

# FANTASY WORLD

## 童話世界

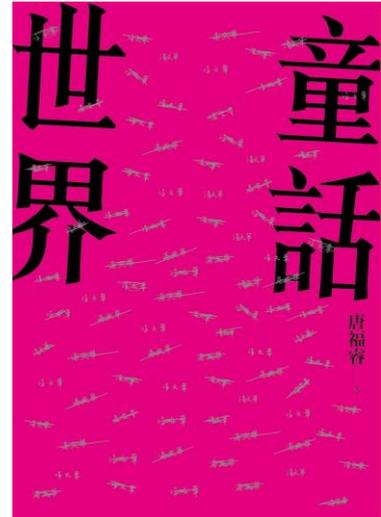
\*Adapted from the movie of the same name

*Twenty years after successfully defending a teacher accused of sexual assault, a lawyer finds himself working on behalf of another of the teacher's young victims. Adapted from the film of the same name, Fantasy World questions whether courtroom victories truly deliver justice, or are some transgressions beyond the scope of legal recourse?*

---

Chang Cheng-hsu, a freshman lawyer of undistinguished looks and family background, devotes all his energies to his first big case. In it, he will defend Tang Shih-cheng, a respected cram school teacher accused of sexually assaulting a female high school student. Too late, Chang discovers he has been manipulated by his client, causing irreparable harm to the girl he loves in the process. As it turns out, the object of his affections, Yen Hsin also had an inappropriate relationship with Tang, and is present in the public seating area of the courtroom as Chang accuses the victim of seducing Tang to secure material benefits, thereby securing victory for his client. Just as Tang intended, Cheng's fierce interrogation of the accuser scares Yen Hsin into silence. Soon afterward, Yen Hsin disappears, and Chang's affections slowly wither.

Twenty years later, Tang is once again accused of sexual assault, but this time Chang will represent the young accuser at the request of his social worker wife. For these twenty years, Tang has used his authority and powers of verbal persuasion to seduce one female student after another, convincing them to enter into a fantasy world of his creation, where they are manipulated into indulging his desires. Spurred on by his remorse over Yen Hsin, Chang is determined to finally bring Tang to justice.



**Category:** Crime

**Publisher:** Mirror Fiction

**Date:** 9/2023

**Pages:** 304

**Length:** 117,120 characters

(approx. 76,100 words in English)

**Full English Manuscript Available**

**Rights contact:**

bft.fiction.nonfiction@moc.gov.tw

However, the young victim never physically resisted the advances of her charismatic teacher. How, then, to prove that this is indeed a case of sexual assault? And will a courtroom victory do anything to heal her psychological wounds? Is the justice Chang seeks for the sake of his client, or is it to expiate his own guilt over defending Tang twenty years earlier?

Adapted from his movie of the same name, author/director Freddy Fu-Jui Tang's latest novel addresses the role of authority in cases of sexual misconduct and assault, taking inspiration from the shattering impact of the global Me Too movement. The author set about adapting the movie after its strong showing at the 2022 Taipei Film Festival, making use of the expertise gleaned from his law career, and the impeccable pacing mastered in the film industry to deliver a searing novel that convincingly portrays the imbalance of power that underpins many cases of sexual assault.

## Freddy Fu-Jui Tang 唐福睿

Freddy Fu-Jui Tang was a lawyer for five years before he moved overseas to study screenwriting and directing at CalArts. Within his distinctly social realist and humanist writing, the legal system is a device that frames the human dilemmas of his characters. He personally adapted his first novel, *Port of Lies*, into a successful Netflix series, released in 2023.

# FANTASY WORLD

By Freddy Fu-Jui Tang

Translated by Roddy Flagg

## Part 1: Ancient Things

2019 (1)

Chang Cheng-hsu tidied his thinning hair from his forehead, noticing as he did so the girl's perfume lingering on his hand.

White musk and rosewood.

It wasn't a very good perfume. The base notes were weak to the point of being dull. She'd probably splashed too much on her wrist. But in the gym, amidst odors of sweat and bleach, it performed its duty.

She was a regular, the girl, a frequent visitor over the last six months – or at least she overlapped with his regular sessions. An overlookable face, but one made less bland by a post-exercise glow in her cheeks. A glow which highlighted the two advantages she could claim: her youth and her figure. He remembered her first few weeks and how her arrival had caused certain users of the gym to put the running machines under more strain than was usual. She had then moved onto the weights section, bringing warmth and curves to the uncompromising steel and muscle.

Her gym wear and accessories were unvarying and on-trend, a testament to too much work on fitting in. Her eyes were evasive but unaffected; her slightly awkward movements betrayed a defensiveness that left her feeling no more secure. He'd overheard her chatting with other gym-goers a few times, the southern accent she couldn't quite conceal confirming his hypothesis: a girl trying her luck in the capital, confident more in her abilities than her appearance. No doubt employed in some clerical role in some mid-sized firm, where efficiency and attention to detail mattered more than experience.

His conversation with the girl with the glow in her cheeks had arisen from their collusion a week earlier during an incident.

A new arrival, a young man, had set his sights on her. Despite having some experience in evading persistent suitors, it seemed she'd never quite acquired the knack of delivering a firm and decisive rejection. So, faced with a dauntless pursuer capable of a 10-minute 15-kilometer-an-hour spurt on the running machine, she struggled to respond both physically and mentally. Until, that was, Chang Cheng-hsu arrived, handing her his own clean towel and the cover she needed to escape.

It was by no means a heroic rescue. If anything, the onlookers thought it awkward. He was on the short side, after all, too slight to draw any attention in the gym. Then there was the receding hairline and the thick glasses a career of reading required.

"I'm done. See you at the door in fifteen," he told the girl with the glow, before giving her pursuer a small smile to let him know the competition was over. That it had never begun. Gravitas, acquired through years of being a lawyer, left that crude and over-eager creature crushed.

Chang Cheng-hsu strolled off toward the locker room. The girl with the glow played along, slipping wordlessly from the runner's grasp. A small victory for culture and wisdom in the great and eternal battle against savagery.

That dauntless pursuer, though, showed himself still undaunted. He found Chang Cheng-hsu in the locker room, just as the older man was packing up to leave. "Was that necessary, buddy? Surely your daughter's old enough to get hit on now, right? Ha ha ha ha ha." Chang Cheng-hsu registered the jibe and accepted the challenge. "If she was my daughter, you'd have bigger problems than your running form. You'd need..." Then, because he knew when threats became crimes: "A good lawyer".

Chang Cheng-hsu saw the young runner in the gym a few times after that, but there was no more backchat. Maybe because he was still mulling over what Chang Cheng-hsu had meant? It's a powerful thing, the law.

The gym's motto, "Be a Better You", wasn't why he worked out. He was already better. After forty-four years of an undeniably successful life, all he needed from the gym was the stamina required to keep up with complex legal cases and the chest and shoulders worthy of expensive bespoke suits. And while he understood that some of his focus on physical appearance was in compensation for emotional setbacks suffered as a young man, he knew his confidence today did not rely on his physique.

He had started his own legal practice fifteen years ago and now had offices in a new building on Songjiang Road. Most of the work was non-contentious cases for corporate clients, with civil or criminal cases for individuals generally declined. Over those fifteen years, his air of success and forceful manner had earned a certain reputation in Taipei's business circles. The practice remained small but that was how he liked it. He employed only two other lawyers and two assistants, all good hands he had mentored personally.

He had named the practice after himself: Chang Cheng-hsu Law. He liked to explain the names to clients, pointing out it included the *cheng* of *cheng-i*, justice, and the *hsu* of *yang kuang ho hsu*, warm sunshine. Justice as warm as the sun. Immediately, the client would be filled with optimism about their case and those unlucky devils mired in litigation would feel (without any justification) a shred of comfort.

Family, too, was an important part of his success. His wife, Chien Yun, was two years younger than him and a professional social worker, employed at Taipei's Center for Prevention of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault. Married for twelve years, they had a daughter, Kai-ting, soon to graduate from elementary school. For someone like Chang Cheng-hsu – a man of limited talents and a conservative nature – a stable family life was the foundation on which to build

business success. Within that ideal framework, his hard work and practical approach had paid off in spades, winning him the freedom and affluence he now enjoyed.

He hadn't expected the girl with the glow to return the towel. He'd had fantasies in which she did, of course. But that was just a biological inevitability, his male genes working on their own account. Experience and wisdom allowed him, with all sincerity, to rule out those possibilities. After all, his relationship with his wife aside, all Chang Cheng-hsu could say about his love life was that there wasn't much to be said about it.

This was not unconnected with his natural endowments: he offered little to appreciate physically. Eyes as small as whitebait, mouth as wide as a catfish, all set in a narrow jutting face. These were not the worst of flaws, but put them all together and the view was not harmonious. Then there was his hollow chest, his narrow shoulders, his somewhat stubby limbs. As a whole, Chang Cheng-hsu did not stand up to careful viewing. These days, it was true, he carried himself with the confidence of a professional and spent enough time in the gym to ensure his physique was as good as it could be. But that had all come later in life.

Chang Cheng-hsu's biggest shortcoming, though, was not physical. It was his discomfort with anything abstract or intuitive, and the consequent failure to grasp the details of anything uninformed by logic or direct experience – which was not something to blame on his legal career, despite it being a common failing among those in the profession. As a result, his understanding of the world was utterly inflexible. There was no scope for the objective and the subjective to learn from each other. The two could, sometimes, overlap. But never mesh.

He had once said to a girl he liked: "If you want, you can borrow my notes." It was an offer made after a purely logical analysis. So, when the girl replied, "If I do want, I'll let you know," he subjected the response to another logical analysis and found it enthusing. Exciting, even.

Fortunately, Chang Cheng-hsu made steady progress both as lawyer and person, his professional skills developing enough to mask his low self-esteem. Then, just as he was struggling with the uncomfortable thought of giving up on hope of love, he met Chien Yun.

He had just turned thirty and quit his job to set up his own practice, renting an office which was old and cheap but close to Banqiao District Court.<sup>1</sup> It would serve as a starting point. To save money he cleaned, painted, and furnished it himself. He even intended to screw the nameplate into the wall outside the door himself. He borrowed a drill and other tools and kept at it for hours – but the nameplate had remained on the floor. He sat in the silent stairwell, glaring at the nameplate announcing his new business.

"Good luck." He hadn't heard the woman approach. "If it falls off, they'll sue you for sure."

Chang Cheng-hsu looked at her and then at himself: his T-shirt and shorts were stained with paint, his hands were filthy, he was surrounded by tools. He realized she thought he was the handyman called in to hang the nameplate.

"You can't trust lawyers, you know." Chien Yun looked at the unhung nameplate and spoke philosophically, as if declaring an axiom, a truth so obvious it needs no logical argument.

---

<sup>1</sup> Renamed Taiwan New Taipei District Court on 1 January, 2013.

Chang Cheng-hsu nodded, unable to deny it. The woman was clutching a briefcase to her chest. Her suit was unfussy, adorning a figure verging on the plump. Her long black hair fell soft and straight. Her face was round and full, her jaw a little wide. Her features had a gentleness to them – her eyes, in particular. A lake in morning fog, reflecting the hazy light of the rising sun. Quiet, clear.

Later, he learned she was in the building to visit a troubled family living on an upper floor. Every case involving children is sad, she told him, and every lawyer a bastard.

“They all claim to be fighting for justice. But whose money are they taking? Think about that.” Chien Yun was sitting on the steps now, her voice flat: “They try to stop the truth coming out then blame it all on the judge. Oh, we’re just part of the process. Oh, the judge makes the decisions. Oh, all we do is play our role. Blah blah blah. They just don’t want to take responsibility. You’d think they were the biggest heroes of all, and somehow the most unappreciated.” Chien Yun’s words faded but the set of her brow remained uncompromising. Then she resumed her pointless resistance: “They think the law can solve everything. Yeah, right. I mean, once someone’s dead, problem solved.”

Chang Cheng-hsu watched as the philosopher inside her gave up and he remembered how someone had once mocked him with similar words. The law can’t solve everything. He’d thought at the time it was just a cynical jest. But later he’d realized there’s always some truth in a joke, and cynicism is often borne of hopelessness rather than humor. With no reason to deny anything she said, he just sat there beside her, quietly. The silence seemed to speak to them: if you will ever be understood, it is now.

And so, they fell in love.

He fell in love with her kindness and a moral clarity that needed no logic. It went against all basic legal principles, which he found to be a great relief: if he didn’t want to argue, all he had to do was stay quiet. And in some moments of purity, he would even find insights in Chien Yun’s views which aligned with the jurisprudence of concepts.

Chien Yun’s love for him was a purer and less rational thing. Chang Cheng-hsu would laugh and tell her that what she wanted to avoid would always exist. Chien Yun was always a little stunned by such a cold but truthful interpretation, but not offended. Because that day they met, she saw in his mournful gaze a more intimate reflection of the man. Of a soul which hid behind the law’s elevation of argument above conclusion, licking its wounds.

Over twelve years of marriage, Chang Cheng-hsu had proved himself a faithful husband and loving father. Even if he did, occasionally, have the urges of any normal man, he maintained full control of himself and did not stray. He might, perhaps, schedule extra meetings with an attractive female client and do his utmost to keep her rates and billable hours low. The law, after all, was his battlefield. He liked this more mature version of himself. A man of both words and action. A seer of the big picture. Bold but able to give ground. Unemotional yet benevolent.

But his good fortune, he knew, had its limits. A week later, when the girl with the glow found him in the weights section and returned his towel, he did not overstep any bounds of propriety.

The towel was carefully folded and smelt of laundry detergent. Something called Garden Scent or Freshness, perhaps. Where she held it she left that remnant of her perfume.

White musk and rosewood.

Nothing wrong with that.

Chang Cheng-hsu took that perfume with him to the locker room, where he washed it from his hands.

He took his bag from the locker. He saw he had several missed calls and one message from Chien Yun:

“Nangang police station. Now.”

\*

He called her several times from the car but she didn't pick up. It was past eight in the evening. A police station? At this time? He started to worry about what might have happened. He parked by the Keelung River and weaved his way through the back streets towards the police station, accompanied by the muffled clanging of the metalworking places along the way. By the time he reached the station entrance sweat was pouring down his back.

The female desk officer took him through to the back office. Ten or so desks in rows, each piled high with paperwork. Officers and concerned parties standing or sitting around those desks, as if randomly distributed. There was a thump from a corner as someone's gear hit the desk. From outside, sirens could be heard, some near, some far. The entire room was caught in the cold harsh tones of the fluorescent lights.

He spotted Chien Yun, talking to a police officer about something clearly serious. She saw him and walked over. Before he could complain, she whispered at him: “I need you to take a victim statement.”

“A victim?” Chang Cheng-hsu was still on edge from the drive. “Do you want to check your phone? Couldn't you at least text me some details?”

“Oh, come on. It's an emergency. Sexual assault.”

Hearing that, he looked warily at the desk Chien Yun had been standing by. There was a young girl sitting there. Her hair was short, in a bob just reaching her shoulders. A pale t-shirt, a pleated shirt that was obviously part of a school uniform, white socks reaching halfway up slender calves. She was hunched up in the chair, arms locked around her legs. She was looking at the floor and he couldn't see her face. He spoke sternly: “You know I don't take these cases.”

“I couldn't find anyone else.”

“We'd have a conflict of interests.”

Chien Yun had it all worked out. “If you don't charge us, there's no conflict.”

He was about to refuse when his wife spotted a detective approaching the girl and rushed over to keep an eye on him.

The detective took a file from the desk and flicked through it before turning to the girl, attempting to unfurrow his brow and relax his jaw. Then, with a not entirely successful smile he asked, "So, kid, you're Kuo Shih-yu? Is that right? Taipei First Girls' High?"

Chien Yun was quick to interrupt. "Sorry, you are...?"

"I'm with Investigations. Just familiarizing myself with the case."

"Here?" Chien Yun could barely hide her anger. "Interviews in cases like this have to be done in private. Or aren't you aware of that?"<sup>2</sup>

The others in the room couldn't help but hear Chien Yun and all turned to look.

"We're short-handed. And I'm not taking an official statement yet." The detective tapped a finger on the paperwork, impatient. "This social work report – yours?"

"Yes."

"The accused's name is Che Ti? Is that surname right? Never heard it before."

"He's a cram school teacher. It's the name he works under. His real name is Tang Wen-hua."

Chang Cheng-hsu was still on the other side of the room but he caught the words "cram school teacher" and frowned.

"Is there a medical report or any other evidence?" The detective continued the questioning.

"There are notes I took from an oral account. The details are all in there."

"That's no good. Unless a statement is taken during the course of an investigation, we can't use it as evidence." The detective raised a stubby finger and beckoned towards Chang Cheng-hsu. "Ask your lawyer buddy, he'll tell you."

Chang Cheng-hsu shook his head at Chien Yun. The detective was right.

"Chang Cheng-hsu!" she hissed with an angry glare: do something. Chang Cheng-hsu looked away, not hiding his reluctance to get involved.

The detective slapped the social work report closed and continued: "Kid, when the teacher did that to you, was there anyone outside the office?"

Kuo Shih-yu face was still turned to the floor. She didn't reply.

"Is that important?" Chien Yun snapped.

The detective raised his voice, reasserting authority. "We decide what's important. Not you." He turned back to Kuo Shih-yu: "Did you call for help? Did you fight back?"

Kuo Shih-yu looked up, unsure of herself, searching for the right words.

Chang Cheng-hsu looked out on the unsettled streets below. He knew what was coming. He hadn't taken a sexual assault case for years. But the techniques, the rules, were still instinctual. What could be said. What couldn't.

"No." The girl's answer was quiet but clear.

---

<sup>2</sup> Guidelines for Police Handling of Sexual Assault Cases, Article 3, Paragraph 1: Interviews with the victims in sexual assault cases should be carried out in accordance with the Procuratorial and Judicial Police Guidelines for Sexual Assault Cases, and the following provisions noted: (1) Chose an appropriate location and carry out interviews in private....

The detective raised an eyebrow: “What? You didn’t fight—”

The crash as Chang Cheng-hsu pushed a chair aside made everyone jump. “That’s enough for today.”

The detective looked at him, shock turning to anger: “Listen, lawyer. We have procedures to follow—”

Chang Cheng-hsu gestured for Chien Yun to take Kuo Shih-yu away, then walked up to the detective. He took the social work report from the desk and then, with due professional courtesy, spoke. “Thank you for your help, officer.”

“We can’t open an investigation without a statement,” the detective warned.

Chang Cheng-hsu watched as Chien Yun ushered Kuo Shih-yu from the room, then let his face darken. It was time to be a lawyer. “Who told you a victim of sexual assault has to fight back?”

“What, you think they shouldn’t?”

“Tell me, where in the Criminal Code does it say physical resistance is a precondition for a sexual assault conviction?”

“It happened in a cram school. If she’d called for help or fought back, how could she have been assaulted? It’s a reasonable question, right?”

“The law was changed almost twenty years ago,”<sup>3</sup> Chang Cheng-hsu stated. He gave the fool before him no chance to respond. “Read a little, officer. Who knows, you might even get promoted one day.”

---

<sup>3</sup> On March 30, 1999, Article 221 of the Criminal Code on forced sexual intercourse was amended, with the requirement that the victim be left unable to resist removed.