

The Monkey King

ON A DISTANT MOUNTAINOUS ISLAND there was once a magic stone. This magic stone was watched over by the Sun, Moon, and Wind, and one day, the Wind blew gently over the stone. Over time, the wind shaped it, and it began to resemble a monkey. The stone monkey began to come to life, and lived among the other animals of the island, eating, drinking, running, and swimming.

It became clear that this monkey was no ordinary monkey. This monkey was so clever and brave that the other monkeys on the island made him their king. He then named himself Sun Wukong, which means the Handsome Monkey King, and made himself a great stone throne. Sun Wukong went on quests for magical tools and garments to make him more powerful—so powerful that he was able to escape Death when it came to take him.

All the while, the gods watched Sun Wukong. The gods grew worried that Sun Wukong's thirst for power was getting out of control, so they called him to the Heavens for a meeting. "This is great!" thought Sun Wukong. "I'm certain they have called me to proclaim me a god. How could they not? I am Sun Wukong, the greatest, cleverest being that ever lived!"

However, when he got there, he found that The Jade Emperor, the ruler of the Heavens, had something else in mind. "I hereby proclaim you Protector of Horses," he said. "It will forever more be your duty to watch over our heavenly stables."

"Pah!" cried the Monkey King. "I am no farmer. I demand to be a god!" To get back at the Emperor, he let the horses loose, and they ran wild across the kingdom.

The Jade Emperor could see that the Monkey King wasn't going to be easy to tame. He approached him later with a new request. "How about being the Guardian of the Royal Garden?"

Sun Wukong accepted the job, hoping he could work his way up to god one day. Then, one day, there was a royal banquet honoring all the most important gods. He was not invited—as the groundskeeper, he had to watch from the side. "That's enough," fumed the Monkey King. "I declare war!" The gods sent all their best warriors to fight Sun Wukong, but he defeated them all with his wits and trickery. The war went on until the Jade Emperor called on Buddha himself to imprison the Monkey King in the palm of his golden hand.

THINK ABOUT IT

The Monkey King is a character that shows up in several folktales in China. Using what you know about his personality, write a new story starring the Monkey King on a separate sheet of paper.