

Not Small Potatoes:

A History of the Kingdom of 109

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For all the 109 Citizens, past, present and future...

"If you would understand anything,

observe its beginning and development." - Aristotle

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Chapter 1

The Arrival

The story of 109 begins with an ordinary prince of the Lands of Longfellow, Eugene Huang. When he was old enough, he was sent away to be further educated and to see the world. After a time that saw many shadows come and go, the Powers-That-Be of Longfellow, led by Principal Vincent Lynch, sent word to Mr. Huang that they were prepared to cede land to him, an island temporarily named 109 plentiful with wildlife and possibilities. They gave him permission to do what he wanted with the land in order to civilize it.

Mr. Huang accepted the offer and returned to Longfellow. On the backs of two large sea turtles, he and his entourage, complete with calypso theme music blaring, arrived on that island. Mr. Huang immediately named the island the Kingdom of 109 and installed himself as its first monarch. To him, the vision and efficiency of a monarchy was the most effective form of government for the fledgling country.

The land of 109 was abundant with most flora and fauna necessary for the nation's growth, but the vegetation was unique in its abundance of mangoes. In the early years of 109 that involved much manual labor, the people sustained themselves mainly by eating mangoes full of vitamin C and fiber. The supply of mangoes never ran low, and to pass the time and dull the pain in their tired hands, the workers often sang this love song to their favorite food:

O tasty mango, o tasty mango,
You make me happy when skies are gray;
Full of nutrition, seed of fruition,
Please don't take my mango away.

Neighbors

There were some established nations both above and below the sea when 109 was established. The venerable King and Queen of Octopus Land ceremoniously gave Mr. Huang an ancient relic, an object made of an unknown substance sculpted into the form of the number pi. Having the first fifteen digits of pi etched into it, the sculptor and material are still a mystery. Some believe that it was left here by an extraterrestrial math teacher who left to find a working copy machine on another planet.

In the early years, the most important friend of 109 was Mr. Williams, one of Mr. Huang's teachers when he was still a young Longfellow prince. While Williams' land and his people had no formalized government or national name, it was hardly an anarchy. Due to their leader's wisdom, sarcasm, and good humor, Mr. Williams' people were known as the happiest community in Longfellow. The young king Mr. Huang sought his counsel nearly every day. Thus, in 109 lore, Mr. Williams is also known as The Sage. He continued to provide invaluable advice to the king throughout his reign, and Mr. Huang would later admit that after Mr. Williams left Longfellow in June 2016, the atmosphere of K109 lost a certain degree of joy and peace that never fully returned.

The Mission of 109

At its inception, the Kingdom of 109 dedicated itself to the study of traditional mathematics and knowledge and has never wavered in its mission. Mathematics is a set of rational conclusions based on a few simple axioms and a few sets of infinite numbers. Thus, math is the perfect arena for one to exercise the mind's ability to formulate ideas.

To Mr. Huang, the practical value of math study lies not in the specific skills that one might use in later life. Rather, the value of doing a wide variety of types of math problems with much repetition comes from the strength, flexibility, and creativity that develops in the brain while doing these mental exercises, not to mention experiencing the beauty and transcendence of the systems of numbers being played with.

Inspired by the Way of Mr. Williams that resisted ultra-utilitarian, modernist fuzzy math fads that come and go, 109 instead combines the abstract and concrete of math to open the study of eternal truths and techniques of mathematics to the minds of its citizens.

But the mission of 109 cannot be accomplished if the right environment is not present to motivate the 109 citizens. To cultivate an environment, Mr. Huang decided that 109 needed two things: safety and tradition. A citizen who feels safe in 109 will be more willing to exercise his or her brain. Thus, as king, Mr. Huang pledged to always favor the well-being of 109 citizens over non-109 citizens. This foundational sentiment would later be put in writing in the 109 Constitution.

Traditions foster a sense of home in that the citizen knows what to expect behind the front door whether that be everyday procedures or rituals for special occasions. Early traditions, such as Perfect Skill Drills were borrowed from Mr. Williams, but K109 soon developed its own such as the 109 Awards, music and speeches on the Last Day of the Quarter (LDOQ). Later traditions would enrich 109 life even more, and as more and more generations passed through 109, the legacy fostered by the 109 sense of community spread to high school and beyond.

Chapter 2

The Phoss and the Prophecy

The Phoss were the native inhabitants of the island that was renamed the Kingdom of 109. Since being fruitful and multiplying was not an aspiration of their culture, the Phoss were few. Seeking isolation, the Phoss had also moved to mountain caves before the 109ers arrived. Their community's purpose was to seek eternal truths through deep thought, and legends pointed to a connection the Phoss had with the trees and the stars. When a particularly wise Phoss walked through the forest, the trees would bend toward him or her. However, the Phoss never called themselves the name outsiders used for them. When strangers asked who they were, they would often say:

"We are not Phoss yet, but we strive to be."

The Powers-That-Be, partly out of ignorance and partly out of fear (for true wisdom intimidates as well as enlightens) had left the Phoss alone. Thus, the PTB never did acquire the infinite wisdom of the Phoss.

The Phoss and 109

The relationship between the Phoss and K109 was different. Being the leader of a nation whose mission was to discover eternal truths in mathematics, Mr. Huang saw value in talking to people who for generations had also sought eternal truth, though they did that through non-mathematical means while living primitively in mountain caves. Hearing that K109 was a defender of traditional mathematics and therefore seeking eternal truths, the Phoss also welcomed talking with Mr. Huang. It was Mr. Williams who first drew a map to the Phoss caves for Mr. Huang. Mr. Williams never explained how he knew the way. Nor did he ever speak of having talked with the Phoss himself. His silence on the matter sparked rumors that he was part Phoss, or perhaps, pure Phoss himself.

The caves were not easy to reach. The narrow mountain paths were exposed and serpentine. In the face of bad weather and darkness, the first attempt at reaching the caves took so long that the 109ers had to turn back before arriving. From then on, excursions to the caves required leaving before dawn to allow enough time for the journey and time for discussions (since the Phoss did not allow visitors to spend the night). Throughout Mr. Huang's entire reign, he often credited the Phoss with helping him keep 109 on the right path toward the light of truth.

The Prophecy

During one of Mr. Huang's cave trips to talk to the Phoss that the Phoss informed him of his future. Through their fasting and meditations, the Phoss had discovered that Mr. Huang would leave 109 one day before his time on earth was over. This came to be known as The Prophecy.

“Your going out will not be of the same manner as your coming in,” they said. “And yet, the two turtles will come for you.”

“I would never leave 109 voluntarily,” replied Mr. Huang.

“We predict many things about ourselves,” they replied. “We are often wrong.”

At least Mr. Huang knew that the turtles would be a sign that his time in 109 would be ending (though he still could never fathom leaving). He ordered his scout Rudolfo, who had eyes like an eagle’s, to keep watch over the sea. His main job over the years was to inform Mr. Huang of incoming immense sea turtles. Meanwhile, Mr. Huang knew he always had the Phoss from which to seek counsel.

Chapter 3

The Murals of 109

During 2003-2005, K109 began to create its own path in Longfellow by adorning its walls with murals that reflected the history and culture of 109. Wishing to adhere to PTB rules, Mr. Huang first obtained permission from Mr. Lynch, and later on, Mrs. Kihm. The first two murals were *The Fire* and *The Pi Relic*. A group effort from Alisha Seam and Lulu Wang of 4th Period, The *Pi Relic* mural was a depiction of the ancient pi relic that the King and Queen of Octopus Land gifted Mr. Huang upon his arrival. *The Fire*, a depiction of the cleansing fire that destroys and refines, was an individual effort from Laura Berk.

During the Golden Age of mural art that lasted from 2005-2008. Mr. Huang ordered that a large navy blue 5-pointed-star be painted on the northern wall to indicate the North Star, the star which seafarers use to verify where they are. After the star was traced in pencil by Evan Burch, some 109ers voiced suspicion that Mr. Huang used the star along with some dark magic to help the Dallas Cowboys win games.

“That’s impossible,” said Mr. Huang. “The Cowboys have no need of my help.”

Other murals painted during the Golden Age:

Manna Fujiu painted mountain ranges in the east and west including transcendent sunrise and sunsets. As the saying goes, “The sun may rise in the east, but it sets in 109.”

Polina Tamarina painted a *Glorious Sun and Sky* above and around the entryway to 109, the only mural to face the exterior of 109. Several Longfellow nations were surprised that Mrs. Kihm allowed this new mural that encroached hallway territories.

For the northwest corner, Nikki Becher was chosen to paint a large mango tree and the scout Rudolfo waiting for the two turtles spoken of in the Phoss prophecy. According to legend, before the mural was finished, Mr. Williams visited 109, took a look at the mangoes that Becher had painted and exclaimed, “I could take one of those off the wall and eat it right now.”

In 2008, fresh from being freed from the control of Mr. Calamito and Officer Morris and their magic crystal ball, former Tieland zombie Kaylin Stigall adorned the inside of the entryway with *The Gate of 109* whose architecture and intricate design would have impressed even the Rivendell Elves. Stigall also painted the phrase “We are not small potatoes” above the gate.

The last mural project before the Relocation was Mya Abousy’s. Adorning ceiling panels, her 2009 project was the only one not painted on a wall. Her *My Little Pony*-inspired *Shooting Star*, the only entire piece of art to survive the Relocation, adorned one entire panel, while her *Glorious Sun* that occupied twelve adjacent panels, did not survive.

Chapter 4

The Expansion

From 2004-2006, K109 experienced the most cultural growth that 109 has ever known. After having put the first few murals on the walls, 109 turned its attention to infrastructure and traditions that would give 109 more legitimacy and legacy in the years to come.

The 109 Times

In the fall of 2004, to standardize information-gathering and reporting, K109 published its first edition of the 109 Times, which has been published on or shortly after the last day of each quarter (LDOQ) ever since. The 109 Times has always been K109's only source for news. It began as a one-page double-sided publication whose main purpose was to cover the year-long Perfect Skill Drills race, but it also covered more specific news from the various periods of 109. In 2010, the 109 Times expanded to eight pages, but complaints from the overworked writing staff eventually forced the Times to shorten to four in 2012.

Besides the front-page articles, the front page includes the names of the past quarter's datemaster and flagbearers. Front page articles normally cover domestic policy, international relations or stories on the royal family. Stories on page 2 and 3 usually focus on happenings within particular periods. Page three always includes an update on the Skill Drills Cup race. The back page of each issue usually includes the Ask Arvid section where one can read Arvid's often salty responses to common questions from 109 citizens. The 109 Times is a non-profit publication and therefore does not normally run advertisements, but over the years there have been several announcements pertaining to 109 merchandise for sale.

From the beginning, 109 citizens were not allowed to write for the 109 Times. Instead, the authors are unknown to 109ers, though their names are in the byline of each article. Mr. Huang has rarely commented on exactly who these people are, except to say that they write their articles based on the information that he passes on to them. He has defended this system by arguing that leaving citizens out of the writing process ensures unbiased writing in the Times. Since the writing is outsourced, citizens have from time to time complained that they have no one to complain to when they notice inaccuracies in reporting.

The 109 Awards

In the spring of 2005, K109 presented the 109 Awards for the first time. Initially, 109 awards went to Best Explainer, Biggest Mouth, Best Penmanship and Best Student in each period. In the first iteration of the 109 Awards, Mr. Huang was master of ceremonies as well as presenter for each award. From 2006 on, the winners from the previous year were the presenters for the current year. The winners from 2005 are the only winners to have received plaques. All other winners have been given prizes related to their achievement.

The process of choosing award winners is partly based on citizen voting. First, Mr. Huang formulates a list of nominees for each category. The list is presented to the voting committee with each member casting one vote. In the case of a tie, the committee votes again from the list of those who tied in the first round of voting.

Starting in 2008, an award for Most Improved was added to all periods except one. This award was not voted on by citizens. Instead, Mr. Huang hand-picks the winner from each period. For unknown reasons, Algebra 2 has never had a Most Improved award.

The 109 Flag

During the 2005-06 year, 4th period proposed that Mr. Huang give the kingdom a more formal existence. The kingdom already had a newspaper, so Mr. Huang asked for possible designs of a national flag. He chose Luke Cheng's (4th Pd.) design incorporating Mod 2, dragons, the staff of Gandalf, a lance signifying Longfellow, and Mr. Huang's face. For his contribution, Luke Cheng is forever nicknamed "Betsy Ross".

The original 3 x 5 ft. flag was flown until 2010, when the now tattered flag was replaced with a new flag of higher quality. In 2011, 109 also acquired a larger flag that traditionally is only flown on the last day of the year.

The 109 Motto

Since Mr. Huang wanted an official motto incorporated into the flag, he held a vote for the best motto. The five finalists, all Latin phrases, were: Quod erat demonstratum, Mathematica defensor, Ad infintum, Vivat rex and Mathematica ad nauseam. On February 24, 2006, the citizens voted for their favorite motto. Mathematica ad nauseam won with 66% of the vote.

Motto Voting Results (109 citizens present):

Mathematica ad nauseum 66%

Vivat rex 14%

Mathematica defensor 8%

Ad infintum 7%

Q.E.D. 5%

The supporters for the other mottos were upset, and Mr. Huang, fearing a revolt, wanted 109ers to get behind the winner, his personal favorite. Looking at the numbers, he noticed that there were exactly 109 citizens present for the vote that day. The population of 109 that year was actually 110, but for some mysterious reason, Greyson Lewis, who had not been absent all year and would not be absent again, was not there. Mr. Huang used this highly unusual, perhaps even providential, occurrence to convince the citizens that they had been sent a sign to accept the vote as counted. That was enough to satisfy and quiet the angry crowd.

Datemaster

Other than king, Datemaster is the oldest office in the government of 109. It existed even before the Constitution was written. During the year 2005-06, Meredith Doherty of 1st Period often asked Mr. Huang what the date was even though she had a myriad of places to look for it. At first, Mr. Huang obligingly told her what the date was each day, but eventually he reached his breaking point. Due to Doherty's annoying persistence, he appointed her Datemaster, the citizen whose job it was to leave him alone, write the date on the board, and change it every day. In this way, the office of Datemaster was born. After that year, datemasters were elected at the beginning of each quarter.

Flagbearers

During 4th Quarter of 2005-06, Mr. Huang's decided that the 109 flag should be flown when the citizens of 109 go outside for Longfellow fire drills. This would ensure that the flag would be safe in case of a real fire and that the citizens follow the flag to stay together outside. The flag is also flown during treaty signings, coronations, and official visits with other heads of state. Flagbearers are elected at the beginning of each quarter. The flagbearer elections have been quite contentious over the years, with citizens sometimes making speeches and even bribing fellow citizens to win votes.

Mr. Huang also decided that he should never carry the flag. After watching numerous films about the American Revolutionary War and the American Civil War, the blockbuster Glory in particular, he knew that the flag was a target, so he decided that a citizen should carry it instead. The one exception is the last day of the year when Mr. Huang puts himself in danger, holding the flag at Farewell Corner as 109 citizens and all the people of Longfellow depart for the summer.

The 109 Website

Since it is common knowledge that Mr. Huang is a proud Luddite, a development in the fall of 2006-07 came as quite a surprise. To further chronicle the history of 109 and hasten the dissemination of information, K109 launched its own website that included, among other things, the 109 mission statement, archived issues of the 109 Times, and photo galleries of murals. By October 2006, the site had over 1000 hits (Mr. Huang was only responsible for 300 of them). In later years, the website expanded to contain photos of citizens, the 109 Constitution, lyrics to 109 songs, names of flagbearers and datemasters, and lists of winners of the 109 Awards.