



I was born in the Year of the Monkey. Like many Asian kids, I grew up with a special fondness for the animal of my birth year. The Chinese zodiac is a twelve-year cycle based on the Chinese lunar calendar, and each year is represented by a different animal. According to tradition, each animal has personality traits that are shared by people born in that year. Monkey is playful and curious. Rat, the hero (or villain?) of our story, is cunning and loves to win.

As for Cat? Poor Cat was left out of the Chinese zodiac, thanks to the trickery of Rat. In the ancient tale of the Great Race, the Jade Emperor invited thirteen animals to come to his palace. In an epic journey that showed off their strengths (and weaknesses), the animals finished the race one by one. They were each awarded a year of the calendar, based on their order of arrival at the emperor's court. But just before the end of the race, Rat pushed Cat into a river. By the time Cat arrived at the palace, all the calendar years were gone—and that is why cats chase rats to this day!

This beloved story is one of my childhood favorites. But I always found Cat's fate to be terribly unfair. I wondered if Rat felt bad about betraying Cat and to what lengths he and the rest of the animals would go to try to make things right. And wouldn't it be fun to watch each animal repeat their mistake from the original race? This book is a playful attempt to answer those questions . . . and to give Cat the year she always deserved.

—Richard Ho

