The Legend of Nian

Written by Karen Mockler
Illustrated by Chengcheng Hu

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Long ago in China, people were afraid of Nian, the dragon beast.
Nian had a sharp horn and a huge mouth. He could eat five people in one big bite! Glump!
All year long, Nian slept deep in the ocean. By the end of winter he was very hungry.
Each year, just before the Chinese New Year, Nian would climb out of the ocean.
He would look for people to eat. Nian liked to eat children best. People would run away and hide in a cave.
One New Year’s Eve, a very old man came. He said he could scare away the beast.
No one believed him so they hid in the cave. That night, people heard boom, bang, and clang. They heard Nian roar.
On New Year’s morning, the old man was gone. Nian was gone, too—and he never came back again.
The old man had left a bag for them. Inside, they found red shirts, firecrackers, tin pans, and sticks. Nian was afraid of noise and the color red!
Now, on New Year’s Eve, people know how to keep Nian away. They wear bright red, light firecrackers, and make noise all night long!
A Note on Pronunciation:
In the Mandarin Chinese language, the closest pronunciation of Nian is: nee-YEN. The word nian also means year.