventor Zhang had arrived at the heavens. He possessed an unwavering determination to improve the lives of the people during a time when technological advancements were scarce. Driven by a profound sense of empathy, Zhang sought to alleviate the burdens and hardships that burdened the common folk. With his unwavering spirit and inventive mind, he embarked on a quest to create inventions that would revolutionize the lives of the people and bring hope to their daily struggles. Zhang's inspiring journey, filled with creativity and a deep sense of purpose, would forever leave an indelible mark on the history of the Dong Han dynasty.

The other gods exchanged hesitant glances, but the Jade Emperor nodded, his expression stern yet approving. "Longwei, your bravery and sacrifice will be remembered," he said solemnly. "May the eight divine dragons lend you their strength, and may your valor inspire others to stand against the forces of darkness."

With a bow of respect, Longwei turned to his loyal dragon companions, their majestic forms shimmering with ancient power. They understood the weight of the task ahead, and their eyes gleamed with determination. As they took to the skies, the heavens trembled with their presence, a beacon of hope in a world engulfed by chaos.

Meanwhile, deep beneath the earth's surface, Zioles reveled in his newfound power. The earthquakes, his handiwork, had grasped the precious Eternal Crystals, shimmering with otherworldly energy. He held the key to immortality within his grasp, his heart consumed by a thirst for eternal life. Little did he know that Longwei and his dragons were descending upon him, their righteous fury blazing like a thousand suns. The clash of titans was imminent, a battle that would determine the fate of both mortals and gods alike.

And so, the stage was set for a cataclysmic confrontation, where the forces of darkness clashed with the unwavering valor of one god and his mighty dragons. The outcome would shape the destiny of all realms, as the world awaited the final outcome of this epic clash between good and evil...

Back at the heavens, the great clash between the titans and the dragon god was soon to commence. The Dragon God and the Titan Lord Zioles stood as titans of their respective domains. The Dragon God, with his majestic wings and fiery breath, commanded an army of powerful dragons. Zioles, on the other hand, possessed immense strength and an indomitable will, leading a legion of fearsome Titans.

The land trembled as the forces of the Dragon God and Zioles clashed in a cataclysmic battle. The very earth quaked beneath their feet, unleashing devastating earthquakes that threatened to tear the realm asunder. In the midst of this chaos, a humble inventor named Zhang stood on a hilltop, eyes fixed upon the awe-inspiring spectacle unfolding before him.

Zhang, known for his ingenious creations, had been drawn to the epic confrontation by the sheer magnitude of the quakes. He watched in both awe and concern as the Dragon God's dragons valiantly fought against the destructive forces of the earthquakes. With every beat of their mighty wings and every blast of their fiery breath, they tried to stabilize the trembling ground and save more poor souls.

Inspired by the dragons' courage and the calamity unfolding around him, Zhang's mind raced with ideas. He believed that he could contribute his own inventions to aid the dragons' valiant efforts. With unwavering determination, he hurried back to his workshop, gathering his tools and materials.

Days turned into nights as Zhang toiled tirelessly, fueled by his desire to help the dragons and protect the realm. He crafted a powerful device, designed to harness the forces of nature. His invention utilized intricate mechanisms to detect the subtle shifts in the earth's crust, providing early warnings of impending earthquakes.

Armed with his creations, Zhang returned to the battlefield, joining the dragons in their fight against the devastating earthquakes. As the Dragon God's mighty creatures unleashed their power, Zhang's inventions worked in harmony with their efforts. The early warning system he had devised allowed the dragons to anticipate the tremors and evacuate vulnerable areas swiftly. The prediction devices, placed strategically, predicted the impact of the earthquakes, providing brief moments of respite in the chaos.

The Dragon God, witnessing Zhang's invaluable contributions, acknowledged the inventor's ingenuity and selflessness. With a nod of approval, the Dragon God infused Zhang's devices with a fraction of his own divine power, further enhancing their effectiveness.

United in their purpose, the Dragon God, his dragons, and Zhang fought side by side, their combined strength and ingenuity stemming the tide of destruction. The earthquakes, once relentless, became more manageable, allowing the land and its inhabitants to endure. Zioles was finally slain by the Dragon God and peace reigned once again.

The invention had done what it was sought to do. Its power still flowed around the dragon heads, before slowly fading away, its colors disappearing into nothingness. It had saved the lives of hundreds of thousands of innocent villagers, as it stood valiantly at the town square of the humble village, witnessing the great battle before peace.