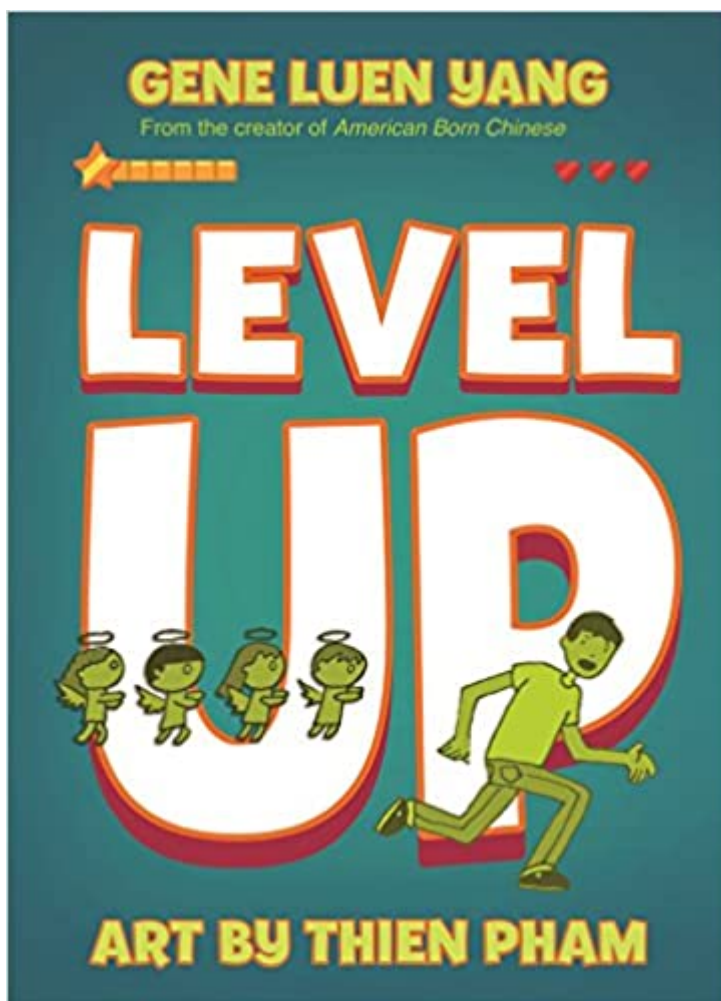


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# Level Up



## Synopsis

From Gene Luen Yang, the National Ambassador for Young People's Literature and author of *American Born Chinese*, comes a magical realist coming-of-age tale, by turns whimsical and deadly serious. Nothing is what it seems when life collides with video games. Dennis Ouyang has always struggled in the shadow of his parents' expectations: Stay focused in high school, do well in college, go to medical school, and become a gastroenterologist. But between his father's death, his academic burnout, and his deep (and distracting) love of video games, Dennis can't endure. He's kicked out of college. And that's when things get . . . weird. Four adorable but bossy angels, straight out of a sappy greeting card, appear and take charge of Dennis's life. He's back on track to become a gastroenterologist. But is he living the life he wants? Partnered with the deceptively simple, cute art of Thien Pham, Gene Yang has returned to the subject he revolutionized with *American Born Chinese*. Whimsical and serious by turns, *Level Up* is a new look at the tale that Yang has made his own: coming of age as an Asian American. Gene Luen Yang is the National Ambassador for Young People's Literature, and is the author of *American Born Chinese*, *Boxers and Saints*, *The Shadow Hero*, and *Secret Coders*. A New York Times Notable Children's Book (Young Adult) for 2011 A YALSA Popular Paperback for Young Adults A YALSA Great Graphic Novel for Teens An Asian/Pacific American Award for Literature Honor Title A New York Times Notable Children's Book "Deliciously imaginative . . . uproariously funny . . . A book so good, it's hard not to fall back on reviewers' clichés." The New York Times "A manifesto for everyone who's ever wrestled with the expectations of their family, their friends, and their society (and who hasn't?), and it's ultimately both humane and inspiring." "Boing Boing" "A piquant, multilayered coming-of-age fable for the wired generation." Kirkus Reviews

## Book Information

Paperback: 160 pages

Publisher: Square Fish; Reprint edition (July 19, 2016)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 125010811X

ISBN-13: 978-1250108111

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.4 x 217.4 inches

Shipping Weight: 9.9 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.3 out of 5 stars 30 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #183,719 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #111 in [Books > Teens > Literature & Fiction > Comics & Graphic Novels > Science Fiction & Fantasy](#) #220 in [Books > Teens > Science Fiction & Fantasy > Fantasy > Contemporary](#) #977 in [Books > Teens > Literature & Fiction > Social & Family Issues > Family](#)

Age Range: 12 - 18 years

Grade Level: 7 and up

## Customer Reviews

Yang, writer-artist of National Book Award finalist *American Born Chinese*, writes this magical-realist tale of Asian-American parental pressure and video-game escape, leaving the art to up-and-comer Pham. Dennis Ouyang struggles with the burden of his dead father's orders that he study hard, go to med school, and become a gastroenterologist. When Dennis, inspired by four mysterious angels, gives up his passion for video games and buckles down to his studies, he befriends three fellow second-generation students and begins to make a place in med school. But a crisis in confidence reveals the true nature of his guardian angels, and the real source of his father's dreams for his only son. Pham's watercolors can be charming, but his primarily gray and brown palette gets visually monotonous; thankfully, his work increases in energy as the plot does. Yang's familiar story of immigrant striving and filial rebellion gets just enough juice from its connection to arcade culture. A bravura storytelling and visual twist near the end brings together the plot's several strands. A minor work from Yang, but a welcome introduction to Pham, whose own upcoming First Second graphic novel, *Sumo*, looks promising. (June) (c) Copyright PWxyz, LLC. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

"Deliciously imaginative . . . uproariously funny . . . A book so good, it's hard not to fall back on reviewers' clichés." —*The New York Times* "A manifesto for everyone who's ever wrestled with the expectations of their family, their friends, and their society (and who hasn't?), and it's ultimately both humane and inspiring." —*Boing Boing* "A piquant, multilayered coming-of-age fable for the wired generation." —*Kirkus Reviews*

I love Gene Yang. I had high hopes, but this did not deliver. Very one-dimensional character who I could not relate to, but I could see the right kid in the right circumstances identifying with a boy who

felt pressure to be someone he wasn't from past generations. Ghosts of the past haunt us, literally. It's create and strangely deep in way you wouldn't expect. Yet, the art is too primitive (and not intentionally so) to convey that depth well. So, it reads a little "meh."

This book was on my son's summer reading list (he's in high school). After my son was done reading it, I read it too. My son wasn't impressed nor was I. There was an opportunity for the book to be memorable but I don't think it's going to be.

Dennis Ouyang has a passion for playing video games. And he's great at it too! But then...four somewhat adorable, yet really bossy angels show up, and tell Dennis that his destiny is to become a doctor and that he needs to give up his passion. So...Dennis reluctantly gives his gaming stuff over to his best friend, buckles down and studies, heads to medical school and hooks up with a crew to study with. But a crisis of confidence reveals what the angels truly are and Dennis begins to question whether he should follow his passion or his destiny...or an entirely new path. Gene Luen Yang creates a compelling and captivating story that puts a new twist on two old genres, coming of age and father/son relationships. Gene creates compelling characters that are easy to recognize and relate too, because regardless of your age, race, gender you can recognize some aspect of your own life in Dennis and his dad's. Perhaps you've even had the same types of conversations with your parents (hopefully without the bossy angels standing by.) Thien Pham, a relative newcomer to the field, creates beautiful and captivating watercolor illustrations to accompany the tale. While the illustrations may not have a lot of details or secrets hidden in them, they work perfectly with the story--especially when it comes to the bossy angels. A wonderful story and well worth adding to any collection.

Amazing graphic novel. I used this for my research paper in my Asian American Studies class.

This was a Christmas present for my brother, who doesn't really like to read but enjoys some middle-school level books and graphic novels. He really liked this book, and read it twice in one day. Actually, he liked it even better than American Born Chinese. I also read it, and I disagree; American Born Chinese was much better. To compare it, this story was a little less rich and complex than American Born Chinese, and the art, here by Thien Pham, is much simpler. On it's own, however, I still think it is a valuable book, and worth the purchase and the (short) time it took to read through.

In the year in which "Tiger Mom" entered the popular vocabulary on Chinese-American parenting, Gene Yang writes a book for the rest of us. The main character lives a realistic Asian-American upbringing until a fantastic 4 angels appear in his life. But all is not as it seems...I read this book in one late-night sitting. At the end, I felt glad to have met these characters and explored their lives. Video games are rarely the subject in good literature, or even a good story, but this makes an exception. A must-read for anyone who has lived their teenage years trying to escape parental expectations through video games.

Thank you!

very interesting. a good book

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