

PLOT SUMMARY

American Born Chinese
A 9 Chapter Comic Book
by Gene Yang

Chapter 1

Set in ancient China.

One bright and starry evening, the gods and goddesses gather together in heaven for a dinner party. Their music and the scent of their wine drift down to Flower-Fruit Mountain, where the Monkey King rules over his kingdom. The Monkey King decides to attend the party, but is rudely stopped at the door simply because he is a monkey. Angered by the disrespect, he summons all his Kung-fu skills to break furniture and kick deity-butt. Afterwards he returns home shaking with fury, sadness, and embarrassment.

Chapter 2

Set in 1980's American suburbia.

Jin Wang is a Chinese-American third grader living in San Francisco Chinatown. Every Sunday, he accompanies his mother to the local herbalist. One Sunday, when his mother has an especially long appointment, he talks briefly with the herbalist's wife, a glassy-eyed toothless woman with a knack for the abacus. The herbalist's wife confides in him a secret: "It's easy to become anything you want to be. You only have to forfeit your soul."

Soon after, Jin Wang's family moves to a Bay Area suburb. There, he attends Mayflower Elementary, where he and Suzy Nakamura, a quiet Japanese girl, are the only two Asian Americans in his class. Because of differences in culture, Jin has trouble making friends until the fifth grade, when a Taiwanese immigrant named Wu-chen Chang begins attending Mayflower. After some initial hostilities, the two become best friends.

Chapter 3

Set in 1990's American suburbia.

Danny, a blonde-haired blue-eyed ASB-president-type teenager, is quietly studying with his girlfriend Jenny when his mother brings him news that his cousin Chin-kee is visiting from China. Cousin Chin-kee embodies every Western stereotype of Asian people. His eyes slant at ridiculous angles, his teeth buck out, he speaks with an almost

indecipherable accent, and he's extremely good at math. Cousin Chin-kee arrives in a flurry of offensiveness, clumsiness, and bad English. Danny's mother suggests that Danny take Cousin Chin-kee to school the next day. Danny almost cries.

Chapter 4

Set in ancient China.

The Monkey King locks himself in the secret caverns of his royal chamber and trains in Kung-fu more seriously than ever. After four months, he emerges from the caverns after mastering thousands of minor disciplines and eight new major disciplines. He decides that the title "Monkey King" is no longer worthy of him and renames himself "The Great Sage, Equal of Heaven." He then proceeds to visit various deities to tell them of his new name. One by one, the deities laugh at him. One by one, the "Great Sage" punishes the deities. The deities eventually gather together to plea to Lord-Above, God of All Gods, to deal with the monkey.

Lord-Above confronts the Great Sage and presents him with a challenge. If the Great Sage is truly as powerful as he himself believes, then he should be able to escape the grasp of Lord-Above. The Great Sage gladly accepts the challenge, calls upon his jet cloud, and speeds off. He flies past the stars and planets, past the edge of the universe, and finally through the barriers of reality itself. There, he finds five golden pillars. He pisses on the pillars to prove that he was there.

The Great Sage returns to Lord-Above and boasts of how far he had flown. Lord-Above then surprises him by revealing that the five pillars at the end of reality were actually the five fingers of his hand. Lord-Above then asks the Great Sage to embrace humility. The Great Sage refuses, so the Lord-Above imprisons him under a mountain for five thousand years.

Chapter 5.

Set in 1980's American suburbia.

Jin Wang is now in middle school. He develops a crush on Amelia, a thin, cute, bookish white girl. His best friend Wu-chen begins dating Suzy Nakamura. This further exacerbates Jin's own yearnings. During an after-school biology project, Wu-chen and Amelia are accidentally locked into the biology supply closet for two hours. To pass the time, Wu-chen and Amelia share about themselves with one another. Wu-chen tells Amelia about Jin and how deeply he values their friendship. After Jin rescues Wu-chen and Amelia, Amelia agrees to go out with Jin on a date. Jin is euphoric.

Chapter 6.

Set in a 1990's American suburbia.

Cousin Chin-kee accompanies Danny to high school. There, he speaks loudly in broken English, answers all of the teachers' questions, and make ill-fated romantic overtures to American girls. By lunch, Danny wishes he had stayed home, but Cousin Chin-kee persists in sharing with him his secret plan to take over all of America, making it a "Yellow Nation." Danny's friends overhear Chin-kee and toss Danny into a trashcan after school. His girlfriend also breaks up with him.

Chapter 7.

Set in ancient China.

Hsuan-tsang, the most righteous priest of his generation, is commissioned by Lord-Above to fetch the Scriptures of Truth from the Western Paradise. Lord-Above also asks him to visit a mountain along the way, under which he will find an ancient "Monkey-Demon" who is to become Hsuan-tsang's disciple.

Hsuan-tsang follows Lord-Above's commands and finds the Monkey King. He and the Monkey King debate the natures of power and humility. Upon lowering himself to serve as the mortal priest's disciple, the Monkey King is freed from his prison. The chapter ends with the Monkey leading Hsuan-tsang off into the desert.

Chapter 8.

Set in 1980's American suburbia.

Jin takes Amelia to the amusement park for their date. They have a wonderful time. The next day, however, Amelia "breaks up" with Jin. Timmy, a popular boy she's had a crush on since elementary school has suddenly begun to pay attention to her. It's an opportunity she's been waiting for all her life.

Jin is crushed. That afternoon, as Jin mopes around in front of the school waiting to be picked up, Timmy walks by and sneers at him. Timmy tells Jin that he really has no feelings for Amelia, but he put the moves on her because he didn't feel that Jin deserved her. He ends the conversation by asking Jin not to eat his dog.

Jin tries to find Wu-chen for solace, but finds Suzy instead. They have a long talk during which Jin confesses his wish to be white. Suzy agrees with him. The two kiss as Wu-chen walks into the room.

Later that night, Jin thinks over his actions. He decides that the reason he kissed Suzy is because he didn't feel that Wu-chen deserved her. When he comes to this

realization, all his feelings of guilt are released. That night, he dreams of the herbalist's wife, from his trips in Chinatown with his mother when he was little. "Now that you've forfeited your soul," she says to him, "what would you like to be?"

When Jin wakes up, he runs to the bathroom mirror and smiles. He's now blonde-haired, blue-eyed, white-skinned. He renames himself Danny.

Chapter 9.

Danny finds Cousin Chin-kee in the school's parking lot at dusk. Danny tells Chin-kee that he is tired of his yearly visits, that his life is ruined after each visit, and that Chin-kee is an embarrassment. They Kung-fu fight.

After a particularly good blow to Chin-kee's cheek, Chin-kee begins to physically change. He becomes shorter, his lower jaw slowly protrudes, and his toes grow finger-like. He is actually the Monkey King. He had been using his shape-changing powers to take the form of Cousin Chin-kee to haunt Danny once a year.

The Monkey King lands a solid right cross on Danny's cheek and tells him, "Blonde hair dye and colored contacts cannot disguise who you truly are, Jin Wang." Jin (or Danny) suddenly realizes that his white face is only an illusion. He now appears (to the reader) as he truly is: a Chinese-American teenager with bleached hair.

The Monkey King reveals that he now serves as an emissary to Lord-Above. Wu-chen, Jin's childhood friend, is the Monkey King's son who was in training to also become an emissary to Lord-Above. The final stage of his training required Wu-chen to take the form of a mortal and remain uncorrupted by human sin for forty years. Because Wu-chen now hated Jin, he was banned from the presence of Lord-Above. The Monkey King chose to haunt Jin as Cousin Chin-kee until Jin reconciled with his son.

The Monkey King leaves Jin with an admonition, "Reconcile with Wu-chen. Then reconcile with yourself." After much searching, Jin finds Wu-chen in the streets of Oakland Chinatown driving a riced-up Acura. The story ends with the Jin and Wu-chen sitting together in a Taiwanese-American cafe, talking late into the night.