

## The Parable of the Fool Emperor

胖子紀年第三年，兔年：

一條巨龍出現在紫禁城上空，恐嚇順天府百姓數日。它的鬚鬚如同城池般寬闊，從它口中噴湧而出一聲充滿怨恨的咆哮，將河流染成黑色，充滿了膽汁。恐嚇的第三天，一位銀商向胖子皇帝遞交了一份呈請書。皇帝已經數週末露面，深藏在紫禁城迷宮般的殿堂。呈請書懇求皇帝採取措施，消除恐嚇，因為每天都有另一箱珍貴的銀子在這條復仇之龍的詛咒下化為銅。

呈請書抵達養心殿，一位侍從小心翼翼地將它放在一堆類似的信件之上，毫髮無傷。龐子皇帝一把抓起它，甚至沒有破開封印，就把它揉成一團，放進了他正在熬煮一種奇異化學湯的火裡。這間上書廳已經被改造成了煉金實驗室，皇帝已經為此耗費了數週時間。一名侍從走進房間，但他們還來不及開口，就被皇帝狠狠地制止了，他正陶醉於眼前小瓶裡翻滾的水銀。

「你看不見嗎？賢者之石就在我手邊！很快我就能擁有足夠的黃金填滿王國裡的每個山谷，全部屬於我！下一個打擾我學習的人，將被靈池封印！」

話音剛落，火焰猛地爆發，將那可憐的皇帝猛地向後踉蹌，長長的鬚鬚也被燒焦了。在劈啪作響的烈焰中，月亮公主的身影出現了，雙眼怒火中燒。

On the third year of the Pangzi Era, the year of the Rabbit:

A great dragon appeared above the Forbidden City and terrorised the people of Shuntian for days. Its whiskers were as wide as the city itself, and from its maw escaped a rancorous screech that turned the rivers black with bile. On the third day of the terror, a silver merchant sent a written petition to the Pangzi Emperor, who had been unseen for weeks, hidden deep within the labyrinthine halls of the Forbidden City. The petition begged for the Emperor to do something about the terror, as every day another crate of his precious silver was being turned to copper thanks to the curses of the vengeful dragon.

The petition arrived in the Hall of Mental Cultivation,<sup>1</sup> and an attendant placed it carefully atop a pile of similar letters, completely untouched. The Pangzi Emperor grabbed it and, without even breaking the seal, crumpled it and placed it inside the fire he was using to boil a strange chemical broth. The Hall for petitions had been converted into an alchemical laboratory that had consumed the Emperor's attention for weeks. An attendant entered the room, but before they opened their mouth they were viciously shushed by the emperor, enraptured by the roiling mercury in the vial before him.

"Can't you see? The Philosopher's Stone is within my reach! Soon I shall have enough gold to fill every valley in the realm, all to myself! The next to interrupt my studies shall be silenced by *Lingchi*!"<sup>2</sup>

With that, the flame flared and sent the wretched emperor reeling back, his long beard singed. From within the crackling inferno, the image of the Moon Princess

<sup>1</sup> Structure within the Forbidden City used for the processing of "memorials," a Ming-era petitioning system. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hall\\_of\\_Mental\\_Cultivation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hall_of_Mental_Cultivation)

<sup>2</sup> The "Death by a Thousand Cuts." <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lingchi>

龐子皇帝對著這幽靈咆哮，從華麗的長袍中扯出十字架、星月和大衛之星，抵禦西方所謂的惡魔。月亮公主毫不畏懼，用千蛇之聲說：

「渺小愚蠢之人。天命從你手中溜走，如同沙漏過篩。若你不響應巨龍的召喚，它將把你的宮殿葬身灰燼！」

皇帝挺直身軀，蔑視火焰中的神祇。

「這是我的帝國。這裡所有的生靈，從卑微的蜉蝣到可怕的巨龍，都服從我的意志。清晨，它們從四面八方向我的宮殿，為我鳴叫。」

一團烏雲爬過天花板，舌頭舔舐著椽子。月亮公主舉起十二隻右臂，做出祝福的手勢，說道：

“我的耐心已經耗盡。我將把你們驅逐到伊國，在那裡你們必須奪回你們的王冠。帶著足夠的黃金回到這片海岸，填滿你們珍貴的山谷，王位將重回你們的懷抱。在此之前，你們將過著乞丐般的生活。”

巨龍撕開了他寢宮的屋頂，魁梧的皇帝驚恐地抬頭望去，隨後被抓著袍子，像貓帶著孩子一樣飛出了城。呼嘯的狂風刮走了他手指上的戒指和身上的衣裙，等到巨龍越過浩瀚的海洋，看到東方荒蕪的沙漠時，他已身無分文，只剩下纏腰布。

appeared, eyes glowing with fury.<sup>3</sup>

The Pangzi Emperor snarled at the apparition, and grabbed from within his ornate robes the Cross, the Star and Crescent, and the Star of David to ward off what in the West was a demon. Undeterred, the Moon Princess spoke with the voice of a thousand serpents:

"Small, foolish man. The Mandate of Heaven slips from your grasp like sand through a sieve. If you do not answer the Dragon's call, it shall bury your palace in ash!"

The Emperor rose to his meagre full height and glared defiantly at the deity within the flames.

"This is my empire. All of its creatures, from the lowly grasshopper to the fearsome dragon, serve my will. In the mornings, they face my palace from across the realm and bay in my honour."

A dark cloud of smog crawled across the ceiling, its tongues licking at the rafters. The Moon Princess lifted her twelve right arms in the sign of benediction<sup>4</sup> and spoke thus:

"My patience is worn thin. I cast you out into the Land of Yi,<sup>5</sup> where you shall be forced to earn your crown back. Return to these shores with enough gold to fill your precious valleys, and the throne shall be yours again. Until then, you shall live the life of a pauper."

The great and terrible dragon tore the roof off his chamber, and the stout Emperor gazed up in terror before being lifted by the scruff of his robes and flown out of the city, like a cat with its child. The howling wind stripped the rings from his fingers and the dress from his body, so that by the time the beast had crossed the vast ocean and sighted the barren deserts of the East, he had nought but his

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<sup>3</sup> Chang'e, goddess of the moon. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chang%27e>

<sup>4</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hand\\_of\\_benediction](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hand_of_benediction)

<sup>5</sup> Barbarians. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dongyi>, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hua%E2%80%93Yi\\_distinction](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hua%E2%80%93Yi_distinction)



loincloth.

龐子皇帝從龍牙中掙脫出來，落在一座沙丘上。他掙脫了沙土，頭髮蓬亂，凝視著如今已是家園的無邊無際的景色，不禁對上天的命運嗤之以鼻。

The Pangzi Emperor was let free from the dragon's fangs and landed in a dune. Freeing himself from the sand, hair made wild and unkempt, he gazed out at the endless landscape which was now his home, and scorned the heavens for his fate.

