

MEET THE GUARDIANS



Ming

Nine-tailed fox – a sparky elemental creature of fire who can shapeshift between a fox and a human girl!



Miaow

A temple cat, usually even tempered and reserved – but sometimes a little bit grumpy.

This book is dedicated to my dad, Johnny Huang

EH

To all who believe in magic

PNQ

LITTLE TIGER

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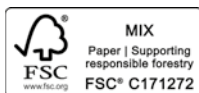
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GUARDIANS ^{OF} THE NEW MOON

MING AND MIAOW'S GREAT RACE



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LONDON



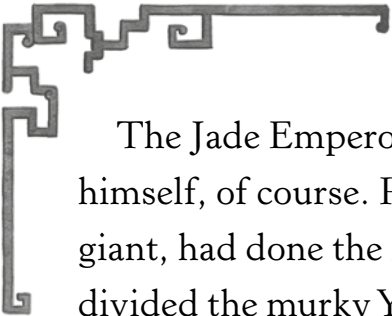


Chapter 1

Jade Emperor

The Jade Emperor was bored.

The King of Heaven had just finished his favourite breakfast – the same mushroom dumplings he ate for breakfast every morning, followed by hot pu’er tea served in the jade cup gifted to him by the goddess of tea, Tie Kuan Yin. He sighed. There wasn’t much to do these days, not since he had completed the really big project of making the Earth.



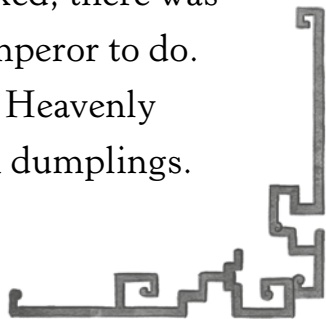
The Jade Emperor hadn't done everything himself, of course. Pangu, the hairy horned giant, had done the hardest work. He had divided the murky Yin from the clear Yang to separate the Earth from the Sky. The snake-bodied Nüwa had taken over from there. She had fashioned four pillars to hold the Sky above the Earth, keeping the two separate, so the Jade Emperor could fill the surface of the new planet with life.

He had started in the Ocean, conjuring all sorts of squishy and shelly things. Then he invented fish, which swam forth to fill the water. A small handful had fleshy fins and stepped cautiously on to the land. Soon, creatures of every imaginable form were roaming the planet. There were ancient animals like dinosaurs and sabre-toothed cats, magical creatures including phoenixes and unicorns. Geckos, bugs, frogs, bats, elephants, owls, elk, cheetahs, wombats...

The Jade Emperor made them all. He wrapped them in a blanket of green forests, blue ice and golden deserts that the giant Pangu folded into mountains and canyons. Then, taking brown clay from the Earth, the Jade Emperor made the first human.

Earth was now complete, full of life. The Jade Emperor was proud of the planet he and his friends had created. Of course, there had been a handful of mishaps. The two-headed ostrich ran in circles because each head wanted to go in a different direction – they had to be separated into two one-headed ostriches. And in the end, Nüwa had been right: the fish-out-of-water was much better *in the water* – perfect as just ... a fish.

Now that Project Earth was finished and the mistakes had been fixed, there was nothing more for the Jade Emperor to do. So he sat on his throne in the Heavenly Palace. He ate his mushroom dumplings.



He sipped his pu'er tea. And he sighed.
The Jade Emperor was bored.

He gazed indifferently into a clear pool that magically revealed any location on Earth. A peek first into the deepest undersea canyons – a singing merman ... glowing fish ... sea monsters fighting over a sunken ship. The usual. Then he peered into a jungle overflowing with life – same as it was every day. Finally he glanced at a great stretch of desert dotted with cacti baking beneath the sun – typical.

An unexpected movement drew the emperor's attention to a medium-sized temple in a small human village. The rooftop was shaped like a tent, the four corners ending in upturned curves mimicking the talons of a dragon.

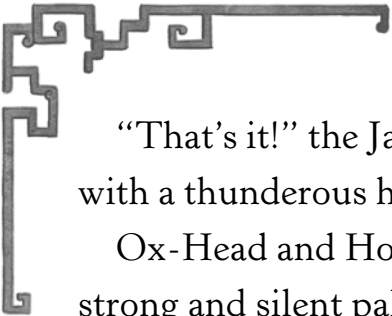
A cat!

Cats weren't as boring as other creatures. No one could predict what a cat might do



next – not even the Jade Emperor himself. This cat was black and white, the balanced Yin and Yang of equal and opposite colours. The cat's tail twitched like a rattlesnake. His eyes were hawk-like, held steady on a hole just below a window. Suddenly, a well-fed rat darted out. The cat launched into a chase so fast it looked like a race.





“That’s it!” the Jade Emperor declared with a thunderous handclap. “A race!”

Ox-Head and Horse-Face – the big, strong and silent palace guards – jumped in surprise and snorted. They snuck a look at the emperor who had stood up from his throne.

“A RACE!” the Jade Emperor repeated, shouting now. “Tu Di Gong! Tu Di Gong, where are you?! TU DI GONG!”

A small man holding a big tower of paperwork twice his height fretted into the throne room. His fingers were stained black with ink. “I’m here, Your Highness.” The chief consul had a nervous face with worry lines that deepened like furrows in a field when he spoke. “A race...?”

“A RACE!” the emperor proclaimed with an impossibly huge smile. “The GREATEST race! All the animals of Earth are invited to compete.”

“ALL the animals?” Tu Di Gong asked. He dropped the stack of papers on to a desk, then withdrew an ink brush from deep inside a sleeve of his robe.

“ALL of the animals! But no flying allowed. No digging either. And absolutely no magic! Running only. Walking is fine, I suppose, although you won’t likely win if you walk... I’ll also allow slithering and sliding. Jogging too – and ambling ... meandering, flopping, skipping ...”

Tu Di Gong scribbled furiously on a never-ending scroll.

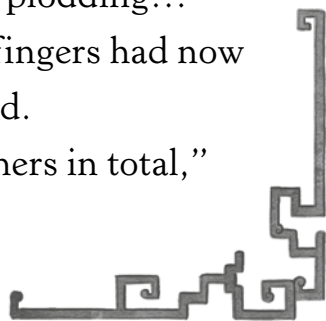
“... hopping, creeping, crawling ...”

The emperor was impressed by the consul’s skill in keeping up with his pronouncements.

“... prancing, pirouetting, plodding...”

The ink on Tu Di Gong’s fingers had now spread to the palm of his hand.

“There will be twelve winners in total,”



the emperor continued. “The first twelve to finish the race will be honoured by having a lunar year named after them.”

“Twelve winners,” Tu Di Gong mumbled while jotting down every word. “Years named after winners...” The lines on Tu Di Gong’s face deepened from furrows into valleys.



“This isn’t going to be easy,” he cautioned. “There will be multiple forms to fill, countless authorisations to authorise.” The consul cross-referenced three different scrolls, two law books and one file marked *URGENT*. “Someone will have to petition the Celestial Ministry of Time to permit naming years after the winning animals. And what about the animals? What will the Faculty of Flora and Fauna require for the racers’ health and safety?!”

The Jade Emperor didn’t hear a word. He wasn’t really a details kind of person. Plus, he was just too excited about the race to worry about procedure.

The chief consul groaned. Unlike the Jade Emperor, Tu Di Gong was never ever bored.