

GUARDIANS OF THE NEW MOON

THE YEAR OF THE TIGER



WRITTEN BY
ERIC HUANG

ILLUSTRATED BY
PHÙNG NGUYỄN QUANG

MEET THE GUARDIANS



Ming

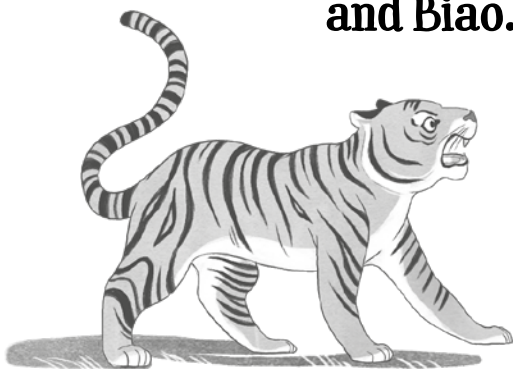
Nine-tailed fox – a sparky elemental creature of fire who can shapeshift between a fox and a human girl!



Miaow

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

and Biao...



A fierce tiger out to protect her forest home who sometimes lets anger get in her way.

Dedicated to Angela and Amelia

EH

To all who believe in magic

PNQ

LITTLE TIGER

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LONDON



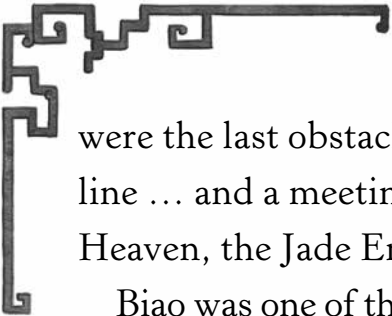
A decorative header featuring stylized grey clouds, a white crescent moon, and several small white stars scattered across the top half of the page.

Prologue

Biao

Biao bared her sharp teeth and roared. She dragged herself on to the bank, where she frightened a tian-lu so badly that the teeny dragon-like creature tumbled into the water with a startled squeak.

Dripping-wet from the river, Biao vented her anger at the muddy bank, carving out chunks of the slippery slope with her claws. She *had* to figure out how to cross the Weak River. Its magical waters



were the last obstacle before the finish line ... and a meeting with the King of Heaven, the Jade Emperor.

Biao was one of the few contestants to make it this far in the Great Race, a competition being held by the emperor. The first twelve to finish would have a year named after them on the lunar calendar, as well as all the glory and prestige that came with it.

Glory and prestige were the very last things on Biao's mind right now, though. She had entered the competition so she could see the Jade Emperor face to face. There was trouble in the Western Forest on Kunlun Mountain, where Biao lived, and she desperately needed his advice. But the only reply she'd had to her plea for help was this short letter:

It is with deep regret that we are unable to assist you. His Most Majestical Majesty,



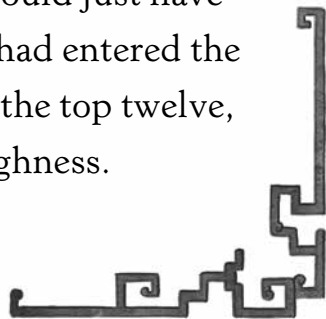
the Jade Emperor, must currently devote every moment to the Great Race.

To which point: your RSVP has yet to arrive! Please make your mark below to confirm your attendance. His Heavenly Highness sincerely hopes you will take part in the competition.

*Grand Consul to the Jade Emperor,
Tu Di Gong*

If things at home had been different, Biao would have entered the race at once. She loved competitions. But with everything that had been happening this past month, there was no time for fun and games. Couldn't the unhelpful Tu Di Gong see that?

Well, if the emperor was too busy to come to Kunlun Mountain, Biao would just have to go to him instead. So, she had entered the race, determined to finish in the top twelve, in order to meet with His Highness.



A chorus of hoots and howls drew Biao's attention to the far shore. The ox had just crossed the Weak River. And not even by swimming – he had walked! Biao's superior swimming skills were of no use here because the Weak River's water was magical. The harder she swam, the quicker she sank.

ROOOAAARRRR!!! Biao had to find a way to cross.

Screech! Squawk! Squeak!

The racers were all astir again. The rat had crossed the water on the back of the ox and was now in the lead.

Biao's eyes widened. "I will hitch a ride, just like that rat!"

There had been a fire in the village up on the hill. The water that doused the flames had washed charred planks of wood into the river. When a piece of table floated by, Biao leapt on top of it and rode the makeshift raft across the water.





She scrambled off the other side and within moments, she had raced through the Heavenly Gates, up the winding path to the Heavenly Palace, and crossed the finish line.

Fireworks announced the racer in third place:

TIGER



The header features a whimsical night sky scene. At the top, several small, four-pointed stars and dots are scattered across the white background. Below them, a crescent moon is partially obscured by a cluster of stylized, swirling grey clouds on the left. To the right, another large, more complex cloud formation with multiple swirls and a darker grey center is visible. The title 'Chapter 1' is written in a large, bold, black serif font, and the name 'Ming' is written below it in a slightly smaller, bold, black serif font.

Chapter 1

Ming

“You want to know how Biao got trapped in the mud pit? *I* trapped her – and I’m glad I did! If you want her, climb Kunlun Mountain and free her yourself!”

The tips of Ming’s hair lit up like sparklers. She was a nine-tailed fox, an elemental creature of fire who could shapeshift to human form. Her magical flames flared when she was surprised. And boy was she surprised. The long-tailed mountain lady

was responsible? *This* little blue magpie had trapped the ferocious Biao? How? What was her deal? Ming had so many questions to ask, but the bird had already flown off.

“Guardians!” the Jade Emperor boomed.

“Follow the long-tailed mountain lady. Find out what happened to Biao and return to the Heavenly Palace with her at once. She must have time to prepare for the Year of the Tiger!”



Ming dashed out of the throne room with her best friend, a black-and-white cat named Miaow. Together, they were the Guardians of the New Moon. It was their job to help Biao embody the qualities of courage and leadership in preparation for her upcoming year.

There was no doubt in Ming's mind that Biao was in need of both of these things. That tiger was *fierce*! Ferocious, even – and really quick to anger.

Ming and Miaow hadn't spent much time with Biao during the race, but everyone had witnessed the Breakfast Incident. Pandy the red panda had accidentally dropped a bit of bamboo into the bacon at the breakfast buffet and Biao had been *furious*. The enraged tiger had called Pandy a bamboo-eating buffoon, setting off a frenzied food fight with the pandas and raccoons, until finally Tu Di Gong had stepped in and



threatened them all with disqualification.

“What a panda-monium that was!”

Ming mumbled as she zoomed out of the Heavenly Palace with Miaow at her side.

“There’s the long-tailed mountain lady,” Miaow announced. The magpie was just ahead.

“How do we stop her when we can’t fly?” Ming asked.

Miaow reminded Ming that the only entrance in and out of the Heavenly Palace was through the Heavenly Gate. Nothing could fly over or dig beneath it. “We’ll have our chance when she descends.”

Using the downhill slope to gain speed, the Guardians reached the gate just as the magpie swooped lower. Ming and Miaow closed the massive doors, blocking the long-tailed mountain lady’s path.

“Out of my way!” the magpie squawked. “You’re as treacherous as that tiger!”



“Apologies for delaying you,” Miaow said.
“But please tell us what happened to Biao.”

“Why should I? I want nothing to do
with that tiger or her friends.”

Ming smouldered. “We are not friends
with Biao. We met her only briefly during

the Great Race, and she was totally rude.”

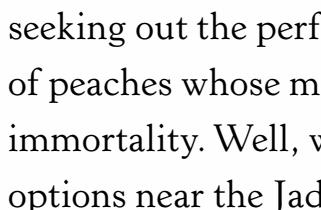
“Please tell us what happened to Biao,”
Miaow repeated.

The magpie cocked her head. Ming felt the blue bird’s piercing gaze bore through her as she appeared to make up her mind and tell her story...

“I was on an important errand for the Queen Mother of the West, which took me to the eastern edge of the Western Forest on Kunlun Mountain. The queen’s realm is far greater than that of your Jade Emperor, you know. More than half of Kunlun Mountain is under *her* protection!”

Ming fizzled a little. The nine-tailed fox knew who the Queen Mother of the West was, but she had never considered anyone could match the power of the Jade Emperor.

“Her Most Royal Majesty the Queen had bestowed upon me the great honour of



seeking out the perfect place for an orchard of peaches whose magical fruits grant immortality. Well, while I was exploring options near the Jade Pool, a dreadful roar conjured a gust of wind that nearly knocked me out of the air!

“That’s when I laid eyes on *her*. Biao had cornered a defenceless farmer against a dawn redwood tree! The poor man told me the whole terrible tale. Passing by, he had noticed the tiger trapped in a pit and felt sorry for her. But as soon as he’d lowered his shovel down for her to climb up –” the bird paused for dramatic effect – “that treacherous Biao grabbed it ... and *pounced!*”

“The farmer cried out to a passing rabbit: ‘Is it fair for this tiger to eat me when I’ve just saved her life?’ The rabbit answered that it wasn’t fair at all. But one ferocious growl from Biao, and the rabbit

changed her mind and hopped away!

“The farmer then turned to the dawn redwood. ‘Do you think it is fair for this tiger to eat me when I’ve just saved her life?’ he begged the tree.

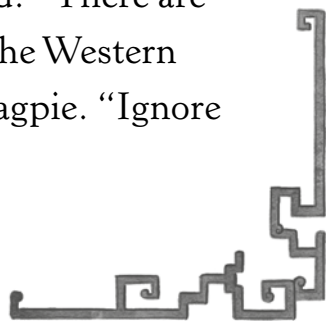


“‘Not fair,’ the tree whispered, though its branches trembled under the ferocity of the tiger’s glare.”

Ming was totally rapt. “Whoa,” she muttered. “Even the trees are afraid of Biao!”

“Talking trees?” Miaow mumbled with a swish of his tail.

Ming frowned at her friend. “There are all sorts of spooky things in the Western Forest!” She turned to the magpie. “Ignore him. What happened then?”



The bird glared at Miaow and continued.
“Furious that the redwood would *dare* to speak against her, the tiger raised a mighty paw and tore *five* gashes into the bark of one of the most sacred trees in the forest!



“After telling me this story, the farmer asked me the same question he had asked the rabbit and the tree. I agreed with him, of course,” she flapped. “But I couldn’t let the tiger know that. Instead, I asked them to re-enact what had happened, explaining that I couldn’t properly judge without seeing it for myself. As soon as Biao jumped back into the pit, I shouted to the farmer, ‘RUN!’

“The tiger was enraged and lunged at me with her claws. I only narrowly escaped!” The magpie twisted around to show off a tear in her tail feathers.

Ming’s eyes widened. “You almost became a *short-tailed* mountain lady!”

The magpie settled herself and preened her feathers. “You now know all I know. I must return to my duties for the Queen Mother of the West.”

Miaow stopped her. “Would you please

take us to Biao first? She must return with us to prepare for the upcoming Year of the Tiger.”

“Year of the Tiger? More like Year of *Treachery*! I want nothing more to do with that monster.”

“We can help with that!” Ming offered. “If you take us to Biao, we’ll take her far away from the Western Forest. You won’t ever have to see that ... *treacherous* tiger again.”

The long-tailed mountain lady squawked and fluffed her feathers. “Deal.”