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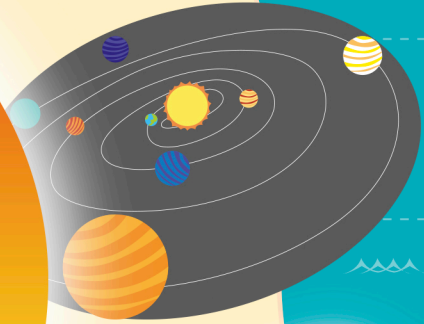
Local Knowledge Book Series



The Puzzle of the Pearl of Andaman

Story : Chairit Srirojrit

Illustrations : Narumon Serjam



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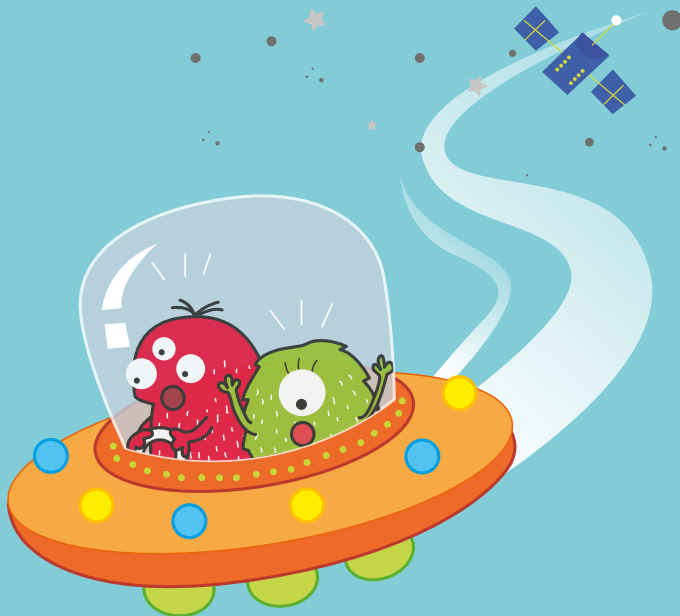
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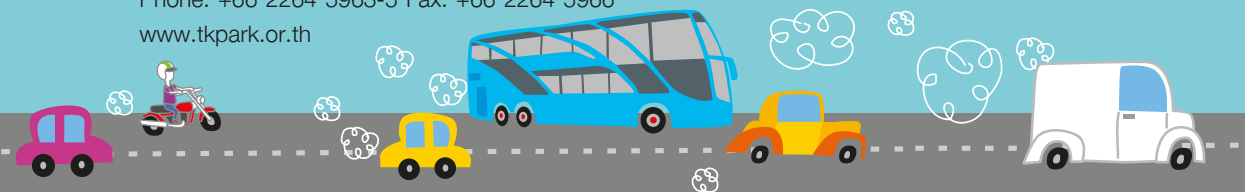
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Preface

Thailand Knowledge Park (TK park) mission in society is to develop a love of reading and give people equal opportunities to experience modern learning centers which speak to their interests. TK park has been cooperating with local administrators in many regions of Thailand to build living libraries as a way to achieve its mission.

Bringing local knowledge to children, in a modern and fun way, is an important tool to inspire them to read and explore. The idea is to create books which reflect local wisdom, together with morality and ethics, for children aged 3 – 12.

The books in the Phuket and Krabi Set were developed by TK park, scholars, and local writers. Children and adults will get to know about Phuket and Krabi and be proud of the unique traditions found there. Moreover, the books also foster better understandings of and tolerant attitudes toward others from different cultures and societies.

TK park hopes the books will be another learning tool to help encourage Thai people to read more and maximize their learning. TK park aims to make the books fun and easy to read. Readers can enjoy them and appreciate their own hometowns, regions, and country.

Thailand Knowledge Park



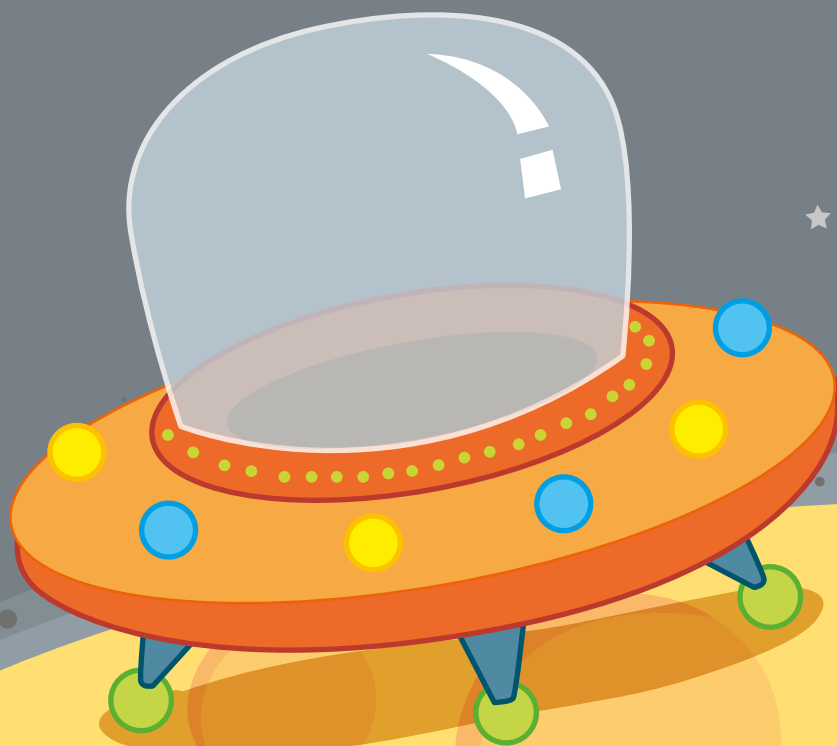
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On Planet VZB in the galaxy far away, a violent ice storm is forming. It signals that it is time for the inhabitant of Planet VZB to flee from the cold winter. The Galactic Weather Forecast Office announces that the storm will be more violent than usual and it will stay longer. So the two siblings, V2 and V4, decide to go on a vacation at a place on this secret map that their grandfather left for them.



V2: V4, are you ready?

V4: Of course! The spaceship is ready and I already got plenty of food for us.

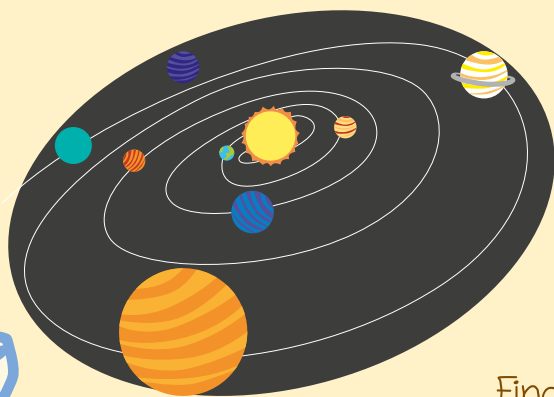
V2: No need for a lot of food. Grandpa said they got delicious food there.



V2 and V4 had heard about this place on the secret map from their grandpa since they were little. He always called it “the Pearl of the Andaman.” Grandpa told them that a pearl is this beautiful gem formed within the shell of a pearl oyster. There are different colors of pearl. For Andaman, it is the name of a place. He told them to follow the map if they wanted to know about this place. Grandpa really loves this Pearl of the Andaman.

Grandpa drew the secret map a few years after he came back from that place. So, there are some things that he might forget about it. flowerer, V2 and V4 determine to find this place.

The Secret Map



“You have to find your way to this milky spiral galaxy in the territory where there are millions of stars.

Find the place where there is only one sun with 8 planets revolving around themselves and around this sun.



That is where the Pearl

of the Andaman is.

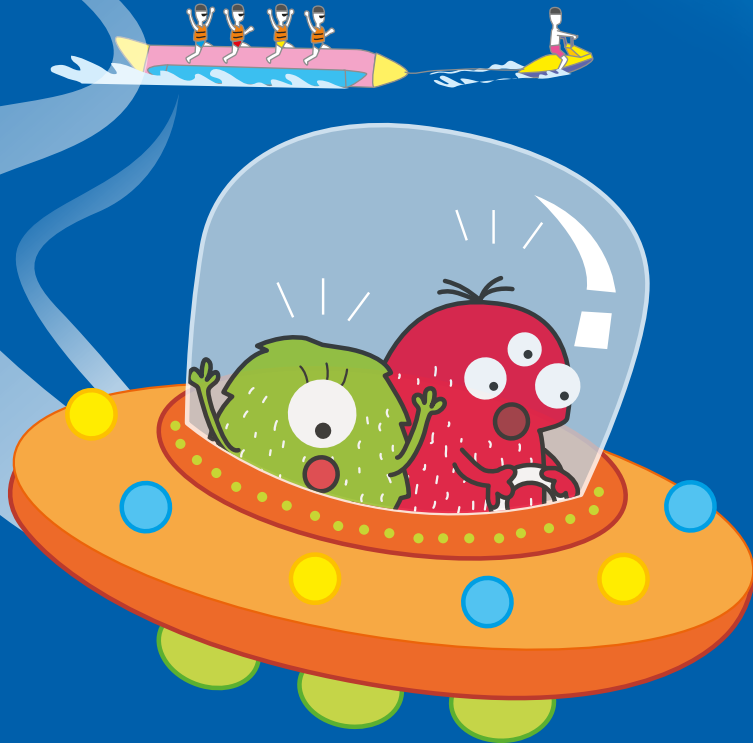
The place is surrounded by salty and clear blue water. Follow the map!”

Between $7^{\circ}45' N$ to $8^{\circ}15' N$ and $98^{\circ}15' E$ to $98^{\circ}40' E$.



“V2, do you remember what grandpa used to tell us about the place? That it’s got everything from shady and cool high mountains with waterfalls, animals, and lots of big trees to places by the sea with long, endless white sand beaches. There are fishermen who live a sufficient life catching fish and selling them. There are enough lands to grow enough food and raise enough animals to feed everyone. Because of this simple happiness, people here always smile. People there live harmoniously together despite their different ethnics. They are kind to visitors too.”

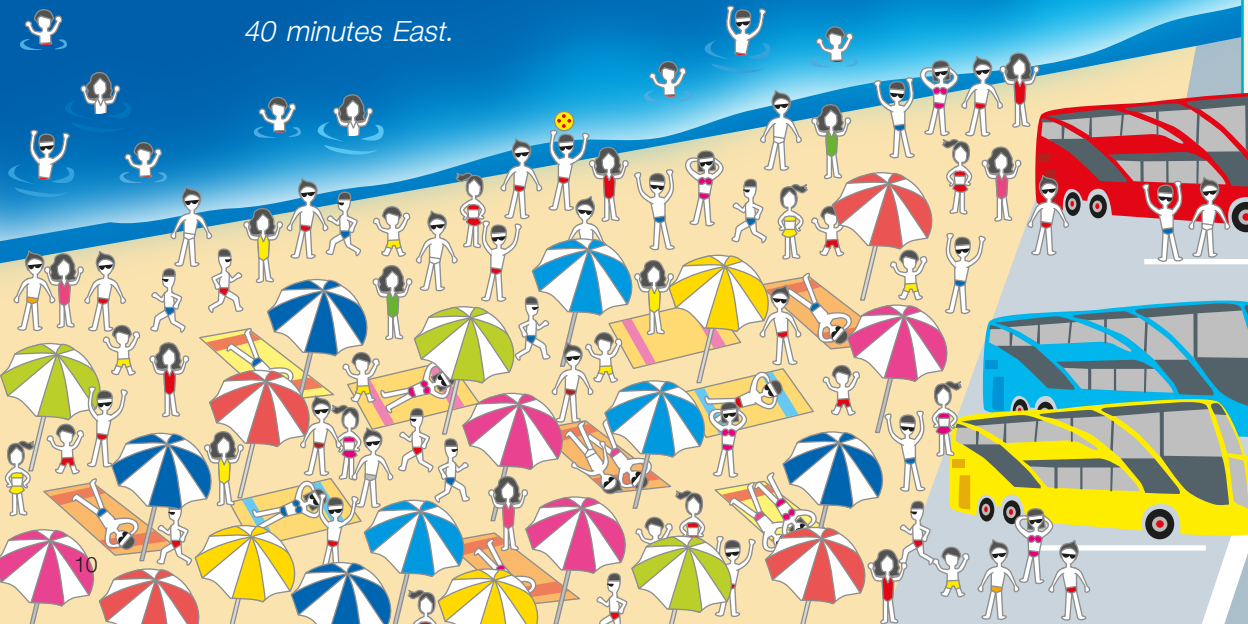




V4: Are you sure we come to the right coordinate?

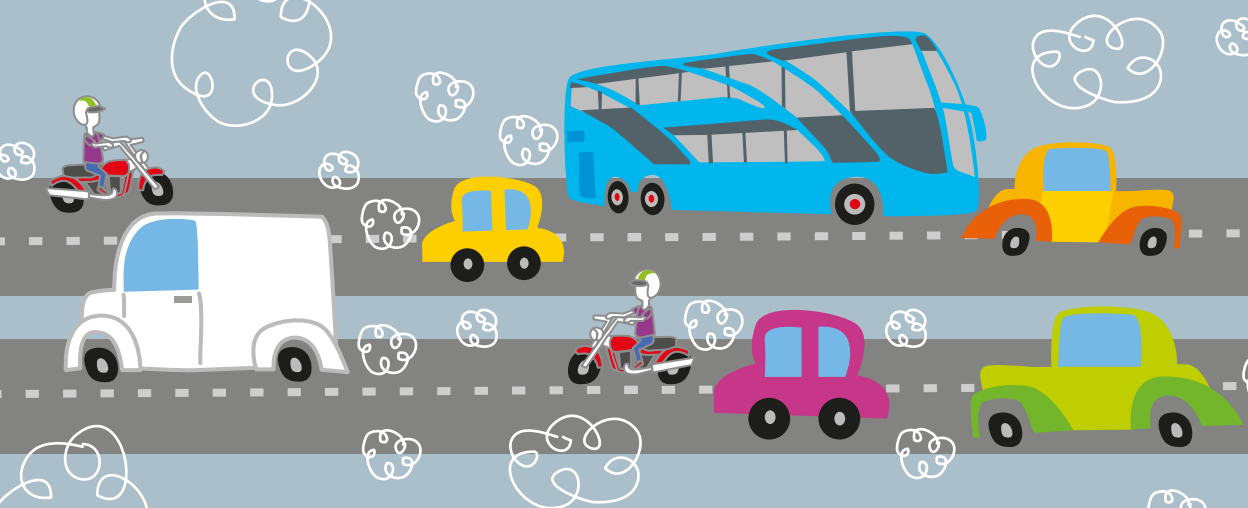
V2: Of course! Here we are between $7^{\circ}45' N$ to $8^{\circ}15' N$ and $98^{\circ}15' E$ to $98^{\circ}40' E$.

V4: Repeat the coordinate — Between latitude of 7 degrees 45 minutes North to 8 degrees 15 minutes North and longitude of 98 degrees 15 minutes East to 98 degrees 40 minutes East.

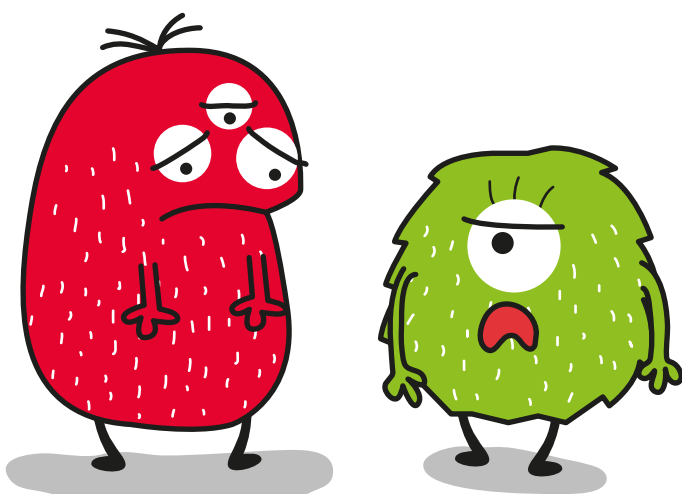




V2 and V4 are confused with what they see. There is nothing like what their grandpa had told them. There are only rows and rows of buildings. They cannot see any white sand beaches because they are covered with different colors of beach umbrellas. Instead of clear blue water, the sea is murky and big piles of waste and garbage are washed up on the beach.



Seeing that the situations on the beach are not like what they have expected, V2 and V4 fly their ship across the mountain to the town. Grandpa told them that the city center is the center for trading, government offices, and beautiful Sino-Portuguese buildings. However, what they find in the city is no different from what they see on the beach. The streets are filled with cars, cars, and cars, from big construction trucks, to tour buses, private cars, swerving motorcycles and vending cars. The kinds of cars that they rarely see are buses and bicycles. This is confusing!

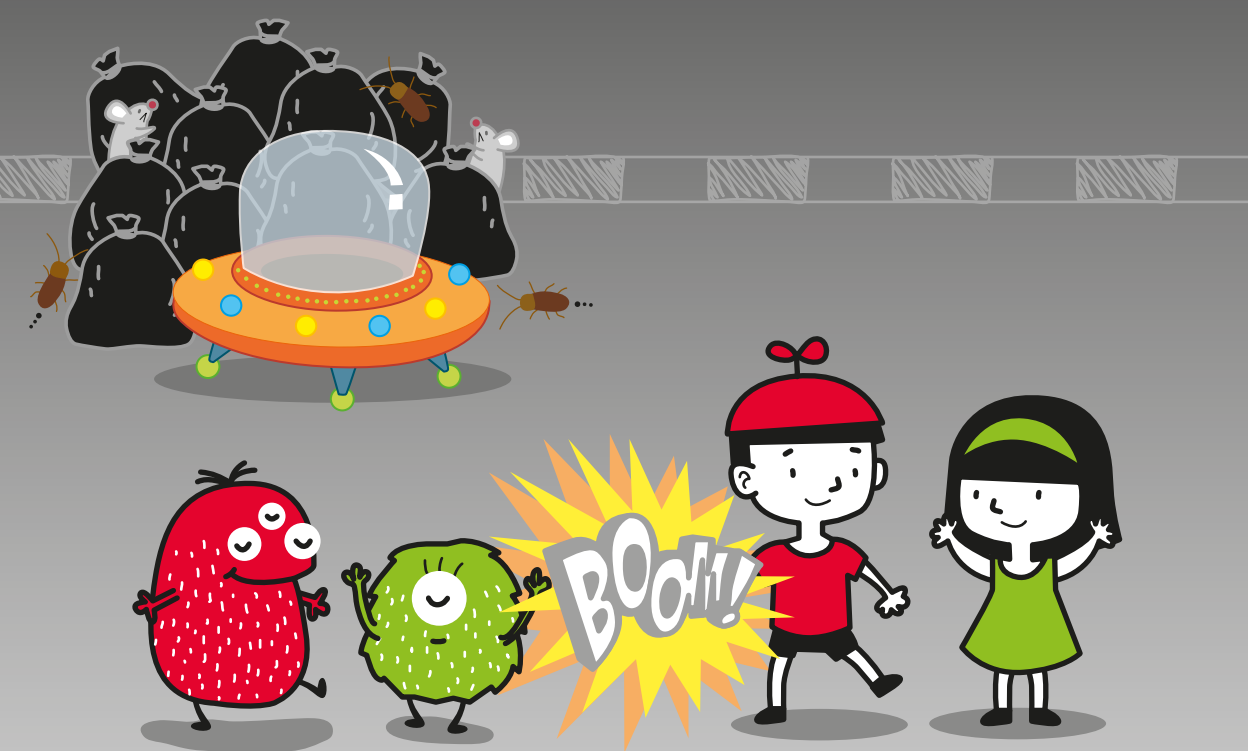




V2 and V4 also cannot find the beautiful old buildings like grandpa said. They only find big department stores with lots of cars coming in and out, high residence buildings, and old and new luxurious hotels. But one sure thing they see are lots and lots of people. There are too many of them that they cannot figure out who are the local people and who are the tourists.

Maybe they are at the wrong place. Maybe grandpa had the coordinate wrong.





Being unsure if they are at the right place or not, V2 and V4 decide to find a safe place to land. But they are unable to find bushy area to land. Finally, they find a place to land. It is surrounded by some sort of black hill. There is no one there except a lot of small insects flying around. As soon as they land, they realize they have made a mistake. They have landed their ship on a giant pile of smelly garbage.

V2 and V4 decide that they have to ask someone whether they are in the Pearl of the Andaman or not. They could come to a wrong place. So, they transform themselves into humans, V2 as Weera and V4 as Venus.

Now we are humans! Let's find someone to talk!

V2: *We are now in human forms. Let's ask the humans whether we are in the right place or not.*

V4: *Call me Venus like human would.*



V2: Excuse me! Is this city the Pearl of the Andaman?

V4: I don't think she will answer you. She is busy on the phone.

V4: Excuse me! Is this city the Pearl of the Andaman?

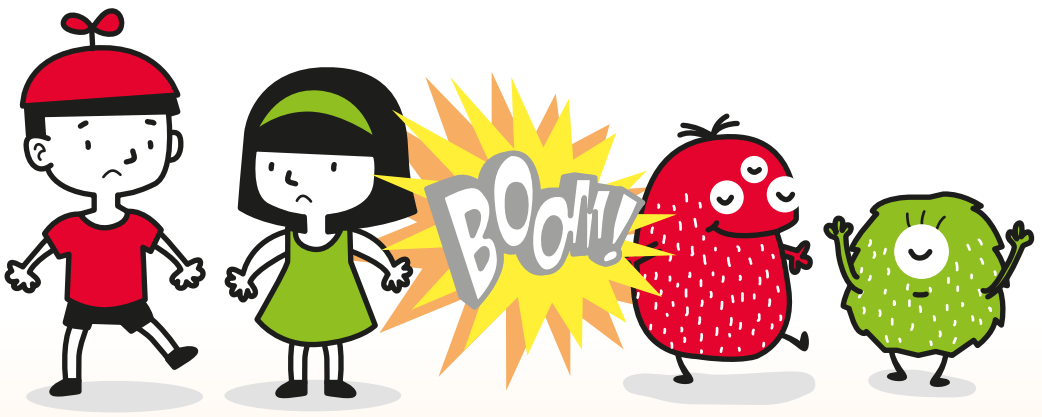
V2: She looks so angry. I don't think I'll ask her any more questions. I think I'm gonna ask that boy.



V4: Peekaboo! Hello. Is this city the Pearl of the Andaman?

The boy: (Swoosh, swoosh, swoosh!) Yes, yes, this is it. (Boom, boom, boom!)





V2 and V4 are feeling uncomfortable with the toxic atmosphere here so they transform themselves back to their VZB forms. This place is nothing like what grandpa had described. How can the Pearl of the Andaman change so much? It would make grandpa so sad if he saw this.





V2: V4, I'm really interested to see what this city will be like ten years from now.

V4: Oh no! I don't want to think about it. I think it will be filled with pollutions, garbage, and people!

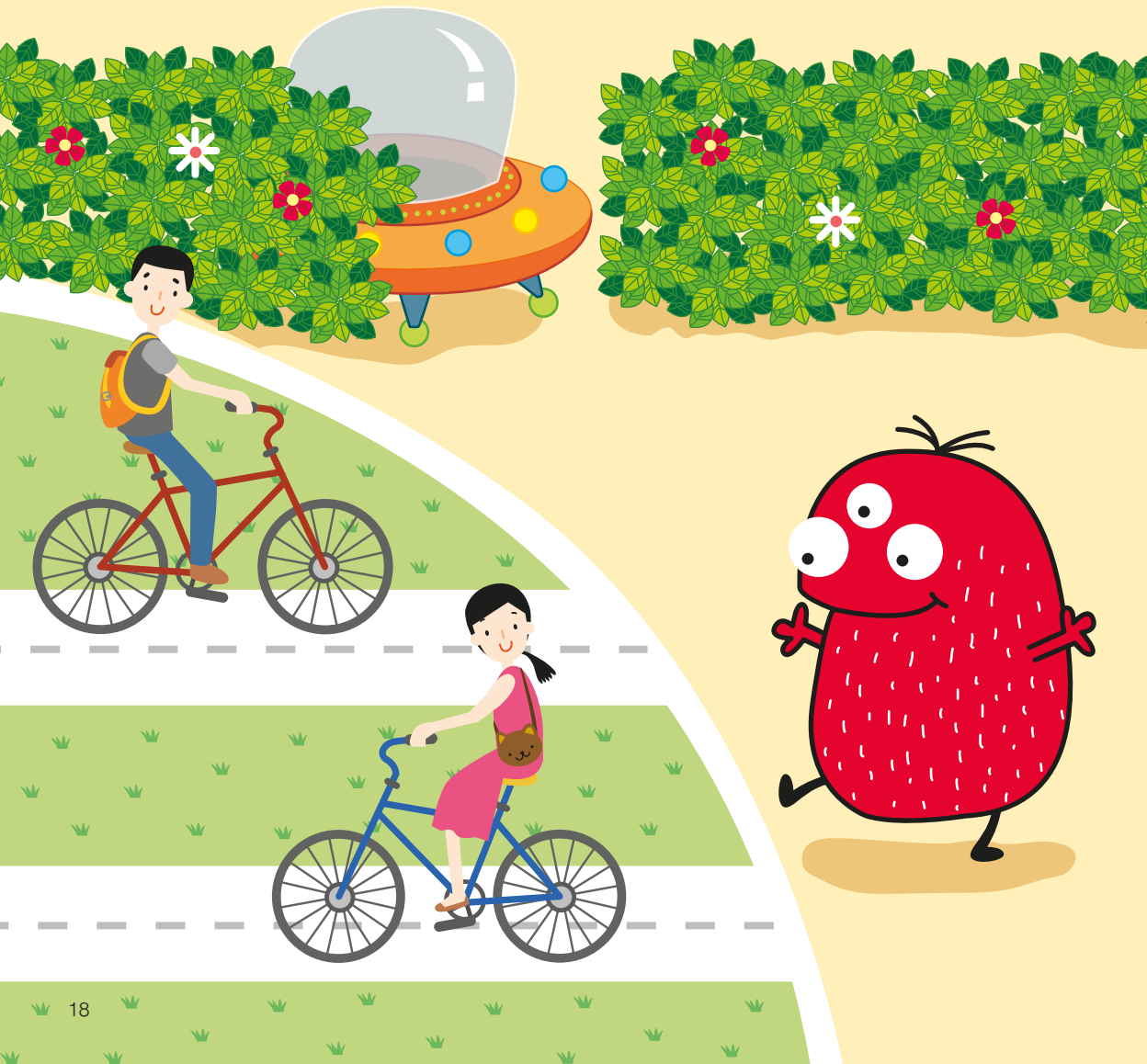
V2: Maybe not. Let's fly faster than light speed to the future and see.

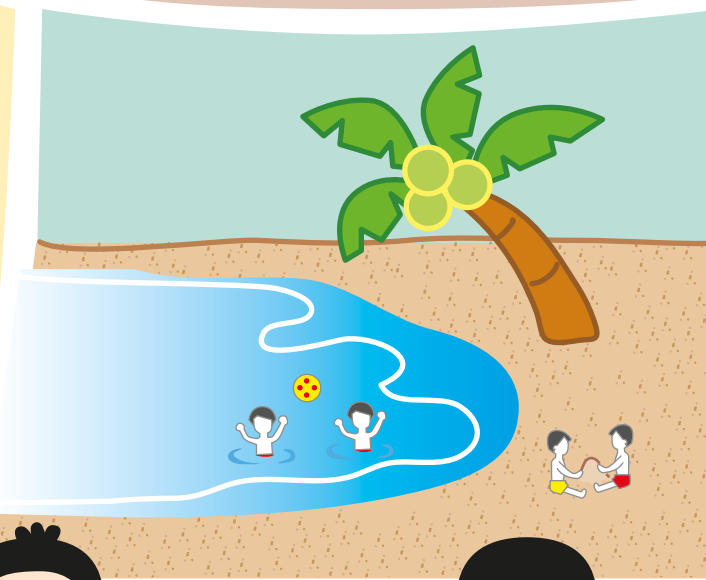
V4: That's good. I can search for more information along the way.

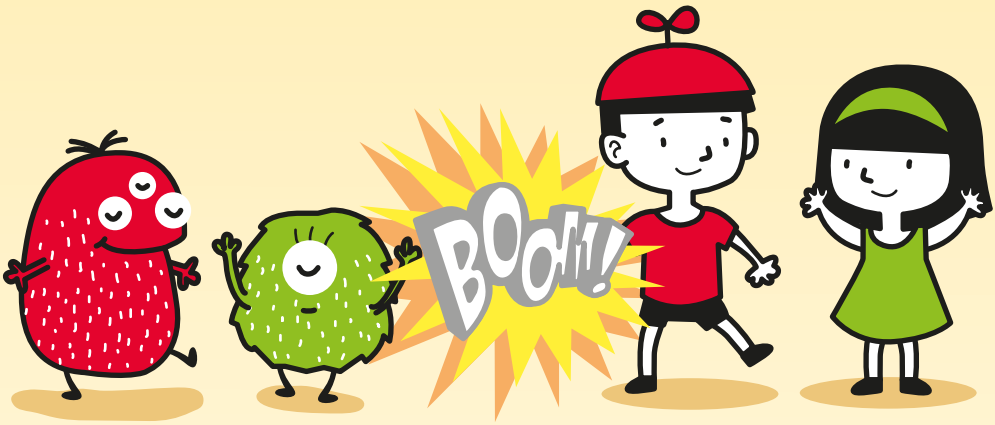
The humans call the Pearl of the Andaman "Phuket." It is an island. It is a province in the southwest of Thailand. The area is 543.03 square kilometers. The city is divided into three districts: Muang Phuket District, Thalang District, and Kathu District. There are 32 smaller islands around Phuket. The census information from Phuket Statistical Office in 2014, there were 378,364 people in Phuket, 179,221 males and 199,143 females. The density of the population is 696.8 persons per square kilometer. There are approximately 225,520 households in Phuket; this number does not include the unregistered population.



As soon as they arrive the future Phuket, they are wondered by how this Pearl of the Andaman looks much better than the one they left. The sea here is glittering blue under the sunlight. They are able to find some bushy area to land without having to land on a pile of garbage. This time, they are able to see the well-renovated Sino-Portuguese buildings. There is less noise and air pollution because people use bicycle more. The mothers go grocery shopping using baskets. The sellers always ask their customers if they want to use plastic bags. However, most of them bring their own cloth bags. Some even refuse to use plastic straw. V2 can see that some people bring their own water canteen instead of buying a bottle of water.







V2: V4, let's transform to humans so we can talk to them!

V4: That's a good idea. I really want to know how the Pearl of the Andaman is able to become a heaven like it is now.

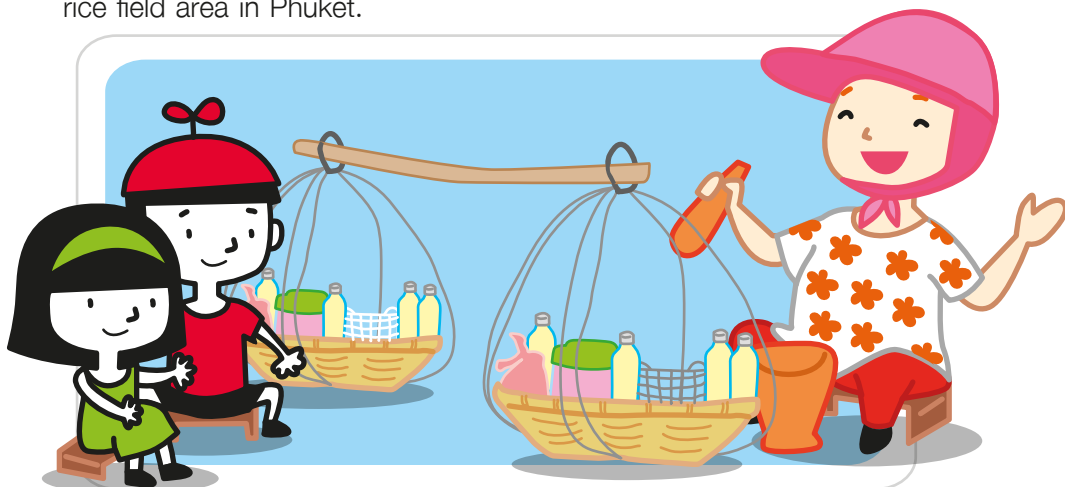
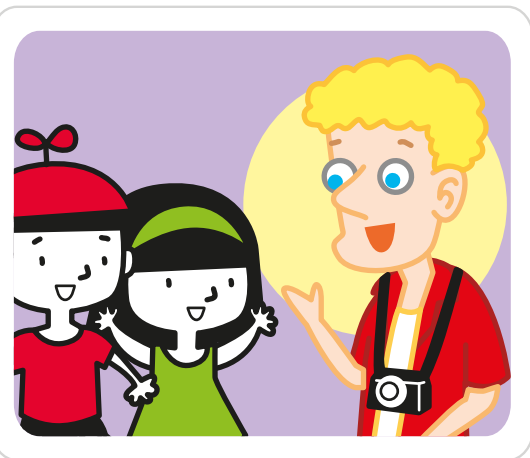
As soon as they finish transforming themselves, they smell something so good that they couldn't do anything but follow that good smell. They meet this vendor who just finishes making some kind of dessert. They really want to try but they have no money. The kind vendor let' them try the dessert for free. They really like it. The vendor tells them the dessert is called "Ah Pong," a popular local dessert that has been around in Phuket for a long time. The ingredients are rice flour, coconut milk, sugar, egg yolk, boiled water, and yeast. Mix everything together and pour it in a special kind of pan. Then roll it out into a small, thin round piece on a small stove. When it's done, the edge is crispy while the center is soft.



After they are full, they go on and talk to the kids who are reading books. They all say that there are good libraries here and the libraries always organize fun activities for children.

The tourists all say the same thing, that the people here are nice and kind. They treat tourists like their own guests. And they give importance to nature and culture.

The spaces for the vendors are also well-arranged so the city looks tidy and organized. Everyone looks after one another. Another kind vendor also suggests Weera and Venus to go visit a rice field that is well taken care of and well-preserved by the people. It reflects how rice plays an important part in people's life. So Weera and Venus rush to visit the last rice field area in Phuket.





They look for the field for quite some time until they finally find this last rice field on Phuket Island. In 2002, there were 1,848 rais of rice fields in all three districts of Phuket. But now it drops down to only hundreds of rais. Because of the increase of the tourism business and the expansion of the town, there is only a small area for rice fields now.

This makes Moo 4, Tambon Mai Khao, Thalang District the last rice field area in Phuket. The farmers still follow the traditional way of rice planting—from growing the rice sprouts, plowing the land, harvest the rice, and threshing them. In the old days, people would come from Phuket, Pattalung, and Trang to help harvesting the rice just like people in other parts of the country always do.

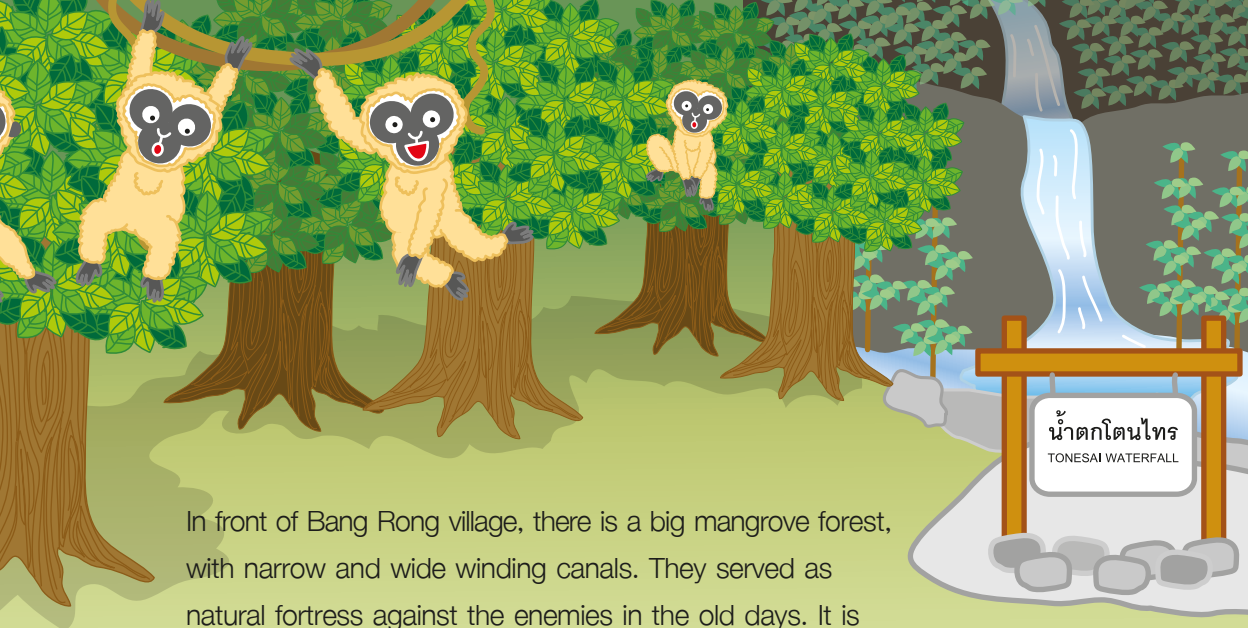
Weera and Venus have fun at Mai Khao Community’s Agricultural Project. There, they encourage visitors and tourists to experience rice farming in the demonstrated rice field. They are also introduced to all the rice farming tools. After they finish harvesting the rice, a kind farmer suggests Weera and Venus to go to a mysterious waterfall.





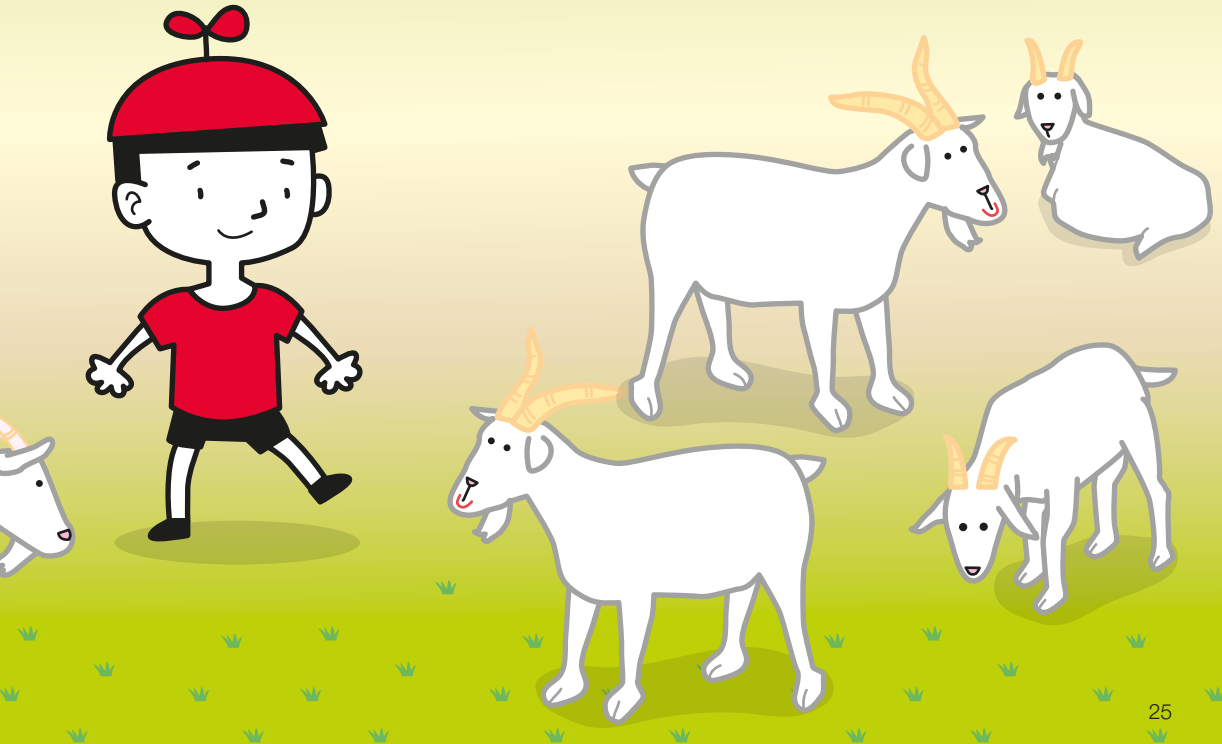
The two alien siblings rush to find this mysterious waterfall. They find out that it is part of Khao Pra Thaw and Bang Rong community, a Thai-Muslim community that has lived in this area for generations. Weera and Venus spend all day here, enjoying different ecotourism activities. People only think about the sea when they visit the Pearl of the Andaman. Little do they know that there is a beautiful waterfall hiding in the middle of the forest. There is also a nature trail from Ton Sai waterfall to Bang Pae waterfall. It is in the area of Khao Pra Thaw Wildlife Conservation Development and Extension Center. When you are there, do not be alarmed if you hear the sound “Pua, Pua, Pua.” It is from the gibbons in the Gibbon Rehabilitation Project, which is a research unit of the Wild Animal Rescue Foundation of Thailand. They help rehabilitate and return the gibbons to Khao Pra Thaw forest. That’s why the sound is heard everywhere here.





In front of Bang Rong village, there is a big mangrove forest, with narrow and wide winding canals. They served as natural fortress against the enemies in the old days. It is practically a natural hide-and-seek playground in the forest.

Bang Rong villagers also organize a goat farm there. The goats are let to run freely around the village. The kids have fun running around with them. These goats provide different products for the villagers—meat, milk and fertilizer from their droppings. A little goat tells Weera to visit Bang La community where there is also an abundant mangrove forest there.





Weera and Venus save their good memories of Bang Rong in their minds and move on to Bang La community. The villagers here put together a force to fight against the investors who try to invade their mangrove forest. From this courageous effort, they received the 11th Green Globe Awards 2009 for Community Sustainability.

Klong Tha Rua Mangrove Forest Reserve is another important mangrove forest on the east side of Phuket. Together, the villagers of Klong Tha Rua have passed on their efforts to protect their mangrove forest to their children. This is how “Kids for Mangrove Trees Movement” started. They carry on the intention to protect this forest.





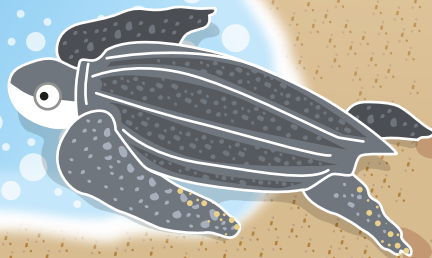
What do they do? They plant mangrove trees to expand the mangrove forest. They take good care of the young mangrove plants until they are ready to be planted. They also release shells into the forest because of the decreasing numbers of them.


Weera and Venus also get to walk along the nature trail where they find different kinds of mangrove trees and animals. Next time, they plan to kayak around the forest to get a closer look of them.



The children at Bang La tell Weera and Venus to go visit Mai Khao Beach where they can meet Leatherback sea turtles. Every year, during the end of October to the beginning or February, the leatherback sea turtles come up from the sea to lay eggs on the beach here. So Mai Khao Beach is basically where the turtles come for their pregnancy care, for the beach to help hatch their eggs.

Leatherback sea turtle is a kind of sea turtles with soft shell. There are 5 longitudinal ridges on the shell which make it look like star fruit (thus the name in Thai). One outstanding feature of these turtles is they can swim for thousands of kilometers across the sea. Their primary foods are jellyfish and sea weed. They can be found in Phuket and Phang Nga areas because they can find plenty of food here.





In the past, the people organized a Turtle walk rally for recreational purpose and for collecting the turtles' eggs. However, since there are less turtles coming up to lay their eggs on the beach now, this activity is cancelled. Even lights or loud noises would cause the turtles not to come up and lay eggs. We need to preserve the turtles. Anyone who plans to visit this place should also visit Sirinat National Park. There lies a long white sand beach with lines of Pine trees along the beach without any hotels or sea umbrellas to obstruct the beautiful view.

FYI, turtles are reptiles!





Weera and Venus also want to know how the city center changes in the next ten years. Will it change in a better way like it does in the outside areas of the city where nature has been revived?

As soon as they arrive to the city, it is very easy for them to find parking for their bikes. There are a lot of green areas all over the city. The old Sino-Portuguese houses are well-preserved. There are more bicycles in this town where the roads are not wide. There are also more buses for public transportation.



The public areas both on the mountains and by the beaches are carefully designed and tended for people to be able to relax or exercise. They are like green lungs, turning toxic air into clean air for people in the city. More importantly, they bring back the smile on the people's faces.



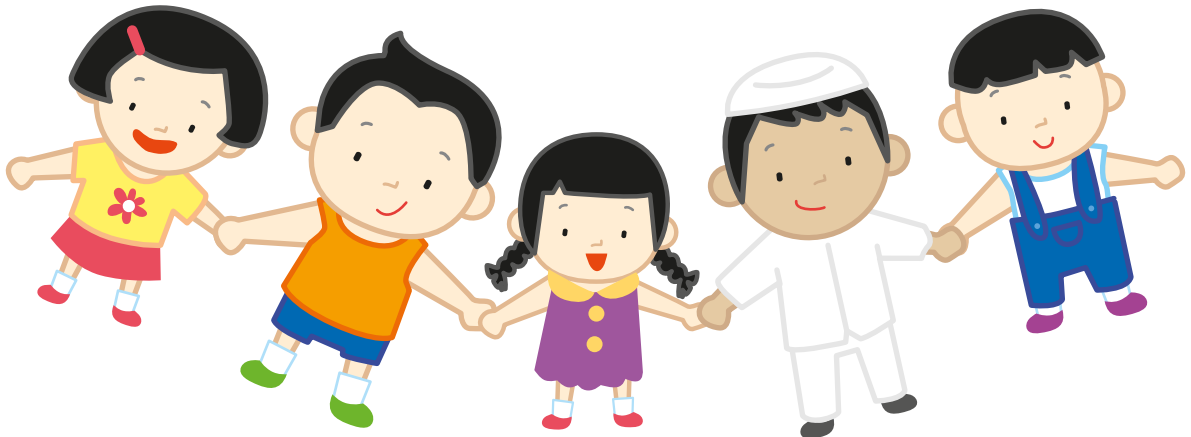


However, both of them still wonder how the Pearl of the Andaman can change completely in a good way like this. So they fly back just three years before and they are shocked by what they find. The city is filled with noise and water pollutions and garbage. The city sceneries are not designed to coexist harmoniously. People's faces are sullen. They live a rushing life. The number of tourists is decreasing.



But Weera and Venus can feel some kind of hidden power moving along the roads, in schools, and in small houses. The people of the Pearl of the Andaman city are working together to take care of their city. They start at home first. They sort their trash. They set a schedule to take out their trash. They grow flowers and plants around their houses. They support local products. They set up City's Cultural Conservation Organization. They start many projects to develop libraries, museums and learning spaces.

They also try to encourage many good habits such as being thrifty, disciplined, respectful, grateful, and modest.



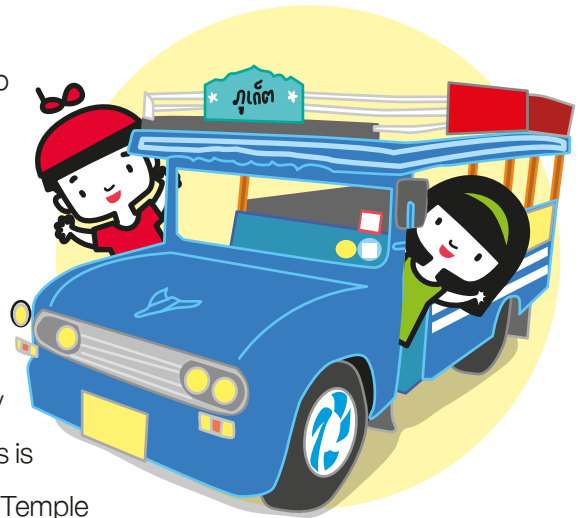


Weera and Venus decide to go back to 10 years in the future again. They swim in the sparkling blue sea under glittering sunlight. They get to eat delicious local foods that have been passed on from generation to generation and are cooked by the local people, not the foreigners. They get to run around and feed the goats at Bang Rong. They help their friends at Bang La plant the mangrove trees.





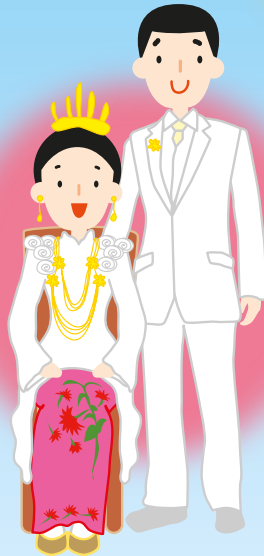
They also transform their spaceship into “Pho Thong” bus, Phuket’s signature local bus. They stop by Wat Chalong and pay respect to Luang Por Cham statue. Their grandpa used to tell them that they had to stop here if they had a chance. He wanted them to pay respect to the statue in his name also. This is because Wat Chalong or Chaitharam Temple is the heart and soul of Phuket people. They spend some time at this peaceful and sacred temple making merits and meditating before transforming themselves back to their alien forms.






V2 and V4 get on their ship and circle around this Pearl of the Andaman, or what the humans call Phuket.

They miss the delicious dessert they can't get elsewhere. They miss the beautiful houses in the city. They miss the waterfalls. They miss the sea. They miss the people they met.





The first thing both of them will definitely do when they get back home is to tell others how united the people of the Pearl of the Andaman are to help one another protect and take care of the nature and their home.

And more importantly, they will draw a new map to the Pearl of the Andaman for those who want to visit there by themselves.





Story
Chairit Srirojrit

- Graduated from WatSuthiwaram School before continuing his education on the Children’s Literature Program, Srinakharinwirot University.
- Currently an editor at Hello Kids, a publishing company under Plan For Kids Co., Ltd.
- Guest lecturer at various universities.



Illustrations
Narumon Serjam

She is currently working as an illustrator, a cartoonist, a graphic designer, a DIY creative, and is (attempting to be) a writer.

Works:

- Illustration in Kook Kai Puad Tong and KrataiTuenToom under the name “NarumonTanawansombat.”
- Author, cartoonist, and illustrator of Happy Drawing: Sanook Wad and illustrator for various books and magazines under the name “by na-ru”

Local Knowledge Book Series Phuket and Krabi

