1 Glued to the screen

1 At only 16, Laura Liang was the youngest person they'd ever chosen for TangCOM's summer intern program. Today was her first day, and she desperately wanted to make a good impression when she arrived at TangCOM
5 Tower on Hong Kong Island. She brushed her chin length hair, checked herself in the mirror and then took her new pair of high-heel shoes out of their box. In the other room, she heard her father telling her younger brother, Tianji, to turn his phone off yet again. His request, however, was
10 followed by another beep from Tianji's phone.

She knew she really shouldn't be happy that her father was getting upset with Tianji while he was making their breakfast, but she'd set out to create a phone game which was so addictive that a player couldn't look away from the
15 screen, and by the sound of things that's exactly what she'd done. Although she was still at school, she dreamed that Mr Tang, the head of TangCOM – Hong Kong's most powerful tech company, would offer her a paid job as soon as he set eyes on her game.

20 Laura suddenly heard her father shouting, "Fire! Fire! The building is on fire!" She rushed out of her bedroom and into their living room with the small kitchen in one corner.

Mr Liang was hitting a cooking pot with a large wooden spoon. Twelve-year-old Tianji was still playing the game on
25 his phone.

"What's wrong, Pa?" Laura asked, pulling on one shoe. "There's no fire."

"There will be if this pot of congee sits on the cooking ring much longer! Tianji, turn off your phone!"

30 "Let me deal with this, Pa," said Laura.

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screen [skriːn] Bildschirm, Leinwand • **intern** [ˈɪntɜːn] Praktikums- • **to brush** [ˈbrʌʃ] bürsten • **chin** [tʃɪn] Kinn • **high-heel** [ˌhaɪhiːl] Stöckel- • **addictive** [əˈdɪktɪv] süchtig machend • **by the sound of things** [ˌsaʊnd əv ˈθɪŋz] wie es sich anhört

1 She leant close and whispered, "Tianji, follow the red snake, swirl it in a circle and then make the circle smaller."

She watched her brother follow her instructions and she saw the game's pattern turn into a spiral.

5 "Now follow the snake down to the red square at the bottom," she went on. "Believe it's your eyes making the snake move and not your finger."

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to lean, leant [liːn, lent] sich lehnen, lehnte sich • **to swirl** [swɜːl] herumwirbeln • **instructions** [ɪnˈstrʌkʃənz] Anweisungen

Tianji stared deep into his phone as if he was losing himself in the game.

"Listen to my voice. Do what Papa tells you to and turn off your phone."

Mr Liang stared in disbelief as Tianji finally did as he was told. "Why did he turn it off when you told him to but not when I did?" Mr Liang asked as he put the congee into small bowls and dropped strips of cooked meat into them.

"My new game interacts with the brain on a very deep level. I found that when a player swirls the red snake down to its home at the bottom, I can plant ideas into their mind and they do what I ask," said Laura with a smile.

Tianji blinked like he'd just woken up from a dream and, when he realised he'd turned off his phone, he shouted, "Oh no, now I've got to start my game all over!"

"You have a terrible life, I'm sorry. Now eat." Mr Liang put a bowl of congee down in front of Tianji. "Laura, this game you've invented is driving me crazy. Your brother's glued to the screen for hours playing it. It's turned him into a real zombie."

"He wasn't one before?" Laura asked with a giggle.

"Ha, ha," replied Tianji slurping his food.

Mr Liang looked under the table. "I don't remember buying those shoes for you, Laura. High heels?"

"I earned the money to buy them. I've been repairing laptops for Alvin down at the PC Gold Arcade," said Laura. She finished eating and stood up. "How do I look?"

Laura turned around to show her father and brother her new outfit, a short red skirt and neat black jacket worn over a white blouse.

Mr Liang looked away and said, "Very grown up."

"But does this jacket go with the skirt?"

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in disbelief [ɪn dɪsˈbəliːf] fassungslos • **to drop** [drɒp] fallen lassen • **brain** [breɪn] Gehirn • **to blink** [blɪŋk] blinzeln • **zombie** [ˈzɒmbiː] Zombie • **giggle** [ˈɡɪɡl] Kichern • **to slurp** [ˈslɜːp] schlürfen

6

"Your mother was the one who knew about fashion. I'm afraid we aren't much help in this area," said Mr Liang.

"And how do you walk in high heels?" asked Laura.

"Can't help on that either." Mr Liang winked at Tianji.

"I've got to run!" Laura shouted as she teetered back to her bedroom.

"You'll need to learn how to walk in those shoes before you can run!" shouted Tianji in reply with a giggle.

"Don't tease your sister. Now, do you have your schedule for the summer?" Mr Liang asked Tianji.

"Yes, Papa. Mandarin club, drama club, football club, computer club, hip-hop dance club …"

Mr Liang looked confused. "Hip-hop dance club?"

"Handball club was full, so I just signed up for the next one on the list," said Tianji.

"Okay, Pa, I'll see you tonight," said Laura, putting two large laptop computers into her bag.

"I've finished my breakfast," said Tianji. "May I turn my phone back on now, please?"

"I guess so," said Mr Liang with a sigh. "Laura's new game hypnotises you. Remember the legend of Medusa, the gorgon whose hair was made of snakes? Anyone who looked into her eyes was turned to stone. Your game does that to people. They play it and it turns them to stone."

"It must be a good game then," said Laura. She thought about what her father had said, and her eyes opened wide. "I didn't have a name for the game, but now I do. Medusa! Thanks, Papa." She quickly kissed her father, picked up her bag and turned to go.

"Wait, Laura," said Mr. Liang. "I need you to look after Tianji on Sunday. He doesn't have any summer clubs that day and I have to work."

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to wink [wɪŋk] zwinkern • **to teeter** [ˈtiːtə] wanken • **sigh** [saɪ] Seufzen

7

"I'll save the date on my phone!" Laura replied as she was leaving the room.

Mr Liang looked around their small apartment. Every surface was covered with computer parts and old-fashioned storage disks. He shouted after her, "Use your brain to remember, Laura. You've even connected our fridge to the internet so it can order milk when we run out. Computers cannot compare with the human brain!"

Her father's voice faded into the distance. After shutting the front door, Laura squeezed past bikes in the narrow hallway. She teetered down the stairs and pushed open the front door. The humid air and noise of the busy street hit her in the face. With her bag over one shoulder, she made her way to the PC Gold Arcade.

Laura had lived in Sham Shui Po all her life. She hurried through crowds of people on their way to work. The smells of frying food, traffic fumes and rubbish filled the air.

Some people might not like the old buildings with their dirty canopies and the noisy air-conditioning units which dripped water on the street, but Laura loved everything about this part of Kowloon.

She passed market stalls of colourful cheap clothes and turned into a quiet street. The cats who lived there watched her go by. One old black cat crossed her path. She wasn't as superstitious as most other Hong Kong people, but black cats were meant to be lucky and she really wanted good luck today. She stopped a moment, and the cat moved around her legs. Laura stroked it, then hurried on her way.

As Laura went up the escalator to the PC Gold Arcade, the smell of hot electrical equipment replaced the smells of the street. The mall was filled with stalls selling everything to do with mobile phones, tablets, laptops and computers.

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shoulder [ˈʃəʊldə] Schulter • **fumes** [fjuːmz] Abgase • **canopy** [ˈkænəpi] Vordach • **air-conditioning unit** [ˌeəkəndɪʃnɪŋ ˈjuːnɪt] Klimaanlage • **to drip** [drɪp] tropfen • **to stroke** [strəʊk] streicheln

After her mother had died, Laura spent hours here. She bought bits and pieces with her pocket money. By the age of ten she'd built her first computer. She didn't know why, but from an early age she understood how computers worked. And after she'd learnt how to write computer code at a summer club, technology filled her imagination. Computer logic gave her great security – you program them, then they do what you want. They weren't like real life. Real life was random and threw horrible surprises your way.

"Hi, Alvin. All working perfectly now," said Laura as she pulled the laptops out of her bag.

"Nice work," said Alvin. He was a skinny guy, who wore his long hair tied back into a ponytail and had glasses with thick frames. "Although, why anyone still uses these old laptops is a mystery to me. Most people want the newest and most fashionable devices these days."

"I like these old things," said Laura stroking one of the chunky laptops. "They can be repaired. When a new phone breaks, you have to throw it away and buy another one."

"I'm glad you like old things. That's why you like me, isn't it!" The large lady eating at the back of the stall put down her chopsticks and shuffled up to the counter.

"Hi, Aunty!" Laura said. Ah Foon wasn't Laura's real aunty, but she used the term naturally out of respect for her as an older woman, as tradition required.

"Nice shoes, Laura. Really match your skirt and jacket."

"Thanks, Aunty," said Laura with a smile.

"Why so dressed up?" asked Alvin.

"It's my first day at TangCOM," said Laura proudly.

"Ah, TangCOM," said Alvin with a sigh. "Everyone calls that brand TeeCee. They're always bringing out a new phone or app which dominates the market."

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random [ˈrændəm] dem Zufall überlassen • **skinny** [ˈskɪni] spindeldürr • **ponytail** [ˈpəʊniteɪl] Pferdeschwanz • **frame** [freɪm] Gestell • **chunky** [ˈtʃʌŋki] klobig, klotzig • **chopstick** [ˈtʃɒpstɪk] Essstäbchen • **to shuffle** [ˈʃʌfl] schlurfen • **term** [tɜːm] Bezeichnung

Klett

1 "Ha, and they make sure that TeeCee apps only work on TeeCee phones," added Aunty. She rubbed her fingers together. "TeeCee knows how to make big money!"

"But if TangCOM likes me, they might give me a job there
5 one day. And I want to earn a lot of money so Papa can give up work and I can look after him," said Laura.

"Talking of earning money, we need to pay you for repairing those laptops. Hold up your phone." Ah Foon tapped digits into her own phone, then tapped it to Laura's.
10 "There, transferred! No need for cash these days. Just a couple of taps on our phones." Ah Foon smiled at Laura. "I hope you do well at TangCOM. You're bright, not like my son here. His school threw him out because he hacked into their computer system and changed his grades from
15 D minus to A plus! If he'd put more effort into learning instead of hacking, he might be the one earn a lot of money so he can look after me," said Ah Foon.

"I do look after you, Ma," said Alvin. "If I hadn't hacked into the government database and moved you up the
20 housing list, you certainly wouldn't have the best flat in your building now, right?"

"That's true," said Ah Foon. She patted Alvin's arm. "But don't do it again. Just because you can get through firewalls, doesn't mean you should."

25 "That's another reason I trust old equipment," said Laura. She reached into her bag, took out a flat, square piece of black plastic and waved it at Ah Foon. "This here is a much safer way to store information than on the cloud."

"Ha, a floppy disk. I haven't seen one of those in years,"
30 laughed Ah Foon.

1 "Floppy disks can't be hacked! And unless someone has old equipment, they can't get access to the information on them. I store the Keyfile encryption codes for all the games I invent on them." Laura put the disk into her bag.
5 She looked at her phone. "It's half past eight. I need to get to the subway. Wish me luck!"

"Good luck!" Alvin and Ah Foon shouted together as Laura hurried down the escalator and ran as quickly as she could to the Sham Shui Po MTR station. She couldn't wait
10 to get to TangCOM and dazzle them with her Medusa game.

Laura just knew today was going to be lucky. She clattered down the steps to the station and tapped her phone to the entry barrier to pay for her fare.

Then one of the heels broke off her new shoes …

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to rub [rʌb] reiben • **to tap** [tæp] tippen • **digit** [ˈdɪdʒɪt] Ziffer, Zahl • **housing list** [ˈhaʊzɪŋ ˌlɪst] Wohnungs-liste • **to pat** [pæt] tätscheln • **to store** [stɔː] speichern

floppy [ˈflɒpi] Floppy, Magnetdiskette • **unless** [ənˈles] es sei denn • **encryption** [ɪnˈkrɪpʃn] Verschlüsselungs- • **to dazzle** [ˈdæzl] beeindrucken, blenden • **to clatter down** [ˈklætə] hinunterpoltern