

# New Year legends in story-telling fest

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**ONCE UPON** a time, the God of Heaven organised a campaign to decide which 12 animals should make up the Chinese zodiac. Both the Dragon and the Rooster were selected, but the Rooster ranked lower than the Dragon because he had lent his horns to the cunning Dragon. Ever since then, the Rooster crows loudly to the Dragon every sunrise to return his horns

This is just one of the Chinese New Year legends to be narrated by mythologist and English lecturer Dr Mark Greene, in a free story-telling session.

Dr Greene, a New York City native with a Ph.D in Mythological Studies and Psychology, has been fascinated by mythology since he was a child. According to him, story-telling is an important element in mythology, which preserves culture. Thousands of years ago, only very few people could read and write. If people wanted to pass a custom on to the next generation, they would either draw pictures or tell the stories verbally.

Story-telling was not only crucial in ancient times, but is in modern



Mythologist Dr Mark Greene believes that stories are an integral part of culture. Photo: K.Y. Cheng

times too. "I believe story-telling points children in a positive direction by sparking their curiosity for their own culture as well as cultures from all over the world," Dr Greene said.

"Kids have the ability to let themselves completely go into the stories. When you say a big monster growls, you will see the fear in the children's eyes. They are good at visualising things in their minds."

According to Dr Greene, there are many similarities between Chinese and western cultures. For example, a lot of festivals are centred around food – turkey for Christmas and steamed pudding for Chinese New Year, to name just two. But most importantly, the whole family will gather together during traditional festivals for dinner, as a way of developing family bonding.

"Ideally, the child will glimpse the fact that humans around the world have more in common than they might have thought and that it is in learning about and enjoying our diversity that our lives are enriched," Dr Greene said.

But why ask a westerner to tell Chinese stories in English? "Telling Chinese stories in English is a practical and important way to bridge the cultures of East and West" he said.

"When a local child hears a Chinese myth in English, something may click in his mind along the lines of, 'Wow, that's a Chinese story and people from other countries know it, translate it and tell it in their language: our stories are part of a greater world of stories.'"

Dr Greene will share interesting stories of Chinese New Year on February 20, at 4pm and 5pm, in the fourth floor lobby of the Hong Kong Museum of Art. Admission is free. Reservations can be made on February 14 and 15, from 10am to noon. To book your seat, call 2734 2154. Other festive activities such as Chinese paper cutting and guided tours at the museum will also take place during Chinese New Year.

## Fire-breathing adventure

This exciting novel tells the tale of a brave young dragon on a quest to save his kind from destruction, writes *John Millen*

**LAST YEAR**, Christopher Paolini's marvellous dragon Eragon took to the skies and became a massive hit with readers all over the world. Now Firedrake, another brave and adventurous dragon, is challenging Eragon's supremacy as Earthling's favourite fire-breathing creature. Cornelia Funke, bestselling author of *Inkheart* and *The Thief Lord*, has created Firedrake, a high-flying dragon with a nose for adventure and a mission to achieve.

Young Firedrake lives with a colony of dragons in a hidden valley well away from the inquisitive eyes of mankind. But their secret existence is suddenly threatened when news arrives that human beings are planning to flood the valley as part of a new hydro-electric scheme. This is the first time that humans have encroached on the dragons' centuries old home, and something has to be done quickly.

All dragons know about the Rim of Heaven, a mythical valley in the Himalaya Mountains where legend says that dragons can live undisturbed forever. But does this wonderful place really exist? Firedrake makes up his mind to find out.

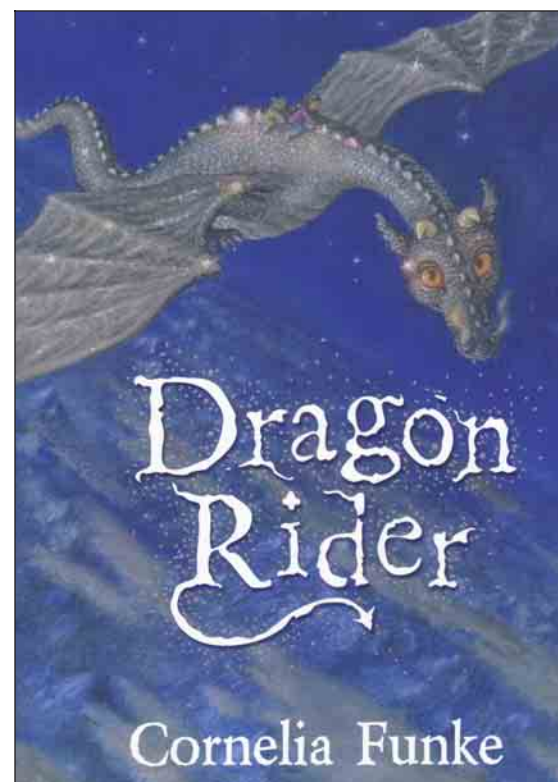
Accompanied by his best friend, a bad-tempered, argumentative fairy called Sorrel, Firedrake sets off on a mission to locate the Rim of Heaven. The two of them are soon joined by a

lonely orphan boy they come across soon after their adventure begins. The boy and the fairy ride on the dragon's back as he flies into the unknown to discover a new home for his fellow dragons. They have to hang on tightly because they know they are in for a bumpy and dangerous ride.

As the adventure picks up speed, the brave trio takes on board Twigleg, a tiny human-creature who is not what he seems. And not far behind this intrepid company of adventurers, there is an evil threat watching their every move. Nettlebrand, a powerful man-made dragon intent on hunting down every other existing dragon, has his sights set on Firedrake and will stop at nothing to kill him. Suddenly, Firedrake and his crew are facing a battle for survival.

Cornelia Funke's thousands of fans already know that she is a brilliantly original storyteller who casts a unique spell with each of her books. In *Dragon Rider*, she provides new and old readers with breathtaking adventure, colourful characters and a suspenseful multi-stranded story line.

*Dragon Rider* is a solid book that is well worth the money. At over 500 pages, it is a book to get your teeth into, a fantastic story that speeds along at breakneck pace towards its thrilling conclusion. We loved it.



*Dragon Rider*  
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Published by The Chicken House  
ISBN 1 90343490 4

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