



# REINCARNATE

By J.R. Horsting

## REINCARNATE



Being thirteen years old is hard enough, but when your dad dies in a weird car accident and your mom quickly remarries his not-so-best friend, it's a lot harder. Meet Nate. He's an average, above-average nerd. He gets picked on. He tries to meet girls and fails. His oddball friends still think he's the cool one. He goes out for sports, but he's better at homework and being alone.

Skip, his annoying new stepdad wants him and his depressed mother, CC, to go on an adventure. Tibet. Rock climbing, rugged living, and enlightenment! To stop the relentless sales pitches, reluctantly they go.

On the flight, Nate has an awful dream again. It's raining. He's with his dad, driving home from a fine time at the museum. "Another great day for the Richmond men!" A swerving oncoming driver, a glint of dad's gold pendant, an airbag in his face, the sound of glass shattering and steel groaning. Darkness, flashes of light, then his mom wearing the pendant, tearfully speaking. "Daa...uh...Dad died." Nate slams awake in the plane. "Nooooo!!" A bewildered flight attendant slowly pulls back the offered bags of peanuts that suddenly no one wants. His mom soothes him, still wearing the pendant.

Tibet. Nate locks eyes with a beautiful young greeter at the airport. They share a smile, but he's quickly shoved into a car and they drive away. Tibet is beautiful. Skip can't stop pointing out the flora and fauna incorrectly to Nate and his mom. Nate corrects him until he's met with, "No one likes a smart guy." They reach a magical mist-laden village overlooked by an impressive Buddhist temple. Skip brags about how he knows everyone. "Hey, pal! How's it shaking?" They avoid him, offering small greetings to CC and Nate.

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The family settles in at a pleasant bed and breakfast. Skip orders Nate to bed, but Nate can't sleep and goes out to see the village. At the doorway...slam!...he runs into the girl greeter from the airport, Tama Tzu. Nate mangles her name and finally asks if he can call her Tammy Sue. She doesn't mind at all. She's at her second job but would love to show him around.

The lights in the village make it look even more magical. Mist from the mountains has wet the road, which mirrors the building's decorations and candles. They walk, getting to know the town and each other. Nate asks of the moonlit temple. He thinks he sees a flashlight searching inside. Tama says, "It is most magical. Tomorrow, I will take you there." It's time for her to return home, so they say shy goodnights.



Nate's on cloud nine. A beautiful girl just asked him on a date. But it's short-lived. A teenager named Xiobo and his two thugs stop him on the way back to the hotel and rough him up. "Stay away from Tama. She is promised to me." Nate's a little shaken, but still determined to see Tammy Sue. "She's worth a beating," he mumbles.

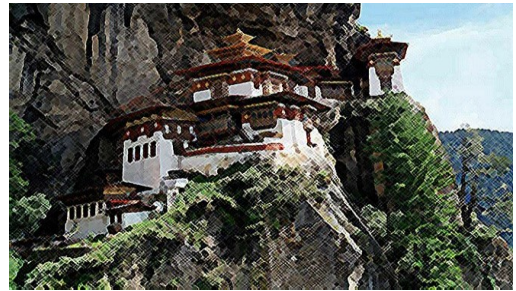
That night, Nate has a different dream. It's magical, flowing and there's a short, fat, glowing, gold, laughing bald guy dancing around. He speaks in near song. "Hey, it's you! Come to the temple. Remember, she's worth a beating! I would have said she's worth flowers but to each his own!"

The next day, Skip charges in, "Your mom has another headache." "I wonder why," Nate grumbles. Skip leaves, ordering, "You watch her. I have business in town." Nate goes to check on his mom. She greets him warmly but looks terrible.

Chuntao, the housekeeper, knocks, and enters. After a short conversation, she brings tea that might help CC feel better. While serving, Chuntao notices the pendant. "That is the Medallion of Karma. It is meant to bless a shrine, not to be worn. That would bring bad fortune."

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Nate tells CC to take it off. She does, telling him it was his father's, a gift from Skip. As they talk, images from Chinese art appear. Artifacts have gone missing from temples. Patrons have been mugged and injured. Weapons have been arriving from China at a rogue military base. General Lei's soldiers are a peace-keeping force stationed near town. When Nate's dad died, his business partner Skip took over the company. All assets went to Skip, including their house and money. It looked perfectly legal to the courts. Skip gave CC a way out...marry him.



When CC removes the pendant, handing it to Nate, she starts feeling better and thinking more clearly. With a kiss, Nate leaves to meet Tama who is happy to see him. They're off to the Temple, hand in hand. Xiobo has seen this from the shadows. "He was warned."

As Nate and Tama walk up the hill, it feels familiar to him. A bothersome praying mantis annoys Nate, making Tama laugh. "Don't hurt it. They are good luck." They reach the temple in the late afternoon. Golden hour. Closing the doors, they meet the monk, Wenyan, who laments, "With no locks on the temple, valuable artifacts keep disappearing." Nate asks, "Is this one of them?" "Why yes, The Medallion of Karma," Tama says they'll put it back. "Thank you. I can tell you are not the ones who took it. The guards will be here shortly." Wenyan departs down the now-misty hill.

Inside the temple, as they replace the pendant, Nate sees a happy golden statue. "It's that guy from my dream!" "Buddha?" The doors open. It's Xiobo and goons. Tama demands, "Leave us alone. The guards will be here soon!" Xiobo replies, "We are the guards. Bao and I want to talk to your new friend. Feng, take Tama home." Nate leaps in the way. "No!" A fast punch and kick from the older boy crumbles him. Forcibly taken away, Tama calls, "Nate!"



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Nate tries to stand as they leave but is stopped by Xiobo's heavy fist. "I did tell you, she is promised to me! My girl! My village! My temple!" Each word is accented by a brutal hit, kick or both. "It's all mine to take or to trash!" Badly hurt, Nate tries to stand and repeats, "No!" Xiobo sees the medallion. "What have you done?" He destroys some decorations in rage. "You dare return protection to the temple?" Bao thug stops him from finishing off Nate. "We have to go. They'll come for him. He probably dies anyway. Look at him." Bloody and broken, Nate falls hard on the stone floor by the statue of Buddha. Xiobo threatens, "If you talk, I will make sure you never do it again." Trying to get to his feet, Nate reaches out and touches Buddha's belly, but passes out as a distant heavy bell sounds. He floats in a dream, leaves, and flowers swirling around him. He ascends higher. Familiar animals and symbols of multi-colored glowing smoke encircle him. Each then joins him until he glows brightly. Then they explode to all white. The white fades. Nate is in a translucent temple in the clouds.



Nate painfully mutters to a giant statue, "Hey, Buddha..." A small glowing, transparent Buddha peeks out. "Hey, yourself!" It points at the statue. "Don't you love it? I think I really pull this place together." Sucking it in, the glowing Buddha continues, "I've lost some weight! You can see it in many of my recent statues." He lets it out. "Aaahh! Good news or bad news?" Nate is silent. "Okay, the good news: you're dead! The bad news: you're my champion! Uh...wait, I think I got that backward." Nate says, "I can't be dead. I'm in pain!" Buddha smiles "You think you're in pain? Believe you are not." Nate does and it works. Buddha admits, "I might have got that backward too."

Buddha becomes stoic. "You will be the first one given the power of reincarnation to use as a weapon. It will first manifest as the sacred Chinese zodiac. You will defend all of my believers and all of my creatures from those who have lost their way."

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Nate asks, "What?" Buddha is back to having fun. "Good news or bad?" Nate replies, "Does it matter?" "You're smarter than you look. Had to be. Good news, she loves you. Bad news, she loves you. I got that one right." With swirling symbols and animals, Nate starts to fade. He's back in the temple and stands up easily, but his eyes are only 6 inches from the floor. He sees his reflection on a metal surface. He's a rat. He blinks: it blinks. He waves: it waves. "No no no no...oh God. Jesus! Buddha!"



Under his breath, he adds, "Sorry." Nate is freaked out. He keeps checking himself in the reflection as if it will go away. "Make me...me. Make me!" Nothing. He decides to go to his mom. Terrified, he leaves the temple for the village. It's night. On the way, he starts to hear voices in the woods. The plants and animals are talking to him. As he goes by, a plant says, "Hey, quit pushing!" Nate sees a discarded matchbox, strikes a match, and holds it up to see. A moth flies in tight circles around him, proclaiming, "I thought it was the light at the end of the tunnel. It's just a rat holding a match!" It bumps him and flies off. He sees glowing eyes, raising up high. A snake strikes at him. A terrifying fight and chase ensue. Nate thinks he lost the monster. Again, bright eyes come closer. It's another rat.

Benni the rat tells him the rats and the villagers are getting sick from the spring water. Nate, with purpose, says, "Show me." They run off toward the village and arrive at the spring. Nate tells Benni to lead him upstream. They find a small house with a garage. A steel drum on its side leaks oil into the spring. "We're going to need more rats." Hundreds come out of the bushes. Benni says, "They all wanted to meet the new guy. Especially Sheila." She gives Nate a come hither look. "Eeww...hi. We need some light." He jumps to a string switch and the bulb glows. All the rats "Ooooo" at his power. They get some rope, work together and set the oil drum upright. Nate says, "I gotta go. See you, Benni. See you, guys...Sheila." As he scurries to town, the light in the shed goes off and on as a hundred tiny voices repeat, "My turn."

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The townspeople look for Nate with his Mom and Tama. Xiobo and the thugs just fake it. Nate realizes he can't be seen like this and thinks back to what Buddha told him. "Believe you are not." The light and symbols swirl around him. Now he's Nate on all fours, in the bushes. He stands. "I'm over here! I'm okay!" Tama runs to him so hard they fall to the ground as she squeezes him. He grunts, "Well, I was okay." She kisses him. He adds, "Oh yeah, I'm okay." She smiles, embarrassed. Nate makes excuses and tells the people, "Whoever has that oil drum by the spring, be careful. That's what was making you sick." One man says, "I will." Nate hugs his mom while holding Tama's hand.

They go to the inn, town lights going on and off, and shrieks of, "Rat!" Nate tells the whole story. They don't believe him until he shows them by changing into a rat. Tama asks can't you become something cute?

Skip bursts in, carrying a large bag. He sees the rat and tries to kill it. CC yells, "NO!" and attacks Skip. The rat makes it out the door, a bright flash, and Nate walks in. "Hi skip. What's in the bag? It sounds like it's full of metal." "Oh, just some stuff I picked up. Come to bed, CC." She replies, "I'm staying with Nate. He went missing today." Skip says, "That's what that commotion was? Get some sleep. We're going climbing tomorrow. Hey, where's your necklace?" "I lost it." Skip is angry, "I was counting on it...um, being in the family a long time." He walks out, under his breath saying, "I'll just need to check the ropes again."

Nate and CC finish talking with Tama. She says, "Xiobo won't bother me, but you be careful." She kisses Nate and leaves.

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At the crack of dawn, Nate wakes up as a crowing rooster. CC wakes barely and says, "Good morning." The rooster Nate shrugs and flaps out the window. He finds a large chicken farm near the village. The hens say they can't take it. "We need more eggs. More eggs! Families are starving. The pressure!" A hen passes out. Changing back to a boy, Nate talks to the farmer. Soon, feeling foolish, the farmer is reading stories to the chickens while playing soothing music. Eggs are rolling out. Xiobo sees Nate and goes after him. Nate changes into a rooster and flies to the top of the barn. "It's hard, but I can fly!"

As a snake, Nate learns the rats are eating the eggs, so he brokers a deal with the farmers. More snakes mean fewer rats means less damage to crops, which helps the goats. As a rabbit, he barter another deal to save more crops with fewer rabbits being shot. Xiobo finds him. Nate ducks down in a bush and a rabbit runs away while the thugs beat the bushes. They chase him around a corner just to find a big snake on a barrel, hissing and striking. Not sure if it's poisonous: they run. They find Nate and chase him through a door, but a large goat butts them back out. Nate brokers a deal for the pigs on a hunger strike in exchange for no more suckling pig dishes. Nate keeps popping in to say hi to Tama, arriving as a new animal, changing to himself, kissing her, then changing back. When she kisses him, he can't resist changing into a pig before the kiss is over. She screams and chases him with a broom. He is a hero to the people and the animals. All the while, the pesky praying mantis follows Nate and even seems to try and help him.

Proud of himself, Nate's walking to see his mom when a little bird tells him of great danger. Skip was messing with the ropes before the climb, shaving one of them with a knife. CC enjoys the view and the climb while Skip is actually being nice and encouraging. Part way up, they come to a tough section. "I'll climb up and lower a rope down, CC." Nate, as a rabbit, is at full speed telling his new friends, "I need help! Meet me at the mountain!"



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Skip lowers a rope with an obvious fray in the middle. CC ties on and starts to climb. Skip pulls on the rope as if to help, the rope fraying more with each pull. Nate has changed into a rooster and is flying up the mountain in short bursts. A few rats pass him as he rests. Nate becomes a rat and climbs fast. The rope gives way and CC falls. As a rat, Nate yells, "Mom!" She stops falling. Hundreds of rats and several snakes, helped by Nate (a boy again), strain to hold the broken line. "Easy does it, everyone." They lower CC to the ledge. Skip has seen the whole thing. Birds start strafing him. Insects sting him. He looks up and sees chicken butts as eggs start smashing down on him. He falls from the ledge, hits some tree branches, and then the bushes. Sounding hurt, he declares, "I'm okay." A lone rooster flaps above him becomes a four-hundred-pound wild boar and lands hard on Skip. "I'm..oh...kaaay."

At the hospital, Skip's doctor says he's a lucky guy and will pull through. Nate sarcastically says, "Great." The doctor continues, "We'll need to observe him for a few days. He's babbling about animals attacking him and pigs flying. It's probably the painkillers. Nate tells his mom the whole story. Skip was trying to make it look like an accident. Stay away from him. CC agrees. Nate says that he's asked the animals to guard the temple. He intends to prove that Skip, along with Xiobo and his thugs, is selling the stolen artifacts. As he explains, the same mantis flies in and perches on Nate's shoulder. CC asks, "Who's this?" The mantis looks at her and tilts its head. "Who, Creepy? I don't know but I think he likes me." As if on cue, Creepy touches Nate's cheek. "Knock it off. I need to get to the temple."

On the way, he's stopped by a dog. "Hurry," says the dog, "the children are trapped in a ravine, scared and crying." Nate feels a familiar twinge and changes to a large wolf-like dog. Monkeys show up, stating, "We're here to help Buddha's champion." Changing to a monkey, Nate joins them in a chain to lift the kids out. The dog leads them home.

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Tama walks to speak with CC, but Xiobo and the thugs intervene. Grabbing her by the arm, he declares, "Tama, I'm going to be a rich man. You will live in luxury." She tries to pull away. "You're hurting me! Stay away. I am not promised to you." Xiobo insists, "Yes, you are!" CC interrupts, "Well, I'm breaking that old promise and you will make a new one. Leave my son's girlfriend alone!" Xiobo laughs. "And you will stop me?" "No, them." She points to the angry animals and villagers. Xiobo and the thugs leave.

Nate gets to the temple. Wenyan says, "Animals chased the guards away." Nate says, "They weren't guards, they were the thieves. Tell the tourists no candy, just fruit. Chocolate gives monkeys gas...trust me." Entering the temple, Nate adds, "I need to go talk with Buddha." The magic circles him and Nate is transported to Buddha's sky temple.

"You make someone your champion, but they don't call, they don't write," jests Buddha. "Good news or bad?" "Not this again," Nate sighs. "Good." Buddha smiles. "You're doing great! The bad is...you will have to stop a little, tiny war. Finish your tasks. Go see General Lei. He's not a bad man. Quite the artist, as a child. You'll need all the help you can get." Buddha imparts, "To change one's heart, you must first change their mind. Ask Wenyan for horses. You have three temples and a village to protect." Then he smiles. "Budh-luck! Budh-by!" He fades, laughing.

Nate quickly leaves the temple and finds Wenyan pointing. "Wenyan! You have horses, don't you? I need them." Nate looks to where Wenyan points. Horses. Wenyan mutters, "How could he have known?" As a horse, Nate leads the other horses toward town. On the way, they see a barn on fire with horses and young oxen.



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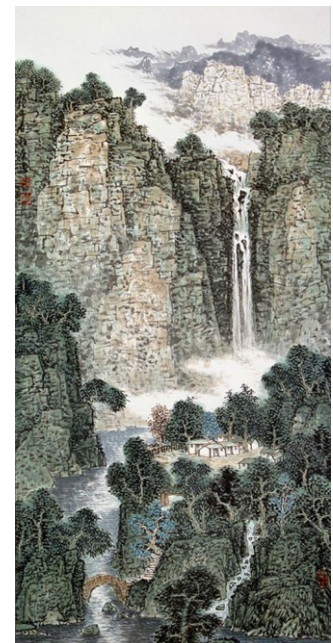
The farmers are overwhelmed. Changing to a large ox, Nate crashes through the barn wall, then through the corral gate, freeing the horses and the oxen. Reverting to Nate, he rubs his head and coughs. Talking to the farmhands, Nate realizes he speaks Chinese.



Back in the village, a tiger that's been killing goats is trapped in a pit. It circles as the villagers look down. One says, "We will be rich. The zoo will pay for it." Nate arrives and says in Chinese, "We have to let it go. It's a mother finding food for her cubs. If she doesn't return, they will die." He is met with murmurs of disbelief. Tama and CC run to stand with him. Nate says, "I am Buddha's champion. Brace yourselves. This might freak some of you...err...I mean all of you out." Nate, surrounded by light and symbols swirling, morphs into a mighty tiger. It roars before becoming each of the other animals. The townspeople all kneel before him. "Get up, find a ladder and get that mother tiger out of the pit! Don't even think about calling the zoo!" The tiger is freed. The villagers give her food for the cubs.

Injured and bruised, Skip, Xiobo, Feng, and Bao watch. They leave in Xiobo's car. Skip says, "It's time to bring in Lieutenant Chao. There has been a religious uprising in the village and my son's the leader." He chuckles. "We need to speed up the plans. This is going to work out great for us, boys."

They arrive at the military encampment and are brought to Lt. Chao. In private, Skip tells of the developments in the village. The villagers are rallying behind his no-good son. "I kept my side of the bargain, looted temples, and made them seem unsafe. I drove the villagers away, but my son is bringing them back." Lt. Chao speaks. "Not if there is no temple to go back to. Make certain you remove all the gold and artifacts as in our deal. Then, I will command the temples to be destroyed. And about your son, that is most unfortunate. The penalty for insurrection by a foreigner is death." Skip adds, "My wife is helping him."



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Chao grins "Most unfortunate." General Lei must not know of this insurrection until it is too late."

Nate talks with the villagers as the animals listen. They make a plan to defend the temples. Tama tells Nate her dad was in the military. He can help. "Organize as best you can. Be safe. The animals will help. They'll watch for your signals and protect you." Nate hugs his mom and kisses Tama. "There's a general I have to see. Hold them, I'll get help." Nate changes to a horse and gallops away.



Human again, Nate walks up to the gate of the encampment. In Chinese, he asks to see General Lei. The guards are amused. Nate insists. "Tell him Buddha wishes for me to speak with him." They check him for weapons and find nothing. Nate is escorted to a holding cell and meets the sergeant of the guard. "You have no papers, no credentials and you wish to see the general?" Nate says, "Get him now or explain why you arrested a monkey." Nate changes into a monkey, does a back flip, sits down, and drums his fingers, smiling and staring at the sergeant. The astonished sergeant tried to speak but falls silent. The monkey acts bored, looking at his fingernails. The sergeant thinks, then says, "I'll just go get him then." Nate turns back to human form. "Thanks." When he returns, the sergeant is relieved that Nate is still Nate, who just mimes monkey at him.



Nate and the general walk. "So, Buddha sent you." Nate says, "Yes, he said we should talk." Lei asks, "What did you do to freak out Sergeant Cheng like that?" They enter an office.

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Skip, Xiobo and thugs are just getting done with the first temple. It has not gone well. Animals keep stealing things from them. A group of soldiers, who have refused to enter the temple, finish loading crates. Villagers arrive on horseback. At gunpoint, they're accused of insurrection as explosives are loaded into the temple. "Soon you will have no temples to plan your uprisings," barks Lt. Chao. "Set up a perimeter! No monks, no villagers!"

The convoy makes its way to the next small temple, delayed by oddly orchestrated animals. Goat herds and pigs won't move. Oxen ram the front Jeep, tipping it over. Soldiers upright the Jeep and fire guns to disperse the beasts.

Monkeys throw mud, coating the windshields. A soldier cleaning a windshield remarks, with an unpleasant face, "This isn't mud." Finally, the soldiers approach the second temple. Half of the village is there with lots of animals. Tama and her dad, Jianjun, stand in front. Skip yells, "Get out of the way or we'll mow you down." Weapons drawn, Lt. Chao and the soldiers walk toward the villagers.

A stern General Lei stares at Nate. Nate looks worried. A knock at the door. "Come in!" A soldier enters with papers, salutes, and leaves. The general smiles. "Do the monkey again." Nate does an impression of a monkey. General Lie laughs. "I wish I could have seen his face. Buddha, really likes my art?" Nate nods. "He told me about it. Said you were good! I'm sorry General, but Buddha asked me to defend the temples. I've got to go. Find out what you can and meet me at the main temple near the village." "It would be my honor. And Nate, call me Boqin." Leaving, Nate smiles. "Thanks, Boqin." General Lei picks up the phone and yells, "Staff meeting, now!"



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Tama and Jianjun face Lt. Chao. "I see you brought your daughter. Has the retired Lieutenant forgotten not to bring valuables to the front of conflict?"

Jianjun replies, "I have not forgotten. My daughter is here because she is brave and strong. You are only here for what you find valuable, but you will..."

Lt. Chao interrupts, "We are here to stop an uprising! We have proof of the insurrection. Our vehicles have been damaged. The villagers stand against us! A former senior military officer is their leader!"

Tama leans forward in anger, and says "Now!"

Monkeys swoop in and take weapons. Oxen, boars, goats, and a few chickens form a line in front of the villagers. Dogs and snakes surround the soldiers, viciously growling and hissing.

Lt. Chao commands, "Forget the animals! Target the villagers!"

Tama stops the fight. "Stand down!" The animals back off.

Treasure is loaded and charges are planted. "I will make an example. Jianjun?" As he looks up, Tama's dad is shot. He falls.

Holding the gun, Lt. Chao says, "That is what happens to

traitors." Tama and the villagers rush to Jianjun's aid. He's gravely wounded.

His daughter weeps. Skip mutters, "This is going better than I hoped." Skip and Xiobo's thugs load the truck, wearing certain artifacts, grinning with great satisfaction. They depart for the main temple.



A storm is brewing as the military convoy arrives at the main temple. CC and Weynan await them beside the remaining villagers and animals.

CC steps forward. "You don't want to do this! These people are trying to save a great gift in this temple, not fight you."

Skip stands out of the truck. "They will have to, and they'll lose. Take them down!"

The soldiers advance and villagers stand strong. Lightning strikes as rain falls.

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A strong horse leaps over the military then lands as a majestic tiger and then stands as Nate. "No! This needs to stop."

Possessed, Skip speaks as his voice echoes, "It has just begun. The power of belief is more than you understand. People have put their faith in totems." Nate changes into a tiger and leaps toward Skip. But gunfire stops him. Villagers take cover.

Skip continues, "They pilgrimage to a crying statue or an image of their redeemer in a piece of toast. They wish to be empowered by their beliefs. Since before history, belief is mightier than any military. Why would a tyrant seek the Ark? The Grail? The Spear of Destiny? Why is the holy land a battlefield? Items. The belief is in the items. You have missed the greatest point. An old, pacifist faith with a weak child as its hero. I have the belief of 500 million people! You have the belief maybe 50...60, at the most. I have control of the main temple, the Tibetan skull cup, the first prayer beads, the enchanted ritual weapons, and the Karma medallion. You have nothing."

Skip drinks from the rain-filled skull cup and passes it to his thugs. They grow several feet taller and glow brightly, beginning to resemble ancient warriors. Skip taunts, "Think you can take your old man?" Nate stands. "Old? Yes. Mine? No. But I thought you'd never ask." He charges as a tiger and is swatted aside with an ancient club. Nate recovers as an Ox and scatters them. They gang up on him, he escapes as a rat. The villages chant in support. Nate changes so fast, he starts to blend all of the Zodiacs together. A snake-winged tiger, an ox-boar



monkey, a human-dog horse. They knock him down, but he fights on, beating them. Nate stands as himself. "Leave here, take your weapons with you, but you will leave without the artifacts."

A shot is fired by Lt. Chao. Nate falls dead. Lightning strikes. Everyone falls silent. CC screams and falls, cursing Skip.

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Rain continues to fall. A light pierces the heavens and targets Nate, symbols tracing it. A mystic dragon stands with Nate. He speaks. "You discount the animals, but they believe in these people." All the animals attack, even the formerly-captured mother tiger. Soldiers are overwhelmed. Skip and his gang is down, their mystic lights fading. Nate yells, the dragon roars, and all the animals and villagers turn their heads as if they understand. Defiant, Lt. Chao speaks. "The charges placed are more powerful than you imagine. Flee now and you might save your lives. This whole region will be destroyed." General Lei's commanding voice is heard. "You are a disgrace, Chao. Your operation is over. This ends now." The full military arrives behind him. General Lei comes to Nate, anguished. "The other infantry will not respond, as if to save themselves their treachery." Showing the com device, Tama's voice comes through. "Many of the soldiers have left. Some of them just dropped their weapons. Can anyone hear me!" "I hear you," says Nate. "Nate, my dad was shot! He refused to leave. He went into the temple to defuse a bomb. The villagers and animals left for the eastern temple." Nate replies. "Get out of there!" Tama says, "I won't leave my father!"

The villagers, some soldiers, and animals strain; pulling a bomb up the muddy side of a hill, all working together to take it away from the temple. Injured, Jianjun works feverishly to defuse the bomb. Wenyan runs out to tell everyone the time is up. Nate yells, "Take cover!" He becomes a glowing dragon, swoops into the temple, and tightly wraps himself around the bomb. Boom!

Dust and debris wash over the huddled villagers and soldiers. A huge explosion is seen on the distant hill. The second temple remains silent. As the smoke clears, all the temples are still standing. Tama's voice comes over general Lei's com as he rises. "My father did it. He defused the bomb! We heard explosions. Are you okay?" A soldier comes over the com. "We managed to get the explosive into a deserted ravine. We, both villagers and



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soldiers are safe here at the east temple." General Lei answers, "Contact the medics, and see to the wounded. Arrest all of Lt. Chao's sympathizers and take these four to lock up."

All eyes turn to CC as she slowly walks towards the smoldering structure of the blasted-out large temple that Nate entered as the dragon. Nate emerges injured and exhausted. "Is everyone okay? I don't feel so good." He staggers and collapses into CC's arms. The villagers and soldiers rejoice. All of them help the wounded.

Nate wakes up in a dreamlike state in Buddha's temple. Buddha gives him a big hug. "Not too bad, my champion! You died less than I thought you would! Well, it's not like I have anything to compare it to. You are the first. Try not to die so much. It takes a lot out of both of us...and it's kind of depressing. But hey, I'd look good at your funeral. I hear black is slimming." Nate asks, "Is everyone okay?" Buddha replies, "Go find out for yourself." And with that, Nate awakens in his hospital bed. CC and Tama are there, crying. They both hug him tightly as he groans. General Lei, smiling, leans in and says, "You did great! You helped save the country and its people. Your mom's not seeing anyone, is she? She's very pretty. I'd like to paint her. Nate objects, "Hey, that's my mom!" General Lei replies, "I know. Put in a good word for me."

Nate hears his father's voice. "I'm glad you're okay, son." He looks towards the window and sees the praying mantis, Creepy. "Yup, it's me." It waves its arm. "Sorry you couldn't understand me earlier, but it's great to see you!" Nate asks, "Dad?" Creepy continues, "Reincarnation. Weird, huh? Buddha filled me in and I came to check on you. Hey, let me introduce you to my fiancé. Cindy, say hi to my boy, Nate." A female praying mantis waves its arm. "Charmed." Nate's praying mantis dad continues, "We're getting married and having kids!"

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Alarmed, Nate says, "Once you mate, she's going to eat you." Creepy replies, "Hey, nobody's perfect. I'm proud of you. See you soon, son!" They fly away.

Later, Nate and Tama walk hand in hand at sunset. She asks, "So you're going to stay?" Nate nods. "Until mom finishes the legal work. Skip has a lot to answer for in both countries. I think she wants to stay. She's been spending a lot of time with the general." Tama asks, "So you stay...and we get married?" Shocked, Nate says, "I'm only thirteen! Can't we wait a few years?" Tama replies, "Fifteen would be okay." Nate exclaims, "Fifteen? I was thinking more like eighteen or nineteen!" Tama smiles, "What? Do you want me to be an old maid?" They kiss.

Buddha addresses the audience. "Good news or bad news?" He rolls his eyes. "Okay, bad news. It's the end. Good news? It's not the end!" He laughs.

## ReincarNate

